

modernizing forces in industry and education to betray the Quranic “trust” of man to be God’s deputy on earth.

Throughout the history of paganism, the deity in question was often appeased by a sacrifice whether it was a golden calf, a portion of the harvest, a first-born son, or a maiden. Iqbal believes that the **new pagan idol, wealth, demands the sacrifice of nothing less than the soul.** Modern persons are simply too intellectual, distracted and busy accumulating to discover the world within. As such, persons do not cultivate the inner nuance of feeling, that feeling of communing with the Creator, of being subject to His will and pleasure, and of being a rightful heir of eternity. Without the anchor of the “self,” humans are unequipped & easily manipulated by mere trend.

In Iqbal’s view, the “sacrifice of the soul” has ominous consequences & is not mere poeticism. To sacrifice the life of the Inner Self is to remain a stranger to the divine aspects of the human. What this means precisely is multifaceted: one does not cultivate the conscience; denies spirit for matter; is cynical of non-intellectualizable mystical experience; denies that “intuition” is a valid source of knowledge; does not persevere but rather gratifies; and considers prayer mere ritual, not an accessing of a Higher Power. People have become earth-bound, directionless & unhinged. The Soul is thus consumed in the fire of the new “**wealth**” idolatry. Money making for its own sake doesn’t compare to a spiritually liberating relationship with our livelihood that benefits not only ourselves but contributes to the well-being of all sentient beings. The Divine force bridges the material world of finance and the invisible world of Spirit. The essence of our soul’s currency is love and the power of love creates a whole life rather than fragments.

Iqbal’s idea regarding the annihilation of the Soul finds surprising resonance in Western views. Many authors have commented on the “rootlessness” of modern persons. These same authors have cited temporal causes: the sociologist Durkheim attributed it to anomie, the breakdown of agreed-upon values; Oscar Wilde felt people were not frivolous enough, too subservient to the established order; Aldous Huxley felt that people were too scientific, not literary enough, and

uninformed by the vast store of classical literature. In a recent provocative exposition of similar themes, Allan Bloom in his *Closing of the American Mind*, attributes all to a lack of education, to lack of familiarity with the Great Books. He writes: “...my generation educated in the American way, all of whom are M.Ds, Ph.Ds, have no comparable learning. When they talk about heaven and earth, about the human condition, I hear nothing but cliches, superficialities, the material of satire ...deprived of literary guidance, they no longer have any image of a perfect soul & hence do not long to have one.” Reason: they live in American capitalism which has lost its soul. Because it legalized **greed.**

Iqbal might regard all these comments as valid, but only partial, truths. His view is higher, more appreciative, and unashamedly theologic. For Iqbal, it is **not** mere absence of culture, but insufficient basis of culture; not mere unadventurous passivity, but lack of higher inspiration for conquest; **not** simple overuse of the scientific intellect, but its misdirection. He might have regarded Professor Bloom’s assessment as somewhat closer to his own view. Even so, Bloom speaks of the great works, including the Bible, more as literary experiences and foundations of culture. Iqbal demands more. For him, **literature is not simple verbal beauty, but cultivation of a “God-fearing personality with lofty ethical principles.”** Iqbal wants a community of God-centered progressive “human egos” who make good use of their material environment. Only then will one be able to resuscitate the languishing soul.

Inspired by the life of Prophet Muhammad (p), Iqbal’s ideal person has “undying faith and a universality of outlook.” It is a holistic image Iqbal has chosen – a synthesis of ancient and modern, Eastern & Western, earthly and celestial. Achieving this confluent of inner purity, this continual drive for perfection, leads to greater fidelity between the Self and Creator.

We can rebound even in the most adverse circumstances when we allow ourselves to be led by the impeccable inerrant guidance system – the Soul. Our soul compass points us to the true north of our abundance: our metaphysical resources. **O Soul! O Heavenly Gem! “They have succeeded who purifies it, and they have failed who corrupts it.” (Ash-Shams: 7-9).**

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# Wealth or Soul

Recognize the magnitude & value  
of your own spiritual currency.  
No person is rich when they are  
**morally bankrupt!**

**Man** thinks that his  
**Wealth**  
Will render him **Immortal**

*The Quran 104:3*

**Whither Your Soul?**  
**Hither or Thither?**

*“Modern persons have ceased to live soulfully (from within). They find themselves unable to control their ruthless egoism & their infinite gold-hunger which has killed all higher striving, bringing them nothing but life weariness. Absorbed in the ‘fact’ they are entirely cut off from the depths of their own being.”*

*“Delve deeply into your buried self & find the clue to life. World of Soul – a world of fire, ecstasy and longing. World of Body – a world of gain, fraud & cunning.*

*The treasure of the body is a shadow – wealth comes & goes.”*

**Muhammad Iqbal – Poet of the East**

**H**ighly esteemed throughout the Muslim world, Muhammad Iqbal, is regarded as seer, sage and an apostle of the Muslim renaissance. Iqbal's life endeavour can perhaps be summarized by a single word borrowed from the title of one of his prose works: "Reconstruction." Iqbal sought to work alchemy on the impoverished collective minds of Muslims. He correctly diagnosed the malaise of the Muslim world, "the sick man of Europe," which was "watching the march of history and science as a bystander." He lamented the fact that Muslims were no longer their own historical determinants. He wished to return to the pristine grace of the Golden Age of early Islam, when Muslim dominance extended from Spain to China, and he chose **verse** as his primary medium.

Iqbal wrote: "The spiritual health of a people largely depends on the kind of inspiration their poets and artists receive." He wished to be the type of poet who imparted solace and hope to his people. Iqbal's own erudition and exposure was remarkable. He earned formal degrees in Literature, Philosophy, Persian Metaphysics & Law having studied in Lahore, Cambridge, Munich and London. It can be said that he was conversant with the whole of scholastic endeavour, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western. In his diary, he even confesses that the poetry of Wordsworth "saved him from atheism in his younger days." He considered himself the intellectual heir of the 12th century Sufi mystic, Rumi, and the 19th century revivalist, Jamaluddin Afghani. He also furthered some of the doctrines and approaches of others: Nietzsche and his idea of the dynamic "Superman," Bergson and the "vitalism of intuition," poetic encounters with "ancient sages" as in Dante's Divine Comedy; and the search for "theosophic knowledge" in Goethe's Faust. Thus one can see Iqbal's eclectic & confluent nature, harvesting wisdom wherever it flourishes. In one poem, Iqbal recounts a chance meeting in Paradise between Rumi and Goethe who are discussing the artistic merits of "Faust." Thus the profundity of Iqbal's scholarship is evident and

Whoever is saved from the

one credits him with a knowledge of men, manners & the flow of history. **His thoughts are all the more significant as they represent an immense studied synthesis.**

To survey Iqbal's warning about Western society, one can turn to his poem "The Devil's Conference." This Faustian parable is set at a symposium of the Arch-Devil Satan, and his Advisory Counselors, who are recounting how they beguiled man from a life of faith. The Arch-Devil opens: "This ancient game of mere elements, this lowly world...The Lord today towards its destruction is inclined...I inspired in the European the dream of Imperialism...I broke the spell of the Mosque, the Temple and the Church...I taught the poor the cult of Fate...And to the wealthy I gave the craze of capitalism..." The tone is one of achieved conspiracy and the four methods used Imperialism, the Spell of the Mosque, Destiny & Capitalism can serve as a departure point for analysis.

As early Muslims boasted of ridding the world of ancient pagan gods, Iqbal similarly wished to smash modern idols. According to Iqbal, the "chief echo of paganism" in modern times is **wealth**. He believes that Western materialism is crass, myopic, pleasure seeking and repugnant. He has misgivings about a society in which the "buildings of banks, hotels, restaurants & casinos outsoar the Houses of God" and that capitalism becomes the creed of the believer. People no longer live by an ideal, but only for raw acquisition, for unbounded luxury, and this has eroded their fundamental dignity: **"Annihilation of man is the business of modern civilization, and the cloak it uses is trade."**

Iqbal believes that the capital-driven person indulges only their pure reason, conceit & pleasure and thus betrays their essential spiritual & moral impulses. This has been accomplished not merely by territorial imperialism but also intellectual enslavement. Iqbal believes that the "dazzling exterior" of the West has seduced the younger Muslim generation. He blames the modern educational system, which produces time-serving imitative economic citizens & not visionary idealist progressive leaders. He believes that "eaglets have been taught the lesson of earthliness." **The young think only of present diversion, luxury & amusement.** "Your sofas are from Europe, your fine carpets from

Iran...My eyes weep when I see such pampered ways among young people."

In a striking couplet, Iqbal asserts that modern education is such a deliberate criminal instrument that he believes it to be worse than wholesale murder, since it robs the best essence of a generation. "Pharaoh would **not** have earned notoriety for infanticide...had the idea of setting up a college crossed his mind." The curriculum at Pharaoh's college would have concentrated on hedonist ephemeral animal pleasures and would have earned Iqbal's wrath.

Iqbal recognized the fine balance between the concern for the afterlife, for man's final accountability before God, and actual retirement from present life. He laments the fatalist tendency of the East to recede from this world in order to better secure grace for the next. He believes this pacifying effect is largely due to the influence of Persian mystical thought. Consider the much lauded 11<sup>th</sup> century *Rubiyat* of Omar Khayyam: "Tis all a chequer-board of nights and days, where destiny with men for pieces plays; hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays. And one by one back in the closet lays."

In the Devil's conference, the Arch-Devil boasts about having taught the world's poor the "Cult of Fate," to obediently accept their lot, and to blindly live out their "destiny." Satan's final address ends the conspiratorial symposium: "Better if this Islamic Law be kept hidden from the world's eye...Better the Believer remains busy and entangled in Metaphysical Theology...Keep the Believer for good a stranger to the world of action, so that all his pawns be beaten on Life's chess board."

The board-game analogy appearing in both poems is significant: instead of being active, autonomous players in the "game of life," people are taught to be mere cogs, work-pieces, easily manipulated and finally discarded. In concrete terms, this means people are taught to willingly accept Western domination of territory and mind; to disavow the progressive sciences; to shun

Quran 64:16

**Greediness**

of their souls, these are the successful.