

IQBAL REVIEW

Journal of the Iqbal Academy Pakistan

Volume: 56

April-June 2015

Number: 2

Editor: Muhammad Bakhsh Sangi

Associate Editor: Dr. Tahir Hameed Tanoli

Editorial Board

Dr. Abdul Khaliq, Dr. Naeem Ahmad, Dr. Shahzad Qaiser, Dr. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Dr. Khalid Masood, Dr. Axel Monte (Germany), Dr. James W. James Morris (USA), Dr. Marianta Stepenatias (Russia), Dr. Natalia Prigarina (Russia), Dr. Sheila McDonough (Montreal), Dr. William C. Chittick (USA), Dr. M. Baqai Makan (Iran), Alian Desoulieres (France), Prof. Ahmad al-Bayrak (Turkey), Prof. Barbara Metcalf (USA)

Advisory Board

Munib Iqbal, Barrister Zaffarullah, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, Prof. Fateh Muhammad Malik, Dr. Moin Nizami, Dr. Abdul Rauf Rafiqi, Dr. John Walbrigde (USA), Dr. Oliver Leaman (USA), Dr. Alparslan Acikgenc (Turkey), Dr. Mark Webb (USA), Dr. Sulayman S. Nyang, (USA), Dr. Devin Stewart (USA), Prof. Hafeez Malik (USA), Sameer Abdul Hameed (Egypt), Dr. Carolyn Mason (New Zealand)

IQBAL ACADEMY PAKISTAN

The opinions expressed in the Review are those of the individual contributors and are not the official views of the Academy

IQBAL REVIEW
Journal of the Iqbal Academy Pakistan

This peer reviewed Journal is devoted to research studies on the life, poetry and thought of Iqbal and on those branches of learning in which he was interested: Islamic Studies, Philosophy, History, Sociology, Comparative Religion, Literature, Art and Archaeology.

Manuscripts for publication in the journal should be submitted in duplicate, typed in double-space, and on one side of the paper with wide margins on all sides preferably along with its CD or sent by E-mail. Abstracts in English should be typed double-spaced on a separate page. It is assumed that the manuscripts sent to *Iqbal Review* are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Publication of material in *Iqbal Review* means that the author assigns copyright to *Iqbal Review* including the right to electronic publishing. Authors may, however, use their material in other publications acknowledging *Iqbal Review* as the original place of publication.

In order to facilitate academic review and production, authors must conform to the following: 1) the name of the author, address, phone numbers, title, and name(s) of universities must appear on the title page of the article; 2) footnotes are to be numbered consecutively; 3) all foreign words must appear underlined/Italic with properly placed diacritical marks. Ten off-prints of the articles and two copies of book reviews will be sent to authors.

All contributions should be addressed to the Editor, Iqbal Review, 6th Floor, Academy Block, Aiwan-e-Iqbal Complex, Egerton Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

Tel: 92-42-36314510, 99203573, & Fax: 92-42-36314496

Email. into@iap.gov.pk Website: www.allamaiqbal.com

Published annually: *Iqbal Review* Two issues (April and October)
Iqbalīyat Two issues (January and July)

ISSN: 0021-0773

Subscription

PAKISTAN

Per issue	Rs.150/-
Per year (Postage included)	Rs.600/- (for one year.)

FOREIGN

Per issue	\$ 6.00
Per year (Postage included)	\$ 20.00 (for one year.)

CONTENTS

The Journey from Īmān bil Ghaib to Īmān bil Hudur: The Role of Science, Divine Ancestry, and Humanity’s Place in Creation <i>Abdul Hameed Kamali</i>	5
Existence and Essence in Mulla Sadrā’s Philosophy: A Comparative Study of Essentialism and Existentialism <i>Dr. Atiya Syed</i>	27
Scriptural Reasoning and the Shared Legacy of Hagar and Ishmael <i>Steven Kepnes</i>	45
The Art of a Soul Seeking Salvation <i>Ms. Atifa Usmani Dr. Shaukat Mahmood SI</i>	63
Modern Psychology and Characteristics of Religious Experience <i>Dr. Tabir Hameed Tanoli</i>	87

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

A.H. Kamali

Ex-Director
Iqbal Academy Pakistan
Lahore

Ms. Atifa Usmani

Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Art and Design,
College of Home Economics,
Gulberg, Lahore.

Ms. Atya Syed

Ex-Chairperson
Department of Philosophy
University of the Punjab,
Lahore

Dr. Shaukat Mahmood

Dr. Shaukat Mahmood ^{SI}
Coordinator PhD Programme,
College of Art and Design
University of the Punjab,
Lahore

Mr. Steven Kepnes

Professor of the Study of
World Religions,
Colgate University
USA

Dr. Tahir Hameed Tanoli

Assistant Director (Acads.)
Iqbal Academy Pakistan
Lahore

THE JOURNEY FROM ĪMĀN BIL GHAIB
TO ĪMĀN BIL HUDUR: THE ROLE OF
SCIENCE, DIVINE ANCESTRY, AND
HUMANITY'S PLACE IN CREATION

Abdul Hameed Kamali

ABSTRACT

Throughout human history, there has been a gradual but inevitable transition from the concept of *Īmān bil Ghaib* (faith in the unseen) to *Īmān bil Hudur* (faith in the known). This trajectory reflects an irreversible progression toward enlightenment, culminating in a time often referred to as the Day of Rising. The development of science, an integral part of this process, is intertwined with humanity's quest for knowledge and wisdom. In the face of existential challenges, humans have historically attributed their origins to divine or supernatural forces, creating hierarchical societies based on notions of divine ancestry. Over time, these ideas evolved, giving rise to the concept of vicegerency, where ruling elites claimed to be the deputies of divine powers.

This paper explores how these ancient ideas of divine rulership re-emerged in both aristocratic and democratic forms, influencing religious consciousness and worldviews. It traces the evolution of theological and scientific thought concerning human origins, particularly through the lens of revealed scriptures, such as the Qur'an and the Bible. By analyzing Qur'anic references to creation, this paper delves into how these texts align with modern scientific understanding of the earth's formation, the origin of life, and the evolution of mankind. Furthermore, it examines the role of humanity as *Khalifa* (successor) on earth, challenging the anthropocentric view that humans are the crown of creation, highlighting instead the vastness of God's creation and the interconnectedness of all life.

In doing so, the paper also addresses the limitations of human understanding and explores the implications of mankind's self-perception in light of the Qur'anic revelations. It ultimately argues that while humans hold a unique position due to their capacity for speech and knowledge, their role as God's vicegerent does not confer superiority over other creations, including the angels. Rather, the paper calls for a deeper reflection on mankind's responsibilities within the broader context of the universe's divine order.

An irreversible trend is pervasive in human history that the *īmān bil ghaib* (faith filled with the Unknown) slowly but assuredly transforms into the *īmān bil budur* (faith filled with the Known). A time is certain when all that was out of sight would be before us; and that moment of history is usually called by us as the Day of Rising. The progress of science seems to be an inalienable aspect of that irreversible movement of history and therefore is an integral component of the faith with which mankind is on the side of wisdom in marking its own time and carving out its future.

Perhaps, in the face of the most threatening physical and ecological environments, man tried to preserve his nerves by forming most grandiose images of his own being. Whenever he tried to peep through his deep past he could not retrace his vestiges as they become faint and fainter and are lost in the indiscernible aeons. Yet as he found himself remarkably in mastery over all he could map, leaving behind all other living creatures around, he was blown to the heights of imagining himself as quite different from all creation and was given to the idea of conceiving himself as distinguished from all in his origin. Not agreeable to level down their being to earthly origin, proud nations traced their ancestry from the deity they worshipped.

Imperceptibly accumulating functional differentiations of roles between men gradually assumed semi-permanence and in the course of time hardened into vertical classifications and stratifications of the human beings as great distortions of civilization in bloom. The humble classes were dissociated from that pompous origin. Only top households mounting over them were considered to be in their right to have claimed their origin and family tree from one, particularly that one god or goddess who as per their convictions ruled the earth below and the heavens above. Thus great civilizations of antiquity served as the most fertile nurseries of the sons and daughters of god. In most periods of their history son-gods ruled over the people as the deputies or viceroys of their deity.

Ideas do not die. They reappear in posterities. They may remain buried for a time, but resurrect and become part of the

culture in vogue. It is from those antiquated civilizations that the idea of the vicegerency of God descended, both in its aristocratic and democratic form, and became part not only of the elements of the religious consciousness but also of the world-view of many a people. In its aristocratic form, the doctrine of vicegerency means that there is one and only one most lofty bloodline which amongst mankind gives birth to the deputies of the supreme Lord of the earth succeeding one after another and thus the earth is never vacant of a viceroy of the lord. In concrete shape, this doctrine is decorated and enriched with several layers of esoteric and mystic fancies all streaming down from the sages of the Greco-Roman or even earlier Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations.

In its most democratic form and humanistic grounding man as a race is proclaimed to have held the position of the vicegerency of God. This idea also flourishes on those quasi-religious fancies which flow down from the ancient polytheistic civilizations with some change in its build in the light of the revealed religions.

The declaration of the Book of Genesis that man was made of dust in its import was a most revolutionary message in the heart of those very civilizations. It was threatening to their ideological ramparts raised on the doctrine of the Divine lineage of their mundane rulers and their august position with the specter of vicegerency of their supreme deity in their hand.

Potter's Image

The idea of spontaneous creation which was built on the earthly origin of all living things means that (i) all animals are created from dust and (ii) all men without distinction have earthly origin. It was the most scientific view that could be formed by the ancient wise men. And the surviving potency of it had been so strong that no one could seriously challenge it up to the last two centuries. According to this view, every kind of life was directly and spontaneously created from earth. Man also came into being in that way. The Book of Genesis further declared that all men were progeny of Adam and Eve and as such none of them could claim some higher status on the basis of his genesis. This view could be quite easily absorbed in the theory of the spontaneous creation. As a necessary aspect of this theory the Supreme Lord of the world was, however, invested with a potter's image in the Jewish and later on in the Christian civilizations.

The verses or *Āyāt*, as they are called of the Holy Qur'an, contain much more data on the subject of creation. But when the Muslim scholars addressed themselves to explain the verses they were overwhelmed by the prevalent views of those civilizations. Consequently, they ignored the fundamental difference between the words of the Book of Genesis and those of the Holy Qur'an and reduced all of its relevant verses to one another in describing the origin of life and man on the earth.

The Arabic word for dust is *turab*. The Qur'an confirms the Book of Genesis, regarding the raising of man from dust, at five places in its chapters/suras: al Kahf (18:38), Room (30:20), al Hajj (22:5), al Faṭar (35: II), al 'Imrān (3:59).

But in so many other verses, it employs different words beyond mere dust: *Salsāl' kal fakḥār* in al Rahmān (55: 14), *teen* in al Asrā (17:61), al' Arāf (7:12), al Anām (6:2) and al Sajdah (32:7), *salsāl' min hamā' masnun* in al Hajar (15:33); *teen' ladhib* in al Saffāt (37:11) and *saḥālat' min teen* in al Mu'minun (23:12).

Only two of the whole series of the above cited expressions *ḥama in masnūn* which means stinking mud and *teen* which means mud/clay including *teen in ladhib*, i.e. elastic clay are such that they are consistent with the potter's image of the Lord. But other expressions go beyond it and as such raze the image to ground as for instance, *salsāl' kal fakḥār* and *saḥālat' min teen*.

Salsāl means an earth which has passed through fire and then cooled down and produces sound. This latter aspect is expressed by the words *kal fakḥār*. The verse says that man is made of, or created from, *salsālat' kal fakḥār*. This very idea is repugnant to the potter's image. A potter puts down his creations of clay in fire after making them and does not put the clay in fire before their making. *Saḥālat' min teen*, i.e., an extracted substance or a highly valuable something drawn from the wet soil or mud becomes entirely incomprehensible in the light of the potter's view for a potter directly puts the plastic clay to shape it into figures and does not go to extract something, a greatly valuable substance or material from it to use in his production. Considerations like these would have impelled the experts to reject the potter's view of God and would have put the scientists to redirect their researches towards more proper directions. This is how the Divine revelations initially may help mankind in mounting much of their ignorance or erroneous views. Had the lead been followed, mankind would have

been in the grasp of much scientific knowledge, many centuries before our age about creation and man.

However, expansion of our knowledge in physics, chemistry, biology, geology and physical cosmology today enables us to grasp the significance of the verses just referred to above. One thing, however, is quite certain that life has come out of the earth and has not come from outside, from some other sphere to it. All the verses, as mentioned above, project, more or less, the evolution of the earth right from its beginning and origin up to the stage of the emergence of life. At a certain stage of the evolution of our sun a great bulging took place around its equator. Whirlpools of gaseous masses containing some percents of fine dust particles consisting of various terrestrial materials such as silicon compounds, iron oxides, water vapours and other elements were released and established at different orbits around the sun. From the whirlpools, on particular orbits, emerged lumps of dust. Gradually all of them merged together to form the planet earth. The reference to dust both in the Book of Genesis and in the Holy Qur'an is to this dust from which the earth itself took origin and grew into a planet. Other expressions of the Holy Qur'an refer to different stages of its evolution. *Hamāⁿ masnūn* seems to refer to its molten state, and *salsalⁿ kal fak^hkh^hbar* to the state when its upper crust cooled down to form a solid rock, and further broke down to thin layers giving sound. An expert geologist may give all the details and fit the terms employed by the verses in a proper order of geological evolution. Then the last state of the earthly materials represented as the *salālahⁿ min teen* directly refers to the organic compounds at the origin of life. This *salālah*, highly delicate something out of the clay is that chemical organization of the earthly compounds in a right proportion which forms the cell of life. This *salālah* lies at the origin of life, and by that reason at the origin of man. It is that from which all life including man was created.

Then there are some important verses which give important clue to the origin as well as to the evolution of life up to man: "And we produced from waters every self-mover, *i.e.* animal. Of them, there are that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs and some that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills. For verily Allah has power over all things (al **Nūr**, 24:45)." We may not go into all the details but may take notice of two important points or conclusions that have drawn in a general agreement amongst the experts. The ammoniac acids and nucleic acids, ingredients to the

production of a living cell, could be produced or would have been produced while the earth was passing through high temperatures at its upper surface including its atmosphere. It was not yet ready for ordinary life. The second point is that when life emerged, and it must have emerged when the atmospheric temperature had cooled down to a sufficient extent, it emerged in sea waters and after a time spread on the dry lands with water pools in them. If we keep in mind the just quoted *āyāt* and read them along with an *āyat* of *sura Hód*, we are led to the idea of evolution of life from water up to the arrival of mankind. The *āyat* is translated thus: “He it is who created the earth and heavens in six days and His Throne (*‘Arsh*) was over the waters that He might try you which of you are of better deeds (II:7).”

The throne Divine *‘Arsh*, as pointed out in numerous verses is the Throne of the *Rahmān*, *i.e.* the *‘arsh* of the Nourishing, Sustaining and Upbringing Lord). The *āyat* discloses that it was on waters to bring life from it. And it was life that had to grow and grow in kingdoms, kinds, orders and species until the rise of mankind. And the mankind, everyone of it, was to be put in testing conditions to let it be manifest which of them are of good deeds (and which of them are of evil deeds). It was quite enough for this end that by the right combinations of the basic acids and other compounds a single micro-organism consisting of one and only one cell emerged. It was this humble beginning of life. Feeding on the environment, self-reproduction and multiplication were inherent laws of its constitution. And from it, *i.e.* a living cell grew all life and all of its forms. The production of all life was just equal to the production of this mono-cellular organism. *Sura Luqmān* reveals “Your creation and your raising is only as that of a single life. Lo, Allah is Hearer, Knower (31:28).” The word used in the *āyat* is *nafs*. This is applicable to every living thing. It is also used in the sense of a soul or self. In the above verse, it means life. There are standing Divine instructions to man: “Travel in the land and see how He originated creation, then Allah brings forth the later growth. Lo, Allah is able to do all things (AI *Ānkabūt*, 29:20).

The differences between a chemical organization and biological organization of the mixtures and compounds may tend to zero, and human researches in this direction are good. They may tend towards zero but they cannot touch the limit zero. It means that there is a residue of spontaneity in life. It spontaneously originated from the chemical mixtures, interactions and

combinations with its own unprecedented laws. All developments of life to various branches and sub-branches, each punctuated with a spontaneous creation of a new form of life, seems to be the governing law in all evolution.

From an order of creation known as the primates gradually two sub-orders emerged. One of them evolved into the rise of monkeys, goralas and apes. The other known as hominids evolved into the rise of our mankind. Our kind has been given the technical name of homosapiens. Before us there were other species of hominids. We are not interested in their details, for we are attending to the origin of man. It appears that mankind must have come into being from one of the homospecies which had been resembling but not totally resembling it so that it was established as a distinct species.

The question is what is the criterion of a distinct species. Its members must be all alike in essential features and structure and they should be able to reproduce themselves by mating amongst themselves *ad infinitum*.

The origin of a new species from an already flourishing species cannot be explained by its infinitesimal changes from generation to generation leading to a new species. It is because all offsprings of a species, even after millions of years, belong to the same species, *i.e.* they are all alike. The new species must be a spontaneous leap from an existing one. and it must be somewhat different and distinctly more advanced in its physiological and bodily structure.

Female Principle

It appears from the Holy Qur'an that in this leap, or spontaneous creation of a new species, perhaps at the level of higher mammals or at least in the sub-order of hominids of the order of primates, the female principle plays the key role. I am inclined to this generalization by reading a work of a versatile thinker of our country, the late Sibti Nabi Naqvi who wrote many creative papers on astrophysics, climatology and religion. I quote from his work, *Islam and contemporary Science*, published in 1973. According to his suggestions, it was a female, independent of a male of her species, which gave birth to Adam and Eve, the ancestors of all mankind. He reproduces *ayat*. 59 of **āi i 'Imrān**, the 3rd chapter of the Holy Qur'an, relating to the birth of Jesus to demonstrate his point. He says, "It is thus clear that Adam and Eve, the first homosapiens from whom men and women have

spread over the earth, were both produced from a single soul” This looks perfectly clear if we look upon this event in the light of the following verse, “Surely, the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam (3:59).” It is a historical fact that Jesus was born to a single soul - Mary, without intercourse with any male. This is what the Qur’an bears out. The similitude of Jesus to Adam is therefore the similarity of circumstances in which a single female gave birth to a child without the help of a male. “In the case of Jesus, the evolution was of soul alone. He could speak when he was still a small baby and proclaimed the truth of God even at that early age. In the case of Adam it was a greater revolution; it was a change of species. Suddenly, in the womb of an older species, a new species took shape and a pair of homosapiens was born.” Let us add that mutation of species does not take place arbitrarily, using the female of any species at random and reproducing from it any species. The law of graduated series is the hard core of all evolution. The new species contains the features of the mother species but with a perceptible degree of advancement with some modifications in its entire structure, so that it is biologically recognizable as a distinct species. Now it will not be possible that mating with any of the mother species by any of its members will be productive of an offspring. Therefore we are bound to seek for the hallowed mother of our species in the advanced hominids only, who were inhabiting the world just at the arrival of the homosapiens and not anywhere else. This search is a fruitful occupation of the physical anthropologists. We may leave it to them.

Now let us draw our attention to an important point related to the problem. *Sura Nisa’* of the Holy Qur’an opens with the verse: “O, ye human beings, fear your Lord Who created you from a single *nafs*, and created therefrom its mate, and from that twain spread men and women (4: I).” The same assertion is also found at other places, for instance, in the *Sura Zumar*: “He created you from a *nafs* then from that He made its mate (39:6).” If these verses are taken in the sense of a mother giving birth to its own mate, it shall be a morbid absurdity in violation of the principle of evolution. The homosapien child was a new species who could not serve as a mate of its mother to produce other homosapien offsprings because of the difference of species separating them. As it is pointed out earlier, the word *nafs* denotes any living entity. With no objection, it may be applied to reproductive cell also which in itself is a microorganism, which under suitable circumstances as provided by the womb of a mother develops into a fully grown baby ready to

be born. If read along with a little exposition of the biological observation, the *āyāt* as mentioned above are eye-openers. We already know cases that a human mother also gives birth to more than one baby. The verses duly point out that the mother of our species gave birth to two babies. The single reproductive cell replete with the species of homosapiens in its growth split up into two cells which separately developed into a pair of babies.

The Bible's statement that Eve was created from the rib of Adam also clearly conjectures to this aspect of creation. If we look at an ordinary cell including a reproductive one, at the start of its growth, it may be seen as bulging out from a side which may be picturised as a rib side wherefrom another cell seems to be in formation. In the case of a reproductive cell, if this new cell, as it is formed, breaks away from the primary cell and independently clings to the womb, twins are certain to be born. The twin cells will now grow into babies side by side. Most probably, it was how from a single *nafs* (reproductive cell), its mate was made and a pair of homosapiens was born. It was all spontaneous evolution, a new leap of life from an already existing species of the kind, in this case, the hominids. It was all in accordance with the basic laws of evolution.

If we keep all the biological evolution in our mind we are convinced that man has a very humble beginning. He can be traced back to that humble, most depictable, one and only one cell from which evolution of life started. Glorified is God alone, Omniscient and Omnipotent, Who has command over all things.

No Crown of Creation

About man's self-rating as we learn it from his boastful claims and pretensions, let it be admitted that it is invariably a function of the boundaries of his knowledge. Although men apparently had a full faith in the glory of God, yet until modern, rather contemporary times they indulged in a very parochial vision of the vastness and grandeur of His dominions. Despite its big dimensions, the entire universe under the God, as per their imagination, was made of an earth to serve as an abode for his living creatures and some seven heavens above as canopies with glittering stars, blazing sun and shining moon. Above the seven heavens, in their view, was His throne court and angels. Having this kind of picture of God's dominions, when man discovered that by his shrewdness and cunning devices he could over-run the earth,

subdue and tame wild cattles, kill and keep at bay reptiles and beasts, ensnare and hunt even the big sea whales he was flattered to proclaim himself as the crown of all creation.

Grounded, as it were, in this vision or wishful dreaming, the entire cosmology whether born of pure thought, inspired by gnostic flights or flowered on mystic glimpses was an assimilation and complete internalization of a universe consisting of seven heavens and an earth with man as the pivot of the whole of existence. Let us confine ourselves to bare outlines of those reveries. Self-conceit of man compounded many-fold. He spelled out himself as the purpose of all creation, meaning of all existence, the heart of all Divine design. He was not hesitant to declare that his was the prime essence, which essentialized all rungs, orders and entities in creation, the foremost Intelligence that particularizes at every level of being, the primordial light which tearing the darkness of non-existence diffused itself in the descending orders of heavens, and diffused further until opaqueness of the sensory world appeared. Then it started to regain and regather itself. At last, it is in man that it is what it is in itself. Consequently, all the worlds reflect in man's existence. He is the *alpha* and *omega* of all dialectic of Being and Nothingness, Essence and Existence.

There is no doubt that in the returning movement from total diffusion to step by step fusion into unity, some mystic poets and *sufis* were capable of seeing an evolution and even versified it. But this does not make them a bit moderners as their entire frame of reference was pegged to the world-view outlined above preserving all the premises, implications and conclusions thereof: (i) man is the entelechy, the reason in action in the creation of seven heavens and in the making of the earth, (ii) he is the prince of all the universe, and (iii) being the prime cause and the end of the universe, he is the *ashraful mukhlbqāt*, the excellent most of all the created ones.

The verse of the Holy Qur'an however, must be sufficient enough to awaken us from such fancies and their cultural legacies: "Verily we have honoured the *Bani Adam* (i.e. mankind). We carry them on the land and the sea and have made provision of good things for them and have preferred them above many of those We created with a marked preferment (17:70)." It is from *sura Asrā* and the words used for rating mankind are '*Faddalabum 'Ala Kathrin min man Khalaqna*'. This verse is an eye opener and leads to a far wider universe. In the light of it, none of the mankind may be daring

enough to raise his status as the prince of all existence and the best of all creation.

According to the Qur'an man excels many creatures God has created. The Arabic word '*Kathīr*' means many or a multitude. But a multitude does not rule out another multitude. 'Many' means a great number. However, the verse directly denies the claim of man as the crown of or the best of all creation. There are other verses which reveal to us that no one knows God's hosts and that He creates what He wills. All those verses remove veils from our perception and open door to an enormously wide universe. Our sight returns fatigued and exhausted but it does not seem to end.

Man's self-appraisal that he is composed of the best composition should be viewed in the light of the basic truth revealed by the Qur'an: 'God is the best of all creators' (al Mu'minūn, 23:147, al Ṣaffāt, 125:37). It means that whatever He brings into being is with its best frame. This message applies to all kinds and species of life. *Sura* al Sajdah reveals: "He gave every thing the best creation and started creating man from clay (32:7)." This excellence in creation is not the prerogative of mankind alone; it belongs to all kinds of life. It is in the light of these verses that verse 7 of the *sura* Teen should be appreciated: "And we created man with the best composition (95:7)."

The same principle governs all the orders of creation. *Sura* Mulk throws a challenge to every observer: "Thou canst see no fault in the Beneficent One's creation; then look again. Canst thou see any rift. Then look and yet again. Canst thou see any rift. Then look and yet again, thy sight will return up to thee weakened and made dim (67:3-4)."

The revealed lesson is that man is not the only creature endowed with the best frame. Every creation is superb. There are no particular references in this regard to allow man to proclaim himself as the prince of all creation. This is the position of man that Holy Qur'an brings out.

This conclusion is immensely reinforced by our observations of the physical universe. Discoveries of its astounding expanses thoroughly demonstrate the truth of āyāt 3 and 4 of the *sura* Mulk just quoted above. As we do now know, our sun is only a modest medium size star in an arm of a galaxy which is perceived by us as the milky way. It contains approximately four thousand million stars. It is a spiral galaxy and beyond it there are other spiral

galaxies with their own clusters of stars. We may confine ourselves to four billion stars of our own galaxy. All of them are bound to undergo the same process of formation, growth and evolution into different stages which works in our sun. Consequently, at a certain stage, they must bulge out at their equators, and form their own planets. If only out of a lot of a thousand stars only one has an earth-like planet for life, then there must be four million such planets in our galaxy. If the probability is as low as one in a thousand rational beings inhabiting them, then there must be forty thousand planets with such beings in the galaxy. Let us not forget that there are other spiral galaxies in the universe with all those probabilities. And beyond them there are millions and millions of galaxy systems in different stages of evolution from nebulous clouds to fully developed spiral systems up to a distance of 1500 million light years.

All of these observations absolutely make it quite self evident that man cannot be the first cause of creation, nor is he the first intelligence, the primordial light, the final cause, the entelechy, or the goal of the universe. It is God Himself, the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Open Cause of all creation. He created many “seven heavens and earth” like these (al *Tālāq*: 2).”

No Vicegerency of God

Now we may examine man’s claim as the son of God, His deputy or viceroy in the earth, though he may not be the prince and light of all the universe. It has been very briefly pointed out earlier that such claims are remnants of the polytheistic civilizations in the cultural legacies of the peoples with revealed religions. We may not trace history in this regard, *but would* confine ourselves to show that none of those claims are compatible with Islam.

The cornerstone of all aspects of the faith in Islam is that God is Omniscient and Omnipotent. This very creed obligates every believer to rule out an associate, a deputy or a viceroy of God in some distant parts of His Dominion. Distances are nothing for Him. He is infinitely so close to each of His creatures that no intermediary in between is required in His power over all things. Fatigue or slumber touch Him not to let Him have some assistant gods or an institution of vicegerency to administer His vast dominions.

During the second and third centuries of Hijrah, esoteric movements were making deep inroads into the Muslim world and

its outlook. It was during this period that the famous verse 30 of *sura Baqara*: ‘Lo, I am about to create a *Khalifa* in the earth (2:30)’ was given a special significance and gradually was filled with strange meanings all streaming down from the remote past, from the Gnostic circles of the pagan civilizations as elements of the esoteric movements. There are other verses in which *Khalifa* (the plural of this word) is used. *Khalifa* means a successor. All of these verses including that one from *sura Baqara* employ the word with the same primary meaning. Hūd said to the ‘Ād folks: “Remember how He made you *Khulafā* after Noah’s folk, and gave you growth of stature (al A’raf, 7:69).” Saleh said to the *Thamūd*: “And remember how He made you *khulafā* after the ‘Ād (7:74).” In both the verses *khulafa* means successors. There are verses in which *Khalāif al ard* is used. It means successor to or successor in the earth. “We destroyed the generations before you when they did wrong; and their messengers came to them with clear proof, but they would not believe. Thus do we reward the guilty folk. Then we appointed you *Khalāif al ard* (successor to the earth) after them that We might see how ye behave (al **Yunus**, 10:14-15).” In the same *Sura* the plight of Noah’s people is recorded thus: “But they denied him, but We saved him and those with him in the ship and made them *khālāif al ard*, while We drowned those who denied Our revelations (10:74).” There is no reason to doubt that when God said to the Angels: “Lo, I am to place a *Khalifa* in the earth. (2:30)”, it was this succession to earth that was the intention of the *āyat*. God intended to create some new life, a new species which would inherit the earth from other species. Metazoa succeeded the protozoa in dominating the earth. Then came species after species in dominating it. Then came prominent species who could exercise inventiveness. They invented tools and thus extended their power in exploring the bounties of earth. Then after all of them, our kind the *homo sapien* was destined to come, who could thoroughly scale it, enjoy its resources exhaustively and perhaps succeed all of its creatures to put it to his advantage. There are no other meanings attached to this verse. The earth is an estate of God. He invited different guests one after another and also side by side to them. Now arrived one, who could fully enjoy the hospitality of his Host, appreciate its comforts and adorn it by his own deeds. It is this guest who could praise the Lord of the estate with full appreciation.

So far as the earth is concerned, it is not even match to a peck *vis a vis* the unscalable expanses of the physical universe yet man may estimate himself as most prominent of all those who are

stationed in this tiny spot as witness to the glory and bounteousness of the Beneficent Lord. In this way, man's claim of greatness on this earth seems to be completely weighty.

Before closing this discussion on the word '*Khalifa*', we may point out the borrowed or secondary meanings in which it has been used in some verses of the Qur'an. The derived, borrowed meaning or secondary intention of the word is to occupy a seat in the absence of its incumbent, or to replace someone for a short time, *i.e.* when one is gone away. Moses proceeded for a forty day sojourn to the Sina'i and asked Harun: "Akhlifni min b'adi (7: 142)." Here *Akhlifni* means replace me and *min b'a'di* means after me, *i.e.* in my absence as per context. But when Moses returned, he saw people worshipping a golden calf. "In agony he said to them: "Bi'sa ma akhlaftum min b'adi, evil is that ye replaced in my absence (7:150)."

It is in this extended sense of the word that in *sufi* orders, the *murshids* appoint *khulafā* to replace them at far flung distances to guide their followers stationing there. It is this sense which carries the shade of a viceroy as one of its particular meanings. Now if the verse: 'Lo, I am about to put a *Khalifa* in the earth', is interpreted in the light of this meaning, it produces a colossal *shirk* polytheism of unpardonable measure. The Living God is never absent from any part of His Dominion. The underground, esoteric movements equipped with some sort of gnosticism propagated this kind of doctrine of *khilāfat* for a purpose, directly cutting at the root of Islam and its world-view. It may be now clear that man does not hold the vicegerency of God in the earth, as its very idea is pregnant with glaring *shirk* (ascribing partners to God).

Our mankind, as distinct from other hominids, is given the Latin technical name of the *homo sapien*. The term means the 'intelligent man'. This is not at all a very happy term, as it does not bring out its differentia from the genus to establish it as a distinct species. The other *homo* species were not shorn of intelligence. Moreover, there is no animal species which is not endowed with some amount of intelligence. Every kind of animal passes through trial and error in search of food, shelter and mates and is forced to use some intelligence, otherwise it cannot survive. Intelligence therefore cannot serve as the distinguishing mark of our kind.

The distinguishing mark of our species is one and only one and it is not found elsewhere in the earth. Man is the *ḥaywān-i-nāṭiq*. He is

a 'speaking animal'. The Arabic term *ḥaywān-i-nāṭiq* far more differentiatingly marks our species than the term *homo sapien*.

Many species, perhaps all kinds of animals which multiply themselves by pairing or live in teams, have some system of mutual signaling. But what distinguishes mankind from all of them is speech. Speech is something very different from vocal communication, we find in different birds or higher mammals. Its essence lies in naming and its structure consists of different roles of names in a language system. There is no scripture, beyond the Holy Qur'an which very clearly brings out that man is distinguished by having been endowed with the enormous power of naming. It is due to this, that he has an intellect whose elements and entire fabric are made of naming and consequently is endowed with an enormous capacity. Indeed to think means to name and to name means to think. The power of naming may fly into the known and the unknown, and even can give names to names and thus can rise above every level of names and yet its fund of naming remains unexhausted.

When God disclosed to the angels His intention of bringing into being mankind, they had reservations about this creature. But when the Beneficent Lord demonstrated the naming power' of this species, the angels were simply overwhelmed. Man could name all things, even the Infinite God, His Omnipotence and Omniscience, the seen and the unseen. His naming capacity could move in all directions. He could name even the bewildering numbers as for instance one hundred million raised to the power of one million millions, and that again raised to the power of one billion billions. The angels could not match him in this power of naming.

It seems that the knowledge of the Angels is intuitive and may sweep over all things. They don't require names, or at the best, their power of naming remains confined to some orders. Consequently, they confessed that they knew what their Lord had taught them, and not all the names.

At this place, I may be allowed to clarify a basic point. Perpetual truths in view of their most singular importance take the form of a narrative for producing an everlasting effect upon the audience. A past event is an indestructible happening and assumes a sort of eternity and therefore serves as a proper medium of truths which are meant for universal appeal. The verses 30-33 of the *sura Baqara* do communicate a perpetual aspect of mankind and not a

past episode at the origin of its species, a bygone encounter of our forefather with the angels. Moreover, it is unimaginable to believe that our first ancestor knew all the names as such. Human diction has increased generation by generation and new names are always in the making with the expansion of our knowledge whether it is in the realm of physical, or in moral and spiritual world. In addition to it, individuals have their own individual, unique experiences, and may label them with names. New naming structures, symbolic forms may come into being all the time so long as human race survives in this earth. The topic is very deep and has a great many aspects. It may, however, be pointed out that names are symbols. There is a way that the symbol turns into signs, and signs are aspects of the reality in signification. In this way reality becomes amenable to names.

There is, however, a lesson in all this discussion. God's creations are uncountable. He has bestowed on each class of His creatures a capacity in which there is none to match with it. The intuitive sweep of the angels is not given to mankind and the angels most probably are not equal to man in the power of naming. In the earth, there is no doubt that man has a decisive edge over all creations of clay, yet in many a capacity he is not a match for many of them. Glorified is the Lord Most High!

On the basis of verse 34 mentioning the angels as prostrating before man on the Divine order, some people, including prominent ones, believe that man is superior to angels. They even believe that as the angels failed in naming they were asked to prostrate before man. The first and foremost thing in this regard is that the theme from verses 30-33 is about the names, but *āyat* 34 introduces quite a different theme as the very words strongly suggest:

And when We said unto the Angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis (the Despaired One)

Does this prostration of the angels before man convincingly establish the rating of man over angels in the Divine design of creation? However, there is only one thing which is perfectly demonstrated that the angels are true models of 'we hear and obey'. And it is what is required of all creation. It is Islam, the universal religion of all creation. Only the despaired one, whoever he is and whatever he is, does not fall in line with the Divine order. Consequently, the verse of prostration cannot be cited as a proof of man's superiority over the angels.

The Nature of Angels

We do not know what the angels are in their frame and composition. What we know about them is that they are laden with the light of Divine intentions and act accordingly. It is in this sense that they comprise of light (*nūr*). This very sense is communicated in the term *deva*. We are familiar with the words like *diya*, *dēpak* of the same root from which the term *deva* is derived. Light and lamp form part of the essential core of their meanings.

However, to our knowledge and conviction, angels or *deva* do not partake in the Divine nature, nor are they needed by the Supreme Lord as attendants, assistants in His creating, sustaining, nourishing and holding all in His grip and knowledge.

Nevertheless, the angels are creatures and therefore are parts of the created worlds. They fit somewhere in those created spheres as potent agents illuminated with the unmixed light of Divine intentions as expressed in particular volitions which run through all the series of occurrences in the living worlds. We know that all the created orders in their texture are thoroughly informed of the multi-colour manifolds of causality as inherent composition of their being.

A universe composed of the high seas of sub-nuclear agitation, storms and cycles of atoms and molecules without a breath of life or a grain of sensitivity anywhere in its spans would have existed with such causality bunches and nexus as we study in molecular, nuclear and sub-nuclear sciences. Inertia would have been the all-pervading supreme law of this universe. An inert will of the Lord would have sustained it up to its appointed time, but in worlds which marvel with life, passion, sentience and prick of heart and which pulsate with higher and still higher orders of existence depicted to us as heavens upon heavens, the causal series are bound to attain amazingly radical transformation. They are not now swarms or waves of energy. They are here units of throbbing impulses, potent monads with their own causality in their own right. It is in these worlds of life, will and spirit wherein even a micro-organism is also a whole, a unity, and is causally potent that the angels have roles in the responses and reactions of the living entities resulting in changes of the fields, spatial manifolds that come into being along with them. As agents lit with the Divine intentions, they are part and parcel of all the living worlds, where feeding upon one another and self-multiplication, birth and death

seem to rule all the manifestations and forms of life. Within and beyond these tense and baffling interactions, the causal agencies of the angels are interwoven in all the scenario of these worlds.

Let us confess that we do not and cannot comprehend all the causal intricacies that function in the orders of living creatures, and we cannot determine or trace out the angelic impacts in and around them. Something like an indeterminacy therefore is an inherent characteristic of the worlds of living organisms. However, it seems most probably true that the different modes of interactions, chains and rings of casualty we perceive in the living phenomena, for instance, collision, competition, aggression and withdrawal, collective actions and reactions, alignments and realignments are not themselves enough in evolving some harmony, giving a visible shape, putting some order or bringing out some cycles of balance in the swarming life centers and their masses. Those are the angels who play their vital role in giving an order in the world of living things to let every creature complete its appointed time. This aspect of the angelic causal involvement is particularly stressed in the Arabic term for them. In Arabic they are called *malā'ika*, the singular is *malak*, which means possessor of great power or possessed of great power. They are attendants to, and assistants of even a humble creature like a micro-organism, its being and its multiplication as such so long as it must exist as per will of the Lord of all creations, in the face of all forces of destruction.

Mark and Position

To our knowledge, man is the most sensitive species on the earth. To his great satisfaction the Lord has revealed in the *āyat* of prostration to man (2:34) that the angels are subject to His standing order to be of utmost regard for men, fully amicable to his frame and amenable to his drives and motives. As revealed at so many places in the Qur'an, "All of this, O mankind, is to test you, which of you are of better deeds (than others)." The *āyat* of prostration never proves that mankind is superior to angels. We should never forget that in very healthy societies, the highest functionaries meet even the lowest client with utmost respect and courtesy. This fact should not induce the client to believe himself as higher than the former.

Some moderns have indulged in open disrespect for the angels. They make them Divine robots, and impel us to believe that they are devoid of free choice. In other words, the angels do not know

good and evil, and do whatever is commanded to them automatically. Therefore, they are machine-like beings. All of these views are thoroughly incompatible with Divine revelations and are inconsistent with the created living worlds in which the angels have role to play. No details are intended here but it may be briefly put that (i) the angels are thoroughly living and spiritual beings with their own compositions and (ii) they are invested with a very high degree of consciousness with a superb moral sense. Their feelings of good and evil are so strong and highly developed that the bad smelling of evil keeps them away from it and it is in this way that they do not commit a sin and thus make no mischief. The possibility of error may lie in all creatures. The angels, perhaps at the level of lower functionaries, may be sometimes near to commit an error, but they are immediately or very soon corrected. Therefore, there seems to be no erroneous effect in the world of events from their side. All these points are covered by the idea that the angels are living beings made of light and pure light and their functional side is posited in the idea that they are with great powers, they are *malā'ika*.

Private Chamber

All the creatures, however, have their limits. None can encroach upon the relation of intimacy which binds the Lord with all of His creatures, and vice versa the creatures with their Lord. The angels are no exception to this Divine law. The Lord gives His audience to the supplicant in His Private Chamber. No angel or any other creature can peep into it. We are using an imagery from our own daily experience. Even the highest ones in rank are disallowed in this Private Audience and this rule is for all the creatures. It means that the Private Chamber of the Lord comprehends every living creature and contains in its span all the living worlds. Mankind has been given the sense and consciousness of a prominent stage and the immense power of naming enable it to be always in contact with its Lord in His Private Chamber and ennoble the world it flourishes in. There is no point of superiority over angles. All of the creatures are in Divine immediacy. Endlessly human consciousness (and activity) may rise upto this immediacy and may be directly before the Throne of the Reḥmān. This is the ultimate of human ascension. But none of these truths put a bar on any other creatures to attain this Height.

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE IN MULLA
SADRĀ'S PHILOSOPHY: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF ESSENTIALISM AND
EXISTENTIALISM

Dr. Atya Syed

ABSTRACT

The article explores Mulla Sadrā's unique position within the tradition of Essentialism by comparing his views to prominent Western philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Christian Scholastics like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. While Sadrā acknowledges the reality of essences, he differs fundamentally from traditional Essentialism by asserting the primacy of existence over essence. This contrasts with Plato's view that essence precedes existence, as well as Aristotle's focus on essence as the defining element of being. Sadrā supports the existence of Platonic Forms but transforms them from abstract universals into particular, transcendent beings. Unlike the static ontology of the Greeks, Sadrā introduces the idea of substantial motion, emphasizing the dynamic nature of existence. The article also compares Sadrā's views with modern thinkers like Louis Lavelle, revealing striking similarities in their integration of classical ontology with theistic frameworks. Sadrā's philosophy is ultimately characterized as a synthesis of existentialism and essentialism, where existence is central, but essences retain a semi-reality, making him an "Essentialist Existentialist."

According to Essentialism at first sight existence seems to impart being to things. But in actual fact existence is an existence of something. What a thing is matters even more than the fact of being.

Sadrā, as we have already stated in the earlier section of the treatise, does believe that essences are real in a sense. He affirms the mental character of essences and also the existence of Platonic Forms. He also asserts that the Forms are independent existents, and they are not the contents of the mind. They are not universals, but particular beings. These views make Sadrā an Essentialist but with a difference. In the present section of the treatise we would try to compare and contrast Sadrā's Essentialism with some of the prominent Western exponents of Essentialism.

We begin the comparative study with Plato who is considered the founder of Essentialism by presenting the theory of Ideas. Socrates teaches that all knowledge is through concepts. Plato accepts this epistemology but turns it into a metaphysics by claiming that the Ultimate Reality is the Ideas. Then he proceeds to describe the fundamental characteristics of the Ideas and calls them substances, Forms and Essences. He goes further and maintains that they are existents in the world of Ideas. Here again we see departure from the Socratic point of view who believes that the concepts exist in the human mind not external to it, as they were subjective. However, the Platonic Ideas become objective realities.

The second important feature of Plato's system of thought is the claim that the world of material objects or the world of existents is a pale copy of the world of the Ideas. The ultimate Reality is the world of the Ideas or Forms. The world of existents is a degradation of the original perfect world of Ideas.

Sadrā not only affirms the existence of Platonic Forms in the Divine realm but also rejects the Neo-Platonic view that Forms exist either in the mind of God or of separate Intelligences. Like Plato he believes in their independent existence. We, however, bear in mind the following fundamental differences between Plato and Sadrā:

- (i) Plato is a pure essentialist. For him essence is prior to existence, but Sadrā thinks that existence is prior to essence.
- (ii) According to Plato the ultimate reality is ‘the Ideas’. For Sadrā the ultimate reality is existence.

The influence of Plato is evident if we study his doctrine of the unity of Being. He asserts that the various beings in the world of manifestations are all limitations of one reality or Being. These limitations are abstracted by the mind and become the forms of quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things, and when transposed into the principal domain, they become the Platonic ideas or archetypes. Unlike the Being which is objectively real and in fact is the reality of the cosmos, the *mahiyyat* are accidents of Being abstracted by the mind without having a reality independent of Being. Even the archetypes possess a form of Being which in this case is God’s knowledge of them.

The afore-mentioned discussion supports the view that Sadrā is an essentialist like Plato. Yet we should bear in mind the following fundamental differences between the two thinkers:

- (i) Plato is a pure essentialist. For him essence is prior to existence, but Sadrā thinks that existence is prior to essence.
- (ii) According to Plato the ultimate reality is “the Ideas”. For Sadrā the ultimate reality is “Being.”
- (iii) In Plato’s system of thought the existents are the shadows or pale copies of the Ideas. Thus for him existence is a degradation of the reality. But Sadrā maintains that existents are the manifestation of the ultimate Reality.
- (iv) According to Plato the Forms or the Ideas are universals. Sadrā, on the other hand, believes that they are particular existents or beings. Sadrā maintains that it cannot be accepted that a thinker of Plato’s caliber would not distinguish between an intellectually abstract entity and a concrete existential order of existence which contains all peculiarities. Here Sadrā is not presenting the Platonic view, but his own doctrine of the movement of the concrete.

- (v) The afore-mentioned discussion leads us to the conclusion that though apparently Sadrā accepts the Platonic theory of Ideas, but transforms Plato's essentialism into his own form of existentialism by maintaining that the Platonic Forms are not abstract. They are concrete particulars and not abstract universals. They are transcendental beings. Each having an individual existence of its own. Their universality only means that to the mind they appear universal.
- (vi) Although, in the Platonic system of thought the concept of God is not clear.¹ But it is evident that Plato's philosophy cannot be considered theistic. Sadrā on the other hand, is clearly theistic thinker and the concept of God is consistent with his philosophy of existence. Since 'Existence' is the only reality. Therefore, God or the ultimate Reality is not to be searched beyond the sphere of existence. He is within the realm of the existence. God is simple and pure Existence.
- (vii) According to Fazal-ur-Rehman (p. 49 II para) Sadrā mollifies the epistemological function of the Platonic Forms. It is consistent with his general doctrine that intellectual cognition cannot capture reality which is pure existence. Sadrā, however, wishes to retain the metaphysical function of the Platonic Forms. Here Fazal-ur-Rehman criticizes, because; in his opinion it is inconsistent with his doctrine of the flow of existence. Fazal-ur-Rehman points out that the whole notion of a pre-existent superior order of the world contradicts the idea of continuous emergent movement of existence.

Aristotle and Sadrā

Aristotle a pupil of independent mind tried to reconstruct the Platonic idealism in a more consistent and scientific manner. According to him Plato seemed to place the Forms beyond the stars. Moreover the gulf between Form and Matter had to be bridged somehow. Aristotle retains the changeless eternal Forms which are the idealistic principles of Plato, but rejects their transcendency. He brings them down from heaven to earth. He maintains that the Forms are not apart from things but inherent in them. Form and matter are not separate. They are eternally together. Their combination produces individual things. The human reason has the power of discerning the Forms in their

particular exemplifications. From this point of view 'Forms' constitute the essences of things or particular material object. At the same time they are principles of reason. Then they are both forms of thought as well as reality. In Aristotle's view they i.e., thought and being coincide. The universals are the last thing we reach in our thinking, but are first in nature. In other words, they are the first principles of reality.

Plato regards the objects of experience as imperfect copies of the universal ideas. For him forms are the substances. Its copies i.e., concrete material objects of the world are mere accidents. Aristotle, on the other hand, considered the particular objects or the individual beings as real substances. But the essence or true nature of the particular concrete being is constituted by its form—the essential qualities of the class to which it belongs. So after all, the form or idea is for him too, the most essential element.

The study of Sadrā evidently confirms that for him the ultimate reality is existence. Essence, on the other hand, is 'idea', but still it is real in the following two senses:

- (a) An idea occurs in the mind. It has a sort of existence, but it is mental existence.
- (b) There is something in the external reality which causes it to arise in the mind. Thus essence has a kind of secondary reality.

This leads to major difference between Sadrā and Aristotle. For Aristotle, essence still remains primary to existence; because; in his philosophy there is graded system of beings. At the upper end is pure Form, which is the final cause.

Moreover, as it has been pointed out earlier, Aristotle despite of all differences with Plato, still agrees with him that essence or Form is the most essential element in the constitution of a particular concrete being and it is universal. But for Sadrā it is 'existence' which is the major reality. 'Essence' has some kind of mental existential status. However, this status secondary in nature or in other words, it has semi-reality.

Besides the afore-mentioned point there are other differences between Sadrā and Aristotle's views which should be kept in mind. Those differences are the followings:-

- (i) Sadrā affirms the existence of the Platonic Form in the Divine Realm.² Aristotle clearly rejects their existence in

a transcendent world. For him they exist in this very world in the concrete objects.

- (ii) According to Sadrā Forms are particular beings, but Aristotle thinks that they represent the universals. In other words, they are concepts consisting of essential qualities of all members of a class. According to Sadrā they appear universal to the mind. In reality, however, they are individual transcendent beings.
- (iii) Sadrā distinguishes between two types or meanings of essence. Firstly, it may mean only a notion without any reference to any existent. Secondly, it may mean the notion or concept of an existent. In the former case, essence has only mental status, while in the latter case it has existential status. Fazal-ur-Rehman³ points out that this distinction has an Aristotelian basis, but it seriously modifies Aristotle's view, since, according to him only existents possess an essence or a real definition, while in the case of fictional or imaginary objects, only the meaning of the term can be given, and is not mentioned a proper essence. In short in Sadrā's opinion essence only has a semi-reality while Aristotle maintains that an essence must exist in order to be a proper essence.
- (iv) Aristotle has presented matter-form formula, in order to explain every concrete object. Ibn Sina converts it into genus-differentia formula. Differentia becomes more important, because; by declaring differentia simple and irreducible, it becomes allied to simple and unanalyzable fact of existence. For Ibn Sina, however, differentia is not identical with existence, Differentia as a part of specific essence (i.e., genus plus differentia) is subsumable under a genus, and is, therefore, part of what Aristotle calls, "secondary substance."

Sadrā maintains that the differentia is neither a substance nor an accident, since it is identical with individual existence. Sadrā develops on argument which interprets the genus-differentia formula in accordance with his doctrine of emergent movement of existence or substantial change. Thus he synthesizes it with the principle of essence-existence.

To sum up, Aristotle presents matter-form formula which is interpreted as genus-differentia formula by one of the greatest interpreter—Ibn Sina. Later on this interpretation was turned into

essence-existence formula, which was a further deviation from the original Aristotle an position.

Sadrā and the Christian Scholastics

St. Augustine (Birth. 353) is the most prominent teacher of the early Christian Church. Plato's impact on his thought evident. The world of essences are identified with the divine intelligence. He believes that the Divine Mind is the abode of Forms or essences. These are expressed through the Word. Thus all that exists, exists only by participation in the ideas of the Word, It is the Word itself, Thus it is given to us in all the creatures. Man is on the horizon of the two worlds. His lower nature is in the existence, while the higher nature in the essences. However, the Augustinian doctrine is much less essentialist than that of Plato on account of two reasons. Firstly, essences do not constitute a world of their own. They are no more than the ideas in the mind of God. Secondly, the objects of the material world are real, but essences play major role in their nature.

Let us compare St. Augustine and Sadrā. Although, Sadrā teaches that the essences have some sort of reality, but at the same time emphasizes the fact that it is a semi-reality. In St. Augustine's thought, on the other hand, they are primary realities as the Divine ideas. He argues that all that exist, exists only by participation in the ideas of the Word. Its implication is that essence precedes existence. Sadrā, however, believe in the principality of existence. He does confirm the existence of the Forms or essence, but he believes them to be secondary to existence. Thus St. Augustine is a thorough essentialist, while Sadrā's essentialism is less essentialist as compared to him, because; in his philosophy existence plays the major role.

Thomas Aquinas and Sadrā

Thomas Aquinas (1225/27—1274A.D) is considered the culmination of Christian Scholasticism. In general his thought seems to be in conformity with the Augustinian metaphysics, but he adopts Aristotle's method and uses his concepts. According to him God has created the world. It follows as St. Augustine asserts that as a creator he has the idea of all existents. For St. Aquinas concrete beings are composed of Form and matter. By Form he means the Platonic Idea. The human intelligence does not grasp individual things in their individuality. It judges existents according to those essences in which they participate. St. Thomas Aquinas has

no interest in existence, except as a means of access to essences. Therefore, St. Aquinas too, is a thorough essentialist.

Sadrā seems to be richer in his philosophical insight though like St. Aquinas, he too, has theological interests. He is much more original than him. He accepts certain notions of Aristotle, but interprets them in such a way as to assimilate them into his general theory of existence.

Another difference between Sadrā and St. Aquinas lies in their attitude towards existence. The former believes in its principality, the latter considers it only a means of access to essences. Since St. Aquinas adopts the Aristotelian philosophy on the whole, he also adopts Aristotle's matter-form formula as it is. Sadrā, as we have mentioned earlier turns it into genus-differentia formula and identifies differentia with existence.

Moreover, under the influence of Aristotle St. Aquinas believes that forms are present in the concrete objects of the material world, while Sadrā affirms the transcendental nature of the Forms. Therefore, he resembles in this respect to St. Augustine for whom the Forms are the Divine ideas. But Sadrā instead of considering them ideas in the Divine Mind, thinks that they are the Divine attributes. He, however, still seems to take a philosophical view closer to St. Augustine than St. Aquinas.

Sadrā and the Modern Essentialism

Essentialism is characteristically a classical philosophy which later reappears in the Medieval times among the Muslim thinkers based on the notions of essence and existence. In the preceding section of the book we have already compared the Greek essentialists such as Plato and Aristotle and Mulla Sadrā, as well as the Christian essentialists like St. Augustine and St. Aquinas. Still there remains the comparison of Sadrā and the modern essentialism, though it is a philosophy which is no longer supported by the majority of the modern philosophers. However, there are exceptions to the above-mentioned statement. One exception, worth mentioning in this respect is Louis Lavelle who is perhaps its chief exponent in the 20th cent. with his own brand of essentialism.

Louis Lavelle (July 15, 1883—Sept. 1951) is one of the great metaphysicians of the 20th cent. He is French, taught philosophy at Sorbonne (1932-34). Later on he joined college de France (1941-51). During his times reaction against system building was prevalent; but he boldly elaborated an extensive system of thought.

The historian M. Delfgaau⁴ considers it a new brand of spiritualism, which is at the same time an extension of the tradition of essentialism. It is a sort of return to the concept of the Absolute. In 20th cent. the French tradition of spiritualism continues. Bergson, Gabriel Marcel and Louis Lavelle embraces it.

Louis Lavelle:

According to Louis Lavelle there is no metaphysics of the objective. Metaphysics should be the science of spiritual intimacy. He rejects all the modern doctrines of negativity, because of their emphasis on despair and anguish. In his opinion such attitudes are the result of subjection to the physical and total denial of the spirit. Consequently, those make the human beings slaves to the temporal leading to servitude and not freedom. He believes that philosophy of spirit restores the respect Love for the spirit.

Actually, Lavelle revives the classical themes of essence. For him the absolute is an endless reservoir of forms and essences from which the individual being receive their own limited existence. The primary aim of our life—the human life is to discover our unique from and spiritual essence. The accomplishment of our essence at our death means the radical passage from finite to the transfinite Being.

Although Lavelle is characterized as an essentialist, because; he believed in the spiritual essence of man, and considers the Absolute as the infinite source of forms or essences, but at the same time he describes it as the pure Being and actuality, which is also dynamic and not mere formal immobility. Consequently, he believes in temporal progression and creativity, actuality and potentiality, perfect Being and continuous act of discovery.

Comparison of Lavelle and Sadrā

The resemblance between L. Lavelle and Sadrā is amazing, though we cannot assert that there is any direct influence of one on the other. Sadrā exists, speculates and presents his views long before Lavelle. It would be more appropriate to say that he anticipated Lavelle. Here the question arises, 'Whether Lavelle has studied Sadrā's thought by any chance? There is no substantive proof that he has or he has not. Still there is astonishing resemblance.

While comparing L. Lavelle and Mulla Sadrā we should keep in mind the following points describing their affinities and differences:-

1. Both have been thinkers and received regular formal education of philosophy and trained to philosophize.
2. We have already discussed epistemology of Sadrā in a previous chapter of the book. During his retirement to Kahak Sadrā mediates and comes to the conclusion that purely rational method is extrinsic and superficial. The realization leads him to search for a method that transforms merely rational propositions into experienced truth. Similarly, Lavelle maintains that spiritualism is based not on speculation, but induction. In other words, knowledge is merely speculative. It should be based on observation and experience. Thus both Sadrā and Lavelle present a comprehensive epistemological theory. According to it all forms of experience should be considered. Sadrā and Lavelle do not believe in divorcing any source of knowledge.
3. Sadrā and Lavelle revive the classical ontology of Plato and Aristotle, and their essentialism, related to the Platonic idea that anything without essence would not be what it is. Aristotle though sceptical about Platonic Idea that anything without essence would not be what it is. Nevertheless accepts the idea of 'telos' or purpose within and try to identify various essences or final causes.

Sadrā while affirming the mental character of essences, also confirms the existence of the Platonic Forms in the divine realm. Thus supporting Plato's thesis that Forms or Ideas or essences have an independent existence, because; he at the same time rejects the Neo-Platonic view that Forms exist in the mind of God or emanated Intelligences.

Louis Lavelle also accepts the essentialists thesis that the value of man is not his particular being, but his essence. Lavelle in his spiritualistic Essentialism maintains that ever if existence is primary to essence, nonetheless, it is given to us so that we can acquire our essence. He does not reject the notion of an Ideal essence which links individual being to the Pure Being.

4. The concept of God in the philosophies of both the thinkers seem similar. For Sadrā God is pure Being and a source of various modes of existence which are His manifestations. Lavelle too asserts that God is the Absolute Being and as such pure actuality and infinite dynamism and endless forms.

5. Sadrā and Louis Lavelle's concept of being are not very different. For Sadrā existence is not a state of being. It is an act — the transition from possibility to actuality. (Hossein Nasr and F. Schuon) Similarly, For Lavelle being is an act— a real experience and a personal accomplishment. A thing becomes a being through an act of participation—an active participation in the process of self-discovery. (Deli'etre, Paris, 197, p. 35)

6. Both of them are theistic thinkers. Therefore, they try to integrate Platonism with their religious beliefs. Here they part with classical essentialist Ontology of Plato and Aristotle. The latter thinkers mentioned the word 'God', but their concept of God very different from that of Sadrā and Lavelle. Moreover, we should note that both of them synthesize their religious beliefs with the classical essentialism, but their religious belief system is different. In the case of Sadrā integration of the classical essentialism is in the context of Islam and in Lavelle's spiritualism it is a synthesis or at least an effort to connect it with Christianity.

7. Sadrā and Lavelle seems to present philosophies which can be categorized as pantheism. For example, Lavelle asserts that the accomplishment of an essence at the time of death means the radical passage of our essence from finite into transfinite Being. Sadrā, however, counter the impression that his thought is pantheistic by the principle of *Tashkik* or ambiguity of existence. He solves the apparent tension between his existential monism (pantheism) and *Tashkik*, i.e., the principle of the ambiguity of existence according to which every contingent being has a unique reality of its own which cannot be reduced to anything else. He maintains that God alone is real as Reality. Then how this all-embracing monism can be reconciled with the above-mentioned view? By making a distinction between necessary Being and contingent beings. Everything is a mixture of essence and existence except God who is Necessary and absolutely simple. Therefore, he cannot be identical with anything that is composite, where as all contingent beings are mixture of essence and existence, therefore, composite. Hence, Sadrā rejects the existential monism (pantheism) of those Sufis who think that existence is a single individual reality, i.e., God, and it is universal having multiple instances.⁵

To sum up, Sadrā counters the assumptions of contradiction of two opposing conclusions which can be drawn from his philosophy of essentialism. The question arises: What about Lavelle? We are not sure, but he has been criticized by Gabriel

Marcel.⁶ If the immanent proceeds from the transcendent, then Lavelle circles back to be original dialectic.

8. After a brief comparison of Sadrā and Lavelle it becomes obvious that both of them are syncretic thinkers. They tried to integrate the different sources of human experience and the classical dialectic of essence and existence. Both of them are exponent of speculative rationalism. Both of them tried to accommodate both primacy of existence and a place for the concept of essence in their system of thought.

9. Both the philosophers introduced dynamism into the classical ontology of Plato and Aristotle. We have already discussed Plato and Sadrā in a previous section of the treatise. Sadrā affirms the existence of the Forms in the divine realm. But at the same time he asserts that they are not abstract notions devoid of all particularity. He also denies them primary reality and attribute only secondary ontological status. At the same time he asserts the idea of constant creative flow of existence. The Platonic Ideas are perfect and permanent. Hence no change is possible. The Platonic world view confident change an illusion and a flaw. Hence their world view is static. Similarly, Aristotelean ontology in a modified way supports the notion of static ultimate reality, though there is an evolutionary movement upward, but they have been eternally determined by the Final cause.

Sadrā, however, develops an argument which interprets the genus-differnia formula in accordance with his doctrine of emergent existence, substantial change and thus assimilates dynamism to the classical static ontology.

Similarly, Lavelle's conception of the nature of the relation of beings to the Being is dynamic. The Absolute Being is pure actuality and an infinite source of existential Forms from which the individual receives his own finite existence. In short, his view of the nature of beings to the Absolute or Pure Being introduces dynamism to the traditional Aristotelean ontology. Moreover, his definition of being not as a state, but an act, automatically makes room for movement, evolution, change and dynamism.

10. Finally, the greatest affinity between Sadrā and Lavelle is that they did not mollify the concept of essence, and yet they believed in the primacy of existence. As such both can be considered Existential Essentialists with one point of difference that they belonged to totally different times and periods of history. In a way Sadrā anticipated L. Lavelle.

The Problem of Change (Mulla Sadrā and the Greek Philosophers)

Philosophy's birthplace is Greece. Its date of birth is considered round about 475B.C. The first period of its history is called, "The Pre-socratic age." Its first school is considered "The School of Ionics." Therefore, we will bring our comparative study of the Greek thinkers and Sadrā on the question of change with a survey of the Ionics.

The phenomenon of change becomes a philosophical debate among the Greek thinkers right from the beginning. Thales—the first philosopher and first Ionic, when he declared, "All things are Water," he conceived the great thought of the unity of the world. He however, is silent about the question of becoming, i.e., how water the primary principle changes itself into different forms and objects. But Thales' statement implied that the fundamental reality or the substance of the universe is capable of change and assuming forms of different objects.

The second Ionic thinker-Anaximander's views that the primary substance is the indeterminate Matter. He also presents the vague idea of two processes responsible for the origin of the world and the phenomenon of change. Thus he, too, seems, conscious of the process of change and the question of the emergence of different multiple forms from the unity of the original source. Later on the third Ionic thinkers—Anaxemines maintains that the different things come into being through the processes of rarefaction and condensation. So it is evident that even the first school of Greek philosophy is aware of the problem of change in the world and the question how it takes place or occurs in the primary unity of the original source leading to multiplicity.

The second school of Greek philosophy known as the Eleatics, however, rejects all change and consider it to be illusory. Their chief exponent believes that the ultimate reality is Being and it is above motion, time and space. He concludes that they are mirages produced by the senses. It is only reason that leads to truth and tells us that the ultimate reality is permanent, static and unchangeable. Being is and not-being cannot be. Motion and multiplicity are not-being. Consequently, Zeno-the follower uses all his logical skill to prove that motion and multiplicity do not exist.

Heraclitus (Dates not known) presents the opposite view of reality. He thinks that change is the ultimate reality. Permanence is an illusion produced by the senses. Reason, on the other hand, tells

us that nothing is stable or enduring. Everything which exists, moves and changes. The objects come into being and again pass away into nothingness. Not only the absolute permanence does not exist, but even the relative permanence is not present. Being and not-being both are real. Becoming means simultaneous existence of being and not being.

Sadrā⁷ has some resemblance with Parmenides so far as the latter preaches unity of being. But his philosophical position comes much closer to his opponent—Heraclitus. Like him he asserts that change is a universal phenomenon of the universe or the world of existents. He considers the world to be like stream of water flowing continually. In his opinion all change is a form of motion and he introduces the idea of substantial motion (الحركة الجوهرية). He attaches much importance to this concept and discusses it not only in his first chapter of “*Al Asfār*” but in many other chapters of the book, and in nearly all of his other books. He, however, mentions the fact that he is not the first thinker to conceive this idea. He has great respect for the Pre-Socratics and indicated it, but either did not describe it explicitly or did not develop the concept. In order to judge the truth of Sadrā's statement we have to study carefully Heraclitus' concept of change. When we do that we certainly notice the resemblance between him and Sadrā.

According to Sadrā's point of view motion is the continuous regeneration and recreation of the world at every instance. He maintains that it is not only the accidents but the substance of the universe itself that partakes of motion and becoming, i.e., continuous recreation and rebirth. In order to prove his point of view, he presents the following arguments:-

(i) He asserts that it an accepted fact that accidents need a substance upon which they depend for their properties. Therefore, every change that takes place in the accidents of a body must be accompanied by a corresponding change in the substance. Otherwise the being of the former would not follow the being of the latter. In other words, since the effect must be the same as its cause, the substance, i.e., the cause of a changing accident must itself be changing.

(ii) It is known that all beings in the universe are seeking perfection. Therefore, they are in the process of becoming and change. In order to overcome their imperfections. Since divine

manifestations never repeats itself. God creates new theophanies at every moment in order to bring new perfections. Thus the matter of each being is in the continuous process of earning new dress, i.e., being united to a new form. It is only the rapidity of this change that makes it imperceptible and guarantees the continuity and identification of a particular being through substantial change.

Heraclitus, though, does not use the same language, but asserts that becoming has two forms which are the following:-

(a) The movement or transition from not-being to being.

(b) The movement change from being to being.

The above-mentioned change or movement is both in things (substance) as well as in their qualities or properties (accidents).⁸ For instance, a man does not exist, and then with his birth he comes into existence. Therefore, it is a movement from not-being to being. Later on he passes away, i.e., movement from being to not being. But between birth and death a number of changes occur in his characteristics. He grows old. His hair turn grey. He becomes wiser or grows more foolish, etc., etc. Similarly, a tree not only comes into being and then disappears, but in between, its height and size changes. It bears fruit. The colour of its leaves turn from green to brown, and then again from brown to green.

Heraclitus compares life to constant conflict and war between being and not-being. For him conflict is a fundamental feature of the universe. It is all-prevading. Sadrā, however, being impressed by Sufism does not use the metaphor of war. He compares life to a stream continuously flowing. In a stream the waters are always i.e., continuously changing, but there is no conflict among the waves. An over all serenity and harmony prevails.

Another common feature of Sadrā and Heraclitus is that both of them accept the idea of unity of being. For Sadrā various beings in the world are all manifestations of ultimate Reality or the Divine Being. But both hem also believes that there is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. Parmendies is the first to preach the doctrine of unity of Being, but excludes motion and multiplicity from the circle of reality. Consequently, his thought leads to the irreconcilable dualism between the world of illusion and reality. However both Sadrā and Heraclitus have to face no such problem. Both thinkers makes room for multiplicity, and yet unity of Being is kept intact.

In the previous section we have discussed the resemblances between Heraclitus and Sadrā, but the differences should also be noted. For example, one major difference is that in Heraclitus' thought we do not find any theistic reference. But in Sadrā's theosophy existence of God is a prior. Moreover, since Sadrā comes long after Heraclitus and long before Plato and Aristotle, therefore their terminology and conceptions are different.

As it is mentioned earlier Sadrā has philosophical affinity not only to Heraclitus, but also with his chief opponent Parmenides—the founder of Eclecticism. He resembles Parmenides as far as the doctrine of unity of Being is concerned. According to Sadrā Being is the same in all the realms of existence, but with different graduations and degrees of intensity, just like rays of the sun, the light of a lamp or the light of a glowworm is the same. (I chap. *Al-Asfār*). But they mean the same subject, i.e., light. However, their predicates are different under different conditions of manifestations. The same holds true in the case of Being. For instance, the being of God, of a man and of a tree or of a heap of earth are all one Being or Reality, but in a various degrees of intensity of manifestations.

Parmenides' doctrine of Being should be discussed in order to determine how far it reassembles Sadrā's concept of Being. Of course, Parmenides' is the exponent of the doctrine of unity of Being. In order to prove his view he present the following arguments:-

(i) Suppose that Being (the ultimate reality) is not a unity, then it means that it can be divided into different parts. The question arises what is that which divides it into different parts? It can either Being or not-Being. If it is assumed that it is Being which is dividing Being, then they still remain parts of the same whole, i.e., Being. On the other hand if it is asserted that it is not-Being which divides the Being, then its implication would be that not-Being is a being, i.e., a thing. But it is absurd, since not-Being is just an idea, not an existent. Hence it is wrong to suppose that Being is divisible. That which distinguishes one object from another is also Being. Thus such distinctions are illusions.

The afore-mentioned exposition of Parmenides' doctrine of unity of Being, makes it obvious that there is a similarity between his and Sadrā's doctrine of Being and its unity. But there is a major difference as well in their thought as far as multiplicity is concerned. Parmenides not only denies divisibility of Being, but

also multiplicity of the objects of existents. He considers it illusory. Sadrā, however, does not agree with Parmenides' denial of the multiplicity. He believes and argues that there is multiplicity despite the unity of Being on account of gradation of Being. This gradation depends on different degrees and intensities of the manifestations.

Conclusion

In the philosophy of Sadrā we find a synthesis of the various intellectual crosscurrents of the Muslim world of his times, such as Sufism, Shi'ism and the Greek schools of thought, i.e., Platonism and Aristotelianism. But if we intend to understand his thought in the light of modern perspective of the Western thought, then we will detect a curious blend of existentialism and essentialism in his views. Perhaps, he is not an existentialist in the modern Western sense according to some historians of philosophy, because, modern Western existentialism and its various brands are basically humanist and mostly atheistic. From another point of view he will be considered an existentialist, since he believes in the principality and primacy of existence. 'Existence' is the sole, reality and the very foundation of his philosophical system. There is no doubt that at the same time he affirms the semi-reality of essences. Thus he synthesizes existentialism (i.e., primacy of existence) with a sort of essentialism by supporting the existence of Forms or essences. Therefore, he can be and he is considered an Essentialist Existentialist in his own right and in his own way.

Notes and References

-
- ¹ M. Delfgeau, *Spiritualistic Existentialism*, 1947, Amestradam.
 - ² Hossein, Nasr, *Sadrā al-Din Shirazi and His Transcendental Theosophy*
 - ³ F. Schuon, *Atma-Maya*, Studies in Comparative Religious, ff. 130, summer, 1973
 - ⁴ Louise Laveelle, *Del'etre*, 1947; Paris, p. 35
 - ⁵ Ibid., p. 22
 - ⁶ Refer to this treatise p. para. Where it has been pointed out that Sadrā rejects existential monism and asserts that the perfect man does not become God.
 - ⁷ One of the principal doctrine of Sadrā is unity of Being. According to him Being is the same in all the realms of existence, but with the different gradations degrees of intensity, just like rays of the Sim.
 - ⁸ Here both the terms, i.e., substance and accidents are used in Sadrā's terminology.

SCRIPTURAL REASONING AND THE
SHARED LEGACY OF HAGAR AND
ISHMAEL

Steven Kepnes

ABSTRACT

This article argues that Islam, as the third monotheistic faith, shares both a distinct and common identity with Judaism and Christianity. This duality, reflected in the shared devotion to God, scriptural traditions, and similar narratives, fosters both tension and potential for harmony. Focusing on the biblical figures of Hagar and Ishmael, the article highlights their pivotal role in the Hebrew scriptures, emphasizing their spiritual significance in relation to Israel and God's plan. Through scriptural reasoning, the article explores how Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are intertwined, suggesting a unified "Jewish-Christian-Islamic" tradition based on shared divine principles. This shared scriptural foundation challenges binary divisions and encourages dialogue and reconciliation between the faiths. The article also reflects on how scriptural reasoning can bridge the divides between tradition and modernity, and between different religious and cultural contexts in a shrinking world.

In this paper I will argue that Islam, as the third monotheistic religion, shares a dual identity as both other and same to Judaism, to Christianity and to the Christian West. This ambiguous position calls forth the ambiguous emotions of sibling rivalry but also promises the possibility of brotherly and sisterly love. From the point of view of scripture, which is my point of entry into any theological discussion, Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity not only a devotion to the one God, to the goodness of creation, and the dream of a future time of judgment and peace, but the very basic principle that revelation is given in scripture. We are all people of the book in this sense and though our books are different we share common narratives, common prophets, and common hermeneutical principles to guide us in the interpretation of scripture. And this gives us, despite all differences, a common starting ground for discussion of the issues that both divide and unite us.

For my reflections today on the simultaneous otherness and sameness of Islam to Judaism and Christianity, I have chosen the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael. I begin with my own texts because I must begin with what I know and where I stand. I must admit that I began my scriptural reasoning on Hagar and Ishmael with a worry that it may not be the appropriate place to start, since the Jewish tradition is fairly negative about these figures. Yet as I reread the stories I was taken in by the spiritual insights and depth of the character of Hagar. And I recalled a point made by the modern Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, which I take to be most instructive in doing scriptural reasoning. Buber argues that the Torah should be viewed, not as an objective history of world creation and redemption, but as a story of the relation of God to Israel that is told primarily from the perspective of the people of Israel.¹ It certainly moves out from Israel to attempt to embrace the entire world, but its starting point is a small family that wanders from some where in ancient Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan and comes to see itself as bearing a world historic message. This means that the Torah is at once a particularistic and universal document. I could put this somewhat differently and say that the Torah is both an ethnocentric and theocentric document. From the ethnocentric perspective of Israel, Hagar may be a mere slave girl and Ishmael a

wild ass of a man and thorn in the side of Israel, but from the perspective of the larger narrative of the Bible and from the perspective of God, Hagar and Ishmael have a unique role in God's design.

Also, although some might be put off by Hagar's status as a lowly slave girl. This fact actually unites her to Jewish and Christian origins. For the children of Israel trace their origins to their status as Egyptian slaves who were freed by God and Christians find their origins in the death of a lowly carpenter who suffered the criminal's death of crucifixion.

Yet in addition to these rough analogies to overarching concepts, the use of scripture, and lowly origins, the stronger point I wish to make, is that the presence of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in scripture embeds the Muslim people in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of the Christians. Hagar is at once the other who comes from Egypt, the land of exile and slavery, and the wife of the patriarch Abraham through whom all the peoples of the world will be blessed. Hagar is at once the surrogate womb for Sarah to exploit, and the second wife of Abraham and mother of his first son. The most obvious implication of this to me is that although Islam is often presented as the other to Judaism and Christianity and to the strange fiction called the "Judeo-Christian Tradition," Hagar and Ishmael's presence in those very scriptures is a warrant for Jews and Christians to take Islam seriously not only as the third monotheism but as a tradition that is rooted in Genesis and whose origin and destiny is intertwined with Israel. If Islam is rooted in the Hebrew scriptures what this opens up is a new possibility to see Islam as not opposed to the Judeo-Christian tradition of Monotheism but, indeed a part of it. Through Hagar and Ishmael, Islam regains its place as simultaneously the first child of Abraham and the third stage in the development of Monotheism. What this means is that we have a warrant in the revealed texts of Judaism and Christianity to engage with Muslims not as strange others but as long lost members of the great family whose destiny is to be a light of truth and healing to all the nations of the world. Thus, the greatest significance of scriptural reasoning is that it is beginning to see the advent of a new religious consciousness that recognizes that there is not just a Judeo-Christian tradition but a Jewish-Christian-Islamic reality.

With this as an introduction I will move now to scripture.

GENESIS 16

7 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." 10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." 11 And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." 13 So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

The first thing to note in these verses is that we have the first appearance of an angel in biblical literature and the first time that God speaks to a woman. Thus, though a slave-girl, Hagar merits particular interest on the part of God. God sends a messenger to her, the messenger finds her in the middle of a journey back to Egypt (as Shur is close to Egypt Gen 25:13), and he finds her by a well. Well scenes are replete throughout the Genesis narrative and thus we call the visits of Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, even Joseph to wells at crucial points in their lives. The angel asks a highly loaded question, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" Clearly the angel knows where Hagar comes from. So this question must be asked more for Hagar's sake than for the angel's. This is the type of question that is only asked of biblical characters of significance, Adam, Cain, Abraham, Elijah, Jonah. It is an existential question that seeks out a person's integrity and ability to respond and to take responsibility. It is a kind of trick question or question of testing that biblical figures often fail. Hagar's answer however, is straight forward, honest, unequivocal, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." Apparently, Hagar passes the test but his leads to a seemingly cruel command that she return and submit, or literally "place herself under her mistress's hand." Given that biblical law demands that one help a run-away slave escape, this is, indeed, a strange command. We can either view it as an expression of the cruelty of slavery, of abusive patriarchy and divine tyranny or search in it for another level of meaning. If, indeed, I am correct, that the first question, "where have you come from..." is a test, then the command that follows may be interpreted

as a deeper more difficult test. Hagar, must return to Sarah and submit to her. Although the Hebrew *hitani* appears to have no relation to the Arabic word to submit, am I stretching to far to find an intimation to the command all Muslim's, indeed all Jews and Christians, have to submit to the will of God? The supposition however, that God wishes Hagar no ill and, indeed, has a special mission for her is born out in the next lines. "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." Nahum Sarna notes that the messenger uses a rhetorical form that signifies "the birth and destiny of one who is given a special role in God's design of history (cf. Gen 25:23 and Judges 13:3)."² It is easy to see connections between Hagar and the first women, Eve. The Hebrew *harbeh arbeh* "I will greatly multiply..." is the same phrase that God uses in the curse of Eve, in greatly multiplying Eve's pain in childbirth. Yet, the consequence of result of Hagar's suffering is that she will be abundantly rewarded with multitudes of descendents. Thus, unlike Eve, Hagar is blessed and not cursed. Since Hagar flees Sarah's home in Canaan, heads for Egypt and then returns to Canaan, her journey reminds us of Abraham's journeys. Like Abraham, Hagar is a wanderer who comes to hear the word of call and fulfil a divine mission.

Tikvah Frymer -Kensky reminds us that the verses that describe Hagar fleeing the home of Sarah and travelling toward Egypt occur right after God has told Abraham in 15:13 that his offspring will be enslaved in Egypt.³

Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be strangers [Ger iyeh zarha] in a land that is not theirs and they shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

It is startling when we realize that the word used to describe Israel in Egypt is *Ger. Ger iyeh zarha*, "strangers shall your offspring be." Thus, God tells Abraham in chapter 15, that his offspring will be literally be *Gerim*. And in the next chapter we meet Hagar, *Ha-Ger*, the Egyptian stranger. Frymer-Kensky makes the point obvious, Hagar, the stranger, Hagar the servant, Hagar, wife of Abraham and mother of Ishmael *is* Israel! She presages, she prefigures, Israel's suffering in Egypt. And in her deep connection to God, and in the fact that God sees and listens to her suffering and rewards her with a multitude of offspring, Hagar also prefigures Israel's ultimate redemption!

But now we must pause to reflect on Ishmael and who he is. First, we have his wonderful name which means “God hears.” Our verses connect the hearing to God attending to Hagar’s suffering.

for the Lord has given heed to your affliction.” But later in verse 21:17 a connection is made to God’s hearing the voice of Ishmael. “And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is’ (21:17).”

In 16:15, Abraham gives Hagar’s son the name Ishmael, fulfilling the divine directive and also legitimizing Ishmael as his son.⁴ Ishmael clearly has a name that suggests that God hears and will attend to his voice; and thus the Torah seems to recognize and underscore that Ishmael and his offspring will maintain a special relationship to God and that God will continue to hear the voice of Ishmael wherever he is!

In this context, it is somewhat difficult to understand the second part of the description of Ishmael in verse 12. “He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.” I have previously described this as the view of Ishmael from the perspective of Israel, which highlights the tension between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac. It is thus not necessarily some deep description of the eternal nature of Ishmael and his descendents. It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse “*al penai kol echav ishkan*” translates it not as “he shall live at odds with” but, “He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen.” This stresses the intricate relationship between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac without the eternal state of conflict.⁵ It is further interesting that the description of Ishmael in the later chapter 21 describes him in less contentious terms. “God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (21: 20-21)

If we leave Ishmael and return to the fascinating figure of Hagar. We have to comment on the fact she names God and furthermore is the only figure, male or female, in the Bible to do this! “So she named the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi’; for she said, ‘Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?’” 16:13. This expression seems to give witness not only to God seeing into the very soul of Hagar, and her passing this test, but to Hagar’s own ability to see God! It is remarkable that after

God names Ishmael, Hagar names God, and the Hebrew expression used in both these occasions are similar. Thus “*Korat Shmo Ismael*,” “you shall call him Ishmael”...is followed by “*v’tikrah shem Adonai*,” “And She called God...” The Hebrew expression *v’tikrah shem Adonai* also calls to mind a different use of the phrase by Abraham in Genesis 13:13. Here we also have *v-ikrah bshem adonai*. This is generally rendered in English “and Abraham called on or called out the name of God.” However, the Talmud interprets this to mean that Abraham was fulfilling his prophetic role and publicizing the revelation of the oneness of God throughout the world. Could it be that Hagar was not just speaking to herself when he called out God’s name, but also wished to publicize her revelation of God as one who sees into the essence of humanity and one who sees the suffering of humanity and responds to it? If this were true, Hagar would be a counterpart to Abraham as another evangelist of the One God.

After Abraham dies, we hear nothing more about Hagar except that a hint of her and what she represents seems to live on in the Torah. This hint is found in the countless references to Ha-ger to the stranger and how Israel is to treat the stranger. The notion of the Ger occurs no less than thirty-six times in the Torah and is connected with the commandment to treat the stranger as one of Israel. The nineteenth century German Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen, argues that the development of the notion of the “Ger” in the Torah represents one of the most significant events in the history of all of monotheism. Cohen tells us that the Ger is a “great step with which humanitarianism begins.”⁶ The power of this notion can be clearly seen in two texts of the Torah. “One law shall be unto him that is home-born and unto the Ger, the stranger that lives among you (Ex 12:49) (cf. Num 15.15, Lev 24.22, Deut 1.16).” “Thou shall love the Ger, the stranger as yourself (Lev 19:33).”

Cohen tells us that what is remarkable about the notion of the Ger is that it achieves its development as monotheism is codified in law and given political expression in the nation. Thus, the notion of the Ger is not developed as an afterthought, but comes immediately with the formation of Israel. Here, under the commandment of the Torah, the stranger must be treated equally, even though he is not a member of the house of Israel.

In the holiness code of Leviticus, the principle of the Ger as fellowman is intensified to the commandment of love. “You shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”

(Lev 19.33). Where Kantian ethics develops the responsibility of the self for others on the basis of a universal rational law, the categorical imperative, and the recognition a fundamental moral duty, Cohen recognizes that humans are not motivated by reason and duty alone. In turning to Leviticus, Cohen follows the lead of the Torah to add the emotions of love and compassion to the ethical relation. “Religion achieves what morality fails to achieve. Love for man is brought forth”⁷ The Torah accomplishes this achievement on the basis of Israel’s own experience of slavery. Israel should be able to identify with the stranger and love her because she too went through the experience of being a stranger when she was in Egypt.⁸

II

I hope that I have convinced you of the power of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of Christians. I have argued that far from being “the other” these figures are part of the very fabric that ties the people of Israel to God. Having walked you through a short exercise in scriptural reasoning with the Torah I would like now to speak a little more about the power of scripture in general and the power of the three particular scriptures of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This will allow me to say a few things about the promise of the movement called scriptural reasoning which I and a number of our panellists are a part. In speaking about scriptural reasoning, one of my central tasks will be to distinguish it from Western philosophic reasoning.

One of the wonders of scripture that I discovered again in my research into Hagar and Ishmael is that scripture is not beholden to modern secular standards of narrative, historical and philosophic coherence. These standards might demand that Hagar and Ishmael, as minor figures in the story of Israel, be painted in wholly negative terms or be excised from the narrative after they have filled their functions as foils to Sarah and Isaac. Yet, we see that after these figures are introduced in Genesis 16 and 21 they are not erased but they appear again. Thus, seemingly out of the blue, Ishmael appears in chapter 25:9 to bury his father Abraham alongside Isaac. The burial site is not just any place but the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was also buried. Scripture then tells us that Isaac settled near *Beer-labai-roi*, the place where God revealed himself to Hagar! The fact that Isaac settles here clearly ties him to Hagar. After being informed of this, we then are given a long list of the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12). Narrative coherence might demand that this

information on Ishmael be left out. Or, rather, if Hagar and Ishmael were truly enemies of Israel, coherence might demand that they be painted in consistent negative portraits. Yet, what we find is a far more complex portrait of these figures. As I have shown, Hagar is a counterpart of Abraham in prophetic sight, she is a positive counterpart to Eve, and her wandering, suffering, and blessing are counterparts to Israel's slavery and redemption. Similarly, Ishmael might be a wild ass of a man but then, in the end, he shows up as a dutiful son to his father and brother to Isaac at Abraham's burial.

We may say that this treatment of the other as both different and same, foe and friend is unique to the Jewish scriptures. But if we move to the New Testament, we see an equally ambivalent portrait of the most clear and obvious other to the Christian, the Jew. On the one hand, we have the portrait of the Jews as hypocrites, Christ killers, stubborn sinners doomed to Hell, and on the other hand the Jews carry the law that Christ fulfils without abrogating. The Jews represent the trunk of the tree onto which Christians are grafted. And most importantly, the scriptures of the Jews, despite many attempts to sever their connection to Christianity, are tenaciously maintained, preserved, and even revered as part of Christian scriptures, as the Old Testament.

Holding on to the Jewish scriptures as Christian scripture simply put, is not easy. Certainly, from the standpoint of narrative and logical coherence it doesn't really work. To pull it off, Christianity must develop a complex, self-contradictory hermeneutic which says at once that Jewish scripture is revealed and wrong. Its way of Torah, its way of the law, is both necessary and superseded. Its promise to the children of Abraham both nullified and fulfilled.

Muslims may look over the shoulders at Christians and see this as strange, but they must admit that they have a similar ambivalence about their older monotheistic brothers and sisters. On the one hand, Muhammad is the final seal, the last prophet, the one who corrects what was wrong in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. On the other hand, the Qur'an, in its infinite mercy and openness, recognizes Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and many others as prophets. And the Qur'an preserves many of the narratives of the Jewish and Christian scripture and it praises the people of the book as righteous children of Abraham. There is no question that there are highly negative statements about the Jews and the Christians in the Qur'an, but if we remember Buber's insight that scripture is at

least partially written from the perspective of one people in an attempt to understand their unique relation to God, we can understand why non-Muslims are presented, at times, in a negative light. Yet, if I may return to my original point about scripture, one of its truly wondrous aspects is that it neither thoroughly demonize the other nor does it leave their narratives out. On the contrary, it preserves the memories and stories of the others and says, in fundamental ways, that these other are related to us. These others, indeed, are us! Thus we read in the Qur'an Surah 2:62.

The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does what is good shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve.

And in Surah 2:135-36

We follow the religion of Abraham who was no polytheist.

We believe in Allah, in what has been revealed to us, what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and in what was imparted to Moses, Jesus, making no distinction between any of them.

And finally, in Surah 3:1-3

Allah, There is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting.

He revealed the Book to you in truth, confirming what came before it

And He has revealed the Torah and the Gospel.

Our dear friend Peter Ochs likes to say that if we look at the logical pattern of modern Western philosophy and the modern culture which it reflects, we are offered a way of thinking that follows a logic of dichotomies. On the one hand, we have secularists on the other religious fundamentalist; on the other hand, we have the progressive West and the other backward Islam. On the one hand, we have modernity, on the other tradition. Light/dark, Spirit/matter, male/female, same/other, us/them, yes/no, 0/1, these are the binaries that define our thinking and our world.

However, in the face of this logic, scripture offers us another way of thinking. Ochs calls it, following Peirce, a logic of relations. In this logic the binary pairs are placed in dialogue. To paraphrase the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, scripture places the isolated elements, God, World and Human in fundamental relations. Scripture offers us concepts of connectedness: creation, revelation, covenant, redemption. It offers us figures of mediation, Adam, Abraham, Hagar, Jesus and Muhammad. These figures are given to fill the gap between us and them, between God and human and between human and human.

This is not to say that scripture is innocent and pure, divorced from dichotomies of spirit and matter, saved and damned us and them. Indeed, if we look, we can find ample examples of these oppositions. But, the point is that scripture cannot be adequately and fully define by these dichotomies. Rather, a closer look reveals, in almost every page of the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an, elements and figures that lie outside of neat dichotomies and divisions. Scripture is filled with lacunae, gaps, inconsistencies and mysterious sayings, images, and parables that defy simple logic. Scripture, again in the words of Ochs, is "vague," its meaning unclear and hidden.

Because of the fundamental vagueness of scripture, the reader is called upon, indeed, required to interpret the text. Unlike a mathematical formula, or a simple sign like a traffic light, scripture does not yield clear, distinct, univocal meanings. Scripture, instead, is an opaque semiotic system whose meaning is fulfilled in its interpretation by us. This is another way of pointing to the logic of relations of scripture. Its meaning is only given in relation to the interpreter or community of interpreters that receives it. In Hebrew, the Torah is often called the *Miqra* which means a calling out. Thus, the Torah is a system of signs that calls out, it calls out to those who listen for it and truly hear it. But we could also reverse the line of communication and say that the cry does not only come from scripture, but that it comes from humans who cry out in their need and suffering. As a conduit of communication between God and humans, scripture itself is a form of mediation, a vessel that bridges the gaps in material and spiritual life. As a conduit for divine communication, scripture is an agent of healing, redemption, even salvation.

Now if my description of the logic of relations in scripture is correct, we should not be shy and bringing our voice and cries of the twenty-first century to it. I have already spoken of the dichotomizing logic of the modern world and I have, at least, intimated that scripture may give us a vision and a way to heal that logic. But I want to go even further and suggest that scripture holds within it additional spiritual resources that may help us to address the suffering in our existential and historical world today.

Certainly, the problem that plagues contemporary Jews, Christians, and Muslims today is the problem of distrust, hatred, and misunderstanding between us. One of the great blessings and also curses of the modern world is that the world seems to have shrunk. You know the movie "Honey I shrunk the kids!" Well,

modern world leaders could easily adopt this and say, “Honey, we shrank the world!” What this means is that we no longer have the luxury of Hagar to run away into the wilderness where we can be alone and isolated from each other. Where Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the pre-modern world could pretty much keep to themselves, we, like Ishmael and Isaac, must live next to each other. And like Ishmael and Isaac, we can either live against each other or alongside each other. Certainly, our scriptures offer us ammunition to oppose one another and even kill one another. But it also offers us alternative avenues of mediation, conciliation, and peaceful co-existence.

As well as offering us a logic of dichotomies, modernity, to be fair to it, did and still does offer us another way to solve the problem of many different people, with different cultures, living in an increasingly smaller world. This is the route of universal principles, universal rights of men, a universal economic order, and a universal global culture. The universalizing move of modernity flips all the dichotomies vertically and subsumes the bottom element into the top. Thus, the other is subsumed into the same, “them” is subsumed into “us,” tradition is subsumed into modernity, religion into secularism, East into West, etc., etc.

Although this modern solution has had some success, it has also led to great suffering throughout the world as people see their traditional cultures, local customs, belief in God-- which are constructed to preserve human dignity and ethical relations between communal members-- dissolving in the solvent of modern universalisms. Certainly, part of the supposed battle between secularism and fundamentalism and between the modern West and Islam is a reaction to the relentless onslaught of a modern universalism which would wash away all particularism in the tidal wave of a global culture. Here again, I believe that scriptural reasoning can be an aid. Although, some have argued that monotheism represents the first great attempt at an imperialistic and universalistic world culture, the record from the scriptures suggests something else. If I follow Buber’s logic and assert that three scriptures offer a mixture of particularism and universalism, the Torah singles out Abraham, but he is told that “all the nations of the world will be blessed through you.” Before Abraham, Noah, a non-Israelite, is called “righteous” and before him Adam, the first human who represents all humans, is created in the image of God. The Tower of Babel story clearly favours a diversity of peoples and languages as it suggests that the attempt to have one language, and

one culture, is counter to God's will. I have given only hints to parallel attempts in the New Testament and Qur'an to negotiate particularity and universalism and to provide resources for conciliation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I will leave it to others to expand on these resources and close by returning to Hagar and Ishmael and then say some final words about what the study of Islamic texts has meant to scriptural reasoning.

What I especially like about the Hagar and Ishmael narratives in the Torah is that the differences between Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael are neither overlooked nor dissolved. The tension and conflict between them is neither denied nor obscured. Instead difference, tension, conflict is acknowledged and strategies and models for conciliation and coexistence offered. This conciliation and coexistence is offered not on the basis of some universal principle, or abstract declaration of human unity, but, instead on the basis of a shared sense of the oneness of God.

Hagar may be a servant and stranger, but she also is a woman, who suffers, wanders, fears, perseveres until she sees God. Ishmael, whose name means "God hears", may be the son of a surrogate mother, who is unloved by his father's wife and tossed under a bush to die, but he also knows how to cry out to God and is heard by God. Hagar and Ishmael may be others to Israel, but in their suffering and redemption Hagar and Ishmael also represent Israel. And in their spiritual search they recall the "suffering servants" of the Lord who even go beyond Israel to represent the spiritual struggle of all human beings.

The movement of scriptural reasoning began over a dozen years ago as a group of Jewish philosophers gathered to read Jewish texts with scholars of Talmud and Jewish mysticism. The movement was enlarged and broadened when Christians joined us some ten years ago and we then read from the Torah and the New Testament. This was fairly natural for Christians, because the Torah is part of the Christian Bible and despite the long history of Jewish and Christian animosities, there has been, for over a century, a sense that it was the combination of Judaism and Christianity together with Greek culture that produced what is sometimes called Western culture or as we like to say in America, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Following the holocaust and with recent Christian scholarship of the historical Jesus and the Jewish character of the early Church, Christian scholars have sought to bring Christianity closer to Judaism. But this has been met by an increasing Jewish and Christian antipathy toward Islam.

Scriptural Reasoning was relatively tame and acceptable when its practitioners read and interpreted the Torah and New Testament, but the movement really became bold and internationally significant when, about seven years ago it started to include the study of Islamic texts. One can imagine the exciting possibilities for discourse and discovery if you merely consider the math. When you move from two partners to three, from a dyad to a triad, the possibilities multiply. Two represents a lovely couple capable of romance but three represents a family, the challenge to bring romance into reality. Emmanuel Levinas has said that the relation of the one to another can easily remain a private matter, but when you add a third, you enter the public domain, things get far more complex and you must consider issues of justice. We have already discussed the problem of binaries which tend toward polarities and oppositions. When a third is added complexity multiplies but so too do terms of relation and mediation. I have already mentioned my sense that the three scriptures are each, in their own way, a combination ethnocentrism and theocentrism. Ochs likes to say that the enlightenment sought a solution to what it saw as excessive ethnocentrism in the Bible by substituting abstract universals for God. My sense is that the addition of Islamic texts to scriptural reasoning supplies us with yet another avenue to approach the problem of the new modern form of ethnocentrism. This is an ethnocentrism which pits the Judeo-Christian Tradition and its modern reincarnation in a post-capitalist global culture against the rest of the world. In the face of this new ethnocentrism, Islam, as both “Western and Eastern” both Us and Them, Same and Different, can be the crucial mediating element between the West and the world. In addition, Islam offers the world the possibility of another chance, another model, for dealing with the conflict between tradition and modernity, between religion and the secular. Judaism followed Christianity in allowing its religious texts, rituals, symbols and liturgies to be disembowelled and made over into the terms of the enlightenment. In this process, Christianity and Judaism became “modern liberal religions” that were transformed into mere handmaidens of modernity. They became shallow reflections of enlightenment ideals and supplied superficial prooftexts to legitimize and not challenge the new modern economic, political, social, and cultural order.

Islam has, by and large, resisted the modern West and now wages a somewhat desperate battle to preserve its traditional beliefs and practices in the face of modernity. Islamic leaders are certainly aware of the avenues carved out by modern Jews and Christians

and some are calling for Muslims to follow parallel paths. Yet others are trying to blaze a new way that will steer between the paths of modern liberal religion on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other. Some Muslims, whose representatives are in this room, are trying to do again the mix of tradition and modernity, Islam and secularism, in new ways that will be a true mediation between the two poles of fundamentalism and secularism and a source of healing and truth that contemporary Jews and Christians will want to follow.

Notes and References

¹ Martin Buber, *On the Bible*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p.24.

² *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p.85.

³ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Sarah and Hagar," *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide* (NY: Doubleday, 1996), p.97.

⁴ *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, Sarna, p.88.

⁵ There is very strong scholarly tradition of Qur'an commentary in Islam, going back to the earliest times, which, in order of preference, gives a very special place to the Old and New Testaments as the exegetical tools to understand the Qur'anic narrative. According to their hierarchical arrangement, these scriptures are the next to the Qur'an itself. Hamid al-Din Farahi and Amin Ahsan Islahi are the two great representatives of this line of commentators in modern times. Steven Kepnes' treatment of the figures of Ishmael and Hagar resonates very strongly with some of the best commentaries on the Qur'an on the issue of Ishmael and Hagar. At this point in his paper he says, "It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse "*al penai kol echav ishkan*" translates it not as "he shall live at odds with" but, "He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen."

It is almost exactly the same what Amin Ahsan Islahi, the greatest of contemporary Qur'an commentators, has written in his *Tadabbur i Qur'an*, (Meditating on the Qur'an) the best of commentaries on the Qur'an to be written in the 20th century. It is very interesting to look at the way Muslim and Jewish scholars approach and reason with their respective Scriptures as well as the Scripture of the Other. What is more amazing is that Islahi has used, obviously quite independently and remaining within the tradition of Qur'an commentary, the same proof texts from Exodus and Genesis that Steve does with a slightly different treatment. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the subject so I translate a few paragraphs from his *Tadabbur i Qur'an* (Faran Foundation, Lahore, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 327-329) to give an idea to the readers.

It was necessary for the sacrifices that these should be offered to the Lord in the *ma'bad* (place of worship) and ...the Holy of the Holy was prescribed to face the South. Similarly the greatest annual sacrifice was also made facing the South. This is a significant point which is usually not taken into consideration whereas it is an established fact that the Tent of worship of the Jews always faced North from the beginning. (See Exodus 27: 9)...”and the table was set

out side the curtain in the northern corner of the tent of gathering and on it the bread was placed before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and the lamp was also placed in the tent of gathering on the southern side.” (Exodus 40: 21-24) In our view the rationale of all these directions is that who ever enters the presence of he Lord would face South i.e. towards Mecca and the Abrahamic tabernacle..... This is further corroborated by the fact that God had made this tabernacle the place towards the children of Abraham faced (*qiblah*). Abraham made his descendents settle in the North and East of Arabia and made the dwelling place of Ishmael their *qiblah*. Torah says that Ishmael settled facing his brothers. Genesis 25: 18 says “....*He dwelt facing all his kinsmen*” and Genesis 16:12 says “*He shall be a free man like a wild ass, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live facing all his kin.*” There can be no other correct explanation of “*he shall live facing all his kin*” as all the descendents of Abraham settled in the North and East of Arabia except Ishmael and who could “*live facing all his kin*” only if his dwelling happened to be in the direction to which they all faced. (Note that Islahi translates these verses from the Hebrew Bible differently, without knowing the recent Jewish Publication Society version mentioned above, without the tenor of the earlier translation which read, “*He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.*”) **M. S. Umar, Editor.**

⁶ Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. S. Kaplan. (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995), p. 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.146.

⁸ It seems that there is a rough parallel in the Torah’s notion of the Ger to the notion of the Dimi in Muslim societies. The Dimi is granted respect and certain protections; but the position of the Dimi, like that of the Ger, is not ultimately equal to the members of the host societies. I will shortly discuss the modern way of dealing with the relation of host societies to others who do not share the dominate religio-cultural identity. The modern way is to move to a universal homogenized culture which dissolves all cultural differences between peoples and assures them all the same minimal human rights. Although this strategy has obvious advantages, it also has the disadvantage of depriving people of life giving religio-cultural systems. Scriptural Reasoning attempts to forge a third way between the solution of bestowing minority status, as in the Ger or Dimi, and washing out all cultural difference in a universal global culture, and abstract declaration of human rights. That third way may begin from the notions of the Ger and Dimi but need to move well-beyond them to recognition of equal status for those who are different before God.

THE ART OF A SOUL SEEKING
SALVATION

Ms. Atifa Usmani
Dr. Shaukat Mahmood SI

ABSTRACT

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi is a highly acclaimed painter artist of Pakistan recognized worldwide. Sadequain's work has drawn much appreciation and criticism alike from the art connoisseurs. His work has actively been analyzed to gain knowledge about the true character of his creations which in turn helps to explain his deeper self as an artist. His work is loaded with enigmatic metaphors having inherently profound connotations. His painting as a medium of expressing his pursuit in life explains the spiritual nature of his quest which is to seek ultimate spiritual salvation. This study is an attempt to explore perception and insight of the artist by analysing the inspirations of his paintings working towards his spiritual goal to achieve salvation as revealed and understood through his artwork. His work is analysed by means of formal and contextual analysis, keeping in view his individualistic style and discreet visual lexis where his characters come alive on canvas as metaphors for his spiritual quest.

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930-1987) possessed an iconic stature in the short history of Pakistani art. As is the case with all other eminent artists Sadequain's work has been extensively reviewed and underwent critical evaluation of all sorts. An artist's creative produce is usually analyzed to reach the true nature and character of his creations which helps to attain knowledge about his inner or deeper self. As is discussed by E.J. Walford "Art contextually is an expression of the key values, insights and aspirations of its makers, their patrons, and the surrounding culture. The exploration of style and media of art in such ways that connect with larger human concerns exposes the readers to their whole selves. Four dominant human concerns to be found at all times in all cultures are: Spirituality, The Self, Nature, and The City."¹

Sadequain has emerged on the art scene of Pakistan as a master painter possessing an enigmatic personality, a gifted potential in draughtsman ship and a fecund imagination. His expressionistic, surrealist rendition of his subject matter has however inherently profound undertones. His painting as a medium of expressing his aspirations, whereby he articulates his own human concerns albeit embedded in culture, speaks volumes of his artistic and inner quest. His quest is not temporal in nature rather it sifts through the layers of inner self to discern the veiled, cryptic soul. The inspirations for his artwork appear to comment on the nature of his seeking soul which surfaces from within onto the canvas crying for salvation. This paper intends to explore artist's perception and insight regarding his pursuit in the spiritual realm as exposed through his artwork. His work will be interpreted by formal and contextual analysis leading to the discussion of iconology of the themes and metaphors he discreetly employed as a reflection of his spiritual quest.

The imagery employed by an artist comes usually as a response to the encounters with the outer world as felt by his deeper inner self. The artist's perception and outlook on life is far distinct from that of other mundane individuals in his surroundings. He analyzes the truth and complexities of the commonplace events with his own discreet mental faculty and recreates it with yet a unique approach of his own. Rookmaaker maintains that all perceptions

are spiritually directed for the artist whether or not they are oriented towards theology.² Many authors in the book *Art as Spiritual Perception* present the view that various artists generally express their spiritual aspirations, religious beliefs and humanity's place in the bigger scheme of things in their artwork and try to reveal spiritual truths through the depiction of natural elements. This approach alone has put religious themes and spiritual perceptions on the map of history of art.³

Hence artists like Sadequain create their art with the help of insights and perceptions which are spiritual in nature. They paint however they feel about all that is presented to them and are able to produce a diverse symbolic and allegorical vocabulary of images on their canvases. All sorts of subjects that act as inspirations for the artist are discerned by way of perceptions. In an artist's perception thus all existing objects may signify and explicate complex themes and phenomena. Therefore it is important for the interpreter also to develop an expanded perception of artist's work which attempts at understanding the possible undertones of his art. Robert Pepperell has articulated this point in these words "Visual perception and aesthetic response can vary from cognitive interpretation of an artwork. Sensory data gathered from visual system may not always be capable of being integrated with semantic knowledge".⁴ Joe Sachs describes perception referring to Aristotle "as a faculty based on pure intellect besides five ordinary senses with the power of which we distinguish and understand imaginations and all that lies beneath the superficiality of things that appear on surface".⁵

This discussion about perception leads to the idea that realities are complex and holistic and which exist as comprehensible concepts, notions, feelings, ideals and principles etc. They can be distinguished and perceived by means of intellect and artist's inner response to his outward inspirations or his outward response to his inner aspirations. It is therefore inferred that the perceptions largely depend on personal experiences and the insight of an individual. One state of affairs might be excruciating for some but may not even spur slightest agitation in others. The artist keenly observes such dichotomy which spells the paradoxical nature of realities. Sadequain's art also is a testament to the fact that he constantly absorbed from his environment within and without as is discussed later, and his art is the reflection of this penetrating introspection through which he was able to bring soulful art works to his audience.

Art though is not merely a creative act to manifest an artist's environment through his poignant brush strokes but simultaneously a process of self-discovery. John Holcombe suggests that most of the times art crops up from some intense underlying personal sentiment or predicament as suffered by their creators that it is commonly construed that emotion might itself be the defining attribute of art. But he further comments referring to Croce who considered art to be an intuitively inspired activity and that to create art is "not simply letting off steam, or imitating actual feelings, but expressing the personality of the artist as it evoked some larger soul of man."⁶ He furthers his point by implying that art is such a vital creative activity which "basically serves no end beyond itself." Holcombe highlights the personal nature of art as a medium of expressing the inner and emotional self of the artist. Whereby he vents out all the repressed energies for his own growth and may even seek an escape from or abnegation of temporal attributes of self and existence. He also remarks on the metaphorical nature of art to be an indispensable tool for the artist to comment on the "ineffable" in a most fitting manner and enable the society to appraise reality from the viewpoint of the artist.⁷

This leads to the fact that a man's very struggle is about deliverance from negative or pessimist states and to acquire the capacity to entering the fertile plains of hope and personal edification. Knowing or realizing ones potentials on the personal scale is of mega significance with far reaching implications. The artist becomes an inspired artist only when he wakes up to the comprehension of beneath the surface realities about himself and his surrounding environ. As he begins to understand the vanity, and expendable nature of the outwardly existence of things, a tumult follows inside the very being of the artist seeking his own truth as is evident in Sadequain's work also. He appears to be suffering from immense pain and agony of hopelessness through his experiences in the outer world and the infuriating turmoil in the inner-self. It is the inner self which relates to the sensitivity of the encounters with the real world in the real perspective and seeks salvation. Salvation sought is the beginning whereas salvation accomplished is the culminating point of self-realization. It redeems and liberates a soul. It is a liberated soul which is all set to acquire its actual and pristine nature of eternal bliss, wisdom and infinite perception which becomes the ultimate goal of a seeking soul.

The concept of salvation is of prime importance in an individual's life. The concept is inherited in the legacy of his belief

system. Almost all religions revealed or evolved, came up with the promise of salvation and redemption for his being both material and spiritual. Encyclopaedia Britannica explains the concept as “deliverance or liberation from fundamentally detrimental conditions, such as suffering, evil, death, or sin and penalty of sin so as to attain a better state”.⁸ Ernest Valea reflects on the idea of salvation as analysed and compared on the basis of world religions which is stated here because of diverse inspirations Sadequain has used to demonstrate this subject:

Concerning the meaning of salvation from an eternal perspective, the views are again irreconcilable. In the pantheistic religions salvation corresponds to the fusion of the impersonal self with the Absolute, implying dissolution of knower and known. Others, such as Buddhism and Taoism, take salvation as an illumination, meaning a discovery of and conformity of oneself with an eternal law that governs existence. For most Eastern religions liberation equals extinction of personal existence, whether the self remains eternally isolated (according to the Samkhya and Yoga *darshanas*), merges with the Ultimate Reality (in pantheism), or is itself an illusion that ceases to exist (in Buddhism). Dualistic religions see human salvation as a return to an initial angelic state, from which one has fallen into a physical body. The monotheistic religions define salvation as entering a state of eternal communion with God, which means that personhood will not be abolished but perfected.⁹

By closely examining the theories about salvation it is not hard to deduce that the spirit behind the concept is to achieve the termination of the state of damnation. This state is although mostly subjective but at the same time perceptual in nature but does signify one fact; which is hoping to being saved or liberated from any undesirable condition one finds oneself to be in. The troubled condition may result from a sense of loss in the worldly realm or from spiritual turbulence. Regardless of the nature of suffering, the soul gets to be inflicted upon by all that is endured by the human body, mind and heart; hence a cry for salvation arises inside of his being. Salvation therefore might be a desirable virtue and an asset for those who are looking for gains in a promised heaven. Whereas salvation is a divine promise for those whose souls are ready to reach out to grow to their full potential, be rid of inner agony and find a balance between the dichotomy of visible and actual, of deeds and inner purity. This spiritual freedom is the aspired state of the creative, introspective artist. This is where his soul reflects on his experiences and he realizes intuition and receives inspiration. Salman Ahmad in his book about Sadequain, *Mystic Expressions*, writes:

Sadequain illustrated selected works of Ghalib, Iqbal, Faiz and himself to reveal various states of self-realization and consciousness. These paintings transcend our dormant susceptibilities as archetypal expressions of mystic vision. They hold a beacon to the path of enlightenment, guide through the gateway of spiritual freedom, and provide a conduit to transpersonal truth. In these paintings, Sadequain seeks to share his observations, experiences, and interpretations of the truth, and his relationship to the world around him and beyond through the poetry of his choice.¹⁰

Sadequain as an artist assimilated much from his surroundings and tried to glean the truths from his observations. His experiences with his environs, which include social and political climate, were vast and profound. He had seen times of social upheaval and of geographic divide fragmenting the very nexus and cohesion of the society he had known. He had seen men becoming recluse in the wake of deprivation and desolation having suffered at the hands of cruelty of destiny. He had also been a witness to innumerable dismal hands raised in prayer gesture awaiting a saviour bringing salvation to their barren lands and drab lives at the scorched plains of Gadani¹¹ where he settled after migrating to Pakistan.

Sadequain's journey was not one of shifting places and changing landscape, rather like many other destitute and impoverished souls, his was a journey through the states of homelessness, migration, destitution and disillusionment. It is only after having experienced such turmoil was he able to actually reflect on the uncouth realities of life. He was not the artist who belonged to the gentry neither was his art meant for the elitists. He himself was reported to have labelled himself as the artist of the dustbin. This kind of abnegation of personal pride and conceit in favour of crude truths echoes loud in Sadequain's art. One can always capture the flavour of cynicism, irony and derision in his paintings and poetry alike blended with an air of gloom.

Asim Fareed writes about Sadequain "Sadequain was self-destructive and spiritually tortured. To see this is to understand his work".¹² which suggests that all the ugliness of his circumstances tarnished his being and left a mark on his soul. This is not to say that it deteriorated him rather his creative faculties flourished and his spirit bloomed in wake of his tormented state. He managed to compare the dispensable nature of physical existence against higher ethereal goals. He let himself become a hermit; sought refuge in solitude to let his inner infernos well ignited which would allow him to receive his inspirations to produce epic tales of man and his

struggles. As Farid further proposes “It is in retrospect that we may now see that this unconventional figure was a vessel through which the divine communed with man”.¹³ and As Leonardo da Vinci has said that “the painter always paints himself”¹⁴ is to say that all artistic endeavours are but the allusions of the perceptions of the artist about himself and his surroundings and his art is his struggle and quest of self-discovery.

In his quest Sadequain let the entire grotesque imagery of his society penetrate his consciousness in order to contribute even more to let others also see the world and life from his perspective. The evolution of his work bears witness to his evolving self. He started off with nude human representations, went on to describing parables of human plight, then took to converting poetry into pictures of renowned visionary poets and eventually settled at producing mystifying Quranic calligraphic paintings. Not content by producing pictorial art alone the restless Sadequain also tried his hand at writing poetry. He has produced immaculate quatrains much in the fashion of Omar Khyam the poet, whom he seems to be inspired by. He himself proclaims that he created poetry through his pictures and he would now produce pictures in poetry. This paradigm shift in his interests and inspirations is nonetheless an evidence of the growth and progression of a soul which transcends the limits of the known into the search for the baffling unknown.¹⁵ This suggests that it is a search for enlightenment attained via salvation, as is portrayed in his self portrait where he paints himself akin to the Lord Buddha “*the fasting Sadequain*”. (Illus: 1)



Illus: 1-Fasting Sadequain

Image courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

In order to understand and interpret Sadequain's work it is crucial to be acquainted with his inspirations. He approved and recognized much with all modern art movements specially Cubism, Surrealism and Expressionism. But Sadequain was also much inspired by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo in spirit of his ideals, and rendition of his subjects painted as metaphors for sublime concepts of irony of deeds and fate, salvation and redemption. He himself has said that he takes the divine Michelangelo to be his tutor and mentor. He was a tormented soul like Michelangelo who was in quest of salvation. His works are infested with such distressed images of man as are reminiscent of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. ^(Illus:2)



Illus: 2- The Last Judgment, Michelangelo

Image courtesy: <https://100swallows.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/the-last-judgment-by-michelangelo/>

Unlike Michelangelo, Sadequain was not into personality cult. As Michelangelo had a clear notion of a saviour, Sadequain on the contrary believed that salvation must come from the inside of person by undertaking a journey into one's own soul to seek one's divine or higher self, by casting aside the basal and lowly human instincts. This doctrine of salvation is displayed in the very heart of most of his themes he chose to draw and paint. In all the wretchedness and discontent which are a hallmark of his art, there is this idea of hope and faith secreted deep inside. As disgruntled as he seems through his art it was only a depiction of awakened soul who could perceive the world differently and had the courage to comment on his own depraved self and the vile of ostentation and

numbness of the society in the most ruthless manner. He was blessed with an inexhaustible imagination that could extend the symbolic vocabulary to any limits to serve this purpose. His symbolism could capture the essence of realities which are subjective in nature though skewed, and was able to stretch the imagination to vastest horizons.

Sadequain's inspirations and subjects can be shortlisted to few metaphors repeatedly illustrated in his paintings which would be analyzed so as to grasp an idea of his stance on his spiritual quest.

Man: Man being Sadequain's most favoured inspiration, emerges in his paintings taking his place at the centre stage of creation, to depict him as Divine's choice to play His will, His command. Man's struggle against all odds is nonetheless a theme which accentuates Sadequain's resilient persona through his paintings. Man in Sadequain's art diction signifies action and not mere characters. As life itself is a personification and embodiment of what man makes of it, Sadequain comes up with effigies on canvas engaged in the drama of life earnestly playing their part. His imagery is loaded with the sinners and the pious, with dead souls and the immortals, with dejected and the glorified, with decadent and the pure, with seekers and the enlightened alike. Such characters are more of concepts than individuals. Whatever man has allowed him to become and whatever worth he has earned by virtue of being the crown of creation is the primary focus of the artist. When he employs man as a universal symbol Sadequain sometimes stumbles on the man's labours whereby he stands scarred, weary and dishevelled yet embracing on to hope and faith in life, and sometimes he comes across dormant, inert man who has given up all hopes and prospects of salvation. There are still more images of man where man emerges triumphant despite being surrounded by extremely precarious circumstances and goes on with his life winning over his state of dismay entering the state of peace. Apart from the context the form given to such representations of man is of vital importance and adds much to the subject. His man is drawn with strong lines, rising taller than his milieu, engaged in perfect action sometimes with tensile strokes. The overstated sizes and disproportionate postures indicate that Sadequain is not after portraying material realism but urges upon the viewer to appraise the context of the action he proposes. He adds drama with the use of chiaroscuro and bold colours which contribute in understanding the character of the person he illustrates.

The renowned personalities Sadequain has chosen for his brush to paint are the people who left an imprint on the wholesomeness called the cycle of life. They are the people who refused to vanish into the abyss of nothingness writing their memoirs on the immortal sands of time. They are the people who are not mortals but quintessence of higher attributes of man. In his painting treasures of time one can detect the flavour of Sadequain's nostalgic fascination with such giants of our historic legacy as the western philosophers Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Archimedes, Herodotus, Sophocles and Confucius and the intellectual marvels from Arabia and Persia, Avicenna, Al-Khwarizmi, Ibn al-Haisam, Ibn al-Hayan, Al-Farabi, Firdausi, Al-Kundi, Ibn-i Rushd, Rumi, Al-Idrees and Ibn-i Khaldun. History has long acknowledged their contributions towards establishing Muslim doctrine and ideology. Leonardo da Vinci, Newton, Galileo and Goethe as the iconoclasts of their times also find their place on this world stage set by Sadequain on his canvas. The voices of the modern day world Iqbal, Einstein, Tagore, Karl Marx, Walt Whiteman and Darwin also play their part in this timeless saga woven by Sadequain's infatuation with the enlightened beings where Buddha takes to be at the centre of the composition.¹⁶ The most intriguing feature is the inclusion of the artist himself in the Muslim group suggesting his place is also with these people who dared to change the course of fate in their times without paying any heed to the contempt and censure they attracted. Buddha taking the centre stage also suggests that where each character of the composition is busy working in his domain in order to realize the purpose of his existence it is actually the way of Buddha i.e. making the journey in the spiritual realm, which enables man to achieve the highest goal of salvation bringing enlightenment and self-realization. It is however important to note that the painting is a tribute not to these individuals but to the ideals they stood for.

Sadequain has used the usual colour palette of blues and ochre in different tonal values. The buildings in perspective are only painted to be suggestive of the faiths these individuals belong to. The high rising minarets also contribute in the drama standing tall as fascinated spectators witnessing the higher stature of these glorified people. The sun with a dark outline and its rays with a shadowy nimbus also describe the painting as allegorical. The sun here acts like the universal sun which is the eternal source of all energy and existence and illuminates these beings who have been the recipients of its light. The colours of the sky blended with the colours of the cloaks and the very individuals and absence of

shadows also imply that the scene belongs not to the material realm but the archetypal world in the ethereal realm. Artist's presence in this world therefore casts light on his spiritual aspirations. (Illus: 3)



Illus: 3- Treasures of Time

Image courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Crows and Cobwebs: An important metaphor Sadequain has exercised in his works is the crow. It is a series of drawings and paintings he has rendered. Crow has a very significant place in the occult symbolism and enjoys different connotations and status in different cultures. In the ancient pagan societies it enjoyed prophetic significance yet in some others it is a symbol for darker forces of nature. Hence is considered a harbinger of bad luck.¹⁷ In mythology and folklore as well as cultural history in general, crows are associated with disease and death due to their scavenging nature and with cleverness trickery and deception¹⁸ By examining Sadequain's use of this emblem deeply one can relate to both implications of the crow symbolism. Crows are intriguingly enough sitting on man's head, hatching eggs or resting calmly on the apparently lifeless, inert human body. The imagery apparently suggests the irony that man has lost his place, dignity and glory amongst God's creation so much so that lowly creatures reign over him as he lies at the mercy of destiny as Hameed Zaman suggests that crows tease and menace the timid and mean humans who are unable to ward off these evil forces. He further comments on the use of this symbol as an insinuation by the artist on the decadence and degeneration of a petrified society as the carrion crow seems ready to devour the leftovers of a diseased community.¹⁹ However if analyzed deeply, the scarecrows appear to be the metaphor for the cherished dogmas of the society which stand tall, self glorified

but have no worth or strength to change the appalling condition of man. Man however feels safe while having clung to these canons for long. He feels insecure on the mere idea of forsaking his beliefs and entering an unknown perilous realm. So static he lies to be dictated by his preordained destiny whereas revolutionary stray thoughts keep coming to him in the cloak of crows to haunt and dare them.

Sadequain thinks of himself as a man who imbibes wisdom by allowing the crow to weave nest and hatch eggs, implying his dare to dream and think creatively in a society that has long resigned to a quiet slumber. ^(illus: 4) He does not identify himself as another amongst the intellectual pygmies or a stooge to be decreed by a scarecrow. His path is the path of a rogue where he is content with his unconventional ways that would allow him to experience greater freedom of thought to exhume his inner self and find peace therein. The evolution of his thought process bears evidence that after having practiced his freedom he did attain some peace as depicted in the form of dove replacing crow on his head in one of his paintings.



Illus: 4- Crow series

Image

courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Same is the idea behind the use of the symbol of cobweb where man seems to be content being in the prison of the slimy, eerie cobwebs. By the look of events taking place cobweb imagery goes to a level further in its implications. The grim landscape, the tall buildings and humans being enslaved by this monstrous web propose the event to be an outcome of man's own doing. Man seems to have won over material resources to glorify his worldly life and his sense of creativity and growth appears to cease with his

materialistic gains; hence the sadistic imagery of cobwebs. Webs pronounce the man's renunciation of his real potential of evolving as the human species. The cobwebs do not look like an entity of an alien origin but appear to be arising from the very actions of man himself. The actions are of pride, materialism, greed, malice and vanity. The mean lower self harbours such conditions of man leaving him a captive of his hideous desires hence pronounced as a cobweb. Realizing this fact however makes one feel that the grip of a cobweb is not much to reckon with and one blow of a firm, honest pledge to not to fall prey to the enticements of lower self will set his beleaguered soul free. Here again the misery the soul suffers is the acting theme lying deep inside the whole pessimistic drama.

The cries for salvation are at the loudest in the following drawing ^(illus. 5) where all the uncanny and creepy symbols come together on the being of the artist who sits in the guise of a *jogi* engaged in an eternal state of contemplation. Apparently it seems that eons would pass before the prayers would be answered hence the cobweb woven between the risen hands and the rodents and snakes crawl on the hermit so freely as he is so lost in his contemplation and connection with the Divine as to appear a nonliving entity. The theme seems to be of utter pessimism and hopelessness as if to suggest that one would almost perish in his pursuit of realization and help seems a far cry. In actuality though, the demons from his meaner self plague him; his intelligence, arrogance, ego all are reduced to be represented as crawling creepy animal symbols. This imagery is of vital importance as it conforms to the idea that the path of spirituality whereby one seeks salvation is a hazardous one and one has to deal with ones inner fiends first which is a stage in the purgation of soul. The serenity of the hermit says much about the perseverance he seems to possess in the way of God realization. The hands are shown perpetually raised to ask God of his providence and bring to him the much awaited, much needed salvation as no endeavours of human intellect can promise him this holy bliss. Left entirely at the mercy of his own resources would still leave him a presumptuous soul drifted far away from salvation.



Illus: 5- Cobweb series

Image

courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Wilderness and Cactus: From the enigmatic and quiet world of Sadequain's imagination come more symbols weird in nature and inexplicable in context. Sadequain has somehow glorified the otherwise very unimpressive plant, the cactus. Cacti grow mostly in wilderness oriented landscapes which other than the growth of this very species appears to be a barren, inhospitable and unwelcoming land. But cacti break open this rocky soil and prove to the world their potential of growth and resilience in the harshest of circumstances. Wilderness exemplifies the vast emptiness the artist himself feels infested with. In the barrenness and sterility of the soil Sadequain traces the impotency of his own soul which despite the fruition of his creative mind seems incapable of reaping the fruits of fulfilment. Hence stretch on his canvas the bleak, dreary long nights of soul in the form of wastelands where the morbid loneliness would dance to the tunes of nature, where the ghastly phantoms would jump out of imagination and take on the form of macabre and distorted creatures and where none but the thorny cacti would grow.

The cacti which grow on their own, untamed, untended and fed on little nourishment extracted from soil, still grow to heights and strength. The contempt and callousness absorbed from their milieu grows on them in the form of spikes. Yet they don't complain and under their hard and thick skins they also contain the pure, untainted sap of life. Christa Paula in her lot 13 also puts forward the view that Sadequain finds these cacti akin to himself as he indicates in his drawing "the transforming cactus". To him the cacti are the recluses, the hermits standing in contemplative, pensive gestures raising their hands to the Divine in hope and faith. His painting "mystic figuration" ^(illus:6) is such an enticing piece of work in this regard saturated with the artist's soulful experience. The cactus appears as a seated human figure, exaggerated, deformed in the usual Sadequain's expressive rendition of his subjects. Befitting the context the cactus as an entity is rendered in strong dark colours, the blue and ochre; yet a mystifying light illuminates the background where the hands spell out the name "Allah" by means of placement of fingers of hands.²⁰



Illus:6- Mystic Figuration

Image

courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Hands: hands take on greatest importance in Sadequain's art. Although the complete figure of man is always exaggerated but still more highlighted are his hands. The fingers look contorted, the tips though conical but resembling the tips of either pen or a pointed paintbrush.^(illus: 7) If human soul is the vessel and instrument to experience the act of Divine, Sadequain as the creator of the

destiny of characters and subjects of his paintings takes his hands to be the instrument to play his mind's will. It is his hands that have perfected the solidity of line and stroke to come up with impeccable and flawless execution of colossal images. Had it not been for the steadiness of his hands he would not have been the mighty Sadequain we know, "who might as well have painted more square feet than Michelangelo" says Ali Adil Khan.²¹ Much in the tradition of Michelangelo's fascination with hands where the hands of God in one painting separate light from darkness, yet in another the God's touch of finger breathes in man His Divine spirit, Sadequain's hands also propose to be engaged in action in almost all of his works. From the erotic scenes to the esoteric his hands are busy unwinding the mystery of the event he has painted. Hands are shown to point to directions, to spread in gesture of prayer, to have metamorphosed to have cobwebs woven around them, to untangle the myths beneath the forms of characters and their actions, and as the carrier of seat of wisdom i.e. the heads of decapitated bodies.



Illus: 7- Hands

Image

courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Decapitated bodies: Decapitated bodies a theme frequently represented in Sadequain's long list of uncanny inspirations speaks volumes about the inscrutable persona Sadequain possessed. On the face of the things the subject appears bizarre and grotesque but contextually it suggests artist's desire for freedom from mind's rationale which would allow a peek into the matters of soul. Mind being the strongest inhibition which continues to reason and sustains on the resources provided by the five senses alone is

treated as a hindrance in the way of achieving intuitive faculty, and spiritual insight. This idea can further be probed by associating the decapitation with sacrifice. In all the works the headless body is carrying the severed head itself and still engaged in some action. (Illus: 8)



Illus: 8- The Artist

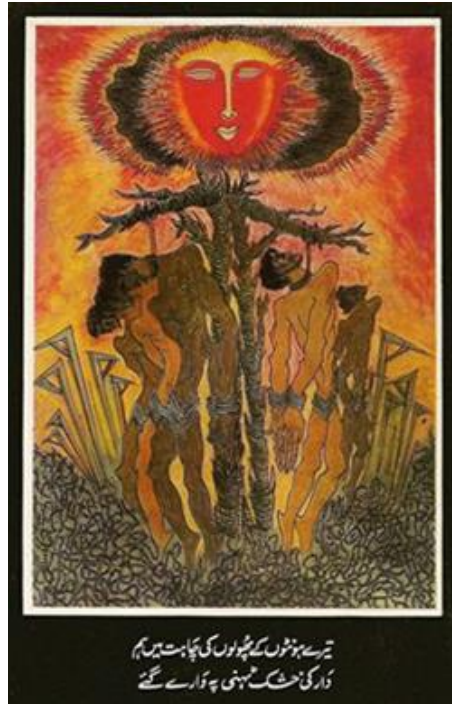
Image

courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

This notion implies an act of sacrifice. Sacrifice is in itself an act of sheer selflessness which can never be a product of a thinking mind but of a loving heart and an awakened soul. Sacrifice is a theme which resonates in the art and literature throughout history, of Muslim creative artists as a legacy left by the iconic figure of Imam Husain; a practice and custom to be followed by the people of the heart in their brazen desire to stand for truth in the most hostile of conditions and attain martyrdom. Martyrdom in Islam is considered a death by consent, hence a sacrifice of highest order and purest nature man can offer on his part to claim for the blissful union with God. Sadequain seems to be deeply moved by the sacrifices of the leader of the martyrs Imam Husain. In ‘The man and his masks’ the writer says:

Sadequain was a fervent admirer of the imaginative elegies of Dabeer and their message of salvation and spiritual power through sacrifice. Karbala for him was a universal simulacrum of bad faith, injustice and tyranny. Like the great *marsiya* poets, he placed the story of Karbala in the wider context of human suffering, and of human emancipation from all kinds of exploitation.²²

The spiritual power curiously enough does not lie in making miracles to change the course of fate rather embracing it with full courage, valour and fidelity for the One whom the sacrifice intends to please. This is the *sunnah* of Hazrat Imam Husain in whose footsteps later mystics followed like Husain Ibn Mansur Hallaj of Persia and Sarmad of the then sub-continent, two other figures who command a distinct place in the lineage of martyrs of truth and manage to capture fancies of Sadequain's canvas.²³ Hallaj famous for his heretic claim *Ana al-Haqq* attracted his martyrdom to achieve complete salvation through self denial. As ironic as it sounds he looked at himself as a vessel emptied of all corporal attributes hence to draw the Beloved's presence and become a medium to speak on His behalf. In the way of his immense love and longing for his Absolute Beloved he offered himself for sacrifice and was brutally tortured, crucified and beheaded; a sacrifice which has adorned the welkin of mighty poets like Attar and Rumi, and later Faiz whose poetry Sadequain painted, and echoes as the voice of yearning souls aspiring spiritual heights, freedom and salvation. (Illus:9)



Illus: 9 painted version of poetry by Faiz Ahmad Faiz
Image courtesy: <http://www.sadequainfoundation.com/paintings/>

Second most significant inspiration for Sadequain was Sarmad. Sarmad was also decapitated on the orders of the despotic Mughal Emperor Aurangzib Alamgir for his heretic religious beliefs which did not comply with *Sharia*. Sarmad did not surrender his beliefs and did not renounce his practices despite being fully aware of the emperor's wrathful nature and deadly intentions, hence meeting his fate of a martyr.

Such lofty personalities acted as inspirations for Sadequain for the effigies of headless bodies that stand tall in the chronicles of time as sheer symbols of devotion and allegiance to their religion of love and sacrifice. Aspiring to carve himself a niche amongst such people, Sadequain himself draws in his series "artist and the muses" an event in archetypal setting whereby Khayyam, the poet asks Sarmad about Sadequain. In asserting a relationship with Khayyam he draws himself painting mystical ideas on the mind's firmament in one figure with severed head held in the hand. While in another similar image of himself his dismembered head is crying his voice out through a trumpet in the likes of Sarmad. This gives a fair idea of the artist's aspirations as a seeker and the bearer of inner truth. He yearns to realize the same truth and love that made these great mystics arduously toil and wilfully sacrifice for. Love is the state of soul which shuns all impurities, deceptions and lies to claim nearness with the Beloved. The way of truth is perilous and asks for a truculent labour on the part of the seeker. It asks for sacrifices of all kinds of one's name, honour, status and even life. Sadequain realizes that the ascetics relinquish all the worldly pleasures deeming them as hazards in the growth of spiritual life and hence they cast off all the lies and go on to embrace the freedom which lies in realising the true nature of man which seeks Divine.

Bilal tanveer comments on Sadequain's theme of headless bodies as:

Among recurring motifs in Sadequain's work is the image of a headless man holding his lopped head in his hand. The dislodged head, sitting on the palm of the man's hand, is studying a beloved subject, while the other hand sketches the subject on canvas.

In another variation of this motif, the severed head is looking back at the vacant spot, while the brush is drawing the self-portrait of the head in blood. In all these versions, the lopped head is an unmistakable symbol of ecstatic transcendence: the head is dismembered from the body but is reunited in the subject, in the act of creation, in the contemplation of the beloved.²⁴

The idea of ecstatic transcendence is a definite state of mystical experience whereby one is free of the falsities of self but has realised that which is Divine in ones being or soul. This experience is so liberating that the idea of sacrificing one's life and one's self comes to happen when the soul is not only advancing in the way of truth but also exploring divine love '*Ishq*'. It is only out of love that man's ego truly ceases to exist as he perishes himself to glorify the Oneness of the Beloved. Sacrifice, mystics believed is the act of utmost selflessness which would bring purest form of actualisation of the One so that no duality remains.

Conclusion:

Andrew Hamilton says "At the end of your brush is the tip of your soul".²⁵ Sadequain's life reflects through his work which speaks loudly about his restlessness, discontent nature, struggle with life, self and society, and a relentless effort to make of himself a man of his own ideals. His work mirrors his journey and his quest. On his quest he made himself a recluse, sometimes an ascetic, at others a metamorphosed cactus-man and last but not the least a decapitated martyr. He was a vagabond by nature and called himself a '*Faqir*'. He said his art was not meant to be personal possession but was to be entrusted to people. He used to give away his paintings and sketches to his friends and strangers alike without asking a penny for them.

Nouman naqvi establishes in his essay on Sadequain that "Askesis or Faqr in Muslim tradition is not only recommended but urged as a form of Jihad and that Sadequain was one such artist who experienced and practiced abnegation and aestheticism throughout his life which is chronicled in his oeuvre. Sadequain inherited this legacy of askesis from Islam which he presented with Gnostic ontology of struggle with one's self."²⁶

This lack of bondage with material yet a strong adherence to the desire to seek answers to riddles of life from within his soul was his ultimate truth; which is sign of a soul awakened to its spiritual needs. Spiritual growth leads to spiritual salvation; the ultimate state of bliss and as per monotheistic religions and eastern traditions the state of perfection of selfhood. Sadequain was informed of this reality through his knowledge, observation and experience. When he experienced the decadence in his society and in himself he unabashedly painted it thus realisation and acceptance of truths. When he suffered loneliness and faced disease and looming death in the arid and scorched desert of Gadani he found cacti as a

symbol of resilience of life. In that he found the purity and mystique of nature that abounds in all creation. When he met with the echoes of giants of history he fancied to stand among them as somebody who has carved himself a deserved niche; an attempt to make him immortal in the chronicles of history just like those great men. Sometimes he follows in the footsteps of Buddha, sometimes he becomes the Qalander of Iqbal whose poetic works he painted. Iftikahr Dadi writes:

Like non conformist *Sufis* Sadequain also digressed from the accepted norms of society and tradition thus attracting criticism which never troubled him. He was on the quest to becoming the perfect man who possesses a colossal status on a cosmic scale. Iqbal made available for Sadequain an aesthetic of modernist subjectivity characterized by restlessness, struggle, and heroism. Sadequain plays out Iqbal's characterization of the *Qalandar* as a restless, superhuman creator, with the artist himself exemplifying this character. Another verse by Ghalib suggests that art itself, and especially painting, is merely an excuse for a meeting with the beloved.²⁷

And lastly in a final attempt at finding salvation for his soul he identifies himself with the likes of Hallaj and Sarmad who were martyrs on the path of love and truth by illustrating himself decapitated yet still undergoing a process of creation suggesting that the soul's journey goes on. All the archetypes that captured Sadequain's attention, imagination and canvas bear witness to his journey on the path to self discovery leading to achieve the blissful state of salvation or the peace within.

Notes and Reference

-
- ¹ Walford, E. John. *Great themes in art*. Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2002.
 - ² Rookmaaker, Hendrik Roelof. *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*. Crossway, 1994.
 - ³ Robertson, Flora. "Art as Spiritual Perception: Essays in honour of E John Walford." *Art and Christianity* 75 (2013): 10-12.
 - ⁴ Pepperell, Robert. "Art, Perception and Indeterminacy." *Contemporary Aesthetics* 5 (2007).
 - ⁵ Aristotle, "Poetics." (384-322 BCE.) Commentary by Joe Sachs, 2003. "An Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, with discussion and excerpt from Poetics." <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aris-poe.htm>>
 - ⁶ Holcombe, John, 2007. "Art As Emotive Expression." <<http://www.textetc.com/theory/emotive-expression.html>>
 - ⁷ Holcombe, 2007.

- 8 Encyclopedia – “Britannica Online Encyclopedia.”
<<http://www.britannica.com/>>
- 9 “Salvation and eternal life in world religions.” “Comparative Religion.”
17 June 2010, <<http://www.comparativereligion.com/salvation.html#15>>.
- 10 Ahmad, Salman. *Mystic Expressions: An Odyssey to Exaltation with Ghalib, Iqbal, Faiz and Sadequain*. Lahore, Pakistan: Research and Publication Department of Topical Printers, 2011. Print.
- 11 Ahmad, Salman, and Şādiqain. *The Saga of Sadequain*. Vol. 1. San Diego: Sadequain Foundation, 2012. Print. Biography.
- 12 Farid, Asim. <<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/>> Daily Times published (Monday, July 26, 2010): page 7, 24.
- 13 Farid : page 7, 24.
- 14 Akhund, Hamid’ Abdul. et al, “Sadequain.”: “ The Holy Sinner.”, Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, 2002.
- 15 Hasan, Burhanuddin. “When Sadequain wove magic.” Dawn the internet edition (September 11, 2005):
<<http://www.dawnpropertyshow.com/weekly/books/archive/050911/books4.htm>>
- 16 Alam, Nadeem. “Influences and Inspirations.”
<<http://ezinearticles.com/?Sadequains-Art---Influences-and-Inspirations&id>>
- 17 The Pagan Files: “Symbolism of the Crow in Different Cultures.” 27 Jul 2007
<<http://alkman1.blogspot.com/2007/07/symbolism-of-crow-in-different-cultures.html>>
- 18 Chappell, Jackie. “Living with the trickster: Crows, ravens, and human culture.” *PLoS Biol* 4.1 (2006): e14.
- 19 Zaman’ Hameed. “Sadequain-drawings.”
<<http://www.sadequain.net/Drawings/drawings.htm>>
- 20 Dr. Christa Paula, lot 13, “Mystic Figuration.”
1965. <<http://www.bonhams.com/>>
- 21 Khan Adil’ Ali. “Sadequain — An artist and muralist par-excellence.” (October 20, 2007)
<<http://news.dawn.com/weekly/gallery/archive/071020/gallery4.htm>>
- 22 Akhund, Hamid’ Abdul. “*Man and his masks*.” et al, Sadequain: “The Holy Sinner.”, Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, 2002.
- 23 Akhund, 2002.
- 24 Tanweer, Bilal. “Stories of Sarmad.” (Sunday, April 05’ 2009) 08:06 AM PST
<<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/in-paper-magazine/books-and-authors/stories+of+sarmad>>
<<http://andrewhamiltonart.blogspot.com/>>
- 25 Naqvi, Nauman. “Acts of Askesis, Scenes of Poesis: The Dramatic Phenomenology of Another Violence in a Muslim Painter-Poet.”
- 27 Dadi, Iftikhar. *Modernism and the art of muslim South Asia*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010.

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY AND
CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS
EXPERIENCE

Dr. Tahir Hameed Tanoli

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-Khud*' 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

-
- 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

۳۷۷ ص ۳۷۷ کليات اقبال اردو، ص ۳۷۷ ۲۶