

SECRETS OF THE SELF

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY IQBAL

'That experience should take place in finite centres and should wear the form of finite this-ness is in the end inexplicable.' These are the words of Prof. Bradley. But starting with these inexplicable centres of experience, he ends in a unity which he calls Absolute and in which the finite centres lose their finiteness and distinctness. According to him, therefore, the finite centre is only an appearance. The test of reality, in his opinion is all-inclusiveness; and since all finiteness is 'infected with relativity,' it follows that the latter is a mere illusion. To my mind, this inexplicable finite centre of experience is the fundamental fact of the universe. All life is individual; there is no such thing as universal life. God himself is an individual: He is the most unique individual.¹ The universe, as Dr. McTaggart says, is an association of individuals; but we must add that the orderliness and adjustment which we find in this association is not eternally achieved and complete in itself. It is the result of instinctive or conscious effort. We are gradually travelling from chaos to cosmos and are helpers in this achievement. Nor are the members of the association fixed; new members are ever coming to birth to co-operate in the great task. Thus the universe is not a completed act: it is still in the course of formation. There can be no complete truth

¹ This view was held by the orthodox Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal in its extreme (anthropomorphic) form.

about the universe, for the universe has not yet become 'whole.' The process of creation is still going on, and man too takes his share in it, inasmuch as he helps to bring order into at least a portion of the chaos. The Quran indicates the possibility of other creators than God. (Quran, ch. 23. v. 14: "Blessed is God, the best of those who create.")

Obviously this view of man and the universe is opposed to that of the English Neo-Hegelians as well as to all forms of pantheistic Sufism which regard absorption in a universal life or soul as the final aim and salvation of man. The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique. The Prophet said, '*Takhallaqu bi-akhlaq Allah*,' 'Create in yourselves the attributes of God.' Thus man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique Individual. What then is life? It is individual: its highest form, so far, is the ego (*khudi*) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre. Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the completest person. Not that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself.² The

² Maulana Rumi has very beautifully expressed this idea. The Prophet, when a little boy, was once lost in the desert. His nurse Halima was almost beside herself with grief but while roaming the desert in search of the boy she heard a voice saying:

true person not only absorbs the world of matter by mastering it; he absorbs God Himself into his ego by assimilating Divine attributes. Life is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all obstructions in its march by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideals, and for the purpose of its preservation and expansion it has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments, *e.g.*, senses, intellect, etc., which help it to assimilate obstructions. The greatest obstacle in the way of life is matter, Nature; yet Nature is not evil, since it enables the inner powers of life to unfold themselves.

The ego attains to freedom by the removal of all observations in its way. It is partly free, partly determined³, and reaches fuller freedom by approaching the Individual, who is most free—God. In one word, life is an endeavour for freedom.

The ego and continuation of personality

In man the centre of life becomes an ego or person. Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained. If the state of tension is not maintained, relaxation will ensue. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable achievement of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation. That which tends to maintain the state of tension tends to make us immortal. Thus the idea of personality gives us a standard of value: it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art,⁴

‘Do not grieve he will not be lost to thee;
Nay, the whole world will be lost in him.’

The true individual cannot be lost in the world; it is the world that is lost in him. I go a step further and say, prefixing a new half-verse to a hemistich of Rumi:

In his will that which God wills becomes
lost;
‘How shall a man believe this saying?’”

³ According to the saying of the Prophet, ‘The true Faith is between predestination and free-will.’”

⁴ The ultimate end of all human activity is Life—glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must

religion, and ethics must be judged from the stand-point of personality. My criticism of Plato is directed against those philosophical systems which hold up death rather than life as their ideal—systems which ignore the greatest obstruction to life, namely, matter, and teach us to run away from it instead of absorbing it.

As in connexion with the question of the freedom of the ego we have to face the problem of matter, similarly in connexion with its immortality we have to face the problem of time. Bergson has taught us that time is not an infinite line (in the spatial sense of the word ‘line’) through which we must pass whether we wish it or not. This idea of time is adulterated. Pure time has no length. Personal immortality is an aspiration: you can have it if you make an effort to achieve it. It depends on our adopting, in this life modes of thought and activity which tend to maintain the state of tension. Buddhism, Persian Sufism and allied forms of ethics will not serve our purpose. But they are not wholly useless, because after periods of great activity we need opiates, narcotics, for some time. These forms of thought and action are like nights in the days of life. Thus, if our activity is directed towards the maintenance of a state of tension, the shock of death is not likely to affect it. After death there may be an interval of relaxation, as the Quran speaks of a *barzakh*, or intermediate state, which, in the case of some individuals, will last until the Day of Resurrection (Quran, ch. 23, v. 102). Only those egos will survive this state of relaxation who have taken good care

be subordinated to this final purpose, and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and braves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to reality around, on the mastery of which alone Life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power. (‘Our Prophet’s Criticism of Contemporary Arabian Poetry’ in *The New Era*, 1916, p. 251)

during the present life. Although life abhors repetition in its evolution, yet on Bergson's principles the resurrection of the body too, as Wildon Carr says, is quite possible. By breaking up time into moments we spatialise it and then find difficulty in getting over it. The true nature of time is reached when we look into our deeper self. Real time is life itself which can preserve itself by maintaining that particular state of tension (personality) which it has so far achieved. We are subject to time so long as we look upon time as something spatial. Spatialised time is a fetter which life has forged for itself in order to assimilate the present environment. In reality we are timeless, and it is possible to realise our timelessness even in this life. This revelation, however, can be momentary only.

The education of the ego

The ego is fortified by love. This word is used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavour to realise them. Love individualises the lover as well as the beloved. The effort to realise the most unique individuality individualises the seeker and implies the individuality of the sought, for nothing else would satisfy the nature of the seeker. As love fortifies the ego, asking weakens it. All that is achieved without personal effort comes under *asking*. The son of a rich man who inherits his father's wealth is an 'asker,' or beggar; so is every one who thinks the thoughts of others. Thus, in order to fortify the ego we should cultivate love, *i.e.* the power of assimilative action, and avoid all forms of 'asking, *i.e.* inaction. The lesson of assimilative action is given by the life of the Prophet, at least to a Mohammedan. In another part of the poem I have hinted at the general principles of Muslim ethics and have tried to reveal their meaning in connexion with the idea of personality. The ego in its movement towards uniqueness has to pass through three stages:

(a) Obedience to the Law

(b) Self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or ego-hood

(c) Divine vicegerency

This divine vicegerency is the third and last stage of human development on earth. The vicegerent is the vicegerent of God on earth. He is the completest ego, the goal of humanity,⁵ the acme of life both in mind and body; in him the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony. This highest power is united in him with the highest knowledge. In his life, thought and action, instinct and reason, become one. He is the last fruit of the tree of humanity, and all the trials of a painful evolution are justified because he is to come at the end. He is the real ruler of mankind; his kingdom is the kingdom of God on earth. Out of the richness of his nature he lavishes the wealth of life on others, and brings them nearer and nearer to himself. The more we advance in evolution, the nearer we get to him. In approaching him we are raising ourselves in the scale of life. The development of humanity both in mind and body is a condition precedent to his birth. For the present he is a mere ideal; but the evolution of humanity is tending towards the production of an ideal race of more or less unique individuals who will become his fitting parents. Thus the Kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth. Nietzsche had a glimpse of this ideal race, but his atheism and aristocratic prejudices marred his whole conception."⁶

⁵ Man already possesses the germ of vicegerency as God says in the Quran (ch. 2. v. 28): "Lo! I will appoint a *khalifa* (vicegerent) on the earth."

⁶ Nicholson's Note—Writing of 'Muslim Democracy' in *The New Era*, 1916, p. 251, Iqbal says: "The Democracy of Europe—overshadowed by socialistic agitation and anarchical fear—originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. Nietzsche, however, abhors this 'rule of the herd' and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the cultivation and growth of an Aristocracy of Supermen. But is the plebeian so