

IQBAL AND TAUHID

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“Iqbal begins and ends with the belief in Tauhid”¹ This statement, at first sight, may look like an oversimplification but, in fact, it is not. For Iqbal the implications of the ‘Kalima’ “Lah ilaha illa Allah” (There is no god but God) are very profound and far-reaching, and provide a basis both for his theology and his philosophy. As Professor Schimmel observes, “Iqbal has built his system upon the principle of ‘Tauhid’, the acknowledgement of the absolute uniqueness of God which is reflected in the unity of the individual life, and the unity of religio-political groups.”²

‘La’ and ‘Illa’

The ‘Kalima’ has two parts - ‘la’ signifying negation, and signifying assertion or affirmation. The contrast between the first part ‘There is no god’ and the second part ‘but God’, has, from early times been a subject of interest to many “speculative minds who discovered not only a strictly dogmatic meaning, but also a deeper mystical truth in the confrontation of the ‘la’ and the ‘illa’.”³ Human life advances by means of the dialectical tension between negation and affirmation. It is by saying ‘No’ to the factors which weaken the Self, and by saying ‘Yes’ to the factors which strengthen it, that the ‘Momin’ reaches the highest stage of his spiritual development Iqbal says:

خودی کا سر نثار لا الہ الا اللہ خودی ہے تیغِ فسان لا الہ الا اللہ

¹ McCarthy, E. “Iqbal as a Poet and Philosopher”, p. 18.

² Schimmel, A.M. *Gabriel's Wing*, P. 86.

³ Ibid., p. 86.

Iqbal's viewpoint

پیش غیر الله لا گفتن حیات تازه از هنگامه او کائنات

(Pas Che Bayad Kard Ai Aqwam-e-Sharq? p. 10)⁵

finds support in Soderblom: "But No is also needed. Without No there will be no proper Yes. For then all that denies and destroys, From this strike, creation is made fresh degrades and delays what is right and good would be allowed to remain unattacked and unabolished. That is why a No is necessary in the moral warfare of the individual, in the evolution of religion and in the history of the race."⁶

By using the sword of 'Ia' the 'Momin' can resist the worship of the idols of modern civilization. Negation is the first stage in spiritual evolution:

در جهان آغاز کار از حرف لاست ایس نخستین منزل مرد خداست

(Pas Che Bayad Kard Ai Aqwam-e-Sharq? p. 19)⁷

But 'Ia' must be succeeded by or else having broken all the idols

one would be left in a world with no God. Iqbal says:

⁴ The hidden Secret of Selfhood is "There is no God but God"; selfhood is the sword, "There is no God but God" is the whetstone.

⁵ To say 'No' to Not-God is life.

From this strike, creation is made fresh.

⁶ Soderblom, N. quoted by Schimmel, A.M. Gabriel's Wing p. 90.

⁷ In the world, the beginning is with the word 'No';

This is the first station of the Man of God.

نہاد زندگی میں ابتدا لا انتہا الا پیام موت ہے جب لا ہوا الا سے بیگانہ
(Zarb-e-Kalim, p. 60)⁸

According to Iqbal, Russia and Nietzsche have passed the stage of 'la' but not reached Russia has said 'No' to despotism and exploitation in religion and politics but has not yet found a positive foundation to build upon. In his message to the Russian people, Jamaluddia Afghani says in Javid Nama:

کرده کار خداوندان تمام بگذر از لا جا نب الا خرام
در گذر از لا اگر جوینده تا ره اثبات گیری زندہ
(Javid Nama, p.88)⁹

Nietzsche too did not pass beyond the 'la' and did not know the deep joy of being the Servant of God. That, as Iqbal sees it, was Nietzsche's tragedy.

زندگی شرح اشارات خودی است لا و الا از مقامات خودی است
او به لا در ماند و تا الا نرفت از مقام عبده، بیگانہ رفت!
(Javid Nama, pp 177-178)¹⁰

⁸ Life in its essence, begins with 'la' ends with 'ilia'.
It is a message of death when 'la' is separated from 'ilia'.
⁹ You have finished now with lords ;

pass on from 'no', march onwards to 'but'

pass on from 'no', if you are a true seeker,

that you may take the road of living affirmation
(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *Javid Nama*, pp 67-68).

¹⁰ Life is a commentary on the hints of the Self,

For the Faithful, then, both negation and affirmation are necessary.

لا و الا احتساب كائنات لا و الا فتح باب كائنات
هر دو تقدیر جهان كاف و نون حرکت از لا زاید از الا سکون

(Pas Che Bayad Kard Ai Aqwam-e-Sharq? p. 19)¹¹

Tauhid the basis of the Islamic polity

The internationalism which Iqbal finds implicit in Islam and to which he refers untiringly in his writings, derives from the idea of Divine Unity. As Iqbal points out in his lectures, Islamic culture “finds the foundation of world unity in the principle of ‘Tauhid’. 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. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man’s loyalty to his own ideal nature.”¹²

The implications of the principle of ‘Tauhid’ when applied to the collective life of the Muslims, are worked out in considerable detail in *Rumuz-e-Bekhudī*. Iqbal points out that the unity of the Muslims is not dependent on ties of country or kinship, but on the principle of Divine Unity, which is “a formative factor for the

“no” and but” are of the stations of the Self;

he remained fast in “no” and did not reach “but”.

(Translation by Arberry, A J. *Javid Nama*, pp 112-113).

¹¹ ‘la’ and ‘illa’ are the criterion for evaluating everything in the universe.

‘La’ and illa’ open the door of the universe.

Both of them are the destiny of the created world,

Motion is born of ‘la, rest from

¹² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 147.

unity of mankind.”¹³ He says:

ملت بیضا تن و جان لا اله ساز مارا پرده گردان لا اله
لا اله سرمایه اسرار ما رشته اش شیرازة افکار ما

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 106)¹⁴

Thus the brotherhood of Islam transcending all barriers of race, colour or nationality, is directly derived from the idea of ‘Tauhid’. “From the unity of the all-inclusive Ego, who creates and sustains all egos,” says Iqbal, “follows the essential unity of all mankind.”¹⁵

تیر خوش پیکان یک کیشیم ما یک نما یک ہیں یک اندیشیم ما
مدعائے ما مآل ما یکسیت طرز و انداز خیال ما یکسیت
ما ز نعمتہائے او اخوان شدیم یک زبان و یکدل و یکجاں شدیم

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 107)¹⁶

¹³ Schimmel, A.M. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 87.

¹⁴ “There is no god but God:” this is the soul

And body of our our Community,

The pitch that keeps our instrument in tune,

The very substance of mysteries,

The knotted thread that binds our scattered thoughts.”

(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 122).

¹⁵ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 93-94..

¹⁶ Well-poinied arrows of one quiver are we;
One showing, one beholding, one in thought;

“The essence of ‘Tauhid’ as a working idea,” says Iqbal, “is equality, solidarity and freedom.”¹⁷ Islam does not recognise the “tyrant overlordship” of either “the sceptered monarch” or “the surpliced priest.”¹⁸ The Prophet of Islam translated the principles deriving from God’s Unity and Sovereignty into terms of actual living:

قوت او هر گهن پیکر شکست نوع انسان را حصار تازه بست
تازه جان اندر تن آدم دمید بنده را باز از خداوندان خرید

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 120)¹⁹

Iqbal also applies the idea of the Unity of God to the Unity of the mind and body -- an ideal realised in the Sphere of Mars in *Javid Nama*.²⁰

خاکیاں را جان و تن مرغ و قفس فکر مریخی یک اندیش است و بس!

One is our goal and purpose, one the form,
The fashion and the measure of our dream.
Thanks to His blessings, we are brothers all
Sharing one speech, one spirit and one heart.
(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness* p. 13),

¹⁷ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 154.

¹⁸ Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁹ He shattered every ancient privilege.

And built new walls to fortify mankind.

He breathed fresh life in Adam’s weary bones,

Red-erred the slave from bondage, set him free.

(Translation by Arberry, A.). *The Mysteries of Selflessness* p. 22).

²⁰ Schimmel, A.M. *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 93.

(Javid Nama, p. 116)²¹

If body and spirit could be regarded as one then there would be no need to separate Religion from State. The ideal ‘millat’, in Iqbal’s view, beginning from the principle of ‘Tauhid’, recognises the organic Unity of man’s life and does not seek to bifurcate it into mutually exclusive compartments either in individual life or in collective life. Because it preserves the wholeness of life, creative ‘Tauhid’ produces both outstanding individuals and nations!

فرد اذ توحيد لاهوتى شود! ملت از توحيد جبروتى شود!
با يزید و شبلى و بوذر ازوست امتان را طغرل و سنجرا ازوست!

(Javid Nama, p.226)²²

Iqbal’s Interpretation of ‘At Tauhid’

In Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, Iqbal gives as a “Summary of the purpose of the poem,”²³ a commentary on Sura CXII entitled “At-Tauhid” which has been called “the essence of the Koran.”²⁴ The Sura reads “Say, God is one God ; the eternal God: He begetteth not, neither is He begotten ; and there is not any one like unto Him.”²⁵ Iqbal takes the various parts of this Sura and

²¹ For terrestrials, soul and body are bird and cage,

Whereas the thought of Martians is unitive.

(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *Javid Nama*, p. 82).

²² The individual through the Unity becomes Divine.

The nation through the Unity becomes Omnipotent;

Unity produced Ba Yazid, Shibli, Bu Dharr,

Unity produced, for the nations, Tughril and Sanjar.

(Translation by Arberry A.J. *Javid Nama*, p. 139).

²³ Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 69.

²⁴ Pickthall, M. M. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York, 1960, p. 454.

²⁵ Sale, G. (Translation) *The Koran*, p. 459.

delineates the philosophical implications of each part in practical terms.

Taking the first part of the Sura, Iqbal exhorts the Muslims to believe in Unity and to translate their belief into action so that their faith becomes a living thing.

یک شو و توحید را مشهود کن غائبش را از عمل موجود کن
لذت ایمان فزاید در عمل مرده آن ایمان که ناپید در عمل

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 183)²⁶

The second part of the Sura deals with God's Self-Subsistence Like God, a Muslim must not depend on things or persons outside himself. Iqbal's voice rings out loud and clear

ز آتش خود سوز اگر داری دلے

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 187)²⁷

Individuals and nations attain spiritual perfection only if they guard their selfhood jealously and resist assimilation:

²⁶ Be one; make visible thy Unity;

Let action turn the unseen into seen;

Activity augments the joy of faith,

But faith is dead that issues not in deeds.

(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 70).

²⁷ If thou hast a heart

Within thy breast, with thine own ardour burn!

(Translation by Arberry, A. J, *The Mysteries of Selflessness* p. 73).

فرد فرد آمد که خود را وا شناخت قوم قوم آمد که جز با خود نساخت

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 188)²⁸

The third part of the Sura tells a Muslim that he is not to set store by his lineage since God “begot not, nor was begotten.” What binds the Muslims together is Love, not ties of blood:

عشق در جان و نست در پیکر است رشتۀ عشق از نسب محکم تر است

(Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, p. 190)²⁹

The last part of the Sura affirms that God has no equal: If the Muslims possess the fortified Ego, then they too can become “an unequalled people,”³⁰ able, like the Perfect Man to command all things

Iqbal and ‘Tauhid’

Iqbal realizes, not without sorrow, that “the pure brow of the principle of ‘Tauhid’ has received more or less an impress of

²⁸ No man to Individuality

Ever attained, save that he knew himself,

No nation came to nationhood, except

It spurned to suit the whims of other men.

(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 74).

²⁹ Love dwells within the spirit, lineage

The flesh inhabits; stronger far than race

And common ancestry, is Love’s firm cord.

(Translation by Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness* p. 75).

³⁰ Arberry, A.J. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 76.

heathen-ism, and the universal and impersonal character of the ethical ideals of Islam has been lost through a process of localization.”³¹ The fact that in his own career as political thinker Iqbal rejected this “process of localization,” shows that for him the ideas, implicit in his creed, were a living force — a practical not just a theoretical necessity. Explaining Iqbal’s “hasty retreat from pure Nationalism,” Halide Edib observes with insight:

“To whatever political creed the Muslim may belong, his ultimate loyalty must be to the One God who cannot be symbolized by material objects or by ideas. This point was best expressed by the Muslim members of the ‘Front Populaire’ in the French colonies. They lifted their fists like the rest of their comrades, giving the sign of their political creed, but added to it the lifting of their index finger to the sky. The last is the sign common to all Muslims: ‘There is no God but one God..’ is always said with that gesture meaning God to be above and beyond all terrestrial ideas and symbols.”³²

Modern civilization does not really understand the meaning of ‘Tauhid’ says Iqbal. It knows how to destroy but not how to create. It cannot pass beyond its unbelief to positive faith

لبالب شیشہ تہذیب حاضر ہے مٹے لا سے
مگر ساقی کے ہاتھوں میں نہیں پیمانہ الا

(Bal-e-Jibril, p. 39)³³

Iqbal often complains about the ritualists and theologians who have made the word ‘Tauhid’ the subject of scholastic

³¹ *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 156.

³² Edib, H. *Inside India*, London, 1937, pp 93-94.

³³ The bottle of modern civilization is brimful of the wine of ‘la’, But the cup of ‘illa’ is missing from the hands of the cup-bearer;

hairsplitting³⁴ and “turned away the interest from practical Islam.”³⁵ In his view,

کسے کو لا الہ را در گرہ بست ز بند مکتب و ملا بروں جست³⁶

As a point of interest it may be mentioned that sometimes Iqbal uses a different formulation of the creed and says “la maujud illa Hu” (There is no existent but God).³⁷

³⁴ *Zarb-e-Kalim*, p. 13.

³⁵ Schimmel, A.M. *Gabriel's Wing*, p, 88.

³⁶ Whoever has tied the knot of “La ilia” in his mind, Passes beyond the fetters of the School and the Mulla.

³⁷ For example in *Rurnuz-e-Bekbudi*, p. 163; and *Musafir*, p. 7.