

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTER-FAITH HARMONY

By

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Islam is essentially the law of things. The Qur'an spells out the primordial identity of Man. Man belongs to a single soul or 'nafs i wahida'. The primordial unity of mankind got ruptured in the history of man, when humanity got divided between the traditional and the profane worlds with all their respective variations. It is this great divide since times immemorial, which continues into the modern and the post- modern world.

The traditional world gives a metaphysical meaning to the word tradition, which has its roots in the Latin tradere meaning "that, which is transmitted." It can be both oral and written. In its ordinary sense, tradition stands for customs, beliefs and conventions inherited from the past. But, in its higher sense, it is attached to a doctrine belonging to an intellectual order. The doctrine may be metaphysical or religious or a combination of both. The social institutions of a traditional society are effectively attached to a traditional doctrine. The traditional world is constitutive of all the great traditions and religions of the world including Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It is pertinent to note that all the traditional societies are attached to the principles of the superior order. The traditional world essentially constitutes all those who accept the Reality beyond the sensible world and

beyond the ordinary senses within the self of man. This world includes the Prophets, Metaphysicians, Religious philosophers and Mystics. Metaphysics essentially characterizes the traditional world. It goes beyond the sensible realm both within man and outside him. The profane world by rejecting the metaphysical principles of the traditional world assumes self subsistence, independence and autonomy. It does not accept any reality beyond the sensible world or beyond the empirical reality of the self. This world is constituted by Atheists and Agnostics. Such an epistemological (science of knowledge) and ontological (science of being) divide has been in all ages and in all countries and is continuing in the unforeseen future. Iqbal addresses the predicament of the modern man in these verses:

ماہر نفسیات سے

جرات ہے تو افکار کی دنیا سے گزر جا ہیں بحر خودی میں ابھی پوشیدہ جزیرے
کھلتے نہیں اس قلمزم خاموش کے اسرار جب تک تو اسے ضرب کلیسی سے نہ چیرے

فلسفی

بلند بال تھا لیکن نہ تھا جسور و غیور حکیم سر محبت سے بے نصیب رہا!
پھر افضاؤں میں کر گس اگر چہ شاہیں دار شکار زندہ کی لذت سے بے نصیب رہا!
نہ دیا نشان منزل مجھے اے حکیم تو نے مجھے کیا گلہ ہو تجھ سے تو نہ رہ نشیں۔ نہ راہی
اگر ہوتا ہے وہ مجذوب فرنگی اس زمانے میں تو اقبال اس کو سمجھتا مقام کبریا کیا ہے!

Broadly speaking, both the traditional and the modern worlds are not only opposed to each other but they have also developed contradictions within themselves. However, the nature of their contradictions is qualitatively different from each other. The traditional world in spite of all outward differences is united from within by virtue of the metaphysical principle of unity in diversity. This is the golden principle of inter-faith harmony. Schuon's idea of the Transcendent Unity of Religions points to this metaphysical truth. The modern or the post-modern world, on the other hand, lacks any such principle of unity. The post-modernist movement rather boasts in having got rid of absolutes, 'imposed unities of meta-narrative and hegemony.'

Metaphysics and religion are intimately linked with each other. With the induction of the religious element, the truths of pure metaphysics get manifested in the form of traditional metaphysics. Philosophy of Religion

has analyzed a number of definitions of religion but has brought out the limitations of each definition in defining religion. The definitions are deficient since they do not convey the whole concept of religion. Certain thinkers have also pointed out that since religion deals with the unlimited therefore, in principle, it cannot be defined. The literal meaning of religion from the Latin word is to bind and it has been generally understood as 'binding man to God through revelation'. Some of the thinkers do not consider Islam as a religion but prefer to call it 'Din' or way. But there arise a number of difficulties for the word din is neutral. It does not point to the straightness or crookedness of the way. The Prophet of Islam is enjoined to say in Surah Al-Kafirun سورة الكافرون ﴿لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ﴾¹ 'Unto you, your 'din', and unto me, my din'. Thus, the Qur'an uses the category din i Islam or Islamic tradition to qualify the neutral sense of the term 'din'. One has to essentially understand that Islam being the law of things is a universal tradition that not only binds man to God through revelation but it also binds man to his historical consciousness in a spirit of openness. In order to understand this point in fullness one has to take guidance from the Prophet of Islam who brought the most creative transformation of a society in the cultural history of the world. He was himself rooted in the Arabian culture manifesting a rich cultural heritage. Arabic language stood for a high level of cultural expression. The Prophet let those cultural elements remain intact which were in consonance with the Spirit of Islam or the Law of things. The Arabs accepted the Qur'anic epistemology and ontology by appropriating the same in their cultural soil. The Arabian cultural identity was thus, creatively transformed into a higher form. History stands witness to the fact that the Arabian society demonstrated a great vitality in absorbing the greatest cultural change within its bosom and flowered with such creativity, beauty and majesty.

Islam is itself one of the greatest civilizations of the world. The most unique feature of the Muslim civilization has been its capacity and strength to absorb the universal elements of different civilizations including the Byzantine and Persian and intertwine them into its doctrine

¹ - Sura Al Kafiroom 6

of 'tawhid' or unity of God. A study of this process of transformation or continuity clearly spells out the vitality of Islam as a universal tradition and its ability to creatively assimilate different points of views and different levels of reality, without falling into the error of imitation. Thus, the Islamic Tradition or the Islamic civilization is essentially tied to the basic doctrine of 'tawhid' or unity of God. It is not windowless but has appropriated true elements of different civilizations and cultures, which have been in consonance with its essential doctrines. In short, Islam legitimizes many a cultural forms and retains them for the development of an integral vision. Iqbal expresses the views of Horton in these words: "The Muslim has always adjusted his religious outlook to the elements of culture which he assimilated from the people that surrounded him. From 800 to 1100, says Horton, not less than one hundred systems of theology appeared in Islam, a fact which bears ample testimony to the elasticity of Islamic thought as well as to the ceaseless activity of our early thinkers. Thus, in view of the revelations of a deeper study of Muslim literature, and thought, this living European Orientalist has been driven to the following conclusion: 'The spirit of Islam is so broad that it is practically boundless. With the exception of atheistic ideas alone it has assimilated all the attainable ideas of surrounding people, and given them its own peculiar direction of development'." (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam)

Islamic civilization, by keeping its original vision intact, has made everlasting contributions in the avenues of human thought. It has produced theologians, philosophers, jurists, Sufis etc in different epochs and countries who have contributed their share in the enrichment of the civilization of Islam. The early Muslim theology started with the Mu'tazilites who called themselves 'the People of Unity and Justice'. Mutazilism was the first Rationalist movement in the world of Islam. Asharism tried to maintain a middle course between the dogmatists and the rationalists. There arose a number of theological schools including Tahawism, Maturidism, Zahirism and Ikhwan al Safa or the Brethren of Purity. The Muslim philosophers including Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Miskawaih, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Tufayle, Ibn Rushd and Nasir al Din Tusi

discussed a number of theological and philosophical problems. They, among other things, tried to reconcile philosophy and religion. Al –Ghazali criticized the Rationalist thinkers on almost all points from his theological position. Iqbal too has been critical of the scholastic theology of the Mutazilites and the philosophical thought of these Muslim philosophers who were highly influenced by Greek thought. He says that “that while Greek philosophy very much broadened the outlook of Muslim thinkers, it on the whole, obscured their vision of the Qur’an” (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam). He further says that it took them much time to realize that the spirit of the Qur’an was anti-classical and could not afford to remain tied to the theory at the expense of concrete facts or concrete experience. This debate that forms an important part of our intellectual heritage also suggests that in the process of assimilation, certain things like the purely speculative method of the Greeks could not become part and parcel of Islamic civilization as such. This is the reason that after al-Ghazali’s intellectual onslaught, such Rationalist movement never re-emerged and it amounted to an end of philosophy in the world of Islam though a voice here and there remained audible. It is pertinent to observe that the later Muslim thinkers revolted against Greek philosophy in almost all departments of thought and made creative contributions in their respective fields including the tradition of philosophy or ‘hikmat’ but the fact remains that the negative impact of the theological polemics against the Rationalists left the Sunni world poorly dogmatic. The predominantly Sunni society started losing the track of even rational argumentation. The tool of ‘taqlid’ further constricted the mind set of the votaries. However, this negative impact was not visible in the Persian world. The Persian world is maintaining a powerful tradition of philosophy in different forms including great names like Shibab al-Din Suharwardy Maqtul, Sadr al-Din Shirzi (Mulla Sadra), Haji Mulla Hadi Sabzwari and it is strengthening the tradition of philosophy. An uncritical acceptance of the past, a narrow minded attitude and a non-reflective approach towards ones religion generally brought religious intolerance in the Sunni world. It became an ideal ground for fanning bigotry, ethnicity and sectarianism. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Abduh etc in our

times tried to integrate religion, philosophy and science but the spirit of conservatism did not allow the Muslim society to fully emancipate itself in the true spirit of Islam.

The Muslim society has lagged far behind in the attainment of knowledge both of the traditional and the modern world in spite of the fact that the Primordial tradition of Islam assigns a pivotal position to knowledge in the scheme of things. The Prophet of Islam prayed: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge. He further prayed: God bestow upon me the knowledge of the ultimate nature of things. Islam lays primary stress on knowledge with its tools of thinking, reflection meditation and inspiration. It wants that even its votaries should reflectively accept its message with an open mind and not in the spirit of deafness or blindness. The Qur'an says: "And who, whenever they are reminded of their Sustainer's messages, do not throw themselves upon them (as if) deaf and blind"¹ The Qur'anic message is that each and every person should reflect on the Signs of God within his own self and in the cosmos in a spirit of openness. It is exceedingly imperative to regenerate a rational understanding of religion in the true spirit of Islam. The process of thinking has to be intensified in our times. We must seek knowledge in order to understand our vocation in the contemporary world. There are innumerable modern challenges to Islam. How can we face these modern challenges, unless we know the nature of those challenges at the intellectual level?

Another Islamic perspective of religious tolerance or openness was provided by jurisprudence. The jurists have played a significant role in the development of Islamic law and in the process there have emerged different schools of jurisprudence. The creative works of the jurists including the four reputed mujtahids or the four imams namely: Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Al Shafi, Imam Malik and Imam Ahmad Hanbal have shown that the Islamic law is dynamic and not stationary. Many

¹ 25:73 (The Message of the Qur'an translated and explained by Muhammad Asad).

substantive and methodological questions were debated pertaining to the sources and extent of Islamic law: the Qur'an, the Hadis, the Ijma إجماع and the Qi'as قياس. But no school claimed finality and the door of Ijtihad اجتihad remained open. But with the passage of times the door was closed and stringent conditions were attached to it. People were asked to do 'taqlid' تقلید of these schools only. However, ibn Taimiyah ابن تيمية revolted against the finality of schools and declared his individual freedom of Ijtihad اجتihad. But he kept the conservative spirit intact and thereby did not take his premises to their logical conclusions. Iqbal says: "The assimilative spirit of Islam is even more manifest in the sphere of law, says Professor Hurgronje - the Dutch critic of Islam: 'When we read the history of the development of Mohammedan Law we find that, on the one hand, the doctors of every age, on the slightest stimulus, condemn one another to the point of mutual accusations of heresy; and, on the other hand, the very same people, with greater and greater unity of purpose, try to reconcile the similar quarrels of their predecessors.'" (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam) The requirement of our times is that the unity of purpose may never be lost sight of and the process of reconciliation must continue with spirit of earnestness. We have to realize that the Qur'an is undated but it has been revealed in time. Its timeless and spaceless truths are manifested in time and space respectively. Each age and every generation is authorized to take its direct inspiration from the Qur'an. Our juristic past can always act as a guide but it is not supposed to hamper the process of finding solutions to the problems being faced by the Muslim communities in different parts of the world. We have to integrate the elements of permanence and change in our religious life. The younger generation cannot wait for the settling of the conditions of Ijtihad اجتihad by the Ulema علماء. It feels that its space is being constricted by undue restrictions in the name of the glorious past. They want answers to the problems being faced by them now. If we do not assist them today, then tomorrow like rolling rivers, they may find their own courses.

The most vital Islamic perspective of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony has been provided by Sufism. Sufis have taught that the Islamic religious life is not static but is spiritually dynamic. The climax of religious life is when faith or 'iman' is transformed into inner certainty. If

the religious behaviour remains tied to the stage of faith and does not move higher to the stage of rational understanding then it tends to become ritualistic, delimited and constricted in its approach leading to religious intolerance and inter-faith disharmony. He is critical of the clerics who remain content with the outward without delving deep into the spirit of the law. He says:

رگوں میں وہ لہو باقی نہیں ہے !	وہ دل وہ آرزو باقی نہیں ہے !
نماز و روزہ و قربانی و حج	یہ سب باقی ہے تو باقی نہیں ہے !
کوئی یہ پوچھے کہ واعظ کا کیا بگڑتا ہے	جو بے عمل پہ بھی رحمت وہ بے نیاز کر !
عجب واعظ کی ددینداری ہے یارب	عداوت ہے اسے سارے جہاں سے
غرو زہد نے سکھلا دیا ہے واعظ کو	کہ بندگان خدا پر زباں دراز کرے
ترا تن روح سے نا آشنا ہے	عجب کیا آہ تیری نارسا ہے
تن بے روح سے بیزار حق	خدائے زندہ زندوں کا خدا ہے
میں جانتا ہوں جماعت کا حشر کیا ہوگا	مسائل نظری میں الجھ گیا خطیب

Sufism has demonstrated the possibility of man becoming himself as a personal witness to Truth. There are prospects of experiencing God, for in the words of Iqbal, complete displacement of emotion with reason is neither possible nor desirable. However, there is a constant strife between reason (aql) and intuition (ishq), which has been brought out by Iqbal in his poem 'aql o dil' whereby he highlights the role of each in the scheme of things. He says:

عقل نے ایک دن یہ دل سے کہا	بھولے بھٹکے کی رہنما ہوں میں
ہوں زمیں پر گنڈر فلگ پہ میرا	دیکھ تو کس قدر رسا ہوں میں
ہوں مفسر کتاب ہستی کی	مظہر شان کبریا ہوں میں
بوند اک خون کی ہے تو لیکن	غیر ت لعل بے بہا ہوں میں
دل نے سن کہا یہ سب سچ ہے	پر مجھے بھی تو دیکھ کیا ہوں میں

راز ہستی کو تو سمجھتی ہے	اور آنکھوں سے دیکھتا ہوں میں !
ہے تجھے واسطہ مظاہر سے	اور باطن سے آشنا ہوں میں
علم تجھ سے تو معرفت مجھ سے	تو خدا جو خدا نما ہوں میں
علم کی انتہاء ہے بے تابی	اس مرض کی مگردوا ہوں میں
شمع تو محفل صداقت کی	محسن آ کی بزم کا دیا ہوں میں
کس بلندی پہ ہے مقام مرا	عرش رب جلیل کا ہوں میں

He points toward a direct contact with God, which is the ultimate of religious life. He says:

ترے عشق کی انتہا چاہتا ہوں	مری سادگی دیکھ لیا چاہتا ہوں
یہ جنت مبارک رہے زاہدوں کو	کہ میں آپ کا سامنا چاہتا ہوں

The difference between knowing and seeing is brought about by Iqbal thus: "When the mystic Sultan Abu Sa'īd met the philosopher Abu Ali Ibn Sina, he is reported to have said: I see that he knows".

Sufism has regenerated knowledge and love in many ages and countries. The Sufi tradition has integrated Shariat and Tariqat, Haqiqat and 'Marifat' in a single unified whole. There have emerged a number of 'Silsilahs' or Sufi orders in the realm of Islamic spirituality in the Muslim world including the famous Qadariyah قادریہ , Chistia شستہ , Suharwardiyah سہروردیہ and Naqshbandia نقشبندیہ orders. There is Shadiliyah and North African Sufism, the school of Ibn Arabi, Najm al Din Kubra and Central Asian school of Sufism, Rumi and the Mawlawiyyah order. The tradition of Sufism has ushered in Egypt and the Arab East, Persia, Turkey, Africa, the Malay Indonesian world and in the Indian sub continent.¹ We have a very strong Sufi tradition in our part of the world, which is intimately linked with different shades of Pakistani culture. It has openness towards all and closure towards none. The Sufis including Baba Farid, Waris Shah, Baba Bulleh Shah, Madho Lal Hussain, Sultan Bahu, Mian Muhammad Baksh, Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Shah Abdul Latif Bhatia, Sachal Sarmast, Lal

¹ -Islamic Spirituality edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Shahbaz Qalandar, Rehman Baba, Baba Saidu and Baba Tajal belonging to different ages and areas of our country have essentially communicated the primordial lesson of universal love, wisdom and truth to the common man. Their teachings of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony have been proverbial. They have wholeheartedly accepted the right of the minorities, for example, to accelerate their cultural development and freely initiate their religious and cultural undertakings in line with their own world-view.

The Sufi tradition is founded on eternal, universal and permanent principles without excluding the elements of temporality, individuality and change respectively for such exclusion is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, it is in the creative syntheses of these elements that the spirit of Sufi tradition can be seen at its best. They have realized the metaphysics of beauty, love and truth. They have contributed a lot in the fields of literature, art and culture. The Sufi impact is manifest in various fields including folk-arts, folk-culture and folklore. The Sufis have transmitted to us a rich spiritual cultural heritage, which is the living and creative reality of our every day lives. We live in this spiritual ambience. They have made an inestimable contribution in expanding our cultural space. The Sufis have shown the way to real freedom, equality and human solidarity by rebelling against all attempts to constrict religious, cultural or social spaces. They have brought home the fact that it is the breadth of human spaciousness, which can make us creatively interact with each other and it is our vocation to expand our human space so that people have a spiritual feeling of oneness. They have made us remember the forgotten truth of human respect and reverence. It is the essential principle for holding respect for one self and others. They have striven for a free and just human society by genuinely practicing the higher values of life permeated by the universal principle of love. The vigor of a society is measured in proportion to its responsiveness to the needs of the common man. We need to be highly committed about alleviating the sufferings of humanity. Islamic tradition teaches us that it is by sharing the sufferings of people that we tend to serve Allah. But this primordial vision can only be realized when our religiosity gets transformed into spirituality.

However, there is a need to purge the Sufi tradition of certain negative elements, which have slowly crept into its body of theory and

practice. Iqbal laments at its being reduced to a life denying attitude insensitive to the needs of the modern mentality. He says:

رہا نہ حلقہ صوفی میں سوز مشاقی فسانے ہائے کرامات رہ گئے باقی
مکتبوں میں کہیں رعنائی افکار بھی ہے؟ خانقاہوں میں کہیں لذت اسرار بھی ہے؟
محکوم کو پیروں کی کرامات کا سودا ہے بندہ آزاد خود اک زندہ کرامات!
اک فقر سے قوموں میں مسکینی و لگیری اک فقر سے مٹی میں خاصیت اکسیری
اک فقر ہے شبیری اس فقر میں ہے میری
میراث مسلمانی سرمایہ اشبیری
صوفی کی طریقت میں فقط مستی احوال ملا کی شریعت میں فقط مستی گفتار
وہ مرد مجاہد نظر آتا نہیں مجھ کو ہو جس کے رگ و پے میں فقط مستی کردار
اٹھا میں مدرسہ و خانقاہوں سے غمناک
نہ زندگی، نہ محبت، نہ معرفت، نہ نگاہ
یہ معاملے ہیں نازک جو تیری رضا ہو تو کر
کہ مجھے تو خوش نہ آیا یہ طریق خانقائی

The Muslim society is increasingly becoming militant, which is constricting the space of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony. The militant element especially exhibited these days in the world of Islam is an alien plant and has not grown from the bosom of Islam. The Qur'an primarily addresses the humanity. It is the obliviousness of this fact which has given rise to a number of misunderstandings about Islam. The principle of 'jihad', for example, essentially is a universal right of self defense and not a tool of offence, violence or oppression. It is simply a right not only for the Muslims but its spirit is applicable to the whole of mankind. It can be understood in the perspective of the teaching of Christianity, which says that if a person smites you on your right cheek, you turn the left. In other words, Christianity teaches that one should not

resist aggression. Islam rises above this teaching and gives a right of self defense to each and every individual and community against aggression, so much so that even if two groups of Muslims clash with each other, says the Qur'an, then efforts be made for their reconciliation but if one of the group resorts to aggression, then the whole community must fight against it. It is in fact a principle of countering aggression. Thus, the principle of 'jihad' never means coercing an individual or a community to accept Islam. It simply means defending oneself from internal or external aggression. The Qur'an says that those who have been oppressed have a right to defend themselves against one another. If this right is not granted then it would lead to the ravaging of monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the name of God is abundantly celebrated. It will also lead to disequilibrium in society. Thus, the universal principle of 'jihad' does not leave room for any one to commit excesses against the other within one's own faith or outside it. We must also remember that the Prophet is reported to have said that the greater 'jihad' is against the insinuations of one's lower self.

Tolerating the religious views and practices of others that are different from one's own tradition and finding commonalities rather than differences in the view point of the other is the true spirit of Islam. The Qur'an teaches tolerance by stating the universal principle that there has to be no coercion in religion. "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from (the way of) error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing" ¹The principle of freedom in religion closes all doors of coercive measures to spread the religious message within and outside Islam. It prohibits the thrusting of truth on any one. It does not legitimize inducement or threat in preaching even truth. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives religious freedom to every citizen of the state including the minorities.

¹:2:256 (The Message of the Qur'an translated and explained by Muhammad Asad.

The process of unveiling truth requires a very careful handling. An aggressive handling of the subject makes the mind of the other unreceptive in proportion to the magnitude of aggressiveness. It makes the other person react by resorting to different psychological defense mechanisms, which become obstacles to authentic communication. The Qur'an has recorded the decent modes of argumentation adopted by the Prophets against the outrageous discourses of their adversaries. The Prophets have not reacted even against so many aspersions cast against them. They have countered the allegations with dignity, poise and composure. They have continued showing light against the heated arguments of their deadliest enemies. Thus, the Qur'an enjoins man to discourse on religion in the most decent manner, to speak in the most kindly way, call to the Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, exercise patience in adversity and repel evil with good. The one who repels evil with good will certainly find the other person being transformed from a deadly enemy to one's bosom friend says the Qur'an.

Metaphysically speaking, righteousness is ingrained in the ultimate nature of things. But there are different shades of rightness, which may sometimes come in conflict with each other. Blind adherence to the two valued Aristotelian logic of right and wrong is one of the foremost causes of religious intolerance and inter-faith disharmony in our society. The two valued logic is not universal. It leaves so many shades of rightness due to its delimited approach. There are shades of rightness and they can also confront each other. The greatest sectarian divide, for example, in the Muslim world has been between the Shia and the Sunni. An uncritical acceptance of the exaggerated narrations on both sides, among other things, has complicated the issue. The early confrontation between the Household of the Prophet and his foremost Companions was not a conflict between right and wrong but it was an open conflict between different shades of rightness. It was such a unique event in the history of Islam that it has no parallels. I will quote at length the apt observations of Schuon in this context: "Islam has an essential political dimension which was foreign to primitive Christianity and which Christianity as a state religion knows only as a profane appendage. Now political activity is

divisive by its very nature, because of the diversity of possible solutions to any problem and because of the diversity of individual qualifications. The Companions of the Prophet were therefore divided by the force of circumstances, and what was at stake was nothing else than the final and lasting victory of Islam. They lived side-by-side like closed systems, somewhat as different religious perspectives exist side-by-side without understanding each other. Each identified himself, in his very being, with his own intuitions of what was right and efficacious....each enclosed himself in his own view point with holy obstinacy, if one may so describe it, rigidity of attitude being the result of sincerity.

"The drama of the Companions is, in sum, the drama of human subjectivity: there would be no problem if there were only the good and the bad, but the great paradox is the existence of the good who differ to the point of not being able to understand each other, and who differ not so much by nature as in terms of situation and vocation. The great epic poems, such as the Iliad or the Song of the Nibelungs, show in all their tragic grandeur this intertwining of temperaments, positions, responsibilities and destinies: combat outwardly, in the current of forms, but unity within, in the unchanging quest for the Light which liberates....It is not their passions that clash but their good intentions, inspired by a totalitarian mentality always ready to deal in terms of irreducible alternatives".

"In the intertwining of destinies which concerns us here, there is the strange case of Fatima.....Herein is the whole drama of a celestial soul predestined to be the martyr of terrestrial life. Here abasement is, as it were, the shadow cast by her spiritual elevation, human individuals appearing in her destiny as the cosmic instruments of her painful alchemy.

"So far as Fatima is concerned, the attachment of this saint to her father clashed, after his death, with the inflexibility of the first Caliph who refused her certain elementary favours in strict adherence to Islamic principles which, in reality, could have been interpreted more broadly in her case; but it was the destiny of Fatima to be deprived of the consolations of this lower world.

Clearly there could have been no malice on Abu Bakr's part towards anyone, least of all Fatima—he was prepared to grant the inheritance provided a direct witness to the tradition authorizing it were forthcoming—but he was obliged by Providence to play a negative role, in a quite outward sense, in relation to that personification of unearthly light that was Fatima. He had to assume this role contingently on the material level and by virtue of his quite extrinsic function as the guardian of legal principles or of legality in the abstract. The affair of the inheritance refused to Fatima exemplifies the dilemma, or conflict, between a principal obstruction and a concrete case that falls outside its orbit¹. The perspective presented by Schuon gives us an opportunity to have a fresh look at our early Islamic history. We need creative paradigms for forging unity amongst divergent view points.

To conclude, Islamic tradition portrays genuine concern for humanity. It clearly spells out its vitality to manifest openness and reverence to different shades of its own tradition, along with other metaphysical and religious traditions of the world, and remains committed to the metaphysical principle of unity in diversity.

¹ - Islam and the Perennial Philosophy