

BRIDGING FAITH AND REASON: THE
SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN
CONSCIOUSNESS IN ALLAMA IQBAL'S
THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Allama Iqbal's profound insights into the spiritual foundations of humanity's relationship with God, emphasizing the integration of faith and reason as complementary pathways to understanding ultimate reality. Iqbal addresses the fundamental existential questions concerning the nature of the universe, humanity's role within it, and the ideal approach to align human conduct with divine purpose. By examining the limitations of poetry and philosophy, Iqbal elevates religion, particularly faith, as a transformative force capable of shaping civilizations. He argues that faith and reason are not antagonistic but rather interdependent, with faith offering a holistic vision of reality and reason providing a gradual understanding of its temporal dimensions. The article further contrasts Islamic thought with Western philosophical traditions, particularly the works of Immanuel Kant and Imam Ghazali, highlighting their differing approaches to metaphysics and the pursuit of divine knowledge. Iqbal's emphasis on spiritual experience as a verifiable, living reality aligns with Islamic teachings, rejecting the dichotomy between the material and spiritual worlds and advocating for a unified vision of existence. The article concludes with an exploration of the psychological insights of Islamic thought, as illustrated in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the pioneering work of Ibn Khaldun, underscoring the relevance of spiritual experience in comprehending the divine and shaping human consciousness.

Allama Iqbal's vision embraced a dynamic synthesis of religion, science, and modern thought, championing a progressive, spiritual outlook that harmonized with contemporary intellectual advancements. Iqbal believed in a living, evolving Islam that encouraged critical thinking and individual agency, urging Muslims to reclaim their rich intellectual heritage and embrace scientific progress without compromising their faith. By promoting "*khudi*" (selfhood) and advocating for an empowered spiritual identity, he aimed to bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern knowledge. His philosophy envisioned an Islamic society capable of thriving in a modern world, rooted in both ethical principles and rational inquiry, fostering a balanced integration of spiritual depth and scientific insight.

Allama Iqbal's thought centers on the harmonious integration of faith and reason, advocating a vision where both elements complement and enhance one another in the pursuit of truth and spiritual fulfillment. He emphasizes that faith, far from being blind belief, carries an element of understanding and is capable of transforming human character and society. Iqbal argues that reason and intuition are interconnected aspects of human consciousness, with reason offering partial glimpses of reality and faith providing a holistic vision. By drawing from Islamic teachings, Iqbal rejects the notion of conflict between the spiritual and material realms, proposing instead that true spiritual experience illuminates and elevates our understanding of the universe. His work highlights the importance of intuitive and empirical engagement, promoting a dynamic spirituality that encourages both intellectual inquiry and profound faith, ultimately bridging the gap between traditional religious beliefs and modern philosophical thought. Here are some dimensions of bridging faith and reason:

(i) Knowledge of the Relationship with God through Faith

While discussing the fundamental questions that have been confronting human consciousness since the beginning, Allama Iqbal touches on the various intellectual and scholarly sources that have dealt with these questions. What are those questions? While mentioning them, Iqbal asks: What is the nature and essence of the universe in which we live? Does it contain any permanent element in its structure? What kind of relationship do we have with this

universe? What is our place in it? What attitude and behavior should we adopt that aligns with our position in the universe, so that the universe assists rather than obstructs us in achieving our goals?

Allama Iqbal brings into discussion three major sources that attempt to answer these questions—poetry, philosophy, and religion. He begins by excluding poetry from this discussion, stating that poetry, by its very nature, is individualistic, figurative, unclear, and ambiguous. Therefore, one cannot rely solely on poetry to establish a foundation for answering such significant questions. After addressing poetry, Iqbal discusses philosophy and religion. When discussing religion, he asserts that religion, in its developed forms, is far superior to poetry. One reason for this is that religion never remains an individual matter; rather, its inclination is from the individual toward society.

Although human intellect is limited in its capacity to fully comprehend absolute reality and answer the fundamental questions mentioned above, religion surpasses these limitations and makes it possible to experience absolute reality.¹ As for philosophy, its essence lies in free inquiry. It questions every assumption and belief with skepticism. The very role of philosophy is to uncover the hidden aspects of those assumptions that humans have accepted without inquiry or criticism and to examine their validity through investigation—whether this leads to their confirmation, refutation, or the conclusion that human intellect cannot trace absolute reality.

Regarding religion, Allama Iqbal states that the essence of religion is faith. Philosophy begins its inquiry with the free critique of reason, while religion's journey starts with faith.² In this sense, religion and philosophy diverge from their very starting points. This is the principle of separation, which we have mentioned earlier in the introduction.

When discussing the conflict between reason and faith, Iqbal remarks that faith is the unseen treasure of life within the living heart of humanity, and reason is constantly lying in wait to steal it. He further clarifies that faith cannot merely be considered a feeling or mere acceptance; it contains an element of understanding and awareness. Religion, in terms of its impact on beliefs, is a system of truths that, when adopted, brings about a transformation in human character and conduct. This is the principle of affirmation that Allama Iqbal uses as the foundation in his Lectures.

Allama Iqbal asserts that this transformation has historically been a powerful means of shaping great civilizations, a fact acknowledged by Professor Whitehead as well.³

(ii) The Understanding of Human Thought and the Nature of Faith

Faith and reason, or intuition and thought, are not always in conflict or opposition to one another. Allama Iqbal argues that it is incorrect to assume that thought and intuition are different from each other because they both stem from the same source and complement one another.⁴ Thought perceives reality in a partial manner, while faith observes it in its entirety. Thought focuses on the temporal aspect of reality, whereas faith focuses on its timeless aspect. Faith is honored with a comprehensive vision of reality, while reason, due to its nature, structure, and disposition, gradually gains awareness of the various aspects of the whole, making a complete vision of reality possible. To make the observation of reality comprehensive, complete, and meaningful, both faith and reason need each other. Essentially, both faith and reason, or faith and thought, seek the same truth. Reality reveals itself to them according to their respective roles. Thus, it can be said that intuition is a higher form of reason, as Bergson expressed.⁵

(iii) Religion as a Living Experiential Reality

Since the goal of religion is to observe reality and attain a closeness to it that brings fulfillment from the fruits of that observation, religion cannot be regarded as merely a hollow system of beliefs. Early Islamic thought, being influenced by Greek philosophy, overlooked many aspects of the Quran's temperament and the truths of religion. Allama Iqbal notes that this approach also manifested in the attitudes of the Mu'tazilah in their defense of Islamic beliefs. When the Mu'tazilah perceived religion as merely a system of beliefs, they neglected the aspect of faith as a living and life-giving reality. By ignoring the possibilities of accessing reality beyond reason, they, under the influence of Greek rationalism, confined religion to a system of logical concepts. Naturally, this led to negative outcomes. The Mu'tazilah overlooked the fact that in the realm of knowledge, whether it is scientific or religious, thought cannot be separated from solid experience. Whenever thought, whether scientific or religious, is detached from solid experience, it becomes mere illusion.⁶ In the first lecture, Allama Iqbal seeks to address this shortcoming by affirming the possibility of spiritual experience.

(iv) The Resolution of the Conflict Between Ideal and Reality in Islam

The external possibility of spiritual experience cannot be established until the nature of the relationship between the external (appearance) and the internal (essence) is determined. In this context, Allama Iqbal highlights the differences between the approaches of Islam and Christianity. He writes that Christianity's attempt to restore the spirit of religion and spirituality is impossible because its fundamental attitude is a rejection of external forces. However, there is no contradiction between the external and the internal, as the external is already illuminated by spirituality. This contradiction can only be resolved if we correct our relationship with external forces and base it on an approach grounded in reality. In Islam, the ideal and the real are not in conflict because the life of external reality depends on its connection with the internal reality. The external reality serves as a sign and a means to access the internal reality.

Here, it is also necessary to clarify the perspectives of idealism and realism.

Idealism asserts that nothing exists in reality except for what is present in human thought, and that whatever we perceive in our mind is merely the expression of the things that come into our consciousness, while nothing actually exists in the external world. Kant objected to this, arguing that many external things exist that we are unaware of in their true nature. We only know their appearances—the aspects that reach our consciousness through the senses. In other words, we know things based on the impressions they make on our senses, and from these impressions, we give them names. The names we assign to things represent only their outward forms, while the true reality of things in the external world remains unknown to us.⁷

Realism, on the other hand, holds that the external world is real and that we perceive it through our senses. This is a fundamental, deeply rooted belief in human consciousness, and all distinctions of human awareness are built on this certainty. Scientific consciousness is also based on this foundation. Whether it is aesthetic awareness or moral consciousness, none of these can exist without the belief in external reality. Religious consciousness, too, cannot be attained without this belief. The sense of reality forms the basis of every possible concept we have. These concepts are also the foundation of human social consciousness, as social

awareness cannot exist without the belief in and acknowledgment of things in the external world. This is our general experience, and it is such a deep and firm conviction in humans that it is hardly doubted. Every thinker who has doubted it has ultimately failed in proving their skepticism.⁸

Allama Iqbal, rejecting the concept of a disconnect between the ideal and the real, explains the negative consequences of such a belief by stating that it would cause our lives to be fragmented into contradictory and conflicting parts. According to Islam's perspective, the external reality must be connected to the internal reality in such a way that it can absorb and illuminate itself through this connection.⁹ The spiritual experience or religious insight that Allama Iqbal discusses aims to eliminate, rather than acknowledge, the difference between the external and the internal.¹⁰

(v) The Beginning of the Understanding of Psychological States in the Times of Holy Prophet (PBUH) and in Later History of Islam

The Quran places great emphasis on the importance of psychological states and experiences, declaring that the critique and purification of these inner experiences are essential for the development of the human self. In Surah al-Shams, it is stated that both good and bad states and experiences occur within human consciousness (Al-Shams, 91:7-9). The process of separating the good from the bad is known as tazkiyah (purification), which leads to success. If one fails to complete this process of purification, the result is disorder, corruption, and ultimately, the failure to reach the desired goal.

There is an example in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that illustrates the critical examination of psychological experiences.¹¹ The Prophet (PBUH) paid special attention to the psychological states of a young Jewish boy named Ibn Sayyad, a story documented in the collections of Hadith. Allama Iqbal references this incident, citing Sahih Bukhari as an example, in which the Prophet (PBUH) went to test Ibn Sayyad and hid behind a tree to hear his mutterings. However, Ibn Sayyad's mother warned him of the Prophet's presence, disrupting his state. The Prophet (PBUH) remarked, "If only his mother had left him alone, the truth of his state would have been revealed."

Allama Iqbal states that fortunately, the hadith scholars carefully recorded this event from the Prophet's life, yet early Islamic scholars were not fully able to understand the nature,

justification, and psychological significance of this act. Western thinkers, when they mentioned this event, failed to recognize the fundamental difference between the consciousness of prophethood and the consciousness of sainthood. Allama Iqbal refers to Professor McDonald's commentary and notes that McDonald, without understanding the essence of the Quran, commented on this incident.¹² Had McDonald understood the spirit of the Quran, he would have seen the signs of the intellectual and cultural movement that gave rise to modern empirical methods in the observation of Ibn Sayyad's psychological states.

Allama Iqbal writes that the first Muslim scholar who truly understood the meaning and value of this observation by the Prophet (PBUH) was Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun can rightly be considered a precursor to many concepts in modern psychology. He critically examined and analytically understood the essence of Sufi consciousness, coming very close to the modern psychological concept of the subconscious. Even Professor McDonald acknowledged this, stating that Ibn Khaldun's psychological insights closely resemble the ideas later presented by William James in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹³

Ibn Khaldun's concept of Sufi consciousness, particularly the idea of the subconscious (*tahatt al-shu'ur*), was not fully recognized by modern psychology until 1890, when F.W.H. Myers coined the term "subliminal self" or subconscious. This term quickly became common in religious psychology. It began to be used to explain aspects of human consciousness or ego that lie beyond ordinary awareness but continuously influence a person's spiritual, psychological, and behavioral dimensions. Later, William James used the concept of the "subliminal self" extensively to explain the human experience of spiritual closeness to the Divine, which one attains in religious life.

(vi) The Islamic Foundation of Spiritual Experience

Immanuel Kant fulfilled a prophetic mission in Germany when he explained the limitations of reason. In doing so, he placed a monumental obstacle in the path of rampant rationalism. Allama Iqbal states that a similar but even more significant achievement was accomplished by Imam Ghazali in the Muslim world. Initially, in Germany, rationalists were allied with religion, but they realized their limitations when attempts to prove religious belief through rational arguments failed. As a result, they separated faith from formal religion. Separating religion from faith was equivalent to

transforming it into a body without a soul. Consequently, ethics and higher values became devoid of spirit and reduced to mere utilitarian actions. This paved the way for the rise of secularism in the West under the influence of rationalism.

Ghazali, by exposing philosophical skepticism, performed a far greater task than Kant, as it had a profound impact on the Islamic world. Ghazali crushed the arrogance of rationalism, which was so narrow in its outlook that it recognized no other methods or principles of knowledge besides its own. However, the fundamental difference between Ghazali and Kant's achievements lies in the fact that while Kant, by limiting the function of reason, denied the possibility of knowing God, Ghazali, through philosophical skepticism, opened the door to intuition (*wijdan*) for seeking the truth and understanding reality.¹⁴

In this sense, the path to attaining closeness to God and spiritual experience is provided by Islamic thought, where intuition and heartfelt consciousness, grounded in a firm moral foundation, bear fruit in the quest for truth.

(vii) The Difference Between Kant and Ghazali's Methods

In discussing the difference between Imam Ghazali and Kant's approaches to knowledge of the Divine, Allama Iqbal writes that Kant, while adhering to his fundamental principles, could not affirm the possibility of knowledge about God. Ghazali, finding no hope in analytical reasoning, turned to the Sufi experience, thus discovering a separate domain for religion. As a result, Ghazali identified a method of knowledge independent of science and metaphysics that, through his own experiences and understanding, proved the validity of religion. This method not only establishes the credibility of religion but also provides justification for the truth of religious teachings without relying on science or metaphysics.¹⁵

In *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error), Ghazali did not rely solely on reason. Instead, he moved beyond reason, employing intuition (*wijdan*) and the heart as sources of knowledge, demonstrating the possibility of spiritual experience. Here, instead of rational arguments, it is the strength of faith that acts as a guiding light to lead a person to the ultimate goal. In contrast, Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, denied the possibility of accepting truths that fall outside the realm of the senses. According to Kant, metaphysics deals with concepts that cannot be experienced. Similarly, metaphysics addresses the absolute totality

of all possible experiences, concepts that transcend reason and any possible experience.¹⁶

Kant argued that metaphysical concepts, by their nature, give the false impression that reason can perceive different things. However, these concepts only serve to complete understanding and perception. The result of this pursuit is an inevitable desire to fully comprehend reality as it is, which is impossible according to Kant.

Kant maintained that metaphysics deals with pure concepts that can never be encountered in any possible experience. This means that metaphysics concerns concepts whose truth or falsehood cannot be confirmed or validated through experience. In other words, the goal and purpose of metaphysics are these concepts, and everything else is a means to that end.¹⁷ According to Kant, the time had come for the end of traditional metaphysics. However, he also suggested that it was still unclear whether the definition and critique of reason's function and role for its potential revival were complete or not.¹⁸

In conclusion, Allama Iqbal's exploration of the relationship between humanity and the divine presents a compelling synthesis of faith and reason, rooted in a spiritual framework that aligns with observable reality. By critiquing the limitations of poetry and philosophy, Iqbal elevates religion, emphasizing its transformative power grounded in faith and lived experience. He underscores that faith and reason, rather than being adversaries, are complementary forces that provide a comprehensive understanding of truth, with faith offering an intuitive, holistic vision and reason contributing analytical precision. Addressing historical influences, Iqbal argues against the Mu'tazilah's rationalistic confinement of religion and highlights the importance of spiritual experience, drawing from both Islamic thought and modern psychology. Through his analysis, he seeks to reconcile the material and spiritual realms, offering a unified vision where the external world reflects inner spiritual truths. By comparing the philosophical contributions of figures like Imam Ghazali and Immanuel Kant, Iqbal illustrates the distinct Islamic approach that integrates reason, intuition, and divine knowledge, ultimately reaffirming the Qur'an's call for an enlightened engagement with both the universe and the divine.

Notes and References

¹ Religion, in its more advanced forms, rises higher than poetry. It moves from individual to society. In its attitude towards the Ultimate Reality it is opposed

- to the limitations of man; it enlarges his claims and holds out the prospect of nothing less than a direct vision of Reality. *Reconstruction*, p.1
- ² ... the incapacity of pure reason to reach the Ultimate Reality. The essence of religion, on the other hand, is faith; and faith, like the bird, sees its 'trackless way' unattended by intellect... *Reconstruction*, p.1
- ³ .. religion on its doctrinal side, as defined by Professor Whitehead, is 'a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended'. *Reconstruction*, p.1
- ⁴ 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 complement each other. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness. *Reconstruction*, p.2
- ⁵ In fact, intuition, as Bergson rightly says, is only a higher kind of intellect. *Reconstruction*, p.2
- ⁶ ... in the domain of knowledge - scientific or religious - complete independence of thought from concrete experience is not possible *Reconstruction*, p.4
- ⁷ Idealism consists in the claim that there are none other than thinking beings; the other things that we believe we perceive in intuition are only representations in thinking beings, to which in fact no object existing outside these beings corresponds. I say in opposition: There are things given to us as objects of our senses existing outside us, yet we know nothing of them as they may be in themselves, but are acquainted only with their appearances, that is, with the representations that they produce in us because they affect our senses. Accordingly, I by all means avow that there are bodies outside us, that is, things which, though completely unknown to us as to what they may be in themselves, we know through the representations which their influence on our sensibility provides for us, and to which we give the name of a body – which word therefore merely signifies the appearance of this object that is unknown to us but is nonetheless real. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.40
- ⁸ That the external world is real and is directly revealed to us by means of our senses, is one of the most fundamental and deep-rooted convictions of man, a conviction on which all the developed forms of distinctively human consciousness are based. The scientific consciousness expressly builds itself upon this foundation, the artistic consciousness assumes its validity, the moral consciousness would be impossible without it, and the religious consciousness would not be unless it had this conviction. The sense of the real and its insufficiency is the presupposition of all that is a yearning for the ideal. These consciousnesses are forms of this yearning. Moreover they are outgrowths of social consciousness, and social consciousness is not possible without this conviction without the belief in an external world of things and men which is common to all. It is so deep-rooted that man has seldom doubted it; those who, like Descartes and Hume, have attempted so to do, have failed in the attempt and had to confess their failure. This conviction may be called the

realistic instinct, as the view of the existence and knowledge of the external world it affirms is called realism. What is this conviction more definitely, what does it involve, and what is the function of philosophy with respect to it?

Syed Zafarul Hasan, *Realism*, 1928, p.1

- 9 The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life into painful oppositions, 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 illuminate its whole being. *Reconstruction*, p.7
- 10 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 which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life into painful oppositions, 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 illuminate its whole being. 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. *Reconstruction*, pp.7-8
- 11 The Prophet of Islam was the first critical observer of psychic phenomena. *Reconstruction*, p.13
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.14
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 16 Metaphysics is concerned with the concepts whose objects are never given in experience, and also with the absolute totality of all possible experience itself; both are ideas of reason that transcend any possible experience. These ideas produce an illusion that reason can cognize objects through them. Kant emphasizes the importance of the distinction between ideas of reason and categories or pure concepts of the understanding. The transcendental ideas are obtained by reflecting on the three forms of the syllogism (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive). The function of the ideas is to drive the understanding toward completeness in its cognition; the search for completeness leads the understanding to want to cognize noumena, which it cannot do. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, pp.xxx-xxxi
- 17 Apart from concepts of nature, which always find their application in experience, metaphysics is further concerned with pure concepts of reason that are never given in any possible experience whatsoever, hence with concepts whose objective reality (that they are not mere fantasies) and with assertions whose truth or falsity cannot be confirmed or exposed by any experience; and this part of metaphysics is moreover precisely that which forms its essential end, toward which all the rest is only a means. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, pp.79-80

- ¹⁸ But although the time for the collapse of all dogmatic metaphysics is undoubtedly here, much is still lacking in order to be able to say that, on the contrary, the time for its rebirth, through a thorough and completed critique of reason, has already appeared. All transitions from one inclination to its opposite pass through a state of indifference, and this moment is the most dangerous for an author, but nonetheless, it seems to me, the most favorable for the science. For if the partisan spirit has been extinguished through the complete severance of former ties, then minds are best disposed to bear out, bit by bit, proposals for an alliance according to another plan. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.118