



## Iqbal's Philosophy of Unity: A Study of Tawhid

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of Tawhid (Unified reality) stands at the heart of Islamic philosophy, theology, and spirituality. For Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Tawhid is not merely a metaphysical principle affirming the Oneness of God, but a dynamic and unifying force that shapes the individual self (Khudi), society, and the entire cosmos. In Iqbal's view, Tawhid represents the unity of existence, consciousness, and purpose, forming the foundation of both intellectual and moral life. This paper explores Iqbal's philosophical interpretation of Tawhid as the core of his metaphysical and ethical vision. It examines how Tawhid manifests through his reconstruction of religious thought, his rejection of fatalism, and his call for human creativity and self-realization. By integrating reason, faith, and experience, Iqbal redefines Tawhid as a principle of spiritual freedom and universal harmony. The study concludes that Iqbal's philosophy of unity provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relation between God, man, and the universe in contemporary Islamic thought.

### 1. Introduction

The concept of *Tawhid*, the Oneness and Unity of God forms the very foundation of Islamic tradition.. In the Qur'an, *Tawhid* represents the essence of divine reality and the ultimate principle of all existence. It asserts that there is only one ultimate reality that is *Allah*. All multiplicity, diversity, and changes are unified in His eternal will and creative command. Within this framework, everything in the



universe is interconnected, not as an accidental collection of parts, but as a manifestation of a single divine source.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the poet-philosopher of the East, reinterpreted the Islamic concept of *Tawhid* in the light of modern philosophical thought. His intellectual mission was to reconstruct Islamic philosophy so that it could respond meaningfully to the spiritual and intellectual crises of the modern age. For Iqbal, *Tawhid* was not a static dogma, but a dynamic and living principle that governs the entire formation of reality. Through *Tawhid*, he sought to bridge the gulf between faith and reason, religion and science, and individual and community.

Iqbal's interpretation of *Tawhid* cannot be understood apart from his engagement with both Islamic mysticism and Western philosophy. He was deeply influenced by classical Sufism, especially the metaphysical doctrines of Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi, and Al-Ghazali, but he reinterpreted them in light of modern thought.

He also studied Western philosophers like Bergson, Kant, Nietzsche, and Hegel, whose ideas of evolution, intuition, and creative will enriched his conception of the dynamic unity of being. While Western philosophy often emphasized rational analysis and individuality, Iqbal synthesized these insights with the Islamic notion of divine unity. In his analysis, the universe is the unfolding of Divine Energy, and human consciousness is its self-revelation at the highest level. Thus, to understand oneself truly is to realize the divine within. Iqbal writes, "The life of the universe is the life of God who, through His creative will, is constantly realizing Himself in the multiplicity of forms." (*Iqbal, Reconstruction, p. 67*)

## 2. Methodology Used

The research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach based on textual interpretation of Iqbal's major works such as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, *Asrar-e-Khudi*, *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*, and his poetry collections. Secondary sources include scholarly commentaries, journal articles, and books like *M. M. Sharif's "About Iqbal and His Thought"* and *Fazlur Rahman's "Islam and Modernity"*. By combining philosophical analysis with contextual interpretation, the study aims to show how Iqbal's concept of *Tawhid* offers a holistic vision of reality, integrating metaphysics, ethics, and social philosophy.

## 3. Hypothesis



The central hypothesis of this research is that Iqbal's entire philosophical system revolves around the principle of *Tawhid*, which he interprets as both a metaphysical truth and a moral imperative. For Iqbal, *Tawhid* is not simply belief in one God; it is the unity of being, knowing, and acting. The individual realizes this unity through creative self-affirmation and moral struggle in harmony with the divine will. Iqbal's *Tawhid* thus transcends mere theological affirmation and becomes a principle of existential integration, synthesizing intellect, intuition, and action.

#### 4. Literature Review

A number of scholars have examined Iqbal's concept of unity. *M.M. Sharif* (1964) interprets Iqbal's metaphysics as "a philosophy of dynamic monotheism," while *Annemarie Schimmel* (1989) in *Gabriel's Wing* describes *Tawhid* in Iqbal as "the rhythm of divine creativity." *Fazlur Rahman* (1962) considers Iqbal's notion of divine unity as an attempt to re-establish harmony between reason and revelation. Despite these contributions, there remains a need to examine how Iqbal's *Tawhid* provides a bridge between metaphysical unity and ethical selfhood - a focus that this paper seeks to address.

#### 5. The Concept of Tawhid in Islamic Thought

The doctrine of *Tawhid*, or the Unity of God, stands at the heart of Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism. It forms the very foundation upon which the entire structure of Islam rests. The Qur'an declares, "Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." (*Surah Al-Ikhlās*, 112:1–4) This brief yet profound chapter encapsulates the essence of Islamic metaphysics, ethics, and spirituality. Every aspect of Islamic belief, worship, morality, and social organization finds its meaning in the principle of *Tawhid*. It signifies not only the oneness of God but also the unity and coherence of all existence under His divine command. The universe, in all its diversity, is bound by one creative will that sustains and governs it.

Etymologically, *Tawhid* means "to make one" or "to affirm unity." Philosophically, it proclaims that God alone is the self-subsistent reality (*al-Haqq*), the source and ground of all existence. Nothing possesses independent being apart from Him. In this sense, *Tawhid* implies both the unity of being and the unity of knowledge. Muslim philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) interpreted this doctrine in metaphysical terms, identifying God as the Necessary Being (*Wajib al-Wujud*). Al-Farabi described the universe as an emanation from the One, where multiplicity flows from unity without diminishing it. Ibn Sina explained, "The Necessary Being is One, for if there were two necessary beings, there would have to be a differentiating factor, which would make



one dependent upon the other, contradicting necessity.” Through such reasoning, classical Islamic philosophy sought to express the absolute unity and self-sufficiency of God.

Theologians, too, elaborated the doctrine from different perspectives. The Ash‘arites emphasized *tanzīh*, the complete transcendence of God, asserting that He is utterly beyond human likeness or limitation. The Mu‘tazilites, in contrast, stressed the rational and moral unity of God, grounding Tawhid in divine justice and consistency. These schools, though differing in method, contributed to the intellectual articulation of Tawhid as a principle reconciling faith and reason.

In the mystical tradition, Tawhid attains an even deeper and more experiential dimension. For the Sufis, divine unity is not merely a doctrine to be affirmed but a truth to be realized through spiritual experience (*ma‘rifah*). The mystic, through inner purification, comes to perceive that all existence is a reflection of one divine reality. Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240) formulated this vision as *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, the Unity of Being, declaring, “There is only one Being, and all other beings are its modes, shadows, or reflections.” This does not mean that God and the world are identical but that the existence of all things is entirely dependent upon God. The Sufi realizes Tawhid not by denying the world but by perceiving the divine presence within it. Jalal al-Din Rumi beautifully conveys this idea: “The lamps are many, but the Light is one; it comes from beyond.” For Rumi, love (*ishq*) is the power through which the human soul perceives divine unity. Through love, the seeker transcends the illusion of separateness and attains oneness with the Beloved.

Thus, in Islamic thought, Tawhid is not confined to the affirmation of a single deity; it is the philosophical key to understanding the unity of existence. From the Qur’an’s declaration of divine oneness to the metaphysical systems of philosophers and the experiential insights of the mystics, Tawhid unites the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of Islam. It affirms that all knowledge, power, and being ultimately belong to God, and that human life attains meaning only through participation in this divine unity.

In modern times, Allama Muhammad Iqbal revitalized the concept of Tawhid by interpreting it through the framework of contemporary philosophy and science. For Iqbal, Tawhid is not an abstract dogma but a living, creative principle that shapes both the cosmos and human life. It signifies unity within diversity, harmony between reason and revelation, and balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility. Iqbal saw in Tawhid the metaphysical basis for equality, solidarity, and freedom, the principles that govern not only spiritual life but also social and political order. In this sense, his philosophy represents both a return to the spiritual essence of Islam and a forward-looking vision of



universal unity grounded in divine creativity. Tawhid, therefore, emerges as the eternal truth that binds God, man, and the universe in one coherent and dynamic whole.

## 6. Iqbal's Metaphysical Interpretation of Tawhid

In the philosophy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Tawhid, or the Unity of God, is not merely a theological assertion but the metaphysical foundation of his entire system of thought. Iqbal reinterprets Tawhid in the light of modern philosophy, science, and Islamic mysticism, presenting it as a living and dynamic principle that governs both divine and human existence. For him, the unity of God implies the unity of all reality, a reality that is not static or inert but constantly unfolding through a creative and purposeful process. Unlike classical philosophers who conceived divine unity as a static abstraction, Iqbal understands Tawhid as an active and creative principle operating in the continuous evolution of the cosmos and the moral growth of humanity. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he writes that “The essence of Tawhid as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom. The State, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization.” Here, Iqbal transcends the theological limitation of Tawhid and interprets it as a metaphysical, ethical, and social principle that integrates divine unity with the creative process of the universe.

For Iqbal, the ultimate reality (God) is not a motionless Absolute as conceived by Greek philosophy, nor a mere logical necessity as described by Avicenna. Instead, He is a living, self-revealing, and creative Ego. Iqbal rejects the notion of a static Being and replaces it with the idea of a living Reality that expresses itself through perpetual creative activity. He declares, “The universe is not a thing but an act; the act of creation is a continuous one, an endless movement of divine life.” Thus, Tawhid becomes synonymous with the unity of reality which is understood not as pantheistic identity but as the organic interrelation between God and the world. God is both transcendent and immanent: transcendent because He is independent of the world, and immanent because His creative energy sustains it at every moment. “God’s immanence in the universe,” Iqbal explains, “is not to be understood in the sense of pantheistic identification. He is immanent because the creative energy through which He reveals Himself is present in the universe.” Divine unity therefore manifests itself as a dynamic process of creation, where the world serves as the perpetual self-disclosure of the Divine Ego.

A crucial dimension of Iqbal's metaphysical Tawhid lies in his critique of pantheism. Though deeply influenced by Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Being), Iqbal rejects its static and impersonal interpretation. He argues that pantheism, by dissolving all distinctions into a single



Absolute, denies the reality of human individuality and moral freedom—both of which the Qur'an affirms in its portrayal of man as *Khalifah*, or vicegerent, of God. "The pantheistic doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*," Iqbal observes, "annihilates the ego of man; it reduces the human self to a mere shadow of the Divine Self." In contrast, Iqbal proposes a panentheistic understanding of divine unity, where the world exists within God but is not identical with Him. This conception preserves both divine transcendence and the genuine individuality of finite beings. "The finite ego is real," he writes, "for it is a free creative centre of experience. It is not a mere illusion or a transient mode of the Infinite Self." Thus, Tawhid does not imply numerical singularity but ontological dependence; all beings derive their reality from one living and creative source, which is God.

Central to Iqbal's metaphysics is his concept of Ego (*Khudi*). He conceives both God and man as egos, differing not in kind but in degree. God is the Perfect Ego, the self-sufficient, eternal, and creative. But the human ego is finite, dependent, and in the process of self-realization. "The Ultimate Reality, according to the Qur'an, is spiritual," Iqbal explains, "and its life consists in its temporal activity. The Qur'anic view of the universe is that it is an act of a free, creative self." Iqbal's God, therefore, is personal and self-conscious, not an abstract principle or an impersonal Absolute. His selfhood is the ground of all existence, and His creative act is the continuous unfolding of His being. In this metaphysical framework, Tawhid signifies not just unity of being but unity of purpose, consciousness, and life. The relation between God and the world is analogous to that between a poet and his poetry, the poem manifests the poet's creativity, yet the poet infinitely transcends his creation. Likewise, the world is the self-expression of God, but He remains eternally beyond it.

Iqbal's interpretation of Tawhid carries profound implications for human freedom. Since God is a living and creative Ego, man created possesses the power of self-direction and moral initiative. The unity of God implies a unity of purpose in the universe, but it does not abolish human freedom. On the contrary, it affirms it as an essential reflection of divine creativity. In his celebrated Persian poem *Asrar-e-Khudi* (*The Secrets of the Self*), Iqbal exhorts: "Strengthen your self, and seek your own being; For God Himself asks man to create his destiny." Human selfhood thus becomes a mirror of divine unity. The realization of Tawhid in the human realm occurs when man aligns his will with the Divine Will. True faith, for Iqbal, is not passive submission but active participation in the creative movement of God's universe. Tawhid therefore emerges as an existential and practical principle that endows man with moral responsibility and spiritual freedom.



In the cosmic dimension, Iqbal conceives the universe as an organic whole, animated by the life of God. Multiplicity and diversity in the world do not negate divine unity; rather, they manifest it. He writes, “The world is not a solid stuff occupying a void; it is a ceaseless creative flow of Divine energy.” This vision resonates with modern scientific discoveries in physics, where matter and energy are understood as interchangeable forms of the same reality. Iqbal uses such insights to support his belief in a living universe governed by spiritual rather than mechanical laws. “There is no such thing as dead matter,” he insists. “The whole universe is instinct with life; the world is a living thought of God.” Thus, his metaphysical Tawhid bridges the apparent divide between science and religion by asserting that the unity of God is the ultimate source of the unity of knowledge.

One of Iqbal’s most original contributions to Islamic thought is his attempt to reconcile the two poles of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*). He maintains that God is simultaneously beyond and within the world, transcendent in His essence yet immanent in His creative activity. Citing the Qur’an, Iqbal reminds us that “God is nearer to man than his jugular vein, yet His reality infinitely transcends all the limitations of human thought.” (Qur’an, 50:16) For Iqbal, this duality is not contradictory but complementary: God’s transcendence safeguards His uniqueness, while His immanence ensures His living presence in creation. Tawhid, therefore, represents a dialectical unity that harmonizes divine otherness with divine nearness, eternity with temporality, and freedom with law. Through this dynamic balance, Iqbal avoids both the cold detachment of deism and the impersonal absorption of pantheism.

Creation, according to Iqbal, is not a completed event but an ongoing process, an unceasing act of divine self-revelation. “The act of creation is not an event in the life of God; it is His very life.” This conception transforms Tawhid into a principle of dynamic monism, where God and the universe are intimately linked through the continuous process of becoming. Every moment of existence is a fresh expression of divine creativity. In his Persian work *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, Iqbal captures this idea poetically: “Self exists by virtue of the existence of God, Self manifests by virtue of the manifestation of God.”

Iqbal’s reinterpretation of Tawhid also bridges the gap between reason and revelation, science and faith. He asserts that all genuine knowledge, whether derived from empirical investigation or spiritual intuition, ultimately points to the same reality. “The spirit of Islam,” he writes, “is essentially anti-classical. It rejects the static view of the universe and seeks to understand it as a process.” In this sense, Tawhid serves as the epistemological foundation of Iqbal’s entire philosophical enterprise. It unifies the empirical and the transcendental, integrating scientific inquiry and religious experience under one



principle of divine unity. For Iqbal, knowledge itself is a mode of worship, an act of participating in the self-revelation of the Divine.

## 7. Tawhid and the Concept of Self (Khudi) in Iqbal's Philosophy

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's metaphysical system rests upon the principle of Tawhid, or Divine Unity, which serves as the foundation of his concept of Khudi, meaning selfhood or ego. For Iqbal, Tawhid is not merely a theological declaration that there is no god but God; it is an existential and creative truth that pervades both the cosmos and the human soul. The realization of Tawhid enables the individual to discover his or her divine potential and purpose in the unity of all being. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal states that "the essence of Tawhid is equality, solidarity, and freedom," expressing his conviction that Tawhid functions not only as a metaphysical truth but as a moral and social principle. The self, or Khudi, achieves strength and perfection by aligning itself with the Oneness of God. The human ego, in his view, is not an illusion to be dissolved but a divine trust, a reflection of God's creative will within humanity. As Iqbal writes, "The Ego attains to freedom by discovering the ultimate source of its being in the Infinite Ego." The self thus finds authenticity only in realizing that its true existence depends upon the Ultimate Ego, Allah, and that the realization of Tawhid awakens the self to its divine origin and destiny.

In *Asrar-e-Khudi (Secrets of the Self)*, Iqbal further illustrates that the realization of the self is a gradual unfolding of Tawhid. The self grows in strength through love (*Ishq*) and action (*Amal*), both rooted in Divine Unity. The stronger the Khudi, the nearer one comes to embodying Tawhid. He poetically declares, "Strengthen your self so much that before every decree, God Himself may ask you: what is your desire?" Here, Iqbal presents the self not as passive but as an active participant in Divine creativity. The unity of God empowers the individual to act with purpose, transforming Tawhid from a theological concept into a living spiritual experience. For Iqbal, Tawhid is also an ethical and social force that eliminates divisions of race, nation, and sect, establishing the brotherhood of humanity under one God. He observes that "Islam is not a church. It is a state conceived as a moral ideal in which all human beings are related to one another through the realization of the same moral purpose." To live by Tawhid is to live in harmony with divine law and moral order.

Iqbal's most original contribution lies in his interpretation of Tawhid as the ground of creative freedom. Belief in the Oneness of God, he argues, implies belief in human freedom and creativity, for man is God's vicegerent (*Khalifah*) on earth. In the *Reconstruction*, he explains, "The truth is that God is not a Being that stands outside His creation. He is the ground of all that is real." In affirming Tawhid,



therefore, the individual affirms the unity of all existence and recognizes himself as an active center of divine creativity. Ultimately, Tawhid unites Iqbal's philosophical vision by reconciling transcendental and empirical reality, bridging the gap between God and the world, spirit and matter, self and society. The universe, as he writes, "is not a thing but an act; and the act of creation is still going on." Hence, Tawhid is not a static dogma but a dynamic process, the ever-renewed unity of being and becoming.

In Iqbal's philosophy, Tawhid is both the origin and the goal of existence. It defines the nature of God, the structure of the universe, and the destiny of man. Through the realization of Khudi, the individual transcends fragmentation and participates in the creative unity of God. Tawhid, therefore, is not simply a theological principle but a living existential reality which is the key to understanding God, the world, and the self as aspects of one divine whole.

Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* deepens this understanding by showing how Tawhid serves as the foundation for renewing Islamic philosophy, science, ethics, and society. He begins by asserting that Islamic thought has stagnated and that Tawhid must restore its creative vitality. "The essence of Tawhid as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom," he writes, indicating that the belief in Divine Unity must manifest itself in human life and institutions. Tawhid implies the unity of thought and action, ideal and reality, and thus becomes the metaphysical basis of a just civilization.

For Iqbal, the universe itself reflects this dynamic unity. He rejects the notion of a completed creation and instead envisions reality as an ongoing divine act. "The universe is not a thing but an act; and the act of creation is still going on," he insists. In this view, Tawhid expresses divine immanence and creativity, revealing the world as a continuous manifestation of God's unity. Human beings, participating in this process, must see Tawhid as a call to action and co-creation rather than passive belief.

This dynamic understanding also shapes Iqbal's reinterpretation of *Ijtihad*, independent reasoning. Tawhid, he argues, means that no human authority can monopolize divine truth. The unity of truth demands intellectual freedom and continuous reinterpretation of revelation. "The spirit of Islam is essentially a spirit of movement," he writes. "The only form of permanence in it is the desire to maintain the spirit of change." Hence, Tawhid compels Muslims to reconstruct religious thought in light of new knowledge and circumstances.

In ethics, Tawhid affirms that all moral values originate from the unity and perfection of God. Realizing Tawhid means aligning one's moral will with the divine will. "The moral ideal of man is not



self-negation but self-affirmation; the realization of his self in the infinite,” Iqbal writes in *Asrar-e-Khudi*. The mature self, rooted in divine unity, expresses moral creativity rather than passive conformity.

Socially and politically, Tawhid underlies Iqbal’s concept of a spiritual democracy, a community of equals united by divine purpose. “The Islamic State is not theocracy; it is a spiritual democracy in which every individual is the repository of divine light and guidance,” he maintains. The unity of God thus becomes the model for human unity, and the Islamic polity a moral order founded on justice, equality, and fraternity.

Iqbal even connects Tawhid with the scientific worldview, viewing science as an expression of humanity’s quest to understand the unity and rationality of the cosmos. “The scientific view of nature is only a further development of the Qur’anic view of the unity of all that exists,” he observes, affirming harmony between faith and reason, revelation and inquiry.

Ultimately, the reconstruction Iqbal envisions is a return to the living, dynamic understanding of Tawhid. The decline of the Muslim world, he believes, resulted from losing sight of Tawhid’s intellectual and creative dimensions. To revive Tawhid is to revive the creative spirit of Islam itself. As he concludes, “The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change.” In this sense, Tawhid stands as the beginning and end of Iqbal’s thought, the origin of all existence and the guiding principle of spiritual and intellectual evolution.

## 8. Conclusion:

Iqbal’s metaphysical interpretation of Tawhid stands as one of the most creative contributions to modern Islamic thought. By identifying God as the living, creative Ego, he transforms the static theological notion of divine unity into a dynamic, existential, and cosmic vision. His critique of pantheism safeguards human individuality and moral autonomy, while his affirmation of divine immanence secures an intimate relationship between the Creator and creation. Tawhid, for Iqbal, is not merely a belief but the metaphysical ground of being, the ethical foundation of freedom, and the epistemological key to all knowledge. It unites theology, science, and morality into a single coherent worldview in which God is both the source and goal of all existence. The unity of God, therefore, is reflected in the unity of life, thought, and purpose- a perpetual harmony sustained by the eternal creativity of the Divine.

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