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Qurʾānic Empiricism

The following passage is taken from the first lecture, "Knowledge and Religious Experience," in Muhammad Iqbal's The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. *It draws attention to what Iqbal regards as a conspicuous feature of the Qurʾān—namely, the Qurʾān's stress on reflective observation of nature. After quoting several Qurʾānic passages—2:164; 6:97–99; 25:45–46; 88:17–20; and 30:22, in that order—Iqbal offers his comments, which are reproduced below.*

No doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qurʾān in this reflective observation of Nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that of which Nature is regarded a symbol. But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Qurʾān which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science. It was a great point to awaken the empirical spirit in an age which renounced the visible as of no value in men's search after God. According to the Qurʾān, as we have seen before, the universe has a serious end. Its shifting actualities force our being into fresh formations. The intellectual effort to overcome the obstruction offered by it, besides enriching and amplifying our life, sharpens our insight, and thus prepares us for a more masterful insertion into subtler aspects of human experience. It is our reflective contact with the temporal flux of things which trains us for an intellectual vision of the non-temporal. Reality lives in its own appearances; and such a being as man, who has to maintain his life in an obstructing environment, cannot afford to ignore the visible. The Qurʾān opens our eyes to the great fact of change, through the appreciation and control of which alone it is possible to build a durable civilization. The cultures of Asia and, in fact, of the whole ancient world failed, because they approached Reality exclusively from within and moved from within outwards. This procedure gave them theory without power, and on mere theory no durable civilization can be based.

There is no doubt that the treatment of religious experience, as a source of Divine knowledge, is historically prior to the treatment of other regions of human experience for

the same purpose. The Qurʾān, recognizing that the empirical attitude is an indispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity, attaches equal importance to all the regions of human experience as yielding knowledge of the Ultimate Reality which reveals its symbols both within and without. One indirect way of establishing connexions with the reality that confronts us is reflective observation and control of its symbols as they reveal themselves to sense-perception; the other way is direct association with that reality as it reveals itself within. The naturalism of the Qurʾān is only a recognition of the fact that man is related to nature, and this relation, in view of its possibility as a means of controlling her forces, must be exploited not in the interest of unrighteous desire for domination, but in the nobler interest of a free upward movement of spiritual life. In the interests of securing a complete vision of Reality, therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Qurʾān describes as *Fuʾād* or *Qalb*, i.e. heart.

The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh
(Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), 11–12

Percipience

The following poem is taken from Part II of Muhammad Iqbal's Zabūr-i ʿAjam *("Psalms of Persia"). Its proposed English title, "Percipience," is meant to suggest the poem's principal motif, expressed in a variety of contexts in the seven verses:*

verse 1: only a perceptive mind can see how the world serves as God's messenger;

verse 2: the failure to achieve one's objective is only a failure to realize that one's commitment to pursue the objective is weak;

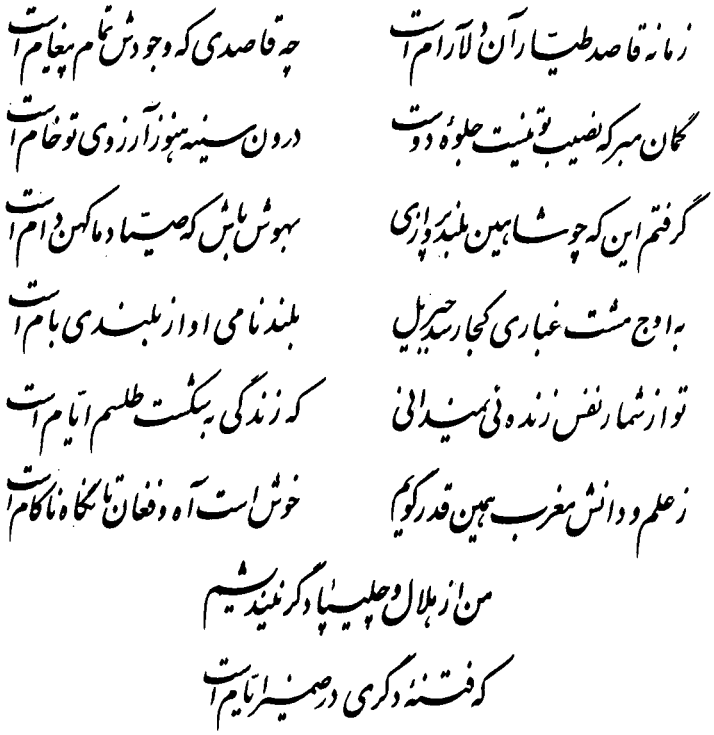
verse 3: a smug confidence in one's strength or ability to make an accomplishment can make one vulnerable;

verse 4: human beings' awareness of and their efforts to realize their potential can earn them a station higher than the angels';

verse 5: true life consists in seeing through, and then rising above, the artificial constraints of time;

verse 6: for all its merit, the Western tradition of learning and wisdom has failed to reach the ultimate truth;

verse 7: a perceptive mind would be more preoccupied with the issues of the present and the future than with those of the past.


زمانہ قاصد طیار آن نگار خرام است — چہ قاصدی کہ وجودش تمام پیغام است
گمان مبر کہ نصیب تو نیست جلوۂ دوست — درون سینہ ہنوز آرزوی تو خام است
گرفتم این کہ چو شاہین بلند پروازی — بہوش باش کہ صیاد ما کہن دام است
بہ اوج مشت غباری کجا رسد جبریل — بلند نامی او از بلندی بام است
تو از شمار نفس زندہ می نمیدانی — کہ زندگی بہ شکست طلسم ایام است
ز علم و دانش مغرب ہمین قدر گویم — خوش است آہ و فغان تا نگاہ ناکام است

من از ہلال و صلیبم چہ غم نمیندیشم
کہ فتنۂ دگری در کمین ایام است

Kulliyyāt-i Iqbāl—Fārsī (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1990), 387

Translation

The world is a swift-flying messenger of that Sweetheart.
What a messenger!—one that is message incarnate![1]

Do not surmise that it is not your lot to see the Friend unveiled;
The longing in your breast is still immature.[2]

I grant that you are, like an eagle, a high flier;
Be on your guard, for our hunter owns a net of old.[3]

How can Gabriel reach the heights of the handful of dust?
His lofty name is due to his lofty abode.[4]

You are alive by the count of breaths; you do not know
That life consists in breaking the illusion of days.[5]

Of the learning and wisdom of the West, I will say only this:
It is well and good to sigh and lament for as long as the vision fails.[6]

I am no longer concerned about the crescent and the cross,
For the womb of time carries an ordeal of a different kind.[7]

Notes

[1]**The world . . . incarnate.** The world is the messenger of God, who is affectionately called "that Sweetheart." The world contains signs (what the Qurʾān calls *āyāt*) that point to God's existence, providence, and compassion, and these signs are so plentiful and ubiquitous that the world may be called not only God's messenger, but God's message incarnate. The messenger is described as "swift-flying" (Persian: *ṭayyār*), which means that the world delivers its message expeditiously and unstintingly. But the world does not verbalize or announce the message from God in a loud and explicit manner; its very existence constitutes the message, though, and a discerning look at the world will lead one forthwith to the right conclusions about God. Thus, the onus of receiving and appreciating the message of God falls on human beings, and only those who observe and study existence with reflective eyes will get the message.

The Persian word here translated as "Sweetheart" is *dil-ārām*, which literally means "one that gives relief and comfort to the heart." *Dil-ārām* brings to mind Qurʾān 13:28, which reads: "Behold, it is only by remembering God that hearts find peace." That is, those who receive and appreciate the message from God find in it a solution to the perplexing issues of life, the solution putting their minds at ease. The Persian word, with its amatory connotations, also suggests that love is the basis of the God-man relationship. Furthermore, normally—in Persian poetry, at least—the lover sends messages to the beloved, whereas, in this verse, it is the sweetheart who does so, indicating the Divine initiative in establishing a relationship with human beings. This particular slant in the verse is found in a number of other poems in Iqbal—for example, in poem 29 in Part II of *Zabūr-i ʿAjam* (for a translation, with commentary, of the poem, see *Iqbāl-Nāmah*, volume 3, number 4, 2–4).

The very first word in the Persian text of the verse, *zamānah*, is here translated as "the world." It may also be translated as "time," though a rendering like "the-world-in-time" or "the temporal world," though, perhaps, a bit pedantic, would bring out the full import and spirit of the word.

[2]**Do not . . . immature.** By "the Friend," again, is meant God. A motif to which Iqbal repeatedly returns in his poetry is that of God's self-manifestation on Mount Sinai in response to Moses' request to see God (Qurʾān 7:143). The verse under study represents one of the many variations Iqbal makes on that motif. Seeing God with one's eyes will be, according to a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad, the ultimate reward of the inhabitants of paradise in the next world. Iqbal is saying that it is possible to be blessed, like Moses, with a vision of God even in this world if one has a strong enough desire to see Him. The verse can be interpreted to mean, in a more general sense, that unwavering determination will translate even seemingly fanciful ideals into reality.

[3]**I grant . . . old.** Addressing the typical Muslim, Iqbal says: You may have the ability to make great achievements, but you must beware of the hostile forces that lie in wait for you and wish to bring you to ruin; if you think that you can fly high like an eagle, evading the nets laid down on the ground to catch you, then you must remember that the forces opposing you are like an experienced hunter who carries an old net in which he has caught many a proud, self-confident eagle like you. The "eagle" can be taken to mean the traditional Muslim and the "hunter" to mean

the forces of modernity, with Iqbal warning Muslims to safeguard their and their culture's integrity in the fateful confrontation with those forces.

[4]**How can . . . abode.** Human beings, though no more than a handful of dust, are superior to angels, who owe their high name to their celestial residence. Human beings inhabit the earth, but, through their efforts, can rise to a station higher than the angels'. Whereas the angels may have a sense of entitlement to high status, human beings earn their own wings, so to speak. As a practical demonstration of human beings' superiority to angels, the Prophet Muḥammad, guided by Gabriel, ascended to the highest heaven, where, at a certain point, Gabriel stopped, saying that only Muḥammad could go beyond that point and meet God.

[5]**You are . . . days.** The ability to breathe is not sufficient proof that a person is alive. Life is not to be measured in terms of a person's breath count in a given period of time—that would be like T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock measuring out his life "with coffee spoons." The true measure of life is to shatter the illusory frame of days and nights—of time, that is—and do something that has eternal value; it is to live—to use Spinoza's famous phrase—*sub specie aeternitatis* ("under the aspect of eternity").

[6]**Of the learning . . . fails.** This verse needs to be understood in light of Iqbal's overall assessment of Western thought. Iqbal's basic criticism of that thought is that it lacks balance since it cultivates the cognitive and the cerebral at the expense of the intuitive and the affective: it illuminates the mind but kills the heart, as Iqbal says in one of his verses; it is brilliant like the sun but yields no warmth, as he says in another verse. In one of his letters, Iqbal says that the story of philosophy—and he has Western philosophy in mind—is one long series of tragic failures to reach, or *see*, the truth. It is these failures to which the phrase "to sigh and lament" refers. But Iqbal seems to concede that the West's endeavors to find out the reality of things have not entirely been in vain, that the story of Western thought includes heroic and memorable attempts to puzzle out the issues of life, and that what he calls the West's sighing and lamenting has, in a significant sense, been "well and good." And yet, at the end of the day, Western thought has failed to cover the last mile and reach the truth. Consequently, Iqbal remarks, rather trenchantly, that, if the vision of the truth is not within its reach, then the West will have to make do with the next best thing—sighs and laments.

"For as long as" in the second hemistich (Persian: *tā*) does not hold out the hope or promise that the West's until now abortive attempts to find the truth—its sighs and laments, that is—will eventually meet with success. Quite the contrary: given its worldview and its approach to reality, the West is unlikely to develop a vision that would give it direct access to reality.

[7]**I am . . . kind.** By "the crescent and the cross" is meant the historic confrontation between Islam and Christianity that took the form of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Iqbal is saying that, unlike many other Muslims, who remain mentally imprisoned in the past, allowing their thought and action to be determined by certain crucial events of former times, he is more concerned about the momentous developments taking place in the present age. Iqbal does not specify what he means

by "an ordeal of a different kind" (*fitnah-i dīgarī*)—whether he means a particular major development, like communism, or whether he uses the singular "ordeal" in a generic sense to refer to several major and decisive developments taking place on the world stage. The main point of the verse, in any case, is that the issues of the present and the future have greater claim on one's attention than issues belonging to a past that may have no more than historical or academic importance.

In the second hemistich, "the womb of time"is a translation of *ḍamīr-i ayyām*, which literally means "in the insides of time."

Mustansir Mir

The Evolution of the Concept of the Islamic State in India

In an important address given in 1930, Iqbal envisioned the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. With the creation of the state of Pakistan nine years after Iqbal's death, in 1947, Iqbal's vision became a reality, and, consequently, Iqbal is known as the spiritual father of Pakistan. The following selection from Zindah-Rūd *("Living Stream"), Iqbal's biography by his son Javid Iqbal, provides a helpful synoptic view of the evolution of the concept of the Islamic state in the Indian subcontinent, indicating Iqbal's contribution to that evolution as well. Brief explanatory notes, including dates, have been added in brackets by the translator.*

The title "Renovator" (Arabic: mujaddid*) is awarded by the Muslim community at large to someone who has performed an extraordinarily great service to the cause of revitalizing Islam in an important respect. According to a* ḥadīth *of the Prophet Muḥammad, God raises such a person in every century, and Muslims have, accordingly, tried to identify a Renovator of Islam for each century. The Muslims of India consider Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's (1564–1624) services to Islam to be of such great distinction and value that they call him the Renovator of the Second Millennium of Islamic history.*

The issue of the distinction between Hindus and Muslims, later dubbed the sectarian issue or the two-nation theory, arose concurrently with the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent in the eighth century. But the historical evidence about it is first provided, about nine hundred years ago, by [Abū r-Rayḥān Muḥammad bin Aḥmad] al-Bīrūnī's [973–1048] *Kitāb al-Hind* ["Book of India"], in which, after furnishing details of Hindu-Muslim differences, Bīrūnī concludes that an unbridgeable gulf exists between Hindus and Muslims. A study of history also makes it clear that, in India, the first conscious attempt to solve the sectarian issue or lay the foundation of a united nationality was made in the sixteenth century by the emperor Akbar [1542–1605] through the "Divine Religion" instituted by him. But the attempt failed because both Hindus and Muslims were against such assimilation. From among Muslims, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī [1564–1624], known as

the Renovator of the Second Millennium, fiercely opposed the movement, and, from among Hindus, Rājā Mān Singh [1550–1614] told the emperor Akbar in unmistakably clear words that only two religions existed in India—Hinduism and Islam—and that they could never be assimilated to each other. In the seventeenth century, a second conscious attempt to create a united nationality was made, along the lines drawn by the emperor Akbar, by Dārā Shikōh [1615–1659]—an attempt foiled by the emperor Awrangzeb ʿĀlamgīr [1618–1707]. On the basis of this historical evidence, therefore, Iqbal counted Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī and Awrangzeb ʿĀlamgīr among the founders of Muslim nationality in India.

The modern revival of Islam in the Indian subcontinent starts in the eighteenth century, when, after the War of Palasi in 1752 and, especially, after the death of Sulṭān Tīpū in 1799, Muslim scholars and jurists issued legal rulings to the effect that India was no longer a *dār al-Islām* ("zone of Islam") but had become a *dār al-ḥarb* ("war zone"), and that, consequently, the Muslims were obligated to either regain, through jihād, their lost political rule or quit India and migrate to some Muslim country. It was on the basis of these legal rulings that distinguished personages like Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī Shahīd [1786–1831], Shāh Ismāʿīl Shahīd [1779–1831], Mawlawī Sharīʿatullāh [1781–1840], Dūdū Miāñ [d. 1860], Mīr Nithār ʿAlī Shahīd [popularly known as Tītū Mīr; 1782–1831], and Ghulām Maʿṣūm Shahīd [d. 1831] started movements of reform and jihād organization. Making the northwestern frontier the center of jihād, Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī Shahīd and Shāh Ismāʿīl Shahīd declared jihād against the Sikhs with a view to liberating the Muslim-majority areas, the Punjab and Kashmir. At that time, the chiefs or rulers of the Muslim-majority areas of the Frontier, Sindh, and Baluchistan who were Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī Shahīd's helpers were Muslims. Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī Shahīd's objective was to establish an Islamic state in the Muslim-majority areas in the northwest. To this end, he wished to liberate the Punjab and Kashmir from the domination of the Sikhs. Likewise, in the Muslim-majority area of East Bengal, the military organization of Mīr Nithār ʿAlī Shahīd and Ghulām Maʿṣūm Shahīd, composed as it was of Muslim farmers, had been created to put an end to Hindu landlords' exploitation, and the two reformers' declaration of jihād, too, was aimed at the establishment of an Islamic state in East Bengal. But the efforts of Muslims to set up an Islamic state in the northwestern and eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent failed because their antiquated strategies and methods were no match for the modern style of warfare used by the British.

At any rate, this much, at least, is clear from a study of the historical aspect of the modern revival of Islam: the awareness for achieving independence first arose among Muslims under the impact of the feelings of Islamic solidarity, with the Muslims undertaking a practical struggle to establish Islamic states in the northwestern and eastern regions. Although, for the time being, the struggle failed, the movement for Islamic revival did not come to an end. Under British dominance, new Western ideas entered the

subcontinent, and it was with a view to nurturing Islamic solidarity that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan [1817–1898] performed distinguished services in connection with the promotion of modern education among Muslims. But during the same period, under the influence of Western ideas, political awakening occurred among the Hindu majority, and Hindus began holding protest demonstrations for the establishment of democratic institutions. Of the Muslims of that period, Sir Sayyid was the first personality to realize that it would not be possible to safeguard the rights of Muslims through the establishment of Western-style democratic institutions, so he kept Muslims from joining the Congress [Hindu political party]. Finally, as a result of the efforts of his followers Muḥsinul Mulk [1837–1907] and Viqārul Mulk [1841–1917], the principle of separate elections for Muslims won acceptance in the beginning of the twentieth century.

It has already been mentioned that Sir Sayyid's views in regard to the safeguarding of Indian Muslims' rights had, with Iqbal, acquired the status of a conviction as early as 1907, and it was under this conviction that he not only went on to elucidate, in his poetical creations and prose writings, the principles of Muslim nationality, but also furnished a strong intellectual and ideological basis for preserving the distinctive national identity of Muslims. It was on this ideological basis, again, that, from 1927 to 1930, he took part in all-India Muslim politics, presenting, finally, the idea of the establishment of an Islamic state in the subcontinent.

Javid Iqbal, Zindah-Rūd
(Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1979), 622–624
Translated by Mustansir Mir

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