

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY AND
CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS
EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This article explores the characteristics of religious experience in light of modern psychology, emphasizing the integral role of moral integrity and the heart in achieving authentic spiritual experiences. Allama Iqbal's perspectives serve as the foundation for understanding religious experience as a phenomenon that transcends mere intellectual inquiry, highlighting its metaphysical nature and tangible impact on the physical world. Iqbal underscores that the essence of religious experience lies not in the intellect but in the heart, which enables a deeper, more intuitive connection with the Divine. Drawing from Islamic principles and contrasting Western psychological theories, the article discusses key aspects of spiritual experience: immediacy, indivisible wholeness, connection with the Absolute Ego, incommunicability, and its transient yet impactful nature. Iqbal challenges the views of Western psychologists, particularly William James, on the nature and communicability of mystical experiences, asserting that religious consciousness carries cognitive and intellectual significance. The article further explores the empirical and philosophical standards for validating spiritual experiences, distinguishing prophetic experiences from those of mystics. Iqbal argues that religious experience cannot be fully comprehended or validated through conventional scientific methods, as it transcends the confines of rational thought. Ultimately, the article illustrates Iqbal's assertion that religious experience, despite its emotional foundation, is deeply intertwined with cognition and has profound implications for human life and understanding of the Divine.

The cognitive dimensions of religious experience present a fascinating intersection between psychology and philosophy, particularly as discussed in Allama Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Religious experience, while rooted in deeply emotional and metaphysical experiences, is not devoid of cognitive value. Instead, it represents a profound form of knowledge that transcends the limitations of conventional rationality. Iqbal argues that religious experiences have a direct and immediate nature, enabling the individual to grasp reality in its entirety rather than through fragmented, sequential thought processes. This wholeness, which characterizes mystical and spiritual states, challenges the typical structures of intellectual consciousness by dissolving the barriers between subject and object. Despite the emotional foundation of spiritual experiences, Iqbal maintains that they possess cognitive content, capable of being interpreted and communicated, albeit partially. The heart, as the organ of spiritual insight, becomes a locus for both intuition and understanding, suggesting that spiritual experiences are a holistic fusion of feeling and thought. By integrating psychological insights, such as William James' exploration of mystical states, with philosophical reflections on the nature of consciousness, Iqbal's inquiry illustrates that religious experience holds intellectual legitimacy, offering a unique form of knowledge that informs and transforms human consciousness in ways that go beyond empirical and rationalist paradigms.

Characteristics of Religious Experience in Light of Modern Psychology

The foundation of religious experience is moral integrity. Without a strong moral foundation, the concept of religious experience cannot be conceived. The fact that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was known as *Sadiq* (truthful) and *Amin* (trustworthy) supports the idea that without clarity and purity of character and morals, the fruits of religious experience will neither be clear nor reliable. Religious experience is both physical and metaphysical at the same time. That is, in its nature and occurrence, it is metaphysical, but in terms of the results it produces in the external world, it is physical. Religious experience serves as a bridge or intermediary that brings about results in the external world. The means of religious experience is not the intellect, but the heart,

because the intellect does not move forward without argument, whereas the heart is about acceptance. In other words, for the authenticity of religious experience, we must rely on the confirmation of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He did not come to humanity with a claim to the knowledge of the Divine but with a message, and the reliability of that message rests on his being *Sadiq* and *Amin*.

Religious experience, in this sense, differs from the definitions provided by psychologists or Western thinkers, in that it is fully communicable knowledge. The final verses of Surah Yunus demonstrate that the one delivering this message has the greatest conviction in it and understands its results as reality. The knowledge gained from religious experience is not only fully communicable but, at times, its communication becomes obligatory. At the prophetic level, withholding its communication, when commanded to do so, falls under the category of “severing the aorta” (*Surah Al-Haaqqa*, 69:46). This religious experience is under complete divine protection, free from any adulteration or ambiguity, and its purity and protection are guaranteed by God Himself.

All other religious experiences at the general human level are inferior in terms of the reliability of their occurrence and the results they produce in the external world. This is why, although Allama Iqbal initially began his discussion by drawing a parallel between the religious consciousness of the prophet and the Sufi to satisfy the Westernized mind,¹ the verses from Surah An-Najm that he later cites completely negate this idea. This is why Allama Iqbal clarifies further by stating that in prophetic revelation, not only the meaning but also the words are communicated.²

Allama Iqbal states that modern psychology has recognized the need to carefully study the contents of mystical consciousness, but we have not yet reached a stage where we can analyze the contents of supra-rational states of consciousness using a scientific method.³ Taking into account the characteristics described by modern psychology, particularly those outlined by William James, Allama Iqbal explains the following characteristics of religious experience or religious experience:

1. Immediacy:

Religious experience is immediate and direct in its occurrence. That is, religious experience both resembles and differs from other significant experiences in our lives. In this sense, religious

experience is similar to other human experiences because it, too, is a source of knowledge, just like other experiences in human life. In other experiences, we gain knowledge by interpreting the information and material provided by the five senses. Mystical experience provides informational content that forms our understanding of God. This means that the content provided through religious experience holds cognitive value, and as a result, a particular viewpoint can be adopted. Religious experience differs from other human experiences in that it does not provide knowledge in a gradual or systematic manner, like a system of concepts, scientific reality, or a mathematical idea, which are connected to each other.⁴ Rather, religious experience becomes a source of knowledge for the person experiencing it suddenly and without any intermediary material or system.

2. Indivisible Wholeness:

Since religious or mystical experience is sudden and direct, it is revealed to the mystic as an all-encompassing state or wholeness that cannot be broken down into separate parts.⁵ This is where it distinguishes itself from other life experiences. In ordinary life experiences, we acquire knowledge of an object through the sequential gathering and arrangement of information. In other words, when we attempt to understand something that comes into contact with our five senses, we gather all the information about it within a certain order, principle, and intellectual structure, placing it within a framework of time and space to comprehend it. This provides us with knowledge of the object. However, in religious experience, this does not occur, because the experience unfolds as a result of a divine manifestation, which happens according to the will of a supernatural entity. The person experiencing it confronts it as a whole.

Here, Allama Iqbal differs from William James. Iqbal explains that mystical experience differs from the general intellectual consciousness in that the latter acquires knowledge of any object by sequentially organizing and arranging partial information about it. In contrast, mystical experience allows the mystic's consciousness to grasp the observed reality as a whole. However, consciousness is not suspended here. In both cases, when reality is encountered, consciousness is aware of its truth. However, in the mystical state, due to the wholeness of the experience, all resulting emotions are transformed into an indivisible unity. When discussing this wholeness, Iqbal addresses the dissolution of the distinction between subject and object, as well as the witness and the observed.

The question that remains is whether this dissolution occurs at the level of perception, interpretation, or reality itself.

3. Connection with the Absolute Ego:

The third characteristic of religious experience is that, during the mystical state, the Sufi develops a profound connection with the Absolute Ego, a connection that is not typically part of their personality during the ordinary routines of life. It is important to note that whenever Allama Iqbal describes any characteristic of religious experience, he provides a basis for it from normal, everyday life. This is also the case here. During this deep connection, when the Sufi becomes overwhelmed by the manifestation or presence of the Divine, their own personality is temporarily suspended. In other words, in this observation, the Sufi's consciousness is present as a witness, but they are not subjectively involved. Here, Iqbal also alludes to the reality of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Being), pointing out that during this mystical state, the distinction between the Sufi and the reality they are observing disappears.⁶

To clarify this point further, Iqbal provides an example from ordinary life. In our daily social interactions, our actions and the reactions we receive from others are evidence of our conscious existence. However, the foundation of all our social and communal relationships is not solely the process of interaction or reaction that we engage in through the signals of the five senses. There is also an inner awareness that makes all these interactions meaningful. Iqbal raises an important point here: we do not possess any sense that allows us to know a person's inner thoughts, their mind's knowledge, or ideas. There is no doubt that we come to know ourselves and our nature not only through the senses but also through inner impressions. Until the knowledge we gain from our senses and the insights we derive from inner impressions are combined, we cannot form a complete intellectual understanding of a person.

If we reflect on this, it becomes clear that our knowledge and experience of other people's minds is direct, and as a result, the social experiences we gain are genuine. We do not question how we gathered information through the senses yet formed a direct mental impression. Building on this idea, Iqbal uses these two points to explain how knowledge of the Divine can be understood.

a) The Qur'an does not ignore the fact that whenever a person seeks to connect with Allah through their senses, Allah will

respond. As the verse says, “A reply to the lamentations comes from the heavens eventually!”⁷ Allah, the Almighty, declares, “Call upon Me, and I will answer your prayer” (Al-Zumar, 39:40). In Surah Al-Baqarah, He further states, “When My servants ask you concerning Me, tell them I am near. I respond to the call of the one who calls upon Me when he calls” (Al-Baqarah, 2:186).

b) Just as we acquire direct knowledge about other minds during social interactions, in religious experience, we also acquire direct knowledge of the Divine.

As a precaution, Allama Iqbal clears up a misconception here: while sensory knowledge of other individuals is indirect, and mental impressions are direct, this analogy cannot be fully applied to the existence of the Divine as a whole. The purpose of this example is simply to explain that the knowledge gained during mystical states or experiences is similar to the way we acquire knowledge through other life experiences.

4. Incommunicable:

The fourth characteristic of mystical experience is that, due to its immediacy, it cannot be fully communicated. Mystical states consist more of feelings than thoughts. Since their foundation is based on emotions, they cannot be completely conveyed to others. The person experiencing it can only communicate certain concepts that they have managed to put into words,⁸ but the full content of the experience cannot be transmitted. Two important points need to be considered here:

a) The first point is that if mystical states are more about emotions than thoughts, is their incommunicability based solely on the fact that thoughts involve intellectual details while emotions are merely experiential? However, upon deeper reflection, we realize that thoughts themselves arise from some aspect of emotion. In other words, thoughts and feelings, as traits of human personality, cannot be entirely separated from each other. Every emotion eventually transforms into thought. As Allama Iqbal himself explains further, when an internal observation occurs at the level of feeling, it exists in a timeless dimension. As soon as that observation turns into thought, it shifts from the timeless to the temporal realm. Thus, the incommunicability of a mystical experience based solely on its emotional nature cannot be regarded as an absolute principle.

b) The second point is that this principle cannot be applied simultaneously to the experiences of both a prophet and a mystic (Sufi), because despite being a spiritual experience, the mystic's experience bears no resemblance to the prophetic experience. There is no other comparison to the prophetic experience outside the life of the prophet. It is a unique aspect of prophetic consciousness, where Allah, the Almighty, created prophets with a special distinction and made them the link between creation and the Creator. Therefore, raising the same questions about the communicability of a prophet's religious experience that are raised about a mystic's spiritual experience would be to disregard the nature of prophetic experience. This is why Allama Iqbal himself mentions in his *Lectures* that revelation occurs both in words and in meaning simultaneously.

The verses from Surah An-Najm that Allama Iqbal references in this context support the notion that prophetic experience, in its essence, outcomes, and communication, is entirely different and distinct from the observations and experiences of ordinary mystics or spiritual individuals.

To support this characteristic of religious experience,⁹ Allama Iqbal refers to verses from Surah Ash-Shura and Surah An-Najm. In verse 51 of Surah Ash-Shura, Allah says:

"It is not given to any human being that Allah should speak to them directly, except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger (an angel) to reveal by His permission what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High and Wise."

This verse explains the nature of revelation as a spiritual experience and the method through which it occurs, detailing how a prophet receives the message from the Divine.

In Surah An-Najm, verses 1–18, the details of the Mi'raj (Ascension) are described. If we closely examine this account, it also supports the same argument. The translation of these verses is as follows:

"By the star when it descends. Your companion has not strayed, nor has he erred. Nor does he speak from his own desire. It is nothing but revelation sent down to him. He was taught by one mighty in power, endowed with wisdom. And he rose to his true form, being on the highest horizon. Then he drew near, and nearer still, until he was two bow lengths away or even closer. And Allah revealed to His servant what He revealed. The heart did not deny what it saw. Will you then dispute with him about what he saw? And he saw him again at the Sidrat-ul-Muntaha. Near it is the Garden of Refuge. When there covered the Sidra that which covered it. The sight

of the Prophet did not swerve nor did it exceed the limit. He certainly saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord.”

These verses further affirm the unique nature of the prophetic experience, distinct from any other religious experience or experience.

According to this explanation, the prophetic experience is entirely different, transcendent, and distinct from the spiritual experience or observation of an ordinary mystic. In the prophetic religious experience, there is neither doubt nor ambiguity. There is no uncertainty in its occurrence. As indicated in “*Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed*”, the observations and contents of this spiritual experience may not necessarily be comprehensible to everyone. This is why everything the Prophet directly experiences and observes constitutes direct knowledge for him, but for others, it may not be as easily understandable—not because the Prophet cannot communicate it, but because others may lack the capacity and ability to comprehend the communication.

If there had been any ambiguity or lack of clarity in the prophetic experience at that level of religious experience, phrases like “*The sight did not swerve, nor did it transgress*” would not have been used. Similarly, it would not have been said to those disputing the Prophet’s experience, “*Are you disputing with him about what he saw?*”, when in fact, the Prophet saw it twice near the heights of Sidrat-ul-Muntaha.

Here, Allama Iqbal explains that, although mystical experience is based on emotion rather than rational deduction, it is not devoid of a cognitive element. It is precisely because of the presence of this cognitive element in mystical experience that it can be shaped into communicable knowledge based on concepts and shared with others. Since every emotion eventually turns into thought, emotion and thought together form a unity in internal observation, where internal and religious experience becomes both timeless in one aspect and bound by time in another.

Iqbal aims to highlight the connection between religious experience and its intellectual, rational, and cognitive significance. For this reason, he references Professor Hawking, who, according to Richard Gilman, believes that thought and emotion form the strongest foundation or source of mystical states. No aspect of mystical states denies the role of thought in interpreting and purifying intuition. According to Professor Hawking, emotion is a restlessness within a conscious being that seeks resolution not

within its own limits but beyond them. In other words, emotion flows from the internal to the external, while thought moves from the external to the internal. However, even in its intensity and restlessness, emotion is not completely unconscious of its purpose. As soon as emotion arises, it seizes the human mind, and the satisfaction of emotion is actually the satisfaction of thought.

If we were to consider emotion as directionless, opposite to thought, many of our actions would generally be without direction—meaning they would lack a clear purpose or objective. It is possible for emotion to exist without an awareness of its cause, just as it can occur in other human actions. For example, if someone is struck by a punch and loses consciousness, they may not be fully aware of the pain or the occurrence itself, yet they have some sense that something has indeed happened.

It seems that emotion, like thought, also possesses awareness and consciousness about an external reality. It is a form of awareness regarding a truth or object that exists beyond or outside the self of the person experiencing the emotion. In this way, emotion, like thought, carries an element of conscious illumination. Building on Professor Hawking's statement, Allama Iqbal advances the view that, despite being based on emotion, religion is never merely confined to emotion, nor does it limit itself to emotion alone. Therefore, there is no justification for criticizing or undermining the knowledge of the mystics based solely on reason.¹⁰

This connection between emotion and thought also provides a solution to the age-old theological debate about the relationship between meaning and words. When emotion moves from an unclear stage to the stage of clear expression through thought, it also creates its own form of expression. In other words, both thought and words arise from the same source—emotion. Our understanding requires us to separate them in terms of time and order, but revelation, when it is revealed in words, cannot be objected to by reason. Allama Iqbal offered practical rather than rational arguments on multiple occasions to support the belief that the Qur'an was revealed both in words and meaning. For instance, when Professor Lucas, the principal of FC College Lahore, questioned Iqbal about the Qur'an being revealed in words, Iqbal replied: "It is not merely a matter of faith for me but a confirmed personal experience. When I write poetry, verses descend upon me in such a way that it becomes difficult for me to choose between them. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is of a much higher and nobler stature."¹¹ Similarly, in a letter to Maharaja Kishan Prasad on

April 14, 1916, Iqbal wrote: "I did not write the '*Asrar-i-Khudi*' myself; it was written through me."¹²

5. Temporary and Transient:

The fifth characteristic of religious experience is that when the connection between the observer and the Divine is established, the observer feels that continuous time is unreal, but they do not completely disconnect from it. Despite its uniqueness, religious experience still resembles ordinary experience in some ways, which prevents the observer from being entirely removed from everyday life. That is why, as soon as the state of religious experience concludes, the individual not only returns to normal life but also carries the certainty, confidence, and assurance gained from the religious experience as part of their being.

Allama Iqbal explains the difference between the return from the spiritual experience of a Sufi and that of a prophet by stating that the return of a prophet leads to far-reaching consequences for humanity. Whether the outcomes are intellectual or practical, religious experience is as real and meaningful as any other life experience. Although the occurrence of religious experience cannot be fully explained through mental or psychological conditions, this does not invalidate the reality of spiritual experience. While psychology has established separate criteria for distinguishing spiritual and religious feelings from non-spiritual and non-religious emotions, it is not possible to apply such distinctions to the scientific understanding of the human mind. That is, whether one views the biological structure or functioning of the human mind through a scientific lens or a religious and spiritual one, it is impossible to make a distinction between the two.

This is why the rules of psychology are never absolute, definitive, or universally applicable to the creative works of highly intelligent and brilliant individuals. Although a particular mindset may be necessary to accept a specific perspective, this does not mean that there is no other perspective or mindset from which that reality can be understood differently.¹³ The standards by which we determine the higher or lower value of concepts are not necessarily tied to the psychological or biological workings of our mental states.

William James also acknowledged that not all mystical revelations or inspirations are meaningful; some may be incoherent or result in nothing. Therefore, it is not appropriate to declare all mystical experiences as entirely divine. This issue has also arisen in

the history of Christian mysticism, where there has been a challenge in distinguishing between genuine or divine spiritual experiences and those that are exaggerated or influenced by evil forces. In Islamic mysticism, the criterion for determining the authenticity of religious experience is entirely empirical—"the tree is known by its fruit."¹⁴ This same criterion has also been adopted in the West.

Here, Allama Iqbal refers to a principle from verse 52 of Surah Al-Hajj, where it is stated: "We did not send any messenger or prophet before you but when he recited (the message), Satan threw (some falsehood) in it. But Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in; then Allah makes precise His verses. And Allah is Knowing and Wise."

This verse highlights that prophetic revelation is safeguarded from any form of satanic influence. The issue faced by Christian mysticism regarding distinguishing between correct and incorrect spiritual experiences is addressed in the Qur'an with the following principles:

a. The Qur'an, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is a revelation free from all satanic influences and is a firm and perfected message that Allah Himself has strengthened and established.

b. Any action that is in accordance with this divine message will also be protected from satanic influences.

c. As stated in the following verse, Surah Al-Hajj, verse 53, satanic influences affect only those whose hearts are diseased—those lacking morals, acting with ill intentions, having hardened hearts, and practicing injustice. These negative traits obstruct the path to true religious experience and lead to distorted experiences influenced by satanic elements.

Is Allama Iqbal satisfied with the characteristics described by William James?

Can the characteristics of spiritual experience outlined by William James be applied universally to all spiritual experiences? Islamic mysticism, particularly the spiritual experiences of Muslim Sufis, has a historical record spanning centuries. If William James' characteristics are applied to this record, what would the standard of knowledge derived from these spiritual experiences be? Furthermore, do these characteristics have cognitive, intellectual, and practical significance? There is no clear example of this in Allama Iqbal's writings, nor does he provide such examples in his

Lectures. The religious experience or the knowledge derived from the heart, which Iqbal mentions in his first lecture, is not elaborated with practical evidence, either in the *Lectures* or elsewhere in his prose writings.

Additionally, when these details are explained using Western terminology, reasoning, and methods, it complicates the understanding of religious experience. Iqbal's style in the *Lectures* makes it evident that he was not fully satisfied with the characteristics described by William James or the perspectives of Western psychology. Iqbal was aware that relying solely on rational standards to prove religious experience might not yield the desired results and could potentially lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, he does not neglect to analyze philosophical or modern psychological concepts when discussing religious or spiritual experiences.

Allama Iqbal states:

(i) Although Sigmund Freud's followers have contributed to religion by excluding satanic whispers from religious experiences, the truth is that the theories of modern psychology have not been confirmed by solid evidence. If the lack of concrete evidence makes religious experience questionable, then psychology itself is not exempt from this criticism.¹⁵

(ii) Dreams, which are a reality of human life, or other similar states in which certain feelings overwhelm us to the point that we feel disconnected from ourselves, do not mean that these feelings were stored in some junkyard of the subconscious. Instead, the emergence of such feelings into consciousness simply indicates that something out of the ordinary has happened in our daily life. In other words, it is natural for us to encounter various stimuli during our adaptation to the environment.¹⁶

(iii) In life, our habitual responses gradually conform to a system that we follow unconsciously. As we continually accept various stimuli, they establish a consistent pattern of response, while the stimuli we reject become part of our subconscious. These subconscious stimuli can create changes in our thoughts and actions, shape our dreams and imagination, or lead us back to those primitive behaviors that we consciously moved past during our evolution. In other words, the different emotions and stimuli present in the human subconscious can cause various states and conditions in life.¹⁷

(iv) There is also an opinion about religion that it is merely a myth, born out of the motivations that humans have rejected, meaning that religious belief and faith are no more than early human conceptions about nature. It is suggested that humans want to see reality according to their desires and hopes, which are not confirmed by the facts of life. Allama Iqbal acknowledges that this might be true for some forms of religion and art, but it is not accurate for all religions. Islam, in particular, stands out because all the truths it presents are confirmed by life, history, and external reality.¹⁸

(v) Allama Iqbal asserts that religious faith and belief carry a metaphysical meaning, although they do not have the same status as the concepts arising from experiments in the natural sciences. This is because religion cannot be considered as a form of knowledge like mathematics, chemistry, or physics, which unravel the mysteries of nature through the principle of cause and effect. Instead, religion seeks to uncover and evolve the human existence in a different way. In other words, religion represents a unique domain of human experience that cannot be equated with scientific or natural experiments.¹⁹

(vi) However, we should not forget that even before science, religion emphasized the importance of tangible experience. It is incorrect to assume a conflict between religion and science on the grounds that one is based on concrete experience while the other is not. In fact, both are rooted in concrete experience. The misunderstanding lies in the notion that they interpret the same experience, when in reality, religion deals with a different type of experience than science or natural sciences. The aim of religious experience is to gain knowledge about a particular depth of human emotions and consciousness.²⁰

(vii) Allama Iqbal also refutes the idea that religious consciousness can be explained as a result of sexual feelings. He argues that both sexual and religious aspects of consciousness are opposites; they are completely different in their character, purpose, and approach. Therefore, the psychological concept that religious feelings are rooted in sexual emotions cannot be accepted as valid.²¹

(viii) Allama Iqbal, while distinguishing between ordinary emotion and religious passion, explains that in the state of religious passion, we become acquainted with a reality that lies beyond the confines of our limited self. Through this, we experience the nearness of an infinite and universal being. The psychological claim

that religious passion is merely a deep-seated turmoil originating in our subconscious is not accurate. Passion is present in every form of knowledge, and its intensity—or lack thereof—directly affects the results and outcomes of that knowledge.²²

(ix) Allama Iqbal points to the practical significance of religious experience, stating that we cannot ignore a reality that profoundly impacts our entire life. For us, what shakes our very being and introduces us to a revolution is what we consider real. Referring to Professor Hawking, Iqbal says that when a mystic or an ordinary person experiences a divine manifestation in their limited and narrow existence, which transforms their life into a new dimension, what else could be the cause but the eternal reality itself, with all its qualities and emotions, overpowering the soul? In fact, our alignment with this manifestation in our subconscious is also a reason for its occurrence. This manifestation expands and elevates our subconscious.

Just as air, hidden within our being, moves and nourishes us, it does not imply that we should stop breathing the external air. Rather, we should draw energy from it while continuing to breathe the fresh air outside. Similarly, when we gain illumination from a spiritual manifestation arising within us, we should also ensure that this light manifests itself externally and that its effects and events are made evident in the outer world.²³

(x) Allama Iqbal, disagreeing with William James on the activity of the Sufi's consciousness during religious experience, argues that mystical experience differs from general intellectual consciousness only in the sense that general consciousness acquires knowledge of an observed object by organizing and linking pieces of information. However, in mystical experience, the Sufi's consciousness is never suspended; rather, it grasps the observed reality as a whole. In both cases, when reality presents itself to consciousness, the awareness of its truth is the same.²⁴

After explaining all these points, Allama Iqbal concludes that the details provided by modern psychology indicate that religious passion, the foundation of religious experience, cannot be proven solely through psychological methods. Religious experience is neither a psychological fact nor a mathematical, chemical, or physical reality. Therefore, if modern psychologists continue to try to understand religious experience using the same outdated methods, they will fail just as their predecessors, John Locke and

David Hume, did.²⁵ This is because understanding spiritual experiences goes beyond the capacity of mere intellectual faculties:

نہ دیا نشانِ منزل مجھے اے حکیم تُو نے
مجھے کیا گلہ ہو تجھ سے، تُو نہ رہ نشیں نہ راہی²⁶

You did not show me the sign of the destination, O philosopher,
I have no complaint against you, for you are neither a traveler nor a
guide.

While critiquing the methods of modern sciences, Iqbal declares them unfit and inadequate for explaining and interpreting religious experiences. Yet, he also demonstrates that religious observation, despite being an emotional and experiential state, is not devoid of cognition. Its meaning can be explained and communicated through interpretation. To guarantee its authenticity, Allama Iqbal establishes two standards. If the truth of a spiritual experience cannot be proven in the external world, it would remain a purely individual matter, unable to serve as a universal source of knowledge. These two standards are intellectual and practical.

The intellectual standard involves a critical interpretation and explanation, without any assumptions, to demonstrate that our interpretations ultimately lead to the same truth revealed through religious experience. The practical or results-based standard refers to the effects and outcomes of the experience. According to Iqbal, the first standard is applied by scholars and philosophers, while the second is applied by the “world-shaping beings”—namely, the Prophets.²⁷

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the exploration of religious experience in light of modern psychology reveals the profound complexity and unique essence of religious experience, as articulated by Allama Iqbal. Religious experience, rooted in moral integrity and accessed through the heart rather than the intellect, transcends the limitations of scientific and rational methods. Iqbal emphasizes that spiritual experiences hold cognitive significance, blending emotion and thought in a manner that challenges conventional psychological frameworks. While acknowledging the insights of Western psychologists such as William James, Iqbal highlights the insufficiency of purely rational or empirical analyses in understanding the supra-rational dimensions of spirituality.

According to Iqbal the religious experience, particularly prophetic experience, is distinct and safeguarded by divine protection, bearing practical and transformative implications for humanity. Through a comparative analysis, Iqbal affirms that while mystical experiences can convey partial knowledge, they cannot parallel the communicable certainty of prophetic revelation. The cognitive and emotional unity in spiritual experiences signifies a reality that reshapes both the individual and their interaction with the external world. Ultimately, Iqbal advocates for a holistic approach that recognizes religious experience as a vital and authentic mode of knowledge, validated not only by intellectual interpretation but also by the tangible impact it has on human consciousness and society at large. This dual standard ensures that religious experience remains a meaningful and universally relevant phenomenon, deeply rooted in both metaphysical truth and practical outcomes.

Notes and References

- ¹ The interpretation which the mystic or the prophet puts on the content of his religious consciousness can be conveyed to others in the form of propositions, but the content itself cannot be so transmitted. *Reconstruction*, pp.16-17
- ² It is no mere metaphor to say that idea and word both simultaneously emerge out of the womb of feeling, though logical understanding cannot but take them in a temporal order and thus create its own difficulty by regarding them as mutually isolated. There is a sense in which the word is also revealed. *Reconstruction*, p.18
- ³ we are not yet in possession of a really effective scientific method to analyse the contents of non-rational modes of consciousness. *Reconstruction*, p.14
- ⁴ God is not a mathematical entity or a system of concepts mutually related to one another and having no reference to experience. *Reconstruction*, p.14
- ⁵ *Reconstruction*, p.15.
- ⁶ But you will ask me how immediate experience of God, as an Independent Other Self, is at all possible. The mere fact that the mystic state is passive does not finally prove the veritable 'otherness' of the Self experienced. *Reconstruction*, p.15
- ⁷ *Reconstruction*, p.16.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.16.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.16.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.18
- ¹¹ وحید الدین فقیر، روزگار فقیر، مکتبہ تعمیر انسانیت، لاہور، ۱۹۸۷ء، ص ۲۰، ۲۱۔
- ¹² ڈاکٹر جاوید اقبال، زندہ رود، سنگ میل پبلی کیشنز، لاہور، ص ۲۳۸
- ¹³ *Reconstruction*, p.18

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- ¹⁴ In the end it had come to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots. *Reconstruction*, p.19
- ¹⁵ *Reconstruction*, p.19
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p.20
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.21
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p.21
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.15-21.
- ²⁷ *Reconstruction*, p.22

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