Iqbal’s “Khudi” - Its Meaning and Strengthening Factors

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The Meaning of “Khudi”

Explaining the meaning of the concept of “Khudi”, in his introduction to the first edition of Asrar-i-Khudi, Iqbal puts this question: “What is this luminous centre of the unity of intuition or mental awareness which intensifies human thoughts and feelings, this mysterious thing which is the repository of the diversified and unlimited potentialities of human nature, this “khudi” or “ana” or “mun” which is practically known but essentially hidden, which is the maker of appearances, yet cannot bear to be seen itself? Is it an eternal fact, or has life, in order to fulfil its immediate practical needs, invented this fanciful delusion or plausible deception? From the viewpoint of ethics, the way of life of individuals and actions depends on the answer to this question.” The answer to this question, says Iqbal, does not depend “on the intellectual capability of individuals or nations, as much as it does on their attitude.”

It is to be pointed out that Iqbal’s choice of the word “Khudi” raised a storm of protests. This was understandable considering the highly negative significance of the word “Khudi” which was synonymous with selfishness and egotism. Iqbal was aware of this and admitted that the “word “Khudi” was chosen with great difficulty and most reluctantly,” because “from a literary point of view it has many shortcomings and ethically it is generally used in a bad sense both in Urdu and Persian.”

requirements of verse, I thought that the word ‘Khudi’ was the most suitable,” also because “there is … some evidence in the Persian language of the use of the word ‘Khudi’ in the simple sense of Self, i.e. to say the colourless fact of the ‘I’. Thus metaphysically the word ‘Khudi’ is used in the sense of that indescribable feeling of ‘I’, which forms the basis of the uniqueness of each individual.”

For Iqbal, ethically, the word “khudi” means “self-reliance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-preservation, even self-assertion when such a thing is necessary, in the interests of life and the power to stick to the cause of truth, justice, duty …” For Iqbal such conduct is moral “because it helps in the integration of the forces of the Ego, thus hardening it, as against the forces of disintegration and dissolution.” Iqbal believes in assertion and in being hard, but he “never identifies hardness with oppression, or the self with selfishness.” Iqbal thought it necessary also to warn the readers “that ‘khudi’ is not used to mean pride as in the common usage of the word in Urdu.”

The Importance of the Self

For Iqbal, the Self is the fundamental reality of the world and the measure of all things. “… the idea of personality,” says Iqbal, “gives us a standard of value: it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art, religion, and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of personality.”

For the perfection of the Self a hundred worlds may be created and destroyed:

3. Ibid. 4. Ibid., p 244. 5. Ibid.
7. Iqbal quoted in H. A. Shuja’, “Iqbal kay Nazriyah-i Khudi ka Sahih Mafulum,” Iqbal, Lahore, Volume 1, No. 4, April 1953, p. 84.
For the sake of a single rose it destroys a hundred rose gardens
And makes a hundred lamentations in quest of a single melody.
For one sky it produces a hundred new moons;
And for one word a hundred discourses
The excuse for this wastefulness and cruelty
Is the shaping and perfecting of spiritual beauty.  

The same thought has also been expressed thus:

cka hoonصد گلستان کے درمیان کی بہتری سے سحر پیدا

Dawn is born of the blood of a hundred thousand stars.

According to Iqbal, the ego “has the quality of growth … as well as the quality of corruption.”  
It can expand to absorb the elements of the universe and the attributes of God. On the other hand, it can also degenerate to the level of matter. In his writings, particularly in Asrar-i Khudi, Iqbal tells us about the factors which strengthen or weaken the ego.

**The Factors Which Strengthen the Self**

Iqbal looks upon personality as a state of tension which can “continue only if that state is maintained. If the state of tension is not maintained, relaxation will ensue. … That which tends to maintain the state of tension tends to make us immortal.”  
For Iqbal it is of the utmost importance that this state of tension be maintained for it is only by the preservation and completion of the personality that we can achieve “that awareness of reality which Iqbal believed to be man's ultimate goal on earth, that awareness of what Eliot called the still point of the turning world.”  
The chief factors which strengthen the personality are:

(i) Desire

Throughout Iqbal’s writings, great stress is placed on Desire as the spring from which the Self draws sustenance. A Self that is lacking in Desire, is, in fact, dead. Iqbal says:

زندگانی شوقیت پا ساختن در کلی تمحم دلی الاداعتن

15. Javid Namah, p. 70.
Life means a passionate burning, an urge to make,
To cast in the dead clay of the seed a heart.\(^{16}\)

And so

\[
\text{آرزو را در دل خود زنده دار}
\text{تا تگردید مسیر خاک توه مزاور}^{17}
\]

Keep desire alive in thy heart,
Lest thy little dust become a tomb.\(^{18}\)

Life can be viewed as dynamic only when it is imbued with restless burning. All that humanity has achieved is a product of Desire:

'\(\text{Tis desire that enriches Life,}
\text{And the Mind is a child of its womb.}
\text{What are social organization, customs, and laws,}
\text{What is the secret of the novelties of science?}
\text{A desire which realized itself by its own strength}
\text{And burst forth from the heart and took shape.}\(^{20}\)

Iqbal calls Desire by several names such as “\text{suz}”, “\text{hasrat}”, “\text{justuju}”, “\text{arzu}”, “\text{ishtiyaq}” and “\text{tamanna}”. Desire is a creative power even when it remains unfulfilled. In fact, Iqbal, in the tradition of Persian and Urdu poetry, thinks that

\[
\text{لغظہ صد حاصل پہیا سے لاحاصل میں ہے}^{21}
\]

A hundred joys are to be found in our unrewarding quest.

The fulfilment of Desire is “at the same time, extreme happiness and the end of happiness. The separation is overcome. But without separation there is no love and no life.”\(^{22}\) Iqbal says:

17. \textit{Asrar-i Khudi}, p. 16.
Separation lends eyes to dust
And gives a leaf
Of grass
A mountain’s mass
Of grief.
Separation is love’s test
And measure and a mirror
Which shows to himself the true lover:
It is by heartache that we live,
And on heartache do lovers thrive.24

In Payam-i Mashriq, we have Iqbal’s own confession:

From the spark to the star, from the star to the sun
Is my quest;
I have no desire for a goal,
For me, rest spells death!
With an impatient eye and hopeful heart
I seek for the end of that which is endless!26

Since life gets its fire and zest from Desire, the poet prays to God:

Grant me, O Lord, that thorn whose prick is everlasting,
That pain, O God, whose torment is everlasting.

What makes a human being what he is, is the capacity for endless yearning. In Iqbal’s eyes, it is this capacity which lifts human being to a station where he would not change his position even with God:

24. Translation by H. Husain.  
25. Payam-i Mashriq, p. 149.  
Priceless treasure is the agony and burning of Desire,
I would not exchange my human station for the glory of God.

(ii) Love

Love is the active sense of positive Desire. Iqbal “lays great emphasis on the value of love … for strengthening the Self.” He uses the word in a very wide sense, and means by it “the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavour to realize them.” As Peter Avery points out, Iqbal’s philosophy is essentially a philosophy of Love. Like Rumi and Ghazali, he preached a philosophy of dynamic love leading to the fulfilment of human destiny as well as God’s purpose in creation.

From Love, the Self acquires vitality and radiance:

By love it (the self) is made more lasting,
More living, more burning, more glowing.

Love is creative of all that is good in life, and the supreme guide of human destiny:

Come, love, thou heart’s most secret whispering,
Come, thou our sowing and our harvesting,
These earthly spirits have too aged grown -
Out of our clay another Adam bring.26

For Iqbal, as for Tillich, “Life is being in actuality and love is the moving prayer of life … In man’s experience of love the nature of life becomes manifest. … The power of love is not something which is added to an otherwise finished process, but life has love in itself as one of its constitutive elements”37 In “The Mosque of Cordoba” Iqbal pays tribute to Love in the highest possible terms:

Love is Gabriel’s breath, Love is Mohamed’s strong heart, Love is the envoy of God, Love is the utterance of God.
Even our mortal clay, touched by Love’s ecstasy, glows;
Love is a new-pressed wine, Love is the goblet of kings,
Love is the priest of the shrine, Love is the commander of hosts,
Love is the son of the road counting a thousand homes.
Love’s is the plectrum that draws music from life’s taut strings
Love's is the warmth of life, Love's is the radiance of life.”39

Love is the fundamental urge of Being, its elan vital and its raison d'être.40 For the heart, the repository of Love, one can give away all else that God created:

You can give the sun and moon and stars out of your hand,
For the value of that handful of dust which contains a heart.

For Iqbal, as for Rumi, only Love is an intrinsic value. All other values are extrinsic and instrumental and are to be judged according to their capacity for the realization of this primary value. Love is the only categorical imperative and strikes no bargain with God or humankind. He who denies Love is an infidel:

I have never discovered well
Law’s way and the wont thereof,
But know him an infidel
Who denieth the power of Love.

The strength and potency of our faith depend on the degree and depth of Love. If one is steadfast in Love, one can win all things, and even “capture God”:

Be a lover constant in devotion to thy beloved,
That thou mayst cast thy noose and capture God.
By the might of Love evoke an army
Reveal thyself on the Faran of Love,
That the Lord of the Ka’ba may show thee favour
And make thee the object of the text,
“Lo, I will appoint a vicegerent on the earth” [Qur’an, ii. 28].

42. Hakim, “The Concept of Love in Rumi and Iqbal,” p. 269.
45. Asrar-i Khudi, p. 23.
For Iqbal, Love is both poison and antidote, both the way and the end. It is "enough for ant and bird and man in both worlds." There is nothing beyond for "Love is thy one beloved and goal."

Lo, love’s ocean is my vessel,
And love’s ocean is my strand;
For no other ship I hanker,
Nor desire another land.

Although Love “is not restricted to its emotional element there is no love without the emotional element.” This element often comes into play in Iqbal’s verse:

I will convert this dross I hold
By passion's alchemy to gold,
That on the morrow I may bring
To thee thy wished for offering.

Love is, indeed, “more than elixir. The latter is supposed to turn baser metals into gold; the former turns all baser passions into itself.”

Iqbal’s conception of Love differs significantly from the conception of Love commonly found in the tradition of Urdu and Persian poetry. Love is that which "individualizes the lover as well as the beloved." It does not accept self-annihilation at any price:

47. Zabur-i ‘Ajam, p. 264. 48. Ibid., p. 156. 49. Ibid., p. 28.
If vision self-effacement bring, *Khudi*
The veil is a far better thing;
Thy trade hath little to entice
That doth require so great a price.\(^{57}\)

Love is that which hardens and makes one live dangerously. Commenting on Iqbal’s idea of Love, E.M. Forster says: “… though Love is indeed good, it has nothing to do with Mercy. Love is appropriation.”\(^{58}\) So, in *Asrar-i Khudi*, we see Iqbal’s contemptuous rejection of vegetarianism.\(^{59}\)

Iqbal’s lover is not the eternally-lamenting, rather weakly and pathetic creature one meets on almost every page of an anthology of Urdu verse. Iqbal associates Love with kingdom and dominion rather than with tears and ignominy:

> عاشق آن نیست کہ گرم فانگر دارد
> عاشق آن اسے کہ بہ کرف دو جھالہ دارد\(^{60}\)

> Never lover true is he
> Who lamenteth dolefully;
> Lover be, who in his hold
> Hath the double world controlled.\(^{61}\)

Like Tillich, Iqbal thinks that “the power of a being is its possibility to affirm itself against the non-being within it and against it. The power of a being is the greater the more non-being is taken into its self-affirmation.”\(^{62}\) Love is that which assimilates, which consolidates and fortifies, therefore, “Love is the foundation, not the negation, of power.”\(^{63}\) That which negates power is not Love:

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60. *Zabur-i ‘Ajam*, p. 130.
It is something else, something other than Love, which teaches a king the ways of a slave.

Love is authority and manifest proof, Both worlds are subject to the seal-ring of love.

(iii) Faqr

The words “Faqir” (or its synonym Qalandar”) and “Faqr” (or “Istighna”) appear very frequently in Iqbal's verse. There is more than one sense in which “Faqr” is interpreted as Iqbal points out:

There is a “Faqr” which only teaches cunning to the hunter,
There is a “Faqr” which shows how man can conquer the world!
There is a “Faqr” which makes nations humble and depressed,
There is a “Faqr” which endows the dust with the attributes of gold!

Iqbal uses “Faqr” to denote an inner attitude of detachment and superiority to material possessions. “It is a kind of intellectual and emotional asceticism which does not turn away from the world as a source of evil and corruption but uses it for the pursuit of good and worthy ends.” Sometimes he identifies Islam with “Faqr”:

If Europe has an inborn hatred for the word “Islam,” another name for this creed is self-respecting “Faqr.”

66. Translation by Arberry, Javid Namah, p. 32.
68. Translation by Saiyidain, op. cit., p. 119.
69. Ibid., p. 118.70. Zarb- i Kalim, p. 25.
Sometimes Iqbal looks upon “Faqr” as the shield of the faithful:

خدا ے پاک بندون کو حکومت مین غلامی مین
زرو کوئی اگر محفوظ رکھتی ہے تو استغننا ہ71

In authority and in subjection, for the pure persons of God if there is any protective shield it is “Faqr.”

Iqbal points out repeatedly that a “Faqir” is not a monk or an ascetic who has renounced the material world and who lives a life of abstinence and self-denial, cut off from the rest of humankind.

کالر ترک نپی آب و یک ے سمجوری
کالر ترک ہے تسخیر. خاک و نوری!
مین ایہ فقر ے اے انل حلفت باز آیا
تمہارا فقر ے دپتی و زہوری72

Leaving the world of water and clay is not the end of renunciation; True renunciation is the conquest of earth and heaven.

I wash my hands off this “Faqr,” O members of this group, - your “Faqr” is nothing but penury and grief.

The “Faqir” undergoes all the trials and tribulations arising from a daily encounter with the temptations that flesh is heir to. His life is not calm like the green of the meadows, but is always stormy like the rough waves in mid-ocean:

سکون پرستی، راپس ے فقر ے بیزار
فقر ے سفید، بمیاں طوافی!73

“Faqr” is weary of the passivity of the ascetic; the boat of a “Faqir” is always storm-ridden.

What knowledge does for the intellect, “Faqr” does for the soul. It clarifies the vision and gives power and strength:

علم کا مقصود ے پاک ے عقل و خرد
فقر کا مقصود ے عفت، قلب و نگاہ
چہتے ے جب فقر ے سان ے بتغ، بیغ خودی
ایک سبب ے کی ضرب گرتن ے کار سببہ74

The objective of learning is purity of mind,
The objective of “Faqr” is the purity of heart and eye.
When the sword of Self is sharpened on the whetstone of “Faqr”
the stroke of one soldier does the work of an army.

A “Qalandar” is the faithful who “has nothing and possesses
everything.” His power is greater than the power of kings:

Crown, throne and army are all the miracles of “Faqr” -
“Faqr” is the leader of leaders, the king of kings.

Just as Iqbal identifies Love with authority, so he identifies “Faqr”
(literally, poverty) with dominion:

Alas! that you lost the secret of being a “Faqir,”
for the kingdoms of Rum and Syria belong to a “Faqir!”

Unless one is able to transcend the physical world, and rise, as it were,
above the rewards it has to offer, one cannot attain real kingship:

Ask God for the selfsame heart and mind -
being wealthy is not possible without poverty.

A person of “Faqr” has kingship in his poverty, for he has been given the
secrets of dominion. To one who lives in bondage, Iqbal says:

You have been afflicted with servitude
because you could not guard your “Faqr”

A “Faqir” is not enslaved by anything; he has “freedom from everything

77. Ibid., p. 91.
78. Ibid., p. 118.
besides God."80 It is this attribute of God-loving persons which enables them to conquer time and space:

"Faqr" is also attributed to ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, whose name has become, in connection with the conquest of the fortress of Khyber, a synonym of the victory of true poverty over worldly strength.82

For Iqbal:

That man of “Faqr” is better than Darius and Alexander whose poverty is imbued with the spirit of the Lion of God (‘Ali).

A “Faqir” unlike a worldly king, needs no arms or armies for his protection. God’s power is his sword and his shield:

"Faqr” comes to the battlefield without arms and apparatus; the stroke is effective if the heart is sound.

Professor Yusuf Salim Chishty points out that the two main ideas underlying Iqbal’s concept of “Faqr” are “Fikr” and “Zikr.”85 “Zikr” is described as feeling the presence of God in one’s heart and employing all one’s limbs in the discharge of obligatory duties ceaselessly, with true reverence and love; “Fikr” is reaching “an unknown through the help of two or more known” (i.e. by a process of inferring).86 “Fikr” and “Zikr” are complementary; “Zikr” illumines one’s heart, “Fikr” illumines one’s mind.87 Both together form “Faqr.” Iqbal says:

80. Schimmel, op. cit., p. 140,
85. Y. S. Chishty, “Iqbal’s Philosophy of ‘Faqr’”, Iqbal Review, October 1962, p. 44.
86. Ibid., pp. 44-45.  87. Ibid., p. 49.
Without the Koran, the lion is a wolf;  
The poverty of the Koran is the root of empire.  
The poverty of the Koran is the mingling of meditation and reason.  
I have never seen reason perfect without meditation.  

Iqbal whose own life was a lesson in “Faqiri” is constantly enjoining upon his readers to inculcate the inner detachment and serenity which can enable a person to be a part of the world and yet not serve any God but God. To his son he wrote:

مرأ طريق امرى نين غريبي سه!  
خودى نه، بيج غريبي مين نام پیدا کر!  

My way lies not in wealth but in “Faqiri”,  
your Selfhood do not sell - in poverty make a name.

In common usage today, a beggar is known as a “Faqir” but in Iqbal's thought “Faqiri” and beggary are diametrically opposed. A true “Faqir” takes no dole even from God: Iqbal’s lines addressed to a would-be patron may be interpreted in a wider context:

غیرت فقر مگر که نسک اس کو قبول  
جب کسی اس سے پہلے میری خدائی کی زکات  

(By) the pride of “Faqr” could not accept -  
when he said, “These are the alms of my omnipotence.”

A “Faqir” not only does not accept charity, it is against the dignity of his state to complain about the hardness of his lot. He bears his cross willingly and patiently, else his “Faqr” is yet imperfect:

جو فقر پھا تلخی دواران کا گلد سن  
اس فقر پھی بانچ سه اپنی پونی گلدیا  

88. Javid Namah, p. 89.  
89. Translation by Arberry, Javid Namah, p. 68.  
91. Armaghan-i Hijaz, p. 278.  
That “Faqr” which complains of the hardships of life – in it yet lingers the odour of beggary.

A nation which combines in its character the attributes of Love and “Faqr” can never know defeat:

خوار جهان میں کبھی بوہنے سکتی وہ قوم
عشق بو جس کا جسور فتر بو جس کا غیور!  

In the world that nation can never lose face whose Love is courageous, whose “Faqr” is self-respecting.

(iv) Sayyadi

Literally, “Sayyadi” means hunting, and “Sayyad” is a hunter. In Iqbal’s thought where so many words find a new connotation, “Sayyadi” comes to denote a kind of heroic idealism based on daring, pride and honour. It is most often symbolized by the lion and the falcon (“Shahin”), the emblems of royalty.

Iqbal has said a number of times in his poetry that a “Shahin” builds no nest:

گذر اوقات کر آئیتہ ہے بہ کوہ و بیابان میں
کہ شاہین کہ ایں ذاتیت ہے کار آشتیان بندی!  

It passes its time in the mountains and in the wilderness; it is degrading for a “Shahin” to undertake the building of a nest.

A “Shahin” builds no nest because for it there is no rest or repose. It lives not in comfort and security but in the wideness of the skies or on the exposed wind-blown mountain-tops. It is the king of the birds precisely because it disdains any form of safety or ease. To the younger generation, Iqbal says:

93. Ibid., p. 48.  
95. Ibid., pp. 162-63.
When the spirit of the eagle is born in young men it sees its goal in the openness of the skies.
Your home is not on the dome of the palace, You’re a “Shahin”- live on the mountain-cliffs!

So far from wishing to live a protected life, the attitude of the “Sayyad” is to invite danger:

لاوئن هو تنکی کہسی سے آتینے گا لیے بہیاہ بہت بھون جن کو جلالاں گا لیے

From where should I bring the straws for a nest which the lightning is very impatient to burn?

The “Sayyad” hunts for the sake of adventure, not for the booty that he wins. In a poem entitled “Shahin”, Iqbal says:

جام و کبوتر کا بھوکا نہیں میں کہ لدی زندگی باز کی زادہ ہو!
جبہنے بالائی پھل کو جہتیا لیے گرم ہڑکے کہ لدی اک پہان ہو!

I’m not greedy for a pigeon or a dove, unlimited for the life of a falcon is one of abstinence. Swooping, turning und then pouncing a gain that is a way for keeping the blood warm.

The “Sayyad” lives hazardously for he believes, as did Nietzsche, that “the secret of a joyful life is to live dangerously.”

Life not living is
Except we live in danger.

He possesses unlimited daring and courage, for he knows:

میری میں فقری میں شاہی مین غلامی مین کچھ کام نہیں بنتا نے جرات- رنگانیا

In wealth or poverty, in authority or servitude,
One cannot accomplish anything without the courage of madness.

He is not afraid of the forces which obstruct his way, nor is he fearful that his own strength will give way and that he will collapse.

A “Shahin” never crashes down from its soaring due to fatigue,
If you are strong, then there is no danger of falling

The “Sayyad” has a code of honour which he must follow. He is truthful and bold and unfamiliar with the ways of deceit and cunning:

The code of young men is being truthful and bold,
God’s lions know not the arts of a fox.

This art is not an imitation of other persons or of Nature. A “Sayyad” creates out of the fire and depth of his own soul. An artist, Iqbal thinks, is a “Sayyad”.

Free art from imitating Nature's way-
are artists “Sayyads” or mere birds of prey?

The “Sayyad” who lives the life of a warrior does not wish to die in peace. He would rather die the way he has lived, amid flames, provided they do not languish, for

That fire I wouldn't have even for punishment,
The flames of which aren't bold and wild, and bright.

To those who would possess the attributes of “Sayyad” Iqbal has this advice to give:

"If you desire honour in the Garden of Life,
Learn then to live a thorn-entangled life.

And for them this is his own prayer to God:

In elevation, make purpose the rival of the Pleiades,
Grant the pride of the shore and the freedom of the waves.

(v) Suffering

Suffering is included in the concept of “Faqr” and is associated with all the factors strengthening the Self, but it needs special emphasis. Since “all the results of individuality, of separate selfhood, necessarily involve pain or suffering,” Iqbal was right in observing that “No religious system can ignore the moral value of suffering.”

That wisdom comes through suffering and sorrow is a thought often repeated. Keats held that it was only through suffering that an “Intelligence” became a “Soul.” “Do you not see,” he wrote in a letter, “how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways.” For Iqbal, too, “Suffering is a gift from the gods in order to make man see the whole of life.” In memorable lines once again he embodies the same thought:

Understanding the world is harder than looking after it—it is when the heart bleeds that vision is born.

Rumi often uses the symbols of rue and aloeswood exhaling sweet perfumes when burnt. Iqbal too wishes to be “burnt” to be tried by fire so that his art can be perfected:

Tongue-tied, thou art in pain:
Cast thyself upon fire, like rue!
Like the bell, break silence at last, and from every limb,
Utter forth a lamentation!
Thou art fire; fill the world with thy glow!
Make others burn with thy burning.

The poet is in agony; the fire which he pours into his songs cannot but scorch his own soul, yet he knows that it is this very pain which gives meaning to his life:

My passionate singing has consumed me, but this is also the reason for my living.

Iqbal was well aware of the importance of suffering for the maturing of the personality. The following words of Nietzsche with whom he had a remarkable affinity might well have been his own: “The discipline of suffering - of great suffering - know ye not that it is only this discipline that has produced all the elevations of humanity hitherto? The tension of soul is misfortune which communicates to its energy, its shuddering in view of rack or ruin, its inventiveness and bravery in undergoing, enduring, interpreting and exploiting misfortune, and whatever depth, mystery, disguise, spirit, artifice, or greatness has been bestowed upon the soul has it

Iqbal says:

Even if one petal is missing, it is no rose;
If the nightingale has seen no autumn, it is no nightingale.
The heart’s tale is coloured with the blood of desire,
The song of man is incomplete without sorrow.
For the seeing eye, grief’s scar is the lamp of the heart,
For the spirit, the mirror of a sigh is an adornment.
Man’s nature acquires perfection through unhappy accidents,
For the heart’s mirror, the dust of woe is like rouge,
Grief is the strongest feather in the wing of the heart’s bird,
Man’s heart is a mystery, sorrow the revealer of this secret.
Sorrow is not sorrow, but a silent song of the spirit
Which is entwined with the melody from the lute of life.

In Iqbal’s verse we also find the idea taken from popular piety, namely, that God sends afflictions to those whom He prefers. Sarah Williams’ beautiful lines:

Is it so, O Christin Heaven, that the highest suffer most

That the strongest wander farthest, and more hopelessly are lost,
That the mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain,
That the anguish of the singer makes the sweetness of the strain?

find an echo in Iqbal:

مری فطرت کی بلندی یہ نوالے غم یہ

The exaltation of my nature is due to my sorrowful strain.

Our dear ones become dearer through their suffering, and so our suffering must endear us to God, as Iqbal says:

تو چیا پچا کے نے رکا ے ترا آئینے یہ وہ آئینے
کہ شکستہ پو تو عزیز تر ے پہ آئینہ ساز مین

Don’t keep protecting it - for your mirror is that mirror,
That broken it is dearer to the eye of the mirror-maker.

Throughout his poetry Iqbal speaks of the “lamentation at dawn” without which nothing can be accomplished. Goethe too had said:

Who ne’er his bread in sorrow ate,
Who ne’er the mournful midnight hours
Weeping upon his bed he sate,
He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers."

(vi) Forbearance

“The principle of the ego-sustaining deed is respect for the ego in myself as well as in others,” said Iqbal. He was a great believer in forbearance and tolerance. To his son he gave this advice:

221. Ibid., p. 320.
Religion is a constant yearning for perfection, 
It begins in reverence and ends in Love: 
It is a sin to utter harsh words 
For the believer and the unbeliever are alike children of God. 
What is "Admiyat"? Respect for man! 
Learn to appreciate the true worth of man; 
The man of Love learns the ways of God 
And is benevolent alike to the believer and the unbeliever; 
Welcome faith and unfaith alike to the heart! 
If the heart flees from the heart, woe betide the heart!124

Iqbal himself explains what he means by tolerance According to Gibbon (whom Iqbal quotes), “There is the tolerance of the philosopher to whom all religions are equally true; of the historian to whom all are equally false; and of the politician to whom all are equally useful. There is the tolerance of the man who tolerates other modes of thought and behavior because he has himself grown absolutely indifferent to all modes of thought and behaviour. There is the toleration of the weak man who, on account of sheer weakness, must pocket all kinds of insults heaped on things or persons that he holds dear.”125 Iqbal observes that there is no ethical value in these types of tolerance; on the contrary, “they reveal the spiritual impoverishment of the man who practices them.”126 The tolerance in which Iqbal believes is born of strength rather than weakness. It is “begotten of intellectual breadth and spiritual expansion. It is the toleration of the spiritually powerful man who, while jealous of the frontiers of his own faith, can tolerate and even appreciate all forms of faith other than his own … only a true lover of God can appreciate the value of devotion even though it is directed to gods in which he himself cannot believe.”127

Associated with forbearance and tolerance is the idea of forgiveness. In Asrar-i Khudi Iqbal refers to the deep compassion

123. Javid Namah, pp. 241-42.  
126. Ibid.  
127. Ibid., pp. 115-16.
which the Prophet of Islam showed towards his enemies:

آی که بر اعدا در رحمت کشاد
مکه را پیغم لا تثرب داد

He opened the gate of mercy to his enemies,
He gave to Mecca the message, “No penalty shall be laid upon you.”

Iqbal describes fanaticism as “nothing but the principle of individuation working in the case of group,” and in this sense of the word defends it: “all forms of life are more or less fanatical and ought to be so if they care for their collective life.” However, when fanaticism involves an attitude of irreverence towards other modes of thinking, it is not condoned by Iqbal. As E M. Forster points out about Iqbal, “Whatever his opinions he was no fanatic, and he refers to Hindus and Christians with courtesy and respect.”

(vii) Courtesy

While stressing that one must always be hard with oneself, Iqbal does not forget to say, not once but repeatedly, that a leader must be kind and courteous in speech and manner. The full-grown ego must possess “husn-i akhlaq” (beauty of disposition). This makes Iqbal’s Perfect Person as worthy of affection as he is of obedience, his heart-winning ways supplementing his world-winning ways. He is no ruthless Superman asserting his authority mercilessly. He is soft in speech and needs to be both a warrior and a chivalrous person in order to be a leader:

نگ بلند، سخن دلنوژ، جان بر سوز
بی‌پنه رخت، سفر میر کروان کے لیے

High-aiming eye, heart-pleasing speech, a feeling soul-
These are the journey’s harness for the caravan-leader.

(viii) Obstructions

Obstructions are essential for the development of “Khudi.” Each hurdle that a person passes over in his long journey brings him

131. Ibid.
nearer his goal. It strengthens his resolve by putting his mettle to the test. One cannot struggle if there is nothing to struggle against. Iqbal looks upon obstructions - whatever be their form - as being necessary to human progress. In Asrar-i Khudi the saint ‘Ali Hujwiri speaks of the benefits of having an enemy:

Whosoever knows the states of the Self
Considers a powerful enemy to be a blessing from God.
To the seed of Man the enemy is as a rain-cloud;
He awakens its potentialities.
The sword of resolution is whetted by the stones in the way
And put to proof by traversing stage by stage.135

Like Rumi, Iqbal considers evil to be extremely important in the development of human personality. “Evil is the inevitable condition of good: out of darkness was created light. From this standpoint it possesses a positive value: it serves the purpose of God, it is relatively good.”136 The spirit of obstruction symbolized by Satan directs a person’s energies to newer channels. It offers a challenge to his spirit and is one of the forces behind his evolution, leading him from conquest to conquest.137 K. A. Hamid expresses Iqbal’s viewpoint very clearly: Humanity is made up of the Gabriel-element and the “Iblis”-element and “the development of ‘Khudi’ does not consist in the utter extinction of the ‘Iblis’-factor. ... The tragedy of ‘Iblis’ is not that he must die so that Adam may live: his tragedy is that his blood must forever feed the life-stream of his hated rival and enemy. It is not without reason that Iblis complains to Gabriel that it is his life-blood,

and not the latter’s everlasting devotion to God, which imparts colour and life to the story of Man. ‘Iblis’ pertains in some sense to the essence of the life-process. Hence … ‘Khudi’ cannot be built up with the Gabriel-element alone for its foundation. Satan's life-blood must always feed the growing plant.”

A human being, during the long and arduous course of his evolution, must face and overcome many painful obstacles, but Iqbal reminds him that “All that is in the universe is God’s, and the seemingly destructive force of nature become sources of life, if properly understood by man, who is endowed with the power to understand and to control them.”


139. Vahid, Ed., op. cit., p. 34.