

IQBAL'S VISION OF A NEW WORLD

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In this short poem,¹⁶ which in fact is a preface to a long disquisition by Jamāl al-Dân al-Afghânâ in *Jawâd Namah*, Iqbal summarizes his vision of a new world. This vision is simultaneously intellectual, ethical, religious, and humanistic. It is intellectual in that it seeks to achieve a viable balance between the principles of constancy and change; it rests on an enduring substratum that, on the one hand, guarantees societal continuity, and, on the other, supports an institutional framework that is responsive to society's changing needs. It is ethical in that it is marked by egalitarianism; it does not divide mankind into oppressors and victims, but erases all artificial barriers existing between the members of the human race. It is religious in that it finds its historical sanction in a religion—Islam. According to Iqbal, the rule of the second caliph of Islam, 'Umar, represents an objectification of the ideal herein outlined. Finally, the vision is humanistic in that the most important material needed for the building of the ideal world is the human material. It is the human will and aspirations that will bring such a world into existence. The ideal world thus exists within our "breasts" and has only to be brought out and given tangible form.

TRANSLATION

There is a world still lost¹⁷ in our breasts,

A world still awaiting the call of "Arise!"¹⁸

¹⁶ *Jawid Namah*, in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*: Farsi, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1989, p. 539.

¹⁷ *still lost*: The world is "lost" in the sense in which we use the phrase "lost treasure." The adverb "still" is meaningful, too. As we learn in the next few lines, the ideal world, Iqbal is alluding to come into existence during the time of the second caliph, 'Umar. This being so, "still" can only mean that the world ceased to exist a long time ago and has to be rediscovered. Iqbal's view of the rapid early expansion of Islam was somewhat different than the one usually held. He believed that the very success of Muslims in conquering vast areas of land in a short period of time had thwarted the possibility of constructing a model Islamic society on solid foundations. In other words, what was gained in breadth was lost in depth. Since this happened centuries ago, the ideal has remained unrealized for a very long time. It is against the background of this view of Iqbal's that the forcefulness of the word "still" can properly be appreciated.

A world without distinctions of blood and colour,
And whose evening is brighter than the morning of the West;¹⁹
A world that is purged of sultan and slave,²⁰
And is boundless like the believer's heart;²¹
A lovely world, whose seed was cast
Into 'Umar's soul by just one blessed look²²
A world eternal, but with ever new adventure²³

¹⁸ *A world . . . "Arise!"* The Arabic word used in the original, *qum*, is associated in the Qur'ān with Jesus, who used to revive the dead by saying: *Qum bi idhni llahi*, "Arise, by God's will!" The world, in other words, is waiting for someone who would have the power to raise it from the dead.

¹⁹ *A world . . . West:* Iqbal was critical of the phenomenon of racism in the West, and the world envisioned by him is an egalitarian society in the truest sense of the expression. "And whose evening is brighter than the morning of the West" means: Even at its most ordinary ("evening") this new world will surpass the West at its most impressive ("morning").

²⁰ *A world . . . slaves:* That is, a world where the unjust division of mankind into master and slave will be abolished. The thought expressed in this line is not to be dismissed as poetic fancy. Iqbal regarded *mulūkīyyat* ("kingship") as a bane of the historic Islamic civilization, and his wish for a world where there would be no sultans and slaves is a powerful—and painful—reminder of the havoc wrought by the dominant monarchical tradition in Islamic history.

²¹ According to a putative *hadīth*, the universe, though huge, is too small a place to accommodate God, but the believer's heart is big enough to accommodate Him.

²² *A lovely . . . look:* Looking for precedents for such an ideal world, Iqbal settles on the era of the second caliph, 'Umar. 'Umar, who pioneered the establishment of major military, financial, and other institutions and provided guidelines for organizing social life in a number of areas, is commonly regarded as the architect of the first great Islamic State. But it was the training he received from the Prophet Muhammad that enabled him to carry out his role and mission in Islamic history; it was the impact of the "look" of the Prophet—Iqbal, dramatizing the matter, calls it a single look that transformed 'Umar, imparting to him the energy and vision that led to the creation of the first great blossoming of Islamic civilization at the caliph's hands.

²³ *adventures:* Iqbal means "happenings, incidents," but "adventures," understood in the Latin sense, is probably more appropriate. In fact the word used by Iqbal is *warīdat*, which is originally Arabic and means the same as the Latin *adventus*, past participle of *advenire*.

Ever new the products²⁴ of its Master Principles;²⁵

Its interior unafflicted with change,

Its exterior undergoing change every moment.²⁶

Such a world is inside you, look!²⁷

I will tell you about its Master Principles ...²⁸

²⁴ *products*: The original, *barg-o-baʿr*, means literally, “leaves and fruit.”

²⁵ *Master Principles*: The word used in the original is *muʿAkamāt*, from Qurʿān 3:7.

²⁶ *A world eternal . . . every moment*: This is possibly the most concise statement Iqbal provides of one of the principal theses of his philosophy. In Iqbal’s view, the survival and progress of a nation are contingent on that nation’s discovering of the point of equilibrium between change and constancy. Digging into the Islamic tradition for concepts that would provide structure to his argument, Iqbal comes up with the notions of *īʿbir* (exterior) and *baʿḤin* (interior). If a nation succeeds in developing an infrastructure of principles (let us call this the *baʿḤin* of the nation) that has perennial validity, and is at the same time able to build, in every age, new institutions (let us call them the *īʿbir* of the nation) that are organically derived from that *baʿḤin* and effectively meet the particular needs and challenges of the age, then that nation, according to Iqbal, has ensured its survival and is on the road to progress.

²⁷ *Such . . . look!* Note the envelope structure of the poem, which began with “There is a world still lost in our breasts,” and ends with a similar thought.

²⁸ In the several pages that follow (656-663), Jamāl al-Dân al-Afghāni dwells on the *muʿAkamāt* he has already alluded to. That these *muʿAkamāt* are, according to Iqbal, derived from the Qurʿān is borne out by the fact that the whole treatment is entitled *MuʿAkamāt i ʿjlam i Qurʿānâ* (“The Master Principles of the Qurʿānic World”). The four sections into which the treatment is divided have the following titles: “Adam’s Caliphate”; “The Rule of God”; “The Land Belongs to God” (a reference to many Qurʿānic verses, e.g., 7:128); and “Wisdom is a Great Good” (a reference to Qurʿān 2:269).