

IQBAL AND THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

Dr. S. M. Zaman

Shaykh ‘Abd-ul-Quddus (d. 945 A.H.) of Gang oh, great sofi saint-scholar of the Nizamiyyah order in the 10th/ I6th C.; reflecting on the ascension of the Prophet (SAW) to the heavens (Mi’ raj), is reported to have made an intriguing remark. He said:

“Muhammad (SAW) of Arabia ascended the highest Heaven and ‘ returned. I’ swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should never had returned”.⁶⁷

Iqbal begins his fifth lecture entitled ‘The Spirit of Muslim Culture’ with this quotation.and then proceeds, to comment on it in a manner which is characteristic of his philosophic view of the world, the place of man therein, but above all the essential difference between the mystic and the prophetic experience. The sublimest aspiration of the mystic is to achieve a state of spiritual ecstasy, wherein he becomes one with his Lord and Beloved, as the natural destination of his spiritual journey. But the Last Prophet of Allah, mercy and compassion for all creatures (Rahmat-lil-’Alamin) had to return to distribute the blessing, the light, the ecstasy if you will, to the rest of mankind, in all parts of the globe, for all times to come. Says Iqbal:

In the whole range of Sufi literature it will be probably difficult to find words which in a single sentence, disclose such an acute perception of the psychological difference between the prophetic and the mystic types of consciousness. The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of ‘unitary experience; ... The Prophet’s return is creative. He returns to -insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. ... The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world-force is supreme in the prophet’.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, ' Allama Sir: The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1989 (rep.) p. 99

⁶⁸ Ibid.

In his own modest way, Iqbal tried to follow and emulate the example of his Master, the Prophet (SAW), when in the celebrated avid *Namah* he unfolded the fascinating story of his poetic journey through the heavens, guided by his mentor 'Pir-i-Rumi'. The pseudonym Iqbal uses for himself as the spiritual traveller in this heavenly excursion is *Zinda Rud*, the living stream, which conjures up a picture of the yearning soul-- the streamlet running through mountains, plateaus and plains--- in an eternal desire to become one with the ocean. The Prophet's Ascension (*Mi' raj*), of which one of greatest lessons is the accessibility of the entire cosmos to man,⁶⁹ been a favourite theme in Islamic literature. In fact a modern Span orientalist⁷⁰ has conclusively established that Dante's *Divine Co* was produced not only under the inspiration and influence of the *Futuh al-Makkiyah*, but the great Italian poet drew quite heavily at this source. Iqbal drew inspiration from both in creating this masterly work of higher poetry, truly his magnum opus.

Like the Prophet descending from the highest station of *qaba qawsayn auw adna* (al-Qur'an, 53:9)⁷¹ in the midst of fallen humanity to deliver the call for fulfillment of man's divine destiny as the vicegerent of God, and to reveal man's true potential of which the Prophet's *Mi'raj* was but a demonstrative pointer, Iqbal saw the resuscitation of the universal truths of pristine Islam at the centre of his poetic and philosophic mission, to infuse a fresh life and spirit into the edifying and elevating institutions, which had degenerated into lifeless and formal ritualism. This is the theme which keeps reverberating in his poetry like a favourite refrain, running as a common strand into the fabric of his entire thought, everything else woven round it elegantly and artistically

⁶⁹ Cf. Iqbal:(I have learnt this lesson from the *Mi'raj* (ascension) of Muhammad (SAW), that heaven itself is within the target-range of man.) See *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore 1993, p. 364.

⁷⁰ Miguel Asin Palacios, *La Escatologia Musulmana En La Divina Comedia* was first published in 1919 from Madrid. An English version, translated and abridged by Harold Sunderland appeared in 1926, under the title of *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (Newyork, E.P. Dutton & Co.) A 3rd edition of the Spanish original came out in 1961 (Madrid). English translation has been reprinted several times from Lahore, Though the work is still valuable for its translations from Ibn 'Arabi's works, the biographical details which it provides are, more or less, regarded as inaccurate by the recent scholarship on the subject. The conclusions drawn by the author about Ibn 'Arabi and the Islamic intellectual heritage in general are still more dubious and questionable,

⁷¹ Trans. "And was at a distance-of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer.

in a panorama of stimulating shades and textures, rousing the very best in the human being:

What with melody and what with music ---- all this is but a device to drag the strayed rein-less camel to the caravan.

Leading the caravan is the Mir-i-Hijaz (The Lord of Hijaz SAW), Love and devotion to him is the quintessence of faith and the ultimate acid test for the purity of belief. Unflinching allegiance to him is the guarantee for bliss, happiness and success here and in the here-after. Allah says in the poet's diction:

If you owe love and loyalty to Muhammad (SAW), I am yours. This whole universe is insignificant-- you will have The Pen and the Tablet to write your destiny yourself, as you wish.⁷²

In a well-known poem of Armaghan-i-Hijaz⁷³, posthumously published in 1938, Iqbal was even more emphatic in stressing the importance of the devotional bond with the Prophet (SAW). Says he:

Lift yourself to the feet of Muhammad(SAW), because he is the faith, the entire faith; if you fail to reach him, the rest is all paganhooood and heathenism.

Kenneth Cragg arranged the chapters in his popular book titled Call of the Minaret according to the sentences of the call to prayer, the adhan. One of the most important features of Iqbal's thought and poetry, as seen by the most eminent Iqbalist in western scholarship, Prof. Annemarie Schimmel, is his "view of the essentials of Islam, i.e. the five Pillars of Faith, and the Creed which is taught to every Muslim child".⁷⁴ Having made this observation, she devotes the bulk of her discourse, no less than 230 pages, to Iqbal's interpretation of the five Pillars of faith and the Essentials of Faith or Creed. Unity of God, Prophethood of Muhammad (SAW), Salat (prayer), Fasting, Zakat (obligatory alms), Hajj (pilgrimage) and Jihad in one group and belief

⁷² 'Jawab Shikwah' Bang-i-Dara, in *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1993, p. 237.

⁷³ Armaghan-i-Hijaz, in: *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1993, p. 237.

⁷⁴ A. Schimmel: *Gabriel's Wing*, Lahore, Iqbal Academy, 1989 (2nd ed.), p. vii.

in God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day (Yawm al.Akhirah) and the Pre-destination in the other, form the constituents of this discussion. It is as ironic as it is-simple and true that the initiative for studying Iqbal's thought as interpretative of the fundamentals of Islam should have emanated from outside the Muslim world. But this is the surest, if not the only, approach for us, particularly the Muslims, to understand Iqbal's message in its true perspective, bereft of all - philosophic casuistry and dialectical hair-splitting.

In a brief presentation like this, one can only allude to the real meaning of some of the Islamic beliefs and practices, which he so forcefully and movingly brings to bear on the reader's mind. On the creative grandeur of adhan (call to prayer) and its true significance, he says:

The dawn which causes the forces of darkness to tremble with fear, is brought forth by the adhan of a true believer (momin)⁷⁵

And look how he laments the loss of spirit in the labyrinth of ritualism.

The ritual of adhan has survived but the Bilalian spirit has departed, just as philosophy remains hut bereft of Ghazali's discourse.

The mosques mourn the loss of worshippers_ those noble souls adorned with the attributes and qualities of Hijaz.⁷⁶

In a poem in the Zarb-i-Kalim, he bemoans the departure of spiritual vision, and the consequential loss of meaning in prayers:

It is highly improbable that you may find communion with God, when even the true standing of man is hidden from your view.

There is neither any grandeur nor any beauty in your prayer, nor does our adhan carry any message of the dawn.⁷⁷

How beautifully the liberating, uplifting and elevating dimension of salat (prayer) is brought out in these verses:

⁷⁵ Zarb-i-Kalim, in: Kulliyat-i-Iqbal op. cit. ' Subh', p. 526.

⁷⁶ Bang-i-Dara, op. cit. 'Jawab Shikwah', p. 231.

⁷⁷ Zarb-i-Kalim, op. cit., 'Mulla-i-Haram', p. 536.

Though Adam (man) is old, the false gods of Lat and Manat are young, visiting every age in a new guise.

This one prostration (before God), which you take so oppressively cumbersome, in fact delivers you of the need for a thousand prostrations (before others).⁷⁸

On the philosophy of pre-destination, he sharply condemns the attitude of passive surrender and inaction and says ruefully:

To--- day their mode of action betrays an attitude of abject surrender to fate,

But once their own intentions used to shape the will of God.⁷⁹

Urging a westernized and philosophy-stricken youth of noble Sayyid descent to discover his 'self', he says:

Had you not lost your self, you would not have become a prisoner and a devotee of Bergson.⁸⁰

Man is in search of peace and stability, in quest of a Code of life.

[But] the ultimate end of reason is a loss of the sense of presence; the end result of all philosophy is remoteness from real life.

It is Din (Faith) which straightens the path of life.

It is Din (Faith) which is the secret of Muhammad and Abraham.⁸⁰

Without Qur'anic wisdom and adherence to its system, it is impossible for Muslims to survive:

O Muslim, if you want to live (with honour), it is not possible to do so without (adhering to) the Quran.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Namaz', p. 550.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Tan ba Taqdir p. 528.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Ek Falsafah-zadah Sayyid-zadeh Key Nam', p. 530.

And where is that most edifying and fortifying force, the live force of belief in the unity of God, unity of His message, unity of the Ummah, unity of thought, unity of action?

Taw-hid (belief in One God) was once a living force in the world!

But alas, today it has been reduced merely to a problem in the Science of Theology!

Commander of the army, I have seen your soldiers.

Their scabbards are empty of the sword of belief in One God!

Alas, neither the mullah nor the jurisconsult knows the secret that unity of thought without unity of conduct is an empty dream!

What is a nation? What is the leadership of nations?

How can these poor mullahs who only know how to lead two rak'ahs of prayer, understand this secret?⁸¹

Once again, look at the beauty, the brevity, the simple and straightforward reason, with which the age-old riddle of pre-destination is explained in the Islamic perspective, in the form of a dialogue between Iblis (Satan) and Yazdan (God).⁸² Says Iblis:

O God, the Creator of the universe with the command of kun (come into existence), I bore no malice or grudge with Adam that poor prisoner of space and time!

(Moreover) it was not possible in thy presence to utter a word of pride or arrogance.

But (the fact is), it was not thy will that I should make a prostration.

God responds to the Devil's cunning apology with a straight but incisive question.

⁸¹ Ibid., 'Tawhid', p. 537.

⁸² Ibid., 'Taqrir', pp. 559-560.

[When did you discover this secret (that it was not My will that you should prostrate before Adam)? Before your refusal or afterwards?]

This brief question and the Devil's one-word reply help understand the chronic controversy with greater ease than volumes of theological and philosophic discourses have succeeded in doing. Iblis answers,

Afterwards, My Lord, the creator of the perfections of Existence

If the will of God dawned on the Devil after his refusal, how could he then take shelter behind His will? So, Yazdan (God), looking at the assembly of angels, declares.

Baseness of nature has taught him this ruse; he says it was not my will that he would prostrate. How he calls his freedom of action the decree of fate! How the ruthless fellow himself names his burning flame as mere smoke!

To conclude, I cannot do better than recall the last paragraph of Prof. Schimmel's Foreword written in 1988 to the reprint of her famous work entitled *Gabriel's Wing*, and I quote her words:

I sincerely hope that Iqbal will continue to inspire the people of Pakistan by reaching them the important role of the human being as the khalifa of God, working on His earth and called to ameliorate it in responsibility for his fellow beings while never forgetting that the earth belongs to God".⁸³

⁸³ Schimmel, *op. cit.*, p. xv.