

THE FLAME OF SINAI

HOPE AND VISION IN IQBAL



Dr. Sheila McDonough

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IQBAL ACADEMY PAKISTAN

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Octavio Paz said once tht poetry is the place that lies between religion and politics. The only side it takes is the side of the people. Its concern is to fınd the voices of ordinary men and women. W. H. Auden said poetry is here to remind the employers that their employees have a human voice.

Patrick Lane, Canadian Poet.
The Globe and Mail, Toronto, August 8, 2000, p. R1.

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INTRODUCTION

“In poetry, literature for the sake of literature has never been my aim. There is no time left to me to attend to the delicacies of art. The purpose is to revolutionise modes of thinking.”¹

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was a writer who elicited great excitement and controversy among South Asian Muslims during his lifetime and subsequently. He became an impassioned voice for the hopes of Indian Muslims as they began to pull themselves out of the spiritual despair that had followed the collapse of the Mughal Empire in India in the mid-nineteenth century. The excitement came from the constant stream of ideas he was injecting into the awareness of his Muslim compatriots through the vehicle of his rousing poetic images. During his lifetime, much controversy arose because his iconoclastic approach threatened many different kinds of established ideas and institutions. After his death, controversy has followed him for many reasons. Some have tended to deify him as the founder of Pakistan; others have demonised him as one who betrayed his early belief in India, and social justice. Many different groups and thinkers have tried to use the label of his name to indicate that they are the legitimate heirs in the sense that their ideologies are the logical outcome of his dramatic imperatives. His legacy remains enigmatic, and much debated.

The comment quoted above was written by Iqbal in a personal letter a few years before his death. My purpose in the following pages will be to try to elucidate what I understand this ‘purpose of *revolutionising thinking*’ to involve. I will argue that this purpose was formulated early in his life, and that, as indicated by this quotation, it remained constant. One who starts out to ‘revolutionise thinking’ is clearly unhappy with the status quo, and wants to change many things. If we assume that this intention was formulated while Iqbal was still in his teens, we can recognise that the purpose

remained strong and coherent right until the end of his life. He died at the age of 61. Since this letter was written just before his death, it seems that he wanted just as much to change the world at the end of his life as he did when he first began seriously to think.

I first read Muhammad Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* when I was a graduate student in Comparative Religion working under the direction of Wilfred Cantwell Smith at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Smith had earlier been teaching at the Forman Christian College in Lahore. He had gone there not long after the death of Iqbal, and had found himself in a milieu in which the ideas of that poet-philosopher were much discussed. Smith's first book *Modern Islam in India*, published in 1943, was one of the first serious studies of Iqbal. We will discuss the content and impact of that book in chapter four. The book reflects many of the attitudes of the young Indian socialists whom Smith knew in Lahore just at the beginning of World War II.

Smith was deeply affected by the violence and disruption of life that attended the final independence of the two new nations of India and Pakistan. This experience led him to change his interpretation of the significance of Iqbal's thought. He returned to Canada, and undertook to create a new Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill for the purpose of studying the development of modern religious thought among Muslims. He wanted to have both Muslims and non-Muslims as faculty and students working together. Since all this was a new enterprise, without precedent anywhere, Smith travelled around the world collecting people to come to work with him. I was one who was recruited by him for the purpose of studying modern religious thought comparatively, with special emphasis on Islam in South Asia.

From the perspective of the present, I realise that Smith had been very greatly influenced by Iqbal, and that the Canadian had created an academic milieu for the study of contemporary Muslim religious thought that followed many of the directions that the Muslim poet-philosopher had indicated as necessary. Although I was not conscious of the fact at the time, I was being trained by the kind of academic institution that Iqbal had wanted for those who would go further in reconstructing religious thought, for Muslims, and also for everyone. Iqbal considered his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* a sort of prologue for the reconstructing of religious thought

in all traditions. He regularly thought about Muslim experience in the context of the history of the religious life of humanity as a whole. He wanted to write about this, but did not live to do so.

I had a Pakistani teacher, Fazlur Rahman, who taught me to read Iqbal in Urdu. I also had an Indian teacher, Muhammad Mujeeb, who gave me a perspective on the complex history of the Muslims in the subcontinent.² In my Turkish professor, Niyazi Berkes, I discerned something of Atatürk's revolutionary spirit.³ From the Japanese professor, Toshihito Izutsu, I learned that the effective study of how language is used in texts can be done across cultures. Izutsu demonstrated that careful analysis of language made it possible for a Buddhist to write an interpretation of the Qur'an that would be welcomed by Muslims as faithful and accurate.⁴ All these and many other teachers and students at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill influenced my developing understanding of the issues Iqbal was dealing with.

My own interest has continued to be in the comparative study of contemporary religious thought. The background training I had from the sociologist Berkes, the philosopher Fazlur Rahman, the semanticist Izutsu, the comparativist Smith, and the historian Muhammad Mujeeb, all contributed to the perspective from which I have approached the study of Iqbal. However, my main academic discipline is the comparative history of religion. Iqbal's teacher, Thomas Arnold, began his seminal book, *The Preaching of Islam*, with a reference to a public lecture given in 1873 in Westminster Abbey, London, by Max Mueller, one of the intellectual giants who founded this field of study.⁵ Thus, Iqbal himself was trained by an adherent of this intellectual approach. The discipline is not much more than a hundred and fifty years old. Iqbal was one of its early disciples and advocates.

The comparative history of religion does not mean comparing religions to see which is better. It means studying the data, the history, the scriptures, the theological and philosophical writings, the institutions, the ritual, the poetry and the literature, and in general all the creative productions that make up the major religious traditions of humanity. The comparative element comes in when one begins to see similarities and differences across this broad spectrum of phenomena. The academic process is one of on-going criticism of earlier theories; in this field of study, as in others, scholars continue

to refine their insights. Thus, questions as to what constitutes mysticism, prophecy, prayer, religious law, ritual, philosophy, theology, and so forth are matters of on-going debate. Iqbal understood himself to be participating in that discussion, and adding his comments from his own background.

My teacher, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, had been strongly influenced by Iqbal. I will discuss that influence further in chapter ten. Smith insisted on an approach to inter-religious scholarly discussion in which statements about religious life and thought should be checked with representatives of the tradition being discussed. The theoretical point is that religions are best understood by those who practice them. Smith also insisted that scholars should not be reductionist, that is they should never attempt to reduce any significant religious phenomenon to a simple explanation. We can observe religiousness as a universal human phenomenon, but we cannot explain it by any one simple theory.

For these reasons, I wish to avoid as much as possible attempting to paraphrase Iqbal. I trust that the reader will not object to many long quotations from the poetry and prose of the Muslim writer. My hope is that readers will be able to hear the voice of Iqbal himself. It is difficult to attempt to paraphrase a writer as complex as Iqbal was. The danger is that the one who paraphrases obscures the meaning because of the limitations of his, or her, conscious, or unconscious mind. I have tried to avoid this problem by focusing directly on some of the images and the terminology, in poetry and prose, that often recur in Iqbal's writing. The poet's own language is the best indicator of the directions of his mind. He is said to have had a beautiful voice. Unfortunately, we will not be able to hear him singing his poetry, as his friends in Lahore did. But I will try to set the stage by explaining the context, so that Iqbal can come forward and make his presence felt.

I assume that no-one else can understand Iqbal better than he understood himself, and therefore I am not attempting to reduce him to an explicable phenomenon. A key element of the training given by Wilfred Cantwell Smith was that one should not try to fit another person's religious experience into some slot of explanation already existing in one's mind. One should never try to reduce a religious phenomenon to something less than it is. Reductionist methodology often has the effect of killing off the human reality of the person

being studied. Readers sometimes feel that now that a person's thought has been explained away, they can forget that voice. I would rather try to give life to the voice, so that readers can hear it for themselves.

Iqbal has been both divinised and demonised quite a lot since his death. In contemporary Pakistan, he is known as Allama, great and respected scholar, a title never given him during his lifetime. In contemporary India, he is often held responsible for the creation of Pakistan, and is thus seen as a renegade. His own portrayals of himself often speak of one who is puzzling to everybody and understood by nobody. This latter image is much closer to the truth of how he was perceived in his lifetime.

Muslims and Hindus in South Asia had been struggling with the reform of traditional religious thinking for more than a century when Iqbal came along. He is of the generation of several geniuses of religious thought in India, such as Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo and Vivekananda. Many of his concerns are similar to the interests of these contemporaries, since they all were motivated by the urge to rid themselves of imperialist domination, and to recover a voice for their own traditions. I will discuss, at some length, similarities and differences in the religious thinking of Iqbal and Gandhi, since these two tend to be seen as the spiritual fathers of Pakistan and India, respectively. I have elsewhere written about Gandhi's understanding of Islam.⁶ I now want to look at the other side of the question and to consider how Iqbal thought about Hinduism in general, and Gandhi in particular.

Iqbal was a well educated twentieth century man, much concerned to find ways to integrate religious faith and contemporary scholarship. I had a background of interest in western religious writers like Paul Tillich and Martin Buber when I came to study Iqbal. I could see that the Muslim poet-philosopher understood the dilemmas of twentieth century religious thought in much the same way as these Christian and Jewish philosophers did. All of them were acutely aware of the disappearance of the culture and values they had been raised in, of a threatening and challenging modernity, and of chaos in metaphysical thinking occasioned by the loss of a coherent image of the cosmos. Tillich had been a chaplain in the defeated German army of World War I; he saw how defeat caused disintegration of faith and spirit. Buber experienced the rise of Nazi

power in Germany, and the impact of mindless racism on his people. Iqbal was part of a Muslim culture that was disintegrating. All three thinkers experienced the loss of what seemed irretrievable; they were all urgently seeking new directions.⁷

Iqbal is acknowledged to have been the best poet to have written in Urdu in this century. He also wrote poetry in Persian, the language that had been the cultural heritage of Mughal India. Many of his prose writings are concerned with the clarification of his philosophical ideas, as well as comments on the political events of his time. The symbols used in his poetry recur, sometimes in different form, in his prose. Most of his significant prose writings were in English. There is much dispute about Iqbal--was he a fundamentalist, a modernist, a Pakistani fanatic, an Indian Sufi, a tool of the western intellectuals, an upholder of rigid Islamic law, an opponent of rigid Islamic law, heretical, orthodox, a mystic, an anti-mystic, a tool of the bourgeois, a tool of the landlords, a socialist, a fascist, a democrat, pro-western, anti-western, a good Muslim, a bad Muslim? At a minimum, we can easily say that he did not think in ways that other people readily understood, and hence he created much disturbance. Such, in part, was his aim.

One can find verses to be used in defence of any and all of these apparently contradictory positions in his writings. Hence, those who love his poetry sometimes quarrel as to what he really meant. But I do not think that anyone would deny him the title of *qawwal*, singer, or doubt that he strove to provide a vision so that his people would not perish. His admirers have disputed among themselves, sometimes bitterly, about what that vision implied, but, in as much as they have loved his poetry, they have not denied that he strove to convey vision. They have known that they have received much from responding to his vitality, but they have not always been able to agree as to what his vision should mean for the present and the future.

I do not intend to defend any of the interpretations listed above as to what Iqbal's vision might imply in terms of action in the world. Since I am taking him seriously as a major twentieth century religious thinker, I want to try to comprehend something of the sources and nature of the vision that impelled him. There is no doubt that Iqbal's creative vitality lasted all his life, and that sparkling and compelling poetry continued to emerge from his mind until almost

his last days. My view is that in the face of passion-driven creative energy of this kind, bystanders have to stand back and view with amazement, as they would a volcano erupting.

Power has erupted into the world, *kratophany* (eruption of power) as Mircea Eliade would say.⁸ *Kratophany* of this kind is the source of communicated religious energy, revival and renewal. Such renewal happens in all religious traditions. The key result of the volcano is that people notice. Those who respond most deeply to the new voice, those who hear in the depths of their minds and hearts, applaud, and are, sometimes, transformed. Wilfred Cantwell Smith first read Iqbal when he was a young teacher in Lahore in 1940; he later said that reading *Bang i Dara* (*The Call of the Marching Bell*) had stirred up and challenged his mind.⁹ Smith, challenged by Iqbal, had designed an educational institution for the study of some of the issues he had encountered in Iqbal. Since I was educated in that institution, I met some of what Smith had discerned in Iqbal. The following pages reflect an effort to convey something of that heritage.

The title, *The Flame of Sinai*, is intended to focus attention on one of the earliest symbols used in Iqbal's poetry, a symbol that recurs often throughout his subsequent writing. There is an imaginal world latent in Iqbal's poetry, a world in which the images relate to each other in a consistent and patterned manner. Islamic design sometimes involves complex and convoluted patterns emerging from the calligraphy, complex variations on the theme of the name of God. The pattern of images in Iqbal's writing involve a somewhat similar elaboration of a few basic themes that remain coherent and inter-related.

This imaginary world of the images was related intimately to the world in which this poet lived, read, thought and wrote. In other words, the world of images existed in Iqbal's mind, and when something happened in the external world, such as the Italian attack on Tripoli, he responded to the event using the symbols. His verses were aimed at communicating with his fellow Muslims about the events that were impinging on them all. He put their feelings of grief into compelling imagery, and then suggested what might be learned, and hoped for, because of, or in spite of, the disasters befalling the community. He used language familiar to his audience, symbols that came from the Qur'an, and from traditional Urdu and Persian poetry.

The images were familiar, but the way Iqbal used them was often startling and tantalizing.

Indian Muslims were enduring the chaotic impact of social and economic change imposed by dominating foreigners on what had been a relatively stable society. Iqbal hoped to guide his people through this chaos into a renewed security based on the revival of the core elements of their spiritual heritage. For this reason, he used the traditional language, but poured new wine into the old bottles. The context was one of tension caused by moving from a decaying social order into a threatening new one. Iqbal's response to this threat of destabilizing change was to learn to think in a new way, in his own unique synthesis of old and new.

Several recent books about the nature of the soul by Thomas Moore have emphasised that the human soul is best understood as the capacity for spontaneous creativeness, and that 'soul' in this respect is always rooted in a particular setting.¹⁰ We cannot conceive of spontaneous creativeness apart from the tools of the particular artist; these tools include everything that shaped this unique human consciousness. Everything he tasted, smelled, heard, saw, read and touched enters into making the artist what he becomes. Like Thomas Moore, Iqbal also thought of the potentiality of the human soul as the capacity for creative power. He, too, understood that the soul rises from the context of home.

Iqbal valued spontaneity as the highest form of individual fulfilment. He became both a poet of a particular time and place, and also a voice capable of eliciting response from anyone, anywhere. It is one of the paradoxes of existence that a compelling voice like that of Iqbal emerges from the particular in order to address the universal. But the particular, in the case of the profoundly creative, is never left behind; it continues to shape and direct what is said. One gets up every morning out of one's own bed in order to get ready to speak.

Thus, we begin our study of Iqbal by recognising we are faced by the need to decipher the symbols of a poet. Nobody has any control over what responses other persons may make to imagery, which is perhaps why poetry can be the most subversive of human arts. No-one can decipher the images in any final way, not least because the effectiveness of the metaphors depends on the freshness with which each person responds to them. One cannot translate poetry effectively into prose. This is because the metaphors of poetry help

us see links between different aspects of experienced reality. A metaphor suggests connections.

We have to use metaphors to illuminate aspects of reality that we cannot describe in straightforward language. Prose is always being used by people trying to hammer experienced reality into some kind of mutually intelligible shape, but prose can never finally do this except with very limited aspects of experience. We have to use symbols to point to what one author has called *The Edges of Language*, the areas of life that we cannot explain with mutually intelligible prose statements, because we have no clear words for such experience.¹¹ The centre of language is where the words lie whose meanings are clear and agreed upon; we can understand easily when this kind of language is used. But the edges of language are where our experience goes beyond anything we easily have words for, and therefore we have to stretch and use metaphors to try to elicit comprehension from others.

The mutually intelligible parts of life are important, but sanity and wisdom require recognition that there is much more to experience than what we can rationally share. This is why we use, and respond to, metaphor. Poets are pre-eminently persons who speak in metaphor. To consider the basic images regularly used by Iqbal in a consistent and patterned manner should indicate some of the characteristic ways in which his mind and heart responded to the events of the external world. Most certainly, he wanted to elicit understanding and response. My aim is to look at his imagery bearing in mind always that his stated intention was *to revolutionise thinking*. The question was, and is, *revolutionise from what way of thinking to what way of thinking?*

Iqbal was unhappy about the despair of his people, Indian Muslims subject to domination by a colonial power that was exploiting their country. He voiced outrage about the hopelessness of the deprived poor people of India. He wrote as follows about how he imagined that God perceived the Indian poor:

*Now, if any stand to worship in the
mosques, it is the poor,
And if any bear the pains of holy
fasting, it is they;
They alone Our Name revere, and Our
Remembrance keep secure;*

*That your misdeeds may be hidden
 Still they labour and they pray,
 Drunken with the pride of riches
 wealthy men neglect God's due;
 The communion of Islam lives on,
 because the poor are true.¹²*

This perspective on the situation of his people was one of the major reasons why this poet wanted to *revolutionise thinking*. He was moved by concern about the suffering of the Indian poor, and by respect for their dignity. In his symbolic world, the suffering are those whose needs demand immediate and practicable response. Iqbal wanted, through his poetry, to stimulate purposeful action towards social and economic changes in society. His poem suggests that the suffering of the poor is a force demanding response.

Iqbal often had Qur'anic imagery in the forefront of his consciousness. Significant Qur'anic images about the dangers of unauthentic responses to life, *to be drunk with pride of riches*, include the following.

*Now We have sent down to you signs making all clear....
 God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;
 the likeness of His Light is as a niche
 Wherein is a lamp
 (the lamp in a glass,
 The glass as it were a glittering star)
 Kindled from a Blessed Tree,
 an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West
 whose oil well nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it;...
 In temples God has allowed to be raised up,
 and His Name to be commemorated therein...
 are men whom neither commerce nor trafficking
 diverts from the remembrance of God,
 and to perform the prayer, and to pay the alms,...
 And as for the unbelievers,
 their works are as a mirage in a spacious plain
 Which the man athirst supposes to be water,
 till, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing;*

Qur'an 24:30-40.

Later on, Iqbal says, in prose, that light is an important key to God because without it we cannot see at all, and because the speed of

light is a sign of the stability of the Divine.¹³ The either/or image of Iqbal's poem on the poor is a restatement of the either/or imperatives of Qur'anic imagery. The imperative to choose rightly is characteristic of all Iqbal's later writings. The basic paradigm that controls the organisation of the images in his mind is always this Qur'anic imperative: *'choose good or evil, and be shaped as individuals and communities by the fruits of your choice'*. We do not know when or exactly how this paradigm became rooted in Iqbal's mind, but it is plainly there in all his mature writings. Authentic religious experience is always ineffable, and can be communicated only through images and deeds. It is from the fruit of Iqbal's writings that we can glimpse something of what had touched the young poet, namely, the wing of Gabriel, as he said.

This Muslim poet was highly educated, curious and mentally alert; he was always interested in, and aware of political, social and economic changes and events in the wider world. He began writing in the Edwardian period, a time when the firm control of the British Empire over India and much of the rest of the world seemed likely to continue for generations. From this time forward, the patterns of his imagery do not change seriously, but the contexts, the situations in which his images come forth to illuminate experience, do change.

The central paradox of his imagery is the contrast between what the people say, and what God says. This is expressed constantly by reflection on actual experience. The images thus provide a running comment on what is going on in the world, and on what these events suggest of the Divine-human tensions that shape history. Human history can be seen as the record of human choices. Iqbal looked at the past, the present, and the emerging future as all governed by the basic Qur'anic paradigm of the necessity of choice. People are free to choose, but the results of their choices will lead either to a fuller life or to vain running after sterile mirages in a desert.

As we seek to understand Iqbal's mind, we will begin with a discussion of the poet's background so that his concerns and affirmations may be understood in their context. In chapter one, we discuss his childhood and youth in the shadow of the Himalayas in North West India, and his student days in Lahore. The second chapter deals with his years of study in Europe. In chapter three, we begin an analysis of his mature thought as expressed in his writings after his return to Lahore. The next chapter leads on to the end of the

war in 1918, and the beginnings of the Indian independence movement, which sets the stage for Iqbal's thinking and acting in the early 1920s. In chapter five, we consider his mature philosophical thought as expressed in his lectures given in Madras and Aligarh. This will be followed in chapter six by a discussion of the theme of religious experience throughout his writings. Chapter seven will look at his involvement with South Asian politics and religion. In chapter eight, we will consider his ideas about comparative religion. Then in chapter nine, we will look at his legacy. The final chapter will deal with the imagery of Iqbal's epic poem about the pilgrimage to eternity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Muhammad Suheyl Umar, "*That I May See and Tell*" *Significance of Iqbal's Wisdom Poetry*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1999, n. 85.

² Muhammad Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*.

³ Niyazi Berkes, *The Rise of Secularism in Turkey*.

⁴ Toshihito Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious concepts in the Qur'an*.

⁵ Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p. 1.

⁶ Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam*.

⁷ Sheila McDonough, "Prophetic Faith in Iqbal, Buber, and Tillich" in *Iqbal Centenary Papers*, pp. 26-41.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*.

⁹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Faith and Belief Some Considerations from the Islamic Instance" in *Memorial Lectures on Iqbal*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Thomas Moore, *The Care of the Soul*.

¹¹ Paul Van Buren, *The Edges of Language*.

¹² A. J. Arberry, trans., *Complaint and Answer*, p. 51.

¹³ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 64.

Chapter One

Origins

*The wilderness of solitude
will open the fate's knock.*

India celebrated the centennial of Iqbal's birth in 1973, and Pakistan did so in 1977, thus demonstrating an inability of the two nations to reach agreement even on such an issue as this. In my discussion of Iqbal's life, I am using, as one important source, the carefully documented volume written in Urdu by the poet's second son, Javid, which is entitled *Zinda Rūd*.¹ This title, which can be translated as flowing stream, refers to the poet's image of himself in the long poem, *Javīd Nāmāh*, (*Pilgrimage to Eternity*), which the poet wrote for his son as a symbol of, and direction for, the Muslims of the future. The poet's family has accepted 1877 as the year of his birth. The issue is complex because the birth records are not clear. The date of 1877 is based on a form Iqbal filled out when he was a doctoral student in Germany.² Let us note, however, that both India and Pakistan wanted to do homage to a revered son. Iqbal lived, and died, as a citizen of India, an heritage that meant a great deal to him. I think he would have been glad to know that there were two celebrations.

Muhammad Iqbal was born in the town of Sialkot in the North West corner of India approximately two decades after the failed revolt of the Indian sepoys against their British officers in 1857. This means that he began life among an humiliated people. The British government had responded to the failure of the revolt by imposing direct rule over much of India; Victoria had been proclaimed Empress of India, and a sustained effort had begun through educational, judicial, executive and commercial institutions to take over the whole of Indian life, and to incorporate India into the British

Empire. The British government permitted Christian Missionary organisations to found and to develop hospital and educational institutions throughout the sub-continent. It was expected that the British Empire was set to flourish indefinitely into the future, and that Indians, through schools, trades and businesses, would be actively incorporated into the larger international entity.

Sialkot was a remote town, far from the centres of British governing and commercial activities in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Delhi. Nevertheless, the first 37 years of Iqbal's life were shaped by the milieu in which the dominance of the British Empire was self evident, and in which that Empire seemed set to endure for a very long time. The impact on him was mostly indirect in the first instance, although he was sent to a local school run by Presbyterian missionaries for his education. Sialkot was a centre for Scottish and American Presbyterian missionary life; conferences were held there annually for missionaries from all over North India. It was also a centre for a British army settlement, a cantonment, for troops ready to fight in Afghanistan, and prepared to do battle in order to stop Russian incursions into the sub-continent.

British and American Protestants at that time generally believed that conversion to Christianity was necessary for Indian, Chinese, African and other third world peoples in order for them to enter fully into what was considered civilised life. The major missionary organisations in Britain and North America had been established early in the nineteenth century, and had recruited many persons to take on the challenges of founding and working in schools and hospitals in Asia and Africa. Many were motivated to do this work expecting that it would lead to conversions. In addition, however, many Christian missionaries, particularly in the educational and medical fields, saw service as an end in itself. Thus, some missionary doctors and nurses believed in helping sick people without imposing conversion, and some teachers shared the same perspective. We do not know much about the missionary teachers whom Iqbal encountered in his school days, although he clearly gained and retained a love of knowledge that remained active in him all his life. He seems to have acquired early an interest in science as a disciplined way of thinking that enabled him later to read Einstein, and Whitehead, with ease.

An autobiographical statement by another Muslim of Iqbal's generation, Muḥammad 'Alī, who lived in a different part of North India, conveys something of the tensions felt by Muslims after the collapse of the Muslim leadership following the failed Mutiny of 1857. In his words:

Here I may remark that the prejudice against English education was still very strong in Upper India. It had been the centre of Muslim political life for eight centuries and even when the rule of India passed away from Muslims hands.... the Musalmans of Upper India did not cease to regard the new rulers of India as something very inferior to themselves in civilization and culture. This storm of ill-will and disdain had been gathering for a whole century and was precipitated among other things by the aggressive activity of Christian missionaries.... In the terrible aftermath of the Mutiny... in its permanent results even more than in some of its terrors, it could, without any considerable exaggeration, be compared to the social upheaval that the French Revolution meant to the old nobility of France... a whole generation kept sullenly aloof from all contact with the culture of the new rulers of India, which in their heart of hearts they still despised.... Few indeed can realize today the feeling of those Upper India Muslims who sulked in their tents for so long, or the difficulties of the pioneers of English education among them, like Syed Ahmad Khan."³

This was the social context in which Iqbal became one of the Muslim students, like Muḥammad 'Alī, whose parents braved the scorn of other Muslims by allowing their children to attend the schools run by the foreign missionaries. Iqbal's biographers are generally agreed that the most significant mentor in his school days was the Muslim who taught Arabic and Persian in the mission school, Moulvi Mir Ḥasan.⁴ This teacher is said to have played an important role in shaping the minds and hopes of his Muslim students. Through this teacher, the young Iqbal was in touch from very early with the mind set of the Indian Muslim reformers who had long range hopes of a renewed and revitalised Islamic civilisation.

The Indian Muslim community had been shocked and devastated by the destruction of the Mughal culture of Delhi by the British after the failed revolt; many had tended to withdraw in confusion. The mutilation of Mughal Delhi, the shooting of young princes by a

British officer, the destruction of buildings, and the ruin of trade and cultural life had all tended to devastate Muslim confidence and self respect. However, there were others who were beginning the processes of seeking to recover Muslim nerve and vision. Iqbal was fortunate in having had a teacher with this kind of lively spirit in his formative years. The pattern of his concerns was set from this training, namely, acceptance of all that he could learn about the world from any source, along with confidence in the possibility of the renewal and re-invigoration of Indian Muslim cultural life. He gained pride in his own cultural heritage, pride that sustained his courage, and his confidence.

Iqbal's father was a maker of Kashmiri caps, a small merchant. The family had emigrated from Kashmir several generations earlier. The conversion to Islam seems to have come about in an earlier generation because of response to a Sufi teacher. Kashmir had suffered invasions from Sikhs and Afghans, and had been ruled by Dogra Hindus in the nineteenth century. Sialkot is fairly close to the foothills of the mountains of Kashmir.

In his later life, Iqbal was an active member of groups to aid and support Kashmiris, and to carry on with Kashmiri cultural life. Iqbal's father was a devout member of a Sufi brotherhood. He had sent Iqbal's elder brother to the missionary school, but had wondered whether Iqbal should be taken out of school and given an exclusively religious education, so that one member of the family could serve the British government, while the other could serve religion. Apparently, it was the Arabic teacher, Moulvi Mir Hasan, who persuaded the father to keep Iqbal in the missionary school.

The mind set of this Muslim teacher became a major impetus in the subsequent development of Iqbal himself, and of many of his fellow students. The teacher's attitude was part of a widely diffused stream of thought in late nineteenth century Indian Islam that derived both from Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and from Jamā al-Dīn Afghānī (1838-1897). Sayyid Ahmed Khan had responded to his own experiences of the destruction of the Mughal civilization of Delhi, after the failed revolt of 1857, by insisting that Muslims must abandon their medieval habits of mind and adapt to the challenges of a new world. He founded the institution that became the Muslim University of Aligarh, and insisted on the translation of works of western science into Urdu. He was motivated by a strong passion to

convince Indian Muslims that they must discover everything about how the British had managed to achieve power.

Sometimes, the results of a coherent passion like that of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān are disseminated widely across time and space. The waves of that energy certainly reached the young Iqbal in his secondary school classes, and subsequently in his university experiences in Lahore. Iqbal's passion for knowledge, like that of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, was based on the conviction that Muslims should know and understand all that could be known about the created universe. This is one way many Muslims understand the universe, that it is all under one God and therefore all open to the explorations of adventurous human minds.

The influence of Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī came from the Arab world where this Muslim revivalist had stimulated vast numbers of young Muslims to feel that they must discover how to rebuild Islamic civilization, and to create new forms of Muslim culture. This imperative came at a time in the late nineteenth century in which the European powers were dominant over almost all the Muslim world. The Ottoman Caliphate had retained independence but was greatly weakened. Afghani's revolutionary imperative stressed the Qur'anic passage "God helps those who help themselves". Qur'an 13:13 Although Sayyid Aḥmed Khān and Afghānī differed in their attitudes to British rule in India, they both insisted on the necessity for a revived intellectual energy to be released among Muslims.

The Arabic teacher in Sialkot, Mir Ḥasan, seems to have effectively conveyed this imperative to his young students. Further, Mir Ḥasan successfully taught Iqbal and his friends to enjoy Persian and Urdu poetry, to appreciate its subtle nuances, and to revel in the richness of imagery characteristic of this artistic form. Pride in their cultural heritage was an invaluable asset to these young Muslims who were directly faced by the domination of a foreign power. Thus, Iqbal started out in life among the humiliated, but with great pride. He seems to have accepted from very early the challenge to move away from the old cultural patterns of the Indian Muslims, which had collapsed following the failed Mutiny, and to discover how to create new forms of Islamic culture and civilisation.

Iqbal's relationship to his parents and siblings was characterised by affection, and mutual trust. His elder brother was a great source of help to him in his early student days. He regularly returned home to

visit his parents during his college days in Lahore. His nephews and nieces remained attached to him and his family later on. However, Iqbal did not share the kind of dichotomy between religious and secular education that was his father's solution to the cultural stresses of the age. As we have indicated, some Indian Muslims, like Sayyid Ahmed Khān, had reacted to British domination by an imperative to learn from the British. Others, such as those who founded the important *madrasah* (seminary) at Deoband, wanted to keep traditional Muslim education separated from contact with foreign ideas and practice. Iqbal's father, like many Indian Muslims of his generation, apparently thought in compartments, one for religion, and one for working for the British government. The father was a active participant in the ritual activities of a Sufi order in Sialkot, and seems to have understood religion as primarily a matter of personal piety and devotion.

Iqbal learned much from his father's devotional life; it marked him in many ways. His father used to read the Qur'an regularly with him every day; this habit continued throughout the Muslim poet's later life. The poet-philosopher's subsequent thought is marked throughout by Qur'anic imagery. There is every reason to suppose that Iqbal's personal piety derived directly from the attitudes and practices of his parents, and from the wider context of Kashmiri Muslim devotional life of which they were a part. On the other hand, Iqbal's early school experience with his mentor, Mir Hasan, set him on a course away from the quietist acceptance of fate that was characteristic of his father's Sufi attitudes. As we will see, Iqbal's attitudes to traditional Sufism became increasingly complex and many-faceted over time.

In 1893, when Iqbal was 16, his parents arranged for him to be married. His wife was Karim Bibi. For the first two years of his marriage, he was still a student at Murray College in Sialkot. After finishing his secondary school studies, he left to attend University in Lahore, and his wife spent most of the time with her parents in Sialkot, except when Iqbal came home for the holidays. Two children were born at this time, a girl, Mi'rāj Begum in 1896, and a son, Aftāb, in 1896. The tension between his family's desire for Iqbal to become a husband and father, and his own wish to go on to higher studies, was not untypical of many Indian families of that time. Early marriage often caused students to give up their academic projects.

University Life in Lahore

When the young student left Sialkot at the age of 21, he went to study in the much larger city, Lahore. In a sense, one could say that his Sialkot school experience shaped the pattern of his later concerns. He had learned to value scholarship, and he never subsequently doubted the necessity of a modern education in science, economics, history, literature, and philosophy. He understood that the pre-industrial life style of his father and other citizens of Sialkot was going to be overthrown by the demands of the new economic and political challenges bursting in upon them. Not only did Iqbal have to leave home, but he also knew that the ways of life of his home could not endure unchanged. For the rest of his life, he wrestled with the dilemma of how to preserve the good from the past in the light of the vast changes that were coming. He later wrote that life moves with its past on its back.⁵

In Lahore, Iqbal joined Government College, an institution with beautiful buildings set in the midst of attractive grounds. Iqbal lived in the university residence where he made many close friends with other young Muslim male students. Many of these friendships endured for his lifetime. University students were a small minority in a population still largely rural and illiterate. Women were not part of university life then. Iqbal was popular and enjoyed his student days. The students were receiving a mostly western education, but they had courses in Arabic and Persian also. Iqbal and the others took part in the traditional *mushā'ira* gatherings—competitions for reciting poetry.

Iqbal was a well-rooted and stable person with good and loyal friends. He later became much involved with tensions involved in the clash of cultures, and in the political struggles in the subcontinent. But beneath the surface tension, his personality remained shaped by hope. In addition, his mind was, and remained, genuinely open; he did not use what he read to buttress his own anxieties. That is to say he never became an ideological thinker, one who seizes upon some verbal formula and uses it to explain everything. His mind never became rigid. To a remarkable degree, Iqbal appreciated authors for themselves. Minds are only free to judge in this way when they are not blinded by personal obsessions and anxieties. Iqbal could respond to a work of art, or philosophy, freely and justly. He often did so.

As the library left behind after he died indicates, Iqbal continued to read widely and continuously all his life.⁶ His books were the mental and spiritual food and joy of his life because they exposed him to other minds and to the on-going flow of human thought. One has to credit his early teachers with success in inspiring this young intelligence to nurture itself and to grow. One of the first 'other' minds' to challenge his imagination in his student days was John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*. The young Muslim poet, and his friends in Government College, were intrigued by this poet. Iqbal said that he wanted to write something in his own language with a power and vision equivalent to that of Milton.⁷

Why would Milton be fascinating to a young student in Lahore in the 1890s? We know that another young Muslim of a slightly older generation, on the other side of India, has told us that he was fascinated in his youth by Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁸ British education in India made available to open young minds much of the turmoil and revolutionary thinking of the 17th and 18th centuries. Milton had been wrestling with the collapse of an older civilization, the medieval Holy Roman Empire, and with the emergence of new revolutionary imperatives, the Reformation and the Puritan Conquest of England. He was part of a new culture that was shaped by the recovery, through translations into vernacular languages, and the new printing press, of the Bible, for the common people to read for themselves.

Milton had a very tough, strong mind; his prose defence of freedom of thought, *Areopagetica*, is the most compelling statement on that subject ever written in English. He also had strong creative power, almost unparalleled in his capacity to pour out sustained imagery for many pages on a coherent theme. Milton's major theme, the human wrestling with God and Satan, undoubtedly gripped Iqbal. Struggling with God and Satan continued as themes throughout the Muslim writer's poetic career, well illustrated by one of his own last magnificent poetic dramas, *Satan's Parliament*.⁹

The ambition of a young Muslim undergraduate in Lahore in the 1890s to write something as compelling for his own people as *Paradise Lost* had been for English people was an extra-ordinary passion. That passion stayed with Iqbal, and directed his own creative fervour. Perhaps he recognised in Milton another form of poetic sensitivity to the collapse of one kind of civilisation, and the

subsequent alienation of people from a secure and simple faith. Certainly Iqbal responded, as Milton had done, to the scriptural images of creation in which humans had been given vast potentialities for either good or evil.

As a Muslim, Iqbal did not think of humans as born into sin, but he did see them as victims of their own greed, self-satisfaction, and arrogance. In the Qur'anic story of the expulsion of humans from the garden, Satan remains always whispering in the ears of people, trying to lead them away from the service of God. According to the Qur'an, the curse on the humans driven out of the garden is mutual hostility. (Qur'an 5:24) Iqbal always conceived of human nature as alienated from the security of the garden, and challenged by Satanic temptations. Paradise was lost in terms of human frailty and confusion. Muslim daily prayer asks for guidance from the dangers of being led astray.

Arnold and Shibli

Iqbal continued during his student days in Lahore to absorb knowledge both about the new western culture that was pervading India, and about his own cultural heritage. He took courses at Government College, a western type of university, and at the Oriental college, which was specialising in Arab and Persian studies. He was fortunate to find a teacher, Thomas Arnold (1864-1930), who was sympathetic to Iqbal's desire to walk both these paths at once. Earlier, the Indian Muslim reformer, Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, in his efforts to create in India a university intended to be the equivalent of Oxford and Cambridge for Indian Muslims, had recruited a number of English scholars to work for his new enterprise. Thomas Arnold had come as a young teacher to Aligarh when he was in his early twenties.

Unlike most of the other Englishmen teaching at Aligarh, Arnold had adapted to wearing Indian clothes. He was interested in helping his young Muslim students become stronger in their own religion. He went with them sometimes to the Muslim prayers and took part willingly in the celebrations following the month of fasting.¹⁰ He had founded a student organisation, *Anjuman al-Farḍ* (duty society) in which the students undertook to work for the regeneration of their community. Arnold was committed to Sayyid Aḥmed Khān's project of attempting to stimulate young Muslims to work for a revived Islamic culture. After Sayyid Ahmad Khan's death, Arnold left

Aligarh to go to teach in Lahore. This is where Iqbal became Arnold's student. The young poet thus imbibed at first hand much of what Arnold had learned directly from his mentor, Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, the great reformer of Indian Islam who had fought all his life to get Muslims to open themselves to modern knowledge.

Arnold had worked closely when he was at Aligarh with a young Muslim teacher about the same age as himself. This was Shibli Numānī (1857-1916), an Indian Muslim who had received traditional religious training at a number of Indian *madrasahs* (seminaries). Shibli also had been walking the two paths of traditional Islamic and modern scholarship. He had been born into an upper middle class landowning Rajput family in Azamgarh, U.P. He had first studied Islamic jurisprudence under some traditional Ḥanafī jurists, and then had studied Arabic literature in Oriental College, Lahore.

His father made him study law, the path to a job with the English civil service. He was not much interested in a career of this kind. He rather turned to writing poetry and studying literature. In 1883, when he was 26, he was appointed by Sayyid Aḥmed Khān as Professor of Persian at Aligarh. He and Arnold were both young, and very much committed to the purposes for which Sayyid Aḥmed Khān had founded Aligarh, namely to produce a new generation of well educated Indian Muslims who could help lead the community into a successful reform of the economic and social conditions of life of their people.

Arnold and Shibli had both accepted Sayyid Ahmad Khan's mandate to work to refute the malicious and stereotyped writings about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad that had been written by certain European scholars with political or missionary motives. Such writings were intended to imply that Islam was a religion incompatible with science and modern life. These Aligarh teachers had known that Muslim students, as they began acquiring European knowledge, would encounter much writing hostile to Islam, and many malicious stereotypes of the Prophet Muhammad. The Aligarh teachers understood that writings of this kind might well serve to undermine self-confidence and pride in young Muslim students. The two young scholars, therefore, set out to do what they could to produce books that would meet the standards of contemporary western scholarship, while at the same time doing justice to the data of the Islamic tradition.

Arnold did this in his seminal book, *The Preaching of Islam*, in which he directly challenged the common western myth that Islam had spread quickly in the seventh century because it was intrinsically violent— ‘the conversion by the sword’ myth. Arnold’s careful discussion of the historical record indicates that the success of the early Muslims was related to many different factors, including the easy acceptance of Muslim rule by populations, in many countries, who were tired of endless fighting among disputing Christians as to the nature of orthodoxy. Arnold demonstrated that the common western notion that Islam had been spread primarily by force was simplistic and wrong.¹¹

Shibli had wanted to help revive Islam by inspiring young Muslims with better information about the heroes and significant thinkers of the Muslim past. He wrote a number of biographies, such as lives of the Caliph ‘Umar, the legal scholar Abū Ḥanīfah, and the poet Rūmī, as well as a life of the Prophet Muhammad. Shibli insisted that Muslims must use modern historical methods in writing about their past, because the older histories tended to be inadequate in their analyses of the data. All these historical biographies written by Shibli were widely read among Indian Muslims, and throughout the Muslim world.

Thomas Arnold wanted western scholars to learn to be just in their writings about the Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic history. Like Shibli, Arnold thought that method was important, and that internal biases must also be acknowledged, and, where they were hostile, rooted out. Sayyid Aḥmed Khān’s horror about the biased Western writing about the Prophet Muhammad by scholars like William Muir had obviously influenced Arnold. Arnold agreed with Sayyid Aḥmed Khān that much of this anti-Islamic western writing was unscholarly and biased in its use of the historical evidence. The English scholar wrote a history of the Muslim Caliphate, discussing the complex issues of the nature of Muslim government. He also wrote a history of Islamic art. He was motivated by a conviction that striving for mutual appreciation of creativeness across cultures was a sensible way to work for peace and mutual respect. When Arnold returned to England, he became involved with the new School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London that had been established to bring knowledge of other cultures to Europe. He held the first chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies there.

The background to Arnold's attitudes lies in a movement in some British universities away from pre-occupation with the assumption of Christian superiority, and towards a readiness to be fair to other religious traditions, and to try to inculcate mutual respect. At Cambridge, a new generation of scholars were beginning to open themselves to studying other world civilisations, and to looking into the historical origins of Christianity. One of Arnold's teachers, Robertson Smith, was the author of the seminal book, *The Religion of the Semites*, that helped shape later critical studies of Biblical and Christian thought in their historical contexts. There was a group of young intellectuals at Cambridge interested in knowing more about the religious traditions of the world. The group included scholars such as the experts on Sufi mysticism, E. G. Browne, and R. A. Nicholson, the philosopher McTaggart, and the physicist Alfred North Whitehead. Arnold shared the cosmopolitan interests of many of these scholars

Before coming to Aligarh, Shibli had received a traditional education in Muslim theology and Hanafi jurisprudence. He had had somewhat unusual training in that he had been encouraged to study Islamic philosophy. Shibli became particularly famous among his Muslims students for his lectures on the Qur'an. Muḥammad 'Alī tells us:

But Aligarh itself presented one bright spot... and I must not omit to mention it. This was no other than a College Professor of rare charms and of an entirely new literary outlook whom Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had been able to attract to Aligarh. He was Shibli Numani, Professor of Arabic and Persian, an ardent lover of poetry and of Islamic History. Besides some exquisite verses in Persian, he has left several biographical and historical works as monuments of research and scholarship.... I was fortunate enough, although still a school boy, to attend his all too brief lectures to the undergraduates on the Qur'an. For half an hour every morning, just before the College students commenced their secular studies, he used to give in the Principal's Hall, a rapid exegesis of the Qur'an, explaining and amplifying the holy text.¹²

Although Iqbal was not among those who heard Shibli lecture on the Qur'an, he was certainly familiar with this Muslim scholar's poetry and historical writings. We know that Iqbal continued the

practice he had learned from his father of regular Qur'an reading every day. He would have been well aware of Shibli's efforts to reinvigorate Muslim understanding of the Qur'an. Throughout his life, Iqbal was concerned to urge Muslims to try to better understand the imperatives of their scripture.

We observed that Iqbal was consciously walking two paths in his studies of western civilizations, and his studies of Islamic civilisations. However, he also met, in the partnership of Arnold and Shibli, a kind of joint mind, as demonstrated in their respective books, which helped him to see that one could gain an intellectual perspective that would attempt to do justice to human history as a whole. Both paths could be taken up into one much wider path. Iqbal learned from Arnold that western scholarship was capable of being just to Islamic history, although so far not much had been done in this respect. He also learned from Shibli that modern methods of scholarship could be used to bring Muslim historical experience alive in new ways for appropriation by future generations of Muslim students.

Iqbal was working directly with Arnold during his student days in Lahore. Shibli had moved on from Aligarh to found an academy to train Muslim intellectuals at Lucknow. Nevertheless, the influence of Shibli was strong on Iqbal, as mediated through Arnold, through Shibli's poetry and books, and directly through occasional personal contact. Throughout the rest of his poetic career, Iqbal was sustained by a vision of the dynamic activism of the first generation of Muslims. One can see in Shibli's biographies of the Caliph 'Umar and of Abū Ḥanīfah exactly this spirit articulated. Iqbal's ideas about the intellectual and spiritual vigour of the first generations of Muslims was similar to the portrayal of early Muslim heroes that is found in the writings of Shibli.

From Shibli's biographies, Iqbal's generation of young Muslim students gained a perspective on the Islamic past that stressed initiative and creativeness. The Caliph 'Umar was presented as one who had worked closely with the Prophet Muhammad during the harsh formative years of the new religious community, but who had nevertheless used his own intelligence to make new decisions and to shape new directions when he became the leader of the young Muslim community. Further, Shibli's study of Abū Ḥanīfah stressed that in order to understand the mental processes of a great legal

thinker, one must be able to follow his reasoning in the context in which he made his judgements. As with the study of 'Umar, Shibli's message was that Islamic society prospered when Muslims developed their creative potentialities, and learned to think for themselves.

Shibli's biography of the Prophet Muhammad follows very closely the material of the original biography written by Ibn Ishāq in the second Islamic century. Shibli's version of the biography differs mainly in the introduction in which he stresses that the life of the Prophet had transformed human history.¹³ This was a new approach to the life of the Prophet. This analysis influenced Iqbal's way of thinking about prophecy, and about the example of the Prophet Muhammad. In Iqbal's later poem entitled *Satan's Parliament*, he describes as follows the ideal Islamic society that Satan fears. Satan is telling his followers to beware of a revival of the faith of the Muslims:

*Yet none the less
The importunities of the hour conceal
One peril, that somewhere the Prophet's faded path
Be rediscovered. A hundred times beware,
Beware, that Prophet's ordinance, that keeps safe
The honour of women, that forges men and tries them,
That bears a death-warrant to every shape
Of servitude, admits no Dragon Thrones,
Knows neither emperor nor roadside beggar.
It cleanses wealth of every foulness making
The rich no more than stewards of their riches;
What mightier revolution could there be
In thought or deed than it proclaims-- earth's soil
Belongs to no earth-monarch, but to God?¹⁴*

These images of the first Muslims, as heralds of a better civilisation, and as destroyers of political dominance (Dragon thrones), and of economic oppression (foulness of wealth), recur many times in Iqbal's later verses. These are the same images of Muslim activism and intellectual vigour that characterised Shibli's biographies of Muslim heroes.

Shibli was also interested in *kalam* (traditional Muslim theology) With respect to the writing of history, Shibli maintained that the methods of medieval writing were inadequate for the present because

the assumptions and methods of that scholarship were no longer useful. He had the same approach to theology, namely that assumptions and methods must be revised in the light of modern thought, and that new forms of Islamic theology should be written. Shibli was very critical of the anti-rational tendency of the Ash'arite forms of medieval theology, an attitude that denied the possibility of reason as a source of valid religious understanding.

Shibli followed particularly al-Ghazzālī and Rūmī in his theological thinking. He emphasised that good theology should discourage *taqlid* (unquestioning acceptance). Shibli said that the positive aspects of Muslim teaching were the highly non-material concept of the Divine, the direct relationship between man and God, and the emphasis on the human qualities of the Prophet. He argued that human freedom must be accepted, because only in this way is human responsibility meaningful. Shibli discovered in Rūmī a better, more convincing way of argumentation, and a clearer, more appealing presentation of faith. From Rūmī, Shibli gained insight into the process of the evolution of the soul. These ideas exercised considerable influence on the developing religious thinking of Iqbal during his student days in Lahore. Iqbal matured in the context of close contact with the perspective that Shibli and Arnold had worked out in their years together.

Shibli dealt with law in the same way as he had done with history and theology, namely that medieval methods were inadequate for modern conditions; legal thinking would have to be revised and reformed. He was one of the few of his generation who had studied both classical Islamic jurisprudence, and modern law. He considered Abū Ḥanīfah a very great jurist, shaped in part by the example of the Caliph 'Umar. Shibli knew that the question of the use of Hadith as a source for law was a significant problem for Muslim jurists. He said that Abū Ḥanīfah had cut down considerably the number of Hadith that could be used in this way; the approach was justified partly by demonstrating that 'Umar had not used this source.

Shibli argued for a reconstruction of Islamic jurisprudence based on modern methods of legal reasoning, and a revised understanding of the history of Islamic law. He was concerned to refute the Western orientalist who were claiming that Islamic law was dead, and no longer workable. Shibli's argument was that all juristic traditions are constantly reforming themselves. There was no reason why Islamic

law could not be reformed by retaining the basic principles, and by working out whatever manifestations of those principles seemed most adequate in a new context. He used the theories of an early 19th century jurist, Ibn al-‘Abidin Shāmī (1784-1836), as a basis for arguing that the applications of basic principles can and must be changed over time if the juristic tradition is to remain alive and vital.¹⁵ Shibli visited the Arab world, and met Muḥammad ‘Abduh, the great jurist who had initiated and developed the reform of jurisprudence in Egypt.

Shibli’s books exercised considerable influence on the developing mind of the young student, Iqbal, as they did on many Muslims of his generation. Iqbal later writes about the need to reform Islamic law in a manner similar to that of this early mentor. Shibli was also a poet, one whose poetical works were important to his youthful admirers. Iqbal had begun writing poetry in his teens. The most renowned poet of the time, Dāgh, had acknowledged some verses that the young Iqbal had sent to him for correction; Dāgh had expressed his appreciation for the young poet’s skill. During his student days in Lahore, Iqbal was regularly writing poetry. There was an organization called *Anjuman Himāyat -i- Islām* (Society for the Support of Islam). The group met annually in Lahore, and Muslims came from different parts of India. Their purpose was to facilitate Muslim scholarship and Muslim self confidence. They established schools and various projects for social service. Once Iqbal was acknowledged as a noteworthy poet, he began every year to read poems publicly at their meetings.

One of the first poems Iqbal became known for was entitled *Himālah*. This poem was published by the poet’s friend, ‘Abdul Qādir, in the new literary journal *Makhzan*, in 1901, when Iqbal was 24. During his childhood in Sialkot, Iqbal would have been able to see in the distance the mountains of the Himalayas from which his Kashmiris ancestors had come. Mountains are among the basic images of Iqbal’s poetry; the pattern of his imagery has been set by the time he writes this poem. The pattern involves seeking insight, encountering a mysterious response, and discovering unexpected complexities in existence. The poem reads:

Himālah

*O Himālah! O rampart of the realm of India!
Bowling down, the sky kisses your forehead*

*Your condition does not show any signs of old age
 You are young in the midst of day and nights's alternation
 The Kalim of Tur Sina witnessed but one Effulgence
 For the discerning eye, you are an embodiment of Effulgence
 To the outward eye you are a mere mountain range
 In reality you are our sentinel, you are India's rampart
 You are the diwān whose opening verse is the sky
 You lead Man to the solitudes of his heart's retreat
 Snow has endowed you with the turban of honour
 Which scoffs at the crown of the world-illuminating sun
 Antiquity is but a moment of your bygone age
 Dark clouds are encamped in your valleys
 Your peaks are matching with the Pleiades in elegance
 Though you are standing on earth, your abode is sky's expanse.¹⁶*

The young poet's perspective includes, first, the significant notion of outward and inward eye. The mountains suggest realities beyond themselves; they amaze the human mind by their size and apparent agelessness. Effective symbols usually participate to a degree in that which they symbolize; a symbol is a word that points to different levels of meaning.

Iqbal apparently learned easily, when young, to see with a double vision, with an outward and an inward eye. He continued throughout his life to do so. The double vision means the ability to see in one way the external world that can be measured--to use a tape measure on the mountains as it were. But beyond the way of seeing in order to measure, there is another way of seeing, which is to see beyond and through, to be able to perceive clues to meaning. The person with the double vision sees in both ways. The phrase 'double-vision' is from the poet, Blake.

*For double the vision my eyes do see
 And a double vision is always with me.¹⁷*

Iqbal seems to have responded to experience much as Blake did, although the Muslim poet probably did not know this. Iqbal knew about double-vision because of his own experience, and his own poetic tradition.

'The Kalim of Tūr Sina' in this poem refers to the compelling experience that came to Moses on Mt. Sinai. 'Kalim' refers to

speech; Moses is a symbol of one who speaks with God. This image of *Sinai*, and of the speaking Moses, is frequently used in Iqbal's later writings. Iqbal's preoccupation with Muslims as a people with a vocation seems to have developed in his mind in his school days. The stance of the person who argues with God encapsulates how Iqbal saw himself; he argues on behalf of his people. One whole collection of Iqbal's later poetry is entitled, *Zarb-i-Kalim* (The Staff of Moses), and another series of verses is called, *The Tulip of Sinai*. The tulip recurs regularly in Iqbal's poetry as the symbol of the suffering human who demands help.

The image of the staff held by Moses refers to stories in the Bible and the Qur'an. A competition was ordered by Pharaoh between his magicians and the upstart Moses. The latter triumphed by performing better miracles, one of which was to transform his staff into a snake. In Iqbal's poems, the staff of Moses suggests the power of truth against magic. Iqbal often uses the image of Pharaoh's magicians to suggest those who wrongly think that their magic power will bring success. This magic power is sometimes equated with measuring skills, modern technology. Pharaoh's magicians were the British imperialists of Iqbal's time. The young poet wanted the mountains to show him how to resist Pharaoh.

The fact that Iqbal uses the term *kalim* (speaking) in this early image, and subsequently, to represent Moses, indicates some of the continuities in his thought. From the Qur'anic perspective, the truth that came to Moses has come to many different prophets, and finally to the Prophet Muhammad. *Sinai*, in Iqbal's writing, represents what has happened in the past, and also what should happen to every human. The image of Moses, and his staff, in conflict with the magicians of Pharaoh, represents, in Iqbal's poetry, the archetypal human struggle against oppression.

The *turban of honour* in the poem, *Himālah*, refers to the granting of a recognition of academic excellence, similar to that of an academic gown and cap awarded to graduates in western universities. This is a complex symbol, suggesting, on one level, that something about the mountain is more powerful than the sun. On the level of measurable reality; the sun is not powerful enough to melt the snow on the mountain. The *turban* image indicates not only power, but knowledge, or rather that knowledge and power are

connected. The knowledge seems to come from the *diwān*, the poem that the mountain sings to humanity.

What is the *diwān* that the mountains sing? They tell of size, vastness in space, and time; they indicate that this immensity is linked directly to the solitude of the heart's retreat. Such isolation and alienation of the individual is a recurrent theme in Iqbal's poetry, and seems to derive from very early experience. Nevertheless, the *turban* is the ultimate human power, because knowledge of the vastness of time and space, represents a clue to the possibility of becoming more powerful than the sun. Further, the immensity in time and space of the mountains points directly to the vast creative capacities that lie within human consciousness.

The word translated as 'effulgence' has the implications of a manifestation of shining light, brilliance. The notion of a bursting through into the mundane world of a shining radiance, with the power to transform the grey conditions of life, is a common theme in Iqbal's writing. The link of the mountain, as a symbol of strength and timelessness, with *Sinai*, as a symbol of transforming insight, is repeated many times throughout Iqbal's poetic career. We cannot know the exact nature of his developing religious awareness, but the germs of all that he has to say later are latent in this early poem.

Thus the link between the strength of the mountains across space and time, and the vast spaces of inner self-awareness came to Iqbal's mind sometime in his youth in Sialkot. To the young Iqbal, the mountains suggested the possibility of escaping the confines of imperial domination, and of rediscovering, through a revived appropriation of the insights of the ancestors, the capacities to create a better future. The flowers on the mountain have never been picked by human hand; they suggest a greater power that could be the source of new life. Much has been written later making guesses as to where Iqbal got his ideas, and as to whether he changed very much. This poem indicates the source of his first insights.

Another very early poem indicates his basic orientation to the dilemma of mutual awareness between God and humanity. It is said that a much older and respected poet, Mirzā Aḥmad of Gurgāon, responded with ecstasy when he heard these verses from the young Iqbal.

*Divine grace has gathered them
as though they were pearls*

*these drops which were
the drawn-out essence of my remorse.*¹⁸

Here, too, the seeds of much of Iqbal's later thought can be discerned. The tears are because of the failure, individually and collectively, of Muslims to function effectively in the new world that was bursting in upon them. The hope is that honest grief and repentance for failure can and will be used by Divine grace to revive and restore. One can understand this theologically, namely that the God of Abraham may help the people in response to honest repentance. One can also understand, from the perspective of literature, that a vivid metaphor can stir up intense response, as Iqbal's verses often did. The power of Iqbal's verses comes from his capacity to convey in condensed form an honest recognition of human failure in the light of Divine promise.

Economics

After graduating from university, Iqbal taught philosophy and literature for six years at Government College, and at the Oriental College, Lahore. These two institutions were physically close to each other. The first was specialising in western knowledge, and the second in Arabic and Islamic thought. Iqbal had studied in both institutions, and he taught in both. He became strongly motivated to try to integrate Muslim knowledge with the contemporary world of scholarship.

He also taught economics during this period, and he published a prose book in Urdu, a book on economics. The title was *'Ilm al-Iqtisād* (Economics). We have mentioned Iqbal's continual reading over a wide range of subjects. In this book, he explains some of the ideas he had gained from studying Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. This latter volume was one of the first works to establish economics as an academic discipline in the modern world. By publishing a study of these ideas in Urdu, Iqbal indicated that he was continuing the process initiated by Sayyid Aḥmed Khān of trying to bring Urdu readers up to date with the latest in modern thought. Sayyid Aḥmed Khān had founded an Urdu Text Translation Society.

Both Arnold and Shiblī helped with the editing and preparation of Iqbal's book on economics, thus illustrating their support for the young poet's ideas. Iqbal had been stimulated by the intellectual vigour of Adam Smith, as he had been by Milton. Adam Smith had been a poor Scottish boy caught up in the intellectual fervour of the

Scottish enlightenment. His book was published in 1776, right in the midst of the revolutionary enthusiasms that led to the American and French revolutions. Adam Smith himself had taught at the University of Glasgow; he lectured on moral philosophy. In this book, he focused on both the promises, and the dangers, that he recognised in the rapid changes taking place as feudalism disintegrated. As a moral philosopher, Adam Smith was lucid about the necessity of developing social and legal structures, new designs for the emerging new forms of society, that would limit oppression. He knew that his world was rapidly changing, and he understood that the processes of change could do much harm if they were not directed by reason, spiritual values, and good judgment.

The perspective that informs his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, is the question—what forces make for the improvement of conditions of life for all the individuals in a society? In somewhat the same vein as Milton, Smith spoke as an alert intelligence grappling with the many serious problems of rapid social change, of the disintegration of known forms of social organization, and of the possibilities of greater destructiveness of human life in the new world coming into being. Undirected change might make human existence much more chaotic and troubled.

This Scottish moral philosopher spoke plainly about the greed and aggressiveness that he saw as innate tendencies of human personality. He stressed that continual criticism of political and economic power was essential; the victims of the powerful must be able to criticise effectively. He maintained that political institutions should be developed that would make political and economic processes open to the scrutiny of all. These institutions should continually function in such a way as to restrain greed and aggression. In others words, if people were being mistreated, they should be able to make laws to restrain and punish their oppressors.

Adam Smith discussed the processes at work in the transitions in social, economic and political life from tribal, to feudal, to commercial societies. His book was written before the large scale transformations of western society brought about by the industrial revolution in the 19th century. However, the small merchants of Scotland were beginning to prosper in his lifetime; he could see the benefits of the collapse of feudalism for new forms of commerce.

Adam Smith had observed the beginnings of aggressive monopolies in Holland and England. Although he favoured the development of free and independent businesses, he feared that great evil might come from monopolies that were subject to no effective criticism.¹⁹ He was fiercely critical of the evil done by companies like the Dutch and British East India companies through the brutal exploitation of Asian people. There was a further danger, he said, that such monopolies would also destroy freedom in their home nations, because they would try to become institutions above criticism. Once the monopolies dominated the economy of the nation, they would dominate the politics and social life, and information services also, so that the people in the home countries would be victimised, just as the colonised people had been.

Iqbal's thinking was stimulated by the ideas of this Scottish moral philosopher. The young Indian was naturally interested in the explanations given as to how the imperialist monopolies functioned. He recognised that the problems caused by the transition away from feudalism were problems for his people too. Iqbal grasped Smith's thesis that economic power must be disciplined by structures of law and accountability to all the citizens. He saw the necessity of devising ways through law, and other social and political institutions, to control greed, and to combat the mistreatment of people. Iqbal's subsequent interest in *Shari'ah*, Islamic religious law, as a means to control greed and exploitation, was stimulated by his recognition that unsupervised social change might be dangerous.

Iqbal's later economic thought focuses on the problem of how to balance freedom with law, namely how to encourage economic development, while limiting exploitation and corruption. He learned from Shibli that Muslim jurists should be flexible, and he learned from Adam Smith that law must function to restrain and control the wielders of economic power. Iqbal continued to think of on-going processes of social change; this meant that governing and legal structures could not be static. Since Shibli was helping him with this manuscript, we can see that both these Muslim reformers recognised that the reform of Islamic jurisprudence should be linked to a good understanding of economics. In other words, to design effective laws for a people who were undergoing rapid change from a feudal to an industrial society, the jurists, politicians, and religious thinkers would all need to understand both the traditional juristic principles,

and also the actual problems involved in transition from one kind of economic and social structure to another.

Iqbal's purpose, like that of Sayyid Ahmed Khān, was to provoke his Indian Muslim readers into trying out some new ideas. He wanted his people to realise that much of their traditional culture, including their economic practices, would have to be reformed. Muslims needed to begin to think about Islamic history as an on-going process of development through stages, related to the processes of development in all world cultures and civilisations. The two perspectives of Adam Smith and Shibli blended in Iqbal's mind.

One of the questions provoking the poet, when he was in his early twenties, was how to shake the Indian Muslims out of their old habits. He mentions early marriages as one of the errors that received led to cultural impoverishment.²⁰ He wanted radical social change. Like Adam Smith, he perceived feudal practices and institutions as obstacles to greater prosperity and social justice. But he also understood that change in itself might lead to worse inequities and injustices, if the change was not directed by sound judgment in the designing of better political, economic and judicial institutions. Iqbal's later objection to nationalism was based in large measure on the understanding of economics that he had gained from Adam Smith. He understood that a modern nation could become an evil instrument of aggression against those whom that nation exploited for economic gain.

We do not usually think of Adam Smith as a religious thinker, but, in fact, he was. He was focused on what actually happened to people in the real world as a result of economic and political policies. For example, he said that the economic activities of the Dutch East India Company caused the destruction of many traditional Indonesian modes of economic life, and that this destruction resulted in great loss of life. Whole populations disappeared when their livelihood disintegrated. Adam Smith looked at economic and political structures in terms of what these modes of organisation did to human life. When the results were destructive, he did not hesitate to say so.

Thus, as a moral philosopher, Adam Smith maintained that these new forces of economic and social change might lead to great evil, unless they could be disciplined and restrained by strong democratic forces. Those forces that would need to have the wisdom and the

power to restrict the dominating tendencies of monopolies. Adam Smith believed that a good world would be possible only if economic and political institutions were controlled by those who were in danger of subjugation to the power of monopoly. Hence, free political criticism based on accurate knowledge of what was happening in the world would always be essential.

Iqbal taught economics briefly at this time, but never did so again. This was the only book that he wrote on economics. Nevertheless, the double-edged problem of how to move to new institutions, without creating bad institutions, remained central to his thinking. Iqbal wanted his Muslim readers to understand that social and economic transformations were a natural part of all human history. Muslims should recognise that their own history was made up of on-going processes of change. They should learn to accept change as a normal part of life. However, they should also watch carefully the actual processes at work so that they could direct the change as wisely as possible. The concerns of Adam Smith to warn against the dangers of excessive greed, and to advise that laws must be implemented to control excesses, became the concerns of Iqbal also. Iqbal thought that the *Shari'ah*, properly understood, might help protect Muslims against the possible excesses of the new forms of economic development. We will return to a discussion of Iqbal's later ideas about law and society in chapter five.

The New Temple

At this period of his life in Lahore, Iqbal was interested in Indian culture as a whole, as well as in distinctively Muslim culture. He wrote a poem about Nānak, the original guru of the Sikh community.²¹ He had had a close friendship with a Hindu philosopher, Swāmi Rām Tirath, who was teaching him Sanskrit. This Hindu was a brilliant mathematician who had taught at the Mission school in Sialkot, and at Forman Christian College, Lahore. When his Hindu friend died in 1906, Iqbal wrote a poem about him. One line says:

*Ah! How gracefully you opened the secrets of life
I am still a prisoner of the discriminations of life.*²²

The implication of this poem is that anyone in any tradition can respond to love, and witness to its transforming promises. Much later in one of Iqbal's last major epics, *Javīd Nāmāh*, the Muslim poet also refers to certain Hindu thinkers as persons who are significant

exemplars of the love of God. This is, therefore, one consistent and significant theme of Iqbal's thought, namely that response to love and to beauty is never confined to any one community. In this, he was following the centuries old Indian tradition of mutual respect between Sufis and Hindu mystics, especially those Hindus of the Bhakti school of personal devotion to God.

Iqbal wrote a poem about Rama that reads:

*Overflowing with the wine of Truth is the cup of India
All philosophers of the Western world have acknowledged India
It is the result of the elegant thinking of Indians
That higher than the sky is the position of India
This country has had many people of angelic disposition
On whose account world renowned is the name of India
India is proud of the existence of Rama
Spiritual people consider him prelate of India
This alone is the miracle of this light of righteousness
That brighter than world's morning is the evening of India
He was expert in sword craft, was unique in bravery
Was matchless in piety and in the enthusiasm of love.²³*

As this poem indicates, Iqbal was impressed in his college days with the elegance of Indian philosophy, and with the tradition of devotional Hinduism symbolised by Rama.

Iqbal's famous poem *Nayā Shivālah* (The New Temple) affirmed the need for cooperation among religiously sincere Indians in moving beyond the closed minds of their traditional religious leaders. He called young Indians to build a new temple in India in which all the worshippers together could witness to the transforming power of love.

*I'll tell you truth, O Brahmin, if I may make so bold!
These idols in your temples--these idols have grown old'
To hate your fellow-mortals is all they teach you, while
Our God too sets his preachers to scold and to revile'
Sickened, from both your temple and our shrine I have run,
Alike our preachers' sermons and your fond myths I shun.
--In every graven image you fancied God: I see
In each speck of my country's poor dust, divinity....
Come, let us lift suspicions's thick curtains once again,
Unite once more the sundered wine clean of divisions's stain*

Firm strength, calm peace, shall blend in the hymns the votary sings--

*For from love comes salvation to all earth's living things.*²⁴

This poem, written before 1908, was understood at the time to convey Iqbal's hope that Indians could move together into a better future for all of them. The poem indicates that Iqbal perceived suspicion, and mutual distrust, to be the causes of the divisions that stood in the way of solving the problems of the real world. He emphasises the need to focus on real human problems, and to value human beings above old superstitions and practices.

The question as to how much of the idealism of this early poem remained with Iqbal later is a disputed and complex issue. He certainly never ceases to insist that love is the power than can transform, strengthen, and bring peace to, all people. We will return to this matter in chapter ten when we consider his epic poem, the *Javid Nāmah*. Iqbal never lost, nor denied, his respect for the elegance of Hindu philosophy, nor his admiration for the devotional strength of Bhakti forms of Hinduism. Neither did he change his distrust of nationalism as a possible instrument of tyrannical monopolies. The poem later became controversial as Iqbal became more critical of Indian nationalism as an adequate political goal for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

He puzzled many people who later could not reconcile his distrust of nationalism with the sentiments expressed in this poem. Some thought his later political ideas represented a rejection of the possibility of effective cooperation between Muslims and Hindus. Others disagreed. The question is one of the most controversial aspects of his legacy.

During these years, Iqbal taught English poetry at Government College, Lahore, for a while. He was thinking about the affirmations of some of the English authors he was reading in relation to his own ideas. During his teaching, Iqbal sometimes spontaneously recited verses of his own in Urdu in response to the impulses that the English poets stimulated in him. He wrote poems that he cited as responses to the American philosopher, Emerson, and to the English mystical poet, Cowper.²⁵ Throughout his life, he was responsive to poets and philosophers whom he found attractive regardless of their origins. It was the quality of the insights of particular persons, as

expressed in their writings that always interested Iqbal, and not abstract ideology.

The young poet's lively sense of humour is well indicated from the poem *Zuhd aur Rindī* (Piety and Drunkenness), which was written during this period.²⁶ The theme is that a zealous member of the ulema (preachers, scholars of Islamic law) wants to know what kind of Muslim Iqbal is—this unreliable poet does not consider Hindus to be unbelievers (kāfirs) and he gets these wild ideas from studying philosophy. He likes 'Alī and is friendly to Shī'ism. He likes music and lovers. He is in favour of spiritual freedom, and is as bad as Ḥallāj in approving of personal ecstasy. In the poem, the zealous dignitary prolongs his sermon, giving vent to all the wrong things the poet is accused of doing and thinking. The dignitary meets Iqbal later on the street and explains that it was his duty to point out all these errors. Iqbal says he has no complaint since he himself does not know what kind of Muslim he is.

Iqbal studied law in Lahore at the same time as he was working for his M.A. in philosophy. When he wrote his exam in law, he failed one subject. Two years later, he asked if he could write the exam again without taking the courses. He was refused permission to do this. In 1901, he applied for a job with the civil service. He was refused permission by the medical board. About this time, his elder brother was accused of being involved in a criminal conspiracy. Iqbal sent a memorandum with a detailed account of the facts of the case to Lord Curzon, and the accusations against his brother were finally abandoned, and the case dismissed. These were difficult years for Iqbal since his financial situation was insecure. His temperament was certainly that of an academic, but university work was badly paid and not much respected. He was not sure what direction to take.

Arnold had returned to England in 1904, and Iqbal missed him very much. Shibli had been invited by Arnold to come and work in Lahore, but he had gone to Hyderabad, Deccan, instead, and later to Lucknow. Shibli was particularly concerned to train young Muslims who could write effectively, because he knew that the impact of modern education might cause young Muslims to lose confidence in their own culture. He wanted to develop writers who could produce material that would stimulate greater self confidence among Muslims in their own traditions. Maulānā Āzād and Suleymān Nadvī were

among those who learned from Shibli how to write for the Muslims of the modern world.

Iqbal was one who took this same vocation of trying to become an articulate Muslim writer upon himself in his own way. When Arnold left to go back to England, Iqbal wrote the following poem to honour his teacher.

Lament of Separation

*Today my heart is convinced of this truth
The light of the separations's day is darker than night
'As from his departure's breath the scar is picked up
Sight is asleep in my eyes like the extinguished candle'
I am fond of seclusion, I hate the habitation
I run away from the city in excruciation of love
I make the heart restless from the olden days' memory
For satisfaction I come ardently running towards you.
Though the eye is familiar with your nook and corner
Still some strangeness is apparent from my speed
My heart's speck was just to be acquainted with the sun
The broken mirror was just to expand into the universe
The tree of my longings was just going to green up
Ah! What does any one know what I was going to be!
Mercy's cloud gathered up its skirt from my garden and departed
Rained a little over the flower buds of my desires and departed.
Where are you! O Kalim of the pinnacle of Sinai of learning
Your breath was the breeze promoting the joy of learning
Gone is that zeal for walking in the vast expanse of learning
In my intellect also you were the inspirer of love of learning.
Where is Lailah's fervour, so as to decorate Love again
May make the dust of Majnun mixed with wilderness again.
The wilderness of solitude will open the fate's knot
I shall reach you after breaking the chains of the Punjab.
The bewildered eye looks upon your picture
But how can one searching for speech be happy?
'No power to speak the picture's mouth has
Silence is the speech which the picture has.'²⁷*

Here is the *Sinai* image once again, in this case linked with the revelations that come from scholarship. Arnold's work was directed towards presenting a more just and balanced attitude to Islamic history than had been characteristic of western scholarship for more

than a thousand years. This was also Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's cause, the strong intention to combat western ignorance of Islam, and to elicit respect for the Muslim religious tradition. This passion had been mediated through Arnold and Shibli to Iqbal. He had absorbed the intention, but felt abandoned when his teacher left him.

The symbols of the Lailah and Majnun, lovers maddened by separation, are classic images of Muslim poetry that Iqbal uses often to symbolise grief.

One motive behind the shared concerns of Arnold and Shibli seems to have been a hope for peace, and for mutual appreciation, and respect, between persons from differing cultures, a hope that the centuries of hostility and mutual contempt could be transcended. This is one of the themes that shapes Iqbal's own quest for a vision of the future in which all human life would be valued.

Shibli died in 1916, at the same time as another great Urdu poet and religious thinker, Ḥālī. Iqbal wrote a poem in memory of both of these significant Muslim exemplars. We include this poem here because these two, like Arnold, were extremely important in shaping the mind of Iqbal when he was a student and young teacher in Lahore. This poem tells us something of how Iqbal understood what he had learned from his mentors.

"Shibli and Ḥālī

*One day Iqbal said to the Muslim
Your existence is unique in the universe.
The tunes of your old songs are the basis of new knowledge
Civilization is the dust of your old caravan
Even the zephyr's current is like stone to it
Very delicate is the mirror of Man's honour
The men of action by discovering the causes of phenomena
Find the cure for the azure-coloured sky's cruelties.
Ask them who are the old secret keepers of the garden
How the autumn became engaged in fight with your garden?"*
*The Muslim became restless with my conversation
The sad sigh became betrayer of the inner sorrow
He said "Just look at the autumn's condition
The leaves of the tree of life have become pale"
Those garden's secret keepers became silent
Whose tune of pathos was the means of mellowness
The garden's inhabitants were still mourning Shibli*

*When Ḥālī also became a traveller towards Paradise
 'Still he is a fool who is asking the gardener
 What did nightingale say, what did rose hear, what did zephyr
 do?'²⁸*

The last couplet is quoted from Shibli's poetry. There seem to be three phases of this poem. Iqbal first speaks to Muslims about the possibilities of using old songs as the basis of new knowledge. His hearers reply that the help they need has gone with the disappearance of these two guiding and supporting voices. The final note is a repetition of a verse from Shibli himself that comes as a rebuke to those who are threatening to turn into pale leaves on the tree of life. This is certainly an instance of a statement not easily translated into prose. However, one can say that Iqbal saw himself as one who recognised that he had been vitalised by the secret keepers of the garden, and who knew that he should not ask stupid questions.

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 - ² Jagan Nath Azad, *Iqbal Mind and Thought*, pp. 41-57.
 - ³ Muhammad Ali, *My Life a Fragment*, p. 6.
 - ⁴ See Dr. S. S. Ma ḥmūd Ḥussain, *Shams al-'Ulama Moulvi Mir Ḥasan*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1981.
 - ⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 166,167.
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 - ¹⁰ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*.
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 - ¹² Muhammad Ali, *My Life a Fragment*, p. 24.
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 - ¹⁴ *Poems from Iqbal*, pp. 83,84.
 - ¹⁵ Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Nu'mani: An Expository of his Religious and Socio-Political Ideas*, pp. 74-76. See also, Sheila McDonough, "Shibli Nu'mani" in Robert Baird, ed., *Religion in*

Modern India. In addition, see Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, pp. 77-85.

¹⁶ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Northrop Frye, *The Double-Vision*, pp. 3-21.

¹⁸ Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, p. 11.

¹⁹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nation*, p. 366.

²⁰ *Zinda Rūd*, pp. 262ff.

²¹ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 324.

²² *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 182.

²³ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, pp. 263,264.

²⁴ *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 8.

²⁵ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 263.

²⁶ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, pp. 118,119.

²⁷ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 132.

²⁸ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 308.

Chapter Two

Encounter with Europe

Oh, heart, you too be silent;
Keep your grief hugged close and sleep

In 1905, when he was 28, Iqbal left India by boat from Bombay to go to study in England. His wife and children were left behind as he had very little money for his expenses. This journey put him among the very small minority of Indians of his generation who were able to study abroad. His elder brother, who had found employment in the civil service in India, had provided most of the money for the trip. Arnold had returned earlier to England. On his journey to Bombay, Iqbal visited Muslim shrines along the way. He visited the shrines of the Mughal prince, Darā Shukoh, the Sufi saint, Nizām ud Dīn Auliya, and the poet, Ghālib. In Bombay, waiting for the boat, he met some Turks who talked to him about the reforming ideas of many Turkish activists. He was impressed by them. On his visit to a Parsi school, he was interested by the number of students wearing glasses. This seemed to him indicative of important modernising changes; he suffered from poor vision.

When his ship passed through the Red Sea, he meditated about the loneliness of the Prophet Muhammad in the desert. The desert recurs often in his poems as a symbol of separation from the busy preoccupations of everyday life; such withdrawal may lead to transforming vision. Iqbal many times repeats the notion that withdrawal may be necessary, if effective transformation is to happen. The rituals of Muslim religious life, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage, all inculcate awareness of the necessity of regular withdrawal from, and return to, the concerns of everyday life. Iqbal was never able to fulfil his desire to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.

On arrival in England, he went directly to Cambridge where arrangements were made for him to be a research scholar. His

academic career in Europe had three facets. He did research and attended lectures at Cambridge, where he received BA. and M.A. degrees. Later, arrangements were made for him to go to Munich in Germany, where he completed a dissertation on Persian Metaphysics and received his doctorate. While he had been studying at Cambridge, he also attended classes in law in London, and had a degree as a barrister. Arnold had guided his academic studies at Cambridge and Munich, but the decision to study law as well was Iqbal's own idea. The desire to work for a degree in law was based on both financial and political considerations. Although Iqbal was naturally attracted to research and scholarship, working for a University in India before 1914 meant working for the British government, and he did not want to do that. Law promised greater possibilities of personal independence and financial reward. His decision to pursue further legal studies in England seems to have been motivated by his annoyance with the problems he had had with the administrators of the legal training in Lahore.

At Cambridge, he found himself in a milieu sympathetic to his concern to make Muslim scholarship better known to Muslims themselves, and also to any scholars interested in a wider appreciation of all the religious traditions of the world. Iqbal met and worked with many of the people who were on the threshold of developing the new academic discipline of the comparative history of religion. The world of western intellectuals, at the opening of the twentieth century, was just beginning to look at world history as a whole, and to see European Christianity as just one among many other world civilizations that had existed. The Cambridge scholars, E. Browne and R. Nicholson, had begun the study of the intellectual history of Sufism.

Iqbal was encouraged by his Cambridge teachers to do further studies on the history of the religious thought of Muslims. His doctoral thesis was the first one to be written about the metaphysics of the complex intellectual tradition of Persian philosophy and mysticism. Western scholarship, in general, in the first decade of the twentieth century was still almost entirely ignorant about Islamic history and culture. Iqbal's philosophy professor, McTaggart, was interested in Sufi philosophical ideas. Another philosopher, James Ward, helped Iqbal learn more about the psychology of personal religious experience.

Some time later, another young Muslim philosopher was a student of these same professors. That philosopher, M. M. Sharif, tells us that, when he returned to Lahore, he talked to Iqbal about the teachers they had shared.

I came in personal contact with Iqbal on my return from England. I met him by chance at a wedding....When I was introduced to him by the bridegroom as a student of Philosophy just returned from Cambridge, Iqbal seemed to be very pleased, for, after him, I was the first Indian Muslim who had studied Philosophy abroad. His deep love for Philosophy made him take an interest in me. The memories of his own Cambridge days came to his mind, and we talked through the marriage about our common teachers, McTaggart, James Ward and others. His studies in Western philosophy.... and his research work in Muslim Philosophy in England and Germany prepared the ground for Iqbal's philosophy in general and the problem of Divine reality in particular; and his early religious training supplied the seed out of which has grown a beautiful plant....Whatever the influence of others in other directions with regard to the solution of the problem in hand, Iqbal's thought was moulded chiefly by Ward.¹

M. M. Sharif based this conclusion about the influence of Ward on his conversation with Iqbal. Sharif explains that Iqbal and Ward had both rejected the notion that God could predict the future. This affirmation is necessary if human freedom is to be taken seriously. M. M. Sharif says that both Iqbal and Ward agreed that God is perfect through His creative process, but is not directing history explicitly towards perfection. God's will functions through the will of the finite egos, not by means of God pulling the strings of puppets, but by the process through which humans freely choose to affirm the transcendent values of justice, goodness and love, once they understand them. Reason can prove the necessity of faith, but cannot turn faith into knowledge. Certainty about God cannot come from reason but from the experiences of living, and from discovering the power of love.² God does not forcefully shape our future. We are free to choose, but wrong choices lead to disaster, whereas right choices enable humans to co-operate with God in making the world a better place for all.

To say that God is perfect through process, but not toward perfection, means that Iqbal and Ward agreed that God was not

forcing history towards a pre-ordained end, but was allowing humans to discover goodness and justice for themselves. Humans, after having discovered the perfections of the Divine Attributes, should be able to use these values to shape human institutions. To be human is to be aware of the possibilities of justice as something that can be actualised. God makes this possible, but humans must do the work. The Qur'anic paradigm about the necessity of choosing good over evil, which was a determining factor in Iqbal's consciousness, was thus supported by the philosophical imperatives that the young Muslim learned from James Ward.

Iqbal's experiences of studying philosophy at Cambridge, and later in Germany, strengthened his basic convictions, and helped encourage the direction of his mind. *Sinai* remains the symbol for him of self-discovery in relation to God. This is the metaphysical background from which Iqbal later goes on to argue for the necessity of working in the world to make the values discovered through religious experience manifest in human legal, political, social and economic structures.

In later life, Iqbal kept up a correspondence with Nicholson and McTaggart that indicates the sympathetic interest they felt in him and his career. His teachers understood his concerns to stimulate greater pride among Muslims in their own intellectual tradition, and they supported his efforts. He seems to have always regarded these teachers as friends and supporters. Most of the members of this particular group of Cambridge scholars were trying to move out of the closed circle of the intellectual life of earlier Christian centuries.

Iqbal also attended some of the lectures given by the mathematician, Alfred North Whitehead. The young Muslim was impressed by Whitehead's message that he personally had been devastated when he found out that all the ideas he had learned in physics were wrong. Whitehead encouraged students to understand that all opinions, on all subjects, should be held as tentative, because new information is always likely to force people to rethink what they thought they knew. Iqbal thus was aware, from his days at Cambridge, of the revolutionary impact that modern science would have on theories of knowledge.

Iqbal was primarily interested in what might be called applied ethics, namely how to create new forms of society that would sustain human virtues, and stimulate human creativeness. He had earlier

shared Adam Smith's concerns as to how to work to limit the dangers of human greed by developing better structures of law. From Whitehead, he gained a similar imperative with respect to the necessity to think about creating new social forms. He agreed with Whitehead's idea that religions are important because they provide basic principles that must be internalised so that young people can grow up to have consciences, and to strive to be just. Iqbal later wrote:³

In our own times, Professor Whitehead—an eminent mathematician and scientist—has conclusively shown that the traditional theory of materialism is wholly untenable.... In the words of Professor Whitehead, the theory reduces one-half of nature to a 'dream' and the other half to a 'conjecture'. Thus physics, finding it necessary to criticize its own foundations, has eventually found reason to break its own idol, and the empirical attitude which appeared to necessitate scientific materialism has finally ended in revolt against matter... According to Professor Whitehead, therefore, Nature is not a static fact situated in an a-dynamic void, but a structure of events possessing the character of a continuous creative flow which thought cuts up into isolated immobilities out of whose mutual relations arise the concepts of space and time....

The criticism of the foundations of the mathematical sciences has fully disclosed that the hypothesis of a pure materiality, an enduring stuff situated in an absolute space, is unworkable.... 'Substance' for modern Relativity-physics is not a persistent thing with variable states, but a system of inter-related events. In Whitehead's presentation of the theory, the notion of 'matter' is entirely replaced by the notion of 'organism'....

We have seen that Professor Whitehead describes the universe, not as something static, but as a structure of events possessing the character of a continuous creative flow.... This quality of Nature's passage in time is perhaps the most significant aspect of experience which the Quran especially emphasizes, and which, as I hope to be able to show in the sequel, offers the best clue to the ultimate nature of Reality. To some of the verses (2:164; 24:44) bearing on the point I have already drawn your attention. In view of the great importance of the subject I will add here a few more.

Verily, in the alternations of night and of day and in all that God created in the Heavens and in the earth are signs to those who Fear Him. (10:6)

And it is He who hath ordained the night and the day to succeed one another, for those who desire to think on God or desire to be thankful'.... (25: 63)

Apart from this, religion on its doctrinal side, as defined by Professor Whitehead is 'a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended'. Now, since the transformation and guidance of man's inner and outer life is the essential aim of religion, it is obvious that the general truths which it embodies must not remain unsettled.

These observations are made by Iqbal in his philosophical writings much later in his life, but they seem to indicate much of what he was thinking as he attended Whitehead's lectures at Cambridge. The fact that he regularly refers to the mathematician as 'Professor Whitehead' probably indicates that Iqbal always thought of this scholar as someone to whom he had listened with great attentiveness when he was himself a student.

The young Muslim student, shaped internally in his own mind by his readings of the Qur'an, and his interest in Muslim religious life, found support in Whitehead's lectures for his own concerns. Iqbal tells us that he found this approach to metaphysics to be a good and useful way to understand Qur'anic teaching about the cosmos. Throughout his life, Iqbal was fascinated by issues of time and space, as indicated in his early poem on the Himalayas. He later said that one of his ambitions was to write a book about Muslim thinking about time. The ideas of Henri Bergson also interested him. On one occasion, the Muslim poet visited the French philosopher in Paris. They shared a common interest in problems of how to think about ethics in the context of a philosophy of process.

Iqbal enjoyed the intellectual challenges, and cosmopolitan intellectual life of much of Cambridge, but he does not seem to have liked English social life very much. It was still a very racist culture in these pre-1914 years. Anti-Semitism shaped many peoples attitudes; Islam was commonly regarded as a dead and sterile religion. Iqbal's teachers did not have these attitudes, but the wider culture did. Iqbal found this atmosphere depressing. Our knowledge

about his attitudes during his student days comes partly from the writings of the young Muslim woman, Atiya Faizee, who belonged to the same group of young Indian Muslim scholars as he did.

The London Muslim League

During these years while Iqbal was at Cambridge, Sayyid Amir 'Ali was in London where he had retired, after having served as the first Indian judge to have been a member of the British Privy Council. Iqbal went regularly to London for his classes in law. He studied at Lincoln's Inn. While in London, he participated in meetings with many other Indian students. The Muslim League had just been established in India; in 1908, a British Committee of the All-India Muslim League was set up in London. Amir 'Ali was the President of this London group. Amir 'Ali was regularly writing articles about Islam for various publications. He wrote many letters to *The London Times* whenever he thought the Press had misrepresented Islam.

Amir 'Ali's books *The Spirit of Islam* and *The History of the Saracens* were widely read among young Muslims who were beginning to experience the positive and negative effects of education in British institutions. One of the effects of this new education was exposure to the widespread negative stereotyping of Islam characteristic of much western writing, both academic and popular. Amir 'Ali's books helped to counteract these stereotypes, and to restore confidence in Muslims as to the value and flexibility of their religious tradition. Iqbal was part of the group of students who met with Amir 'Ali. The young poet-philosopher was elected to the executive committee of this London branch of the Muslim League. Iqbal continued to be a loyal supporter of this party for the rest of his life.

M. K. Gandhi came from South Africa to London in 1906, and again in 1908, to ask the British Cabinet to support the efforts of the Indians in South Africa in protesting the mistreatment they were receiving. Amir 'Ali and his friends were supporting these South African protests. Amir 'Ali went with Gandhi on a formal visit to the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs to request the support of the British Government for the struggle of the Indians in South Africa for equal rights as citizens of that British territory.⁴ Both the Muslim and the Hindu were furious at the reception they got. The British refused to do anything about the South African situation.

Gandhi expressed his feelings later on the boat when he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, (Self-governing India) Gandhi's essay is a vehement attack on the immoral western civilization that had lost all knowledge of God, and that was dominated purely by greed. Amir 'Ali also expressed his anger at the British refusal to help in the protests against the South African racist policy. He wrote an attack on western ideas of civilisation that was published a year before Gandhi's essay was written. The characterization of western civilization is so similar in these two writings—white men who think they are superior because they wear trousers, etc—that one gets the impression that Gandhi and Amir 'Ali maybe had tea together after they left the Colonial Office, and shared their anger at the way they had been treated.

Amir Ali's comments provide insight into the attitudes of the young Indian students, in the London of 1908, who were the peers and companions of Iqbal. We can assume that the anti-racist perspective expressed in this article is one that the young Iqbal and his Indian friends shared. Amir 'Ali writes with biting indignation about the moral hypocrisy of the British: he says that, in the Middle Ages, religion served as the legitimation for enslaving other races, as in Mexico and Latin America. Now, however, he says:

Religion has made room for what is called the 'Western civilisation.' 'The white man's burden' has elbowed out the Gospel, whilst trade has become more important than 'evangelisation.' Although the missionary, in his efforts to avoid martyrdom, has always at his back ironclad and big guns, the Bible is not forced upon unwilling people with the same fierce proselytising zeal as a few centuries ago; it is now trade which they are compelled to admit whether they will or not. They are no more converted, they are 'civilised.' Civilisation is brought to their doors with beat of drums and clangour of arms, in the shape of trousers and top-hats, drink, disease, infant-murder and prostitution....

The champion of Jehovah restricted salvation to birth in Israel; the champion of 'Western civilisation' confines it to a special colour. With him it is a primary article of faith that, whatever maybe the case in heaven, the kingdom of the earth is for the white skin.... South Africa presents at this moment an extraordinary spectacle of what a mixture of high altruistic pretensions

and rank selfishness can produce in the name of civilisation. Every lover of humanity must recognise the blessings which modern civilisation has brought to the world, but it would be sheer self-deception to shut one's eyes to the ills to which it has given birth or which it has intensified; to the hypocrisy of a great part of modern life; to the relegation of national and individual duties to the background in favour of hollow show and pretension, above all the apotheosis of money and power.⁵

In addition to South Africa, Amīr 'Alī also discusses a number of other examples of harsh measures enacted against colonial peoples, including the refusing of permission for a boatload of immigrants to enter Canada, discriminatory policies in the German East African Protectorate, the mistreatment of native peoples in North and South America, New Zealand, and Polynesia, and French efforts to impose their culture in Algeria and Morocco. All are seen as part of the same disease of self righteous western arrogance based on assumptions of racial superiority.

Iqbal, like many other foreign students in western countries, gradually came to hold a wider perspective on the world-wide nature of imperialism. While still in India, he had known something of the effects of British domination on the local culture, but now he grasped more fully the extent and destructiveness of the imperialist system. This strongly worded passage from Amīr 'Alī gives us a pretty clear idea of the feelings of the Indian students in England at the time. There was not much difference of opinion between Hindus and Muslims about the hypocrisy of the western attempts to justify domination over Asian and African countries.

In chapters seven and eight, we will discuss further similarities and differences in the ideas of Iqbal and Gandhi. In the first decade of this century, they shared attitudes much like those we have quoted from Amīr 'Alī. At this stage of events, these two young Indians, and many others, were looking for guidance as to how to remedy the ills of living in a colonised condition. The Muslim writer urged reform of the hypocrisy, and of the dominance of power-drunk imperialists over colonised people. He saw this as a process. Amīr 'Alī wanted Indians to become more articulate in their protests and to fight against discrimination, but he did not want to abolish modern industrial society.

Since Iqbal was in London at the time that Gandhi and Amir 'Ali tried to reason with the British about South Africa, he would have been well aware of the issues. Like Gandhi and Amir 'Ali, Iqbal was compelled to think about directions to take as a way of transcending the evils of imperialism. The Indian intellectual leaders felt that no help could be expected from the western governments of the time in terms of working for the liberation of the colonised peoples.

Iqbal believed that repetition never occurs in history. He understood process to mean that the choices we make create new situations. He thought that Muslims should learn to think in the Qur'anic way of 'either/or' in terms of actual choices to be made. He did not, however, extend 'either/or' to mean the choice between abstract systems. In other words, Iqbal thought that one continually has to make choices in life, but the choices are not between static, abstract systems. In any given human situation, choices are to be made. One needs to try to make choices in the light of the highest values one has. But there is no pre-existing, or eternal model that can be followed. We these choices as best we can in the light of the dim awareness we have of truth, goodness, and justice. But we never have more to guide us than the insights of our cultural heritage, and a sense of transcendent goodness. We have no pattern or blueprint, because we are making something new.

We learn from Atiya Faizee that Iqbal seems to have been somewhat withdrawn in terms of social contacts with the English. Much earlier, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, on his trip to England, had said that the alcoholism was one thing he did not like. Drunken university parties may well have been disliked by Iqbal for similar reasons. In addition, however, Iqbal was certainly drawing conclusions in his own mind as to what the positive and negative aspects of western society were. His thinking about what directions Muslims should take in the future was being influenced by his insights into what was wrong with the western societies he observed.

The years from 1900 to 1914 were characterised by extreme competitiveness between European nations in terms of expanding national trade, and of dividing up the rest of the world between them. Britain and France had seized power over much of Africa and Asia, and the newly united nations of Italy and Germany were trying hard to catch up. The war that finally broke out between the European powers was essentially a struggle to see who could grab most of the

riches of the world for his own nation. As someone who was always reading, and always very aware of current events, Iqbal understood the dangers latent in the competitiveness of these nation states. For the rest of his life, he distrusted nationalism. In his mind, nationalism, destructive competitiveness, and war were inextricably linked.

In the debates about the meaning of Iqbal's ideas, there has been dispute as to how, and in what ways, the European period affected him. We will discuss these questions further in chapter seven. Here we will just observe that he seems to have suffered considerable disillusionment with western civilization as racist, greedy, and likely to destroy itself. Iqbal had learned to look more thoroughly at what was going on in the world as a whole, and what he saw discouraged him greatly. In his early days, as he had moved from Sialkot to Lahore, he had been aware that the civilization of his ancestors would have to be changed to catch up with the new sciences and commercial practices of the modern world. His European experience, however, seems to have convinced him that European civilization itself was unstable, and liable to destructive explosions. Thus, as he saw the world in his student days, neither the feudal culture of the ancestors, nor the civilization of Europe was reliable. Something different was required; the problem had become more complex.

At one point, he visited a friend in Scotland and attended a meeting at a Church in which a Christian missionary was showing slides of mission work in India, and asking for money. India was presented as poverty stricken and barbarian. Iqbal got up and spoke for half an hour saying that his people had been conquered, but that they had a rich literature and culture of their own. The audience seems to have sided with him rather than with the missionary.⁶

In 1906, Iqbal published an article in a journal published in Cawnpore about the independence movement in India.⁷ He said that Hindus and Muslims in India would have to learn to work together if they were to make their nation strong. A number of the young Indian students in London met each other regularly. Atiya Faizee saw Iqbal quite often. She says that Iqbal told her he had both inner and outer aspects to his personality. The inner, *bāṭin*, was Sufi, while the outer, *ẓāhir*, was a practical businessman.⁸ The practical businessman was concerned with the law degree. When he went to do his studies in

law in London, Iqbal stayed with his friend Abdul Qadir. He eventually qualified for admission to the Bar.

Heidelberg

Iqbal left England to go to Heidelberg in Germany to complete work on his thesis. He wanted to study some old Islamic manuscripts that were in German libraries. As a serious research scholar, he was interested in doing all he could to recover the lost elements of the Muslim intellectual tradition. Atiya Faizee reports that Iqbal had told her that he was very interested in learning more about German philosophy. She describes him in London as very witty and amusing. Apparently, he found formal social events somewhat boring. The rigidity of English class structures seems to have annoyed him.

He had a happier time in Germany; Heidelberg seemed to him to be a very lovely place. It was a old university town beside a river, with an ancient castle, and beautiful parks. He lived in a student hostel, and took classes in German language, literature and philosophy. Two of his teachers in Germany were women scholars. His appreciation of the beauty of the setting is well expressed in one of his poems.

One Evening

(By the river Neckar at Heidelberg)

*Silent is the moonlight pale,
The boughs of all the trees are still,
The music-maker of the vale
Hushed, and the green robes of the hill;
Fallen into a swoon. Creation
Sleeps in the bosom of the night,
And from this hush such magic grows,
No more now Neckar's current flows;
Silent the starry caravan moves
Onward, no bell tinkling its flight,
Silent the hills and streams and groves,
All Nature lost in contemplation.
Oh heart, you too be silent: keep
Your grief hugged close, and sleep.⁹*

Many of Iqbal's poems have this theme of sharp contrast. The paradoxes typical of his thought often involve, as in this poem, the distinction between the apparent unified harmony of the rest of

nature, all silent in contemplation, and the urgent unrest of the troubled human spirit.

Iqbal became personally attached, during these Heidelberg days, to one of the German women teachers, Emma Wegenast. They exchanged letters after Iqbal returned to India, but never met again. Her letters to him have not been found; Iqbal tended not to keep personal correspondence. However, she kept his letters to her and they are now available.¹⁰ Iqbal had learned German in three months. Emma Wegenast was teaching German language and literature in a private tuition-centre for foreign students.

She and Iqbal studied together the epic poem, *Faust*, by Goethe (1749-1832). The two young people spent time walking beside the river talking about poetry. She helped him fulfil his wish to understand the German poet better. Goethe was one of the first western intellectuals to have taken a serious interest in Sufi thought. Reading Goethe had helped crystallize in the mind of the Scottish writer, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), the idea that the centuries of western contempt for the Prophet Muhammad had been based on a deliberate caricature. Carlyle's essay on the virtues of the Prophet Muhammad in his book, *Heros and Hero Worship*, was read by the young Gandhi, and by many of Indian students of Iqbal's generation in London. That essay was the first statement in English by a well-known author to challenge the centuries old negative stereotypes about the honesty and sincerity of the Prophet of Islam.

The impact of Goethe on western thinking about Islam was thus significant. Iqbal would naturally have been interested in Goethe for this reason. Also, *Faust*, the tale of a human who sells his soul to the devil, could be seen as symbolic of the moral crisis of the transition from the medieval to the modern world. Iqbal was interested in poets who contemplated Satan. Milton and Goethe stimulated in Iqbal's mind much reflection on the complexity of the human spirit, creative, free, puzzled, and threatened by the variety of options that had to be faced.

Later, when Iqbal writes about Goethe, we perhaps glimpse something of the content of the conversations that may have taken place between these two young people as they discussed German literature. In the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal quotes directly from Goethe:

In the endless self-repeating

*For evermore flows the same.
 Myriad arches springing, meeting,
 Hold at rest the mighty frame.
 Streams from all things love of living
 Grandest star and humblest clod.
 All the straining, all the striving
 Is eternal peace in God.¹¹*

Iqbal quotes this passage at the end of a chapter entitled 'the philosophical test of the revelations of religious experience'. This suggests that the young Muslim thought that Goethe would have understood his image of *Sinai*. Goethe had been one of the first European artists to try to open himself to religious wisdom coming from other cultures. He wrote a poem, addressed to the East, to indicate his wish to communicate with the wider world. At the age of 78, the German poet said in conversation:

If we Germans do not look outside of the narrow circle of our own environment, we fall an easy prey to pedantic conceit. For that reason I like to look around in foreign nations, and I advise everyone else to do the same. National literature is of little consequence now, the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must do his share to hasten the arrival of this epoch.¹²

Iqbal was interested in discussing world literature. His dislike of nationalism might also be linked to this attitude that he shared with Goethe, namely that working outside the narrow circle of one's own environment is good for the mind and spirit. Atiya Faizee visited Iqbal when he was in Germany, and met Emma Wegenast. Later, when Iqbal was back in India, he wrote to Atiya Faizee about Fraulein Wegenast, and said that the German woman philosopher was honest and good. The Muslim poet and the German teacher had shared a mutual interest in mystical poetry.

After Iqbal left Heidelberg, his letters to Emma Wegenast, in the period before 1914, indicate that he missed her companionship.¹³ In 1914, Germany was caught up in the first World War and no communication between Iqbal and his German friend was possible. Much later, when Iqbal was in London in 1931, he tried to arrange to visit her in Germany, but was not able to do so because of his other commitments.¹⁴ In a letter to Emma Wegenast in 1932, Iqbal wrote:

The memory of the days when we read together Goethe's *Faust* always comes back to me with painful happiness.... Germany was

a kind of second home to my spirit. I learned much and thought much in that country. The home of Goethe has found a permanent place in my soul.¹⁵

Emma Wegenast's undoubted affection for Iqbal should put to rest any idea that he was incapable of a positive response to a well educated western woman. Since she was clearly someone he liked very much, it is not reasonable to refuse to acknowledge that he was capable of appreciating intelligence in women. Had Iqbal really been a closed-minded reactionary on the subject of women, such a friendship would not likely have occurred. Atiya Faizee never suggests that Iqbal was opposed to the education of women. As someone who was with him and his friends on many occasions in England and Germany, she knew that he enjoyed the company of women who were his peers.

After returning to India, Iqbal responded to Goethe's poem, *West-Ostlicher Divan*, with his own reply. His title was *Payām i Mashriq* (Message from the East). *The Tulip of Sinai* was one part of this collection of Persian poems. Tulip is an image often used in Iqbal's poetry for the suffering human; the red at the centre of the tulip is symbolic of the human heart. To put the tulip together with *Sinai* indicates a linkage between human despair, and a taste of infinity. Iqbal was responding to Goethe's interest in the mystical experiences of all the world by saying that his own experience involved a quest to find direction for the revival of his people. Iqbal says that his people must revive, because their insights are needed by the rest of humanity.

The Development of Metaphysics in Persia

Iqbal's academic work in Germany was related to his researches into the history of Islamic philosophy and Islamic mystical thought. He was oriented in the direction of scholarship first established by Sayyid Ahmed Khān and Shibli. This direction meant to use the tools, the libraries, and the techniques of modern academic research in order to do more honest and accurate analysis of the Muslim past than was being done in the writings of those western scholars who, consciously or unconsciously, were using their researches to disparage Muslim intellectual and spiritual accomplishments. Because of his friendships with Shibli and Arnold, Iqbal was aware that co-operation between Muslim and western scholars was feasible, if the western scholars would accept a conscious readiness to

abandon biased assumptions against Islam in their research. Arnold and Nicholson were directing his research interests; through them he seems to have come into contact with many of the Europeans who were working in these areas, such as Asin Palacios in Spain, and Wensinck in Holland.

In Germany, Iqbal consulted some previously unknown manuscripts in the Berlin State library. He was venturing into an academic field, a modern history of Islamic metaphysical thinking, in which almost nothing was available in either western or Islamic languages. If he had opted to stay in a University and devote himself exclusively to this area of research, probably he would have written many more volumes. He was seriously interested in knowing more about the history of Muslim religious thought, and in writing accurately about it. In this respect, he was explicitly carrying on the process of reviving the interest in Muslim thought that had been begun by Shibli.

After completing his studies, Iqbal received his doctoral degree from Munich for his thesis entitled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia —A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*. The volume was dedicated to Arnold. Iqbal's contribution to the effort of producing new scholarship about Islamic history was to look for the documents in European libraries that would help demonstrate the vitality and originality of past forms of Muslim religious thinking.

The approach in the thesis is that of the comparative history of religion, an academic discipline that was in its infancy at the time Iqbal was working in Germany. His method was to analyse the history of metaphysical ideas expressed in the Persian language. He did so taking into account the influence of environmental and cultural factors on the shaping of mental attitudes. By taking this approach to the relationship of ideas to their contexts, Iqbal was indicating that he had a sophisticated grasp of the processes by which ideas change and develop over time. He assumes, as did most of the other scholars of his generation, that one can distinguish between an explicitly Semitic form of religious awareness, focused on the will, and an explicitly Aryan one, focused on knowledge.

The subjects he discusses include the pre-Islamic philosophical background in Persia, the impact on Muslim thought of the neo-Platonic Aristotelians, Islamic rationalism, the Ash'arite-Mu'tazila controversy, Sufism, and later Persian thought. He deals with all

these subjects from the angle of seeing the developing of Islamic philosophical thinking as a dialectical process in which the establishment of certain abstract ideas stimulates contrary ideas. What remains constant is the on-going Muslim devotion to the Qur'an, which shapes the way in which Muslims in different ages react to various metaphysical systems of thought.

From this thesis, one can see that Iqbal was knowledgeable about Buddhist metaphysics, the Hindu philosopher Shankara, and medieval Christian thought, as well as with 19th century German Christian religious thinkers such as Schleiermacher. The Muslim poet-philosopher had an overview of human religious thought as a whole that was as advanced as that of anyone of his generation. He may have learned about Shankara and Buddhist metaphysics from the Hindu mathematician who had been his good friend in Sialkot and Lahore. His personal library includes a book by the Hindu philosopher, Radhakrishnan. Iqbal's interest in Hindu philosophy seems to have continued all his life. The Hindu thinker most represented in Iqbal's library is Tagore.

He indicates in the thesis that the neo-Platonism characteristic of much Muslim thought did not do justice to Plato himself, because the medieval Muslims did not have access directly to much of Plato. Later, Iqbal comments that modern Muslims also have access to knowledge of Aristotle that is greater than the knowledge that was available to medieval Muslim thinkers.¹⁶ This is one reason why Iqbal was convinced that Muslims must reconstruct their religious thought. Medieval theologians and philosophers had not had the same resources available to them that modern scholars had. Iqbal wanted Muslim intellectuals to re-think the implications of their religious commitments to the problems of a changed world. Iqbal's approach to issues in Islamic philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence followed many of the directions that had been indicated by Shibli.

One area of concern that remains constant in all Iqbal's writing is the question of materialism as contrasted with an awareness of spiritual reality, the issue that underlies the *Sinai* image. Jamāl ad Din Afghānī had focussed on materialism as the evil underlying the inhumanity of western imperialism, and had attacked Sayyid Aḥmad Khān for appearing to cooperate with the British. Although Iqbal did not accept Afghani's characterization of the Indian Muslim reformer,

he does seem all his life to have been thinking about this question of materialism from various angles. In this thesis, materialism is considered as a form of metaphysics.

Iqbal thinks of intellectual history as on-going process in which persons are sometimes focusing on the material world, and sometimes retreating from that world. The latter way of thinking tends to reject all external forms as standards of truth.¹⁷ One extreme of materialism tends to create by means of reaction the bursting out of anti-materialism. Iqbal viewed Muslim religious thinking as a dialectical process of this kind in which one fixed metaphysical position tends to elicit the opposite position.

Iqbal says that the metaphysical position of the early rationalist Muslim philosophers, the Mu'tazila, was philosophically materialist, and theologically deist. These early Muslim rationalists had argued that matter had built in tendencies to behave consistently. This elicited the opposite view of the conservative theologians, the Ash'arites. The conservative thinkers refused to acknowledge that human reason could discover truth. In passing, Iqbal also notes that the Ismaili movement stood for centuries as a champion of science and philosophy in spite of many persecutions. Iqbal characterised the movement initiated by al-Ash'ari as an attempt not only to purge Islam of all non-Islamic elements, but also to say that everything in human consciousness is pre-determined by God.

This Ash'arite position would mean that the external world would not really exist. Iqbal considered this as an anti-rational position that had developed in response to extreme rationalism. Extremes of rationalism elicit denial of reason. Iqbal quotes Shibli's *'Ilm-al-Kalām*, (theology), as his source for this description of this medieval quarrel between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arites.¹⁸ From Iqbal's perspective, future Muslim religious thinkers needed to move beyond these old quarrels. Muslims needed to escape the mental confines of these old debates and move into new modes of philosophical and theological thinking.

Like Shibli, Iqbal considered the eleventh century mystic, al Ghazzālī, one of the greatest personalities of Islam. In his thesis, Iqbal expressed his admiration for the intellectual force of Ghazzālī. This philosopher had helped to create a system of education that had produced many great Muslim minds. Iqbal's own hope was that better philosophical reasoning among his generation of Muslims

might similarly lead to a renaissance of Muslim culture and intellectual life. Iqbal quoted the well-known passage in which Ghazzālī indicated his rejection of all forms of theological and philosophical authority. "From my childhood I was inclined to think out things for myself."¹⁹

Ghazzālī's rejection of authority had caused him to turn to search his inner consciousness for guidance. Iqbal agrees with this attitude. He says that al-Ghazzālī's silence as to the nature of the soul was based on similar reticence in the case of the Prophet Muhammad. However, Iqbal also thought that the scepticism of Ghazzālī had been one of the forces that had revived Muslim energy. He hoped that the same thing would happen in his time.

Iqbal refers to writings of both Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and Shiblī in his discussion of these issues; he was aware of carrying on the thinking of his mentors in this area. Iqbal's conclusion about the debate between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arites reads as follows:

It is, therefore, clear that while the dialectic of Rationalism destroyed the personality of God, and reduced divinity to a bare indefinable universality, the anti-rationalist movement, though it preserved the dogma of personality, destroyed the external reality of nature.... The one saves nature, and tends to do away with the God of Theology; the other sacrifices nature to save God as conceived by the orthodox. The God-intoxicated Sufi who stands aloof from the theological controversies of the age, saves and spiritualises both the aspects of existence, and looks upon the whole Universe as the self-revelation of God--a higher notion which synthesises the opposite extremes of his predecessors. 'Wooden-legged' rationalism, as the Sufi called it, speaks its last word in the sceptic Al-Ghazzālī, whose restless soul, after long and homeless wanderings in the desolate sands of dry intellectualism, found its final halting place in the still deep of human emotion. His scepticism is directed more to substantiate the necessity of a higher source of knowledge than merely to defend the dogma of Islamic Theology, and, therefore, marks the quiet victory of Sufism over all the rival speculative tendencies of the time.²⁰

One of the debated issues in many studies of Iqbal is the question as to whether or not, or in what sense, he was himself a Sufi. This passage indicates that he had no reservations about his conclusion

that al-Ghazzālī had definitively indicated the necessity for personal religious experience as a necessary foundation for faith. Without such experience, speculation is trivial, and becomes a ground for useless theorising and dispute. Religious experience does not necessarily mean an immediate intuition of the reality of God, but it certainly requires the humility about the limits of human knowledge that is necessary for serious prayer and meditation.

In his fourth chapter, Iqbal goes on to discuss realism and idealism as two different attitudes to life that have characterised later Islamic thought. He characterises al-Asha'ri as an idealist in the sense of one who denies any essence in matter. Iqbal argues that both sides, realist and idealist, are far from acceptable theories of knowledge by modern standards. Iqbal is very impatient with the Ash'arite failure to take seriously the impact of experience on the mind as something significant. The poet is moving towards an insistence that an adequate theory of knowledge must take both the external world and the internal mental world seriously.

In his fifth chapter, Iqbal discusses the origins of Sufism. He knew that Nicholson and some other European scholars had been tending to locate the origins of Sufism in sources coming from outside the Islamic tradition itself. Iqbal does not agree with this position, and has some mildly caustic things to say about the tendency to suppose that all new ideas come from outside. He rather thinks that the opposite is the case, namely, that members of a tradition spontaneously follow directions that make sense to them in terms of their original commitments. He writes at some length about the actual historical troubles of the 8th and 9th centuries inside the Islamic world, and indicates that the wars, and social disruption of that period were enough to cause persons to retreat into the contemplative life. In his words:

This extraordinary vitality of the Sufi restatement of Islam, however, is explained when we reflect on the all-embracing structure of Sufism. The Semitic formula of salvation can be briefly stated the words, "Transform your will" --which signifies that the Semite looks upon will as the essence of the human soul. The Indian Vedantist, on the other hand, teaches that all pain is due to our mistaken attitude towards the Universe. He, therefore, commands us to transform our understanding--implying thereby that the essential nature of man consists in thought, not activity or

will. But the Sufi holds that the mere transformation of will or understanding will not bring peace; we should bring about the transformation of both by a complete transformation of feeling, of which will and understanding are only specialised forms. His message to the individual is --'Love all, and forget your own individuality in doing good to others.' Says Rumi: 'To win other people's hearts is the greatest pilgrimage, and one heart is worth more than a thousand Ka'bahs. Ka'bah is a mere cottage of Abraham; but the heart is the very home of God'

But this formula demands a *why* and a *how* --a metaphysical justification of the ideal in order to satisfy the understanding, and rules of action in order to guide the will. Sufism furnishes both. Semitic religion is a code of strict rules of conduct; the Indian Vedanta, on the other hand, is a cold system of thought. Sufism avoids their incomplete psychology and attempts to synthesise both the Semitic and the Aryan formula in a higher category of Love.²¹

This quotation indicates many of the key ideas that shape Iqbal's own later writings, particularly the reference to Rūmī as a guide. This discussion is entitled *The Origin and Qur'anic Justification of Sufism*. The title indicates that Iqbal had no doubts about the Qur'anic basis of the vitality which has developed among Muslims because of the Sufis. In another passage, Iqbal quotes the famous passage from Shibli's commentary on Ibn Maskawaih's theory of the evolution of the soul, the passage that serves later as an element in the poet's epic about the ascension of the soul.²²

The remainder of the thesis is devoted to further analytic discussions of the metaphysical ideas present in a number of the manuscripts that Iqbal had found in European libraries. He lists nineteen such manuscripts. The overall aim of the thesis was thus to make known the details of earlier Islamic thinking that had been lost, and to place the development of medieval Islamic thinking in its historical context. Iqbal also suggested possible future directions for Muslim religious thinkers to take. He said that they should move beyond these earlier debates, and focus their efforts on rethinking their values in the intellectual context of the modern world. His chief conclusion is that Muslims of the future should rethink their perspective on the relationship between realism and idealism.

In writing about Suhrawardī, Iqbal notes that this thinker insisted on a kind of spiritual intuition, *dhaug*. In Iqbal's words:²³

Unaided reason is untrustworthy; it must always be supplemented by 'Dhaug'—the mysterious perception of the essence of things—which brings knowledge and peace to the restless soul, and disarms Scepticism for ever.

We have here a prose statement characterising some of the elements that recur in Iqbal's poetic image of *Sinai*. Iqbal often uses poetic images to indicate the limitations of reason without the guiding force of vision. Although he is writing about Suhrawardī, this insight seems to be one that he personally considered important.

Iqbal then writes about some of the medieval Muslim philosophical ideas about the universal man, the potentiality latent in all humans, as the perfection of the human norm. This ideal has often been considered by Muslims as the model for the spiritual life. The Qur'an repeats, 'I am a human being like you'.

A later Muslim philosopher discussing this same issue, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, points out that Muslim sages have spoken of the Prophet as a precious gem among stones.²⁴ Iqbal's thought was focused in this way on the Prophet Muhammad as the exemplary human being.

Iqbal examined how some earlier Muslim mystics have dealt philosophically with this idea. The notion of the universal man includes the symbolic view that the Prophet is the prototype of creation. Nasr writes about this same Muslim idea as follows:

Only the saint realizes the totality of the nature of universal man and thereby becomes the perfect mirror in which God contemplates Himself. God created the world so that He might be known according to the sacred *Hadith* 'I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known, therefore I created the world'. The Universal Man is the mirror in which the Divine Names and qualities are fully reflected and through which the purpose of creation itself is fulfilled.²⁵

Iqbal later published a study of the thought of a mystical writer, 'Abdul Karīm al-Jilānī (1366-1408), who had developed a theory of *Insān ul Kāmil*, The Perfect Man. The theory is that Being exists in two modes, the unqualified absolute, and the qualified, which is manifested. There is unity in the un-manifested, and diversity in the manifested. This basic paradox, the unity of Being and the diversity

of experience, is a problem for all the philosophies of the religious traditions of the world. The only way to deal with this paradox is metaphor. The Perfect Man is a metaphorical idea that makes it possible to link the two worlds of unity and diversity.

The human being, caught up in the world of diversity, is capable of developing in such a way that he, or she, will become able to reflect, as a mirror, the attributes of God, the Absolute who is the sum of all the attributes. The human being learns to do this through spiritual training and mystical ascent. *Insān ul Kāmil* refers to the final stage of human development in which the person becomes the eye of God, and his, or her, life, the life of God.²⁶ The notion of polishing the mirror of the heart is a common Sufi metaphor intended to indicate that the more a person refines the motives behind actions, and the more generous and less mean, he, or she, becomes, the more other people can recognise the Divine Attributes. In other words, through meeting a person who is merciful, one can grasp something of the reality of Divine Mercy.

In this later article on al Jili, Iqbal indicates that the difference he has discerned in this Persian metaphysics, as compared to Vedanta, lies in a greater emphasis on the reality of matter. The *insān ul kāmīl* notion, as developed by this thinker, stressed that at a certain moment of mystical consciousness, human consciousness might come into close relation to the Divine, but separation always follows. There is, therefore, no suggestion of any final absorption of the human into the divine. The human can know much about the Divine Attributes, such as justice, mercy, wisdom; he, or she, can reflect these attributes in his, or her developed character, but the human remains distinct and separate.

Many years later, in 1929, Iqbal writes more about his own version of how Muslims should reconstruct their religious thought. We will discuss these ideas in chapter five. Iqbal becomes more explicitly critical of monism, the theory that all being is one. He also tries eventually to devise a more fully worked-out system of thought for Muslims. It seems that his work on his thesis had led him to recognise that Muslims needed to achieve more systematic modes of modern metaphysical thinking. Later on, he tries to remedy this problem himself.

The thesis tells us that Iqbal continued in Europe to be very interested in religious experience. In his early poem *Himālah*, he

wondered whether new, transforming insights into the nature of reality would be possible in the India of his time. The *Sinai* image suggests that insight might break into consciousness, and guide to the transformation of life in the present and the future. One question that has puzzled many of Iqbal's interpreters is whether or not the poet's European experience caused him to shift radically the direction of his thought. The similarity of concerns in his thesis to the problems raised in the earlier poem suggests that his philosophical interest in religious experience remained constant. The differences in his thinking after the European experience lay more in his political thinking rather than in his metaphysics. He came eventually to place even more emphasis on the necessity of working in the world to make one's religious insights manifest through the creation of social institutions. However, the germ of this way of thinking had been present as early as his book on economics.

Iqbal was interested in materialism both as a philosophical and a moral system. His philosophical studies at Cambridge, and in Germany, had confirmed his conviction that materialism was not a particularly rational philosophical option. He knew that, in Whitehead, he had been exposed to one of the best scientific minds of his generation; he had learned, from listening to this mathematician, to embrace a whole-hearted scepticism about dogmatic simple-mindedness in any discipline. Simple theories about the nature of matter were not intelligent. Iqbal found in this approach a philosophical support for theism. His western experience, therefore, not only did not threaten his faith, it also confirmed for him a rational basis for theism.

Iqbal's mentor, Sayyid Aḥmed Khān had primarily been an historian, a jurist and a social thinker. He had been greatly concerned to help Muslims reconsider their social, legal, and economic values, and to separate out matters that were the result of custom as opposed to those that derived from Muslim basic principles. But he had remained personally devout.²⁷ Afghāni had been wrong to have supposed that Sayyid Aḥmed Khān was as materialist as many of the British were. Iqbal understood that Sayyid Aḥmed Khān had consciously chosen to emphasise education as the primary need of the Muslims of his lifetime. By the time of Iqbal's maturity, however, many thoughtful Indian Muslims recognised that education was not enough. In addition, a more active stance against

imperialism was needed. Iqbal, and many of his contemporaries were sympathetic to Afghani's anti-imperialism imperatives.

In Iqbal's later thought, nationalism and materialism were linked because the poet believed that persons who lost the sense of a transcendent source of judgment on human life had to choose another focus for existence. One who did not consciously serve the absolute source of justice and goodness could be diverted to serving immanent goals, such as personal success, the triumph of his nation, or the dominance of his class, or caste. The question is the old one of whether to serve God or mammon. To worship material success, nation, class or caste, was to exclude other persons as objects of value. Iqbal thought that upholding a transcendent source of goodness was the only way to teach people to value all persons.

Sicily

One of Iqbal's poems, written as he departed from Europe, indicates how he perceived the very old conflict between Islamic and Christian civilizations. The poem is about Sicily. On the boat returning to India in 1908, Iqbal saw Sicily. He was reminded of the earlier destruction by the Normans of what had been a vital, intellectually alive, rational, and progressive Islamic civilisation on that island. The poet writes of his grief about the loss, and promises to go back to India to stir up Muslims to work for revival. He speaks about both the past destruction of a sophisticated Islamic culture, and the present challenge of rebuilding a better Islamic society. That new civilisation should be one in which reason and social justice would prevail over superstition and corruption. The poem represents Iqbal's manifesto for the future.

Sicily

*Now weep blood, oh eyes, for the tomb of the arts of Arabia
Stands there in sight.*

*Where the men of the desert whose ships made a playground of
ocean once rushed to the fight--*

*They who brought into emperors' throne rooms; the earthquake,
And swords in which lightnings had nested:*

*Their advent proclaimed a new world--till the old was devoured
Their keen blades never rested;*

*At their thundered Arise! a dead earth sprang to life, and man
burst from the chains of unreason:*

From that tumult our ears are still tingling with joy--shall their

*Hymn never know a new season?*²⁸

This was written in 1908, whereas Gandhi's manifesto, *Hind Swaraj*, was written, also on a boat, a year later in 1909. The long boat trips, transitions between civilisations, were perhaps a good place for the nurturing of personal outbursts of these kinds. Although Gandhi's essay is prose, it really is as much a symbolic manifesto as Iqbal's poem is. Both these manifestos are calls to young Indians to reject the corruptions of the decadent western civilisation and to create something better.

Gandhi called for the rejection of western medicine, law and knowledge, and for the recapture of the values of ancient India, as he understood them. The right form of a good civilisation, according to Gandhi, would be one characterised by duty and morality. Gandhi wrote: "Let there be no mistake about my conception of Swaraj (independence). It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence."²⁹

Gandhi's theoretical ideal for the future of India was a society composed of innumerable villages, all strong in themselves. "But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village.. till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units."³⁰ Gandhi's language pointed to a vision of perfected humanity. He thought that this ideal had existed in ancient India.

If we compare Gandhi's vision with Iqbal's we can recognize a number of similarities and differences. Both writers were aware of departing from an oppressive European civilisation. The very fact of having been away from home and subjected to foreign life styles, life styles in which had non-white persons were discriminated against, sharpened the determination of these two young lawyers to bring home a message to warn people. These articulate Indians also wanted freedom and dignity for individuals. Gandhi, however, conceived of this freedom as primarily a matter of the spiritual freedom for the individual in the village, living cooperatively and simply with other villagers, not oppressed by any kind of hierarchical control.³¹

Gandhi's ideal of a pastoral society is a notion something like that of some Protestant communities, such as the Mennonites, some of whom have opted out of modern industrialised society altogether.

Some of these groups have chosen to live the co-operative village life of agricultural producers. Gandhi's critique of hierarchical society was revolutionary for India with its implications for the destruction of the caste system of traditional Hinduism. He believed that the existing caste system that he had grown up with was a perversion of the original ideal.³² Thus he wanted Hindus to rid their society of oppressive practices, and to build again a society in which all would flourish.

Iqbal also disliked hierarchy; his image of the destruction of kingship by the first Muslims was his way of affirming his hope for a future in which no humans would dominate over others. Gandhi and Iqbal had similar ideals for the future in this respect, but their ideas about how to reach these goals differed. They both rejected western materialism and greed as adequate motives for building a better world. But Gandhi's rejection was more extreme than Iqbal's was. Iqbal tended more to think of working for better social and economic conditions of life so that persons would be born into a world where each would have more chances of developing his or her creative possibilities. One can work for a world in which there might be no hunger without necessarily thinking that each individual must live a very simple life. One cannot easily imagine Iqbal living happily in a village. For one thing, he always wanted to be reading. His ideal of freedom included freedom of the mind.

As his poem indicates, Iqbal envisaged the best Muslim societies of the past as those, such as existed once in Cordoba, in which knowledge, philosophy and science had flourished. Sicily had been the centre of a high Muslim culture of this kind. When Iqbal thought about the creative prowess of the early Muslims, he imagined battles against superstition and unreason. The cleansing of the Ka'bah from idols represented to him a liberation of the human spirit from oppressive anxieties and irrational fears. Another example of Iqbal's judgment on the Europe he knew reads as follows:

*Though the bowl of faith finds none to pour, the beaker
Of modern thought brims with the wine of No.
Subdued by the dextrous fiddler's chord, there murmurs
In the lowest string the wail of Europe's woe--
Her waters that have bred the shark now breed
The storm-wave that will smash its den below!...
His own resolves bestow*

*The empire of To-day on him who fishes
 To-morrow's pearl up from Time's undertow.
 The Frankish glassblowers' arts can make stone run;
 My alchemy makes glass flint-hard. Pharaoh
 Plotted and plots against me; but what harm?
 Heaven lifts my hand, like Moses', white as snow;
 Earth's rubbish-heaps can never quell this spark
 God struck to light whole deserts, His flambeau!
 Love, self-beholding, self-sustaining, stands
 Unawed at the gates of Caesar or Khosro
 If moon or Pleiads fall my prey, what wonder--
 Myself bound fast to the Prophet's saddle-bow!
 He —Guide, Last Envoy, Lord of All—lent brightness
 Of Sinai to our dust; Love's eyes, not slow
 To kindle, hail him Alpha and Omega.³³*

In 1908, Iqbal returns to India from Europe thinking that shark-dominated culture to be on the brink of a storm wave that would smash it. His hope is to remain loyal to his own perspective of *Sinai*, to ward off the false magicians, the false promises of materialism, and to provide a way of thinking through which millions of future pearls, Muslims animated by love, may find the stimulation that will bring them to life.

In addition to his disillusionment with the aggressive militarism, and excessive nationalism of the Edwardian era in Europe, Iqbal, during his time abroad, did meet and talk to many Muslims from different parts of the world. He had begun to think more about of the centuries of conflict between Islamic and western civilizations. This conflict was also a centuries old one, marked by the Crusades and the Christian reconquest of Spain. Another Indian Muslim studying modern history at Oxford during this time, Muhammad Ali, was convinced that the British schemes included the intention of overthrowing the Ottoman Caliphate and recapturing Istanbul, to return the city to Christian domination.³⁴

Half a century earlier, the loss of Byzantium to the Turks in 1453 had sent shocks waves into European civilization; the impulse to recover that loss remained latent in Europe. Iqbal was just one among many Muslim students in Europe in those pre-war years who was discovering anti-Islamic sentiments to be very widespread. He had learned that many Europeans considered Islamic civilisation

dead, and that they hoped to seize all Muslim territory for themselves.

One could say that Iqbal's European experience convinced him that European societies, as he observed them from 1905 to 1908, were moving fast towards a mirage, a delusion that would destroy them. The Qur'anic passage in question gives other images of the wrong direction. An image of the state, condition, of the unbelievers is:

*Or (the unbelievers state)
Is like the depths of darkness
In a vast deep ocean
Overwhelmed with billow
Topped by billow
Topped by (dark) clouds;
Depths of darkness, one
Above another: if a man
Stretches out his hand
He can hardly see it! (Qur'an 24.40)*

As Iqbal got on the boat to leave Europe, one can readily imagine that images like these ran in his mind as commentary on the European policies as he had observed them. Much that was terrible did happen in 1914. Iqbal had been expecting something like a war, because he was sure that aggressive and materialist nationalism was heedless and foolhardy.

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⁴ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 6, pp. 113-126, 137-139,228, 242.

⁵ Amir 'Alī, "Anomalies of Civilisation" in Syed Razi Wasti, ed., *Memoires and*

Other Writings of Syed Amir 'Alī, pp. 302-318.

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- ²¹ *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, p. 82.
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Chapter Three

Back in India

**Human intellect is nature's
attempt at self criticism.**

When Iqbal returned to Lahore in 1908, he taught for a while at Government College, but he wanted more personal economic independence. He preferred not to work directly for the English government. Therefore he began to practice law. He kept this up for the rest of his life; he earned about enough to keep his household going, but not much more. He continued to be actively involved in writing, and in pursuing his academic interests in history, economics, literature and philosophy. Close relationships were maintained between Iqbal and the universities in Lahore; he often graded papers and did other forms of part time work for them. His basic temperament was that of an academic and a research scholar. Teaching and writing were among his greatest pleasures.

He and the wife he had married in his teens were not happy together. On his return to Lahore, he wrote a letter to his father telling the old man he had been wrong to compel his son to marry young. Iqbal had said in his book on economics that early marriages were bad for the economic development of society. His two children were in their teens at this point; his daughter died subsequently in 1915. A legal separation was worked out according to which the parents agreed to live separately, but Iqbal accepted financial responsibility for his children. His wife's father was a successful doctor. Iqbal seems to have continued to have good relationships with his former father-in-law. His son, Aftab, was raised by the mother's family, and seems to have resented his father. Good relations never developed between father and eldest son.

He married two more times. The first time his family and friends helped make the arrangements. Iqbal told his mother that he wanted someone who would get on well with his family, and his mother

went to see the young woman who had been suggested. Iqbal's culture was one in which the women members of the family were not talked about much in public, since this was considered an invasion of privacy. However, Iqbal wrote the following poem on the occasion of his mother's death in 1914, which indicates that he had been, in his own way, greatly devoted to her.

I will visit thy grave with this complaint:

Who will now think of me in midnight prayers?

All thy life thy love served me with devotion---

When I became fit to serve thee, thou hast departed.¹

His feelings for his mother help explain why he wanted her help in finding a wife for him who would get on well with his parents and other family members. He doubtless wanted peace at home so that he could pursue his writing without stress. His mother approved the young woman she visited, so arrangements were made for Iqbal to be married to Sardār Begum. She had not attended school but had learned to read Urdu at home. Her father was a Kashmiri merchant, much the same background as Iqbal's father. Before she came to Iqbal's house, however, difficulties arose. Iqbal received some letters criticising this young woman as unsuitable, and he became very upset. Three years were spent during which time his friends investigated the situation.

Another of his old friends brought him the idea of marrying another young woman, Mukhtār Begum, the daughter of a prominent Kashmiri family in Ludhiana. Thus, Iqbal married again, probably in 1913. Later, it transpired that the critical letters about Sardār Begum had been written because another advocate had wanted to marry her. She, however, wanted to be married to Iqbal. She wrote to Iqbal that she did not want to be married to any one else. He explained this to his new wife, Mukhtār Begum, and she was sympathetic to Sardār Begum's problem. Eventually, he was married to both of them, and they lived together. The young women were of the same age, and apparently liked each other.² The evidence suggests that Iqbal did achieve the relaxed household that he had wanted. One of Iqbal's sisters, Karīm Bibī, spent time with the family. Iqbal seems to have enjoyed this large family. He liked playing card games with his nieces. His hobby was keeping pigeons on his roof; he liked to watch the birds fly. In the summer, the whole family would go to Sialkot and enjoy themselves there.

One of his friends, Mahārājā Kishan Prashād from Hyderabad, came to Lahore and Iqbal met him at the station. Later, an extensive correspondence took place between the two. Iqbal thought that Hyderabad might be a place in which his ideas about the future development of a revived, intellectually alert new form of Muslim culture could be implemented. The Maharajah wanted to give Iqbal a stipend so that the poet would have more time for writing, but Iqbal did not accept it.

One of his friends has told us that Iqbal, when he was home, welcomed all kinds of people as visitors. The friend had first visited Iqbal as a young student. He writes:

Iqbal asked us about ourselves and we told him we were students. Then without waiting for any further conversation, I shot a question at him,...'Sir' said I, with all the vehemence characteristic of student immaturity, 'You are one of the greatest philosophers of our time.... But you seem to be wedded to a most irrational and untenable belief, I mean your belief in God'. Iqbal did not feel at all displeased or surprised.... He turned to me quietly and said, "I have seen Him". I thought I saw a faint smile on his lips, as he puffed at the *hookah*. After a while he continued, 'There are moments in a man's life when he can experience God. Such moments are, however, rare' he added a little later, 'very rare'. Can anyone and everyone have that experience I asked. "No one is shut out", was the answer, 'but he who wants it has to wait for it'

From that day onwards, I saw him regularly. There never was any fixed time for interviews.... He seldom went out of his house. It would indeed have caused a sensation in Lahore if he had been seen walking on the road or shopping.... His comparative lack of physical activity found more than ample compensation in his unceasing effort in the realm of the mind and the spirit. His reading was vast, and varied, although one never could know when he found time for it... The daily gatherings at his house were something unique. I have never seen a man who found himself so much at home in such a variety of company. Government officials, shop-keepers, students travellers,... all came. And all were welcome. There was no distinction of caste, creed, or colour among his callers. And they talked of many

things--poetry, philosophy, religion, politics, sex, everything. There was nothing that was taboo.³

Iqbal was becoming increasingly well known among Urdu speaking people because of his poetry. He also became the centre of various controversies, many of which carried on throughout the rest of his life. It was not uncommon for persons who returned from studying abroad to be viewed with a certain distrust by those who had remained at home. A fatwa (ruling by a Muslim jurist) was given against him accusing him of being a 'kāfir' (one who denies God). The Muslim author, Suleymān Nadvi, who had been trained by Shibli at his academy in Lucknow, commented harshly on the silliness of this fatwa saying 'if Iqbal, is not a Muslim, who is?'⁴

A number of Iqbal's friends published their reminiscences later in an Urdu volume entitled *Malfūzāt*. Most of them recorded that Iqbal enjoyed conversation with his friends, and that he was famed for his wit. In his days practising law, he often spent the evening in musical sessions at the home of a friend. Sometimes the music stimulated him to write poetry. One author comments:

For singing poetry as well as for speech, Iqbal was gifted with a melodious voice. His singing of his poems at symposiums of poetry actually influenced the styles of recitation of poetry for an entire generation of poets in twentieth-century India.⁵

In these years shortly after his return from Europe, Iqbal was making notes for himself about ideas in a small notebook. This notebook was edited and published by his second son, Javid, many years after the poet's death. The notes are something like the sketches one sees sometimes of ideas painters have before they produce their works of art. Iqbal was a deeply reflective person, constantly reading, seeking new insights, reflecting and revising his own ideas. These fragments of thought indicate something of the raw material out of which Iqbal's poetic masterpieces were forged. One of his comments is: "Human intellect is nature's attempt at self-criticism".⁶

If we link this comment with his earlier image of the turban, the human capacity to think, as vaster than the mountains, we can observe that Iqbal always acknowledged amazement at the capacities of human intelligence and imagination. This is one of the basic keys to his imagery, namely that the hope for the transformation of the

conditions of life in the world lies with the imaginative power of the well educated human mind.

Iqbal's personal letters in the year 1910, shortly after his return from Europe, indicate great frustration with the intellectually stultifying pressure of social custom in his Lahore environment yet, his decision, at the same time, not to work for the British Government by working in the University, also indicates frustration with British dominance over India. He was caught between two forms of social pressure both of which he disliked. Another thought:

15th May, 1910. Yesterday morning at about 4, I saw that glorious visitor of our hemisphere known as Halley's Comet. Once in seventy-five years this superb swimmer of infinite space appears on our skies. It is only with the eyes of my grandsons that I shall see it again. The state of my mind was quite unique. I felt as if something indescribably vast had been closed up within the narrow limits of my clay; yet the thought that I could not see this wanderer again brought home to me the painful fact of my littleness. For the moment all ambition was killed in me.⁷

It may be that, for Iqbal, the sight of the comet, and the vision of the Himalayas were related experiences. These encounters with the immensity of all that humans do not know, or understand, about their universe, are characteristic of Iqbal's emphasis on the finitude of human knowledge. One of the paradoxes of Iqbal's imagery is the assertion of the immeasurable vastness of human intelligence and creative power (the turban), along with a statement about the limitations. Halley's Comet was perceived by the Muslim poet as a message about both infinite possibility, and finitude.

Another of his comments is that loss of political power is ruinous for a people's character. "Ever since their political fall the Musalmans of India have undergone a rapid ethical deterioration."⁸

We will later discuss, in chapter seven, Iqbal's interest in political power for Muslims, through separate electorates, or other means. We should keep this comment in mind, namely that he thought that Muslims had disintegrated morally when they no longer exercised responsibility over their own lives. Iqbal thought that all colonised peoples tend to self-hatred because the colonised are tempted to accept and to internalise the imperialists' negative images of those they dominate. The masters usually retain power by convincing the

dominated that they deserve to be ruled by others because of their inferiority. Iqbal understood this problem very well.

Another of his reflections reads:

You must give up those modes of activity which have a tendency to dissolve *personality* e.g. humility, contentment, slavish obedience, modes of human action which have been erroneously dignified by the name of virtue. On the other hand, high ambition, generosity, charity and a just pride in our traditions and power fortify the sense of personality.

Personality being the dearest possession of man must be looked upon as the ultimate *good*... that is good which has a tendency to give us the sense of personality, that is bad which has a tendency to suppress and ultimately dissolve personality.”⁹

Liberation from domination continues to be Iqbal's dream. Here he indicates that such liberation was essential for the Indian Muslims if they were to become again capable of strong and generous personalities. His later concern for the preservation of Muslim culture was related to this insight about the bad effects of domination on personality.

The notebook indicates that Iqbal was thinking quite a lot about the ideas of the German philosopher, Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche had died shortly before Iqbal went to study in a German university. The academic world of the time had been very disturbed by this philosopher's ideas. He was seen by many as an unbalanced and wild critic of European society. Iqbal, as a self-conscious victim of imperialism himself, liked much of Nietzsche's attack on the hypocrisy of Europe. He also was attracted to the force of Nietzsche's poetic imagination, as expressed in the epic *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In addition, the Muslim author found the German's ideas about the nature of culture intriguing. Iqbal wrote:

God created things; man created the worth of things. The immortality of a people depends upon their incessant creation of 'worths,' said Nietzsche. Things certainly bear the stamp of Divine manufacture; but their meaning is through and through human.¹⁰

One responds best to thinkers whose minds are running in similar directions to one's own. Iqbal was convinced that the power to shape the conditions of human life rests with human beings. The German philosopher's ideas showed him that all forms of human culture are

human creations. Iqbal was pondering how he could get his people to understand that they could, and should, throw out the British and build a new and better civilisation.

There has been much subsequent criticism of Iqbal's use of Nietzsche. Some think Iqbal may have had fascist tendencies because of his interest in working for better structures for human life. A lot of confusion on this subject arises from the error of projecting back onto Nietzsche, or onto Iqbal, ideas like those that the Nazis used during the World War II. The Nazis upheld a myth of an 'Aryan' superman, the ideal human, one who had an innate right and duty to impose his rule over the rest of inferior humanity. Nazi propaganda, in the 1940s, used many of Nietzsche's phrases, such as 'the will to power', to legitimate their drive for world conquest. They were doing this almost half a century after the death of this philosopher.

After the hard-won and costly defeat of the Nazis in 1945, people in Europe and America became very sensitive to any use of Nietzsche's terminology. The impression arose that anyone speaking favourably of Nietzsche necessarily believed in world domination by supermen. Later scholarship, however, particularly the work of Walter Kaufman, has tried to go beyond this stereotyping of Nietzsche by paying more attention to trying to understand the German writer in his own context. After Nietzsche's death, his sister, who was a supporter of German master race theories, had helped propagate the idea that her brother had preached German superiority. More careful reading of Nietzsche himself, however, indicates that this was not the case. Nietzsche had been alive during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870; he had hated the war. He also detested the self-righteous pompous German pride as expressed in parades, militarism, and in the later operas of Wagner. Wagner had been his friend originally, but later Nietzsche wrote *Contra Wagner*, an explicit protest against the dramatising of military glory in Wagner's operas.¹¹ The European intellectual Nietzsche most admired was the ironic and critical Voltaire. One who admires the cutting wit of Voltaire, a Frenchman, is not an advocate of German pomposity and master race theories.

Nietzsche had vigorously attacked what he saw as the hypocrisies of the intellectual and religious life of the Europe during the last half of the nineteenth century, the Europe he knew. He attacked this

culture because he said it was false, moralistic, and repressive of creative individuality. He himself felt repressed by it. Nietzsche was primarily a religious thinker, one who felt that the self-righteousness of the long line of Protestant ministers among his ancestors had produced an unhealthy culture, one that repressed individuals in the name of morality. He believed that Christian repressive moralism had led to hypocrisy, complacency, and self-deception. He also disliked the excessive rationalism that had come from the Greeks after Socrates, because he thought such rationalism led to preoccupation with abstraction rather than with the immediacies of life. Nietzsche's own profession was that of a scholar of classical Greek. The culture he most admired was that of pre-Socratic Greece, which he thought had valued spontaneity and free self expression. His colleagues could not stand his ideas, because he was so acutely critical of the alleged values of his own culture. He was rejected by most of the European intellectuals of his own time.

Iqbal was thinking about Nietzsche back in 1910, the time of a very self-assured and self-righteous European civilization. He was intrigued by Nietzsche's criticism of the Europeans. As one who was the victim of the repression that the imperialists exercised over their colonies, Iqbal was understandably receptive to Nietzsche's analysis of European hypocrisy. Only after 1960 have western writers begun to exhibit an appreciation of Nietzsche similar to that expressed by Iqbal. This puts the Muslim philosopher at least fifty years ahead of his time in this respect. Another factor might be that Iqbal appreciated Nietzsche's critique of western civilisation at a time when most western scholars could not tolerate the harshness of those judgments. It has taken a long time for that situation to change. Almost a century later, Jacques Derrida has entitled one of his books, *Nietzsche's Spurs*, an indication that Nietzsche continues to stir up interest among those who are restless with the status quo.

Since Iqbal had been in a philosophy department in a German university soon after Nietzsche's death, he was aware of the furore that the fiery thinker had stirred up among his countrymen. Later, Iqbal refers to the ferocious anger created among western scholars by Nietzsche; it was comparable, he suggests, to the anger Ḥallāj created among the ulema.¹² The Sufi, Ḥallāj, had been executed in the tenth century because he was suspected of heresy.

Here, we should just note that Iqbal personally witnessed the German anger against Nietzsche; this experience seems to have triggered much subsequent reflection in the Muslim poet's mind. He was intrigued by Nietzsche's ideas about the creation of values. We create for ourselves the kinds of houses we will live in, literally and symbolically. Iqbal's point is that all of culture is a human creation, including the value system: a militaristic culture will think of the warrior as the greatest good, and other societies will have different ideal norms.

Iqbal recognised that humans can, and do, decide, individually and corporately, what the values of their society will be, although most people are not aware that this has happened. Iqbal was 33 at this point and on the edge of the creation of the poetry that would challenge the ways of thinking of his people. He knew what he was about to do. He set out to stimulate his people to think in new ways. He wanted to challenge them to transform their values.

The paradoxical nature of Iqbal's way of thought was demonstrated by two new poems, *Shikwa* (The Complaint), and *Jawāb i Shikwa* (The Answer to the Complaint) written in 1911. Iqbal and his compatriots were becoming increasingly worried about the intentions of European imperialists to take over the entire Islamic world. When the Italians invaded Tripoli in North Africa, Iqbal gave voice to the anger of his people. At the same time, the Balkan wars were taking place, wars that the Muslims understood as pressure against the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the British government had revoked the partition of Bengal, a decision that was perceived by Indian Muslims as a threat to their hopes for cultural autonomy. It looked as though Islamic civilisation everywhere was on the brink of extermination.

Shikwa is a kind of scream addressed to God from the Muslim community as they see themselves about to disintegrate and disappear from history. This loud voice shouting at the doors of heaven demands to know how God could abandon a people whose lives for centuries have been shaped by prayer, fasting, and service to the commands of the one God. The accusation is that God is deserting the very people who have been most faithful to Him.¹³

The poem was greeted with much enthusiasm when it was recited in Lahore. The people's love for Iqbal's poetry increased because he so vividly articulated their confusion and despair. But, typically,

Iqbal having made a strong statement, looks at the issue from another perspective, and writes his version of how God responds to the complaint from the Muslims. This is *Jawāb i Shikwa* (The Answer to the Complaint). The people have made so much noise that God has to recognise them.

The answer is that the failure lies with the Muslims, and not with God, who remains the same, Just, Good and Transcendent. The people have not understood what was expected of them. Iqbal wrote this at a time when the European powers were dominant over Muslims everywhere. It may well have seemed to many that Muslim independence was about to disappear forever. The answer to the complaint is that God remains God, no matter what happens in history. The problem for humans in any time and place is to grasp the judgment of God upon their immediate situation, and to try to see what that judgment tells them they should do. The reply is a rejection of mourning over the loss of the past. Believers are told always to look forward. The answer says: God does not accept self-pity; He demands transformation.

After the outbreak of the World War, Iqbal published, in 1915, a new, long poem. The title was, *Asrār i Khudī* (*The Secrets of the Self*). This poem created a storm of protest because it appeared to be an attack on the mystical tradition as exemplified in the classics of Persian poetry. Iqbal's title carried with it some provocative implications.

*No one hath told the secret which I will tell
Or threaded a pearl of thought like mine.
Come, if thou wouldst know the secret of everlasting life!
Come, if thou wouldst win both earth and heaven.*¹⁴

The shock was violent because the poem challenged the traditional idea that a good, religious person was one who had overcome his or her personal desires. Such a person had tried to empty himself, or herself, of all distinctive personality, *fanā*, and had tried to become nothing more than an instrument of God's purposes, *baqā*.

Nietzsche had said that the traditional Protestant Christianity of his culture had encouraged his people to deny their own personalities and to understand themselves as needing to make themselves over into the pattern required by Christian teaching.¹⁵ According to Nietzsche, the whole establishment of Catholic priests and Protestant

Ministers functioned only to create unhealthy guilt. The worst crime, according to the German philosopher, is to make people feel guilty. The priest and ministers functioned to interpret God to the people, to make the people indulge in self-hatred, and to force them to accept whatever modes of behaviour the religious leaders imposed on them. The whole system worked, according to Nietzsche, to make the people servile and dependent on the authority of the clergy. The people lost the capacity to be their spontaneous selves, because the clergy had made them internalise a crippling sense of guilt. Nietzsche wanted to get rid of Christianity altogether, and to return to the cheerful life style of pre-Socratic Greece where creative people were not burdened by priests telling them what to do.

We will discuss more fully later, in chapter five, Iqbal's critique of certain aspects of Nietzsche's thought. Here, we want to draw attention to the two matters where Iqbal did agree with Nietzsche. First, any culture is a human invention and can be changed, and, second, the way to healthy change is to encourage self respect, and pride in the natural self. Self respect is a quality best acquired in early life; it would be difficult to restore to a person who had lost it. Strengthening and disciplining healthy self respect was one of Iqbal's major concerns throughout his life. The opposite to self-respect, from this perspective, is servility, the worst characteristic of the Indian Muslims of his time, as Iqbal said often.

Iqbal's startling poem, *The Secrets of the Self*, was received by his people with confusion precisely because he was changing the significance of a word. This word *Khudī* (self) had been understood in traditional poetry and religious thought as a bad thing. Religious teaching had encouraged people to overcome self, and to become open to God. Self and God were seen as opposites. Iqbal took what was considered a bad word, and made it the central good word of his new thought. This was very disconcerting and resulted in much criticism from his contemporaries. He was presenting a new interpretation of the history of Islamic thought and practice.

The structure of this long poem was similar to that of the *Mathnavī* of Jalāl ud Dīn Rūmī, the thirteenth century mystical poet whom Iqbal considered his surest guide to the mysteries of life. The basic theme of *The Secrets of the Self* is that the spirit of the original Muslim understanding of the Qur'an has been lost over the centuries. An unhealthy life-negation had entered into Muslim thought, partly

from neo-Platonic influences on Sufism. Iqbal's burning question is; why have Muslims become passive, quietistic, and servile to the British? He thought a partial answer lay in the medieval modes of religious understanding that had led to quietism.

The cure to the loss of the original Islamic impulse to vitalism was to recover a sense of the Qur'an as an imperative to energy and action. Iqbal's mentor, Shibli, was renowned for his classes on the Qur'an at Aligarh, which had had the effect of stirring up his Muslim hearers. Iqbal's purpose was similar, to recover the energy that had vitalised many past Islamic civilizations, and to stir his generation of Muslims to create new forms of Islamic life. The Qur'an, properly understood, should be the effective catalyst for the new Islamic civilization on the brink of being born. The theme of *The Secrets of the Self* is the imperative to Muslims to become more vividly alive, and to seek adventure.

*The secret of life is in the seeking,
Its essence is hidden in desire
Keep desire kindled in your heart
Lest your dust becomes a tomb.*¹⁶

Nietzsche's term, *ubermensch* (higher humanity), was similar to that of the American Unitarian, Emerson, who had talked about the *oversoul*. Nietzsche was generally fiercely critical of all European intellectuals, but he said that one author he enjoyed reading was the American, Emerson.¹⁷ Emerson had used the term *oversoul* to indicate the possibility of a level of human development beyond the everyday self.

Emerson and Nietzsche were both mystics who rejected traditional Christianity. They looked for truth in their own experience. From the perspective of this kind of mysticism, *oversoul* refers to a deeper level of consciousness in which the self finds its roots. Mystics in many religious traditions use symbols to indicate this kind of possibility. Iqbal knew that Nietzsche's terminology was related to that of Emerson. The Muslim poet recognised that the idea of *oversoul* represented recognition of the possibility of persons becoming more vividly alive, aware, and conscious. Iqbal wrote in his notebook: "The powerful man creates environment; the feeble have to adjust themselves to it."¹⁸ Power in this respect is linked with vision. Iqbal also said: "Power is more divine than truth; God is power. Be ye, then, like your father who is in heaven."¹⁹

The insight that God is power is significant because an Absolute that was powerless would be meaningless for human beings. People may have differing opinions about the attributes, will and purposes of the Absolute, but they tend not to differ in perceiving power as the distinguishing characteristic of the source of life. In Iqbal's view, the basic human responsibility is to become able to mirror the attributes of God. This would require also mirroring the attribute of power. To use a homely image, to be plugged into the power of God would be to become effective in the world, because that power, properly transmitted, would be dynamic and electrifying.

Iqbal's paradoxical mode of expression comes into play again when he puts up, against his affirmations in *The Secrets of the Self*, another long poem, published two years later. This one, entitled *Rumūz i Bekhudī (The Mysteries of Selflessness)* was stating the other side of the paradox. Both these poetic masterpieces were published in the midst of the 1914-1918 war. The timing is not accidental; Iqbal was aware of living in a period of collapsing civilisation. Feeling the flames engulfing the Europe he had known, he was striving to liberate his people and point them forwards. He wrote the following comments in prose about the anguish of the time.

The Democracy of Europe—overshadowed by Socialistic agitation and anarchical fear--originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. Nietzsche, however, abhors the 'rule of the herd' and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the cultivation and growth of an aristocracy of supermen. Out of the plebeian material of life, Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power.²⁰

Iqbal was not ready to uphold any theory of the need for an aristocracy, spiritual or otherwise. He thought his people could do better than that.

The issue addressed in *The Mysteries of Selflessness* is—how are the creative individuals to relate harmoniously to each other, if they are all busy expressing their distinctive personalities? What is to stop them annihilating each other, as was going on in the trenches of Europe at the time, if each is just fighting for his own space and his own needs? One can create social order by repressing individuals, forcing them to conform to some norms imposed either by priests or kings. But if priests and kings are abolished, and all the individuals

are to be free to develop as fully as each one can, how can order be possible?

Iqbal's thinks the answer to these questions lies in the Qur'an, properly understood, and in the experiences of the first generations of Muslims. In his view, this proper understanding of the Qur'an was lost over the centuries, as explained in *The Secrets of the Self*. However, this Qur'anic perspective can be rediscovered; it means that the self must be growing towards God, and away from everything in the self that separates from God. One of the images in *The Mysteries of Selflessness* is that the self is a candle that is burned up in giving light to other men. Often in Iqbal's poetry, the coming of Islam is equated with the destruction of priesthood and idolatry, with the creation of a society of free persons, each responsible directly to God, and with the development of reason as a basis for ordering society.

Life is worth living because we are capable of love, and love always means self-giving in service of the other. Love is response to the reality of the other; this is the key image that Iqbal gets from Rūmī, and that shapes all his thought. The secret and the mysteries mean that all kinds of self-hatred, coming from servility, must be overcome, because the servile cannot openly love. But once servility is overcome, then the individuals who love should expend their energies in a mutual effort to create what Iqbal called a spiritual democracy, because love cannot permit the enslaving of any persons, or the refusing of the possibility of growth to anybody.

In prose, Iqbal later expressed his ideas about the relationship he perceived between the development of the creative powers of the individual, and the need for that individual to discover the mystery of the roots of his being. Mystical experience should help the person find himself, or herself. The goal should be, in Iqbal's words:

The reconstruction of the finite ego by bringing him into contact with an eternal life-process, and thus giving a him a metaphysical status of which we can have only a partial understanding in the half-choking atmosphere of our present environment... in the religious process the ego integrates its competing tendencies and develops as a single inclusive attitude resulting in kind of synthetic transfiguration of his experiences.... this final experience is the revaluation of a new life-process--original, essential, spontaneous. The eternal secret of the ego is that the

moment he reaches this final revelation he recognises it as the ultimate root of his being without the slightest hesitation. Yet in the experience itself there is no mystery.

Nor is there anything emotional in it. Indeed with a view to secure a wholly non-emotional experience, the technique of Islamic Sufism at least takes good care to forbid the use of music in worship, " and to emphasize the necessity of daily congregational prayers in order to counteract the possible anti-social effects of solitary contemplation. Thus the experience reached is a perfectly natural experience and possesses a biological significance of the highest importance to the ego. It is the human ego rising higher than mere reflection, and mending its transiency by appropriating the eternal. The only danger to which the ego is exposed in this Divine quest is the possible realisation of his activity caused by his enjoyment of an absorption in the experiences that preceded the final experiences.

The history of Eastern Sufism shows that this is a real danger.... 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. The final act is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which depends on the whole of being of the ego, and sharpens 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.²¹

The challenge that Iqbal was throwing at the members of his community through the publication of *The Secrets of the Self* and *The Mysteries of Selflessness* was thus a complex challenge to recover the imperatives of the original Muslim community. The Muslims of the present and future should become disciples of the reforming vision transmitted through the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet. The world was not just to be seen, or known through concepts, but should rather be made and remade by continuous action. This both is, and is not, a mystical imperative. It is a call for self-knowledge, but it is a criticism of any kind of 'world-rejecting' mysticism. The self is to be affirmed; all that threatens well-being, such as self-hatred, self-contempt, and servility is to be discarded. Spontaneous creativeness is to be affirmed as the highest value. This imperative urges liberation from passivity.

In his doctoral thesis, Iqbal had explored the ideas about the *insān ul-kāmil* (perfected self) in the writings of Muslim mystics. He understood that this image was a recognition of the possibilities of growth within the individual self; the self should pass through many phases towards a more complete fulfilment in knowing and experiencing the reality of the Absolute. Later, he emphasised more strongly that growth towards God should be understood as unending. Such growth required that religious persons not seek to escape the world of matter, but rather orient themselves towards perfecting the conditions of life in the world. Thus, the individual should grow in his or her knowledge of the reality of God; this growth should never cease. The result should lead to observable fruit in terms of the reforms brought to the structures of human existence. Real friends of God should work for the transformation of the way people live.

Self-knowledge is the secret necessary to begin the processes of growth. This is core idea of *The Secret of the Self*. Once the self discovers the depths and possibilities within, the self must acknowledge that every other self has similar potentialities. This means that every life is valuable, and that fulfilment comes from growing towards a greater fulfilment of the promises of enriched life for everyone. This latter insight is the message of *The Mystery of Selflessness*.

In 1922, Iqbal's friend R.A. Nicholson published an English translation of *The Secrets of the Self*. The British government, in recognition of his scholarship and poetic talent, gave Iqbal a knighthood in 1924. Eventually, most of Iqbal's major poetic works were translated into many European, Asian and Muslim languages. His ideas were gradually absorbed by many of his Indian Muslim contemporaries, and by many other people as well.

Annemarie Schimmel has written that *The Mysteries of Selflessness* represents Iqbal's understanding of the imperatives the Prophet Muhammad had laid on his community. Two chapters of her book, *Gabriel's Wing a Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, deal with Iqbal's interpretation of the five pillars of faith, and with poet's understanding of the essentials of faith. She quotes Iqbal's introduction to the first edition of *The Mysteries of Selflessness* in which he said:

Just as in the individual life the acquisition of gain, protection against injury, determination for action, appreciation of higher

values are all dependent on the gradual development of the ego-consciousness, its continuity, enhancement and consolidation, similarly the secret of the life of nations and people depends on the same process, which can be described as the development, preservation and consolidation of the communal ego....

The question arises as to whether in these circumstances, it is possible to bring forth a community, the basis of whose collective life will be peace and goodwill. According to the Qur'an, this is possible, but only when man adopts as his ideal the direction of all his thoughts and actions by faith in the unity of God, as ordained by the Almighty. But the quest and attainment of this ideal cannot be left to political statesmanship.... It will really be a blessing from God, the Beneficent that abolishing all self-imposed distinctions and differences amongst the nations of the world, a community is created which can be virtually styled as people obedient to God, and whose thoughts and actions can be truly described in God's own words as those of the witnesses for mankind.²²

She comments that, in this ideal nation, which is to be organised according to the Qur'an, each individual will have the power to expand his or her powers as fully as possible, and to become the vice-gerent, trustee of God, responsible for the well-being of everyone on the planet. The vice-gerent idea comes from the Qur'an. (Surah 2: 30, 33:72.) Both individual and nation are called in this way to vicegerency. New work is called for constantly, just as God constantly unfolds fresh creative energies.

Iqbal did not consider the Indian Muslim community, as he knew it, to be representative of ideal Muslim virtues. He wrote:

I am sure that, if the Holy Prophet would appear once more and teach Islam in this country, then the people of this country would not be able to understand the Islamic truth due to the existing conditions and behaviours.²³

This is somewhat reminiscent of Dostoevsky's story in *The Brothers Karamov* in which Jesus, when he comes again, is rejected by the Church as an unacceptable radical. This attitude partly explains why Iqbal thought God would not listen to the screams of the Muslim community. God says, according to Iqbal in the *Jawāb i Shikwa*, that He will respond only to those who live creative lives in the same manner as the Prophet Muhammad did. Muslims will only

be able to build a really better future when they become once again focused directly on God, as the Prophet had been. Iqbal wrote that Muslims needed to internalise commitment to serve goodness and justice.

*We, who are present now,
Have bound our hearts to Him who is unseen,
And therefore are delivered from the chains of earthly things.*²⁴

Iqbal, writing in the midst of the chaos of the terrible European war, called himself the voice of the *Poet of Tomorrow*. He was attempting to express a vision of future possibility for humans yet unborn. Part of the *Secrets of the Self* reads as follows:

*My own age does not understand my deep meanings,
My Joseph is not for this market.
I despair of my old companions,
My Sinai burns for Moses who is yet to come.
Their sea is silent, like dew,
But my dew is storm-ridden, like the ocean.
My song is of another world than theirs;
This bell calls other travellers to take the road.*

*Many a poet was born after his death,
Opened our eyes when his own were closed,
And journeyed forth again from nothingness....*

*But I am a lover; loud crying is my faith:
The clamour of Judgment Day is one of my minions....*

*My flood requires whole seas to hold it.
Unless the bud expand into a bed of roses,
It is unworthy of my spring-cloud's bounty....*

*Wrestle with my sea, if thou art a plain
Receive my lightning, if thou art a Sinai.
The Fountain of Life hath been given me to drink,
I have been made an adept in the mystery of Life..*

*Art thou a Muslim? Then cast off this girdle
Be a candle to the feast of the religion of the free* ²⁵

The feast of the religion of the free was a hope for vast numbers of people in many parts of the world as the terrible war was grinding to its end in 1918. German sailors mutinied at the end of the war, and returning soldiers in many parts of the world came back full of anger at the greed and stupidity that had led to so much death. Formerly oppressed peoples from the Irish to the Chinese were stirring, and rebels, many of them poets, were speaking in many languages of the need to create a much better future than what had been. Iqbal was both a very local man, and a very cosmopolitan one. *The religion of the free* was a vision of a better future for his own people, as a light to lighten the gentiles, and as a model for everyone. He knew that the world was staggering under the disappearance of many of the old forms of oppression, and seeking new leaders, and new hope. Iqbal believed that sane leadership could best come from those who wanted to live honestly, and to serve goodness with love.

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³ Mumtaz Hasan, "Iqbal - Recollections" in Riffat Hasan, ed., *The Sword and the Sceptre*, pp. 31-34.

⁴ *Zinda Rūd*, pp. 275,276.

⁵ p. Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, p.44.

⁶ *Stray Reflections*, p. 3.

⁷ *Stray Reflections*, p. 12.

⁸ *Stray Reflections*, p. 14.

⁹ *Stray Reflections*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *Stray Reflections*, p. 88.

¹¹ Walter Kaufman, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 661-683.

¹² *The Javid Nāmāh*, p. 112.

¹³ a. J. Arberry, trans., *The Complaint and Answer*.

¹⁴ *The Secrets of the Self*

¹⁵ *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 31,502, 595, 598, 600.

¹⁶ Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, p. 56.

¹⁷ *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 522.

¹⁸ *Stray Reflections*, p. 91.

¹⁹ *Stray Reflections*, p. 90.

²⁰ Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, p. 60.

²¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 198.

²² Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 145, 146.

²³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 74.

²⁴ *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 13.

²⁵ Luce-Claude Maitre, *Introduction to the Thought of Iqbal*, pp. 50-51.

Chapter Four

Post War Challenges

When shall this galley of
gold's dominion founder?

Iqbal was 41 when World War I ended. This means that all the formative stages of his development had occurred in the now lost civilization that had preceded this disastrous conflict. The immediate post war years were marked by much confusion and turmoil as the old imperialist powers struggled to regain control over their former colonies. Formerly repressed peoples strove to create new independent nations. Women in many western countries seized the opportunity of the loss of great numbers of men to ensure that they finally got the vote. Suffrage was granted to women in many European and North American countries shortly after the end of the war. Many peoples were struggling to create new forms of civilization from amidst the ruins of the war.

Three particularly strong willed revolutionary personalities came forward and communicated their respective visions to vast numbers of persons in this post war period of unrest and confusion. These were Lenin, Ataturk and Gandhi. Iqbal had agreed with Nietzsche that social forms come into existence because persons with visions invent social forms, and then get others to implement them. The sociologist of religion, Max Weber, had talked about charisma, new vision, as a formative element in the designing of human culture. A charismatic leader is marked by the response of the followers to the vision he puts forward. It is the depth of the response that affirms the authenticity of the charisma. A charismatic leader is putting forward new ideas not based directly on the old practices of the traditional bureaucratised authority systems. Charisma tries to overcome the old in the name of the new.

A deeper question is why any particular new vision is adopted by any human group. In part, the answer depends on how chaotic the situation is, and how feasible the implementing of the particular vision turns out to be. The vision only works if it makes immediate sense in the actual economic, social, political and religious context to which the revolutionary message is delivered. People pick up and use ideas when these ideas seem useful in the actual situations. All three of these revolutionaries turned out to be extremely charismatic in the sense that their respective visions took hold of many minds. Much uprooting of old patterns and implementing of new designs for society resulted from the impact of each one of these new leaders.

Iqbal's stance in relation to all three of these revolutionary leaders was essentially that of a non-committed observer. The charisma did not work with him, nor did any of these three visions seize complete hold of his mind. All three revolutions impacted seriously on his people, his life, and his thought, but he always retained a critical distance. He retained his paradoxical way of thinking. Iqbal never accepted anyone as a spiritual or intellectual guide, other than the poet, Rūmī. From Rūmī, he accepted clues to life from the complex images in the poetry. But accepting discipleship to the leadership of anyone was foreign to Iqbal's questioning, sceptical nature. To all these new revolutionaries, Iqbal responded with both *yes* and *no*.

Lenin

Lenin's vision was the first to burst out in a formidable explosion when the Russian revolution erupted towards the end of the war; all the peoples of the formerly Tsarist Russia were caught up into new social and economic structures of life. Many communists in Asia were hoping to implement similar revolutions following the leadership of the Russian revolutionaries and applying it to their native lands. Iqbal also hated economic injustice, particularly the exploitation of colonial peoples by the imperialists. He was ready to rejoice loudly at the collapse of the old Empires.

Iqbal wrote a poem about Lenin talking to God. The poem opens when Lenin, after death, meets God. He says that back on earth he could hardly have been expected to believe in God when the religious establishment was approving the social structures that exploited the poor. Lenin describes in this poem how he saw the injustices of the capitalist world. This is used to explain to God why

it is that people who are exploited cannot be expected to believe in transcendent goodness and justice.

Lenin Before God

*All space and all that breathes bear witness; truth
It is indeed; Thou art and dost remain.
How could I know that God was or was not,...
In high-reared grace, in glory and in grandeur,
The towering Bank out-tops the cathedral roof;
What they call commerce is a game of dice:
For one, profit, for millions swooping death,
There science, philosophy, scholarship, government,
Preach man's equality and drink men's blood;
Naked debauch and want, and unemployment--
Are these mean triumphs of the Frankish arts!
Denied celestial grace a nation goes,
No further than electricity or steam;
Death to the heart, machines stand sovereign,
Engines that crush all sense of human kindness.
Yet signs are counted here and there the Fate,
The chess player, has check-mated all their cunning,
The Tavern shakes, its warped foundations crack,
The Old Men of Europe sit there numb with fear;
What twilight flush is left those faces now
Is paint and powder, or lent by flask and cup.
Omnipotent, righteous, Thou; but bitter the hours,
Bitter the labourers's chained hours in Thy world!
When shall this galley of gold's dominion founder?
Thy world Thy day of wrath, Lord, stands and waits.¹*

This is a strong statement about Iqbal's passion for social justice, and about his hopeful responses to the promises of the Russian revolution. Nevertheless, he was never interested in joining a Marxist political party. Iqbal has been much criticised, during and after his lifetime, by Indian and other socialists. The debate with the socialists was one of intellectual battles that went on throughout the poet's life.

The typical socialist critique was that Iqbal did not understand socialism, an idea put forth by the Canadian socialist scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in 1943, in his seminal book *Modern Islam in India*. At the time he wrote the book, Smith, who was teaching in Lahore, had been discussing issues of politics and religion with a

group of his friends, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Indian Christians. Many of them had studied in Europe and were supporters of the socialist ideals of Nehru. The perspective on Iqbal, in Smith's book, represents what many Indian socialists felt about the poet in the thirties and forties. The idea is that Iqbal has some good feelings about the sufferings of the poor, but that he did not understand economics well enough to understand the necessity for a socialist revolution.

Smith's judgement 'that Iqbal did not understand socialism' has continued, for half a century, to shape socialist ideas about Iqbal in the subcontinent. Iqbal Singh's book about Iqbal, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, published first in 1945, has just recently been re-issued in India in 1997. Singh repeats again, in the nineties, the original Smith thesis that Iqbal had failed to understand socialism.² In the 1930s and 40s, many Indian socialists, who supported Nehru, labelled Iqbal a reactionary. Smith had argued that Iqbal was a confused idealist who failed to comprehend that a modern man should recognise God's will in the immanent force in the historical process that was leading to revolution. Smith said that Iqbal's emphasis on the spiritual basis of reality was 'pie in the sky' escapism. In the early 1940s, Smith, and the other socialists, would not have said, as Iqbal did, that Lenin had failed to recognise transcendent truth.

This dispute between Iqbal and the socialists brought the poet into conflict with the ideals of Nehru. Iqbal respected Nehru's readiness to fight for social justice, but he could not share Nehru's uncritical enthusiasm for the vast social changes brought about by the Russian revolution. Iqbal's *yes* and *no* to Lenin colour his responses to Nehru. This is particularly true with respect to religion. Iqbal thought that Lenin's total rejection of religion was a mistake, an error that he thought Nehru might repeat.

Iqbal wrote to try to explain to Nehru that the Muslims needed to change, to drop their medieval social forms and modes of theology and law, and to rethink their values in response to the challenges, needs and problems of a new age. But they should change because doing so would be an affirmation of the demands God was placing upon them to be more just and rational in the social forms they designed. To deny God would not solve their problems. Iqbal tried in various ways throughout his life to communicate his perspective to Nehru.

In one open letter to Nehru, Iqbal explained why, in his view, the present condition of the Muslims needed reformation and revival.

They (the reformers) found the world of Islam ruled by three main forces and they concentrated their whole energy on creating a revolt against those forces:

(a) Mollaism. The *ulama* have always been a source of great strength to Islam. But during the course of centuries, especially since the destruction of Bagdad, they became extremely conservative and would not allow any freedom of *ijtihad*, i.e. the forming of independent judgment in matters of law. The Wahabi movement which was a source of inspiration of the nineteenth century Muslim reformers was really a revolt against this rigidity of the *ulama*. Thus the first objective of the nineteenth century Muslim reformers was a fresh orientation of the faith and a freedom to re-interpret the law in the light of advancing experience.

(b) Mysticism. —The masses of Islam were swayed by the kind of mysticism which blinded actualities, enervated the people and kept them steeped in all kinds of superstition. From its high state as force of spiritual education, mysticism had fallen down to a mere means of exploiting the ignorance and the credulity of the people. It gradually and invisibly enervated the will of Islam and softened it to the extent of seeking relief from the rigorous discipline of the law of Islam. The 19th century reformers rose in revolt against this mysticism and called Muslims to the broad daylight of the modern world. Not that they were materialists. Their mission was to open the eye of the Muslims to the spirit of Islam which aimed at the conquest of matter and not flight from it.

(c) Muslim Kings. The gaze of Muslim Kings was solely fixed on their own dynastic interests and so long as they were protected. They did not hesitate to sell their countries to the highest bidder.”³

Iqbal thus tried to communicate to Nehru that he wanted to change and to reform Muslim society, but not to accept materialistic socialism. However, Nehru never seems to have accepted this position as reasonable. In his personal statement as to where India should go in the future, *The Discovery of India*, written in jail and

published in 1944, Nehru wrote as follows about the virtues of the Russian revolution as he saw them.

We have to get rid of that narrowing religious outlook... which comes in the way of our understanding ourselves and the world. Some Hindus talk of going back to the Vedas; some Moslems dream of an Islamic theocracy. Idle fancies, for there are no going back to the past.... India must therefore lessen her religiosity and turn to science.... In Russia the outstanding event of the past twenty years has been the tremendous education and cultural achievements of the masses.⁴

Nehru was not uncritical of the Soviet Union's political structures, but he did think that much had been done there to get rid of medieval ways of thinking. He wanted to diminish the role of traditional religious ideas and practices in the India he envisaged for the future. He knew, and said, that the Muslim tradition at its best had affirmed the value of brotherhood, but he also said that the Muslims of his time in India had lost that ideal, and were focused on sterile thought and practice. Much of this is not unlike Iqbal's own condemnation of the backwardness of the religious leadership of the Indian Muslims. Nevertheless, Iqbal differed from Nehru in that he did not want to diminish the role of religion in education and public life. He feared atheistic materialism more than Nehru did. Iqbal wanted to promote a religious outlook that would not be narrowing.

The images in the above-quoted poem about Lenin explain why Iqbal did not join a Marxist party. The symbols of the turban and the mountains in the early poem *Himālah* remain keys to Iqbal's unique perspective. Human intelligence, the turban, can go far in comprehending the forces at work in history, and in designing history, but the mountains nevertheless point, as did Halley's Comet, to levels of reality beyond the grasp of human intelligence. Thus, Lenin did not see God, and became a militant atheist, because the religion of his culture was linked with the oppressive political structures that he had vowed to overthrow. But the fact that so-called religious experts often are linked with oppressive political structures does not prove the non-existence of God. It only proves that these so-called experts are committed to a view of God that equates the divine will with the upholding of a particular political and religious structure of authority.

Iqbal's point, in the poem, is that such a limited view of the nature of the Absolute proves nothing about the possibility of levels of reality beyond what is immediately apprehended by the senses. The poet favours a more open-minded approach, a perspective that is not ultimately materialistic. To some extent, his convictions about the validity of this perspective had been confirmed by Whitehead and Einstein. This was the basis of Iqbal's philosophical rejection of Marxist materialist theory. He understood that Marxist theory was materialist; he was never willing to agree that human history was the product of material forces only.

Iqbal's philosophy of history, hinted at in this poem, was that the judgment of God can and does ultimately bring about the collapse of corrupt civilisations. Or, to put the point in another way, the quality of human civilisation depends upon the quality of the spiritual insights of its adherents. Iqbal continued to read the Qur'an daily, and to seek guidance there. From that source, he gained the insight into the historical process that suggested to him that corruption cannot endure indefinitely. The *yes* to Lenin was thus *yes* to the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, and to the end of many of the 19th century forms of imperialist domination. The poet, however, says *no* to militant atheism, and to a vision of the worker dominated state, as the final answer to the need for social justice. The Indian socialists were, and still are, irked with this ambivalence of Iqbal in relation to their cause.

Ataturk

The second explosive vision to burst on the scene was that of Ataturk. After a Serbian student assassinated the Archduke of Austria, the European powers began to get ready for a serious war.⁵ The cabinet of the Ottoman Empire debated, in 1914, what they should do in the case of a war in Europe—remain neutral, join their former allies the British and the French, or support the Germans? Whichever decision they made would have momentous consequence for the Ottoman Empire, and for Muslims throughout the world. The leaders of the Ottoman Empire decided to fight on the side of Germany, because they thought the Germans would win. It was this decision that did much to produce the structures of life in Turkish and Arab societies that developed after the war. Had the Ottomans made a different decision, the world would have been very different for the Muslims after 1918.

The result of the conflict, after a bitter struggle of four years, a struggle that was extremely debilitating for all concerned, was that the Germans eventually lost. The Ottoman Empire, like the Tsarist Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, disappeared from the stage of history. The Europeans, particularly the Greeks, were interested in recapturing Istanbul and restoring Byzantium. The Greeks invaded Turkey for this reason just after the war, and a bloody struggle took place. The British and the French took over much of the former Ottoman Empire as trustees to be administered by themselves, in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. Eventually, the Greeks were thrown out of Turkey by the army, and one man came out on top. This was the Turkish general, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who had led the fight that stopped the British navy from capturing Istanbul. After expelling the Greeks, the young Turks, led by Ataturk, made a peace agreement with England and France and settled down to rebuild their devastated nation.

All these events were very devastating for the Indian Muslims. After the destruction of the Mughal Empire in India in 1857 by the British, many Indian Muslims had looked to the Ottoman Caliphate as the last remaining independent Muslim power. They feared that, if the Ottoman Caliphate was overthrown, then Mecca and Medina would be seized by the European powers; this would be the end of any possibility of Muslim independence. The Khilafat movement had been organised by Indian Muslims, in 1919, to lobby the British to keep the Ottoman Caliph independent. Iqbal had not been much involved with that cause, although it had been the first mass movement of Indian Muslims that had successfully united the university educated Muslim liberals with the ulema (traditional religious leaders).⁶

The Turkish revolution led by Ataturk, who became President of Turkey and who ruled for many years, was a considerable shock to the Indian Muslims. They fell into disarray after the Turkish revolution. In 1924, Ataturk's new government abolished the Caliphate, and implemented many revolutionary changes. The new government eventually renounced all power over non-Turks, gave up the rest of the Empire to whoever wanted it, abolished the office of the Sheikh ul Islam and the legal standing of the Shari'ah, outlawed the Sufi orders, and implemented a new modern form of Turkish life. Many Muslims elsewhere were shocked and overwhelmed by these

radical changes. The Turks even abolished the Arabic alphabet and replaced it with the Roman alphabet, thus cutting their young people off from the contact with the written sources of the Islamic past, and with the rest of the Muslim world.

Iqbal, once again, responded with both *yes* and *no*. He was not thrown into total confusion by Ataturk's victory, as most of the Indian Muslim leadership seems to have been. The poet-philosopher believed that one must act in order to change civilisation and to implement effective new forms of social order; the Turks were doing this. Iqbal said that they were the only Muslims who were genuinely alive in this time, namely taking control over their own lives effectively. The strong *yes* to Ataturk was applause from Iqbal for Muslims who were behaving with strongly focused purpose. Iqbal's habit of reading widely meant that he was familiar with the writings of the Turkish poet, Zia Gokalp, who was the source of many of Ataturk's ideas.

Iqbal felt in this Turkish poet a vital enthusiasm for a better future that he shared; the Indian Muslim agreed that changing and adapting Muslim laws to fit the new conditions of twentieth century life was essential.⁷ Debates about this issue continued throughout Iqbal's life. Since most of the Indian Muslim leaders were shocked and upset because the powerful Ottoman Empire had collapsed, Iqbal was largely alone in greeting the revolutionary young Turkish Muslim leaders with enthusiasm. He was impressed with the Turks because they were grappling seriously with real problems. Ataturk was an effective military leader who had learned the hard way how to defeat his enemies by well-designed action. He is still greatly revered by the Turkish people, because he ensured their survival and progress. He and his associates put in place efficient new methods for implementing mass education for Turkey. The Turkish revolutionaries of Ataturk's generation worked hard to bring their ideas to the people, to develop rapid mass education and economic development, and to encourage social change. Ataturk himself, and most of his close followers, lived relatively simple lives. They are still revered by many of the Turkish people for their effective leadership at a time of great crisis.

Iqbal's *no* to the Turkish revolution lay mainly in scepticism on his part as to whether or not some of their reforms had gone too far with respect to Islamic culture. The Turks themselves eventually

acknowledged some of this by changing back in certain areas; for example, giving the call to prayer in Arabic had been abolished, but was subsequently restored. Iqbal was also distrustful of nationalism as a sort of quasi-religion that many twentieth century people were adopting when they lost their faith in God. There is a significant, but subtle, difference between patriotism and nationalism. The former is just love for the place where one grows up, which most ordinary people experience, and which is an important virtue. Most people learn to value the universe from the part of it that they first experience.

Nationalism, as a modern ideology, is different from this natural love of one's own place. Nationalism is a modern ideology because it has replaced the medieval Empires. As an ideology, it is a belief system that encourages its followers to adopt unquestioning commitment—my country right or wrong—and loyalty to the idea of the nation. The nation is an idea, an abstraction, involving lines on pieces of paper, passports and so forth. A person who believes in his nation often feels justified in supporting anything that the nation does. This is also a form of materialism. Iqbal thought it was this kind of nationalism that had led to the excesses of imperialism, and to the World War. He was dubious about the wisdom of the Turks in exalting nationalism above all other concerns. But he approved of their energy and purposefulness.

Gandhi

The third revolutionary who burst onto the scene was Gandhi, who returned from South Africa and entered Indian politics in 1919 with a messianic vision of freedom. He was demanding radical social change and the purification of the subcontinent from all vestiges of foreign influence. Gandhi's earlier work of challenging the racist policies of the government in South Africa had had the wholehearted support of the Muslims who had been with him struggling to change a very bad social situation. Strong bonds of unity had been forged between Hindus, Muslims, Indian Christians, and Parsees who had together been mistreated by the South Africans, and who had bonded together to resist.

In South Africa, Muslims had worked readily with Gandhi. However, when he returned to India, the situation became more complex. Iqbal responded to Gandhi also with both *yes* and *no*. The two exchanged letters in 1919 when Gandhi wrote to ask Iqbal to be

the head of a new nationalist university. Gandhi and his followers had developed a novel form of protest against the British control over India. They asked all lawyers and judges to stop working in the courts, and all students and teachers to leave the British controlled universities. Many of them had done so, and new nationalist forms of educational institutions were being established in the early 1920s.

In Iqbal's letter, he tells Gandhi he is supportive of the new forms of national education. This meant that the Muslim thinker approved of the efforts to get away from British dominated institutions and to create new Indian ones. At this time, it seemed that the revolution being led by Gandhi and the Ali brothers might succeed. Iqbal in his letter was wishing them well, and indicating that he agreed with the actions designed to get the British out of India, and to build an independent country. He rejected the offer to be a University president, because, he said, he was temperamentally unsuited for a job like that. He also offered some reflections to Gandhi, which perhaps indicated a willingness on his part to enter into dialogue. Gandhi, however, was totally wrapped up in his own revolutionary activities and never tried to enter into further dialogue with Iqbal.

Iqbal made two points in this letter indicating the directions of his thinking at this time. One was that the Muslims had greater need for technical education than for more university training. Here we see again a manifestation of Iqbal's interest in economics. He knew that the Muslims since the time of the failed Revolt of 1857 had failed to develop tools they would need to function as an effective community in an industrialised world. He indicates that his concern was much more with providing tools for the technical training of the poorer Muslims than it was for more advanced education for the students of the upper classes of Muslims. His other point was that he was thinking about the need the Muslims had for the *Shari'ah* as a guide to their future development. Iqbal wrote:

There is no doubt that in view of the events that have happened in the Muslim world—especially with regard to Arabia and the Holy places—the Musalmans of India will consider themselves justified in adopting some form of non-cooperation, but the religious aspect of the question of education is to my mind, still obscure, and I have already published proposals for a thorough discussion of the whole question. I am afraid I am not an expert on the *Shariah*: but it is my conviction that in connection with the

question of education the law of Islam cannot fail to give us a suitable line of action under our present limitation.⁸

The *yes* and *no* to Gandhi are clear enough in this statement. *Yes* to some form of non-cooperation with the British, but *no* to moving ahead into designing governing, educational and other institutions for an independent India without much more thorough discussion and agreement between all the people involved. The key to later conflicts is explicit in this letter. Gandhi expected unquestioning support during a revolutionary struggle, whereas Iqbal wanted clarification and lucidity about what the goals were before he would agree. Iqbal showed himself open to discussion, and ready to talk.

Iqbal knew that he was temperamentally not an activist in the sense that the Ali brothers and Gandhi were; these leaders were constantly touring India by train and making the same speeches over and over again to huge crowds. Iqbal worked as a lawyer earning enough money to support his family, and he sat at home, read, thought, and wrote poetry. Sometimes these poems were memorised and repeated all over India so that they entered into the minds and hearts of the people. His was a different form of activism.

The Riddle of Life

A great poet produces images that seize the imagination; Iqbal was extra-ordinarily successful in doing this. He often said, like Ghalib, that the images must be written from the blood of the heart. Such images help bring reality into focus; they are potent because they are not the product of a manipulative intent, but rather an expression of strongly felt experience. Much remarkable poetry continued to pour forth from Iqbal during these years.

One long poem, *Khizr i Rāh*, (*Khizr the Guide*) illustrates some of the problems Iqbal was debating with himself during this turbulent era. Khizr is a symbol that occurred in the *Secrets of the Self*, and that comes up often in Iqbal's verse. The reference is to Surah 18 of the Qur'an. The late 20th century philosopher, Jacques Derrida, has written about postcards as being sometimes more illuminating than seriously thought out letters, because the postcards come from unexpected angles, and suggest subtle new ways of looking at problems, different from the status quo systems of thought. Derrida has a major book entitled *The Postcard*. The symbol of Khizr seems to represent, for Iqbal, something like the postcard-- the unexpected,

counter-culture, off from an unexpected angle, new insight. This poem is a meditation.

*By the river's brink I stood one evening, lost in the scene,
Yet hiding a world of fretting thoughts in my heart's cell.
Night deepened silence; calm the air, languid the current,
River or painted water the eye could scarcely tell....
--there that world-measuring courier I had sight of --Khizr,
That ancient in whom youth's colours fresh as the day break
dwell.*

*'Seeker', said he, 'of eternal secrets! When the heart
sees with clear vision, the fates that rule earth wear no veil.'
At these words in my soul doomed to long search awoke
a tumult as of Judgement Day; and thus I spoke....
--What is the riddle of life? What thing is the State? Or why
Must labour and capital so bloodily disagree?'⁹*

Khizr's answers include that the state is a mirage, and the messages of the bourgeoisie, disguised as colour, culture, craft and kingship, all designed to subdue labour, are very cunning. The message to Muslims is that they should continue to maintain, through prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage, their readiness to serve God. They should be wary of accepting too simple answers.

*With open eyes in the mirror of my discourses
You should watch a faint image of the coming age.
The sky has one more tested trick preserved in its store
Watch the disgrace of planning in face of destiny's strength.¹⁰*

If we think of this poem in the light of rejection of the three visions discussed above, it is evident that Iqbal doubted that any of these charismatic visionaries had produced ways of life that would endure very long. This image of the disgrace of planning in terms of what actually happens is an interesting key to history. Several events in recent history reflect this idea: one, that the attempt to produce a society based on Apartheid in South Africa did not work; and two, that the efficient planning of the Americans in the Vietnam War, or the Russians in Afghanistan, did not work either. The Russians eventually have rejected the political forms imposed on them by Lenin; the Indians have not followed Gandhi in developing spinning by hand as the core of their economic development. The charismatic visions did not turn out to be entirely practicable. The Turkish revolution succeeded in many ways; however, the Turks did not

finally abolish religious thought and practice. Humans can make as many plans as they want. The deeper issue is--what is really going to work?

Iqbal's distrust of charisma seems to indicate something of his good sense. His basic thought is tricky because he is both affirming that what is dead in civilization must go, hence the Ottoman Empire was truly finished; yet new forms of civilization will not work either, if they are based just on human planning, rather than on destiny's strength. It is not enough to destroy.

In the poem quoted above, Iqbal is using the words *planning* and *destiny* to indicate two different ways of setting goals for the future. *Planning* implies self-interested motives, such as wanting to keep one human group oppressed. From Iqbal's perspective, planning for the building of sound institutions in the future would need to accord with *destiny*. The motive should be the wider good than just the well being of one person, or community. To serve *destiny* is to serve larger causes than one's own immediate goals. From this perspective, any institutions designed for the future should be characterised by a readiness to unleash the potentialities of all humanity. In other words, there should be no repression. The structures of a better civilisation should make it possible for all persons to become to become just, merciful, generous and good.

Perhaps an analogy with gardening might make this point more clear. Humans can and do accomplish all kinds of feats in creating and sustaining varieties of gardens. But to garden well means we have to work in harmony with the potentialities and needs of the seeds, the earth, the air, and the water. Our creativeness has to be linked in inter-action with all these forces. All these issues are implicit in Iqbal's term *destiny*. The word is a translation of the Qur'anic term, *taqdir*. We will discuss the poet's use of this term further in chapter five.

Iqbal thought that any way of life that failed to make such possibilities real, to accord with *destiny* would not long endure. To contrast what people plan for, as against what *destiny* requires, is to contrast limited human greed, with the unlimited possibilities of a non-hierarchical social order. Thus, humans have the freedom to design their own institutions, but if they design institutions that do not accord with human potential, then the designs will fail. Apartheid and imperialism are examples of failed designs. Human potential is a

gift, and has to be treated as such. Social forms need to protect and to encourage the potentialities of all, and not to repress some for the benefit of a few. Systems that permit domination and repression will not ultimately survive. Iqbal did not think that any one of the three charismatic visionaries, who came forward at the end of World War I, had produced visions of social and political structures that would be adequate. He wanted a vision that would include social justice, and democracy; he also wanted to emphasise the value of all human life.

Iqbal's Political Activities

Iqbal himself took part to a limited degree in political activities in these post war years. He was elected to the Punjab Legislative Council and served four years (1926-1930). The council was dominated by the local landlords. Mass political parties hardly existed in the Punjab. Iqbal mainly played the role of critic, often annoying the landlords by his attacks on the taxation and education systems. The Muslim League met in Lahore in 1924. Most of the resolutions at the session were in favour of creating an independent India, once the British were gone, in which there would be a loose federation of autonomous communal provinces. The delegates supported the continuation of communal electorates and veto power over communal legislation for representatives of the community to be affected. One author comments: "In short, the resolution simply extended the principles of pluralism which had been operating in Indian public life since the nineteenth century."¹¹

Iqbal's political ideas meant that he disagreed with the oppressiveness of traditional landlords, and was supportive of land reform. On the other hand, he also disagreed with the socialists about the need to have one strong central government in India in order to bring about effective social change. This was the core of his disagreement with Nehru. Iqbal wanted social change, but he also wanted to retain cultural autonomy for the Muslims. After the collapse of the non-cooperation movement, not only had most of the Muslims moved away from supporting Gandhian ideals, but certain revivalist Hindu groups had become more active in promoting a kind of exclusivist Hindu ideology. This latter type of Hinduism spoke to the feeling that Hindus were despised for being weak and that they must become strong and assertive. There was a lot of mutual vituperation going on about religious differences in the popular press

in North West India at this time. Iqbal and the other Muslims felt increasingly threatened by this active form of aggressive Hinduism.

Personal Life

During these post war years, Iqbal's personal circumstances had not changed much. He continued to practice law and write poetry. In 1924, both his wives found themselves pregnant at the same time. Mukhtār Begum, and her baby, died in childbirth. The family was very distressed. Sardār Begum gave birth to a son, Javid. Several years later, Sardār Begum gave birth to a daughter, Munira.

Sardār Begum died in 1935, when her two children were still quite young. A German governess was appointed to help raise the children. She has left a brief memoir of her life with the family. Iqbal himself died in 1938. Javid Iqbal later wrote that his father had told his sister to learn German because German women are very brave.¹² Munira, when grown up, married the son of one of Iqbal's friends, and became herself the mother of sons. She has lived a quiet life. Javid Iqbal also married and had two sons. He has been a lawyer, a judge, and a Chief Justice. He is currently an elected member of the Senate of the government of Pakistan. He has written and edited a number of publications about his father's life and thought, and has consistently worked in a variety of ways to disseminate his father's teachings.

Javid Iqbal tells us that his father had prayed at the tomb of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi for a son, and that he took the young boy to visit that shrine. The son tells us of his memory of that visit:

Father took me inside the mausoleum, sat close to the grave of the saint, and recited the Qur'an. I felt afraid of the darkness and was terrified by the grave; yet I was aware of a peculiar familiarity with my hushed and desolate surroundings. I watched father recite the Qur'an. His sad voice vibrated through the dark dome of the mausoleum and tears streamed down his cheeks.¹³

Iqbal later wrote a long epic, *Javid Nāmāh*, published in 1932; the poem is addressed to his young son as a symbol for the young Muslims of the future. The message was to grow constantly more creative, and more able to transform the world into a better place for all humanity. There is verse in this poem that refers to Jawaharlal Nehru, and his father, as significant exemplars for the young to admire.

Who gave to India this yearning for freedom?

*Who gave the quarry this passion to be the hunter?
 These scions of Brahmins, with vibrant hearts,
 whose glowing cheeks put the red tulip to shame--
 keen of eyes, mature and strenuous in action
 whose very glance puts Europe into commotion.
 Their origin is from this protesting soil of ours,
 the rising place of these stars is our Kashmir...
 whence comes all this ardour you possess,
 whence comes this breath of the breeze of spring?
 It is from this selfsame wind's influence
 that our mountains derive their colour and scent.¹⁴*

The ancestors of the Nehru family had been refugees from the destruction of Delhi by the British. The father, Motilal, had made a large fortune by his own efforts as a lawyer, and had played a significant role in the early phase of the Indian independence movement. Iqbal wrote to the son, Jawaharlal, on a number of occasions on which he thought that Nehru was misunderstanding the point of view of the Muslims. Iqbal seems to have hoped that he and Nehru might be able to learn to understand each other.

Shocks to the Independence Movement

In the early twenties, the Indian independence movement had two shocks. The first was the abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish revolutionaries. Since the Khilafat movement had been the main national organisation in which the Indian Muslims had been participating, the leaders, such as the Ali brothers, were left in a state of confusion that lasted several years. The aim of the Indian Khilafat movement had been to support the independence of the Turkish Caliph after the defeat of 1918. Once the Caliph was deposed by the Turks, the Indian Muslims were confused about what they should do next.

At the same time, the non-cooperation movement also collapsed when Gandhi called it off after violence broke out. After the failure of these two movements, cooperation between Hindus and Muslims decreased significantly. There was an increase in mutual distrust that continued up until the outbreak of World War II. Many different attempts were made to try to work out a mutually acceptable approach to plans for a future independent India, but none succeeded.

The British government, in 1909, had agreed to the principle of separate electorates for India so that Muslims would be elected from clearly designated constituencies. The other minorities were to have the same arrangements. In 1916, the scheme was accepted by a joint meeting of the Muslim League and the Congress. Throughout all the subsequent negotiations in the years between the two World Wars, Iqbal supported the view that separate electorates for Muslims would be essential whenever India would receive independence.

In 1920, a Unity Conference was held in Delhi. Jinnah was president of the Muslim League at this point; he led the conference to an agreement to give up separate electorates if a number of issues were fulfilled that would mean that the Muslims in the central legislature would be entitled to no less than one-third of the total seats. These agreements were known as the Delhi proposals. In 1927, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution accepting substantially the Muslim proposals and the Muslim League and the Congress appointed subcommittees to work out a basis for a future constitution for India on the basis of the Delhi proposals. Iqbal, however, sided with Miān Muḥammad Shafi', a leader of the Punjab Muslims who was against this proposal, and thus weakened Jinnah's position. Nevertheless, an All-Parties Conference took place in 1928 to consider these matters and produced what is known as the Nehru report.

If the parties involved had been able to agree at this point in history, it is not improbable that a future independent India that included the all the Muslims would have been possible. The failure of the Nehru report to get the consent of everyone involved is thus a turning point towards the subsequent division of the sub-continent. The Muslim League split into two parts on this occasion. One part was called the Shafi' League, which included Iqbal. The other part included Jinnah. The British sent the Simon Commission to India to investigate the possibilities of self-government. Indians were not included as members of the Commission. The Shafi' League rejected the Delhi Proposals, and agreed to cooperate with the Simon Commission.

In 1929, Jinnah produced fourteen amendments to the Nehru report. These included the model of a federal government with residual powers given to the provinces, as is the case in Canada. The report also claimed that Muslims should have one third of the seats

in the Central Legislature, and that separate electorates to be maintained in the absence of agreement. These amendments were rejected.

The Shafi' League held a meeting in 1928 at which Iqbal strongly supported provincial autonomy. However, subsequently Iqbal missed a meeting because he was absent in Delhi. In his absence, Miān Muḥammad Shafi' adopted a conservative position that Iqbal considered reactionary. The poet therefore resigned as secretary of the Shafi' League. He wrote as follows:

I now find that the extract of the League memorandum as published in the press makes no demand for full provincial autonomy and suggests a unitary form of provincial government in which law, order and justice should be placed under the direct charge of the governor.... This suggestion is only a veiled form of diarchy and means no constitutional advance at all. I ought not in the circumstances remain secretary of the All-India Muslim League.¹⁵

Miān Muḥammad Shafi' then reversed himself and Iqbal withdrew his resignation. What this event tells us about Iqbal's position is that he was not sympathetic to landlords who were anti-democratic, and who wanted rule by the British in concert with one local official. Iqbal was consistent in his insistence on democracy. On the other hand, he was strongly in favour of a large degree of provincial autonomy within a federal India because his major priority was always the preservation of control by the Muslims over their educational and cultural affairs. This is why he did not agree with the concessions of Jinnah to the Congress, which he thought did not guarantee enough provincial autonomy.

Iqbal wanted democracy and provincial autonomy with respect to culture, much like the model of Canada. The Canadian constitution was developed in this way because the English speaking Protestants were the majority of the population, and the French speaking Roman Catholics in Quebec wanted control over their culture and education. A recent study of Canadian history suggests that each generation of Canadians has had new and different problems to face in relation to the demands and expectations of the two founding groups; the process of negotiation and striving for mutually acceptable compromise is on-going. One problem is solved and another appears. This does not mean that federalism is unworkable; it just means that

the people have had to become accustomed to living with compromise.¹⁶

The period after 1924 in India is characterised by the historian, Peter Hardy, as the 'period of frustration'. The various national bodies were attempting to work out some kind of agreement that would serve to unite them in order to work to get the British out. At the local level, however, sparring was going on as to who was to get government jobs and government assistance. Much of the worry of the minority Muslim community about what would happen when the British left India was worry about patronage in jobs and business. Miān Muḥammad Shafi' in the Punjab in this period undertook to get more government jobs for Muslims, to give preponderance in village areas to Muslims where the population justified this, and to reduce Hindu preponderance on municipal boards. Hardy comments that the advantages of Hindu commercial and banking wealth were thus diminished.¹⁷

During this time, Iqbal demonstrated that he was able to take part in local politics with clear ideas about taxes, educational policies, and land reforms. He could master detail well. But he knew that his greatest strength was that of a theoretician, rather than an administrator. He continued to remain focused on long range planning for the development of his people.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Poems from Iqbal*, pp. 42,43.

² Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, p. 142.

³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 75.

⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 383.

⁵ The best book about the background in Yugoslavia of this assassination is Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

⁶ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p.112-125.

⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 159-160.

⁸ Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam*, pp. 59-61. Gandhi

Memorial Library, New Delhi, Gandhi's Correspondence, SN 7361, LN 340.

⁹ *Poems from Iqbal*, pp. 17-23.

¹⁰ *The Call of the Marching Bell*, p. 354.

¹¹ G. R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India*, p. 178.

¹² Javid Iqbal, "Iqbal: My Father" in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, p. 62.

¹³ Javid Iqbal, "Iqbal: My Father" in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, p. 56.

¹⁴ *The Javid Nāmāh*, p. 121.

¹⁵ Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, pp. 89,90.

¹⁶ John Ralston Saul, *Reflections of a Siamese Twin Canada at the end of the Twentieth Century*.

¹⁷ Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, pp. 213-215.

Chapter Five

How to Think

Conduct must not be
based on an illusion.

Fortunately for those of us who wish to understand Iqbal's thinking, the Madras Muslim Association invited the poet-philosopher to give a series of public lectures. He did this in 1929 in Madras. The chair of the meeting was a Hindu, Dr. P. Subranoyan, and the audience consisted of persons from many different traditions. These lectures were subsequently published, with one additional chapter. In this volume, entitled *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal focused on the question of how to go about thinking in new ways about religion and social change.

Iqbal had accepted the methods and techniques of modern science, including psychology and the social sciences, from his days in a Mission school in Sialkot. The tension he felt about the contrast between these new forms of knowledge, and the religiousness of his parents, dates from very early in his life. It was his father who had sent him to that school; Iqbal seems to have felt that he was expected somehow to reconcile the ways of the school and the ways of the home. Eventually, he could not accept his father's compromise of just separating the two ways of thinking into different compartments. One usually becomes a philosopher because one is unsettled. Iqbal was distinctly unsettled for the rest of his life by basic questions about the meaning of existence. More than that, he recommended 'becoming unsettled' as a necessary condition for growth.

Iqbal never solved his dilemma by accepting the absolute authority of any personal intellectual or spiritual guide, from his own tradition or elsewhere. The *yes* and *no* that were so typical of his thought continue on throughout his philosophical discussions. In these lectures, he skims through much of the history of Islamic and western thought. He acknowledges that he has learned much from

many sources, but no one thinker or school of thought has ever served to satisfy him entirely.

Neither did he believe that he had himself discovered a totally satisfactory system of thought that would solve all human dilemmas forever. Iqbal begins these lectures by insisting that no human intellectual system, including his own, can ever be final. He is consistently a paradoxical thinker because he knows that human insights into the meaning of reality are necessarily fragmentary. The universe is much vaster than our capacity to think about it, and therefore we have only fragments of insights. We cannot always make a final synthesis of these fragments; we must live with paradox. Paradox means accepting as valid different affirmations that cannot easily be reconciled with each other.

As a young student at Cambridge, the Muslim poet-philosopher had listened to Whitehead who said that he learned early in his life that all the ideas in physics were mistaken. Whitehead said that discovery had been a shattering experience for him. Many years later, the mature adult, Iqbal, began his own lectures with exactly this comment, namely that physics keeps changing, and that therefore all other forms of human thought must do the same. Iqbal understood this need for a constant reconstructing of human ideas as profoundly as Whitehead did.

Iqbal agreed with the British scientist that not only were all past human theories largely mistaken, but also that present and future ideas would probably also eventually prove to be inadequate as human understanding grows and develops. Whitehead and Iqbal applied this insight to theories of philosophy, history and religion as well as to mathematics and physics. Acceptance of contemporary scientific methods requires us to hold our theories lightly, tentatively, because evidence may come from any quarter to challenge them. Such an attitude can be liberating; we should not base our emotional security on theories, about the nature of the cosmos, or anything else. Someone like Whitehead or Iqbal could rebound quickly and easily to new insights. One needs a kind of inner freedom to be able to do this.

Iqbal thought about social change by affirming that *yes*, the medieval ways of life and thought characteristic of his father's generation were declining and would cease to have an active presence in history. But should anything of the wisdom of the earlier

generations be preserved? What should be kept, and how could this be done? Iqbal saw himself as caught between two ages; he had to accept the dying of the old. The challenge was to discern how to build wisely for the future. The grief, which cries out in much of Iqbal's poetry, is a poignant lament for the older Islamic civilizations. When he had looked at the tomb of the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir, just outside Lahore, Iqbal grieved that the flowing river of time would never bring back the culture that had been swept away. Standing beside the Ravi, the river outside Lahore, Iqbal wrote:

*With palsied hand the taverner of heaven
Has brought the cup: red wine stains evening's skirt;
Day's headlong caravan has made haste towards
Extinction: twilight smoulders like hot ash
Of the sun's funeral pyre...¹*

The grief had to be expressed. But the one who wept before the flowing river knew that he had to put the past behind him, and find some way to move forward. He had packed up, and left home. On his first journey to Europe, Iqbal had paused to look at the crescent moon reflected in the Nile. He wrote:

*The sun's boat is broken and drowned in the Nile
But a piece is floating about on the water of the Nile
The twilight's pure blood drips into the sky's basin
Has the lancet of Nature drawn the sun's blood?...
Your caravan is afoot without help of bell's call
The human ear cannot hear your foot-steps' sound
You show the spectacle of the rise and fall to the eyes.
Where is your home? To which country are you going?
O star-like planet take with me yourself
The prick of Longing's thorn keeps me restless
I am seeking light. I am weary in this habitation
I am the restless child in the existence's school."²*

These images of brokenness, loss of guidance, and ignorance of what is going on are characteristic of Iqbal's verse. The poem indicates his search for light; the image of a caravan moving without coherent direction symbolises Iqbal's sense of the despair brought on by the loss of a secure, known world. He often speaks of himself as tormented by longing, and pricked by an infinite desire.

When he wrote *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal was expressing in prose what he had discovered in his search for light. The purpose of the lectures is to offer, to his people, and to the wider world, a sense of where a new bell might take them. The approach is similar to that of his doctoral thesis, namely an effort study Islamic thought from the perspective of the history of world religious thought as a whole. His explicit aim was to indicate where he saw weakness in medieval Islamic philosophy and theology, and to suggest remedies.

Iqbal believed that revised modes of Islamic religious thinking ought to help enable Muslims to become more effective and creative in meeting the challenges of modernity. At the time when he delivered these lectures, he still hoped to be able to write several more books in which he intended to discuss the historical development of Islamic religious thought, of Islamic jurisprudence, of Sufism, and of Islamic communities in the context of world history as a whole.³ He approaches the study of Islamic thought, whether in philosophy, theology Sufi thought, or jurisprudence as a study of on going processes. The processes are unending because the contexts keep shifting.

Iqbal steadily insisted on viewing intellectual history as a process in which ideas inter-acted with changing social and economic contexts. His eventual aim was the development of a new curriculum and a method for training Muslims to think in new ways about the historical development of their intellectual tradition. This volume was intended to set the stage for much more that was expected to come. Although the other books were never written, because of Iqbal's ill health, and preoccupation with earning his living, we can see germs of all of them in these lectures. His basic purpose was to convince his people that they needed to use modern intellectual methods to study their past, and to devise new and better ways to implement the values of that tradition for the future.

We find him taking his same *yes* and *no* approach to all the Muslim and non-Muslim authors, past and present, whom he thinks might shed some light on where the bell should lead the caravan. In order to see how he has put together his conclusions, we will look more carefully now at the contents of each of the chapters of his book.

1. *Knowledge and Religious Experience*

Iqbal's title for his first chapter tells us that he has remained focused on the necessity of religious experience as a basis for sound religious reform. How can such experience be understood from the perspective of modern thought? Can Muslims, who accept disciplined modern methods of study, still feel that there is value in religious experience? Does modernity necessarily destroy faith?

Iqbal was convinced that the debilitating effects of colonial oppression on his people had caused them to lose self-confidence, and to doubt the value of their cultural tradition. Iqbal is looking for a new bell that he hopes will stir up renewed intellectual vigour. Traditional Muslim theology, philosophy and jurisprudence will not serve, Iqbal thinks, to stimulate the kind of renewed pride that can only come from learning to solve real problems effectively. This is because the traditional religious leaders have been trained to know what the answers were to the problems of earlier centuries. They scarcely grasp, however, what the problems are in the modern world.

Iqbal wants to encourage the Indian Muslims to regain self-confidence; his solution is to teach them to value their potentialities as creative individuals. He maintains that traditional Muslim philosophy and theology had not paid sufficient attention to affirming the value of the potential creativeness of the individual. Iqbal knew that the increase in education in science was likely to lead Muslims to lose their traditional faith. Since he had been educated in science as well as in Islamic philosophy and history, he thought that a bridge was possible between these diverse disciplines. However, the bridge would require educating future Muslims well in both areas. This was why the traditional methods of training religious leaders would not serve to produce thinkers whose leadership would be effective.

Iqbal maintained that Muslims should become good scientists, well disciplined in their capacities to evaluate ideas and theories carefully and rigorously. Further, he thought that similar discipline and rigour should be applied to studies of the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an, the historical development of Islamic jurisprudence, and the history of Islamic philosophy and theology. He was convinced that ideas must always be studied in their particular contexts. In order to think about what Muslims should do in the present and the future, it was first necessary to understand and

to evaluate what they had done in different phases of their long and complex history.

Throughout this book, Iqbal continues to be focused on *Sinai* [religious experience] as the basic clue as to how future generations of Muslims should think about the possibilities and responsibilities of human life. He is concerned to get rid of modes of thinking that lead to passivity and despair. He wants Muslims to recapture a sense from the Qur'an of their potentialities as free and creative persons. This first chapter is directed to a consideration of the relationship of such experience to modern knowledge as appropriated and understood by Iqbal. He was particularly interested in the insights of modern psychology. Iqbal says *yes* and *no* to Freud. The *yes* reads: "And it is in the elimination of the satanic from the Divine that the followers of Freud have done inestimable service to religion."⁴

Iqbal thought that Freudian psychology, by focusing on elements within the mind as a source of mental disorder, had helped get rid of the notion that disturbed persons were victims of possession by evil powers outside the self. Since western history, in particular, had many instances of persecution of people thought to be possessed by demonic forces, the elimination by science of such superstitious notions was a considerable achievement in making for a more sane society. Psychology thus made it possible for persons to move more constructively to understanding and healing mental disorders.

On the other hand, psychology became reductionist if it tried to assert that all forms of awareness are caused by internal factors exclusively. Iqbal's *no* to Freud reads as follows:

If our vagrant impulses assert themselves in our dreams, or at other times when we are not strictly ourselves, it does not follow that they remain imprisoned in a kind of lumber room behind the normal self... Religion, it is said, is pure fiction created by these repudiated impulses of mankind with a view to find a kind of fairyland for free unobstructed movement.... That there are religions and forms of art, which provide a kind of cowardly escape from the facts of life, I do not deny. All that I contend is that this is not true of all religion.... Religion is not physics or chemistry seeking an explanation of nature in terms of causation; it really aims at interpreting a totally different region of human experience—religious experience—the data of which cannot be reduced to the data of any other science.⁵

Thus, Iqbal takes religious experience as the central issue in his criticism of Freud. The kind of experience indicated by the *Sinai* image is not necessarily a matter of retreat from reality, but is rather finding a direction in which to grow. Sound religious experience should help provide the energy and purpose to work for the transformations of conditions of life in the world. The *Sinai* experience involves response to the immensity of the external world of space and time, and a recognition of the vast potentialities of development and growth within consciousness. It is primarily an experience of the expansion of awareness.

This quotation is an important indication of Iqbal's thoughts about religion and science. He states that religion does not explain nature in terms of causation. Thus physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and other sciences will go uncovering other aspects of the complexity of the natural world without threatening religious life. This is because, in Iqbal's opinion, religious life is a matter of the expansion of the potentialities of individual consciousness. Religion should be understood as an area of life different from the study of the natural world. Iqbal's *yes* and *no* to modern science is thus a matter of clarifying which are the appropriate areas of study. He sees no serious threat to religion from science. He knew that neither Whitehead nor Einstein had any serious difficulty in reconciling their attitudes to science and religion. Iqbal wanted Muslims to welcome science enthusiastically, and also to continue to practice their personal devotional lives.

In this and the following chapters, Iqbal makes a number of comments about the problems he sees in medieval Muslim theology and philosophy. These Muslim disciplines need to be reconstructed, he thinks, in the light of modern modes of thinking. The poet offers a *yes* and *no* to the thinking of the medieval theologian, al Ash'ari, and his followers. The Ash'arite is the intellectual tradition that has dominated Muslim theological education for many centuries. The tradition still shapes the curriculum in many of the *madrasahs* [seminaries] in which Muslim religious leaders are trained.

Shibli had strongly criticised the Ash'arite philosophical position. Iqbal had followed the same direction of criticism in his doctoral thesis. In this chapter, he talks about the inadequacies of the Ash'arite tradition in relation to the significance of individual

consciousness. The *yes* is stated in this way: "The more constructive among the Ash'arite thinkers were no doubt on the right path."⁶

The right path, according to Iqbal, was to move away from the 'enervating philosophy of life' that had developed from the kind of Greek philosophy, especially neo-Platonism, a philosophy that had tended to consider the events in this world insignificant and meaningless. Iqbal develops his same point in chapters two and three. He later restates the *yes*.

I regard the Ash'arite thought on this point as a genuine effort to develop on the basis of an Ultimate Will or Energy a theory of creation which, with all its shortcomings, is far more true to the spirit of the Quean than the Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe. The duty of the future theologians of Islam is to reconstruct this purely speculative theory, and to bring it into close contact with modern science.⁷

2. *The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience*

In Iqbal's second chapter, he explains more fully his *no* to the Ash'arite philosophical position.

Muslim thinkers of the school of Al-Ash'ari did not believe in the infinite divisibility of space and time. With them space, time, and motion are made up of points and instants which cannot be further subdivided.⁸

Iqbal says in several ways, throughout the course of this book, that Ash'arite theology must be reconsidered and reconstructed in the light of modern science. This is particularly true with respect to refining thinking on matters of space, time and consciousness. Iqbal does not think the Ash'arite position was clear enough about the reality of process and development within time. In his view, these theologians had failed to take seriously the possibility that free human beings could seriously change what happens in time. He believes that Muslims will become more creative if they clarify their thinking about 'purpose' as the determining element of consciousness.

Thus ends and purposes, whether they exist as conscious or subconscious tendencies, form the warp and woof of conscious experience. And the notion of purpose cannot be understood except in reference to the future. The past, no doubt, abides and operates in the present; but this operation of the past in the

present is not the whole of consciousness. The element of purpose discloses a kind of forward look in consciousness. Purposes colour not only our present states of consciousness but also reveal its future direction. In fact they constitute the forward pushes of our life, and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be. To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be.... A state of attentive consciousness involves both memory and imagination as operating factors. One the analogy of our conscious experience, therefore, Reality is not a blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea. It's nature is through and through teleological.⁹

This is one of the clearest statements by Iqbal about human consciousness, time, and space. The capacity to have purposes is the defining element of human personality for him. His word for God is Ultimate Ego. By this, he means that the best clue we have in experience to the nature of the Divine is the purposiveness of human consciousness. For a finite ego to have an awareness of the Ultimate Ego is to catch a glimpse of infinite goodness at the heart of reality. Such a glimpse is the *Sinai* experience.

Iqbal is clear in his insistence that reality does not unfold in terms of a blueprint that has been designed ahead of time.

Consciousness may be imagined as a deflection from life. It functions to provide a luminous point in order to enlighten the forward rush of life. It is a case of tension, a state of self-concentration, by means of which life manages to shut out all memories and associations which have no bearing on a present action. It has no well-defined fringes; it shrinks and expands as the occasion demands. To describe it as an epi-phenomenon of the processes of matter is to deny it as an independent activity, and to deny it as an independent activity is to deny the validity of all knowledge which is only a systematized expression of consciousness. Thus consciousness is a variety of the purely spiritual principle of life which is not a substance, but an organizing principle, a specific mode of behaviour essentially different to the behaviour of an externally worked machine.¹⁰

This comment is also a *no* to Marxist and other theories that try to define human consciousness as an epi-phenomenon [product] of matter. According to Iqbal, human consciousness is a spiritual organising principle. This consciousness inter-acts in a living way

with the natural world, and with other minds; the one inter-acts with the others, and changes constantly.

3. *The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer*

In this third chapter, Iqbal again criticises the traditional Ash'arite position on space because, he says, the medieval theologians could not explain movement.¹¹ He also criticises traditional Muslim thinking about the nature of the soul [*nafs*]

The point, however, that the constructive endeavour of the Ash'arite s, as of the moderns, was wholly lacking in psychological analysis, and the result of this shortcoming was that they altogether failed to perceive the subjective aspect of time. It is due to this failure that in their theory the system of material atoms and time-atoms life part, with no organic relation between them.¹²

Iqbal thinks this problem is acute because, if we think of time as purely linear, with God at the beginning of Creation, we have difficulty explaining freedom as something real. He thinks the *Sinai* experience provides a better way to think about time and freedom. Iqbal believes that religious experience can help an individual find an aspect of his, or her, consciousness, what he calls 'the appreciative self', that is different from the day to day self. The daily self is the one that is caught up in serial time. In his words:

The appreciative self lives in pure duration, i.e. change without succession. The life of the self consists in its movement from appreciation to efficiency, from intuition to intellect.... Thus the character of our conscious experience--our point of departure in all knowledge -gives us a clue to the concept which reconciles the opposition of permanence and change, of time regarded as an organic whole or eternity, and time regarded as to atomic. If then, we accept the guidance of our conscious experience and conceive of the life of the all-inclusive Ego on the analogy of the finite ego, the time of the Ultimate ego is revealed as change without succession.¹³

At the moment of the *Sinai* experience, therefore, the human becomes aware of the timelessness of his or her inner self, and of the corresponding timelessness of the Absolute. Timelessness means distinct from the daily passage of time. Iqbal knew that we have to use metaphors to explain this experience, because there is no way we can speak about it clearly in prose. The inner, or appreciative self

makes judgments and decisions. Iqbal thinks we can judge the quality of an individual's level of spiritual development by the decisions, actions, and creations of that person. Thus, when we observe ourselves making a significant decision, we can see the fruit of what we do. What we cannot do is observe the whole process at work when our consciousness is acting dynamically in this way. The timeless element, the rootedness of the self in the depths of ourselves, is beyond our capacity to observe.

This is probably the most significant of his insights. If everyday time were the only reality in our existence, it would be hard to understand how it is that we can actually change what happens. We create the future by what we do. Iqbal had learned from Nietzsche that everything in culture, including our values, is a product of human creativeness. Iqbal's solution is that we derive our purposes from the part of ourselves that is in contact with a reality outside of, different from, everyday time. The more in touch we are with this outside reality, the more focused our purposes become, and the more readily we can change what is happening in the present, and what will happen in the future.

Yet the purposes themselves change. As we change the environment, new forces act on us; we must continue to shift our purposes as reality shifts around us. The source of the changing purposes must still be found through our contact with the timeless aspect of ourselves. The bell calls the caravan, but the directions keep shifting. We move forward, one day at a time. Each day the whole situation must be re-evaluated.

Iqbal does not like the metaphor of absorption into the divine to characterise the relationship of the self to the absolute. He wants to retain difference between the human self, and the absolute. On the other hand, he also wants to say that the everyday human self is rooted in something much deeper. We are not absorbed into the absolute because our separated selves have to keep working to create the new. We do not create having a full picture of the final product as we work. Our separated condition means that we have only glimpses, hints and intuitions about where we are going, and what we are creating. Iqbal does not think that human language can say more than this.

Iqbal thinks that prayer can be a means to help individuals become aware of this timeless element in their experience. Prayer

can be done alone, or with others. The poet thinks that Muslim congregational prayer is a useful mode of spiritual discipline.

Prayer as a means of spiritual illumination is a normal vital act by which the little island of our personality suddenly discovers its situation in a larger whole of life.... I cannot help quoting here a beautiful passage from the mystic poet Rumi in which he describes the mystic question after Reality: 'The Sufi's book is not composed of ink and letters: it is nothing but a heart white as snow. The scholar's possession is pen-marks. What is the Sufi's possession?--footmarks. The Sufi stalks the game like a hunter: he sees the musk-deer's track and follows the footprints. For some while the track of the deer is proper clue for him, but afterwards it is the musk-gland of the deer that is his guide. To go one stage guided by the scent of the musk-gland is better than a hundred stages of following the track and roaming about'.¹⁴

Iqbal says that congregational prayer is particularly helpful because praying with others helps multiply the individual's power of perception, deepens his or her emotion, and dynamises the will.¹⁵

Another issue discussed in this chapter is the problem of evil as expressed by the Qur'anic narrative about the exile of Adam and his wife from paradise. Iqbal says this story has nothing to do with any idea of 'original sin' or moral depravity as a human condition.

Thus we see the Qur'anic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate men's rise from primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first glad of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being. Nor does the Quran regard the earth as a torture-shell where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin. Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice; and that is why, according to the Qur'anic narration, Adam's first transgression was forgiven. Now goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing co-operation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of

goodness.... That God has taken this risk shows His immense faith in man; it is for man now to justify this faith.... As the Qur'an says: 'And for trial will We test you evil and with good.' [21:36]¹⁶

Prayer, individual and corporate, can help to stimulate more fruitful growth towards goodness. Only free persons can choose the good freely.

4. *The Human Ego-His Freedom and Immortality*

Chapter four emphasises the Qur'anic teaching with respect to the individuality and uniqueness of each human person. Iqbal says:

Three things are perfectly clear from the Qur'an.

[1] *That man is the chosen of God....* [20:122}

[2] *That man, with all his faults, is meant to be the representative of God on earth....* [2:30}

[3] *That man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at this peril....* [33:72]

"Yet it is surprising to see that the unity of human consciousness which constitutes the centre of human personality never really became a point of interest the history of Muslim thought."¹⁷

Iqbal says that the influence of Greek philosophy led some Muslims thinkers to think of the soul as kind of matter. He thinks that devotional Sufism was the main aspect of Muslim practice that led to focus on the inner aspects of human religious experience. Iqbal rejects the kind of Sufi thought that thinks of religious experience on the analogy of the drop disappearing into the ocean, absorption into God. He rather thinks of continuous inter-action between the person and the Creator.

Iqbal repeats his claim that Muslim religious thought must be reconstructed. Many of the philosophical assumptions of the medieval theologians are no longer viable. In his words:

Nor can the concepts of theological system, draped in the terminology of a practically dead metaphysics, be of any help to those who happen to possess a different intellectual background. The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah Wali Ullah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realised the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history

of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broad vision engendered by wide experience of men and manners, would have made him living link between the past and the future, was Jamal-ud-Din Afghani.... The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us.¹⁸

This passage suggests that Iqbal may have absorbed some of his imperative to thinking new thoughts from his secondary school teacher, who first taught him about Shāh Wali Ullāh and Jamāl al Din Afghānī. The poet's later personal knowledge of the impact of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān on Shibli and Arnold strengthened his sense of vocation. Iqbal's mind developed in the same direction all his life. He grew, by absorbing and integrating new sources of wisdom, but the direction of his growth remained the same. He did not make any radical shifts in his interests. His problem was rather how to work out the implications of the values he had understood from the early period of his life.

In this chapter, Iqbal explains his perspective on the nature of the soul. He uses the words *soul* and *ego* interchangeably. According to him, we cannot have any fully adequate concept of the soul. "The finite centre of experience therefore, is real, even though its reality is too profound to be intellectualized."¹⁹

Iqbal maintains that the traditional Muslim idea, stemming from al-Ghazzālī, of the soul as distinct from other mental states is inadequate.²⁰ Further, the idea of William James that the ego is a stream of consciousness is also not good enough.²¹ Iqbal thinks that beneath the stream of consciousness, there is a different level of consciousness. In his words:

"I do not mean to say that the ego is over and above the mutually penetrating multiplicity we call experience. Inner experience is the ego at work. We appreciate the ego itself in the act of perceiving, judging and willing. The life of the 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 mutual invasion. It is present in it as a directive energy and is formed and disciplined by its own experience. The Qur'an is clear on this directive function of the ego.

'And they ask thee of the soul. Say: the soul proceedeth from my lord's 'Amr'; but of knowledge, only a little to you is given.' [17:85]....

Thus my real personality is not a thing, it is an act. My experience is only a series of acts, mutually referring to one another, and held together by the unity of a directive purpose. My whole reality lies in my directive attitude. You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in a temporal order; you must interpret, understand, and appreciate me in my judgments, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations.²²

This notion of soul is one of Iqbal's most basic ideas. He insists that the soul is both beyond the everyday self, and yet linked to that self, and growing. One can point to the soul, and make comments about it, but it remains something not finally capable of being conceptualised. It is the directive force of personality. One knows a person from what he or she does, creates, hopes, and judges. The act of judging comes from the soul, and reveals the quality of the particular soul. Those whose souls are poorly developed are petty and mean in their judgments. Iqbal believed that such pettiness was one of the consequences of colonial domination. Throwing off the imperialists, therefore, involved searching for a renewal of the energy of the soul. Recovering freedom would be better done if the freedom was understood to be linked with the development of the creative potentialities of the individual soul. Religious practice should help develop that sense of free potentiality.

The timing of the daily prayer which according to the Quran restores 'self-possession' to the ego by bringing it into closer touch with the ultimate source of life and freedom, is intended to save the ego from the mechanizing effects of sleep and business. Prayer in Islam is the ego's escape from mechanism to freedom.²³

Iqbal relates the idea of 'faith' to 'freedom'. Faith, *imān*, is a way of evolving the inner richness of the soul. Faith has nothing to do with the acceptance of creeds and intellectual statements; it is rather a mode of directing the self in prayer towards the absolute source of goodness and justice. The person of faith is directed towards growing more aware of, and more able to express within the structures of existence, the goodness that is perceived as the core of existence. A person with a sense of such core goodness might, for example, build a hospital.

We observed earlier that *destiny* is one of the key terms in Iqbal's poetry and prose. He discusses here the Qur'anic origin of the term.

It is time regarded as an organic whole that the Quean describes as 'Taqdir' or the destiny --a word which has been so much misunderstood both in and outside the world of Islam. Destiny is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities. It is time freed from the net of causal sequence--the diagrammatic character which the logical understanding imposes on it. In one word, it is time as felt and not as thought and calculated.... Time regarded as destiny forms the very essence of things. As the Qur'an says: 'God created all things and assigned to each its destiny.' The destiny of a thing then is not an unrelenting fate working from without like a task master; it is the inward reach of a thing, its realizable possibilities which lie within the depths of its nature, and which serially actualize themselves without any feeling of external compulsion.

Thus the organic wholeness of duration does not mean that full-fledged events are lying, as it were, in the womb of Reality, and drop one by one like grains of sand from the hour-glass. If time is real, and not a mere repetition of homogeneous moments which make conscious experience a delusion, then every moment in the life of Reality is original, giving birth to what is absolutely novel and unforeseeable. 'Every day doth some new work employ Him', says the Qur'an. To exist in real time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time, but to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation....²⁴

Thus *destiny* is one of the classical terms of Islamic thought to which Iqbal has given new meaning. Just as he gave new meaning to the word *khudī*, self, so also has he transformed the traditional understanding of *taqdir*, destiny. The term implies the intention of God in creating humans. Iqbal understands that humans are free to create as they will. However, the closer they are to understanding the nature of God, the more able they will be to create in harmony with *destiny*. The gardener must understand the potentialities of the seeds he, or she, works with, if the garden is to flourish. Each of us has within us our individual potentialities; however, these potentialities function at their best when they are directed towards the common good. Not to pursue the common good is to chase after mirages.

5. *The Spirit of Muslim Culture*

In chapter five, Iqbal explains the differences he sees between mystic and prophetic consciousness. This is again an application of comparative history of religion theory as he understands it. The mystic, he thinks, does not try to radically change human history as a result of his experience. The prophet does. This is why Iqbal considers the Prophet Muhammad to be significant for human history as a whole.

The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world-force is supreme in the prophet. Thus his return amounts to a kind of pragmatic test of the value of his religious experience. In its creative act the prophet's will judges both itself and the world of concrete fact in which it endeavours to objectify itself. In penetrating the impervious material before him, the prophet discovers himself for himself, and unveils himself to the eye of history. Another way of judging the value of a prophet's religious experience, therefore, would be to examine the type of manhood that he has created, and cultural world that has sprung out of the spirit of his message....I want rather to fix your gaze on some of the ruling concepts of the culture of Islam in order to gain an insight into the process of ideation that underlies them, and thus to catch a glimpse of the soul that found expression through them.²⁵

He goes on to say that in Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition.²⁶ Iqbal believes that the Qur'an tells humans all they need to know about the relationship between humans and their Creator. In his view, people should think, in the manner of the Qur'an, that they must grow in their understanding of the attributes of God, namely, mercy, justice and goodness. This is why they should pray, and seek self knowledge. For the rest of the problems of existence, reason, guided by spiritually grounded judgment and insight, should help lead to the solving of whatever problems appear.

The Qur'an teaches, as Iqbal understands it, that inner experience, nature and history should all serve as sources of knowledge. There should be no end to the quest for knowledge. The study of history should enable future generations of Muslims to understand better, in the manner of Ibn Khaldūn, the mistakes that past and present generations have made, and continue to make, as they try to improve

the structures of human life. Each generation will have new problems and new difficulties to solve. The solving of one set of problems often leads to the creation of new difficulties. In this sense, also, the river of time flows onward.

One of the key notions that Iqbal has taken from his studies of world religions is what he calls 'magian' culture, a culture developed by Mani in ancient Iran.²⁷ Iqbal thinks of this culture as a kind of escapism from history, a style of escapism that erupts from time to time within all the major traditions. He thinks such escapism was characteristic of much medieval Islamic religious culture. To be escapist in this way means to try to avoid responsibility for what happens in history, and to focus one's energies instead on dreaming of another world.

6. *The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam*

In chapter six, Iqbal deals more specifically with problems of relating Muslim values to the challenges of modern life. He says that the principle of *tawhīd*, unity, is a foundational principle.

Islam, as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal, and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile, in its life, the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life; for the eternal gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles, when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change, which according to the Quran, is one of the greatest 'signs' of God, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature.²⁸

This is a significant passage that explains why Iqbal thought that nationalism, and any kind of tribalism was a falsification of Qur'anic values. To be loyal to God, and not to thrones, meant, as Iqbal understood it, that humans should never give their hearts finally to any political structures other than the well-being of all humans. All humans possess souls, and are capable of moving close to God; for this reason, all are valuable. Muslims should treasure and care for all humanity.

Iqbal believed that Muslims within history needed to balance both permanence and change. What is permanent is the spiritual nature of

all human life, and the rooting of human spirits in the Absolute. What changes is the practical working out of the basic principles in the contexts of changing economic, political and social situations. Iqbal applies this insight specifically to jurisprudence. He acknowledges that the scholars who worked out systematic legal thought in the early Islamic centuries were wise to have done so in the context of the times in which they lived. However, he questions the fact that, in later centuries, Muslim scholars have been unwilling to go back to first principles and to revise anew the entire structures of legal thought.

We have seen that Iqbal gives new content to the terms *khudī* [self], and *taqdir* [destiny] Now he goes on to give new meaning to *ijtihad*. This is term meaning the exercise of judgment to arrive at new modes of reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence. Iqbal says that the classical systems of jurisprudence had hedged the notion of *ijtihad* around with so many restrictions that it has become impossible for individuals to exercise the skills of independent legal reasoning.

Such an attitude seems exceedingly strange in a system of law based mainly on the groundwork provided by the Qur'an which embodies an essentially dynamic outlook on life. It is, therefore, necessary, before we proceed farther, to discover the causes of this intellectual attitude which has reduced the Law of Islam practically to a state of immobility.²⁹

Iqbal thinks that the immobility in legal thinking was caused by a distrust in the ninth century of rationalism; this was the century in which the principles of Islamic jurisprudence became fixed. Rationalism was then perceived as a threat to the stability of society. Further, in the Islamic Middle Ages, the growth of Sufism among many of the better intellects among the Muslims led to a lack of interest in creative jurisprudence. The final blow was the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. This caused the Muslims to become backward looking.

However, Iqbal thinks it is urgently necessary now for Muslims to recapture a readiness to think creatively about jurisprudence. In the modern period, Muslims should learn from nature, history, and study of the inner self.³⁰

Thus a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people's decay.... The only effective power, therefore, that counteracts the forces of

decay in a people is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals. Such individuals alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revisions. The tendency to over-organisation by a false reverence of the past, as manifested in the legists of Islam in the thirteenth century and later, was contrary to the inner impulse of Islam.³¹

Thus, Iqbal felt strongly that Muslim jurisprudence must be revived by a process of rethinking of the whole system that had been worked out in the ninth and tenth centuries. The rethinking, he believed, must be done by going back to the first principles, and working out how to apply those principles most effectively in terms of the new problems of the modern world.

Iqbal says that he admires the creative originality of Ibn Taymiyyah, the fourteenth century reformer who had called for a renewal of *ijtihād*. Iqbal knew that the Wahhābī movement in 18th Arabia, and other 19th century revival movements, had taken much of their vitality from the imperatives of Ibn Taymiyyah. The poet says *yes* to the dynamism expressed in these movements. However, he also says *no* to other aspects of this form of revivalism. He criticises the revivalists for an uncritical idealisation of the past, and for falling back too uncritically on the Traditions of the Prophet as the main source for their jurisprudence. He understood that revivalists of the Wahhābī type wanted to transcend the present, but he thought they had erred in imagining that they could recreate a past era of Muslim history.

Iqbal valued the insights of Ibn Khaldūn, the fourteenth century philosopher of history, more than he did Ibn Taymiyyah, because he thought that Ibn Khaldūn understood more clearly that history could not be repeated. This insistence that history could not be repeated is an essential aspect of Iqbal's thought. His idea of 'no repetition' follows from his understanding of the relationship of time and space. He was certain that nothing was ever repeated exactly. This is why he was so insistent that Muslims must continually rethink how to apply their basic values to new problems. More new problems would always be impinging upon them. The notion that one could somehow escape from the pressing demands of urgent change by retreating into a vision of an idealised past was understood by Iqbal to be a kind of self-defeating religious romanticism. It was another mirage.

He also discusses here the reforms in Turkey following the revolution led by Atatürk. As we indicated earlier, Iqbal admired the activism of the Turks, but he thought they had gone too far in cutting themselves off from their past. He was, however, in agreement with the abolition of the Caliphate. He wrote:

The republican form of government is not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam, but has also become a necessity in view of the new forces that are set free in the world of Islam.³²

Iqbal had criticised western democracy, especially in his poetry, as evil because it was hypocritical. He meant by this that any democracy that restricts its membership to a few is false. For him, democracy meant the capacity of all the citizens to criticise those in power over them. If western democracies allowed no power of criticism to emerge from those they were oppressing, their democracies were only disguised tyrannies. Thus, Iqbal was committed to the necessity of a republican form of government for Muslims, but it had to be a real republic in which all voices could be heard.

7. Is Religion Possible?

In his last chapter, Iqbal poses the question ‘Is Religion Possible?’ as indicative of longing for a new form of guiding bell, since the old bells no longer function adequately. He thinks a different perspective on past Muslim history must be found, in order to enable the people to pass on to something new. The people have to learn to let their past go, and to move freely into the future. In response to the question, ‘Is Religion Possible?’, he replies with an account of phases of development within the relationship of religious values to history. In his words:

Broadly speaking religious life may be divided into three periods. These may be described as the periods of ‘Faith,’ “Thought” and “Discovery”. In the first period, religious life appears as a form of discipline which the individuals 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 sources of its authority.... 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 the law, but by discovering the ultimate sources of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.... Yet higher religion, which is only a search for a larger life, is essentially experience and recognized the necessity of experience as it's foundation long before science learnt to do so. It is a genuine effort to clarify human consciousness, and is, as such, as critical of its level of experience as Naturalism is of its own level.³³

Iqbal thought his dilemma could be at least partially resolved by teaching Muslims to look in a new way at Islamic history. They should recognise on-going phases of development. In the first phase, Muslims generally had believed without analysing reasons for their confidence. The first Muslims had responded to the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet with trust and readiness to follow. In the second phase, medieval Muslim theologians and philosophers had thought they could construct a rational theory of the cosmos into which their religion fitted.

Both the first phase of trust, and the second phase of theological rationalism, had been adequate for the earlier phases of development of the Islamic intellectual and moral tradition. But neither would serve adequately to meet the challenges of the twentieth century, and the ages yet to come. Iqbal thought that a third phase would require abandoning these earlier perspectives; Muslims would have to discover new ways of thinking religiously. In a sceptical age, unquestioning trust was no longer feasible, and the new physics of relativity meant that believers could no longer relate their faith to a specific picture of the universe. In order to build new forms of civilization in the future, Muslims in the present had to be ready to acknowledge that the past ages had to be put behind them as no longer relevant. They had to learn to look within for a basis of faith.

Perhaps Iqbal's own early religious experience in responding to the Himalayas had given him just what he is talking about in this paragraph, namely a discovery of the ultimate sources of the law within the depths of his own consciousness. Here, he indicates that such an awareness will have to be the main type of religious life for

the Muslims of the future. From this angle, we can consider all the many references to *Sinai* throughout Iqbal's verses as related. The poet is always referring to a personal awareness of the ultimate truth within consciousness, an awareness stimulated by a symbolic grasp of the vastness of space and time.

Iqbal says that blind acceptance of religious authority will no longer work when the Muslims become highly educated. Put simply, unquestioning trust is no longer satisfactory, and a clear picture of how the universe works is not possible either. But the human alone symbolically before the mountains remains, and the vastness and power of the mountains teases him, or her, into reflecting on the untapped and unrecognised vastness and power latent within himself, or herself. This is the message of *The Secrets of the Self*. That recognition of the depths of individual consciousness requires response also to *The Mysteries of Selflessness*.

Iqbal thought that human beings need the cumulative wisdom of their religious traditions in order to discover how to become civilised and to live in harmony with other persons. A newborn needs grandparents; the cumulative tradition is the source of collective wisdom. But this wisdom must also constantly be tested to see if it works in the present. Whatever does not work in the new situation can be dropped, but what proves useful as an effective guide to a better life should be preserved, and used. Those who use elements of the cumulative tradition in the context of their own age and time also change the interpretation, and add new elements of their own. The river flows on.

The Islamic cumulative tradition has been much occupied with jurisprudence and law. Iqbal thought this had been one of the strengths of Islamic culture. We discussed earlier Iqbal's letter to Gandhi in 1920. The poet had written:

I am afraid I am not an expert on *shariah*; but it is my conviction that, in connection with the question of education, the law of Islam cannot fail to give us a suitable line of action under our present limitation.³⁴

Iqbal wrote almost exactly the same thing to Jinnah in 1937, after the failure of the non-cooperation movement, and the increase of communal tensions. He says to Jinnah:

Happily there is a solution in the enforcement of the Law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas.³⁵

The first letter to Gandhi was written at a time when Iqbal and most other Indians thought the non-cooperation movement might succeed in driving the British out of India. The second letter to Jinnah was written almost twenty years later, shortly before Iqbal's death. Much had changed in the political life of India over this period of time, yet Iqbal is still making the same point. During the long period of controversy about constitutional rights in India between the first and second World Wars, Iqbal's basic sense of direction had not changed.

In what sense did Iqbal think that the law of Islam would be a good guide for the future? Iqbal consciously distinguished, as Sayyid Aḥmed Khān had done, between the basic principles of the *Shari'ah*, and the practical applications of those principles as worked out by governing officials and jurists in specific historical contexts. The poet was himself a practising lawyer well aware of the complexities of the tensions between actual situations and particular laws. Working in the courts helps develop an awareness of the limitations of justice conceived of as an abstract ideal.

As Iqbal understood the *Shari'ah*, the basic principles, the sources of the law, remained the same, but the detailed applications of those principles changed over time. He wrote:

The whole system of Islamic ethics is based on the idea of individuality; anything which tends to repress the healthy development of individuality is quite inconsistent with the spirit of Islamic law and ethics. A Muslim is free to do anything he likes, provided he does not violate the law. The general principles of this law are believed to have been revealed; the details, in order to cover the relatively secular cases, are left to the interpretation of professional lawyers. It is, therefore, true to say that the entire fabric of Islamic law, actually administered, is really judge-made law.³⁶

In the biographies of the Caliph Umar and the jurist Abū Ḥanīfah that were written by the poet's friend and mentor, Shiblī, the reader gains some insight into as to how the law had developed historically. Iqbal, like Shiblī, thought of the innovative law-making activities of these two past Muslim heroes as models of what good Muslim social thinkers should be like. In both cases, these men, one who had known the Prophet well, and the other who was close to many of the first generation of companions, had felt free to interpret what the

implications of the revealed principles should be. They used their minds to work how to apply these basic principles to actual situations.

These are Iqbal's models of how the law was to be understood and implemented. The principles are given, but the implications of those principles will be different in varying social and political contexts. It will always be necessary to use reason to work out for any particular context what the implications of the principles might be in terms of actual social, political and economic structures of life. *The sources of the law in the depth of consciousness* represent the guiding bell that Iqbal found. He says that we have within, if we could but discover the depths of ourselves, the capacity to recognise justice and goodness. Once people discover the sources of the law in this way, they can then move on to devise, through discussion and debate, how best to implement these ideal values in actual laws and institutions. Designing better ways of life should be an unceasing process.

Iqbal thought that the Ash'arite perspective ultimately meant a loss of moral responsibility, because Muslims who held that view did not feel any obligation to transform the conditions of life in the world. If time is unreal, the moral obligation to work effectively within time ceases to have importance. Only those who take time seriously can feel the imperative to make the world a better place for all. Iqbal wanted to write a book about the Muslim perspectives on time because he thought that this was one of the most urgent problems needing clarification.

Iqbal says, in his final chapter, that a Sufi had taught him that he must learn to hear the Qur'an with the same immediacy that the Prophet had done. Saeed Sheikh tells us that this Sufi was Iqbal's father. The comment in the *Reconstruction* lectures reads:

As in the words of a Muslim Sufi—'no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet.' It is, then, in the else of this last phase in the development of religious life that I use the word religion in the question that I now propose to raise. Religion in this sense is known by the unfortunate name of Mysticism, which is supposed to be a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times. Yet higher religion, which is only a search for a larger life, is

essentially experience, and recognized the necessity of experience long before science learnt to do so....

Conservatism is as bad in religion as in any other department of human activity. It destroys the ego's creative freedom and closes up the paths of fresh spiritual enterprise.... The fact, however, that religious experience is incommunicable does not mean that the religious man's pursuit is futile. It is in contact with the Most Real that the ego discovers its uniqueness, its metaphysical status, and the possibility of improvement in that status.... it is a vital fact.... It can embody itself only in a world making or world-shaking act; and in this form alone the content of this timeless experience can diffuse itself in the time-movement, and make itself effectively visible to the eye of history....

Religion, which is essentially a mode of actual living, is the only serious way of handling Reality.... In so far as the ultimate nature of Reality is concerned, nothing is at stake in the venture of science; in the religious venture the whole career of the ego as an assimilative personal centre of life and experience is at stake. Conduct, which involves a decision of the ultimate fate of the agent cannot be based on illusions.... No doubt the deed, i.e. the control of psychological and physiological processes with view to tune up the ego for an immediate contact with the Ultimate reality is and cannot but be, individual in form and context; yet the deed, too, is liable to be socialized when others begin to live through it with a view to discover for themselves its effectiveness as method of approaching the Real.³⁷

Since the imperative to internalise the impact of the Qur'an just as the Prophet had done was a message to Iqbal from his father, this approach may well have shaped the questions the poet asked as he had contemplated the Himalayas in his youth. The insistence that each person must do this for himself, or herself, is the guarantee in Iqbal's words of 'fresh spiritual enterprise'. The enterprise will be fresh because each person hearing and internalising the Qur'an personally is, in a way, hearing it for the first time. The person receiving revelation in this personal and immediate way brings to the revelation the contents of the mind that hears.

The Qur'an can only be internalised by a unique human mind, which means that only those answers may be found that speak to the questions asked, and to the context of the person. This is why what

each person hears will be different. Even more important, what believers corporately know because of the structures of economic, political, and social life of their historical era will also influence what impact the Qur'an has on their minds, individually and corporately. For example, the questions Iqbal asked were questions about the despair and confusion of the Muslims of his generation faced with a dominating foreign power occupying their country. These were his own questions, and also the questions of the Muslims of his generation. Muslims in the future may well go to the Qur'an with different questions as their political, social and economic problems change.

Further, Iqbal stresses that to internalise revelation seriously means that the whole self of the person who hears must be challenged and transformed. After commenting that conduct must not be based on an illusion [mirage in the desert], the Muslim philosopher goes on to say:

A wrong concept misleads the understanding; a wrong deed degrades the whole man, and may eventually demolish the structure of the human ego.³⁸

Iqbal thus said that discovering the sources of the law within one's own consciousness involves a complex process of opening oneself to the vastness of the external universe, becoming aware of the immensity of one's inner self, and internalising the perspective and the symbols of the Qur'an as sources of direction for one's future actions and thoughts. The Qur'an should be read every day, since every day new problems would have to be faced. Iqbal's approach implies the importance of 'praxis' namely, that to appropriate such a truth as the meaning of justice, it is necessary to put this truth into action. Only when we are actually striving to implement justice in a specific situation can we see implications of what justice means. Our understanding grows as the struggle to make justice real goes on. One finds out the value of truth by engaging oneself in working for truth in a real situation.

Iqbal said not only that each Muslim should try in his own way to internalise the Qur'an, but also that each should try create institutions that would make life better for everyone. For example, the abolition of slavery has changed the lives of countless millions of people. Other changes we might make in the structures of our existence may similarly influence the conditions of human life in the future. The

quality of life for all humanity is the product of the decisions made and actions taken by other persons.

Yet the deed, too, is liable to be socialised when others begin to live through it with a view to discover for themselves its effectiveness as method of approaching the Real.³⁹

Iqbal's religious experience had taught him that one, who responds to his or her own *Sinai*, may in so doing make *Sinai* possible for others. The persons in many cultures who have been fighting to realise structures of life that will ensure justice on matters of race, religion, and gender have almost always felt that they were fighting for causes bigger than themselves as individuals. This notion of a cause 'bigger than oneself' is part of the what Iqbal understands by *Shari'ah*. He is saying that from now on in human history one should decide about one's basic principles, causes one will struggle for, from within the depths of oneself, because blind acceptance of traditional ways of life will not work, nor will fixed cosmological ideas.

*Before the soul a mirror has been hung,
bewilderment mingled with certainty;...
To see Him is to wax ever without waning,
to see Him is to rise from the body's tomb;
servant and Master lying in wait on one another,
each impatiently yearning to behold the other.
Life, wherever it may be, is a restless search;
unresolved is this riddle--am I the quarry, or is He?*⁴⁰

The restlessness that the young Iqbal wrote about in *Himālah* is affirmed again here towards the end of his life. He is still wrestling with the question as to whether he is looking for God, or God is looking for him. His message to the Muslims of tomorrow is that they are going to find this question as perplexing as he does.

In a speech in 1932, Iqbal quoted the Bible, that 'where there is no vision the people perish' as an explanation of how he understood his role in life as a visionary.⁴¹ In the King James translation of the Bible, the passage relating to vision reads as follows: "Where *there* is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he. [Proverbs 29: 18]"

This combining of vision and law is central to how Iqbal thinks about existence. The constant influx of the new is always related to the need to purify consciousness through spiritual discipline. Such

purification of the motives of individuals should create persons capable of remaining faithful to the basic principles of the law, while finding new ways to transform the structures of existence. Iqbal's perspective assumes that one should be both faithful, and creative.

In sum, the intention of the teaching in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is that every Muslim in the future should seek his, or her, own *Sinai*. Each must face the unknown immensity of the cosmos, and the unknown vastness of his, or her, unique potentialities. Each should continually read the Qur'an and seek to hear the revelation, and to internalise it, as the Prophet and the first generations of Muslims had done. Iqbal assumes that what the individual finds within will accord with what the Qur'an teaches. Each person should then act in the world, having chosen to direct himself, or herself, to the process of making these Qur'anic values real. The action must be based on a realistic understanding of the actual context in which the individual lives. *Ijtihad* should be exercised by Muslims, individually and collectively, in order to make manifest *that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam*.⁴²

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 9.

² *Call of the Marching Bell*, pp. 109,110.

³ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 234-237, 103.

⁴ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 24.

⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 24, 25.

⁶ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 4.

⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 170.

⁸ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 35.

⁹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 53.

¹⁰ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 41.

¹¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 69.

¹² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.74.

¹³ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 76,77.

¹⁴ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 91.

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- ¹⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 92.
 - ¹⁶ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 85.
 - ¹⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 95,96.
 - ¹⁸ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 97.
 - ¹⁹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 98.
 - ²⁰ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 100.
 - ²¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 102.
 - ²² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 102,103.
 - ²³ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 109.
 - ²⁴ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 49,50, 109.
 - ²⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 124,125.
 - ²⁶ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 126.
 - ²⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 143-145.
 - ²⁸ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 147.
 - ²⁹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 149.
 - ³⁰ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 110-112.
 - ³¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 150,151.
 - ³² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 157.
 - ³³ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, annotated by Saeed Sheikh, p. 181.
 - ³⁴ Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam*, pp. 60,61.
 - ³⁵ Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, p. 385.
 - ³⁶ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 61.
 - ³⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 181.
 - ³⁸ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.185.
 - ³⁹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 185.
 - ⁴⁰ *Javid Nāmah*, pp. 136,137.
 - ⁴¹ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 195.
 - ⁴² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 180.

Chapter Six

The Power of Vision

Every act creates a new situation

We will now look at some further examples of the image of *Sinai* in Iqbal's writings. Iqbal followed the Qur'anic teaching that all the Prophets from Adam down had given the same message. As a Muslim, Iqbal believed that the experience of the Prophet Muhammad was the culmination of the long history of prophetic interventions in history. As a poet, he found the Biblical and Qur'anic narratives about *Sinai* strongly evocative. Iqbal's mind was steeped in the imagery of the Qur'an. He interpreted his experience in the light of that imagery.

The Biblical narrative in the King James' translation reads:

"And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

"And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

"And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. "And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai on the top of the mount; and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people;....

"And God spake all these words, saying. "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image....

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy....
 Honour thy father and thy mother...
 Thou shalt not kill Thou shalt not commit adultery.
 Thou shalt not steal
 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour
 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, nor his wife...nor any
 thing that is thy neighbour's.

“And all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off. ...

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear not; for God is come to prove you” (Exodus 19:8-24. 20: 1-20.)

Similar Qur'anic passages are:

“When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, He said: ‘O my Lord! Show (Thyself) to me that I may look upon Thee.’ God said. ‘By no means Canst thou see Me (direct); But look upon the mount; If it abide In its place, then Shalt thou see Me ‘ When his Lord manifested His glory on the Mount, He made it as dust, And Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses, he said” “Glory be to Thee! I turn in repentance, and I Am the first to believe.’

“And We ordained laws for him in Tablets in all matters, both Commanding and explaining All things (and said): ‘Take and hold these with firmness and enjoining thy people to hold fast by the best in the precepts: Soon shall I show you the homes of the wicked,-- (How they lie desolate).’ (7:143-145)

In another surah of the Qur'an, the commandments are indicated as follows; “Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him,

And that ye be kind to parents....

Kill not your children for fear of want...

Nor come nigh to adultery...

Nor take life--which God Has made sacred--except for just cause....

Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight.....Nor walk on the earth with insolence.”

(17:23-37)

All these Biblical and Quranic images and commandments are latent in Iqbal's image of *Sinai*, and are implied every time he refers to the fire on the mountain, and the speaking Prophet. The Prophets are models because they were open to vision. Iqbal assumes that any authentic personal religious experience will lead to an awareness of the same truth as the commandments, the basic principles.

The Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye, has discussed the significance of traditional religious and poetic images in his book *The Educated Imagination*. Frye says that the images we inherit play a role in shaping consciousness. That role is neither subjective, in the sense of particular and unique inner responses, nor objective, in the sense of phenomena that literally impinge from outside. The images enter into the consciousness from the cultural tradition, and then serve as a kind of interpretative structure by means of which meaning is attributed to both inner and outer phenomena.¹ In Frye's opinion, the education of the imagination is a crucial responsibility if we wish to encourage the development of balanced and creative personalities. This is why education that transmits the cultural tradition effectively is an important source of the vitality of a culture.

Iqbal was very fortunate in his early education that filled his head with the provocative images of the Qur'an, and with Persian and Urdu poetry, as well as with disciplined training in science and the humanities. He was pre-eminently one who possessed an educated imagination, and who used that heritage with great skill. His hope for his people in the future was that they would all have the chance to become possessors of educated Muslim imaginations.

Iqbal understood the prophetic tradition that culminated in the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, to have communicated what Rudolf Otto has referred to as *The Idea of the Holy*. This idea involves recognition of the importance of the religious emotion of awe, awareness of human finitude in the face of the immeasurable universe, and of response to moral imperatives to justice, mercy and goodness as appropriate directives for human life. The Qur'anic images of prophetic vocation existed as an interpretative structure in Iqbal's mind through which he brought together his sense of outer and inner immensity, and discovered the direction for his growth and

development. The Biblical and Qur'anic prophetic traditions affirm that to stand in awe before God means to hear the basic principles as directive guidance for life.

The *Sinai* image in Iqbal's poetry carries with it a vision of the possibility of transforming individual and corporate conditions of life in any historical period. The person modelling his or her life on the Prophet's example has to be ready to focus on the real problems of whatever age he or she finds himself or herself in, and to be ready to act steadily towards bettering the conditions of life for all people in the context of that age. The prophetic model thus requires recognition that history is real; people are in the world of space and time and should not try to escape from it. Iqbal often criticises 'escape from the moral responsibilities of life' as a false understanding of religion.

The *Sinai image*, as Iqbal understood it, tells us that the Absolute is always the source of life, and the source of hope. We are able to struggle to make the world better because our roots in the Absolute give us a basis for imagining that our situations could be transformed. It is necessary to imagine a better world in order to work for it. The *Sinai* experience is what opens up consciousness to think beyond everyday existence, and to envisage possibilities of transformation.

*I sowed my eye into the field of love
And reaped a harvest of vision.*²

Similar images of Moses and Muhammad recur often throughout Iqbal's writings. Iqbal thinks that all persons are potentially capable of living in this way of retreating from everyday life, and then coming back filled with vision of how to work for a better future. The back and forth rhythm of this way of life, called seclusion (*khalvat*) and manifestation (*jalvat*) are fundamental images discussed many times in Iqbal's poetry. Muslim prayer, fasting and pilgrimage are all ways of going out of the known world, and then back into it, refreshed and renewed.

Some further examples of the *Sinai* image can be found in Iqbal's *Persian Psalms*.

*To Moses' lesson list;
For Europe's scientist
Though ocean's depth he plumb,
Could ne'er to Sinai come.*³

Iqbal often uses the image of Moses before Pharaoh to indicate that Pharaoh manipulates by magic, but Moses moves by genuine responses to the one God. The Muslim poet often equates western science with magic in the sense that it will not in itself lead to God. Science can be used for materialistic rather than humane purposes, and often is so used. Thus, to say that science is enough in itself to educate human beings is wrong. Science can provide tools, but not ultimate purposes.

In *The Secrets of the Self*, the *Sinai* experience is said to be the motivating force that gives the individual power to move towards the transformations of the structures of existence. Moses was empowered by his direct experience of God to pull out a Shining Hand in his encounter with the false magicians of Pharaoh. Iqbal writes:

*God's vicegerent is as the soul of the universe,...
His white hand is strengthened by the staff,...
There sleeps amidst the ashes of our To-day,
The flame of world consuming morrow.
Silence the noise of the nations,...
Arise and tune the harp of brother-hood,
And give us back the wine of love!
Bring once more days of peace to the world....
It is to thee that we owe our dignity
And silently undergo the pains of life.⁴*

This indicates a direct link between the symbols of *Sinai* and *The Secrets of the Self*. Iqbal understands religious experience to expand awareness, both of the external, symbolised by the mountain, and the internal, the vast inner potentialities of consciousness. The metaphors that arise out of the experience point to the link between external and internal.

Iqbal says, metaphorically, that the unused air cells of lungs (internal) need the air (external) in order to expand.⁵ The result of such inner expansion of consciousness should be growth in a direction towards greater integration, and away from unfocused confusion. *Sinai* focuses the self.

*My song is from another world,
a call to the road, a bell tolled
For caravans not yet in view
O many poets were reborn*

*After their death; they shut their own
Eyes, but they opened ours....*

*But, lover that I am, to wail
Is my vocation; and a boom
Of lamentation like the crack of doom
Heralds my progress on the trail
I blaze. My voice outsings
My instrument's capacity;
But I am not afraid to snap its strings.....*

*I have been given access to the springs
Of everlasting life, and I evoke
The living soul of things.⁶*

Iqbal knows that the images of long dead poets like Milton and Rumi have come alive again many times inside human minds in many different historical periods. He was hoping to write in a way that would stimulate response in a future he would not live to see. He understood himself to be a trail blazer for those who would come after him. Other images of humans seeking for answers come from the *Rubā'iyāt* poems.

*As a Beggar you went
To Mount Sinai,
The Divine Light to See
For an observer of
Your own inner Beauty
You couldn't Be!
Oh, wander about
In the search of
a 'Perfect Man'
For God made him
The 'Lord of Creation'
And in his search
Is also He.⁷*

This is a paradox that recurs several times, namely that the searching outside should lead to searching inside. Only by knowing human generosity for example could the possibility of divine generosity be understood. The human attribute is a clue to the Divine Attribute. The other side of the paradox is that to grasp the reality of

the Divine Attributes, such as Justice and Mercy, is to make possible the growth of similar attributes within the human soul.

The Importance of Sirhindī

In his poetry, Iqbal pays homage to many of the distinguished saints (friends of God) of the Sufi tradition. In a sense, these friends of God reveal the potentialities of Muslim spiritual life. In his poem, *To the Panjab Pirs*, Iqbal tells us what went through his mind as he stood by the tomb of Aḥmad Sirhindī.

*I stood by the Reformers' tomb: that dust
Whence here below an orient splendour breaks,
Dust before whose least speck stars hang their heads,
Dust shrouding that high knower of things unknown
Who to Jehangir would not bend his neck,
Whose ardent breath fan every free heart's ardour,
Whom Allah sent in season to keep watch
In India on the treasure-house of Islam.
I craved the saints' gift, other-worldliness;
For my eyes saw, yet dimly. Answer came:
'Closed is the long roll of the saints: this Land
Of the Five Rivers stinks in good men's nostrils.
God's people have no portion in that country
Where lordly tassel sprouts from monkish cap;
That cap bred passionate faith, this tassel breeds
Passion for playing pander to Government.'⁸*

Iqbal had gone to the tomb of the saint to pray for the gift of other-worldliness, to be able to escape all the pressures of his environment. The answer he got was *No!* This is why Iqbal often links the pirs, the spiritual heads of the Sufi orders, with the mullahs, the preachers, who spend their time debating out-dated theological problems. This tassel—the servility of the pirs of Iqbal's time—is unacceptable. The pirs and the mullahs are little use in helping the community discover how to escape servility. Iqbal often lumps pirs together with mullahs as representatives of sterile and deadening forms of religious authority. They do not understand that they have learned answers to questions that are no longer asked, or that they have failed to understand the new questions of the present.

Iqbal agrees with the distinction made by Sayyid Aḥmad Sirhindī between *Waḥdat al Shuhūd* (Unity of Witness) as opposed to *Waḥdat al Wujūd* (Unity of Being) Iqbal was consciously opting to follow

the trend of reformed Sufi thought in South Asia that had been inaugurated by Sayyid Aḥmad Sirhindī in the sixteenth century. Iqbal had not written like this about Sirhindī in his doctoral thesis. By the time the *Reconstruction* lectures were written, however, the emphasis on Sirhindī is clear in Iqbal's poetry and prose. The issue is specifically one of moving away from a trend in Indian Sufi thought and practice that is associated with monism, the unity of being, towards an emphasis on theism, the notion that the Creator is distinct from the creation.

The Unity of Witness approach emphasises that an element of separation will always exist between the human and the divine, even though the human moves ultimately close enough to have direct vision of the divine. Sirhindī was known as the *mujaddid i alf i thānī*, the reformer of the second millennium. His teachings were disseminated through the Naqshbandiya, a Sufi brotherhood that had come from Central Asia and that had been popular with the first Mughal Emperors.

In the South Asian context, the idea of stressing the symbol of witness as opposed to the symbol of unity is linked with an emphasis on the separation of human and divine. Some mystics teach that we are all just drops of water that will finally be absorbed into the ocean. This image suggests that ultimately the drops are the same as the ocean. If, ultimately, there is nothing other than God, why would there be a need to act to make the world better? If the world is God, why would we change it? Iqbal comes to distrust monism, the image of God as the ocean, because he thinks that this idea tends to undermine the impulse to act in the world. Iqbal wanted to stir his people into new forms of vigorous thought and action. He feared that, if they just thought of themselves as passive drops waiting to be absorbed, they would not hear his challenge. Iqbal maintained that all the Sufi orders needed to change their theories of religious authority. He wrote:

Khawaja Naqshband and the Mujaddid of Sirhind hold a very high rank in my heart, though it is deplorable that this order (i.e. the Naqshbandiya) has also come today under the sway of Persianisation, and that holds true even for the Qadiriya order in which I myself have been initiated, though the goal of the venerated Muhyiuddin (Abdul Qadir Gilani) had been to rescue Islamic mysticism from Persianism.⁹

Persianism in this context is the poet's term for other-worldly mysticism, a failure to focus on transforming the actual structures of life in the world. Iqbal had been initiated into the Qadiriya order when he was young. This is an order, founded in the twelfth century, with a long history and an active presence in South Asia. Iqbal criticised all the Sufi orders of his milieu for failing to teach their disciples to pay attention to the possibilities of actually making the world a better place.

Iqbal thought that anyone who tried to become aware of the depths of his own individual consciousness should reject status quo norms of what it is to be a human person. The status quo norms have usually been developed as a basis for legitimating dominance, namely economic, political, and/or religious control of one group of humans over others. In order to fight against such structures of dominance, one must get rid of passivity. One must also know that one is potentially much more than the existing structures of life apparently permit one to be. The quest for self discovery should be welcomed as novel and stimulating adventure. This is how Iqbal thought that the colonised could best get rid of the imperialists, and begin the process of growth into something new.

Rejection of Nietzsche

Iqbal had earlier agreed with Nietzsche that we can, and should, change our ideas about what is possible for us, and for the wider society. However, in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal says a clear *no* to Nietzsche's aristocratic bias. The Muslim poet thinks this is the same attitude that had shaped the arrogance of European imperialism. Iqbal wrote:

The philosophy of Nietzsche—at least in the domain of ethics—is an attempt rationally to justify the conduct of Europe, yet this great prophet of aristocracy is universally condemned in Europe. Only a few have realised the meaning of his madness.¹⁰

Iqbal's own rejection of imperialism, and of European claims to a civilised superiority is linked with his sense of pride in himself and his culture. Iqbal thought that Nietzsche had failed because the German thinker had never understood the kinds of values that the Muslim poet had expressed in *The Mysteries of Selflessness*. Nietzsche had not found a spiritual guide who could lead him beyond pride in his isolated creative self. Iqbal said:

That a really 'imperative' vision of the Divine in man did come to him cannot be denied. I call his vision 'imperative' because it appears to have given him a kind of prophetic mentality which, by some kind of technique aims at turning its visions into permanent life forces. Yet Nietzsche was a failure; and his failure was mainly due to his intellectual progenitors such as Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Lange whose influence completely blinded him to the real significance of his vision....

Thus failed a genius whose vision was solely determined by his internal forces, and remained unproductive for want of external guidance in his spiritual life.¹¹

Although we assume that Iqbal had not read Nietzsche when he wrote his *Himālah* poem, it seems that the perspective of that poem guided him in his subsequent responses to the ideas of the German philosopher. Perhaps the 'turban' in Iqbal's original *Sinai* poem was symbolic of what Iqbal possessed that Nietzsche did not, namely intellectual mentors whose influence could lead him to a constructive understanding of the significance of his vision. These mentors would include primarily the Qur'an, and the practice of the Prophet. In addition, Iqbal's father, Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Ghazzālī, Rūmī, Ibn Khaldūn, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Ḥālī, Jamāl ad Dīn Afghānī, and Shibli all served as sources of wisdom and inspiration. The Muslim poet did not totally reject his heritage as the German philosopher had done. Iqbal quotes Nietzsche:

I confront alone an immense problem: it is as if I am lost in a forest, a primeval one. I need help. I need disciples: I need a *master*. It would be so sweet to obey.... Why do I not find among the living men who see higher than I do and have to look down on me? Is it only that I have made a poor search? And I have so great a longing for such?¹²

Iqbal thinks that Nietzsche's failure to recognise wisdom in the religious traditions of humanity has caused him to isolate himself from other persons. Ultimately, any mystic quest into the individual self that does not value the human species leads to sterility and contempt for life. This is why, in the patterns of Iqbal's symbols, *The Mysteries of Selflessness* are required to balance *The Secrets of the Self*. Iqbal agreed with much that Nietzsche had said about the evils of pompous pride in one's culture and nation, and of aggressive war-mongering. He also agreed with Nietzsche about the dangers of

servility, and the menace of religious institutions that functioned to inculcate guilt and self contempt in the human heart. But he was sure that Muslims had an ultimate hope in a way that the German did not.

For Iqbal, this ultimate hope is nowhere to be found in established systems of domination, but rather lies in the always present possibility of overthrowing these systems, and making better ones. The process never ends, but each generation from now on will always have to look for the ultimate truths within themselves as individuals. Iqbal's pressing concern was to urge that self-scrutiny was, and would be for the foreseeable future, essential for everyone. *Sinai* represents in Iqbal's poetry a possibility for everyone. We ought to be becoming more capable of goodness than we were yesterday, more able to manifest the goodness that we know as a potentiality within ourselves into goodness transformed into actual human institutions, universities, systems of law, social, political and economic structures, and works of art.

The dangerous people are the ones with fixed and static intellectual systems inside their heads that protect them from the challenge of the new and unsettling. Iqbal always thought that the more we are unsettled, the better. To be unsettled does not mean to be unstable or insecure, but it does mean that our ideas should be held as tentative, ready to be renewed, replaced, revitalised, and/or reinforced by the new that is trying to burst into the closed circles of our skulls. Iqbal hoped that an Islamic renaissance would come when Muslims rediscovered their spontaneity.

Iqbal's poetry elicited powerful emotions from those who listened when he read or sang his verses in public gatherings such as the annual meetings of the *Anjuman-Himāyat-i-Islam* in Lahore. The strong response indicated that he was speaking of matters dear to the hearts of his listeners, and bringing into focus their feelings about their conflicted situations. In one such early poem entitled *The Pain of Love (Dard i 'Ishq)* he wrote:

This audience (the modern world) is the lover of material sights

The purpose of your sight is the closet of secrecy

Every heart is intoxicated with the wine of thinking

*Something different is the Tur of the Kalims of this age.*¹³

This is yet another symbol of the mountain and the speaking Prophet. This was one of Iqbal's early poems. Moses had also been moving between two worlds, the empire of Pharaoh that he was

leaving, and the new one he was striving to reach. *Sinai* in this respect may be thought of as the guidance often sought and found by those in transition. On one level, the Indian Muslims of Iqbal's time had lost the key to spontaneity. Iqbal and his admirers were tormented by the limitations and evils of their situations as colonised people. The imperatives of the poetry were an incitement to cast off this colonised condition.

Iqbal's concern to preserve Muslim cultural autonomy was linked with his experience of receiving response from those who shared his religious and poetic tradition. The community he knew was one capable of an enthusiastic response to poetic images. Emotions like this were of great value to him. He did not want the Indian Muslims to lose their sensitivity to poetry, and their capacity to respond to love with joy. His political demands for Muslim cultural autonomy, which we will discuss in chapter seven, should be seen in the light of Iqbal's experiences of Muslim crowds responding to his complex poetical images. Cultural autonomy represented to him a means of preserving and transmitting the spiritual heritage of Muslim literature and religious thought.

The directions Iqbal found were paths to take rather than final solutions in any sense. We know he found great complexity when looking inside himself. He constantly expands his ideas by finding more different ways of expressing his insights, but the core intuitions remain steady.

Whosoever eats (lives on) the light of God, becomes the Qur'an.,

*"This mystery is known to none but the faithful;
He looks like a reader, but is himself the Qur'an."¹⁴*

What does it mean to say that the believer can live again the life that the Prophet lived, and become himself the Qur'an? Iqbal thinks in terms of developing a perspective on life similar to that of the Prophet. With such a perspective, the person of faith should encounter the problems of life and respond positively and creatively. The acts undertaken would not be the same as in the Prophet's lifetime, but they would similarly be motivated towards the creation of goodness, and justice.

Journey to Afghanistan

Iqbal had much to say about transforming conditions of life in the modern world in terms of religious education, political structures,

and economics. He knew he was not an administrator by nature, and he earlier refused to be principal of the Jami'a Millia Islamia in Delhi. But he was interested in developing new curriculum for religious education, because he wanted the Muslim society of the future to be able to design educational structures that would effectively bridge the gap between traditional Muslim knowledge, and the modern social and natural sciences.

In September 1933, Iqbal was invited by Nādir Shah, the King of Afghanistan, to serve on a committee to advise the government of Afghanistan on the establishment of a new university which would use the best of modern knowledge, and reconstruct Muslim understanding of the past, and present in the light of new ways of thinking about Islamic history and values. The other two members of the committee were Suleymān Nadvī, Shibli's student, and Ross Masud, the grandson of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān.

This enterprise of designing effective new modes of Muslim education was very dear to the heart of Iqbal, as it had been to Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Shibli and Arnold. In this 1933 trip, the three members of the committee stayed in Afghanistan for a month, and Iqbal travelled around the country. He valued Afghanistan because it had not been subject to alien domination. The King was assassinated in November 1933, just three months after the arrival of the committee. This assassination meant a change in the aims of the regime. The educational reforms became more difficult. Iqbal returned home, but he was remembered in Afghanistan. Iqbal never succeeded in finding a Muslim ruler who would implement his ideas on education. After the poet's death, however, the government of Afghanistan donated the marble for his tomb in Lahore.

Iqbal's poem, *Javīd Nāmāh*, was published a year before his trip to Afghanistan, during the time while the Afghan ruler, Nadir Shah, was still alive. The image of Nadir Shah in the poem is that of one whose wisdom guides the travelling spirit of the symbolic Muslim looking for guidance for the creation of a better future. The representative of the rulers of Afghanistan says in the poem:

*In our nature, fever and ardour spring from the heart;
Waking and slumber possess the body from the heart....
The power of the West comes from science and technology,
and with that selfsame flame its lamp is bright.
Wisdom derives not from the cut and trim of clothes*

*the turban is no impediment to science and technology.
 For science and technology, elegant young sprig,
 brains are necessary, not European clothes;
 what is needed is not this or that kind of hat.
 If you have a nimble intellect, that is sufficient;
 If you have a perceptive mind, that is sufficient.*¹⁵

If we take this as a directive as to how Iqbal thought young Muslims should be educated, we can see that he wanted them to avoid simple copying—hats etc.—of western fashions. On the other hand, another line of the poem says ‘science is a hard quest’. Thus, Iqbal wanted young Muslims to become very disciplined intellects, but not just pale imitators of the externals of western society. He had hoped to be involved in working out new curriculum and educational institutions in Afghanistan that would make this ideal form of Muslim education feasible. But this ambition was not fulfilled, because of the change in government. Iqbal could not develop his own ideas of education in his own country, because the British were still dominating the educational institutions, and had control over curriculum. But neither could he find a free Muslim nation where his theories could be given concrete shape in institutions.

Response to the Qadiani Movement

In 1934, Iqbal published his views on the Qadiani (Ahmadi) movement that had been very active among the North Indian Muslims of his life time. This movement had been started by Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (c.1839-1908), a visionary who had claimed to be sent by God to bring a new understanding of Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity to India. The Qadianis believed this man to be a new prophet for the modern age.

If the ideal Islamic university of Iqbal’s dreams had ever been realised in his lifetime, the poet-philosopher might well have headed up a department of comparative history of religion, the academic discipline that had shaped his approach in his doctoral thesis. In his writings on the Qadianis, as in his *Reconstruction Lectures*, Iqbal always proceeds by situating his topic in the context of his version of the religious history of the whole world. His perspective is that of a scholar whose mind is always roving across the data from the religious history of the world.

This article on the Qadianis is a response to some comments Jawaharlal Nehru had published in a Calcutta newspaper. Nehru was

commenting on some earlier writing of Iqbal on the subject of the Qadianis.¹⁶ Iqbal uses the term 'comparative religion' in his answer to Nehru. He says that reading Nehru's article on this subject has given his mind a 'painful conflict of feelings'. Iqbal's discussion of this topic is one of the clearest statements on his part as to why he felt he could not accept Nehru's leadership, even though he knows the Congress leader to be a man of wide cultural sympathies.

Iqbal's feeling of pain in response to Nehru's articles was partly because the poet understood the Congress leader to be saying that modern, scientific men had no use for traditional religions. Iqbal also was very critical of traditional religious leadership, and he thought of himself as a modern, scientific man. But the poet wanted a third way, neither traditional, nor atheistic. He tries in this article to explain this third way to Nehru, and to get the Congress leader to think of Iqbal's reformist Muslims as possible colleagues and friends in the common task of getting the British out, and building a better India for the future.

Using his comparative religion approach, Iqbal begins his first article with a discussion of the Muslim understanding of the finality of the Prophet Muhammad. He disputes the Qadiani claim to the status of prophethood for Mirza Ghulam Ahmed because, he says, this idea can only be divisive at a time when the Indian Muslim community needs unity. He characterises the claim for a new prophet as typical of 'creed-communities' for whom the continuity of prophethood is essential.

Iqbal knows that some earlier Muslim mystics struggled with the issue of how to articulate a concept of a living relationship with God in the present. The issue is a philosophical problem for all religious traditions with scriptures. Is knowledge of God confined to the scripture only, or do on-going generations of believers continue to relate directly and personally to the divine? Is Scripture the only way to know God? Is the inspiration that a saint receives similar to, or different from revelation that the Prophet receives? This is an issue that had been discussed by many of the Muslim theologians of earlier centuries.

Iqbal does not say, as some conservative Muslims have said, that no human being other than the Prophet Muhammad has ever had direct personal access to divine inspiration. The notion of *Sinai* as a possibility for any human being at any time or any place in history is

central to Iqbal's understanding. If Iqbal could have a *Sinai* experience, why does he deny something like this to the founder of the Qadianis?

In traditional Muslim theology, distinction was usually made between the Prophetic experience of revelation, (*wahy*), and the saint's, (*wali*), experience of inspiration (*ilhām*) Iqbal agrees that many of the Sufis of the past had experienced inspiration. But he also insists that the Muslim mystics never claimed to be giving new ethical directives for human beings; they also accepted the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad. The idea was that Prophets brought new ethical directives, whereas saints did not. Iqbal thus argues that the Qadianis were wrong to have maintained that a new prophet had come.

Iqbal considered his own *Sinai* experience to have confirmed what he had learned from the Qur'an. It was, therefore, an experience of inspiration, but not revelation. He objected to the Qadiani claims because he thought they failed to acknowledge the finality of the Qur'an as the last authoritative revelation to humanity. This issue is whether or not religious experience in the present confirms the values of the Scripture. Iqbal thought that his understanding of a personal experience of inspiration did confirm the Qur'an, whereas the experiences attributed to the founder of the Qadianis did not.

The poet's criterion for authentic prophethood was 'by their fruits you shall know them'. Iqbal accepted the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad because of the fruits that the Qur'an has borne over the centuries. This fruit includes stimulus to conscience, to reason and to creative involvement with struggles to change the conditions of life in the world. Iqbal was convinced that one who tries to hear the Qur'an, as the Prophet Muhammad heard it, could become a force towards the transformation of all human life and thought. The poet many times says that the coming of the Qur'an abolished superstition. His idea is that humans after the coming of the Qur'an were required to stand on their own feet and use their minds and hearts to discover how to implement their values. They could no longer on magic to solve their problems; they had to take responsibility for solving their problems themselves. Muslims responding to the Qur'an were guided by a vision of the good, but they had to use their minds freely to create the actual solutions the

world needed. They had to become mature, responsible adults, not relying on magic, superstition, or self-appointed religious leaders.

In this respect, Iqbal perceived the Qadiani movement to be a retreat from reason into superstition, a retreat from personal moral responsibility to acceptance of help from a magical presence. Such a quest for magical guidance was characteristic of much past Muslim reliance on pirs and self-appointed holy men, but Iqbal wanted to liberate his fellow Muslims from such forms of servile dependency. He perceived the Qadiani movement as a renewal of tendencies that he wished the Muslims to learn to overcome.

Iqbal had his own typology of religious leadership. He thought that a culture that wants God-inspired leaders to appear regularly, a culture that seeks messiahs, is one that wants to abdicate moral and intellectual maturity and responsibility. The messianic leader is wanted as a person who can give all the orders, and to whom the others can submit. This is what Iqbal calls *magian*, an ideal of perpetual reincarnation. The notion is that the people are never without a supernatural presence in their midst who will dominate their lives. Iqbal thought that the first Muslims were effective precisely because they overthrew the older cultures that had these *magian* ideas. In his view, the energy and purposefulness of the first Muslims came from the overthrowing of priestly and kingly domination. He understands the Qur'an to be the opposite of the *magian* attitude, because believers are left to use their own minds as distinctive individuals in solving their problems. Those who respond to the Qur'an should become more mature precisely because they should not expect magical help. Iqbal wrote:

It is no small surprise to me that my effort to impress on the Indian Muslims the extreme necessity of internal cohesion in the present critical moment of their history in India, and my warning them against the forces of disintegration, masquerading as a reformist movement, should have given the Pandit an occasion to sympathize with such forces.¹⁷

I think we should take Iqbal at his word that he found Nehru's sympathy with the Qadianis to be a surprise. For him, it would be very troubling because he wanted acceptance from Nehru for the role of Muslims loyal to the independence of India, but loyal also to their insistence on cultural autonomy for themselves. Iqbal said that the messianic leadership of Mirza Ghulām Aḥmad had had the effect of

religiously legitimating political servility. Iqbal expected that Nehru would dislike this as much as he did. Iqbal commented:

I am inclined to think that my statement on Qadianism... has embarrassed both the Pandit and the Qadianis, perhaps because both inwardly resent, for different reasons, the prospects of Muslim political and religious solidarity..... It is obvious that the Indian nationalist whose political idealism has practically killed his sense for fact, is intolerant of the birth of a desire for self-determination in the heart of north-west Indian Islam. He thinks, wrongly in my opinion, that the only way to Indian nationalism lies in a total suppression of the cultural entities of the country through the interaction of which alone India can evolve a rich and enduring culture. A nationalism achieved by such methods, can mean nothing but mutual bitterness and even oppression.¹⁸

This rebuke to the Pandit tells us something of Iqbal's feelings on that subject. 'The Indian nationalist whose political idealism has killed his sense for fact' is clearly Nehru. For Iqbal, the birth of a desire for self-determination in the heart of north-west Indian Islam was a fact that Nehru was ignoring and refusing to deal with realistically. Iqbal was worried that Nehru's unwillingness to take religious revival seriously as something real that happens in the world would cause trouble. Iqbal thought that Nehru's belief that religions would just wither away was a kind of socialist naivete.

Iqbal was unhappy with the Qadianis of his time because he thought they were failing to share the quest for the liberation of the Indian Muslims from British control. He saw their passive acceptance of the British as something like the servility that he had been fighting against all his life. He knew, of course, that many other Muslims had similarly despairing attitudes in terms of acceptance of foreign rule. Iqbal just wanted to wake all of them up, including the Qadianis, to the possibility of a revived and re-invigorated Muslim community.

We noted that Iqbal criticised the Qadianis for a *magian* approach to life, relying on a kind of magical authority. However, in chapter five we observed that Iqbal also said that the Ash'arite approach had *magian* tendencies, because the Ash'arite theologians had not focused sufficiently on the reality of time and individual consciousness. He made similar criticisms of the Sufi pirs. In this respect, Iqbal thought that many of the ulema and the pirs were as

misguided, in certain ways, as the Qadianis were. Iqbal's discussions of this kind were intended as criticisms of ideas, and confused thinking. Thus, he wanted the Qadianis, the ulema, the pirs, and all the other Muslims to think more clearly. He thought that *magian* tendencies generally failed to develop in people an adequate sense of their own moral responsibility for themselves, and for other people.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, pp. 39-68.

² *The Secrets of the Self*, p. 45.

³ *Persian Psalms*, p. 83.

⁴ *The Secrets of the Self*, pp. 73,75.

⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.26.

⁶ *The Secrets of the Self*, p. 28.

⁷ *Rubā'iyāt*, p. 22.

⁸ *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 58

⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 195.

¹⁰ *Stray Reflections*, pp. 42,43.

¹¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 195.

¹² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 195.

¹³ *Call of the Marching Bell*, pp. 107,108.

¹⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p.232..

¹⁵ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 129.

¹⁶ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 247-290.

¹⁷ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 259.

¹⁸ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p.258.

Chapter Seven

Iqbal and South Asia

**The flame of life must be
kindled in one's own soul**

In 1930, Iqbal was elected to preside over the annual session of the Muslim League in Allahabad. On this occasion, he delivered the speech that later opinion has considered a seminal event in the eventual crystallization of Muslim hopes for greater cultural autonomy. What did Iqbal think could be done about the problem of mutual negative stereotyping between Hindus and Muslims? How did he envisage religious imperatives for Muslims in the changing social and economic development of South Asia? What forms should serious religious faith take in the context of a modern, scientific and industrialised culture? This speech throws some light on the mature Iqbal's ideas on these and related questions. We will quote most of the speech because we understand him best if we pay careful attention to his terminology.

Gentlemen, I am deeply grateful to you for the honour you have conferred upon me.... I lead no party; I follow no leader. I have given the best part of my life to a careful study of Islam, its law and polity, its culture, its history and its literature. This constant contact with the spirit of Islam, as it unfolds itself in time, has, I think, given me a kind of insight into its significance as a world-fact. In the light of this insight,... I propose, not to guide you in your decisions, but to attempt the humble task of bringing clearly to your consciousness the main principles, which, in my opinion, should determine the general character of these decisions....

If you begin with conception of religion as complete other-worldliness, then what has happened to Christianity in Europe is perfectly natural. The universal ethics of Jesus is displaced by

national systems of ethics and polity. The conclusion to which Europe is consequently driven is that religion is a private affair of the individual and has nothing to do with what is called man's temporal life. Islam does not bifurcate the unity of man into an irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter. In Islam, God and the universe, spirit and matter, Church and State, are organic to each other. Man is not the citizen of profane world to be renounced in the interest of a world of spirit situated elsewhere. To Islam matter is spirit realising itself in space and time....

Professor Wensinck of Leiden (Holland) wrote to me the other day; 'It seems to me that Islam is entering upon a crisis through which Christianity has been passing for more than a century. The great difficulty is how to save the foundations of religion when many antiquated notions have to be given up. It seems to me scarcely possible to state what the outcome will be for Christianity, still less what it will be for Islam.' At the present moment the national Idea is racialising the outlook of Muslims, and thus materially counteracting the humanising work of Islam. And the growth of racial consciousness may mean the growth of standards different and even opposed to the standards of Islam.

I hope you will pardon me for this apparently academic discussion. To address this session of the All-India Muslim League you have selected a man who has not despaired of Islam as a living force for freeing the outlook of man from its geographical limitations, who believes that religion is a power of the utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as States, and finally who believes that Islam is itself Destiny and will not suffer a destiny.

The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created.... And as far as I have been able to read the Muslim mind, I have no hesitation in declaring that if the principle that the Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian home-lands is recognised as the basis of a permanent communal settlement, he will be ready to stake his all for the freedom of India. The principle that each group is entitled to free development on its own lines is not inspired by any feeling of narrow communalism.... I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institution of other

communities... but the staunchest internationalist recognises that without the fullest national autonomy, it is extraordinarily difficult to create the international State. So also without the fullest cultural autonomy, and communalism in its better aspect as culture, it will be difficult to create a harmonious nation....

I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single State... the idea need not alarm the Hindus or the British. India is the greatest Muslim country in the world. The life of Islam as a cultural force in this country very largely depends on its centralisation in a specified territory. This centralisation of the most living portion of the Muslims of India.... will eventually solve the problem of India as well as of Asia. It will intensify their sense of responsibility and deepen their patriotic feeling. Thus possessing full opportunity of development within the body politic of India, the North-West India Muslims will prove the best defenders of India against a foreign invasion, be the invasion one of ideas or of bayonets.

Nor should the Hindus fear that the creation of autonomous Muslim States will mean the introduction of a kind of religious rule in such States.... The truth is that Islam is not a church. It is State conceived as a contractual organism.... and animated by an ethical ideal which regards man not as an earth-rooted creature, defined by this or that portion of the earth, but as a spiritual being understood in terms of social mechanism, possessing rights and duties as a living factor in that mechanism.

Thus it is clear that in view of India's infinite variety in climates, races, languages, creeds, and social systems, the creation of autonomous States based on the unity of language, race, history religion and identity of economic interests is the only possible way to secure a stable constitutional structure in India. The conception of federation underlying the Simon report necessitates the abolition of the Central Legislative Assembly as a popular assembly, and makes it an assembly of the representative of federal states.... The Muslims demand federation because it is pre-eminently a solution of India's most difficult problem i.e. the communal problem.... It appears to me that the Hindu-Muslim differences regarding the ultimate form of Central Government are being clearly exploited by British politicians through the

agency of the Princes, who see in the scheme prospects of better security for their despotic rule. If the Muslims silently agree to any such scheme, it will simply hasten their end as a political entity in India.... The best course, I think, would have been to start with a British India federation only. A federal scheme born of an unholy union between democracy and despotism cannot but keep British India in the same vicious circle of an unitary central Government. Such a unitary form may be of the greatest advantage to the British, to the majority community, and to the Indian princes; it can be of no advantage to the Muslims.

Gentlemen, I have finished. I am not hopeless of an intercommunal understanding, but I cannot conceal from you the feeling that in the near future our community may be called upon to adopt an independent line of action to cope with the present crisis.... If today you focus your vision of Islam and seek inspiration from the ever-vitalising idea embodied in it, you will be only reassembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity and thereby saving yourself from total destruction.¹

In India, at that time, the word *provinces* was used for the various divisions within that part of India that was controlled by the British, whereas the word *states* was used for the princely states, areas under the control of local princes rather than the British. *State* is a word that can have many different meanings. Sometimes it means an entirely independent political entity. It can also mean a part of a larger whole, as in the United States of America. Iqbal's use of the term *state* in this speech has led to some later confusion as to what he intended. It is best to understand his comment within the context of what the word meant in the India of his time. His meaning is better understood within the context of his speech as a whole. In this, and in other speeches in the years given before his death in 1938, Iqbal had been thinking primarily of a federated India in which the federated states would have cultural autonomy. If that option failed, then the Muslims would have to think again.

Iqbal had wanted the reform of Muslim legal, social and economic institutions to be carried out in a democratic way by the Muslim citizens. We know that Iqbal considered the mental habits of servility created among Muslims by the domination of the British to be one of their greatest problems. He said that the only way to overcome the bad effects of servility on personality was to accept

real responsibility for one's life in the world. He wanted Muslims to have the freedom to take the responsibility for re-interpreting the basic principles of Islam in a practical and effective way. This is why he thought they needed control over their education and culture.

He speaks here of Islam as a contractual organism animated by an ethical ideal; he also refers to the vitalising ideal of the Muslim tradition. He indicates once again that this vitalising ideal is the affirmation of the value of all human life, as opposed to the restrictive ideals of tribalism. Iqbal thought of the 19th and 20th century forms of nationalism as new forms of tribal paganism. He believed that the foundational affirmations of the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet were against tribalism in all its manifestations.

He continues to affirm his emphasis on what he understood as the basic principle of Islam, namely racial equality. He was convinced that the greedy and violent nationalisms that he had seen tearing Europe apart in the 1914-1918 war were the result of Luther's reforms having made religion personal.² Iqbal feared that once religion was made personal, then nationalism became a sort of quasi-religion, and people became ready to die or to do anything for their country. He hoped that proper understanding of the Muslim basic principles would enable Muslims to escape falling victim in this way to the folly of ideological nationalism.

Iqbal had developed his understanding of nationalism in the context of what he saw as the competing nationalisms in Europe that had led to World War I. Nationalism meant to him a type of culture in which the citizens had no values other than service to the aggressive greed of the nation state. He thought that these forms of nationalism had developed in Europe because Christianity had become other-worldly and personal. In his view, cultures without religious values tended to develop false gods. Worship of the nation as the ultimate value in life was a form of false god.

Iqbal had learned from Adam Smith that monopolies that were not subject to regular criticism tended to become mindless and destructive in their greed. Adam Smith himself had indicated that the basic values should be, as Jesus had said, for each person to love God with all his heart, mind, and soul, and his neighbour as himself.³ Iqbal thought Europe had lost this Christian awareness of the universal value of all human life. When Iqbal speaks of *personal*

religion he means something like what he means by *magian*. These terms mean for him a kind of religiousness that is concerned only with the salvation of the individual out of the world. He thought a better perspective was one in which the believer accepted a responsibility to work in the world to improve social and economic institutions. In other words, Iqbal believed that purely *personal* religion was too pessimistic about the possibilities of improving the conditions of existence.

From Iqbal's perspective, one should understand *The Secrets of the Self* first. Once the person understands his or her position in relation to the transcendent, then *The Mysteries of Selflessness* apply. Iqbal thought that Luther's reforms had caused the West to affirm the first phase of this process, but to forget the necessity of the second. If religious persons abdicated their responsibility to look after the world, evil forces, such as tribalism, nationalism, racism, economic greed and international lawlessness, took over.

*The East saw God and did not see the world,
the West crept along the world and fled away from God...
What is the Koran? Sentence of death for the master-man
Succour for the slave without food and destitute
Look not for good from the money-grubbing manikin--
You will not attain piety, until you expend."* (Qur'an 2:246) ⁴

In other words, the Muslim poet thought that Europe had fallen victim to the trap of domination by the kind of nationalistic greed that Adam Smith had considered wicked. Iqbal thought that greed had developed because the people had lost their sense of the need to bring their religious awareness to bear on the actual problems of everyday life. When the religious people became too 'other-worldly', then forces of greed and tribalism took over again.

In an earlier rebuke to Nehru, Iqbal had warned that excessive nationalism of the Russian model could have bad consequences. It might repress minorities. This would be bad for the cultural development of India. Iqbal had said that he objected to:

Total suppression of the cultural entities of the country through the inter-action of which alone India can evolve a rich and enduring culture.⁵

If such suppression occurred, those who remained loyal to the traditional religions might become embittered and oppressed, as had

happened in the USSR. Their bitterness might lead to communal conflict.

Iqbal thought that both good and bad forms of communalism were possible. The good form would be one that stressed a pluralism of cultures in which each group felt free to develop and reform its ideas and practices without stress from outside. Such a form of pluralism, he thought, would make the adherents of religious traditions feel relaxed and friendly to each other. On the other hand, the bad form of communalism would lead to the dualistic thinking that conceived as the 'other' as intrinsically dangerous and threatening. This was the kind of communalism that led to violence and mutual hatred. The problem of negative stereotyping of each other between Hindus and Muslims is an instance of what Iqbal meant by *bad* communalism.

Psychology of Religion

Iqbal was interested in thinking about which psychological attitudes led to integration rather than disintegration of personality. His personal library contained many books on psychology of religion. He was sympathetic to the views of William James about the universality of religious hopes and fears. He observed that Ibn Khaldūn, one of the foremost Muslim philosophers of history, would have been in close sympathy with James.⁶ Iqbal said that both James and Ibn Khaldūn agreed that many forms of religious life exist, but that some are more sensible than others. Iqbal also thought that reason should be used to make judgments about the rationality of the fruits of religious experience. Does the experience make the person more or less coherent, stable and purposeful?

We know that Iqbal has said much about the psychology of the colonized, namely that to be servile makes people mean, miserable, defensive, and uncreative. He seems to have feared Nehru's version of nationalism precisely because he thought that, if the new India just tried to get rid of, and suppress, the traditional religions, the adherents of those religions might turn nasty, mean, vindictive and mutually hostile. Iqbal believed that humans could create their own cultures: he also believed that certain types of culture would lead to mutual hatred, whereas others might more easily lead to peace. For this reason, the constitution of a nation had could play a role in directing citizens towards either mutual respect, or hostility to each other.

In his youth, as indicated in his poem, *The New Temple*, Iqbal had urged freedom loving Indians to work together to get rid of oppressive religious attitudes, and customs. Iqbal changed his ideas later as to how to work for the goal of good communalism. However, the goal did not change. As indicated in the 1930 speech quoted above, the goal remained a better India. Today, one might phrase the matter as a better South Asia. The issue remains the same, namely, how the persons from different religious and cultural backgrounds could devise ways and means of effective co-existence, and cooperative working together on common problems. In the original poem, and in the later speech, he stresses that mutual distrust is the cause of much trouble.

Iqbal respected Nehru; he wanted to achieve more fruitful communication with this Congress leader. In 1933, Iqbal wrote:

I have never had the pleasure of meeting Pandit Jawahar Lal, though I have always admired his sincerity and outspokenness. His latest statement in reply to his Mahasabha critics has a ring of sincerity which is rare in the pronouncements of present day politicians in India.⁷

Nehru believed that religions in the past had been involved with support for oppressive governments, and that secular political institutions would be necessary for India in order to undercut the control the religious leaders had held over society. Iqbal thought along similar lines as Nehru in his recognition that religious leaders in the past had supported oppressive regimes. He differed from Nehru in that he believed that religious life in the future could effectively be disentangled from control by feudal leaders and medieval minded religious leaders. Effective religious education was Iqbal's solution to this dilemma. We will discuss the Muslim poet's ideas on religious education more thoroughly in chapter nine. Here, we want to acknowledge that Iqbal agreed with most of Nehru's analysis of the evils that religious control over society had led to in the past. He had, however, a different idea as to how to work for a better future.

Iqbal's Responses to Gandhi

Iqbal seems not to have a similar hope that communication would be possible with Gandhi. As an outsider, I am struck by the lack of mutual comprehension and respect between Iqbal and Gandhi, both of whom were giants in terms of their spiritual depths and their

influence on their respective peoples. Gandhi took Iqbal's criticism of nationalism as little more than a political tool for reactionary forces. The Mahatma does not seem to have recognised that Iqbal's criticism of nationalism had a serious religious basis, namely that to worship the nation as an end in itself can lead to destructive materialism, and even to war, if the nation is ready to fight to promote its ends.

There were many complex problems, and much mutual distrust and misunderstanding between Muslims and Hindus, reformists and socialists, in the long negotiations that began in 1919, and ended in 1947, with the creation of the two new nations of India and Pakistan. I am not attempting here an in-depth analysis of that many-faceted process. I will try only to focus specifically on Iqbal's perception of Gandhi, and Gandhi's perception of Iqbal, as two aspects of the wider scene. These two were important because they were perceived by their respective followers as spiritual guides to the future. Studying Iqbal and Gandhi together is something like studying two solitudes. They read many of the same books, and had many friends in common. Nevertheless, neither of them seems ever to have tried to talk seriously with the other. Iqbal does not seem to have thought that Gandhi's ideas for the future of India were practicable.

Gandhi had been enthusiastic about the vision of Islam as a reforming spirit that he had encountered among his Muslim supporters in South Africa. He had wanted to translate Amir 'Ali's *The Spirit of Islam* into Gujrati; he urged all Indians to read it.⁸ Gandhi had hoped to gain the support of liberal Muslims in South Africa, and later in India. He succeeded in doing this in South Africa, but had more trouble later in India. Gandhi, after the failure of his efforts, along with Amir 'Ali, to get the support of the British government for the efforts to combat racism in South Africa, had written *Hind Swaraj* while he was returning on the boat in 1909.⁹ I have not seen any evidence of Iqbal having commented on Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, although it is probable that he did know about the statement, since it had created a considerable stir among Indian intellectuals generally.

Iqbal did not accept non-violence as an absolute principle, as Gandhi did. Iqbal wrote as follows about his attitudes to violence. He was responding to a review of his *Secrets of the Self* written by Lowes Dickinson.

I believe in the power of the spirit, not brute force. When a people is called to a righteous war, it is, according to my belief, their duty to obey the call; but I condemn all war of conquest.... But Mr. Dickinson is quite right when he says that war is destructive, whether it is waged in the interests of truth and justice or in the interests of conquest and exploitation. It must be put an end to in any case.... Nor is the spirit of Islam so exclusive as Mr. Dickinson thinks. In the interests of a universal unification of mankind, the Qur'an ignores their minor differences and says 'Come let us unite on what is common to us all'.

I am afraid the old European idea of a blood-thirsty Islam is still lingering in the mind of Mr. Dickinson. All men and not Muslims alone are meant for the kingdom of God on earth, provided they say good-bye to their idols of race and nationality, and treat one another as personalities.... The salvation of man lies in absolute equality and freedom of all.... That Muslim peoples have fought and conquered like other peoples, and that some of their leaders have screened their personal ambition behind the veil of religion, I do not deny; but I am absolutely sure that territorial conquest was no part of the original programme of Islam. As a matter of fact I consider it a great loss that the progress of Islam as a conquering faith stultified the growth of those germs of an economic and democratic organization of society, which I find scattered up and down the pages of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. No doubt the Muslims succeeded in building a great empire, but thereby they largely repaganized their political ideals and lost sight of some of the important potentialities of their faith....

The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam; my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and, in this endeavour, I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race, and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of this world, fosters a spirit of the unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relations with his neighbours. This is what Europe lacks, and this what she can still learn from us.¹⁰

Thus, Iqbal's attitudes to violence were not so radically different from those of Gandhi. His differences with Gandhi lay rather in his

notion of how to work for the economic and social development of India. In a speech towards the end of his life, Iqbal indicated where his attitude to reform within history differed from that of Gandhi. He wrote:

Nor do Mahatma Gandhi's political methods signify a revolt in the psychological sense. These methods arose out of a contact of two opposing types of world-consciousness, Western and Eastern. The Western man's mental texture is chronological in character. He lives and moves and has his being in time. The Eastern man's world-consciousness is non-historical. To the Western man things gradually become better; they have a past, present and future. To the Eastern man they are immediately rounded off, timeless, purely present. That is why Islam, which sees in the time movement a symbol of reality, appeared as an intruder in the static world pictures of Asia. The British as a Western people cannot but conceive political reform in India as a systematic process of gradual evolution. Mahatma Gandhi as an Eastern man sees in this attitude nothing more than an ill-conceived unwillingness to part with power and tries all sorts of destructive negations to achieve immediate attainment. Both are elementally incapable of understanding each other.¹¹

This suggests that Iqbal himself thought that mutual understanding between himself and Gandhi would not easily be possible. The destructive negations he refers to might be those of *Hind Swaraj*, a piece of writing that is entirely negative with respect to the wickedness of western civilisation. This perspective may be one reason for Iqbal's lack of interest in Gandhi. Iqbal took history very seriously as an on-going process of working for change over time by the improving of governing institutions. The absolutism of Gandhi's rejection of western civilisation may have indicated to Iqbal that the Mahatma did not think in terms of historical progress and development.

Neither Gandhi nor Iqbal seems to have thought about the similarities in their respective spiritual voyages. They were roughly contemporaries, both of whom left behind the conservative elements of their respective traditions by travelling abroad for the purposes of seeking for new ideas and new directions. Both were lawyers familiar with constitutional law, and British political institutions. Both were self-consciously aware of being caught between the

values of their own disappearing cultures and the threat of a challenging modernity that seemed antagonistic to those values. They recognised similar problems, but they did not seek for solutions in the same way.

Gandhi also had an image of the Prophet Muhammad in his mind as a religious person who had struggled effectively in his own time against injustice. Gandhi said that, when he was himself fasting against injustice, he had the picture in his mind of the Prophet Muhammad fasting.¹² Gandhi got his ideas about the Prophet Muhammad from the writings of Shibli and Amir 'Alī, which he regularly studied. He was directed by a strong drive to overcome the oppressiveness of racist foreign domination. He thought he could take the Indian Muslims with him, in his fight to get the British out of India, because he had elicited their support for his struggles in South Africa.

Gandhi was a reformer who distrusted modernity. He knew about the evil of modern civilisation at the gut level because of his experiences of virulent racism in South Africa. He knew about war, too, because he had served as a stretcher bearer in two wars in South Africa. But he seemed to have hoped, as indicated in *Hind Swaraj*, that all the terrible evils of modernity could be kept out of the utopian, free India he wanted to create. The main source of Gandhi's understanding of the religious value of non-violence was the Jain philosopher in Gujarat whom he had met in his youth.¹³

Iqbal conceived of nationalism as a potential threat, whereas Gandhi perceived Indian nationalism as liberation. On this point, there seems to have been no depth of mutual understanding between the two. Perhaps the best way to think about these differences is to see Gandhi as the activist busy implementing immediate goals, whereas Iqbal was preoccupied with longer term strategies in terms of designing a future for the subcontinent in which nationalism would not be the main directive force shaping policy.

The Round Table Conference

The only occasion on which Gandhi and Iqbal met was at a conference in London. This particular meeting seems to have convinced each of them that the other was on the side of reactionary and obscurantist forces. After the end of World War I, the British had wanted to make plans for future constitutional developments in India. These processes over time involved many different schemes,

and many efforts to arrive at agreement. The British invited various Indians to attend two Round Table Conferences in London for the purposes of discussing arrangements for greater independence for India. Iqbal did not attend the first one. He did attend the second one in 1931 at which the Congress was represented by Mahatma Gandhi. The persons at the meeting could not reach agreement because of the problem of disputes about pluralism. In a sub-committee on minorities, Mahatma Gandhi insisted that he and the Congress represented all the Indian people. The rest of the minorities, with the exception of the Sikhs, disagreed with this position; they signed an Indian minorities' pact and gave it to the British prime minister. Iqbal took credit for having made sure that the minority opinion was voiced.

Iqbal's personal encounter with Gandhi took place at this conference. Nehru, who had not been present at the conference had later made a report in which he had said the reactionaryism rather than communalism had prevented the Muslim delegates from accepting the position put forth on behalf of the Congress by Gandhi. Iqbal wrote a response to Nehru in which he said that this was a 'perfectly wrong statement of what happened in London.' Iqbal said that the Indian woman poet, Sarojini Naidu, had been sitting near him, and that she had shared with him a similar impression as to Gandhi's attitude. Gandhi had been unwilling to wire to the Congress Executive to get their consent to the offer of the Muslim community to settle their differences.

The political leader of the untouchables at the time of Round Table meeting was Ambedkar, an untouchable who had managed to get a Ph.D from an American University; he was the acknowledged political leader of his community. Ambedkar thought specifically in terms of political rights. He wanted the untouchables to officially proclaim themselves a separate community from the Hindus. Iqbal said in his letter to Nehru:

Mr. Gandhi's second and most unrighteous condition was that Muslims should not support the special claims for Untouchables, particularly their claim to special representation. It was pointed out to him that it did not lie in the mouth of Muslims to oppose those very claims on the part of the Untouchables which they were advancing for themselves, and that if Mr. Gandhi could arrive at a mutual understanding with the Untouchables, the

Muslims would certainly not stand in their way. Mr. Gandhi, however, insisted on this condition. I should like to know how far Pandit Jawahar Lal with his well-known socialist views would sympathise with such an inhuman condition.

This is the inner history of the negotiations between Mr. Gandhi and Muslim delegates. I would leave it to Pandit Jawahar Lal to judge whether the alleged political reactionaryism among Muslim delegates or the narrow political outlook of others was responsible for the result of the negotiations.¹⁴

Iqbal's opinion, based on his personal experience on this occasion, was that the narrow-mindedness was on the side of Gandhi. Gandhi did take a paternalistic attitude to the untouchables. He wanted to reform untouchability from within Hinduism, but he could not accept the idea of the untouchables opting out of Hinduism entirely. Since he had led the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the Mahatma was well aware that the upper caste Hindus could be accused of a kind of apartheid in their treatment of the lowest castes in India. However, Gandhi wanted to reform Hinduism from within and not to accept any criticism from outsiders.

Iqbal thought Ambedkar's position eminently reasonable. Why did Gandhi not agree? I think we can best understand this attitude of Gandhi's as part of the Hindu leader's very deep antagonism to the British, which was based on his bad experiences in South Africa. Gandhi seemed to have felt that Indians must have a sort of organic unity among themselves if they were to become strong enough to drive the British out of India. The idea of allowing parts of India to drop off the organic body of unity, parts such as the Muslims and the untouchables, was felt by the Mahatma to be a threat to weaken Mother India, and to make her more vulnerable to British oppression. Iqbal's personal experience of trying to reason with Gandhi on this issue surely strengthened the Muslim poet's conviction that business could not be done with such an intransigent person. It seems that Iqbal wrote to Nehru because he hoped to find a more reasonable mind there.

Iqbal seems to have decided as a result of this experience that Gandhi was reactionary with respect to caste. Iqbal was contemptuous in relation to what he saw at that time as a plain case of reactionary politics. This issue is both simple and complex. It is simple politically, and complex religiously. Iqbal and Ambedkar

thought that the issue was a simple matter of human rights; persons in an independent nation should be able to choose freely which religious community they wished to belong to.

Iqbal and Ambedkar thought the untouchables should be free to opt out of Hinduism if they wished to do so. Gandhi, however, wanted nothing done in this respect until the Hindus had reformed themselves in such a way as to make membership in the Hindu community acceptable to persons from all castes. He wanted the upper caste Hindus to change their attitudes and practices so that the former members of the lower castes would be treated as equals; he wanted untouchables to feel at home and safe within the Hindu community.

Gandhi had consistently maintained that the reform of caste structures must be done by the Hindus themselves. The one *Satyagraha* campaign that had been explicitly aimed at changing caste practices was the Vycom *Satyagraha* campaign in 1924. This had been a campaign to change the practices that refused to allow untouchables to use the roads close to a Hindu temple. Gandhi, at that time, took the position that non-Hindus should not take part in a campaign to change Hindu religious practices. He wrote:

“It is the duty of the Hindus to free the society of the evil rampant in it. They cannot and ought not to call in the aid of outsiders in reform work.... It demoralizes you and unnecessarily offends the orthodox section whom you have to convert and conquer through your love and who will surely legitimately feel insulted by such non-Hindu interference.”¹⁵

For this reason, the Sikhs were not allowed to provide food for the Hindus who took part in this campaign.

Gandhi's grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, has written at some length in his study of his grandfather's life and thought, *Gandhi the Good Boatman*, about the complexity of Gandhi's relationship with the lower caste people who now call themselves *Dalits*.¹⁶ His point is that Gandhi did a great deal in his lifetime to change attitudes to the untouchables, but that, over time, the Mahatma has not been accepted as a guide by most of the representatives of that community. Like other oppressed communities, the untouchables have preferred leadership from amongst their own people. Gandhi had envisaged himself as the leader of the untouchables, but that community did not finally accept him in that role.

Gandhi had been opposed to the 'opting out' of the Hindu community by the untouchables. He refused at the 1931 Round Table conference to take Ambedkar's position seriously. However, in November 1931, a Minorities Pact was announced by the British government. The Pact was signed, among others, by Ambedkar and the Aga Khan, and demanded separate electorates for Muslims, untouchables, Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans. This was the position that Iqbal had supported. When this Pact was announced, Gandhi then made a declaration that he would resist a separate electorate for the untouchables with his life. Within a week after his return to India, Gandhi was arrested. In September of 1932, Gandhi announced from prison that he would fast unto death if the British government persisted in agreeing to allow the untouchables to have separate electorates. He would fast until all the parties agreed to accept his point of view.

This fast did have the effect of energizing many upper caste Hindus to change their policies, and to open access to public wells, public schools, public roads and many other institutions to the untouchables.¹⁷ Across India, many temples were opened overnight. After Gandhi had fasted seven days, an accord was signed between untouchable leaders and upper caste Hindus. From Gandhi's perspective, this result meant that he could change the caste system by his moral example. The fast indicates how Gandhi thought that Hinduism could be transformed. He wanted the transformation to come about by the freely given consent of the upper castes. He managed by this fast to get Ambedkar to stop making demands for a separate electorate. Ambedkar agreed, because he did not want to be responsible for the death of Gandhi, but he was not happy about it.

Ambedkar eventually became one of the architects of the constitution of India, and did much to guarantee equality of rights for all citizens of the new country. On the other hand, Ambedkar did not want to remain within Hinduism. Finally, eight years after Gandhi's death, Ambedkar became a Buddhist, and took many members of his community with him out of Hinduism. Gandhi had changed many attitudes and practices with respect to caste, but he had not overthrown the institution entirely. The lower castes wanted more done for them than Gandhi had been able to accomplish.

Rajmohan Gandhi has observed that his grandfather thought he was always obeying the single voice of his conscience, but that in

reality he obeyed two different voices.¹⁸ One was the voice of truth that often led him into danger and serious conflict, such as his conflict with the racism of the South African government. The other was the voice of his anxieties about India, and his dislike of western civilisation. His anxiety about India tended to make him feel that India must become a sort of corporate body with one mind and heart. Probably most of us are like Gandhi in this respect; we have difficulty understanding that the call of truth and the call of our anxieties are not necessarily the same.

This latter aspect of the second voice led Gandhi to put the values of independent and united India foremost in his thought and action. When this second voice led Gandhi, as it seems to have done in his encounters with Ambedkar, he put the unity of Hindus as his foremost value, and fasted to require Ambedkar to accept this view. Understandably, Ambedkar perceived this as a kind of blackmail in which he was told to change his political intention to take the untouchables out of Hinduism, or else cause the Mahatma to die. It was a bitter choice for Ambedkar.

Gandhi and the Congress leadership seem to have thought of an alliance between the Muslims and the untouchables as a political tool to be used against them. It may have been such a tool, but it was more than that. There is no reason to doubt Iqbal's sincere indignation about Gandhi's attitude to Ambedkar. For Iqbal, as for Ambedkar, social justice was a very real and very serious problem for India. Neither of them believed that accepting Gandhi's leadership would effectively solve the problems of the untouchables, or of the Muslim minority population of India.

Iqbal does not seem to have taken Gandhi's role as a social reformer of Hinduism very seriously. In another poem, Iqbal wrote:

*I have laid bare such mysteries as the hermit learns, that thought,
In cloister or in college, in true freedom may be grounded.
No fastings of Mahatmas will destroy the Brahmin's sway;
Vainly, when Moses holds no rod, have all his words
resounded!*¹⁹

Thus, Iqbal apparently did not see any possibility of *Sinai* insight which could lead to real and effective change, in what he knew of Gandhi. 'The Brahmins sway' is what Iqbal perceived as the social reality of India, the force that he saw as threatening to Muslims, and

untouchables. He did not think Gandhi was capable of changing that social reality.

Gandhi also believed that the untouchable problem was real, but he was not prepared to allow non-Hindus to have a voice in the reforming of his people. He was more worried about the sensibilities of the upper caste Hindus than he was about the untouchables and the Muslims. He thought the upper caste Hindus were the ones most urgently needing to change their values. Basically, he seems to have wanted the untouchables and the Muslims to just stand aside while he worked on getting the upper castes to change. Iqbal and Ambedkar were impatient with this position; they did not think Gandhi would be able to change Hindu social practices. That is one of the main reasons why the Muslim poet wanted guarantees of political rights for the Muslims and the untouchables.

The more complex issue is whether outsiders should participate when reformers are attempting to change values within their own community. Gandhi, as indicated in his comments on the Vykom *satyagraha*, clearly said no! outsiders should keep out. His reason was that he wanted to change the hearts of the upper caste Hindus himself by his love and devotion to them. His theory of non-violent social change was that persons change most effectively when they recognise their errors freely for themselves and agree to change. Gandhi believed that the upper castes would be more willing to change when they recognised that those who wanted to change them really cared for them.

There is little reason to doubt the soundness of Gandhi's judgement in this respect. Most people get upset if outsiders try to impose change on them. Many members of Gandhi's own family, including his wife, had objected to his involvement with lower caste persons. Most, though not all, had eventually changed. The Mahatma wanted to change all of India, as he changed the attitudes of his wife and family, by the force of his will and his example. Certainly, Gandhi was right that non-violent social change is the most effective kind of social change. In this kind of transformation, the persons who change accept the responsibility for what has occurred; they acknowledge that growth and development has been positive and good. On the other hand, if change is imposed from outside, resentment may continue to fester within those who have been compelled against their wills to behave differently.

The question is, however, whether, in many actual political situations, such an approach is feasible? Iqbal's comment that Gandhi's fasting would not change the Brahmins is representative of the widespread negative Muslim response to this idea that one must wait for the Hindus to change themselves of their own free will. How long would Muslims and untouchables have to wait for justice if the Hindus were to be left to reform themselves? In my view, this is a serious question with no simple answer. The two extreme positions of either refusing to change until consensus occurs, or changing immediately by the use of law, both have weaknesses in them. Those forced to change by law will harbour resentment; but, if no change occurs, antagonism will increase. To wait for consent can mean waiting a long time. It is a choice between a rock and a hard place.

Gandhi was right that Hindus needed to understand change in social practice as a religious good to be embraced with enthusiasm for a better future. Iqbal and Ambedkar were also right that law would have to play a role in a modern state in guaranteeing human rights. But, at the time, neither Gandhi nor Iqbal perceived wisdom in the approach of the other. Each just concluded that the other was reactionary. In other societies, such as the United States, changes with respect to racism have taken place over time as a result both of reformers working to change attitudes, and of legal reform. The two paths to social change are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in most cases, both are needed. Gandhi tended to distrust law as a force for social change. He had seen law being used for evil purposes in South Africa, and he tended to accept as valid only those changes of attitude that resulted from a profound personal change of attitude. He did not want to use the law as a force to effect change in caste relations. Ambedkar and Iqbal, on the other hand, believed strongly in the force of law to effect significant change.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 161-194.

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- ² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 163.
- ³ Adam Smith, *The theory of the Moral Sentiments, or an Essay towards an Analysis of the Principles by which Men Naturally Judge Concerning the Conduct and Character, First of Others and Afterwards of Themselves*, 1759. Pp. 188-195.
- ⁴ *Javid Nama*, p.68.
- ⁵ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 258.
- ⁶ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 17,18.
- ⁷ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 363.
- ⁸ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 6, pp. 270,271.
- ⁹ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 10.
- ¹⁰ Riffat Hasan, ed., *The Sword and the Sceptre*, pp. 362-366.
- ¹¹ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 211,212.
- ¹² M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu-Muslim Unity*, p. 66.
- ¹³ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, The Early Phase*, vol. 1, pp. 273-281.
- ¹⁴ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 364,365.
- ¹⁵ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 24, p. 93.
- ¹⁶ *Gandhi, the Good Boatman*, pp. 225-264.
- ¹⁷ *Gandhi, the Good Boatman*, p. 252.
- ¹⁸ *Gandhi, the Good Boatman*, pp. 37-76.
- ¹⁹ *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 35.

Chapter Eight

Comparative Religion and Social Change

The godly virtue of being
free from all wants

We noted that in his prose writings, such as his doctoral thesis, his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, and his correspondence with Nehru about the Qadianis, Iqbal, explicitly, and implicitly, acknowledged that he was thinking about life from the perspective of the comparative study of the history of religion. He regularly thought in terms of his understanding of the whole of human religious history, and of psychology of religion as part of that history. For this reason, I think we should acknowledge that he was a comparativist and a generalist, one who wanted all people to know about all the religions of the world, and to recognise that changes in perspective were constantly happening in all traditions.

Gandhi, also, in his own way, was a comparativist and a generalist. He had read about other religions during the time in London when he was actively involved with the English people he had met in vegetarian restaurants. In his autobiography, he tell us that he had read and admired Carlyle's essay about the sincerity of the Prophet Muhammad in *Heroes and Hero Worship*. The vegetarian friends of the young Gandhi had their own journal; they published articles about world religions. They were interested in designing new forms of co-operative religious life for the future. Many of them were opposed to British imperialism, and to arrogant Christian claims to exclusive control over religious truth. Gandhi took part in discussions with these English people, wrote articles for their journal, and generally felt at home in their milieu.¹

During his first years in South Africa, Gandhi tried to make sense of the fact that many Christian South Africans were supporting the racist policies of their government. He was perplexed by this since his experience with his vegetarian friends in London had led him to think that all the world religions taught peace and non-violence. If all religions taught peace and justice, how could one explain that so many Christian people were justifying oppression? Also, in this same early period in Gandhi's life in Africa, he was under the influence of some Christian friends who were trying hard to convert him.

Pyarelal, who served as Gandhi's secretary for many years, says that it was studying the writings of Tolstoy that helped the Mahatma find a way out of these dilemmas. Tolstoy's book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, helped Gandhi resolve his personal doubts, and provided him with what Pyarelal calls 'the science of the spirit'. Under the influence of this approach, Gandhi discovered a way to relate non-violence to social action. Pyarelal says that Gandhi responded with enthusiasm to both the writings, and the example of the Russian. Gandhi found in Tolstoy's life a key to living a life of protest against social evils. Pyarelal says about Gandhi:

So deeply was his thinking impregnated with Tolstoy's that the changes that took place in his way of life and thinking in the years that followed can be correctly understood and appreciated only in the context of the master's life and philosophy. It coloured his views not only on life and religion but on economic, social and political questions as well. Under its impact, India's ancient spiritual truth became to him instinct with a new meaning and provided him with ready made formulas that he needed in order further to refine the science that the master had propounded and to develop techniques of its extended application.²

Once he began his active struggle against the racism he encountered in South Africa, Gandhi chose Tolstoy Farm as the name for his first community. He took for granted that people from many diverse religious backgrounds would join him, as, indeed, they did. Gandhi always had co-workers from many religious communities working at his side throughout the more than twenty years of the South African struggle. He worked out his own theoretical ideal for this multi-religious approach; he believed that the basic truths of mercy and goodness were the same in all traditions. The issue for Gandhi became how any one person used

the symbols of his, or her, religious tradition in the context of an actual situation, like that of South Africa.

In other words, he believed that all the scriptures of the world contained similar teachings about non-violence, justice and peace. People from different religious backgrounds who found themselves in the same situation had to decide in that context what those symbols should mean. For example, Gandhi used the Qur'anic verse that one should respond to evil with good (41:34) as an equivalent of non-violence. Gandhi did not hesitate to quote the Qur'an often as an imperative to Muslims to work with him in combating racism and other evils. In 1907, Gandhi was appealing to the Indians in South Africa to resist an unjust law. He said:

We, therefore, entreat the other Indians to hold the honour of India high and to suffer all hardships rather than submit to the new law. We give below... what is said in the last section of the *Holy Koran*:

'Say: I submit myself to God who is the King of the whole world. He will save me from the clutches of Satan, of the wicked and of men.'

Let every Indian inscribe these words in his heart. This is the time to save ourselves from the clutches of timid men. The verse quoted above applies to all, be they Hindus, Muslims, Parsis or Christians. For there is only one Truth. And likewise, there is the same God over all. 'Gold will always be gold, though it takes on different names when it is made into ornaments.'³

The last quotation above is from the poem of the medieval Gujarati poet, Narsinh Mehta, who was one of the major influences on Gandhi's religious thought. This statement is a not untypical example of Gandhi's use of Qur'anic imagery in the context of the South African struggle. He regularly appealed to mixed audiences of Muslims and Hindus by quoting both the Qur'an and the Ramayana inter-changeably as imperatives to fight on the side of good against evil.

The Hindu reformer's approach to the issue of comparative religion was thus strongly marked by his South African experience. The impact of the oppressive racism he experienced there caused him to seek help wherever he could find it. Anyone who was prepared to join the struggle against the government's policies was

welcomed. The quality of the individual's commitment was the key issue.

How does all this relate Iqbal's thinking about the comparative study of the history of religion? What would the Muslim poet have thought about the 'science of the spirit' that Gandhi had taken from Tolstoy as a guide to thinking about the relationship of religious values and modernity? Could we use the phrase 'the science of the spirit' to characterise what Iqbal thought he was doing? Since Iqbal did not directly discuss the question, we have to leave it open, perhaps for future generations of students steeped in the knowledge of all three thinkers to ponder for themselves.

Tolstoy is not discussed in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. However, one of his books is in Iqbal's library. Even more significantly, the Russian mystic is a symbol in the *Javīd Nāmāh*. Tolstoy, in Iqbal's epic poem, bears witness against the corrupt Church that had supported the wickedness of imperialist oppression. In Gandhi's case, the Russian actually helped the Hindu thinker formulate his ideas. Tolstoy did not play a comparable role in shaping the direction of Iqbal's thought. Nevertheless, he is the figure the Muslim poet chooses to represent a Christian protest against imperialism. Gandhi and Iqbal seem to have heard a similar message from Tolstoy's life and thought; they both understood him to say that the materialism, violence, and greed of nineteenth century Europe had led to an oppressive civilisation. Tolstoy was heard by both these Indian reformers to urge that sincere religious people should resist materialism as a basis of civilisation.

The Hindu and the Muslim recognised something like 'a science of the spirit' in that both were seeking ways to energise their co-religionists. Each of them went through a complex process, similar to what significant reformers often endure; the process involves rejecting domination by the thought forms of an oppressive social order. To move against an oppressive status quo, energy and inspiration must be sought elsewhere. The young Iqbal had asked for such directive insight from the Himalayas.

When Gandhi in South Africa had felt an acute need for direction, he sought advice from his Jain friend back in India. This friend, Rajchandra, was a friend from Gandhi's youth. He was a Gujarati dealer in gems, and a poet. When Gandhi was bothered in South Africa by problems of trying to make sense of many different

religions, he wrote to his Jain friend for advice. The correspondence continued until Rajchandra died in 1901. The Jain advised Gandhi to take the *Bhagavad Gita* as a guide. Gandhi wrote:

Shri Rajchandra often used to liken different religions to pens or folds in which animals are confined for their protection. But a seeker after liberation seeks not protection but freedom. He has no need, therefore, to belong to any fold or to adopt any denominational label....

Personally I believe", Gandhi wrote, "that in relation to their respective devotees, all religions are perfect. So far as the rest are concerned, they are all imperfect.... In the words of Shrimad Rajchandra, therefore, it is unnecessary in our work-a-day world for anyone to give up his own religion and adopt another in order to attain liberation. Everybody can attain liberation by following his own. For liberation means complete freedom from all attachment and hatred and this is the common goal of all religions.⁴

In sum, Gandhi, from this time forward, assumed that all human understanding of religious teaching was imperfect, but that the ultimate goals of all religious teaching was the same. His thinking crystallised in the context of his intense involvement in South Africa with a life or death struggle against the racist policies of the government. His experience convinced him of the truth of what Rajchandra had taught him, namely that, in the context of an actual struggle against evil, it did not matter very much what the religious background of an individual was. What mattered was the readiness of that individual to gain strength and insight from his, or her, own tradition. In that context, many Muslims accepted Gandhi's leadership willingly.

When Gandhi returned to India during World War I, he continued to be guided by the same theories about religion and life. In the immediate post war period, he convinced many Indians, including many Muslims, to join him in a policy of active non-cooperation with the British. This was the time when he wrote asking Iqbal to become the principal of the Jama'i Millia Islamia.

We are thus left with the question--did Gandhi and Iqbal have similar ideas with respect to the basic truths of all religions? If they had similar ideas, why did they disagree? It is wise to avoid the temptation of leaping to conclusions too quickly with respect to these

questions. More students of the subject are needed who will study the thought of both these reformers in their contexts, and discuss together what insights they discover. The topic is one that requires a disciplined approach in which admirers of Gandhi and Iqbal will submit their views to each other in order to see if they agree. When discussing the religious insights of other people, it is always advisable to check one's ideas with a person representing the tradition in question.

Gandhi was not the only Hindu of his generation to attempt to reconstruct the religious thought of his people. Other Hindu poets and philosophers, such as Tagore and Radhakrishnan, for example, were more like Iqbal, in some respects, than they were like Gandhi. We are focusing on Gandhi here simply because he and Iqbal had in common that they were perceived as key religious leaders in the struggle to overcome the domination of the British.

Iqbal delivered his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* lectures in Madras in 1929; they represent the clearest source we have in terms of a systematic exposition of his mature thought. On Gandhi's side, the closest parallel would be his *Discourses on the Gita*; these were delivered in 1927, after the Mahatma had spent a quiet year of rest living in a village. The period of 1927-1928 represented for each man a time of reflection after the failures of the revolutionary struggles of the 1920s. Both these series of talks represent conscious efforts to explain how to relate religious values to the urgent problems confronting Indians, and all humanity, in the late 1920s. Each reformer was trying to help the members of his community find direction and purpose; they were doing this in a time of discouragement after the failures of the preceding efforts to get the British out of India.

In the *Discourses on the Gita*, we find that Gandhi also is giving new interpretations of traditional terms. Gandhi interprets the battle described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as a metaphorical contest between *dharma* (duty: serving good) and *adharma* (bad behaviour: serving evil). He wrote:

We should identify with Arjuna and have faith that Shri Krishna is driving our chariot.... Thus the meaning of the *Gita* on the commonsense level is that, once we have plunged into a battle, we should go on fighting. One ought not to give up the task one has undertaken....

The *Gita* does not decide for us. But if, whenever faced with a moral problem, you give up attachment to the ego and then decide what you should do, you will come to no harm. This is the substance of the argument which Shri Krishna has expanded into 18 chapters.⁵

Gandhi reads *The Bhavagad Gita* as a metaphor about the need to make right choices in concrete situations. The right choice is *dharma* and the wrong choice is *adharma*. He further explains that scripture should be interpreted in terms of the specific problems of the present age. Thus, in the twentieth century, the need to is to see the importance of labour. "The right *yajna* (sacrifice) for this age is spinning."⁶

Spinning means for him an economic system in which there is no social division in terms of work. No people should enjoy leisure on the backs of the others who do all the work.

Both Gandhi and Iqbal discuss Luther, perhaps because each of them thought of himself as a reformer. Gandhi wrote:

And then came Luther in Germany. He said that the others misinterpreted the texts, and that their lives were all deception. As the sun moves westwards, darkness follows close behind it, reaching almost as far as the sun but not quite; in this way, hypocrisy follows close behind holiness. Luther saw through all this. He plainly saw the superstitions and hypocrisies which flourished in monasteries. It is a strange law of nature that once men become accustomed to a certain thing they continue to do it through sheer inertia. In those days, they even burnt people alive. Those who believed in mortifying the flesh thought it their duty to curb the senses and to kill others who did not do so. Observing these evils, Luther went to the opposite extreme.⁷

Gandhi is saying that superstition and hypocrisy are bad, but that mortifying the flesh should not be given up for that reason. The sharpest disagreement between Gandhi and Iqbal would seem to be on the question of the self. Gandhi is in favour of mortifying the flesh.

In other words, he understands spiritual growth to mean escaping from the desires of the ego, and trying to reach an 'egoless' state of abandon. Iqbal thought this kind of language meant an abandonment of creativity, and an escape into passivity.

Iqbal said about Luther:

We are to-day passing through a period similar to that of the Protestant revolution in Europe, and the lesson which the rise and outcome of Luther's movement teaches should not be lost on us. A careful reading of history shows that the Reformation was essentially a political movement, and the net result of it in Europe was a gradual displacement of the universal ethics of Christianity by systems of national ethics. The result of this tendency we have seen with our own eyes in the Great European War which, far from bringing any workable synthesis of the two opposing systems of ethics, has made the European situation still more intolerable. It is the duty of the leaders of the world of Islam today to understand the real meaning of what has happened in Europe, and then to move forward with self-control and clear insight into the ultimate aims of Islam as a social polity.⁸

These two very different readings of the significance of Luther tell us quite a lot about Gandhi and Iqbal. Each was trying to revive the spirits of his co-religionists. Gandhi's imagination dwelt on the spiritual hypocrisy that the Reformation had challenged, and on the cruelties that some forms of Christianity had indulged in. He wanted his people to learn to oppose hypocrisy and superstition, and to have the courage to criticise bad practices done in the name of religion. However, he did not want them to go so far as to renounce asceticism and chastity as religious values.

Iqbal, by contrast, was thinking about the horrors of nationalism as expressed in World War I, and trying to get his people to see that one needed to relate religious values to the social order, if people were to avoid a repetition of the destructive violence that had broken out between the competing nations of Europe. He thought that the Reformation had gone too far in terms of taking religious values out of the public sphere. His hope was that the Muslims would prove to be the ones who could best lead the world back into a more sane social order.

The issues of similarity and difference between these two thinkers are complex. They were opposing many of the same things, namely, the British, materialism, spiritual inertia, depression of spirit, hypocrisy, intolerance, and so forth. They were urging many of the same reforms, such as freedom from domination, social justice, clear thinking, and tolerance. We cannot hope to do a comprehensive analysis here of all the issues that lay between these two. Such a

study ought to involve a joint effort by scholars familiar with both thinkers. However, we will try to highlight some specific instances where the two reformers differed. The way each of them understood the meaning of *religion* was an issue in itself.

Who is a Faqir?

Gandhi's follower, Vinoba Bhave, had learned Arabic and had written a study of the Qur'an. This latter book tells us how Gandhi and his followers understood the Qur'an. Vinoba Bhave referred to himself as a *faqir*; this is an Arabic word with connotations of consciously accepted poverty. It was a term widely used in India during the Middle Ages for wandering Sufis. No-one seems to have considered Bhave's use of this term for himself strange. This suggests that, in traditional India, the term was used in a general way for people who embraced poverty as a religious discipline.

Gandhi and Bhave seemed to have shared an idea about an ideal Muslim religious person as non-violent, humble, seeking to serve others, just and merciful. As Bhave's little book on the Qur'an indicates, he understood these virtues to be the values taught by the Qur'an.⁹ This perspective had its roots in past centuries of Hindu ascetics' experience of inter-acting with Indian Sufis. Gandhi and Bhave thought that a good Muslim of the present would have the same characteristics as a devout Sufi of the Middle Ages. They expected that such pious Muslims would respond gladly to working with the Hindu ascetics who wanted to serve the Indian poor. But Gandhi and Bhave apparently did not understand what might be called the neo-Sufism of Iqbal, which is perhaps to say that the impact of *The Secrets of the Self* had not resounded in their ears. Iqbal had been reacting strongly against the kind of Sufism that Gandhi and Bhave had admired.

Iqbal also used the word *faqir*, but he gave new meaning to it. In Iqbal's words:

Search, if you can forbear, the *faqr* that originated in Hijaz.
(Arabia) That *faqr* creates in man the godly virtue of being free
from all wants. Whosoever is in possession of this honorable *faqr*
is a *Ghazi* (warrior) even without a sword and a spear.

In it lies the wealth for the faithful; beseech the Lord to bestow
this *faqr* on you.¹⁰

Iqbal's ideal *faqir* is the Prophet Muhammad himself. The poet also thought that these same attitudes characterised the Prophet's

close followers such as Umar and Ali. Iqbal consistently refers to these first Muslims as persons self-consciously interested in serving the new truths that had come through the Qur'an. He believed they had been ready to sacrifice all material goods in the interests of working to make these new values known.

In his study of Iqbal's terminology, Muhammad Munawwar comments that many of the famous Muslim *faqirs* of the past had been men of scholarship who had acted as teachers, reformers and guides. Munawwar writes:

It is noteworthy that as long as there existed in the Muslim society the great men of the spiritual domain of *faqir*, the veritable pillars of courage and strength, the Muslims never wavered in fighting against all external hazards as well as in rooting out ignorance, misrule, greed, or unjust distribution of wealth. During the absence of these undaunted persons, on the other hand, there crept into Muslim society a kind of despondency and defeatism in all spheres of life. Says Iqbal:

As long as the *faqirs* stood in rows in the mosque for prayers,
They caught the emperors by their necks.

When that fire (of faith) died out, the Muslims slunk to the
monasteries.¹¹

The reason for this differing usage of the term, *faqir*, may be that Gandhi's ideas about the ideal Muslim were much more traditional than Iqbal's. Gandhi thought of a *faqir* as a selfless servant of the poor, whereas Iqbal saw the prophetic model as one who would act positively to transform social, political and cultural institutions. Iqbal's *faqir* was an activist out to change the world. Gandhi's *faqir*, like Vinoba Bhave, was to embrace poverty and to seek to change by persuasion. There is no ultimate reason why the two views should be mutually exclusive, but in the historical context of the Indian struggle from 1919 to 1947 to get the British out, the two perspectives became hostile to each other. Gandhi never seems to have recognised that a new kind of Muslim attitude to faith was emerging. For him, the traditional pious Sufi was the model of the good Muslim.

Will and Knowledge

Iqbal, in his doctoral thesis, had begun his discussion of the comparative history of religion by stressing that Islam emphasised *will*, whereas Hinduism emphasised *knowledge*. This style of contrast between 'Semitic' and 'non-Semitic' forms of religion was

common in western studies of comparative religion at the time when Iqbal was a student in Europe. Iqbal absorbed this way of thinking from Arnold, and from other scholars of Arnold's generation. He may also have felt that many past generations of Indian Muslim scholars had some similar ideas.

There are, certainly, significant differences between cosmological systems that portray time as endless repetition, and those that portray time as linear. The Indian traditions envisage repetition, whereas the Semitic ones stress movement from a beginning at a point in time towards an end. The Bible and the Qur'an both speak of creation and final judgment as the beginning and end of time. This insight into contrasting cosmological images has been characteristic of the work of Mircea Eliade, one of the greatest historians of religion of the twentieth century.¹²

Iqbal's approach was in harmony with the scholarship of his time. Many years later, however, we may be able to see that the typology was too simplistic.

If the Muslim poet-philosopher had thought more seriously about Gandhi as an authentic religious reformer, he might have realised, that, whatever else one might think about Gandhi, no-one should fail to see that this Hindu was dominated by an intense *will* to change the world. This obvious fact would not have fitted Iqbal's theory that Hinduism did not encourage *will* as a religious characteristic.

Scholarship in the comparative history of religion since Iqbal's time has moved away from using 'Semitic' and 'non-Semitic' as typologies to characterise religious traditions. Although the differences in cosmology that Iqbal had observed are certainly present, it does not automatically follow that every generation of Hindus will interpret these symbols in the same way. More recent scholarship acknowledges that all traditions contain within themselves a variety of perspectives, and that believers choose in their own contexts those elements from the past that they might use effectively in the present.¹³ At any time, a person in any tradition may select particular aspects from the complex tradition of his or her culture to affirm as meaningful in the present. Further, the conditions of modernity have meant that persons in all traditions have been developing new insights.

Though Iqbal talked about *will* as a characteristic of the Islamic tradition, it was *knowledge* that he affirmed as most essential for the

Muslims of his time. He wanted Muslims to learn to approach the problems of modernity with careful judgment and insight. His appeal to the jurists of the past was based on his confidence that the careful thinking of well-trained jurists was the best way to go about solving problems. No one wants cases to be evaluated by judges who leap to conclusions without careful consideration of the evidence. Iqbal did not advocate following literally the judgments of legal scholars of the past, but he did recommend studying those scholars as a way to learn how to think carefully and systematically.

In the actual situation of India in the 1920s and 30s, it was Gandhi who stressed *will* and Iqbal who stressed *knowledge*. Gandhi said: join the cause of independence and fight (non-violently). Iqbal said: no, stop and think what the goals are first! Many Muslims admirers of Iqbal wanted to know where they were going before they would move.

How to Reform one's own Tradition?

A further irony of this complex problem of inter-action between the Hindu and Muslim reformers is that Iqbal also thought that Muslim insiders should change their own traditions without involvement or pressure from outsiders. We discussed earlier, in chapter seven, Gandhi's strong insistence that Hindus must reform their tradition by themselves. Now we note that Iqbal felt the same about the needs of his people. He wanted cultural autonomy for Indian Muslims, either within provinces with majority Muslim populations within a federated India, or in an independent nation, because he wanted the Muslims to be free to develop their own culture in their own way.

As Gandhi was a reformer of Hinduism, so Iqbal was a reformer of Islam. Gandhi wanted the Hindus left alone to reform themselves, and Iqbal wanted Muslims left alone to work out their own problems. The poet-philosopher wanted his fellow Muslims to recognise for themselves that the basic principles of their religion should lead them to develop social democracy, a social democracy that would overcome the social injustices characteristic of the older feudal society in which he had himself grown up. One of his most memorable phrase is the 'spiritual democracy is the ultimate aim of Islam.'¹⁴

Iqbal and Gandhi were both highly sensitive to the feelings of their religious compatriots, and they well understood that effecting

change would be a delicate matter. Gandhi's problem was to change Hindu attitudes and practices with respect to caste, and to religious education. He had tried to invent new forms of religious education in South Africa, and he urged the development of the Basic Education scheme in 1937. He knew that Hindus needed to work on reforming themselves from within. He understood that they might well become more intractable and rigid if outsiders tried to change them.

From the perspective of the present, it seems tragic that neither Gandhi nor Iqbal appears to have recognised that the other wanted to reform his community without interference from outsiders. Iqbal knew that Muslim landlords would not easily yield their social and economic power, but he thought that proper implementation of the basic principles of Islamic law could compel them to do so. This means that he thought of the law as a tool for implementing social and economic justice. But, just as Gandhi wanted Hindus to change by themselves, so also Iqbal wanted Muslims to change by themselves.

Iqbal wanted Muslims to recognise that change was compatible with the basic values of their tradition. This is why the Muslim reformer thought that improved forms of religious education were urgently necessary. He wanted cultural autonomy for the Indian Muslims precisely because he thought that such autonomy would make them readier to change and develop. If the Muslims were to become a minority community in an independent India dominated by Hindus, Iqbal feared that they might retreat into sterile religious conservatism.

Iqbal thought of law and education as the most effective ways to implement effective social change. The poet-philosopher made his statements about Islamic law carefully as a way of indicating that the principles of the Islamic law were sound with respect to equality and justice, and that the future generations of Muslims should work out for themselves how to implement these values most effectively in reformed and modernised structures of Islamic law. But, clearly, Iqbal wanted the Muslims themselves to choose freely to change their laws and the political, economic and social structures of their society. He understood that pressure from outsiders would tend to make his people more rigid and unwillingly to change.

The Myth of Pan-Islam.

When Gandhi returned to India from his encounter with Iqbal and Ambedkar in London in 1931, he was again jailed. One finds the Mahatma reflecting in jail, in 1932, that Iqbal's poetry reflected a change for the worse in terms of Muslim readiness to work together with Hindus. Gandhi had read about the 1930 speech in the newspaper. He thought that speech meant that Iqbal was opposing the Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi's secretary, who was in jail with him, recorded the following comments. Gandhi said: "Other Muslims too share Iqbal's anti-nationalism; only they do not give expression to their sentiments."

Gandhi quoted as follows one of Iqbal's poems which the Hindu leader saw as a threat to national unity:

China is ours, and so are Arabia and India. We are Muslims, and the whole world is our native land.... Monotheism is the treasure deposited in our breasts. It is not possible to destroy us. O sky, we are not the people to be suppressed by untruth; you know because you have tested us a hundred times.... This song of Iqbal is as a stroke on the war drum; and the caravan of Islam is ready to march.¹⁵

Gandhi interpreted this poem as a threat. The Hindu leader seemed to think that the 1930 speech, and this poem, were similar hostile statements, intended to disparage the cause of Indian nationalism and independence. He quoted this poem to indicate that Iqbal was lost to the cause of Indian nationalism, and was now a menacing voice. It might be that Gandhi's personal encounter with Iqbal in London, an Iqbal accusing the Mahatma of unrighteous behaviour, may have deepened Gandhi's feeling that the Muslim poet was now an enemy. A similar deepening of distrust may also have developed in Iqbal's mind following that encounter.

It seems clear that Gandhi did not recognise that Iqbal understood his poetic images to represent an imperative to serve truth and social justice. Gandhi, from this time onward, seems to have thought of Iqbal as a reactionary advocate of some kind of pan-Islamic political agenda which would be incompatible with the goal of independent India. Gandhi and other Congress leaders, from 1930, onwards often referred to Iqbal as an advocate of pan-Islam. They apparently thought of this pan-Islam term as a reference to some dim Muslim hope of belonging to a new, huge, modern Islamic empire. The

phrase was used in the western press with this connotation of threat. The Congress view was that Iqbal had come back from Europe in 1908 preaching a message that all Muslims should leave India and join a new, huge, pan-Islam empire. This was the interpretation that was put on Iqbal's writings by most of the Congress leaders and the Indian socialists.

This pan-Islam notion was a distorted stereotype. Iqbal himself said in a press interview that the idea was an invention of the western press. He said:

The term Pan-Islamism has been used in two senses. As far as I know, it was coined by a French journalist and in the sense in which he used that term, Pan-Islamism existed nowhere except in his own imagination. I think the French journalist meant to give shape to a danger which he fancied was existing in the world of Islam. The phrase was invented after the fashion of the expression 'Yellow Peril' in order to justify European aggression in Islamic countries.

Later on, I think the expression Pan-Islamism was taken to mean a kind of intrigue, the centre of which was in Constantinople. The Muslims of the world were understood to be planning a kind of Union of all the Muslim States against the European States. The late Professor Browne of Cambridge University, has, I think conclusively proved that Pan-Islamism in that sense never existed in Constantinople or anywhere else.¹⁶

Thus, Iqbal considered the pan-Islam idea an irrelevant red herring. His own interest had been focused on designing ways of life for the Muslim future, rather than in returning to the Muslim past. As indicated in his first book on economics, Iqbal was very conscious of the reality of social, economic and political changes emerging out of the transition from a feudal economic and social order. Iqbal had not supported the ideal of the Ottoman Caliph as a vital symbolic head of a Muslim empire.

It is true that Jamāl al-din Afghānī had been one of the heroes, like Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, revered by Iqbal and his schoolmates back when they were in secondary school in Sialkot. The imperative for Muslims to throw off the imperialists everywhere in the world and to create new forms of Islamic civilisation was shared by many young Muslims in many parts of the Muslim world. They identified with their fellow Muslims who were striving to get rid of foreign

domination. But this did not mean that most of them envisaged any kind of united political entity. To call for reviving Muslim energy and purpose does not necessarily imply another Muslim empire. Iqbal thought the challenge meant the effort to create a number of different new Muslim nations, and to develop cultural autonomy for the Muslim within India. He thought that Muslims in the future would be citizens of many different countries, but that they would share certain basic values. He wrote:

It seems to me that God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members.¹⁷

Iqbal's ideal of the reformed Muslim life of the future was thus that Muslims would live in different countries, and hold different passports and so forth, but that they would share a common responsibility of working with others of like mind for common international goals of peace and justice. Iqbal considered nationalism a kind of idolatry of the national ego. He wrote: "Modern culture based as it is on national egoism is... only another form of barbarism."¹⁸

Iqbal wanted Muslims to avoid chasing after such a false idol.

Parallel Reform Traditions

Iqbal did not have time to think very much about the reforming tradition in Hinduism. Although the Muslim poet-philosopher was a representative of the reforming tradition in Indian Islam stemming from Sayyed Ahmed Khān, he seems not to have thought much about comparable developments in the Hindu tradition. He did not discuss the Hindu reformist tradition, stemming from Raja Ram Mohan Roy, as an effective tradition that would encourage the development of self-conscious and clear headed Hindu reformers. Just as Gandhi seems to have thought that Muslims would remain the same as the Muslims he knew, so Iqbal seems to have thought that the Hindus would stay the same as the Hindus he knew. Neither reformer seems to have paid much attention to the possibilities of change and development in the other tradition.

The Muslim poet-philosopher had tried to encounter other cultures in depth by going to their founding documents and sources. He was well informed about classical Hindu philosophy, as he was

well informed about the classical sources of western philosophy. But he and Gandhi both seemed vague in terms of distinguishing between the aggressive forms of revivalism in the other community, and progressive reform. Iqbal tended to see Hindu revivalism, as most other Muslims in North-West India did, as manifested particularly in anti-Muslim polemic. Gandhi also tended to equate Iqbal's reforming language with an anti-Hindu form of Muslim revivalism.

Iqbal's interest in reviving energy for Muslims did not mean that he was propagating a kind of separatist revivalism, although many Muslims and Hindus thought that was just what he was doing. Iqbal and Gandhi were both performing the complex juggling act of trying to balance the different balls of reforming one's own tradition, while at the same time affirming universal validity in all religious life. Neither succeeded in doing this with complete success, and neither understood the intent of the other. Both wanted their respective communities to separate for the purposes of internal reform, but they also wanted these reforms to lead to the development of attitudes of willingness to work with others for common goals.

The literary critic, Northrop Frye, says that there are two main types of effective metaphor. He says that the literary imagination is primarily a kind of model-thinking, an infinite set of possibilities of experience to expand and intensify our actual experience. Metaphor, he observes, is a bridge between consciousness and nature, a microcosm of language itself. Gandhi and Iqbal were model-thinkers, creative individuals using traditional language in new ways for the purpose of helping their respective peoples move more easily into a challenging future. Each of them was effective in devising metaphors that elicited response. Each had worked out his own symbolic world, his own mythology.

Frye comments that metaphor can be both universal and particular in its appeal:

A mythology is not a proto-science;... It is a structure of human concern, and is built out of human hopes and fears and rumours and anxieties....

There is primary concern and there is secondary concern... Primary concern is based on the simplest and baldest platitudes it is possible to formulate: that life is better than death, freedom better than slavery, happiness better than misery. Secondary

concern is what we call ideology, the desire of particular social group, or a class or priesthood or bureaucracy or other special interest within that group, to preserve its ascendancy, increase its prestige, or proclaim its beliefs. Every work of literature, as something produced for its own time, is in part an ideological document.... What we call classics are works of literature that show an ability to communicate with other ages over the widest barriers of time, space and language.... Surely this suggests that it is becoming a central task of criticism, in literature or outside, to try to distinguish the disinterested vision from the interested ideology.¹⁹

The metaphors of Gandhi and Iqbal are of both kinds, primary and secondary. Gandhi did not write poetry, but he often expressed his appeals for revolutionary change in metaphor. Frye's distinctions may help us see that Gandhi and Iqbal often used images to stimulate awareness of the importance of primary needs, such as, justice, peace, the reconciliation of opponents, and the transcending of older, more unjust social structures. When they used metaphors of primary concerns, each of these reformers appealed to many different kinds of people. However, it is use of the metaphors of secondary concerns by each reformer that have been sources of disagreement.

Nationalism

One of the greatest paradoxes about Iqbal's thought is that such a strong opponent of nationalism ended up revered as the founder of a new nation, Pakistan. In Nicholson's Introduction to his English translation of the *Secrets of the Self*, the author commented:

Notwithstanding that he (Iqbal) explicitly denounces the idea of nationalism, his admirers are already protesting that he does not mean what he says.... We cannot regard his ideas as typical of any section of his co-religionists. They involve a radical change in the Moslem mind, and their real importance is not to be measured by the fact that such a change is unlikely to occur within a calculable time.²⁰

This was written in 1922. Nicholson recognised that Iqbal's condemnation of nationalism was the aspect of his thought least intelligible to his fellow Muslims. It was also generally unintelligible to his fellow Hindus. Gandhi's inability to comprehend Iqbal's critique of nationalism was shared by many Muslims as well as by most of the Hindus of the time. At the time of a fierce struggle for

independence, most people seized the vision of 'their own nation' with zeal. Iqbal was very much the odd man out with respect to this issue. This was one matter on which he thought it might take a long time for people to understand him.

Why must reform be done at home?

Thomas Moore, the author who writes about the care of the soul, speaks of the need to nourish the soul with the particular. Souls, capacities to be spontaneously creative, develop best in an environment perceived as home, relaxed, accepting, nourishing in every respect. The well-nourished soul then becomes capable of moving creatively into the wider world. Our various traditions of religious language, poetry, architecture, music, devotional practice, and conceptualisation can all function as modes of soul-nourishing. The particular tradition gives and nourishes roots, and allows the branches to grow towards the sky, and towards recognition of the others who are also growing in their own ways.

If we think of the cultural tradition as the home where one retreats from outsiders to find refreshment and nourishment, it may be easier to understand why both these Indian reformers wanted their communities to reform themselves without interference from outside. All of us may want to change the insides of our homes from time to time, but no-one wants such changes imposed by outsiders. Changing or redesigning one's literal, and/or cultural home is a very personal form of creativeness. One is changing what one knows best, and therefore one tends to feel that any outsider would not usually be capable of giving help or advice, because the outsider could not have an equivalent depth of understanding.

Iqbal's Final Advice

Iqbal himself distinguished between a desire for cultural autonomy and nationalism. The first was a need to convey the cultural tradition to future generations through education and social institutions, whereas the second was the placing of the abstract ideal of the nation as the central ideal of a people. However, Iqbal seems to have been largely alone, in his time, in making this distinction. In the years just preceding his death, the poet was doing all he could to encourage the Indian Muslims to become self-consciously aware of their need to struggle for the maintenance of their cultural autonomy. His personal experience of the failure of the Round Table

Conferences seem to have made him feel that much more work needed to be done to energise the Muslims.

Iqbal made another speech in Lahore in 1932 to the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference. He explained there the reasons he had seen for the failure of the Round Table Conferences. He felt that the Congress was insisting too strongly on being the only representative voice for India. Iqbal wanted a much more pluralistic India, with the emphasis on doing justice to the variety of voices. He said to his Muslim audience:

I am grateful to you for the confidence you have placed in me at this critical moment; but I certainly cannot congratulate you on your choice of a man who is nothing more than a visionary idealist. Perhaps you think you need a visionary at this juncture; for where there is no vision the people perish.... To reveal an ideal freed from its temporal limitations is one function; to show the way how ideals can be transformed into living actualities is quite another.... The man who has got the courage to migrate from the former to the latter function has constantly to take stock of, and often yield to, the force of those very limitations which he has been in the habit of ignoring. Such a man has the misfortune of living in the midst of perpetual mental conflict and can be easily accused of self-contradiction....

Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man. It is my belief that Islam is not a matter of private opinion. It is a society, or if you like, a civic church. It is because present-day political ideals, as they appear to be shaping themselves in India, may affect its original structure and character that I find myself interested in politics. I am opposed to nationalism as it is understood in Europe, not because, if it is allowed to develop in India, it is likely to bring less material gain to Muslims. I am opposed to it because I see in it the germs of atheistic materialism which I look upon as the greatest danger to modern humanity... Yet that which really matters is a man's faith, his culture, his historical tradition. These are the things which in my eyes are worth living for and dying for, and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be temporarily associated....

Let me state the position as plainly as possible.... The British Government's present attitude, however, would show that they do not mean to function as an impartial holder of balance in India,

and are indirectly driving the Indian communities, which are mainly Hindus and Muslims, to a kind of civil war. We tried the majority community and found them unwilling to recognise the safeguards which we can forego at the risk of complete extinction as a nation determined to live its own life.... The Muslim community is thus brought to face the question whether it is in the interests of the community that their present policy which has so far obviated British difficulties and brought no gain to the community shall continue for any further period of time. This is a question for the open Conference to decide. All that I can say at the present stage is that, if you decide to discontinue this policy, your immediate duty is to prepare the whole community for the kind of self-sacrifice without which no self-respecting people can live an honourable life. The most critical moment in the history of the Indian Muslims has arrived. Do your duty or cease to exist....

The whole community needs a complete overhauling of its present mentality in order that it may again become capable of feeling the urge of fresh desires and Ideals. The Indian Muslim has long ceased to explore the depths of his own inner life. The result is that he has ceased to live in the full glow and colour of life, and is consequently in danger of an unmanly compromise with forces which, he is made to think, he cannot vanquish in open conflict. He who desires to change an unfavourable environment must undergo a complete transformation of his inner being. God changeth not the condition of a people until they themselves take the initiative to change their condition by constantly illuminating the zone of their daily activity in the light of a definite ideal. Nothing can be achieved without a firm faith in the independence of one's own inner life. This faith alone keeps a people's eyes fixed on their goal and saves them from perpetual vacillation....

Our ideal is well defined. It is to win in the coming constitution a position for Islam which may bring her opportunities to fulfil her destiny in this country. It is necessary in the light of this ideal to rouse the progressive forces of the community and to organise their hitherto dormant energies. The flame of life cannot be borrowed from others; it must be kindled in the temple of one's own soul. This requires earnest preparation and a relatively permanent programme. What then shall be our future

programme? I am inclined to think that it should be partly political, partly cultural.

Apart from the purely practical value of this proposal for the Muslims of India, we must remember that the modern world, both Muslim and non-Muslim, has yet to discover the infinite value of the legal literature of Islam and its significance for a capitalistic world whose ethical standards have long abdicated from the control of man's economic conduct.²¹

This statement is a further indication of Iqbal's lifelong adherence to the concerns he had first articulated from his reading of Adam Smith, namely how to devise ways for his people to move out of feudalism, and into a modern economy, without abdicating control over the ethical standards of life. He feared a totally immoral form of capitalism, one that would stress gain as the only desirable end, and that would be as ruthless as the Dutch and English East India Companies had been in destroying everything that stood in the way of the companies' profit.

Perhaps the person who best understood Iqbal's thinking on economic matters was Zakir Husain, a Muslim with a doctorate in economics from Germany. Zakir Husain had led the Jami'a Millia Islamia, the National Muslim University in Delhi, from the time of the failure of the non-cooperation movement to independence. He was one of the few Muslim leaders who understood and revered both Iqbal and Gandhi. After independence, he became the first Muslim President of India.

Zakir Husain wrote a book on capitalism that indicated economic concerns similar to those of Iqbal. Later, a special presentation volume was given to him on his seventy first birthday. One article in that volume by an Indian Muslim economist, Muhammad Shabbir Khan, is devoted specifically to the relevance of Adam Smith's moral ideas to the economic development of India. This article represents a point of view very much in accord with Iqbal's concerns as to how to change constructively from feudalism without falling victim to oppressive monopolies. The monopolies are most dangerous when they so manipulate society as to make criticism of their activities difficult or impossible.²²

The Movement towards Pakistan

As indicated in this 1932 speech quoted above, Iqbal, and most of the Muslim leaders were still thinking at that time about how to

achieve a constitution for an independent India in which, the poet said, Islam would be given a position that would enable the Muslims to develop freely in their own way.

Our ideal is well defined. It is to win in the coming constitution a position for Islam which may bring her opportunities to fulfil her destiny in this country.

Iqbal has again used the word *destiny* for his basic goal; this *destiny* should be to develop better forms of common life. For the Muslims to fulfil their *destiny* in the new India, they would have to reform their own social, political and economic structures of life. The goals of reform should be to implement structures that would get rid of all racial, caste and class barriers among the people. The people should hold in view the twin goals of development of the individual potentialities of all the citizens, and freedom from domination by political rulers, kings and religious authorities, priests, Sufi pirs, ulema. One could say that Iqbal's goal was continuous reformation, because the struggle to overcome domination never ceases. The whisperings of Satan, according to the Qur'an, are always present to tempt humans into desiring to control and to wound other humans.

However, it is quite possible that in India when this speech was given, non-Muslims, and perhaps some Muslims, too, may have understood the word *destiny* to mean some kind of divine right of Muslims to rule over others. The long history of Muslim political control in medieval India would tend to make Hindus suspicious of any talk of Muslim destiny. This is another instance in which Iqbal's intention was probably misunderstood by many.

Iqbal, in 1932, still seems to have been thinking about a federated India in which the member states would have autonomy over their cultural development. The speech quoted above indicates that he did not trust the British, and did not think it wise for Muslims to try to use British support as a weapon against Congress. On the other hand, he also thought the Congress had failed to give the Muslims the assurances they wanted.

The suggestions Iqbal made in this speech included developing a strong, unified national Muslim organisation, well funded. Then he suggested the formation of youth leagues, and well-equipped volunteer corps to devote themselves to social service, custom reform, commercial organisation, and economic changes, especially

help for the poor villagers of the Punjab. He wanted to the young people to organise themselves to help educate the peasants to help the latter escape being victims of money lenders. He wanted also to establish male and female cultural institutions in all the larger towns which would have nothing to do with politics. Some of these ideas about organising the people at all levels were similar to some of the organisations that had been developed in Turkey by the followers of Atatürk.

These institutes should be linked with the universities so that all the educational institutions would come to share a common purpose. Finally, Iqbal suggested an assembly of ulema who would be trained in modern jurisprudence in order to protect, expand, and reinterpret the law of Islam in the light of modern conditions, while keeping close to the spirit embodied in its fundamental principles. No bill related to the personal law of the Muslims should be passed without the consent of this body.

This speech represents the clearest statement we have of the mature Iqbal's political and social thought. One key notion is that Hinduism and Islam needed to be reformed separately. *The flame of life must be kindled in one's own soul*. Iqbal was concentrated on how the Muslims might go about reforming themselves. The implication is that the Hindus should reform themselves on their own.

Visit with Nehru

Nehru visited Iqbal at the poet's request in 1937. Over the years, Iqbal had written several times directly to Nehru, and he clearly thought he could hope for a degree of comprehension from this source that he would not get from Gandhi. Nehru was not only a fellow Kashmiri, with a considerable knowledge of, and love for Urdu poetry, but he was also himself a person who had written a significant study of Indian history, *The Discovery of India*.

Iqbal would not have agreed with all the perspectives of that book, but he was also very interested in intellectual history. Many of the books he wanted to write would have been histories of Islamic thought. This common interest in the on-going processes of historical development was one of the similarities in the modes of thinking of Nehru and Iqbal. We have Nehru's account of this 1937 meeting. Nehru says they liked each other, and enjoyed their conversation.²³ We can gather from Nehru's report that he personally knew that

Iqbal was not a voice of political or religious reactionary forces. The source of disagreement between these two very intelligent men, who liked each other, was atheistic socialism. Iqbal was much more worried about the dangers of militant atheism than Nehru was.

We know from Nehru's own writings that in the 1930s he was still an admirer of the Russian revolution, much more so than Iqbal was. Iqbal seems to have thought that several possibilities might occur if Nehru became leader of India. Nehru might make India into the equivalent of the Soviet Union; Nehru might cause a civil war in India between socialists and upper caste Hindus; Nehru would be defeated by the upper caste Hindus. These seem to have the options in Iqbal's mind in 1937. In none of these projected possibilities was there much room for the cultural development of the Indian Muslims in the direction of Iqbal's hopes. This seems to be why Iqbal rejected Nehru as well as Gandhi as a possible leader to follow.

Iqbal works with Jinnah

The next significant event occurred when the British held elections in 1937 to enable Indians to form provincial governments. They had passed a Government of India Act in 1935 which provided for the development of such new forms of Indian government. Jinnah visited Iqbal in his home in order to consult him about the up-coming elections. On May 8, 1936, Iqbal and others issued a statement acknowledging their confidence in Jinnah's leadership. Iqbal was increasingly ill and unable to participate very actively from this time forward.

In 1936, the Congress party won a considerable victory in provincial elections throughout India. As a result, the Congress leadership decided to form exclusively Congress ministries, and to try to wean the Muslim masses away from any other parties. The Congress set out to try to win support from the Muslim masses. It was the attitude and actions of the Congress leadership at this point that precipitated the Muslim leadership into a much more determined attitude. They felt that the Congress was deliberately trying to exclude them from adequate representation. The Congress was attempting to reach the Muslim masses, and so the Muslim League also undertook campaigns to organise the Muslim villagers and poorer people.

In the last four years of his life the poet was ill and not able to take much active part in events. Iqbal wrote eight letters to Jinnah in

the year 1936-37. Jinnah himself published these letters after Iqbal's death, and wrote a forward. Jinnah said:

The letters which form the subject of this booklet were written to me by the sage, philosopher and national poet of Islam, the late Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal,... a few months before his death.... I think these letters are of very great historical importance, particularly those which explain his views in clear and unambiguous terms of the political future of Muslim India. His views were substantially in consonance with my own and had finally led me to the same conclusions as a result of careful examinations and study of the constitutional problems facing India, and found expression in due course in the united will of Muslim India as adumbrated in the Lahore resolution of the All-India Muslim, League, popularly known as the 'Pakistan Resolution' passed on 23rd March, 1940.²⁴

These letters make clear that Iqbal never lost his interest in economics. His concern for the cultural autonomy of Muslims was linked with his concern that the Muslims must work for social justice among their own people. He wrote to Jinnah:

I have no doubt that you fully realise the gravity of the situation as far as Muslim India is concerned. The League will have to finally decide whether it will remain a body representing the upper classes of Indian Muslims or Muslim masses who have so far, with good reason, taken no interest in it. Personally, I believe that a political organisation which gives no promise of improving the lot of the average Muslim cannot attract our masses....

The problem of bread is becoming more and more acute. The Muslim has begun to feel that he has been going down and down during the last 200 years. Ordinarily, he believes that his poverty is due to Hindu money-lending or capitalism. The perception that it is equally due to foreign rule has not yet fully come to him.

The atheistic socialism of Jawaharlal is not likely to receive much response from the Muslims. The question therefore is:

How is it possible to solve the problem of Muslim poverty? And the whole future of the League depends on the League's activity to solve this question. If the League can give no such promises I am sure the Muslim masses will remain indifferent to it as before. Happily there is a solution in the enforcement of the Law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas. After a

long and careful study of Islamic law I have come to the conclusion that if this system of Law is properly undersold and applied, at last the right to subsistence is secured to everybody. But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states. This has been my honest conviction for many years and I still believe this to be the only way to solve the problem of bread for Muslims as well as to secure a peaceful India. If such a thing is impossible in India the only other alternative is a civil war which as a matter of fact has been going for some time in the shape of Hindu-Muslim riots.....

Also, the insertion of Jawaharlal's socialism into the body-political Hinduism is likely to cause much bloodshed among the Hindus themselves. The issue between social democracy and Brahmanism is not dissimilar to the one between Brahmanism and Buddhism. Whether the fate of socialism be the same as the fate of Buddhism in India I cannot say. But it is clear to my mind that if Hinduism accepts social democracy, it must necessarily cease to be Hinduism. For Islam the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam. The modern problems therefore are far more easy to solve for the Muslims than for the Hindus.²⁵

This statement indicates the pessimism Iqbal felt about the future of India. Since Iqbal himself was always talking about process and change, one might reasonably ask why he would exclude Hindus from the possibility of reformation and transformation? He does concede that Hindus will have to work with modern problems, although with difficulty. Iqbal knew, as a student of comparative religion, that all traditions change and evolve over time. But he seems to have thought that change would be very difficult for Hindus.

We will discuss Iqbal's epic about spiritual maturation, *The Javid Nāmah*, more fully in chapter ten. We will note that the Muslim poet commented, at the end of his voyage, that he was getting ready to engage suitably with Hindu poetry and philosophy. Thus, it is possible that Iqbal hoped that, once the federated India of his dreams came to birth, more serious mutual appreciation between Muslim and Hindu religious thinkers might develop.

In the earlier period of tension before the outbreak of World War II, not only was there not much communication between the spiritual leaders of the Muslims and the Hindus, there also was caricature on both sides of the other. Yet it was the outbreak of the war that was the decisive factor in eliminating the possibility of coming to a mutually satisfactory agreement.

If we ask, who was responsible for eventual failure of the Congress and the Muslim League to reach agreement, one answer might be Hitler. This is because, if the second World War had not broken out in 1939, it is not impossible that the various Indian parties involved in negotiating with the British might eventually have achieved a constitution for an independent India that would have been acceptable to all parties. Rajmohan Gandhi suggests that this might have occurred.²⁶

Iqbal's last public statement to his own community was a speech he gave on the radio on New Year's Eve, 1938, three months before his death. The tone indicates horror at what the poet saw going on in the world. He said that the modern age was proud of its developments in science, but that in spite of progress in understanding the forces of nature, tyranny was still manifest everywhere under the labels of democracy, fascism, communism and nationalism. The spirit of freedom and dignity in human beings was everywhere being crushed and trampled.

As I look back on the year that has passed and as I look at the world in the midst of the New Year's rejoicings, it may be Abyssinia or Palestine, Spain or China, the same misery prevails.... The governments which are not themselves engaged in this drama of fire and blood are sucking the blood of the weaker peoples economically. It is as if the day of doom had come upon the earth, in which each man looks after the safety of his own skin, and in which no voice of human sympathy or fellowship is audible.

The world's thinkers are stricken dumb. Is this going to be the end of all this progress and evolution of civilization, they ask, that men should destroy one another in mutual hatred and make human habitation impossible on this earth? ... Do you not see that the people of Spain, though they have the same common bond of one race, one nationality, one language and one religion are cutting one another's throats and destroying their culture and

civilization by their own hands owing to difference in their economic creed. This one event shows clearly that national unity too is not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationalism, colour or language. So long as this co-called democracy, this accursed nationalism, and this degraded imperialism, are not shattered, so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as distinctions of race, colour and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely, they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life, and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialize!

Let us therefore begin the New Year with the prayer that God Almighty may grant humanity to those who are in places of power and government and teach them to cherish mankind.²⁷

Thus Iqbal again says, and finally, that one of his greatest worries was the danger of irresponsible nationalism. The evils he had seen breaking out in 1914 in Europe had left an indelible imprint on his mind as to the wickedness of the idolatry of the nation state. He feared that such idolatry of the nation could mean that the citizens of the nation would be manipulated into hating other nations, and to sacrificing themselves blindly for the nation, as had happened in Europe.

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- ²⁴ *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, pp. 383-385.
- ²⁵ *Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, pp. 385, 386.
- ²⁶ *Gandhi, the Good Boatman*, p. 268.
- ²⁷ *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, pp. 226-228.

Chapter Nine

Legacy

Neither are we afghans nor turks
nor yet from the lands of centra asia
We belong to the garden, and descend
from the same ancestors
Forbidden unto us are the distinctions
of colour and race
Yes! We are the harvests of a new spring.

This is the verse that has been engraved on Iqbal's tomb, a simple and lovely monument placed directly in front of the great mosque in Lahore.¹ The tomb expresses eloquently the love his people have felt, and do feel for Iqbal and his work, and their recognition of the element of mystery in his elusive personality. I also think that we appreciate him better when we acknowledge the mystery. The *Sinai* experience, that which unveils the *Secrets of the Self* and *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, is individual, mysterious, and cannot be otherwise.

The reference to the garden is reminiscent of the earlier poem on the deaths of Ḥālī and Shiblī, who were symbolically portrayed as nourishers of the garden. This garden symbol suggests both the beginning and end of time, the source and final significance of life. Once again the affirmation is strong here that Iqbal affirms an end to racism. 'Harvest of a new spring' implies that the first Muslim struggle against kingship, superstition, and priesthood, carries with it the possibility of transformation in the future of the ways in which human beings live together. The garden suggests that humans may finally come to live at peace with each other.

Shortly after the poet's death in 1938, the Germans had invaded Poland, and the second World War broke out. Iqbal may well have

feared something like this, but he did not know exactly what would happen. War always causes chaos, so that no-one can know what is going to happen. The World War stopped the negotiating process for the independence of India. After the war, the British were too impoverished and weakened to be able to hold onto their Empire, and they pulled quickly out of the subcontinent. The two new nations of India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947. Bangla Desh became a new nation in 1972.

Iqbal was no longer a living voice in the affairs of the Muslims as they opted in 1940 to work for a separate nation. After the end of the World War, at the time of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, widespread violence broke out. When this occurred, Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah all tried to halt the killing. Iqbal's family sheltered some local Hindus during the rioting in Lahore.² But the events had escalated beyond the control of the leaders.

Saiyidain writes to Nehru

In the midst of the rioting and violence that attended the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the Indian Muslim educationist, K. G. Saiyidain, a person who had known Iqbal well, wrote an open letter to Nehru about some of the problems he foresaw. Saiyidain had decided to stay with India. He said:

You know more fully than I can possibly describe the extent and the intensity of the suffering which partition and the exchange of populations have brought in their train. But that is not the worst.... The tragedy is accentuated and problem of re-education made more difficult by the fact the most of them do not see both sides of the picture. They have deeply dyed communal glasses stuck over their eyes and these are so cunningly contrived that they show only the misdeeds of the 'other' community--which means *every* community except their own. Thus they imagine not only themselves but 'their' entire community to be innocent victims of a diabolical plot, hatched by the 'other' community to wipe them out.... This alarms me even more than the cold-blooded acts of inhumanity committed by goondas and hooligans. They have been able to get away with their misdeeds because the conscience of the communities *as a whole* did not revolt actively against them. It had become atrophied as a result of the poisonous propaganda to which it had been subjected....

How can this fire be put out? How can we help in putting it out? This has been the constant obsession of many of us who are connected with educational, literary and cultural activities and who have retained sufficient sanity to realize that we are *all* guilty and that it is less important to apportion guilt and assess responsibility than to fight against this menace to culture and humanity.³

Two generations later, Rajmohan Gandhi has acknowledged that his grandfather's intense concentration on the goal of nationalism has had some unfortunate consequences. He has written as follows:

Gandhi's nationalism was a truth for Britain and the West, for it bared the greed and vainglory that had masqueraded as the white man's burden. For India, however, nationalism was in the end a drug. It blinded Indians to the cruelties they were capable of perpetrating on one another.⁴

In some respects, Pakistan, since independence, has followed a similar direction to India in adopting nationalism as a creed. Iqbal had been afraid that nationalism might become a drug in exactly this sense, that the people might be led to revert to forms of tribalism in which the well-being of their particular communities would be seen as the be-all and end-all of life.

After the independence of Pakistan, Iqbal has been revered as a founding father of the new nation. He became known as Allama, great scholar, a title never used for him during his lifetime. An Iqbal Academy was established that has regularly published journals in English and Urdu. Many books have been written by friends and admirers who wished to convey the poet-philosopher's legacy accurately. Iqbal's thought has been particularly studied in philosophy departments, and has become an area of academic specialisation. There are organisations of Iqbal Academies in many different countries. An Iqbal Chair has been established at Cambridge. There are web sites about Iqbal. Every year, Iqbal Day is celebrated in Pakistan and through out the world by the poet's admirers. His works have been translated into many Islamic, Asian, and western languages.

However, legacy also means: 'what use have other people made of Iqbal's ideas?' To what extent has he been understood or misunderstood? This is a very large question, one deserving of a book in itself. We cannot deal exhaustively with this question here,

or with the political and social aspects of the issue. Pakistan has had an extremely complex history in its early years, as many new nations have had. We will not try to discuss the relationship of Iqbal's ideas to that complex history, except to note that debates about him continue. We will focus rather on religious education, since, as indicated by his journey to Afghanistan, this was the legacy that Iqbal himself cared most about. He wanted to build for the future, and he knew that building good educational institutions was one of the most important means to ensure hope for a better life.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith published in 1951, shortly after the independence of Pakistan and India, a little book entitled *Pakistan as an Islamic State*. Smith spent time in Pakistan after partition, and talked to many different kinds of people. His book reports on the diversity of ideas that he met in his conversations with Pakistanis at the time of the birth of their new nation. He gives his analysis of this diversity. He observes that a Pakistani friend told him that building an Islamic state was like holding the string of a kite lost in the fog. The kite was pulling and the person holding the string responded. But nothing more than that could be said as to where they were going.⁵

This metaphor is a significant key to Smith's own rejection of his earlier socialist perspective, because from now on, in all his books and writings, he says we always have to move in something of a fog—following the pull from above. The shocks of partition, and his discovery of the brutality of the Stalinist regime, had knocked out of Smith's head any certainty that he, or anyone else, could ever have a clear enough grasp of all the factors at work in any historical situation to be able to say that they knew exactly what forces were shaping history.

If one cannot know clearly about all the forces are shaping one's situation in life, what can one do? Smith suggests: hold the string of the kite and follow it; Iqbal, quoting Rumi, said: follow the scent of the musk deer.⁶ In philosophical language, this means to be aware of transcendent judgment on all that humans do. Or, as Iqbal would say, renounce *planning* and try to work with *destiny*. One could say that *destiny* is the kite. The thesis of this little book of Smith's is that Pakistanis found themselves, in 1947, in a completely new situation, with many terrible difficulties to handle, and not much to guide them. They were about to do something new; they had created a

nation explicitly for the purpose of providing Muslims a way to implement their values. Now they had to discover in practice what that meant.

One finds Smith's clearest language about his criticism of Marxism in this book. He was telling his Indian socialist friends why he had renounced that position. He wrote:

It is official Marxist doctrine that a person as such, 'man in general', does not exist; a person exists only as member of a social class. Consequently, an individual condemned as being 'an enemy of the working class' is regarded in U.S.S.R. as having literally no rights whatever, and is treated accordingly.... It is difficult to believe the stories coming out of the Soviet Union about treatment of those out of favour. Slowly, however, the outside world is beginning to discern the importance of transcendent ideals, and to realize that it is better to have ideals, even when not lived up to, than to repudiate them outright. It is important that practice be good. It is equally important that, when practice lapses, good ideals be acknowledged; so that there be something to which one can appeal... To recapitulate our argument, the people of Pakistan have chosen that their state shall be Islamic;... It is important that they pursue this, since it is their way of saying that it shall be good.... What happens in the country depends in a quite fundamental way on how the Muslims, in this new and disrupting age of ours, interpret their religion; on what visions and applications of truth and goodness they are able to rise to.⁷

In South Asia, moving forward after independence has involved difficulties caused by the growth of nationalism, and negative stereotyping, in both India and Pakistan. In Smith's later book, *Islam in Modern History*, he devotes a special chapter to the matter of the Muslims who remained with India. He indicates that they also would have to be creative, but with different problems to face. Their challenge would be to devise new ways for Muslims to come to terms with life in a secular state.

Iqbal's legacy has sometimes been interpreted as a justification for anti-rational enthusiasm. The Pakistani philosopher, Fazlur Rahman, has observed that some negative consequences have followed from too much mindless dynamism. He wrote:

The doctrine of activism and dynamism advocated by Iqbal has found such a tremendous response that the very considerable intellectual effort of which it was the result has been made to commit suicide in the process. Iqbal's philosophical legacy, has, therefore, not been followed, partly because of what he has said, but largely because he has been both misunderstood and misused by his politics-mongering followers.⁸

At its worst, this kind of uncritical dynamism, among students in particular, has had a negative effect on universities in Pakistan, India, and Bangla Desh. In Vali Nasr's book, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, the author indicates that Jama'at Islami student movement has played a large role in creating dissension in the academic environment in South Asia. This is because, when Islamic symbols are used to propagate a particular political ideology, the results are negative for the atmosphere in a university. Universities need to be conducive to open discussion of ideas; fixed ideology often works against freedom of expression. It has not generally been understood that Iqbal never used the words *ideology*, or *identity*. He did not use these words, nor did he think in this way. Poets are the most precise of all humans in their use of words. They mean what they say, and they chose their words carefully.

One major misunderstanding has been the notion that Iqbal was advocating a corporate self. As Vali Nasr indicates in his study of the life of the founder of the Jama'at Islami, Mawlānā Mawdūdī, the latter interpreted Iqbal's symbol of selfhood (*khudi*) and the reconstruction of Islamic thought, to mean that the Islamic system should be distinguished from other systems (isms).⁹ From this perspective, selfhood is viewed as corporate, allegiance to a system, rather than as individual. Once selfhood is understood to be corporate, then intellectual life takes the form of defending one system against other systems, rather than by seeking individual insights into how to solve problems.

In Iqbal's final years, he had been hoping to establish an institution in which his perspective on the study of Islamic thought could be implemented. He had written to the al Azhar in Egypt asking for a scholar to come who was well trained in both Islamic and Western thought and history. Egypt was not able to provide such a person. Mawdūdī was the author of many polemical articles and books after his first provocative book, *al Jihād fīl Islām*, had been

published in Delhi in 1927. As part of this quest for a scholar, Mawdūdī had been invited to meet Iqbal in Lahore in 1937. Mawdūdī's followers have sought to legitimate his claims to be a disciple of Iqbal by indicating the Iqbal wanted Mawdūdī to head up the educational institution that Iqbal wanted to establish. Nasr's study, however, indicates that Iqbal was guarded in his conversation with Mawdūdī, and that he did not approve of him as a leader for the institution he wanted to create.¹⁰ Iqbal died a few months after this meeting.

Many of Iqbal's friends and admirers in the early years of Pakistan have worked in diverse ways to express their understanding of his intentions. However, no-one has yet managed to design and to implement in a large scale fashion the modes of religious education both for specialists, and also for the people at large, that Iqbal thought would be essential if the Muslims were to become creative in significant ways again. The issue of building good institutions for the training of students who could work effectively in rethinking the relevance of Islamic values to the modern world had been at the centre of Iqbal's mind throughout his life.

Some of the revivalist leaders, who have thought they were following Iqbal, have rejected Sufism as retrograde and irrelevant to their project of immediate world transformation. In so doing, they have misrepresented the poet. Iqbal's own complex relationship with traditional Sufism meant that he rejected the traditional authority structure of guide and disciple; he would not accept the authority of a *pir*. However, Iqbal thought that Muslim individuals needed to seek wisdom through encounter with the teachings of the past. It may seem paradoxical to assert that one refuses the authority of a *pir* while affirming the need for exposure to the spiritual wisdom of the Sufi tradition.

The solution seems to lie in Iqbal's own experience of the teacher of Arabic and Persian in his secondary school, Moulvi Miir Ḥasan. This is the model of religious education that lies at the root of Iqbal's notion of how to educate the Muslims of the future. Young Muslims need to know as much as possible about their own cultural tradition, and they also need to affirm the freedom of each of their consciences. They can and should decide for themselves, individually and corporately, how they will use the insights that they gain from their appropriation of their own cumulative tradition. But

they can only hope to do this well when they have been taught to value the insights of their magnificent poetic tradition.

Katherine Ewing in her book, *Arguing Sainthood, Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Islam*, has indicated that the role of Sufism has continued to be a debated issue within Pakistani society. Following their understanding of Iqbal's criticisms of the traditional Sufi authority structure, the governments from Ayub Khan onwards have tended to take over the administration of the major shrines, thus undercutting the financial benefits that some of the Sufi leaders had gained from the shrines. The government department set up to administer the trusts have also been issuing pamphlets about Sufism. For example, a newspaper article spoke of one of the Sufi leaders of the past as an exponent of the Islamic socialism which Iqbal and Jinnah had advocated.¹¹ Efforts have been made to make the celebrations at certain key shrines national events. Research centres and libraries were set up at several major shrines to encourage scholarly interest.

How to train religious leaders

Since Iqbal consciously spoke of himself as a poet of the future, it is not surprising that many of his insights have not as yet been fully developed or implemented. He had wanted cultural autonomy for Muslims primarily because he had hoped that a better intellectual training in their own tradition might enable them to devise more effective forms of social, economic and political life. He had been consciously attempting to advocate a reformed system of religious education for the Muslims of the future.

A century earlier, the Muslim reformer Sayyid Ahmed Khan had recognised the disasters that had come to an earlier generation of activist Muslims who had tried to stir up Muslim religious warriors to fight in the 1830s. The leaders of that group of activists were killed in battle with the Sikhs. Sayyid Ahmed Khan had been vividly aware of the dangers of effervescent activism. The Revolt of 1857 had frightened him, because he had seen Indians trying to fight a superior power with inadequate weapons, and bringing disaster on their heads by doing so. The fear of this kind of mindless activism was one of the driving elements behind his efforts to convince the Indian Muslims that they must become as well educated as the British.

Sayyid Ahmed Khan had wanted to educate Muslims to think through their problems with adequate intellectual tools. This is a key

element in Iqbal's heritage, and one reason why he did not opt for mindless activism during the time of the Khilafat movement. When Gandhi was talking about the need for committed will in the 1920s, Iqbal, like Tagore, was talking about the need for Indians to become better educated. Iqbal had earlier written a poem when he visited the grave of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān in the yard of the Mosque at Aligarh. From the tomb-stone, he felt the power of advice coming to him, advice to work for new vision and fire, to refuse to revive old and useless ideas, and to face the future with courage. Iqbal understood that the revival instigated by Sayyid Aḥmed Khān was a revival of courage linked with forward looking imagination. What was dead in the past must be abandoned. Iqbal knew that this stance of the earlier reformer had stirred up much controversy; he understood that his calling was to do the same.¹²

Iqbal's position on democracy and law is sometimes characterised as modernism. He wanted the Muslims to have the autonomy to develop their own law in terms of their perceived needs, but he wanted this done through an elected parliamentary body. His intention was that there should be high standards of education in the physical and social sciences, and the humanities.

In addition, all citizens should have a good training in the Islamic tradition, so that they could vote in an enlightened manner. They should all have a similar educational background so that they could work together constructively. *Ijmā'* (consensus), is one of the traditional pillars of Islamic jurisprudence. In the past, the consensus has been that of the scholars trained by the same curriculum developed in the tenth century. As with the other words, *khudī*, and *taqdīr*, Iqbal also changed the connotation of this word. For him, *ijmā'* meant that all the adult citizens should take part in the decision-making processes relating to the nation's life.¹³

The reform of religious education was Iqbal's most basic interest. Given that he wanted all the Muslim citizens to take part in thinking about the future direction of their nation, it follows that they would all need an education adequate enough for them to make sensible decisions in using their voting rights. Iqbal wanted the Muslims of the future to have the same kind of thorough training in the knowledge of the Qur'an that he had been given by his father, and also to have very sophisticated understanding of the modern world

and its problems. He trusted that, if the Muslims were educated in this way, their judgments would be sound.

Unlike Tagore, Iqbal was not able to design and work for the ideal university of his dreams. All the books he wanted to write were aimed in the same direction of giving guidance for the future development and reconstruction of Muslim thought and practice. He was attracted by the notion of writing a history of Muslim religious thought in the context of the history of the world as a whole. Another projected volume was to be a history of the intellectual development of Sufism.¹⁴ All these imagined projects were intended as source materials for the intellectual training Iqbal hoped to encourage. He envisaged a new kind of religious education so that Muslims, yet unborn, would be given the intellectual and spiritual resources to be able to learn to think in the way that he did. As a good teacher, he wanted to train students to think for themselves. However, he wanted them to think after they had absorbed, as he had done, all they could learn about their own tradition, and about the problems of life in the present.

Iqbal wanted the Qur'an, Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic history all to be studied within the context of an understanding of the religious history of humanity. He wanted to write a history of Islamic jurisprudence in this way, a history which would show how Muslim legal thinking had developed in the contexts of particular social, economic and political contexts. One reason for the necessary rethinking of Islamic law is precisely that the judgements of past jurists may no longer serve when the context and the problems have changed. The example of the Caliphate is one clear instance of this problem. Centuries of jurists had argued for the necessity of this institution, but under the conditions of the twentieth century, these old forms of legal reasoning no longer applied. Fazlur Rahman also tried to fulfill some of Iqbal's intention in this respect in his book *Islamic Methodology in History*.

The psychology of religious experience was one of Iqbal's basic interests throughout his life. He hoped to be able to discuss some of the psychological aspects of Sufism within the context of a comparative study of mystical life and thought.¹⁵ This was an interest he had worked on in his doctoral thesis, and that remained with him. He knew that a highly sophisticated modern scientist like Whitehead could still be a religious man. He wanted Muslims to learn to be able

to combine rigorous intellectual discipline with a personal readiness to broaden their levels of awareness through prayer and religious discipline. Religious life, in his view, should be primarily aimed at expanding consciousness.

In 1925, Iqbal had written a letter to the Secretary of the All Indian Muhammad Educational Conference in which he expressed his ideas as to how the Muslim religious leaders of the future should be educated. He clearly thought that the transformation of the curriculum by which the religious leaders were trained was a matter of the highest priority if the Muslims were to be able to create the kind of society he envisaged for the future. He wanted research scholars to be trained to investigate Muslim history and to focus particularly on the relationship between Islamic culture and modern knowledge. In his view, the roots of modern culture lay partly in earlier Islamic culture.

Religious leaders were needed for the spiritual needs of the community, but the spiritual needs change as the social conditions of life change; the religious leaders needed to have a comprehension of the changes in question. Iqbal wrote:

“Spiritually, the older theology is, generally speaking, a set of worn-out ideas; educationally, it has no value in view of the rise of new, and restatement of old problems. What is needed today is intellectual activity in fresh channels and building of a new theology and *kalam*.”¹⁶

His intended curriculum would include a thorough grounding in mathematics, science and philosophy as a preliminary training for those who hoped to do advanced research in Islamic Studies. Those who hoped to become jurists needed a sound comprehension of the society they hoped to influence through their guidance. Iqbal wrote as follows about how to train the Muslim jurists and religious leaders:

In view of the fact that the whole system of Mohammedan Law stands in need of constructive readjustment, we should give them a thorough grounding in modern Jurisprudence and principles of legislation and perhaps also in modern economics and sociology.... The present state of the administration of Mohammedan Law in this country is simply deplorable and there are difficulties which can be solved through legislative agencies only.¹⁷

The core idea of this curriculum is that students who intend to become Muslim religious leaders need to study economics and sociology first, in order to discover what the issues and problems of the modern world are. They should then go on to study the history of Muslim theological, philosophical and legal thinking in the context of the problems of the past. Students should learn to recognise how Muslims of the past have used their consciences to develop as best they could answers to the problems of their own times. Past ideas and institutions need to be understood as structures dependent on the contexts in which they were developed. What served in a past eras of history may no longer be viable in a changed situations.

Once this is understood, students should be better able to make decisions in the context of the actual problems of their time. Such decisions should always be rooted in the basic intention to create better institutions for the development of a society, and a world, in which all could flourish. Economics and sociology are necessary as preliminary to thinking about the future, because solutions to actual problems require that the problems be clearly understood first. The solutions follow later.

Iqbal and the role of women

There has been some dispute as to whether Iqbal envisaged changes in the social roles of women in his community. Should women also flourish in new ways in the Islamic cultures of the future? In some respects, Iqbal was very much ahead of the ideas of other members of his Indian Muslim contemporaries. In other respects, he was much like the rest of his milieu. In family matters, he tended to be respectful to the values of his parents, and to wish to live the kind of harmonious domestic life typical of his culture. We noted in chapter one that he asked his mother to approve of the woman recommended for his wife. On the other hand, he also accepted as friends the women in his culture who were opting for more education.

In her historical analysis of changes in attitudes towards women in South-Asian Islam, *Secluded Scholars*, Gail Minault has discussed the processes at work over time in the slow social changes, and the intellectuals who advocated such changes. The processes included gradual development of educational institutions for women from the late nineteenth century onwards. The *Anjuman Himāyat i Islām*, the organisation that Iqbal had been involved with in Lahore since his

student days, had undertaken to promote schools for girls among its other reforming activities. The poet, Hali, had been one of main Indian Muslim advocates of improvement in the situation of women in his community. The status of women had steadily been changing over time as a result of the increase in the opportunities for education available to them.

Iqbal had not been at any stage of his life one of the active promoters of better educational and social opportunities for women. The issue was not one of his basic concerns. On the other hand, he was not an opponent of education for women. When Atiya Faizee told Iqbal she wanted to start a women's branch of the Muslim League, he advised her to keep the control of the organization in the hands of women.¹⁸ The poet understood that women must organise themselves and not let men control the organisations, if they were going to effect serious change. This is an insight that all the effective women's organizations in all cultures have learned to be essential. I think we can take this to mean that Iqbal was enough of a serious democrat to recognise that he was not the one to lead women into a different future, but that he knew that they had the right to organise themselves. The creative women of his own culture, such as Atiya Fayzee and Sarojini Naidu, got on well with Iqbal, and understood that he appreciated their intelligence.

Fazlur Rahman has effectively argued that the Qur'an promotes the equality of males and females in their fundamental relationship with God.¹⁹ But even Fazlur Rahman has seen Iqbal's negative image of the cold Martian woman of the *Javīd Nāmāh*, a woman advocating power for women and no love for men, as a 'wholesale rejection of Western social ethics'.²⁰ It is true that this cold Martian tells the Eastern women that to be the 'beloved' is to be oppressed. In a way, this is a female Satan. But, as a Satanic image, this woman is evil because she cannot love, and does not want love in society. The image is an affirmation that a society without love is contrary to *destiny*, the potentialities of humanity. A male unable to love would probably be a less effective image. Ultimately, however, lovelessness is an evil that transcends gender. Iqbal tends to think that it is the women who keep the possibility of love alive. Thus, he is suggesting that, if the women give up on love, the society is in serious trouble.

Many of the women reformers in Pakistan's subsequent history have recognised that Iqbal's way of thinking has been helpful and

useful for them in their efforts to change Pakistani society. A commission was set up about ten years after independence to study the possibility of changes in the Marriage laws. *The Family Laws Ordinance* was promulgated in 1961 as a result of the Commission's recommendations. The women authors' of the book, *Women of Pakistan*, a history of women's the activities of the organizations in the new country, have quoted Iqbal to the effect that 'each generation guided but unhampered by the work of their predecessors should solve their own problems'.²¹ This was the perspective that shaped the views of the women members of the committee that worked to reform the marriage laws.

The Muslim women activists in the early years of Pakistan were members of families which were very familiar with Iqbal's ideas. They took for granted that the *Secrets of the Self* applied to them as much as it did to their brothers. The *Sinai* image implies no dominance of any human person over any other human person. This applies to females as to males. Iqbal was not attempting to lead Muslim women, not least because he understood that they must lead themselves into whatever changes they wanted in their society. He just wanted them to understand, as the males must understand, that to create a society without love would be chasing mirages in desert.

Liberation Theology

With the passage of time, Iqbal's influence has been spreading throughout the Muslim world. Muslim liberation theology has been developing in several parts of the world. The Iranians have had direct access to Iqbal's thought because much of his verse was written in Persian. The contemporary Iranian reformist philosopher, 'Abdul Karim Suroush, has acknowledged the debt he owes to Iqbal. Suroush was a supporter of the Iranian revolution of 1979, and one of the leading intellectual leaders of the time. Subsequently, Suroush has modified his position, and has been arguing a point of view much like what Iqbal meant by spiritual democracy.

An example of Suroush's thought is a lecture he gave at McGill in 1995 entitled *Text in Context*. Suroush says that all human understanding of religion is necessarily human, including interpretation of scripture and religious law. This means that human understanding is conditioned by the contexts of the persons in question. Suroush acknowledges that Iqbal has made an important contribution to the Muslim understanding of this process of changes

in interpretation because of the poet's insistence that medieval forms of Muslim understanding of scripture had been conditioned by Greek ideas.²²

This form of liberation theology insists that the meaning of the Qur'an for a particular time and place will be shaped by the possibilities and challenges of that situation. Believers in all ages should steep themselves in knowledge of the Qur'an, take part in regular practice of the pillars of Islam, and use their minds and hearts to affirm the relevance of the Qur'anic values to their own situations. This emphasis on the context means that traditional forms of religious education are not enough in themselves to prepare Muslims to judge how best to implement Qur'anic values in response to contemporary problems. The contemporary problems are not the same as the medieval ones, and therefore these current problems must be understood by all the people together who are affected by modern challenges and possibilities. The way the Qur'an was understood centuries ago is not necessarily helpful for the present. The Qur'an has to be understood afresh by each generation.

Another instance of similar thinking comes from South Africa. In his book, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, Farid Esack explains the thinking of the group, *The Call of Islam*, that was formed to organise Muslim support for Nelson Mandela at the time when the African National Congress leader was still imprisoned. Esack explains that he grew up in a very poor South African setting in which the poverty was shared by the non-whites who often helped each other. He managed to get a scholarship to study in a Tablighi Jama'at madrassah in Karachi, where he spent eight years gaining a very traditional and conservative form of Muslim religious education.

After receiving this traditional education, Farid Esack opted to try to study religious history and thought from a different and more modern perspective. He went to the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian Relations at Selly Oak College, in Birmingham, England. He developed further his way of thinking about Islamic values and society, and went back to South Africa where he became one of the leaders of the *Call of Islam* movement. They supported Nelson Mandela. In this context, Esack and other Muslims struggled actively against the racist policies of the South African government, were harassed, imprisoned, and threatened. They worked out a

position emphasising the Qur'anic imperatives to struggle against injustice in a specific context.²³

These Muslim liberation theologians emphasise praxis, namely that religious insights become serious when they are internalised and put into practice. One sets out to take action in the light of a value, such as racial justice, that one believes is right. By fighting for the value, and getting hurt in the process, believers discover that the significance of the value is strongly increased. Liberation theology has discovered that when believers experiment with implementing values, then they come to understand those values. Justice is best understood when an active struggle is undertaken to fight against specific injustice. Farad Esack also discovered that the traditional modes of Muslim theological training were not adequate to help young Muslims understand how to struggle against the real problems of the modern world.

A third instance is Asghar Ali Engineer. In India since independence, the conservative religious leaders have exercised a major role as spokesmen for the Indian Muslims community as a whole. This has not been the case to the same degree in Pakistan, or Bangla Desh. Indian Muslims have not been able to implement reforms in the Marriage Laws comparable to what took place in the two other South Asian Muslim societies. The fact that the Indian Muslim community is conscious of its status as a minority has tended to encourage reliance on the more traditional religious leaders.

In this context, Asghar Ali Engineer has been a voice attempting to articulate the on-going relevance of the reforming tradition begun among Indian Muslims by Sayyid Aḥmed Khān, Shibli, and Iqbal. Muslim liberation theology emphasises the need to struggle in specific contexts against injustice.²⁴ Asghar Ali Engineer has been actively studying the problems causing communal violence in India.

In other parts of the world at the end of the twentieth century, many persons are thinking about what to do to end negative stereotyping of other people's religions. The Palestinian leader, Hanna Ashrawi, has observed that one of the most helpful ways of beginning the process of overcoming the past heritage of negative stereotyping between Jews and Arabs has been the use of television programmes designed by a joint committee of Israelis and Palestinians for young children. These programmes follow the Sesame Street model. It has been demonstrated that children young

as three and four already absorb the negative stereotypes of their culture.²⁵ Programmes of this kind help overcome the fears of the other, and tend to work against the dangers of children growing up hating the other.

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⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Pakistan as an Islamic State*, p. 66.

⁶ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 73.

⁷ *Pakistan as an Islamic State*, pp. 87-99.

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⁹ Syed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, p. 156.n.3.

¹⁰ *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 34-37.

¹¹ Katherine Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*, p. 72.

¹² *Call of the Marching Bell*, pp. 108, 109.

¹³ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 138-140.

¹⁴ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 101-115.

¹⁵ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 112-115.

¹⁶ *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 234-237.

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Chapter Ten

Moving Towards Eternity

View the world otherwise and
it will become other

I myself came to studying Iqbal because of influences from Jawharlal Nehru, and from Wilfred Cantwell Smith. The history of the British Empire, that I had studied in a Canadian high school, had emphasised the good things the British had brought to many parts of the world. I happened to read Nehru's *Discovery of India* just after graduating from high school. I still remember the stimulating shock of reading that book, and my realisation that my education had neglected to teach me much. Nehru showed me the other side of what the British had done.

For this reason, I think I see why Iqbal put Nehru in his poem, *Javid Nāmah*, as one of the voices that should be heard by the young people of the future who want to understand the world they have inherited. Nehru taught me not to look at history from the perspective of any one culture exclusively. Nehru, and his father, are in the *Javid Nāmah* as voices of brave men who were willing to give up their wealth and prestige in order to fight on behalf of the dispossessed.

I met Smith at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, in 1953 when I began to study comparative religion with him. He had established the new Institute of Islamic Studies in this university; he was also attempting to create a new model for the study of the comparative history of religion. He was motivated partly by his experience of the violence that had attended the creation of the two new nations of Pakistan and India. Smith had been teaching in Lahore from 1940 to 1946. He had been absent from Lahore in 1947, and 1948, but had returned in 1949. He has written:

One of the things that has burned itself most deeply into my consciousness is the Hindu-Muslim cataclysm of 1947, the time of the partition of India; the terrifying upheaval of hatred and violence, when ten million persons were uprooted and perhaps one million were massacred, many brutally.¹

This experience drove Smith back to Iqbal, and to a renewed seriousness in thinking about faith. At about the same time, Smith discovered, as did many other western intellectuals of his generation, many unpleasant truths about the policies of the Stalinist regime in Russia in terms of stifling dissent with brutality. In his introduction to his book, *Islam in Modern History*, published in 1957, Smith explained that he recognises that his earlier socialist theories about the class bases of Indian Muslim life had been too simplistic. He continues to study developments in the Islamic world, but no longer does so from a Marxist perspective.

Smith was invited back to Lahore in 1974 to give a lecture in the series of Iqbal Memorial Lectures that were sponsored by the Punjab University. He said:

When the invitation was received, I was deeply moved. Far from its being a formal matter, it was for me something personal and gripping.... You can little guess how much this had meant to me.²

Smith said he had tried to pay honour to Iqbal, not by writing explicitly about the poet-philosopher's life and thought, but by receiving inspiration from him, and by applying his mind to the same problems that had concerned the Muslim thinker. Subsequently, Smith has become one of the most significant innovative thinkers and institution builders in North America, and in the world, in the area of the comparative history of religion as an academic discipline.

After establishing the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill, and serving as Director of that Institute for many years, he went on to become Director for Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. He has published nine major books, as well as many articles and chapters in other books. His writing is always directed towards refining the ways in which religious life is understood. One of his books, *The Faith of Other Men*, was broadcast over the national radio in Canada, and has been influential in arousing interest in world religions. It has been reissued with the title *Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*.

Many of his Smith's admirers do not know that one of the major sources of his inspiration was Iqbal. In this respect, Iqbal's own perspective on comparative history of religion, as an academic discipline, has entered into the main stream of university life throughout the world through the influences particularly of Smith, and of Fazlur Rahman. Both of these scholars have tried to convey something of Iqbal's understanding of the Qur'an to the wider world. Many of their students in different parts of the world are carrying on the imperatives and concerns of their teachers.

Smith acknowledges that he had learned to think about Islam through Iqbal's eyes. He says that reading *Bāng i Darā* (*The Call of the Bell*) enriched his imagination, deepened his vision of the world, and shaped his understanding not only of what it might be to be a Muslim, but what it might be to be a human being. He told his Lahore audience, in 1974, that they could be sure that he, Smith, would understand much less about human existence if he had not been stirred and stimulated by Iqbal. In particular, Iqbal influenced Smith's understanding of the complex relationship between faith and reason, a subject addressed at length in many of Smith's books. Smith's category of *faith* resembles Iqbal's *Sinai*.

Faith is something that people do more than it is something that people have; although one may also say that it pertains to something that people are, or become. The Qur'an presents, in reverberantly engaging fashion, a dramatic challenge wherein God's terror and mercy, simultaneously, are proclaimed to mankind, whereby we are offered the option of accepting or rejecting His self-disclosure of the terms on which He, as Creator and Ruler of the world and of us, has set our lives. What the Qur'an presents is a great drama of decision.³

Smith's perspective on the relationship of Islam and Christianity is stated as follows:

So far as concerns my own personal case, I prefer diffidence and leave the issue in God's hands; but so far as concerns our two communities, Muslim and Christian, I affirm with conviction that corporately we both have faith. The system in which we conceptualize our relation to God, formalize it, moralize it, differ; but that relation itself, I make bold to say, obtains in both cases, and is sure.⁴

Faith and Belief

Smith says he was agog when he realised that *imān*, the word for *faith* in Arabic, is not the same as the word *belief* in English, at least as the word *belief* as understood in the twentieth century. This became a key element in his subsequent writing. He argued that current usage of the word *belief* tends to mean commitment to abstract statements. This kind of commitment tends to separate people. Much contemporary seeking for *identity* presupposes that each of us finds some abstract statement about *belief* and then hangs his, or her, *identity* on that statement. We look for a team to join.

This type of *identity quest* is very different from going to the mountains, as Iqbal had done, to seek direction. Iqbal did not use the word *identity*. He tells us that contemplating the mountains gave him insight into the potentialities of human beings to transform the conditions of their existence. Such an insight is a challenge to discover, and to grow, rather than an invitation to join any particular team. The symbols of Iqbal's religious tradition shaped the direction of his quest, but did not tie him down to any fixed or static notion of where he was going. This is a paradoxical issue; the symbols of any particular tradition both do, and do not, direct and shape how the adherents may grow.

The element of freedom comes in thinking about relationship between past, present and future. When the young Iqbal faced the mountain, he had in his mind all that he had understood from the Qur'an and his mentors. This background shaped the questions he asked. He brought the past with him. Nevertheless, his experience of illumination occurred in a moment of his present time. Later, he speaks of such moments as the 'appreciative' self, the self different from the self of everyday time. Out of that experience, he moved towards trying to create a better, and different future. He found that he was free to do whatever he could to make tangible the values he had discovered from his experience of illumination.

Identity is not a good word to convey a sense of what such a liberating experience might be like. Vocation, or calling, would be more adequate since these terms indicate the uniqueness of what the isolated individual finds out in such moments of compelling insight. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's later complex intellectual wrestlings with the problem of the relationship between cumulative tradition and personal faith represent his efforts to shed some light on this process

of finding meaning. It was Iqbal's poetry that stirred the Canadian scholar to think about these matters.

Smith's category of cumulative tradition is intended as an intellectual tool to be used when we try to organise in our minds the vast amounts of material available to us from the history of all the major religions.⁵ Believers in the present choose the options that make most sense to them in their immediate situation as they struggle to devise ways to relate the basic principles of their traditions to modern problems. This is the reason why all the traditions are constantly changing; the adherents of the traditions are always making new decisions as to what elements of that tradition should be affirmed in the new contexts in which they find themselves.

Iqbal's educational philosophy was based on the assumption that the new is always happening. There is no way to teach the members of new generations in advance what the answers to their problems might be. The problems will be new, and new answers must be found. Smith's category of cumulative tradition is also premised on this assumption. Both Iqbal and Smith say that as members of any religious community move through time, they are continuously threatened by the disappearance of cultural values and practices that are fading. What we believed and trusted in yesterday is always disintegrating. Tomorrow is making demands that yesterday cannot answer.

An analogy from architecture may be helpful. An architect setting out to design a new mosque or church should look at many examples of such architecture from the past to gain insight into how such buildings could be made. He or she should also know as much as possible about what materials, and techniques for effective building, are available in the present. Then he or she sets to work, to think, to imagine, to test, and, eventually, to create a new version. Cumulative tradition functions exactly in this way, namely that the creations of the past should be valued as sources of insight and wisdom, but always as stimulation to doing something new. This is why the great religious traditions are never static.

When Smith had turned away from Marxist thought, and back to Iqbal, he had done so explicitly because he had come to realise that persons needed to be rooted in something bigger than themselves, a

sense of goodness and justice as transcendent values, if they were to develop sensitive consciences.

Smith saw the brutality of the Stalinist regime as a product of a culture without faith in something bigger than the material needs of individuals.

Smith's later wrestlings with the words *faith* and *belief* are very intricate. The wrestlings spring from his desire to affirm the value of *faith*, while questioning any kind of *belief* in an abstract set of ideas. Smith was familiar with the ways of thinking of the Marxist theoreticians whom he had known in his youth. He came to recognise that such theoreticians, and fundamentalists in all traditions, get into difficulty because of their commitment to abstract systems. "When he had written *Islam in Modern India*, Smith had thought he had possessed an intellectual method that would explain the meaning of all the data. People who are committed to abstract systems, tend to close themselves off to listening to other people, and to trying to understand others. They just want to convert everyone to their views. At its worst, commitment to abstractions of this kind ends up, like the Gulag camps of the USSR, imprisoning everyone who differs. After he abandoned the simplicity of his earlier socialist theory, Smith never again spoke of believing in an immanent and inevitable process in history.

After he gave up relying on abstract theories, Smith directed his interest to creating new models for the comparative study of religion in which students could be helped to comprehend the inter-actions that occur within the historical process between cumulative tradition and personal faith. Education should also make people distrustful of simple explanations, and of abstract systems of thought that seek to explain everything by some formula. He tried to train students so that they should learn to be able to listen carefully to others, and to check their perceptions by techniques of dialogue.

Iqbal's Educational Philosophy

One of the best exponents of the relevance of Iqbal's ideas for education, K. G. Saiyidain, wrote a book entitled *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, that was published first in Lahore in 1936. Iqbal himself wrote the preface and indicated that he felt that this was an excellent expression of his views. Saiyidain spent the rest of his life working for the improvement of educational institutions in India. He has three other books that deal with aspects of Iqbal's thought: *The Humanist*

Tradition in Indian Educational Thought, Education, Culture and the Social Order, and Islam the Religion of Peace.

Saiyidain says that Iqbal's ideas are important for education because of his emphasis on the creative potentialities that are latent in every person. The function of a good education is to stimulate and draw out these potentialities. Further, Iqbal's condemnation of materialism as the main purpose of life is helpful in designing educational institutions. The emphasis should not just be on equipping children to strive for material gain, but rather on encouraging them to develop all their potentialities, along with a readiness to serve goodness in whatever form that obligation may arise. Finally, Saiyidain stresses that Iqbal's approach is to discourage any form of fanaticism or prejudice. He stresses that Iqbal was opposed to any form of intellectual narrowness. Iqbal had written:

Both nationalism and atheistic socialism, at least in the present state of human adjustments, must draw upon the psychological forces of hate, suspicion and resentment which tend to impoverish the soul of man and close up his hidden sources of spiritual energy. Neither the medieval technique of mysticism, nor nationalism, nor atheistic socialism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by a fresh vision of his origin and future, his when and whither that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values.⁷

Iqbal understood that his quest for personal illumination was linked to a search for a means to prepare the coming generations for their great responsibilities. He did not know that the citizens of India and Pakistan would later have the responsibility of deciding whether or not to use nuclear weapons against each other, but this is the kind

of issue implicit in his statement. He understood that the soul of man could go in various possible directions. It could close up, wither in the context of inhuman competition, fall victim to hatred, despair, suspicion, jealousy and resentment, and express all this frustration and anger through killing and destruction, as happened in World War I, or it could go another way.

Iqbal also thought that the cultivation of the knowledge of the religious tradition was the best vehicle for shaping persons to be ready to respond to their experiences of *Sinai*. For him, it was his regular study of the Qur'an with his father, his absorption of Urdu and Persian poetry from his secondary school teacher, his studies of economics and social thought, his later knowledge of the history of Muslim philosophical, theological and legal thinking, and also his encounter with the fiery heritage of Sayyid Aḥmed Khān and Jamāl al Dīn Afghānī that stoked his readiness to encounter the fire on the mountains, and the challenges of his world.

In his letter acknowledging his approval of Saiyidain's book about educational theory, Iqbal wrote:⁸

Lahore

21st June 1936

My dear Saiyidain,

Thank you for your letter which I had received a moment ago. Your summary is excellent and I have got nothing to add....

I suppose you are aware of the Educational implications of Leibnitz's monadism. According to him the monad (the mind of man) is a closed mind incapable of absorbing external forces. My view is that the monad is essentially assimilative in its nature. Time is a great blessing. While it kills and destroys, it also expands and brings out the hidden possibilities of things. The possibility of change is the greatest asset of man in his present surroundings.

Yours sincerely

Mohammad Iqbal

This was written towards the end of Iqbal's life, and can well serve as a significant final word from him about the priorities of existence. Change is inevitable and necessary, and growth requires

us to assimilate whatever we can from what impinges on us. The destruction of the old can be very beneficial, because it makes the growth of the hidden possibilities come alive.

The Pilgrimage to Eternity

The phrases of Surah Fatiha, the daily prayer of the Muslims, indicate, as does the Lord's prayer of the Christians, that life is lived in the constant condition of threat from evil, and of need for guidance in shaping the decisions one must make. Iqbal knew that human life as a whole is shaped by the choices we make. He believed that a devotional life is necessary as a means to keep watch over the motivations of the soul, and as a technique by which to try to refine the impulses that direct our choices.

Iqbal gave new meaning to the word '*ishq* (love). In his poem, *The Mosque of Cordoba*, '*ishq* is presented as strong creative power, the speech of God, the warmth of life, that gives effective vitality to everything. To put it in another way, no one can do good work as long as he or she is crippled by conscious or unconscious fears for his or her well-being. The creative person is the self-forgetting person who is open to the reality outside, and responding vigorously to its challenges. In human terms, '*ishq* is the opposite of crippling fear, and nervous self-consciousness.⁹ Love is the desire to communicate.

The traditional forms of Muslim mystical discipline stress spiritual exercises of various kinds to enable the self to become increasingly free of attachment to desires and fears; the aim is to become liberated from all that distracts from service to the good. The idea of spiritual maturation is that humans must learn constantly to transcend themselves by becoming more focused, less dissipated, more charitable and just, less angry, greedy and bored. They should move towards becoming more coherent, less confused, and more certain as to what they are and where they are going. The movement should always be towards a firmer sense of reality, and away from mirages in the desert.

The *Javīd Nāmāh* (*The Pilgrimage to Eternity*) was written explicitly by Iqbal as a guide to the young Muslims of the future. It can also be read as a meditation on the poet's own life, as lived up until 1932, when the poem was published. The poem is about an imaginative journey through space. The model of the ascension of the human soul up towards God is a model based on the ascension of

the Prophet Muhammad referred to in surah 17 of the Qur'an. The model has directly influenced many forms of Muslim mystical thinking and practice. Miguel Asin Palacios, a Spanish Christian scholar who knew Iqbal, has maintained that the Muslim literary heritage of meditation on ascension also influenced Dante in his writing of *The Divine Comedy*.

The *Javīd Nāmāh* is primarily a spiritual guide to the process of maturation. However, we should not forget that Iqbal was sure that human society as a whole was always a product of the level of combined spiritual strength and wisdom of the persons making up that society. Humanity is also at every moment moving either towards the *destiny* that is possible for the species, or chasing mirages in the desert, losing opportunities to make things better, and often destroying many different forms of life. Iqbal's message to the Muslims of the future is that they, individually and collectively, have a serious responsibility for what humanity may become. The spiritual maturation of the individuals shapes the quality of the corporate existence as a whole.

Since the *Javīd Nāmāh* is a reflection on what Iqbal met, thought about, and internalised in his own lifetime, it cannot be taken as blueprint to be followed literally, since his particular context will never be repeated. Nevertheless, it is a message about what it was like for one human being to try to make sense of his life. The structure of the poem is a journey up off the earth and through the planets to beyond. Persons, incarnations of ideas, are encountered on each planet. The traveller, the living stream, the symbol of Iqbal himself, is asking questions everywhere he goes. He constantly struggles to find meaning and to make sense out of existence. His guide is the Persian poet, Rūmī.

The opening question is:

*Is this world then some prey, and we the huntsmen, or are we prisoners utterly forgotten?*¹⁰

This question as to whether humans have some power in life, or whether they are abandoned orphans lost in an uncaring universe, might be seen as symbolic of Iqbal's youthful confusion. One of his earliest poems about the grief of his people, victims of ruthless imperialism, was entitled the *Cry of the Orphan*.

Next, the poet says that the light this world receives comes from beyond the planet. He asks again for the manifestation of God directly to him, another request for *Sinai*.

Why does the flame shrink away from the stubble?

Why is the lighting-flash afraid to strike?

*So long as I have lived, I have lived in separation.*¹¹

All this is in the opening prayer. Then comes the prelude, where it is noted that on the first day of creation, Heaven rebukes the Earth. The angels are amazed and puzzled by this new creation, Adam, a confused, and tormented rebel, who does not accept the world as given. One way to understand this is to hear it as the passionate refusal of the young Iqbal to accept the world he was born into. He wanted to set fires to make a better future.

But how to set such fires? Rūmī comes, and explains how to proceed.

Whether you be alive, or dead, or dying--for this seek witness from three witnesses. The first witness is self-consciousness, to behold oneself in one's own light; the second witness is the consciousness of another, the third witness is the consciousness of God's essence.¹²

Rūmī says, start the journey! Find out what you are potentially from what you see in yourself, from what another person can see in you, and, finally, from what God sees in you. The force that stimulates the journey is love. "Love in the soul is like sight in the eye"¹³

The first stop is the moon. Rūmī tells the voyager not to fear the moon, because we live with it all the time. Rūmī leads the poet to a cave inside the moon where he meets an Indian ascetic. My guess is that this may refer to the experience of friendship that Iqbal had had with the Hindu mathematician in his student days. This may mean that Iqbal and his friend had early in Iqbal's life talked about the possibilities of moving beyond the dilemma in which India was caught between the fierce exploitative powers of the British and the confusion and despair of the Indians. The poem suggests that Iqbal learned from his Hindu friend to have hope for the future; the mathematician seems to have taught the poet that spiritual depth was present in Hinduism because the Hindu symbols spoke of goodness and power in the world of matter, and in the human soul.

Rūmī is Iqbal's guide because Rūmī is a poet of encounter, of the impulse to grow by expanding one's awareness, by meeting other people, other minds, other world views. Rūmī had expanded his own mind in his encounter with the wandering mystic, Tabriz. Iqbal learned from this theology of encounter to be ready to grow in response to whatever he met. The imaginary Hindu, whom he encounters on the moon, is called the friend of the world. Jagan Nath Azad says that this friend of the world is visualised by Iqbal as the personification of Hindu philosophy. Azad says this is a reference to the attribute of Shiva as the friend of the world.¹⁴ Shiva tells the traveller that a new dawn is about to break in the East.

On the moon, the traveller next meets the Buddha, who teaches that the paradox of being both in the world, and not in the world, is good. This moon voyage could be taken to represent Iqbal's intellectual voyage through the cumulative wisdom of the religious teachings of all the major world religions. Iqbal meets all these experiences openly, and learns something significant and helpful from each encounter.

Next comes Zoroaster, who represents awareness of the struggle with Ahriman, Satan. The devil tells him to become a world-renouncing mystic, and go and live in a cave. Zoroaster tells the Muslim poet to fight this demonic temptation, and go to work in the world. This Prophet says that when love becomes perfect, it fashions men. It may be that this image reflects something of Iqbal's long and complex involvement with the thought of Nietzsche, and with Nietzsche's epic, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Iqbal had a book about Zoroastrianism in his personal library.

Tolstoy then comes as an incarnation of the teaching of Jesus for the modern world. The western man is seen trapped by an evil magician; the black magic of greed, materialism, and exploitation are seen to have poisoned the Church leaders, and to have corrupted western civilisation. Tolstoy speaks as a Christian who rejects his life as an aristocrat, and as a military officer, and who goes to the Russian peasants to seek the wisdom of simple goodness.

This image of Tolstoy may reflect Iqbal's experience in Europe where he saw little trace of living Christian values in the political and economic activities and structures of the time. He saw only sharks, ruthless greed determined to exploit the whole world, paying no attention to the suffering it inflicted. The poem suggests that the

same kind of greed, manifested in materialistic nationalism, threatens to take over India as well.

*You who display wheat and sell barley,
Because of you Shaikh and Brahmin sell their own country.
Your infidelities have debased reason and religion,
Your profit-mongerings have cheapened love.
Your love is torment, and secret torment at that....
Wisdom, which loosened the knots of things,
To you has given only thoughts of devastating....*

*Your death is life for the people of the world;
wait now, and see what your end will be!*¹⁵

Tolstoy thus speaks as one who has renounced western civilisation because of its violence, corruption and lying. This is shown as a restatement, and a reliving, of the message of Jesus. Iqbal's impression of Europe at the height of imperialist arrogance was that Christianity had failed to influence the real forces at work in society. He thought that Hindus and Muslims might also follow the same path.

Finally, the voice of Muhammad is heard. Pagan Mecca speaks of the disaster Muhammad brought to their traditional society and culture.

*His creed cuts through the rulership and lineage
Of Koraish, denies the supremacy of the Arabs;
In his eyes, lofty and lowly are the same thing--
He has not recognized the worth of the noble Arabs
But associated with uncouth Abyssinians;
Redskins have been confounded with black skins
The honour of tribe and family have been destroyed.*¹⁶

As in most of Iqbal's imagery about the Prophet and first Muslims, the emphasis here is that these religious revolutionaries changed history by implementing effectively a society based on new ideals of justice and equality. The revolution brought by Muhammad enabled his followers to transcend tribalism.

This stop on the stage of the moon tells us the lessons learned by Iqbal in his youth from the teachings of the religions of the world. He had asked for help in solving the dilemma of how to transcend the evils of imperialism, and the despair of his people. The help he got from all the religious traditions was to learn to comprehend his

inner depths, his capacity for creativeness, and his need to struggle in the real world. Encounter with the spirits who manifested the insights of the major world religions gave the questioning Iqbal assurance that humanity had many resources to teach the young to live with courage and vision. He learned to hope that vigorous action shaped by clear vision could once again overthrow a society based on racism, greed, and corruption. He had learned much from many sources. But he saw the coming of the Qur'an as the most complete of all forms of guidance. For his generation, he hoped that if the message of the Qur'an could be internalised constructively again, it might bear fruit once more, as it had done many times in the past.

The next stage of the journey is Mercury. Here Iqbal meets the spirits of the Muslim leaders who tried to resist Imperialism, and to put new heart and vision into the spirits of the people. This is probably an autobiographical reflection on his own internalisation of what he had learned from Moulvi Mir Hasan, and later from Arnold and Shibli, about the revival of energy and purpose of the 19th century Muslim reformers. The Muslim world looks dead, but is capable of rebirth. The wanderer says to Rūmī: "I find no sign here of any living thing"¹⁷

But then the spirits of Afghani and other Muslim reformers are encountered. The traveller learns from them and agrees.

I will take nothing from Europe except—a warning!

You enchained to the imitation of Europe, be free,

Clutch the skirt of the Koran, and be free!"...

What is the Koran? Sentence of death for the master-man,

Succour for the slave without food and destitute.

Look not for good from the money-grubbing manikin-

You will not attain piety, until you expend (3:8)

What pray is born of usury? Tumults!

No one knows the pleasure of 'a good loan'.

Usury darkens the soul, hardens the heart like a stone,

Makes man a ravening beast, without fangs and claws....

When the Koran's design descended into this world

It shattered the images of priest and pope;

I speak openly what is hidden in my heart--

This is not a book, it is something other!

When it has entered the soul, the soul is transformed;

*When the soul is transformed, the world is changed.*¹⁸

Iqbal learned from the examples of the Muslim reformers who preceded him that the world could be changed. The mirages of a wicked economic system based on greed and exploitation should be challenged and transcended.

After Mercury, the traveller is led to Venus. The traveller says he is lonely because he is driven to seek new worlds every moment; he always wants more than what he sees. Venus is a damp and misty world that knows no Abraham, full of idolatry and ancient pagan deities. The defeat of the Mahdi of the Sudan by Kitchener is seen as a triumph of the forces of Pharaoh. This may be a reflection on Iqbal's time in Europe, and his experience of the determination of the imperialists to destroy every form of resistance to their will and greed.

Rūmī next guides the poet to the sphere of Mars. He finds a wise man there who advises him to change the situation of humans on earth.

For why is there poverty and want under heaven's arch?

Because you say what is the Lord's belongs to you.

View the world otherwise, and it will become other

This earth and heaven will be transformed.¹⁹

He then encounters a Martian damsel who claims to be prophetic. She is not one of the simple Martians, but one kidnapped from the Franks. She warns women to cut themselves off from men and family life. Rūmī warns that this lack of love comes from irreligious education. This phase of the journey seems to reflect Iqbal's awareness of the contrast between God-fearing poor Muslims, and the violent individualism of a modernity that appears to reject love.

The next phase of the journey takes them to the sphere of Jupiter where the spirits of the martyred Sufi Ḥallāj, the poet Ghālib, and the martyred Persian woman, Qurrat al-'Ain Ṭāhira, are encountered. Ḥallāj tells him: "Be partner with the ring of wine-bibbing dissolutes' beware of allegiance to a Master who is not a man of tumult."²⁰

The traveller, Iqbal, is shaken out of his own concerns by contemplating the passion of these lonely mystics who had been driven by their hunger for truth to reject the status quo norms of their times. The persecuted mystic, Ḥallāj, says his desire was different from the simple faith of the Mullahs. They wanted a Paradise of

eating, and sleeping and singing. He wanted to contemplate Being. The traveller asks Ḥallāj why he was hung. The answer is that he had kindled in himself the fire of life.

*Selfhood is everywhere visible, yet invisible,
our gaze cannot endure to look on Selfhood;
within its light many fires lurk hidden,
from its Sinai creations, epiphanies shine...*

*What I have done you too have done; beware!*²¹

This phase of his voyage may reflect Iqbal's sense of alienation when he returned to Lahore from Europe, his despair with the religious leadership of his people, and his sense of identification with the martyrs of the past. *Sinai* is linked here with the development of creative powers in the self that are bound to come into conflict with the people who want to keep the world as it is. To be an authentic self is to challenge the status quo. Ṭāhira says:

*From the sin of a frenzied servant of God
New creatures come into being;...
Behold Love's glory in city and fields,
Lest you suppose it has passed away from the world'
Lilies concealed in the breast of its own time--
How could it be contained in such a closet as this?*²²

The spirit of Satan is then encountered. Satan complains that humans follow him so easily that he has no challenging adversaries. The travellers move on to Saturn where the spirits of traitors are encountered. These are the villains who betrayed India to serve the West.

The final stage is entitled *Beyond the Spheres*. Here Nietzsche is discovered, a madman who named the evil that was western civilisation, but could find no spiritual goal to follow. After this, the traveller departs for the Garden of Paradise. In the final phase, the poet is reminded of the grief of his own people, and meets the spirit of a mystical guide from Kashmir. The traveller is told to become strong by fighting Satan:

Iqbal meets Bartari Hari, a Hindu poet of the seventh century.
*We rose in reverence for his art
And prepared suitably to engage with him.*²³

The fact that this Hindu poet comes into the *Javid Nāmah* in the ninth heaven, close to the end of the journey, seems to indicate that

Iqbal found him a fruitful and significant source of insight. A couplet from the same poet is written on the title page of Iqbal's *Gabriel's Wing*. If we take the *Javīd Nāmāh* as a statement about Iqbal's own spiritual journey, it might be that this poet was one he discussed with the Hindu scholar who was his friend in his youth. Iqbal seems to have spent most of his life unravelling, clarifying and explaining the key insights that he gained while he was young. The fact that this Hindu poet comes at the end of the journey may well mean that Iqbal was still thinking that more encounter and dialogue with religiously serious, and open-minded, Hindu poets and thinkers would be necessary for the Muslims of the future.

Next the traveller through space meets a Persian poet, and an Afghan ruler. Finally, he enters the Divine Presence, where he speaks of the misery of his people. The answer he receives is:

Are you alive? Be vehement, be creative;....

Break whatsoever is uncongenial

out of your heart's heart produce a new world

Man of God, be trenchant as a sword,

be yourself your own world's destiny!

*So slender is your cup that the tavern has been put to shame;
seize a tumbler, and drink wisely, and so be gone!*²⁴

Maturation for Iqbal thus meant absorbing wisdom from many sources, and then seeking to engage himself in a vital way with the problems of his time. He would combat whatever seemed wrong to him, and try to speak lucidly so that those who followed him would better understand themselves, and the work they had to do.

What I have said comes from another world;

this book descends from another heaven

I am a sea; untumult in me is a fault;

Where is he who can plunge into my depths?

A whole world slumbered upon my shore

And saw from the strand naught but the surge of a wave.

I, who despair of the great sages of old,

Have a word to say touching the day to come!

Render my speech easy unto the young,

*Make my abyss for them attainable.*²⁵

The task for future generations is thus to try to make this abyss attainable. In part, this certainly means better education.

Some of the best guidance I have found for the task of understanding the relevance of complex poetry, like the *Javīd Nāmāh*, comes from Northrop Frye. In his book, *The Educated Imagination*,²⁶ Frye explains that freedom means little without an appropriation of the accumulated wisdom of our species as available through our literature. We become what we might be from our developed capacity to make sense of what we read about, and learn from, the experiences of others.

Educated imaginations are necessary to guide in constructive building for the future. We can build little that is significant without the ability to imagine what we might do; our imaginations tend to be crude until they have been steeped in the best that our ancestors have passed on to us. This would be obvious enough in architecture. It is equally true with respect to religious thought, and with the designing of curriculum for the training of the educated imaginations of the generations yet to be born. Iqbal was a startling and refreshing instance of an highly educated person using his imagination to try to communicate the possibilities of using the cumulative tradition of his people in new and dynamic ways. He hoped that the process would never stop. Freedom was acknowledged as a prerequisite to a fruitful journey through space and time. In Iqbal's words:

The Qur'an conceives God as 'holding all goodness in His hand'.... Goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the Self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing co-operation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus seen to be a condition of goodness.... Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding.²⁷

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¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth*, p. 108.

² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Faith and Belief Some Considerations from the Islamic Instance", Iqbal Memorial Lecture, Lahore, 1974, p. 3. Smith repeats some of these ideas in two of his later books, *Faith and Belief*, chapter 5, and *On Understanding Islam*, chapter six.

- ³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, p. 39.
- ⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Faith and Belief Some Considerations from the Islamic Instance, Iqbal Memorial Lecture, Lahore, 1974, p. 36.
- ⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 154-169.
- ⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Pakistan as an Islamic State*. This small book gives the clearest indication of Smith's criticism of Marxist theory. He indicates that under Leninism, anything was justified that would help the revolution.
- ⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 188, 189.
- ⁸ K. G. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, p.vi.
- ⁹ *Poems from Iqbal*, pp. 37-42.
- ¹⁰ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 21.
- ¹¹ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 22.
- ¹² *Javid Nāmāh*, pp. 29,30.
- ¹³ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 32.
- ¹⁴ Jagan Nath Azad, *Iqbal Mind and Thought*, p. 76.
- ¹⁵ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 50.
- ¹⁶ *Javid Nāmāh*, pp. 50,51.
- ¹⁷ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 53.
- ¹⁸ *Javid Nāmāh*, pp. 62, 68, 69.
- ¹⁹ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 87.
- ²⁰ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 91.
- ²¹ *Javid Nāmāh*, pp. 95,96.
- ²² *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 96.
- ²³ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 123.
- ²⁴ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 138.
- ²⁵ *Javid Nāmāh*, p. 24.
- ²⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, pp. 56-68.
- ²⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 80, 85, 123.

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