

WAYS TO GOD

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Religion has its centre in God Who created the world *ex nihilo* and is sustaining it through Divine laws, moral and natural.¹ He fashioned man from clay and infused of His spirit in him.² He sent down prophets to guide man to the path of moral restraint and rectitude, Muhammad (*Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*) being the last of the series of prophets and Quran being the last Book revealed to him. He laid down in the Quran the way that leads to Him: unshakeable faith in the unseen, followed by centring the human will in the Divine will, leading to actions chosen by the considerations of the life hereafter. A heart open to the transcendent (*qalbin salimin*³) and responsive to the unseen (*qalbin munibin*⁴) is one end of the path, the other end being the all-good God Who illumines the path in proportion to the intensity of the longing and yearning of heart for God. The following verses of the Quran motivate the heart to exert itself in the direction of God:

1. God is omnipresent. In the case of man, He is nearer to him than his own neck artery, jugular vein.⁵
2. "When my servants ask thee concerning me, I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on me."⁶
3. The way to God is characterized by a reciprocal movement of the mystic seeker and God towards each other. The *salik* yearns in his heart of hearts for God and inwardly moves towards Him in right earnest. But this is not a one-sided affair. "You remember me," says God, "I will remember you."⁷ This is the solemn promise of God to those who care

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to remember Him. "If the mystic seeker," says the Prophet, "moves a span towards God, God moves a yard towards him; if he advances a yard towards God, God moves equal to the expanse of extended hands towards him; if he goes walking to God, God goes running to him."⁸ The centre of this spiritual romance, I-Thou courtship, is a private sanctuary in which *salik* lives all alone. The mentor cannot enter it. He, at best, surrounds it with the most promising influences.

4. Whoever gains knowledge of the self, gains knowledge of God, said Hazrat Ali. And the deeper the knowledge of the self, the higher the awareness of God. The ever increasing knowledge of the self leads to the increasing awareness of God. The Quran speaks of three stages in the development of the self: the impulsive self,⁹ the reproaching self¹⁰ and contented self.¹¹ The characteristics of each stage are as under:

- (a) The self appears on the human scene, first of all, as an impulsive self. This self is an arena of unbridled desires and search for carnal pleasures. The individual at this stage idolizes external transitory goods and believes that these will bring him happiness and contentment. But instead he is caught in the grip of Divine discontent.
- (b) The Divine discontent with the universe of desire marks the advance of self from the state of impulsion to that of reproachment, from the rowdism of desire to the discipline enforced by ire. It is at this stage that conscience emerges which pronounces upon the moral quality of actions, approving the right and condemning the wrong action. The conscience censures the self over its unbecoming conduct and a tug of war ensues between the two-halves of the self, desire siding with body and inciting it to evil, ire siding with spirit and restraining it from evil. This inner conflict is the mother of morality. External transitory goods now lose their significance and attraction and a new urge for seeking the well-being of spirit leading to eternal bliss and happiness reigns supreme.
- (c) The intensity of the new urge marks the advance of the self to the final state of the satisfied self where spirit is all in all. The self is no longer the seat of conflicts,

tensions and turmoils. Peace reigns in it. It does what the spirit wants it to do. This is the highest stage of the spiritual development of man where man is happy with God and God is happy with man.¹²

Asked what does *ihsan* mean, the Prophet said: it means that the touchstone of the true prayer is as if one is seeing God with naked eyes while praying or at least God is seeing him praying. Such a prayer is characteristic of the mystic who has reached the highest spiritual stage of the satisfied self.

5. *Anfus*,¹³ inner experience of the self, is not the only authentic way to God. *Afaq*, outer experience of the universe, is as authentic way to God as is the *anfus*. The study of the heaven and earth kindles the Divine spark in man. There are signs of God for the mystic seeker in the sun, the moon, the mountains, running rivers, the field of corns, the gardens of olives, date-palms, grapes and fruits of all kinds, in the birds poised in the sky, in the clouds held up in the air, in the lengthening of shadows, in the alternation of day and night, in variety of colour and tongue of people. The laws of Nature are the set ways of God which know no change.

I shall close the discussion with a quotation from Iqbal:

“Nature is to the Divine self as character is to the human self The knowledge of Nature is the knowledge of God’s behaviour.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Quran*, 7:54.
- 2 *Quran*, 15:29, 21:91, 32:9, 38:72, 66:12.
- 3 *Ibid*, 37:84.
- 4 *Ibid*, 50:33.
- 5 *Ibid*, 50:16.
- 6 *Ibid*, 2:186.
- 7 *Ibid*, 2:152.
- 8 *Bukhari Sharif* (Urdu), Hamid and Co., Lahore, 1982, Volume III, p. 903.
- 9 *Quran*, 12:53.
- 10 *Ibid*, 75:2.
- 11 *Ibid*, 89:27.
- 12 *Ibid*, 89:28.
- 13 *Ibid*, 41:53, 51:21.
- 14 *Ibid*, 41:53, 51:21.
- 15 Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986, p. 45.