

MUHAMMAD IQBAL - PHILOSOPHY OF THE SELF

RIFFAT HASSAN

Iqbal's philosophy is often described as the philosophy of *Khudi*, or the "Self." For him the fundamental fact of human life is the absolute and irrefutable consciousness of one's own being. For Iqbal, the advent of humanity on earth is a great and glorious event, not an event signifying human sinfulness and degradation. He points out that according to the Qur'an, the earth is humanity's "dwelling-place" and "a source of profit" to it. Iqbal does not think that having been created by GOD, human beings were placed in a super-sensual paradise from which they are expelled on account of an act of disobedience to GOD. Pointing out that the term "Adam" functions as the symbol of self-conscious humanity rather than as the name of an individual in the Qur'an, Iqbal describes the "Fall" a transition from "a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience." (*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1930: 85).

For Iqbal, Adam's story is not the story of the "First Man" but the ethical experience, in symbolic form, of every human being. Following the Qur'anic teaching that though human beings come from the earth, GOD's spirit has been breathed into them, Iqbal holds on the one hand, that human beings are divinely created, and, on the other hand, that they have evolved from matter. Unlike dualists, Iqbal sees no impassable gulf between matter and spirit, nor does he see human beings as a mere episode or accident in the huge evolutionary process. On the contrary, the whole cosmos is there to serve as the basis and ground for the emergence and perfection of the "Ego." Humanity's evolution has not come to an end, for the destiny of human beings lies "beyond the stars."

The purpose of life is the development of the Self. In order that they may achieve the fullest possible development, it is essential for human beings to possess knowledge. Following

the Qur'an, Iqbal maintains that there are two sources of knowledge: the inner consciousness of human beings and the outer world of nature. Starting with the intuition of the Self, human beings become aware of the "Not-Self," the confronting "other" which provides a constant challenge for them. Nature, however, does not confront GOD in the same way as it confronts humanity, since it is a phase of GOD's consciousness. GOD is immanent since GOD comprehends the whole universe, but also transcendent since GOD is not identical with the created world. All life is individual. There is a gradually rising scale of self-hood running from the almost inert to GOD, who is the Ultimate Ego. GOD is not immobile nor is the universe a fixed product; GOD is constantly creative and dynamic and the process of Creation still goes on. The Qur'anic saying, "Toward GOD is your limit" (Surah 53: *An-Najm*: 42), gives Iqbal an infinite worldview, and he applies it to every aspect of the life of humanity and the universe.

Iqbal distinguishes between two aspects of the Self, the efficient and the appreciative. The efficient self is that which is concerned with, and is itself partially formed, by the physical world. It apprehends the succession of impressions and discloses itself as a series of specific, and consequently numerable, states. The appreciative self is the deeper self of which one becomes aware only in moments of profound meditation when the efficient self is in abeyance. The unity of the appreciative self is that in it each experience permeates the whole. The multiplicity of its elements is unlike that of the efficient self. There is change and movement, but this change and movement are indivisible; their elements interpenetrate and are wholly non-serial in character.

Corresponding to the two aspects of the Self are the two levels of time, serial time and pure duration. Serial time is spatial or clock time, whereas pure duration is a ceaseless continuous flow in which all things live and move and have their being. As human beings perfect their ego-hood, they cast off the girdle of serial time and gain a measure of eternity.

Iqbal believes ardently that human beings are the makers of their own destiny and that the key to destiny lies in one's character. He constantly refers to the Qur'anic verse, "Verily GOD will not change the condition of a people till they change what is in themselves" (Surah 13: *Ar-Ra'd*: 12). Humanity's mission on earth is not only to win greater freedom but also to gain immortality, which according to Iqbal: "is not ours by right; it is to be achieved by personal effort. Man is only a candidate for it." (*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1930: 119).

Though humanity is the pivot around which Iqbal's philosophy revolves, yet as pointed out by Schimmel, Iqbal's "revaluation of Man is not that of *Man qua Man*, but of Man in relation to GOD" (Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 1963: 382). Iqbal's "Ideal Person" is the servant of GOD. The relation between humanity and GOD is a personal one, hence the great importance of prayer in the thought of Iqbal. The belief in the one living GOD gives humanity freedom from all false deities and fortifies it against forces of disintegration. Iqbal sees his concept of the "Ideal Person" realised in the Prophet of Islam, whose life exemplifies all the principles dearest to Iqbal's heart. In his view art, religion and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of the Self. That which strengthens the Self is good and that which weakens it is bad. Iqbal does not admit the absolute existence of evil but regards it as being necessary for the actualization of moral purpose as vital activity in the world. His Iblis (or al-Shaytan, Satan) is the counterpart to his "Ideal Person."

"Muhammad Iqbal - Philosophy of the Self," 2018 New Horizons, website:
<http://www.nhorizons.org/articles/item/iqbal>