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SELF AND ZIKR

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ABSTRACT

Self is the central and pivotal concept of Allama Iqbal. Among the steps described by Allama Iqbal for the training and evolution of self, one of the steps is obedience to God. Obedience to God means that man should implement the commandments of Allah on himself to such an extent that his purpose is included in God's purpose. Islam has taught many ways of worshiping and obeying Allah. The method of worship which can be continued at all times and by which a person does not get away from God at any time is Dhikr. The importance of remembrance has been emphasized in several verses in the Holy Quran. The feeling of closeness to Allah is what makes a person different from the common man. Because the feeling of God's closeness brings about the change in human consciousness that enables him to prevail over every religion in the universe. The most effective way to reach this feeling of closeness is the remembrance of Allah.

***Zikr*, a basic need of the self**

In order to satisfy its urge for Beauty by contemplating the qualities of beauty and perfection of the Divine Self the human self not only makes use of natural phenomena but also those words of the dictionary as symbols of Divine qualities which are commonly used for them. The Holy Quran calls these words “*al-asma-ul-husna*” (or the beautiful attributes).

The true believer repeats these words externally and internally by keeping their import in mind. During this process he concentrates his attention on that beauty and perfection which this import expresses. He, therefore, derives enjoyment from this method of inner study and observation of Beauty and is acquainted with its grandeur and depth. This form of seeking Beauty is called *zikr* or *ibadah*. Though the word *ibadah* has a wide meaning, and all the acts and deeds of man count as *ibadah*, yet in the restricted sense the term *ibadah* is also used to represent *zikr*. *Zikr* adds to the intensity of love in man, with the result that he becomes bright like the flame. The Muslims need a man of God in whose heart the flame of God’s love has become bright due to excessive *zikr*, and whose intellect is faster than the lightening in the swiftness of thought. He can then create an upheaval like the dooms day to change the world according to the will of God.

To engage on *zikr* from midnight till dawn has been praised by the Quran in the following words:

تَسْجُدُ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ

Their sides forsake their beds (32:16) ¹

This time is more beneficial and effective for the purpose of the self because the self can concentrate its attention more easily on it due to silence and solitude and the descent of God’s special blessings at this time. The urge to love keeps the self restless like the mercury, but the midnight *zikr* lends it rest and peace just as the aloe wood sets the mercury at rest.

Zikr or *ibadah*, so to say, is not any vocal exercise. It is a mental activity resulting from a realisation of Beauty the purpose of which is to deepen this realisation further through the observation of Beauty from near until man’s love achieves perfection. If *zikr* is not

accompanied by an inner effort, it cannot help the growth of love. That is why, Iqbal has laid stress on *Zikr* and *Ibadah* in his poetry again and again.

The pearl of the shell of faith

Since sincerity in *zikr* decreases the love of other than God and increases that of God gradually, its final result is that indulgence in obscenity and disobedience on the part of the true believer both become impossible. Therefore, Islam has enjoined every Muslim to perform a specific minimum form of *zikr* which is determined by the Prophet's orders and which is known as *salat*. *Salat* is a pearl which is formed inside the shell of faith. In this respect, so to say, it is the believer's lesser pilgrimage as he circumambulates the *K'abah* in it internally and mentally. *Salat* is like a dagger in the hands of a Muslim which eradicates immorality and disobedience.

But *salat* provides that much *zikr* which is the minimum required for creating in the believer love for it and for laying the foundations of his habits of sincere *zikr*. It does not of course provide him with all the *zikr* that he needs for evolving his love completely by satisfying his desire for Beauty. The Holy Quran, therefore, enjoins upon the believer to take part in *zikr* abundantly even after his regular prayers. If the feeling of Beauty which Iqbal calls (inner feeling) is missing in *Salat* its purpose cannot be realized. Iqbal thinks that the major cause of the decline of Muslims is this fact itself that they have lost this very feeling of Beauty or the urge to love God sincerely. If we see their prayer today, we find that neither the rows have been arranged with the fervour and zeal evenly nor is there any concentration on prayer, and nor any pleasure is being felt in prostration because the hearts are devoid of God's love.

Iqbal complains that the callers towards True Love are not available now either in mosques or in shrines or in schools. It is now he alone who is calling everyone towards it. The cells of the Sufis and teachers are empty of the pure and sparkling wine of Divine Love. If this pure and sparkling wine is not available today anywhere, it can be found in Iqbal's flagon.

Feeling of Beauty or inner feeling or Love is itself faith. This is precisely the sign of a true Muslim. Even if anyone is a Muslim or says or hears about it, his prayer will be futile unless he is a true Muslim. The Muslim is not a true Muslim today. Therefore, his prayer is to no effect.

Deep Muslim faith

Iqbal calls this feeling of Beauty deep Muslim faith too. The reason is that it is the Muslim's special distinction. He distinguishes it from outward faith. Outward faith is simply where a Muslim may offer his prayer with its outward movements and discipline. But the deep Muslim faith is that when a Muslim may offer his prayer, the true feeling of the beauty and perfection of God or Love may accompany him. This very feeling of Beauty or deep Muslim faith is itself the secret of the universe to Iqbal's eyes. The universe has been created only for its sake and it alone is going to be the means of man's highest perfection. It is the dynamic power of all human activity. Without it avenues of right action for man cannot open. It keeps the branch of conviction and faith alive and fresh.

Sharia is nothing but an expression of the fixed methods of this feeling of Beauty or Love or love for God. If the feeling of Beauty or Love is absent, there is no prayer at all. On the contrary, the whole of sharia becomes a combination of ideas the purpose of which is not virtue and piety, but which themselves become the objects of worship, hence assume the form of idols.

Iqbal designates *ziker* sometimes as "*ab-e-sehar-gabi* (morning sighs) ", sometimes "*fughan-e-subh-gabi* (morning lament) " and sometimes as "*adab-e-sehar gabi* (habit of rising in the early morning) ". Man cannot satisfy his desire for Beauty completely till he loves others than God, for this desire does not find satisfaction in anything else except God. Till then neither does his personality reach perfection nor does he get complete peace of mind. But without *ziker* man cannot achieve that station of Divine Love where he may become free from the love of others than God.

That is why Iqbal himself also made midnight *ziker* a part of his daily routine which even the biting winter winds of London could not force him to abandon.

Fiker is neither perfect without *ziker* nor can it realise its aim. *Ziker* and *fiker* should go hand in hand.

Knowledge of the qualities of the self

The emphasis of Iqbal on *ziker*, prayer and similar other teachings of Islam is not because he wishes to call attention to these teachings by becoming a preacher or a teacher of Islam, as has been understood by some who do not appreciate him and call him a *mullah*, but because the undeniable facts of the qualities of human

nature or human self which he has discovered due to his research make it necessary. And the method by which he has researched these facts is not much different from that followed by the scientists. The scientist tries to discover the qualities of everything by means of observation. But certain things in the world are also such that they cannot come within the observation of any one directly. It is only their external effects which can be observed. It is obvious that the knowledge of the qualities of such objects can be acquired by the scientists only through the observation and study of their effects. The scientist adopts exactly the same method for acquiring their knowledge. One of these things, as I have already mentioned, is the atom. An American scientist had perhaps seen the atom by an electronic microscope ten or twelve years ago. But the knowledge of the qualities of the atom to whatever extent it is available to the scientists today, had nearly all been acquired before through the observation of its effects without seeing it. Another similar object is the human self which we cannot see with our eyes. But, its qualities can be seen by its effects. The knowledge of the qualities of the self is extremely important to man as the self itself is the essence of man. All the acts and deeds of man because of which there is hustle and bustle in the world are the deeds and actions of the self itself. Hence, it is extremely important for us to know what is the self, what are its qualities, and what is the origin and source of its activities and further, what does it want and why? Without knowing about these things we can neither bring human actions and deeds under control, nor direct them as we wish. For example, we cannot stop man's mutual wars and rivalries or create an atmosphere of peace, conciliation, progress and prosperity in the world or tell how man should establish his political, legal, educational, moral, scientific, artistic, military, diplomatic and economic systems so that they are durable, correct and beneficial for him and are not a source of anxieties for him. Keeping before him the effects of the self which are in the form of human deeds and actions, Iqbal has derived some results about its qualities and characteristics. His philosophy consists only of these results. Some other people have also tried to know about the qualities of the self from its effects before Iqbal, but except for Iqbal no one's results (which are reflected in the mirror of the past and the present history of individuals and societies) can explain the effects of the self in a satisfactory manner. These results are neither completely harmonious with these effects nor with each other, and nor with other scientific facts. Hence, they are below the standard of rationality and are unconvincing. If from the observation

of the effects of the self, Iqbal has found that the self is merely a powerful urge to love God, and nothing else apart from this, and all the effects of the self, all its deeds and actions whether right and wrong, are created out of this urge to love which is satisfied by *zikr* and *fikr*, he is compelled to say so whether one likes it or not. This is not a sermon, but an expression of the unavoidable results of observations. It makes no difference whether in deriving these results correctly Iqbal has been greatly helped by the islamic teachings. Nor whether the islamic teachings confirm these results further. If, after observing the properties of water, someone may say that it turns into ice at zero degree centigrade, there will be no defect in it even if that individual who hates ice, or is allergic to it, may dislike this statement; the sayer must say only this even then.

Importance of *Ibadah*

Man's action called God's worship, the main element of which is *zikr*, is the most valuable and the highest of the human experiences. Man gives the greatest, the most powerful and the most important desire of his life the opportunity to express itself naturally and correctly through it. In this way, he evolves his personality to the stage of its highest perfection by satisfying it completely and permanently. It is, so to say, the return of the human self to its source and its going back to its goal. It is the meeting of lovers, long separated lovers who have searched for each other long and hard through ages of evolution. Iqbal tells us that worship is a natural activity which, in respect of its origin, is but the complement to the scientists' search after truth. He says;

“Prayer is instinctive in its origin”..... “In thought the mind observes and follows the working of Reality; in the act of prayer it gives up its career as a seeker of slow footed universality and rises higher than thought to capture Reality itself with a view to become a conscious participator in its life. There is nothing mystical about it. Prayer as a means of spiritual illumination is a normal vital act by which the little island of our personality suddenly discovers its situation in a larger whole of life”..... “In fact prayer must be regarded as a necessary complement to the intellectual activity of the observer of Nature. The scientific observation of Nature keeps us in close contact with the behaviour of Reality, and thus sharpens our inner perception for a deeper vision of it” “The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer”.²

If the believer is, in fact, a true believer the spiritual power which he acquires by *zikr*, glorification and prayer is not wasted by him by sitting in a corner of the mosque. On the contrary, he uses it to change the world according to the will of his Creator. The Quran says that there is nothing in the world which does not glorify God. If man is content with only *zikr* and glorification, he is no more than the conscious or half-conscious inorganic matter and vegetation. But since man knows himself and is self-conscious, his real role in the universe is to become a co-worker with God in His construction and completion. To achieve this purpose, he should exalt the name of God not only vocally but also through constant struggle. Vocal glorification and *zikr* are the means of preparing for this role, for they provide the power which is of use in performing this role effectively. Unfortunately, most of the doctors of religion lay stress on *zikr* and glorification, but not on changing the world according to God's will, although according to the injunctions of the Quran, God demands of the believers that they should struggle for changing His world according as He desires and holds them the promise of His help, if they do so.

إِنْ تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ

If you help (in the cause of Allah) He will help you. (47: 7) ³

Helping God is precisely this that the true believer who loves God should also make an effort to evolve the universe to that perfection to which God wishes to evolve it. Iqbal has described these facts in three forceful couplets which are given below:

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ The Noble Quran by Dr. Mohammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Mohammad Muhsin Khan, Islamic University Al-Madina.

² *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Edition 2007, (New Typesetting), PP: 92-94, Published by Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf, Publishers-Booksellers-Exporters, 7-Aibak Road, (new Anarkali), Lahore.

³ In the printed first edition of the Urdu book this *ayah* appears above the verses of Iqbal and its Urdu translation above the last para at page 246, although this *ayah* should be right above its Urdu translation. This is an error which the author has corrected in his personal copy of the printed first edition of the Urdu book with his own hand by pointing out its correct place. This translation incorporates the correction mentioned above. The translation of the *ayaah* referred to above has been taken from The Noble Quran by Dr. Mohammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Mohammad Muhsin Khan, Islamic University Al-Madina.