

ISLAM OFFERS PANACEA FOR MOST OF
MODERN ILLS

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ABSTRACT

Modern civilization is marked by over intellectualism and excessive rationalism. It is generally believed that reason is the most reliable faculty for knowledge and life. As a result of this excessive reliance on intellect and reason, Iqbal says, ... the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e., from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. Modern approach, a close and critical study would reveal, is one-sided as according to it perceptual experience is the only genuine and concrete experience. In the field of philosophy it has given rise to systems like positivism, empiricism and logicalism; no place is left for intuitionism and spiritualism. In the field of morality it has given rise to "labelism" and other "external" theories of good and bad, right and wrong. Morality has been reduced to business honesty in the West, while sex-morality has been almost relegated into the background, the result being that human society is going to face an unprecedented catastrophe in future. In fairness to the West, however, Iqbal regrets that both East and the West are one-sided. The West makes a distinction between matter and spirit which is insurmountable following the legacy of thinkers like Rene Descartes. They also make a distinction between ideal and the real. As Iqbal says, 'With Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled. The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being'.

The subject of today's colloquium comprises two parts- viz, "The Modern Challenge to Religion" and "The Islamic Response." In my paper this morning I will be mainly concentrating on the second part as my topic is "Islam Offers Panacea for Most of Modern Ills". Modern world, a close study would reveal, has been predominantly marked by its scientific approach which has been applied in all the various fields including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and even literature. Due to this over-application of scientific spirit, the modern civilization has landed humanity today into some serious difficulties which may be recounted as below:-

1. Modern civilization is marked by over intellectualism and excessive rationalism. It is generally believed that reason is the most reliable faculty for knowledge and life. As a result of this excessive reliance on intellect and reason, Iqbal says, '... the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e., from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness.¹ In the words of renowned Aldous Huxley in his *Doors of Perception*² endorsing Iqbal's viewpoint, 'Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape,..., is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul'.³ Consequently, we are witnessing an alarming rise in the rate of divorces, suicides, juvenile delinquency, and criminotic tendencies in the most civilized countries of the world today. Islam, on the other hand, recognises reason as one of the sources of knowledge. According to the Quran, there are three sources of knowledge- namely, Nature, History, and Fuad or Inner Experience. Iqbal remarks,... and it is in tapping these sources of knowledge that the spirit of Islam is seen at its best'.⁴ Again, he says, 'In the interest of securing a complete vision of Reality,..., sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Quran describes as Fuad or Qalb, i.e., heart.'⁵

2. Modern approach, a close and critical study would reveal, is one-sided as according to it perceptual experience is the only genuine and concrete experience. In the field of philosophy it has given rise to systems like positivism, empiricism and logicalism; no place is left for intuitionism and spiritualism. In the field of morality it has given rise to “labelism” and other “external” theories of good and bad, right and wrong. Morality has been reduced to business honesty in the West, while sex-morality has been almost relegated into the background, the result being that human society is going to face an unprecedented catastrophe in future. In fairness to the West, however, Iqbal regrets that both East and the West are one-sided. He writes in *Javed Namah*, his famous mathnavi,

“For Westerners doth reason furnish all Accoutrement of life and for the east Love is the key of mystery...”⁶

This one-sidedness is pestering both the hemispheres as a result whereof both are facing, insurmountable difficulties in their own respective spheres. He adds,

‘... Love-led

Can reason claim the Lord and reason-lit

Love strikes firm roots. When integrated

These two draw the pattern of a different world’.⁷

This “different world” will be a panacea for all the ills of humanity and the result will be that “welfare state” which humanity has been aspiring since its dawn and which has been delineated by Islam in its basic principles and ensuing social system. Iqbal is still more emphatic in his *Gulshane Raʿze Jadeed (The New Rose Garden of Mystery)* when he calls it a “sin” to close one eye whereby he means limiting oneself to only one source of knowledge. He says,

“If he should close one eye, it would be sin;

It is by seeing with both eyes that he can gain.

The path...”

This multiple approach to knowledge and life, as we have seen above, has been taught by Islam which can serve for the requisite panacea.

3. Modern civilization is basically materialistic. Due to its excessive intellectualism and one-sided approach, modern Western approach concentrates on logic and matter. When the only source of knowledge is recognized to be senses, organized into concepts by

reason, there is left little place for spiritual aspects of reality from its purely internal point of view. Modern science, under the inspiration of Albert Einstein's famous Relativity Theory, has reduced time to the fourth dimension of space. This approach can only generate a materialistic interpretation of the universe as time loses its originality and significance. In Islam time has its original entity and importance. Iqbal quotes the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as saying: 'Do not vilify time, for time is God'.⁸ Time rather has primacy to space. The Muslim Sufi Poet Sheikh Fakhar-ud-Din Al-Hamdani Al- Iraqi (b.686/1287) in his booklet *Ghayat al Imkan fi Dirayat al Makan*,⁹ conceived infinite varieties of space and time basing his views on the teachings of the Holy Quran. As Iqbal says, 'He conceives infinite varieties of time, relative to the varying grades of being intervening between matter and pure spirituality'. He adds, 'Rising higher and higher in the scale of immaterial beings we reach Divine time--time which is absolutely free from the quality of passage, and consequently does not admit of divisibility, sequence and change'.¹⁰ Similarly of space Iraqi says (to quote Iqbal again), 'Now there are three kinds of space- the space of material bodies, the space of immaterial beings, and the God'.¹¹ The Quran is replete with such verses which purport to the space space of of God. Now, if we believe in the multiplicity of space-time network, the universe is no longer amenable to materialistic interpretation only; it admits of other interpretations also, including a spiritualistic interpretation. As Iqbal has believed, if there is a spiritualistic space-time framework, then there are non-physiological data supplied by a special faculty called "Fuad" or "intuition",¹² which when organised by the spiritual space-time framework, will provide a special kind of knowledge called 'mystical' or religious knowledge. It is the knowledge of spiritual entities or realities which culminate in a knowledge of God, the Supreme Being. This knowledge, according to Iqbal, is as real and genuine as any other type of knowledge, say perceptual knowledge of the external world. His famous lectures *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*¹³ is devoted to this end.

4. According to modern civilization, religion and science (i.e. knowledge) are not going well with each other; they are sometimes antagonistic and opposed. This is because the West makes a distinction between matter and spirit which is insurmountable following the legacy of thinkers like Rene Descartes. They also make a distinction between ideal and the real. As Iqbal says, 'With Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled. The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with

the real but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being'.¹⁴ He goes to say, 'It is the sharp opposition between the subject and the object, the mathematical without and the biological within, that impressed Christianity. Islam, however, faces the opposition with a view to overcome it'.¹⁵ Talking of both Christianity and Islam he says, 'Both demand the affirmation of the spiritual self in man, with this difference only that Islam, recognizing the contact of the ideal with the real, says "yes" to the world of matter and points the way to master it with a view to discover a basis for a realistic regulation of life'.¹⁶ In fact, according to Islam there is no profane world. There is a famous saying of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH): 'the whole world has been made a place of worship and purity for me',¹⁷ which means that a Muslim is allowed to offer his prayers anywhere, at any place, even in the mud, if no other option is available. Islam enjoins the "Conquest of the Universe"¹⁸ as one of the basic and sacred duties of a Muslim. From this it follows that there should be no opposition between science and religion. Western civilization, on the other hand, makes a sharp bifurcation between religion and science, which has led to the prevalent empirical and materialistic approach. Iqbal has taken much pains in his *Lectures*¹⁹ to show that there is no real opposition between science and religion, thought and intuition. While discussing Al-Ghazali, the renowned Muslim Sufi and Thinker of the 12th century A.D.,²⁰ Iqbal says, 'He failed to see that thought and intuition are organically related...'²¹ He adds, 'Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and intuition are essentially opposed to each other. They spring up from the same root and compliment each other... Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation. Both seek visions of the same Reality...'²² Again, he says, 'The truth is that the religious and the scientific processes, though involving different methods, are identical in their final aim. Both aim at reaching the most real'.²³ Islam, as seen before, recommends that thought and intuition must be integrated in order to reach the complete reality and to "draw the pattern of a different world" which will be a world of humanity, justice, fraternity and equality in the real sense.

5. The bifurcation between reason and intuition led to a bifurcation between politics and religion. The doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings in England, its aftermaths and subsequent settlement intensified the above bifurcation rendering any reconciliation rather impossible. Consequently, religion and the governance of the state have been placed into two water-tight compartments. This situation is by no means satisfactory. In Islam, on the other hand, 'the spiritual

and the temporal are not two distinct domains,..²⁴ Iqbal says, 'In Islam it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another.. Islam is a single unanalysable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies'.²⁵ The basic concept of Islam is "tauhid" the essence whereof as a working idea is equality, solidarity and freedom. The state, from the Islamic standpoint', says Iqbal, 'is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, and inspiration to realize them in a definite human organization.²⁶ He adds, 'The ultimate Reality, according to the Quran, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material, the secular.²⁷ There is no such thing as a profane world in Islam, as said before. Iqbal concludes, 'the state according to Islam is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization'.²⁸ Thus, there is no bifurcation in Islam between the church and the state; the latter should be an outward exposition of the former. This arrangement, I believe, will be in a position to solve the problems which the world is facing today on this score. Iqbal concludes by saying that 'the Quran considers it necessary to unite religion and state, ethics and politics in a single revelation much in the same way as Plato does in his *Republic*.²⁹

6. The world today is going democratic and consequently a variety of democracies have emerged, and are emerging, in the world. It is quite lately that the West has learnt the lesson of democracy, Islam emphasized the need for Consultation (*Mushawrat*) over fourteen centuries ago. The Quran says in the chapter on "Consultation", "Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation;..."³⁰ Thus, mutual consultation is a sign of piety and an obligation for a Muslim. The Western concept of democracy is, however, quantitative; as Iqbal says with reference to Stadel, (Western) 'democracy is a form of governance in which heads are counted, not weighed'.³¹ The Western democracy, says Iqbal, emerged out of "the extension of economic opportunity" with the establishment of colonies in the various parts of the world: it is quantitative and materialistic. Islamic concept of democracy, on the other hand, is that of a "spiritual democracy" of which Iqbal says, 'the democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character'.³² Thus, Islam takes into consideration the actual worth of the individual with respect to his "taqua" (piety) and his personal

character. The fundamental principle of Islam, according to Iqbal, is the idea of “tauhid” or oneness of mankind. He says in his Lectures, ‘As an emotional system of unification it organizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood relationship as a basis of human unity’.³³ Islam rejects all geographical, racial and linguistic differences; he is superior who is better in piety. The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) declared in his famous last sermon, “The aristocracy of the old time is trampled under my feet. The Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab and a non-Arab has no superiority over the Arab. All are children of Adam, and Adam was made of the dust of the earth’.³⁴ This is, indeed, the highest type of democracy which Islam has preached and to which humanity can arrive.

It is obvious from a study of the above that Islam offers the best possible panacea for ills of the modern world generated by over-intellectualism and excessive naturalism and empiricism which are depriving man of spirit, ethics and a divine order of the world which deals with the “internal” aspects of reality. The modern man, due to his scientific approach, is dealing with “external” aspects of reality and is living an “external” life only, and all the ills he is facing are due to this one-sidedness. Islam can afford that comprehensive knowledge and life which modern man requires today in order to live a full and complete life.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ Dr. M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Ashraf, Lahore, 1978, p.187

² *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, comb. Ed., Penguin Books, 1959, p.49

³ Ibid

⁴ Iqbal, Ibid, p.127

⁵ Ibid, p.15

⁶ Pilgrimage of Eternity, S. Mahmud Ahmad Eng. Tr. Of Iqbal’s *Javed Namah*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1961, vs. 1133-35, p. 54.

⁷ Ibid, vs. 1135-38.

⁸ Reconstruction, p.11

⁹ Ibid, q. by Iqbal, p. 75

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 135.

¹² Ibid, p. 16

¹³ Ibid, pp. 183ff.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.9.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁷ Taken from *Sahib Bukhari* (Sayings of the Prophet collected by Imam Bukhari; cf. Book VIII: PRAYER: Ch. 56

¹⁸ The holy Quran says that Allah has created the heavens and the earth, and all between them, for a serious/just end (XLIV-38-39); that He has subjected to you all things in the heaven and on the earth, and has made His bounties flow to you...(XXXI:20) and that He has bestowed on man (the) faculties) of hearing, sight and feeling/understanding (XXXII:9). Thus, God has bestowed on man all the means required for understanding the universe and conquering it. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to pray: "God! grant me knowledge of the ultimate nature of things!" quted by Iqbal in *Reconstruction*, p.3.

¹⁹ *Reconstruction*, pp. 2-3, 5-6, 195-96,

²⁰ Abu Hamid b. Muhammad (1058-1111 A..D), one of the greatest and most original thinkers of Islam.

²¹ *Reconstruction*, p.5

²² Ibid, pp. 2-3

²³ Ibid, pp. 195-96

²⁴ Ibid, p.154

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, p.155.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 166.

³⁰ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, (Lahore: Ashraf, 1980), XLII: 38. The Quran more emphatically says, and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou has taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah... (II: 159).

³¹ Dr. M., Iqbal, *Darb-i-Kaleem* (the Rod of Moses), Lahore: Ahsan Bros., 1959, p. 150

³² R.A., Nicholson *Secrets of the Self*, (Lahore: Ashraf, 1975), Intro.p. XXIX,n.

³³ *Reconstruction*, p. 146.

³⁴ H.H, Bilgrami quoted in *Glimpses of Iqbal's Mind and Thought*, p. 94 cf. Prophet's address of Dhil-Hijjah, March 7, 632 A.D.