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The Imamate of James: Brother of Jesus, Successor of Christ & Leader of Early Christianity

Every Prophet has had a Legatee (*wasi*) in whom the Light of the Imamate has been firmly set and established with surety, and to whom the knowledge of prophecy has been temporarily entrusted through trusteeship.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 136)

The disciples said to Jesus, 'We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then?' Jesus said to them, 'No matter where you go, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.'

Gospel of Thomas Saying 12

This article illustrates how the historical successor of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of the Children of Israel, was his brother James the Just (Hebrew: Yaakov Tzadik). The evidence for this is drawn from historical sources, including the New Testament, Church Histories, and extra-biblical writings. These sources clearly show that James was the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church, which held authority over the early Jewish Christian communities, and also indicate that Jesus himself appointed James to succeed him. We also explain the theological importance of the succession of James the Just and his family within the Ismaili Muslim theological vision of the hiero-history of Prophethood and Imamate. In Ismaili terminology, James the Just was Jesus' Legatee (*wasi*) and the Imam after him.

1. The Cycles of Prophethood and Imamate

According to the Ismaili conception of the spiritual history of humankind, there have been six Major Prophets – called *Natiqs* – since the beginning of the current 7,000 year Prophetic Cycle: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, [Jesus](#), and [Muhammad](#). They are the “six days” in which God created the heavens and the earth of the World of Religion. Adam was not the first human being, but his period marked the beginning of the Cycle of Veiling (*dawr al-satr*) in which spiritual truths (*haqa'iq*) and esoteric knowledge is veiled by exoteric symbols (*zahir*) and religious law (*shari'ah*). Each Major Prophet brought a divinely-revealed guidance (*tanzil*) – such as the Torah, Gospel, Qur'an – and a religious law. Every Major Prophet was also succeeded by a Legatee (*wasi*) from his own family; this Legatee disclosed the spiritual interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the revealed message and the religious law to the elite of the community. The Legatee was succeeded by a line of Imams from his family and descendants, who interpreted the exoteric and esoteric teachings of the Prophet until the coming of the next major Prophet. The Seventh *Natiq* will be the [Lord of the Resurrection \(*qa'im al-qiyyamah*\)](#), who will unveil the spiritual meaning of all prophetic revelations and laws at the end of Muhammad's era and begin the Seventh Cycle, the Cycle of Resurrection.

Some of the names of the past Legatees can be determined using the Bible and the Qur'an: the Legatee of Adam was his son Seth; the Legatee of Noah was his son Shem; the Legatee of Moses was his brother Aaron; the Legatee of Muhammad was his cousin 'Ali b. Abi Talib. In all cases, the Legatee comes from the family of the Major Prophet. Ismaili writings explain how, after Prophet Abraham, the offices of Prophethood and Imamate continued in the separate lineages of his two sons – Isaac and Ishmael. The Prophethood and the Trustee Imamate (*al-imamah al-mustawda*) were entrusted to Isaac and his descendants. The Trustee Imamate continued among members of the same family as transmitted through brothers, cousins, or

progeny. The Trustee Imams after Isaac included: Jacob, Joseph, Jethro, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the Israelite Judges and Aaronic High Priests, Samuel, David, Solomon, the righteous Davidic Kings and the Prophets of Israel and Judah (i.e. Ahija, Elijah, Elisha, Micah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Joel, Habakuk, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Haggiah, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi). Meanwhile, the Permanent Imamat (*al-imamah al-mustaqarr*) continued with Ishmael and his progeny through an uninterrupted lineal descent down to Imam 'Abd al-Muttalib, the grandfather of both Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib. During this time, the Trustee Imams stood at the forefront of the Abrahamic Religion in biblical Israel while the Permanent Imams remained concealed in Arabia and unknown to most except the highest ranks of the believers.

“It is said that after Abraham, the Kingship and Prophethood and the Religion and Imamate continued in two lineages: one was the exoteric lineage through the progeny of Isaac and the other was the esoteric lineage through the progeny of Ishmael. While the signs of Kingship and Prophethood continued to be passed down in the lineage of Isaac, the lights of Religion and Imamate continued in the lineage of our lord Ishmael. Jesus represented the last of those signs which had been passed down the lineage of Isaac and he also attained to the commencement of the divine illuminations which had graced the progeny of our lord Ishmael.”

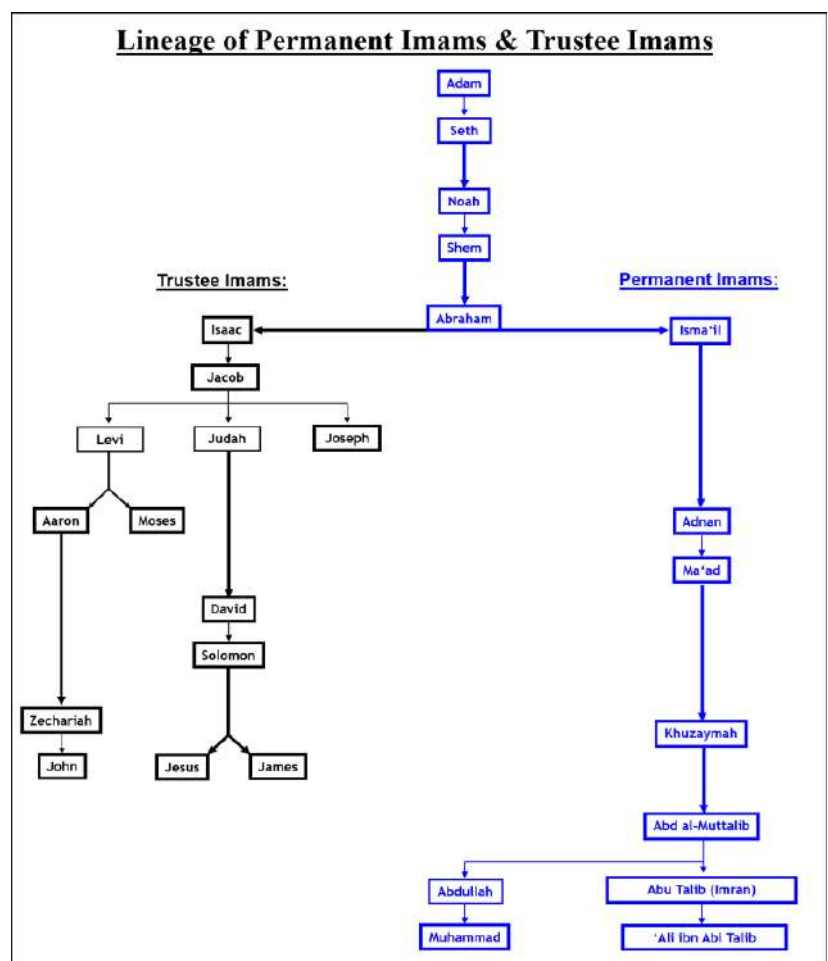
– Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. S. J. Badakhchani (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 137

“Isma‘il was the titular Imam (*mustaqarr*) while Isaac was only the trustee Imam (*mustawda*). After that, the real Imamate entered into a sort of ‘secrecy’ until the time when it reappeared, during the period of Muhammad, in the line of Imams descended from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. In the interval, it was the ‘trustee’ Imams who occupied the ‘front of the stage’ during each prophetic period, although the texts also inform us of the names of the real Imams.”

– Henry Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* (Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), 142

2. The Prophethood and Imamat of Jesus

Jesus was the fifth Major Prophet of the current Prophetic Cycle and symbolically corresponds to the fifth day of the “Great Week of Religion” in Ismaili terminology. The Trustee Imam before the birth of Jesus was ‘Imran, the “spiritual father” of



Maryam. ‘Imran designated Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, to succeed to the Imamatus and the spiritual care of Maryam was given to Zechariah. Zechariah knew that Jesus would be the next Major Prophet, so he appointed Maryam as his *Hujjah* (proof or deputy) to serve as Jesus’ “spiritual mother”, meaning it was Maryam’s role to spiritually train Jesus into the [Summons of Truth](#). In the realm of the esoteric, the Imam and his *Hujjah* are the “spiritual parents” of every initiate. The Qur’an (3:37) relates that Zechariah would go and see Maryam in her chambers only to find that she was already given food by her Lord. This means that Maryam was receiving divine support (*ta’id*) from the Permanent Imam, Khuzaymah, who was in Arabia without the mediation of the Trustee Imam Zechariah. When it was time for Jesus to be initiated into the Religion of Truth, the Permanent Imam sent his divine support – what the Qur’an calls the Spirit (*al-ruh*) and the Angels – to Maryam and informed her that Jesus, the fifth Major Prophet, was to be spiritually trained by her without the assistance of the Trustee Imam. Her statement, “*How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me*” (Qur’an 19:20), means that Maryam was not authorized by the Trustee Imam to initiate Jesus into spiritual knowledge. Under normal conditions, Jesus’ “spiritual father” would be Imam Zechariah and his “spiritual mother” would be Maryam. However, in this case, only Maryam would be Jesus’ “spiritual mother” without the aid or consent of Imam Zechariah.

“By ordering her to receive the entry of Jesus in the *da’wat* (to ‘give him birth’ in the *da’wat*), he instructs her, by God’s command, to receive, without the knowledge, order, or consent of the Imam, not simply the entry of a young man as a new initiate, but the entry of one who will be the future prophet, the prophet of the ‘fifth day’ of spiritual Creation, that is, of the fifth period in the cycle of prophecy; and this Prophet will be ‘her son’ in the higher spiritual and esoteric signification of the word, ‘Jesus son of Maryam’... **The mystery of the ‘virginal conception’ of Christ is here; it is not something that belongs to the physical nature of the human body; it is the ‘spiritual birth’ of the future prophet as proceeding, by the command of Heaven, uniquely from his mother, that is, from the purely esoteric, without intervention of the masculine principle that is the exoteric and the Law.** This is not a question of allegory; the spiritual truth of the event, recaptured on the plane to which it relates, is the literal truth.”

– Henry Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* (Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), 128

The meaning of the “Virgin Birth” – Jesus having been born “without a father” – is that Jesus’ spiritual “birth” took place under his spiritual mother Maryam without the involvement of his “spiritual father” Imam Zechariah. Instead, Maryam received spiritual nourishment or divine support (*ta’id*) directly from the Permanent Imam Khuzaymah, who was concealed in Arabia.

Zechariah bequeathed the Trustee Imamatus to his son John the Baptist, who was also a Prophet and the messianic forerunner of Jesus. John came from the priestly lineage of Aaron and fulfilled the prophecy of the “Messiah of Aaron” (the Priestly

Messiah) or the return of Prophet Elijah expected by many Jews in the Second Temple Period. Jesus himself descended from the royal lineage of David and he was the expected “Messiah of Israel” (the Royal Messiah). Before his death, John surrendered the Trustee Imamat to Jesus, whom he recognized as the next Major Prophet at his baptism. In this way, Jesus was the heir to the Prophethood and Trustee Imamat promised to the progeny of Isaac.

“Given these deeply rooted hopes and expectations among these messianic Jews one can scarcely imagine the excitement and fervor that John the Baptizer and Jesus would have stirred as they prepared their next moves in the spring of A.D. 27. John as a priest from the tribe of Levi and Jesus as a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah must have stirred the hopes of thousands who had come to expect the arrival of the Two Messiahs as a sure sign of the end.”

– James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 148

As documented in [our earlier article](#), both Qur’an and Historical Jesus scholarship agree that Jesus claimed to be and was perceived by his disciples to be a great Prophet of God and the Messiah of Israel and certainly not an “incarnation” of God or a “divine person” within the Godhead. Many New Testament historians refer to the historical Jesus as an “apocalyptic Prophet”.

“I suggest that Jesus was seen as, and saw himself as, a prophet; not a particular one necessarily, as though there were an individual set of shoes ready-made into which he was consciously stepping, but a prophet like the prophets of old, coming to Israel with a word from her covenant God, warning her of the imminent and fearful consequences of the direction she was travelling, urging and summoning her to a new and different way” (p. 162-63). . . This portrait of Jesus as a prophet seems the most secure point at which to ground our study of Jesus’ public career, and in particular of his characteristic praxis. Equally impressive are the strong hints, throughout the gospels, that Jesus as modelling his ministry not on one figure alone, but on a range of prophets from the Old Testament (p. 165).”

– N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 2006), Vol 1, 162-166

However, Jesus was also revered by the early generations of his followers as an “idealized human figure” – a theomorphic human being who represents God on earth, embodies God’s wisdom and spirit, bears some of God’s names, and carries out many divine functions. The idea that some Prophets represented and reflected God on earth is found in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish writings (see J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God*). In the Synoptic Gospels and the pre-Pauline creeds, Jesus is revered as God’s Regent, representative, and self-expression. Thus, from an Ismaili perspective, Jesus was certainly a Prophet of God but he was also the Trustee Imam and was therefore the human manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect, which constitutes God’s Names and Attributes insofar as they are knowable to His creatures.

“There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth or appearance on earth. Such self-assertions appear only in the latest form of the canonical Gospel tradition and presuppose substantial developments in christological thinking which cannot be traced back to Jesus himself... We cannot claim that Jesus believed himself to be the incarnate Son of God; but we can claim that the teaching to that effect as it came to expression in the later first-century Christian thought was, in the light of the whole Christ-event, an appropriate reflection on and elaboration of Jesus’ own sense of sonship and eschatological mission.”

– James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, Second Edition (SCM Press, 1992), 254

The earliest group of Jesus followers were Jews consisting of his family members, his apostles, and other followers in Jerusalem. They are often referred to as “Jewish Christians” and differed from other Jews only by their acceptance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah raised up by God after his death. Otherwise, these Jewish Christians were Torah observant (“zealous” for the Law per Acts 21:20), observed the Sabbath (Acts 1:12), prayed in the Jewish manner (Acts 3:1), continued to attend the Temple and submit sacrifices (Acts 2:46, 3:1), and did not see Jesus’ death on the Cross as a sacrificial atonement for original sin. They interpreted Jesus’ death as a “covenant sacrifice”, similar to the Passover sacrifice, which renewed God’s Covenant with the Children of Israel (as per James D.G. Dunn, “When did the Understanding of Jesus’ Death as an Atoning Sacrifice First Emerge?” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Christianity*, ed. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond and T. A. Miller, 169-181).

“In short, it is evident that the earliest community in no sense felt themselves to be a new religion, distinct from Judaism. There was no sense of a boundary line drawn between themselves and their fellow Jews. They saw themselves simply as a fulfilled Judaism, the beginning of eschatological Israel... Indeed we may put the point even more strongly: since Judaism has always been concerned more with orthopraxy than with orthodoxy (right practice rather than right belief) the earliest Christians were not simply Jews, but in fact continued to be quite ‘orthodox’ Jews. **Notice then, that this is the group with whom Christianity proper all began. Only their belief in Jesus as Messiah and risen, and their belief that the last days were upon them mark them out as different from the majority of their fellow Jews. None of the other great Christian distinctives that come to expression in and through Paul are present...** Altogether it is a form of Christianity which we today would scarcely recognize – Jewish Christianity indeed, or perhaps more precisely, a form of Jewish messianism, a messianic renewal movement within pre-70 Judaism. If we now shift our glance from the beginning of Christianity forward 150 years or so into the second century and beyond, it at once becomes evident that the situation has significantly altered: Jewish Christianity, far from being the only form

of Christianity, is now beginning to be classified as unorthodox and heretical. There seem to have been several groups of Jewish Christians (four anyway) whose beliefs put them beyond the pale of the emerging great Church... The best known sect, whose name became a kind of stereotype in great Church polemic against Jewish Christian heresy, was the Ebionites.”

– James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, Third Edition (SCM Press, 2006) 257-258

The later Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian sect, still existing in the second and third centuries. Information about them is only present in the writing of the proto-Catholic Church authorities like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Jerome, Epiphanius, and Eusebius. Their distinctive beliefs were as follows:

- Faithful adherence to the Law (Torah) of Moses including circumcision, Jewish dietary law, and adoration of the Temple in Jerusalem;
- Acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and the “True Prophet” like Moses in a line of Prophets going back to Adam; that Jesus came to uphold and purify the Law, not to abolish it;
- Reverence of James the Just as the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church and all churches by the appointment of Jesus himself and having authority over all the Apostles including Peter;
- Rejection of Paul (Saul) of Tarsus as an enemy of the true Church, who corrupted the true message of Jesus;
- Recognition of Jesus as a virtuous human being and Prophet who was “adopted” as the Son of God at his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him; Jesus was the physical child of Joseph and Mary.

The core beliefs of the Ebionite Jewish Christians, for the most part, directly match the beliefs and practices of Jesus’ original Jewish followers – including his family members and apostles – who formed the Jerusalem Church. It remains a great irony that the original and earliest form of “Christianity” would become classified as a heresy by the proto-Catholic Church:

“If these are indeed the three principal features of heretical Jewish Christianity, then a striking point immediately emerges: heretical Jewish Christianity would appear to be not so very different from the faith of the first Jewish believers... In short, apart from the different attitudes to the temple cult, the measure of agreement between the earliest Jerusalem believers and Ebionites is quite striking. The heretical Jewish Christianity of the second and third centuries apparently has no closer parallel than the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. *Indeed, on the basis of this evidence, the heretical Jewish Christianity of the later centuries could quite properly claim to be more truly the heir of earliest Christianity than any other expression of Christianity.*”

– James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 262-263

3. The Historical James: Brother and Successor of the Historical Jesus

These early Jewish followers of Jesus constituted the “Jerusalem Church”, which was the “Mother Church” possessing religious authority over all other churches including Gentile believers. The undisputed leader of the Jerusalem Church as indicated by New Testament writings and later sources was James, the brother of Jesus, followed by the Apostles Peter and John. “When we first meet James, the brother of Jesus, in the earliest Christian literature, he is already among the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1.19), and very soon thereafter he stands at the head of the community eclipsing even Peter in importance” (Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 262).

Thus, James of Jerusalem was the Legatee (*wasi*) and Imam in direct succession to his brother Jesus of Nazareth. The leadership of James over the early Jewish Christian movement and the Jerusalem Church is indicated in Paul’s Letters, the Book of Acts, the Epistle of James, the Church History of Eusebius (d. 339) ([available online](#)) drawing on the writings of Clement (d. 215) and Hegesippus (d. 180) for his information on James.

James as the Leader of the Jerusalem Church:

“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – [only James, the Lord’s brother.](#)”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 1:18-20

“[James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.](#)”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 2:19

James Issues the Judgment at the Jerusalem Council:

“[When they finished, James spoke up. ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me... It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.’](#)”

– *Acts of the Apostles* 15:13-21

James Sends Emissaries to Correct the Antioch Church:

“[When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.](#)”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 2:11-14

Gospel of Thomas: Jesus Appoints James as His Successor

“The disciples said to Jesus, ‘We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then? Jesus said to them, No matter where you go, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.”

– *Gospel of Thomas* Saying 12

Eusebius, Hegesippus & Clement of Alexandria: James as Holy Man & Bishop of the Jerusalem Church

“Then James, whom the ancients surnamed the Just on account of the excellence of his virtue, is recorded to have been the first to be made Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem. This James was called the brother of the Lord because he was known as a son of Joseph, and Joseph was supposed to be the father of Christ, because the Virgin, being betrothed to him, ‘was found with child by the Holy Ghost before they came together,’ (Matthew 1:18) as the account of the holy Gospels shows. But Clement in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes writes thus: ‘For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Saviour, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just Bishop of Jerusalem.’ But the same writer, in the seventh book of the same work, relates also the following things concerning him: ‘The Lord after his resurrection imparted knowledge to James the Just and to John and Peter, and they imparted it to the rest of the apostles, and the rest of the apostles to the seventy, of whom Barnabas was one.’”

– Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 2, Chapter 1, Section 2-4

“James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Saviour to the present day for there were many that bore the name of James. He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people. Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, ‘Bulwark of the people’ and ‘Justice,’ in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.”

– Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 2, Chapter 23, Section 4-7

“The Chair [or “Throne”] of James, who first received the Episcopate of the Church at Jerusalem from the Saviour himself and the apostles, and who, as the divine records show, was called a brother of Christ, has been preserved until now, the brethren who have followed him in succession there exhibiting clearly to all the reverence which both those of old times and those of our own day maintained and do maintain for holy men on account of their piety. So much as to this matter.”

– Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 7, Chapter 19, Section 1

Pseudo-Clementine Literature: James Appointed by Jesus as His Successor:

“The Church of the Lord which was constituted in Jerusalem multiplied most plentifully and grew, being governed with the most Righteous ordinances by James, who was ordained Bishop in it by the Lord.”

– Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions in Robert Eisenman, *James The Brother of Jesus* (Penguin Books, 1998), 202

“James, the lord and the Bishop of Bishops, who rules Jerusalem, the Holy Church of the Hebrews, and the churches everywhere excellently founded by the providence of God.”

– Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, in Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 259

“Our Lord and Prophet, who has sent us, declared to us that the Evil One [that is, ‘the Devil’], having disputed with him for forty days, but failing to prevail against him, promised that he would send apostles from among his subjects to deceive them. **Therefore, above all, remember to shun any apostle, teacher, or prophet who does not accurately compare his teaching with James...**and this, even if he comes to you with recommendations.”

– Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, in Robert Eisenman, *The New Testament Code* (London: Watkins, 2006), 570

“Whatever may be the situation with regard to the bishops outside Jerusalem, there is sufficient testimony for a monarchical episcopate in Jerusalem, on the ‘throne’ of James, which was regarded by the early Jewish Christian Church as the continuation and the provisional equivalent of the throne of David, which was to be occupied by Jesus.”

– Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, Vol. 2 (Harper, 1959), 721-22

Based on the above evidence – mostly from proto-Catholic sources – James succeeded his brother Jesus by direct appointment as the leader of the early Jesus movement comprised of his Jewish followers. **Functionally, the office of “Bishop of Jerusalem” is the equivalent in early Christian discourse to the office of the Imam in Ismaili theology.** Historically, the Jerusalem Church exercised authority over all early Christians, and so the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church would have been the “Imam” of Jesus’ followers during his absence. At the metaphysical level, James’ status as the Righteous One (*tzaddik*) who upholds the world is equivalent to the status of the Imam. According to the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus told his disciples to go to “James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into existence.” This formulation alludes to the Shi’i Ismaili and Sufi concept of the Light of Muhammad according to the famous *hadith qudsi* where God says to the Prophet: “*Were it not for you [Muhammad], I would not have created the heaven and the earth.*” It also speaks to the famous *hadith* of the Prophet: “*If the world were devoid of the Imam for even a moment, it would convulse along with all of its inhabitants.*” Thus, the description of James as the foundation of the heavens and the earth speaks to his status as the Imam of his time:

“That ‘James the Righteous One’ is someone for whose sake ‘Heaven and Earth came into existence’ means that not only are Heaven and Earth predicated on his

existence but, as 'the Zaddik', he precedes them or is pre-existent. The reader will recognize in this something equivalent to what goes by the name of 'the Logos' or 'the Word' in the Gospel of John above. **There is also something very akin to it in what goes by the name in Shi'ite Islam of 'the Imam' doctrine. All these terms have common aspects and are more or less equivalent."**

— Robert Eisenman, *James The Brother of Jesus* (Penguin Books, 1998), 136

There is also a tradition related by the Ebionites from the lost "Gospel of the Hebrews" where Jesus after his resurrection first appeared to his brother James. This Gospel describes how Jesus blessed bread and gave it first to James to eat: "The Lord (Jesus) said, 'Bring a table and bread!' He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to James the Just and said to him, 'My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among those that sleep.'"

Gospel of the Hebrews, quoted in John Painter, "Models of Leadership and Mission," in Chilton and Evans (eds.), *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 149

The story of Jesus presenting a "table" to his disciples is also mentioned in the Qur'an as a "Table from Heaven" (5:112). **According to the Ismaili Da'i Abu Hatim al-Razi, the meaning of the "table" that Jesus prepared for his apostles is the divine inspiration (*ta'yid*) that flows from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul:** "*The table means the spiritual sustenance (maddah) from the spiritual stream which they [Jesus' apostles] were waiting and longing for.*" As al-Razi further explained, Jesus bringing the "table from heaven" to his disciples means that Jesus appointed his Legatee or Founder (*asas*) for the guidance of his followers: "*The Messiah intended to install his Founder (asas) and promised that he would appoint the Founder among them so that they would gain the spiritual stream through him*" (Translated by Shin Nomoto in his PhD Thesis, "Early Ismaili Thought on Prophecy according to the *Kitab al-Islah* by Abu Hatim al-Razi," 1998, 213-214). Thus, the story of Jesus offering a table of bread to his brother James esoterically means that Jesus mediated divine inspiration (*ta'yid*) to James from the Universal Intellect and appointed James as his Legatee (*wasi*), in the very same manner that Prophet Muhammad appointed 'Ali b. Abi Talib as his Legatee.

"This situation is perhaps best understood by looking at the analogous one in a more recent 'Community', considering itself heir to the promise of Abraham... The one, supported in what came to be known as Shi'ite Islam, represents this as being a family Caliphate, that is a succession within the family of the Prophet – the word 'Caliphate' in Arabic actually meaning 'succession'. This is, of course, analogous to the claims of those supporting James in early Christianity."

— Robert Eisenman, *James The Brother of Jesus*, 164

4. James as Interpreter of Jesus: The Epistle of James

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations... Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that

gives freedom, and continues in it — not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it — they will be blessed in what they do.”

– Epistle of James 1:22-25

The epistle sent by James to the twelve tribes of the Children of Israel contains his interpretation of the teachings of his brother Jesus. In his capacity as Jesus’ Legatee (*wasi*) and Founder (*asas*) of the Imamatus after him, James’ essential role was to guide the new community by clarifying the teachings of his brother Jesus. James D. Tabor has traced a great deal of James’ teachings back to the historical

JESUS’ TEACHINGS IN THE Q SOURCE	TEACHINGS OF JAMES	teachings of Jesus found in Q, the common source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.
Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)	Has not God chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. (2:5)	“What is particularly notable about the letter of James is that the ethical content of its teaching is directly parallel to the teachings of Jesus that we know from the Q source. The Q source is the earliest collection of the teachings and sayings of Jesus, which scholars date to around the year 50 A.D. It has not survived as an intact document but both Matthew and Luke use it extensively...If one takes the letter of James, short as it is, there are no fewer than thirty direct references, echoes, and allusions to the teachings of Jesus found in the Q source!”
Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments . . . shall be [called] least in the kingdom. (Matthew 5:19)	Whoever keeps the whole Torah but fails in one point has become guilty of it all. (2:10)	
Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” shall enter the kingdom . . . but he who does the will of my Father. (Matthew 7:21)	Be doers of the word and not hearers only. (1:22)	
How much more will your Father . . . give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matthew 7:11)	Every good gift . . . coming down from the Father. (1:17)	
Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)	Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. (5:1)	
Do not swear at all, either by heaven for it is the throne of God, or by earth for it is his footstool . . . let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No.” (Matthew 5:34, 37)	Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath but let your yes be yes and your no be no. (5:12)	

– James D. Tabor, Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 42

Diagram from James D. Tabor, Paul and Jesus, p. 41

“The Muslim emphasis on Jesus as messianic prophet and teacher is quite parallel to what we find in the Q source, in the book of James, and in the Didache... **Islam insists that neither Jesus nor Mohammad brought a new religion. Both sought to call people back to what might be called “Abrahamic faith.” This is precisely what we find emphasized in the book of James.** Like Islam, the book of James, and the teaching of Jesus in Q, emphasize doing the will of God as a demonstration of one’s faith. Also, the dietary laws of Islam, as quoted in the Qur’an, echo the teachings of

James in Acts 15 almost word for word: “Abstain from swineflesh, blood, things offered to idols, and carrion” (Qur’an 2:172).

– James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 315-316

5. The Authority of James and the Ministry of Peter

The Catholic Church traces the religious authority of the Papacy to the Apostle Simon Peter. Catholics held that Jesus appointed Simon Peter as the head of the Church according to the following statement in the Gospel of Matthew:

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. **And I tell you that you are Peter (Cephas), and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**”

– Gospel of Matthew, 16:15-19

Catholics interpret the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” as the delegation of religious authority by Jesus to Peter and the naming of Simon as “Cephas” (meaning rock) to indicate his role as the foundation of the Church on earth. The New Testament scholar Hyam Maccoby explains that this language of granting “keys” that open and close heaven was used in Isaiah to describe the appointment of a “chief minister” to the Davidic King. Therefore, when Jesus gave Simon Peter the “keys” to his kingdom, he was appointing Peter as his minister or vizier, not as his successor:

“By giving Peter the ‘keys of the kingdom’, Jesus was appointing him to be his chief minister. King Hezekiah’s chief minister was called Shebina; and when the Prophet Isaiah predicted that this official would be dismissed in favour of Eliakim, he did so in the following terms... ‘And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place.’ (Isaiah 22:19-23). The similarities between this and Jesus’ charge to Peter are striking... so that Jesus by giving Peter these powers is appointing him not only chief minister at his royal court but also head of the Sanhedrin; this is the only difference between the appointment of Eliakim and that of Peter... Peter, then, is appointed chief minister of King Jesus. This explains fully the relationship between Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, in the movement, and why James suddenly rises to prominence at this point. When Jesus became King, his family become the royal family, at least for those who believed in Jesus’ claim to Messiahship. Thus, after Jesus’ death, his brother James, as his nearest relative, became his successor; not in the sense that he became King James, for Jesus was believed to be alive, having been resurrected by a miracle of God, and to be waiting in the wings for the correct moment to

return to the stage as Messianic King. James was thus a Prince Regent, occupying the throne temporarily in the absence of Jesus... The position of Peter, then, after the death of Jesus, is thus easily understood. He could not become the leader of the Jesus movement, because he was not of the royal blood. But he could and did retain his position as chief adviser and minister of the royal court, the holder of the 'keys of the kingdom'."

– Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1998) 122-123

Therefore, the appointment of Simon to the "Petrine Office" revered by Catholics amounts to an office of minister or vizier, while the actual successor was James. This means Peter served as the chief minister of James after the death of Jesus and this is what one finds in the New Testament: James stays and rules from Jerusalem while Peter is the leading missionary over the various travelling missionaries. In Ismaili terminology, Jesus was both the Major Prophet (*natiq*) and the Trustee Imam from the lineage of David. Jesus appointed his brother James as his Legatee (*wasi*) to succeed to the Imamatus symbolized by Davidic royal authority and appointed Peter as his *Bab* (Gate) or supreme *Hujjah* (Proof) – meaning that Peter led the preachers (*da'is*). Thus, James was the Imam after Jesus while Peter functioned as the *Bab* or *Hujjah* of James.

6. The Authority of James and the Preaching of Paul

"Let us assume that a Messianic leader known as 'Jesus' did exist in the early part of the first century in Palestine. Furthermore, let us assume that he had brothers, one of whom was called James. Who would have known the character Jesus better? His closest living relatives, who according to tradition were his legitimate successors in Palestine, and those companions accompanying him in all his activities? Or someone who admits that he never saw Jesus in his lifetime, as Paul does, and that, on the contrary, he was an Enemy of and persecuted the early Christian community, and came to know him only through visionary experiences that allowed him to be in touch with a figure he designates as 'Christ Jesus' in Heaven? The answer of any reasonable observer to this question should be obvious: James and Jesus' Palestinian companions."

– Robert Eisenman, *James The Brother of Jesus*, xxix

The teachings of James directly conflict with those of Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, to whom most of the New Testament documents are attributed to. While James was the appointed successor of Jesus and acknowledged as such by Jesus' Apostles, Paul presented his authority and teachings as wholly independent of James, the Apostles and the Jerusalem Church. Throughout his letters, Paul refers to "my gospel" as something different from "other gospels" preached by the Apostles of Jesus.

Paul claimed to receive revelation from the risen Christ and to have been chosen by God to spread the gospel to the Gentiles:

“Paul, Apostle, not from men, nor through [any] man, but rather through Jesus Christ and by God [the] Father, who raised him from [the] dead.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 1:1

“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ... But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 1:11-17

Paul maintained that his teachings were wholly independent of Jesus’ Apostles in Jerusalem:

“Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders [James, Peter, John], I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brethren had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. As for those who were held in high esteem [James, Peter, John] – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism – they added nothing to my message.

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 2:1-6

Paul boasted of receiving revelations from Jesus and ascending to the third heaven:

“I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle of 2 Corinthians* 12:1-4

Paul boasted that he was equal to the Apostles of Jesus and worked harder than them:

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle of 1 Corinthians* 15:9-11

Paul claimed that the Apostles of Jesus taught a different gospel than his:

“For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle of 2 Corinthians* 11:4-6

“I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the ‘super-apostles,’ even though I am nothing. I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle of 2 Corinthians* 12:11

“[Paul speaks] of the pillars of the Jerusalem church [in Galatians ch. 2]. Paul is against them — see especially Gal. 2:11. Paul speaks against them with ill-concealed sarcasm in the repetitive words ‘reputed to be something,’ and ‘those of repute’ (Gal. 2:2,6,9). Several commentators on I Corinthians argue that the Kephas [i.e., Peter] party (1 Cor. 1:12 [Cephas]; 3:22) are the judaising party in Corinth — Paul disapproves of this faction. Similarly at 1 Cor. 9:5, Paul speaks disparagingly of Kephas [i.e., Peter] and the brothers of Jesus, i.e., the Jerusalem pillars....The rivalry between Paul and Peter is most strongly apparent in these chapters of Galatians and 1 Corinthians.”

J. K. Elliot, *Essays in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Bloomsbury, 1992), 132

James and the Church Elders accused Paul of attacking the Law of Moses:

“When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you.”

– Acts of the Apostles 21:17-25

Paul’s teachings were rejected by James and the Apostles at Antioch:

“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.”

– Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, *Epistle to the Galatians* 2:11

“Paul had in effect been disowned by the church which had first commissioned him as a missionary. Since Paul continued to believe passionately in the truth of the gospel which in effect had been rejected at Antioch, the relationship could not continue as before. It is not surprising, then, that in his continuing mission, as we shall see, Paul seems to have worked much more as an independent missionary... It would further follow that Paul saw the outcome as constituting an effective breach with the mother church in Jerusalem.”

– James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 491-493

7. Paul and James in Conflict: Faith, Works, and the Law

“Accordingly, James and his successors provide us our best historical link to Jesus and his original teachings. That we find no trace of Paul’s gospel, nor of Pauline theology, in the Q source, or in the letter of James, or in the Didache, should not surprise us. James and his successors represent an original version of Christianity, linked more directly to the historical Jesus, that has every claim of authenticity.”

– James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*, 311

The Law (Torah) of Moses is the Curse of Slavery (Paul) vs. the Law of Moses is Freedom (James):

Paul: *“For all who rely on the works of the Law (Torah) are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” – Epistle to the Galatians 3:10-13*

Paul: *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.” – Epistle to the Galatians 5:1-3*

James: *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect Law (Torah) that gives freedom, and continues in it — not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it — they will be blessed in what they do.” – Epistle of James 1:22-25*

Justification through Faith Alone (Paul) vs. Justification through Faith & Works (James):

Paul: *“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.” – Epistle to the Galatians 2:15-16*

James: “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.” – **Epistle of James 2:8-11**

Paul: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” – **Epistle to the Romans 3:20-28**

James: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” – **Epistle of James 2:14-19**

Abraham was Justified by Faith Alone (Paul) vs. Abraham was Justified by Works (James):

Paul: “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” – **Epistle to the Romans 4:1-3**

James: “You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” – **Epistle of James 2:20-24, 26**

All Foods are Permissible to Eat (Paul) vs. Unclean Meat, Strangled Animals & Blood are Not Permissible to Eat (James):

Paul: “Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” If an unbeliever

invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.” – Epistle of 1 Corinthians 10:25-27

Paul: *“Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” – Epistle of 1 Corinthians 8:4-13*

Paul: *“I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.” – Epistle to the Romans 14:14*

James: *“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.” – Acts of the Apostles 15:17-21*

James: *“As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” – Acts of the Apostles 21:21-23*

“It is obvious then that what is reflected here is a controversy within Christianity – between that stream of Jewish Christianity which was represented by James at Jerusalem on the one hand, and the Gentile churches or Hellenistic Jewish Christians who had been decisively influenced by Paul’s teaching on the other.”

*– James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 263*

8. The Successors of James in Jerusalem: The *Desposynoi* as the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Jesus

“The observation that not only James, but also other members of the family of Jesus were prominent in the leadership of the churches of Palestine down to at least the early second century prompted a series of scholars from Harnack to Schoeps to speak of a Christian ‘caliphate’ or of a dynastic form of Christianity, in which the highest authority in the church passed down from Jesus through dynastic succession of members of his family, as much as the highest authority in early Islam passed down through descendants of the family of the prophet Muhammad.”

*– Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 125*

James the Just was revered as a holy and righteous man by many Jews in Jerusalem. The Pharisees urged James to publicly denounce his faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. However, James refused and instead declared that Jesus was the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of God in heaven. He was killed by a mob of Jewish leaders in 62 AD.

Eusebius, Hegesippus & Clement of Alexandria: James Dies as a Righteous Martyr

“The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: ‘You just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, for as much as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified

one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus.’ And he answered with a loud voice, ‘Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.’ And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, ‘We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.’ And they cried out, saying, ‘Oh! Oh! The just man is also in error.’ And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, ‘Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.’ So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, ‘I entreat you, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34). And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, ‘Stop. What are you doing? The just one prays for you.’ And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. These things are related at length by Hegesippus, who is in agreement with Clement: James was so admirable a man and so celebrated among all for his justice, that the more sensible even of the Jews were of the opinion that this was the cause of the siege of Jerusalem, which happened to them immediately after his martyrdom for no other reason than their daring act against him. Josephus, at least, has not hesitated to testify this in his writings, where he says, ‘These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, that is called the Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man.’”

– Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 2, Chapter 22, Section 12-20

James was succeeded as the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church and the leader of the Jewish Christians by his brother (or cousin) Symeon bar Clopas (Simon bar Cleophas). The basis for Simon’s succession was his familial relationship to James and Jesus. Eusebius calls him a cousin of Jesus but the Gospels (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3) suggest he was one of Jesus’ brothers. In Ismaili terms, this means that Simon bar Cleophas became the Trustee Imam after James.

Eusebius, Hegesippus & Clement of Alexandria: Symeon Succeeds James

“After the martyrdom of James and the conquest of Jerusalem which immediately followed, it is said that those of the apostles and disciples of the Lord that were still living came together from all directions with those that were related to the Lord according to the flesh (for the majority of them also were still alive) to take counsel as to who was worthy to succeed James. **They all with one consent pronounced Symeon, the son of Clopas, of whom the Gospel also makes mention; to be worthy**

of the episcopal throne of that parish. He was a cousin, as they say, of the Saviour. For Hegesippus records that Clopas was a brother of Joseph.”

– Eusebius, Church History, Book 3, Chapter 11, Section 1-2

“The same author (Hegesippus) also describes the beginnings of the heresies which arose in his time, in the following words: ‘And after James the Just had suffered martyrdom, as the Lord had also on the same account, **Symeon, the son of the Lord’s uncle, Clopas, was appointed the next bishop. All proposed him as second bishop because he was a cousin of the Lord.** Therefore, they called the Church a virgin, for it was not yet corrupted by vain discourses.”

– Eusebius, Church History, Book 4, Chapter 22, Section 4

The city of Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 AD and the Temple was destroyed. It is reported that the Jerusalem leadership fled to Pella under Symeon’s leadership. Afterward, they returned to Jerusalem and the family of Jesus was persecuted due to their being descendants of David and relatives of Jesus. Symeon bar Clopas was accused of heresy, tortured, and finally killed in 107 AD. Symeon was succeeded as the head of the Jerusalem Jewish-Christian community by another member of Jesus family, named Justus or Judas.

Eusebius, Hegesippus & Clement of Alexandria: Symeon Dies as a Righteous Martyr

“It is reported that after the age of Nero and Domitian, under the emperor whose times we are now recording, a persecution was stirred up against us in certain cities in consequence of a popular uprising. **In this persecution we have understood that Symeon, the son of Clopas, who, as we have shown, was the second bishop of the church of Jerusalem, suffered martyrdom. Hegesippus, whose words we have already quoted in various places, is a witness to this fact also. Speaking of certain heretics he adds that Symeon was accused by them at this time; and since it was clear that he was a Christian, he was tortured in various ways for many days, and astonished even the judge himself and his attendants in the highest degree, and finally he suffered a death similar to that of our Lord.** But there is nothing like hearing the historian himself, who writes as follows: Certain of these heretics brought accusation against Symeon, the son of Clopas, on the ground that he was a descendant of David and a Christian; and thus he suffered martyrdom, at the age of one hundred and twenty years, while Trajan was emperor and Atticus governor.

– Eusebius, Church History, Book 3, Chapter 32, Section 1-3

Eusebius provided a list of the successors of James the Just to the office of Bishop of Jerusalem. He noted that all these Bishops were circumcised Jews, which means they adhered to the Torah of Moses. He also said that that these Bishops “received the knowledge of Christ in purity”, meaning that they preserved the true teaching of Jesus. From an Ismaili perspective, these Jerusalem Bishops were the Trustee Imams and the legitimate successor of Jesus.

Eusebius, Hegesippus & Clement of Alexandria: The Bishops of Jerusalem

“The chronology of the bishops of Jerusalem I have nowhere found preserved in writing; for tradition says that they were all short lived. But I have learned this much from writings, that until the siege of the Jews, which took place under Adrian, **there were fifteen bishops in succession there, all of whom are said to have been of Hebrew descent, and to have received the knowledge of Christ in purity, so that they were approved by those who were able to judge of such matters, and were deemed worthy of the episcopate. For their whole church consisted then of believing Hebrews who continued from the days of the apostles until the siege which took place at this time;** in which siege the Jews, having again rebelled against the Romans, were conquered after severe battles. But since the bishops of the circumcision ceased at this time, it is proper to give here a list of their names from the beginning. The first, then, was James, the so-called brother of the Lord; the second, Symeon; the third, Justus; the fourth, Zacchæus; the fifth, Tobias; the sixth, Benjamin; the seventh, John; the eighth, Matthias; the ninth, Philip; the tenth, Seneca; the eleventh, Justus; the twelfth, Levi; the thirteenth, Ephres; the fourteenth, Joseph; and finally, the fifteenth, Judas. These are the bishops of Jerusalem that lived between the age of the apostles and the time referred to, all of them belonging to the circumcision.”

– Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 4, Chapter 5, Section 1-4

While the above list of fifteen persons is presented by Eusebius as a line of successors to James, Richard Bauckham has argued that only James, Symeon, and Justas (Judas) were the Bishops of Jerusalem in succession while the other names refer to twelve deputies serving under them. “These can then be readily understood as a college of twelve elders who presided over the Jerusalem church along with James... there is evidence, especially in the Jewish Christian traditions incorporated in the Pseudo-Clementines, for the idea that a monarchical bishop should have twelve presbyters” (Bauckham, 73). According to Bauckham’s reading of Eusebius, Symeon was the Jerusalem Bishop for some forty years and his successor, Justus (d. 113), was the son of James or Jude, another of Jesus’ brothers.

Eusebius made special reference to the prominence of the descendants of Jude, brother of Jesus, as heirs of Jesus and descendants of David. They were persecuted by the Romans because of their status as Jesus’ family and were revered by early Christian churches: “They came, therefore, and took the lead of every church as witnesses and as relatives of the Lord. And profound peace being established in every church, they remained until the reign of the Emperor Trajan”

(Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 3, Chapter 32, Section 5-6). **Thus, the family and descendants of Jesus – known as the *Desposynoi* (“those belonging to the Sovereign”) – clearly parallel the status of the Prophet Muhammad’s *Ahl al-Bayt*:** “Both in Jerusalem and in Galilee, until the Bar Kokhba war, the family of Jesus – the *Desposynoi* – were the most influential and respected leaders of Jewish Christianity, at first along with members of the twelve, later more exclusively... We

must now see the family of Jesus as Davidides, conscious, through family tradition, of the hopes of Davidic restoration which had been cherished in their line since Zerubbabel.”

– Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 374-376

In any case, all the successors of James came from the descendants of Jesus’ brothers, including James himself and Jude. From the extant evidence, it appears that the descendants of Jude, recognized as *Desposynoi* and Davidic descendants, exercised leadership roles in Palestinian Christianity well into the second century. In Ismaili terms, this means that the progeny of Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, succeeded as Trustee Imams preserving the essence of Jesus’ revelation and teachings. The twelve deputies under the Jerusalem Bishop refer to the twelve *Hujjas* of the day who convey the Imam’s teachings.

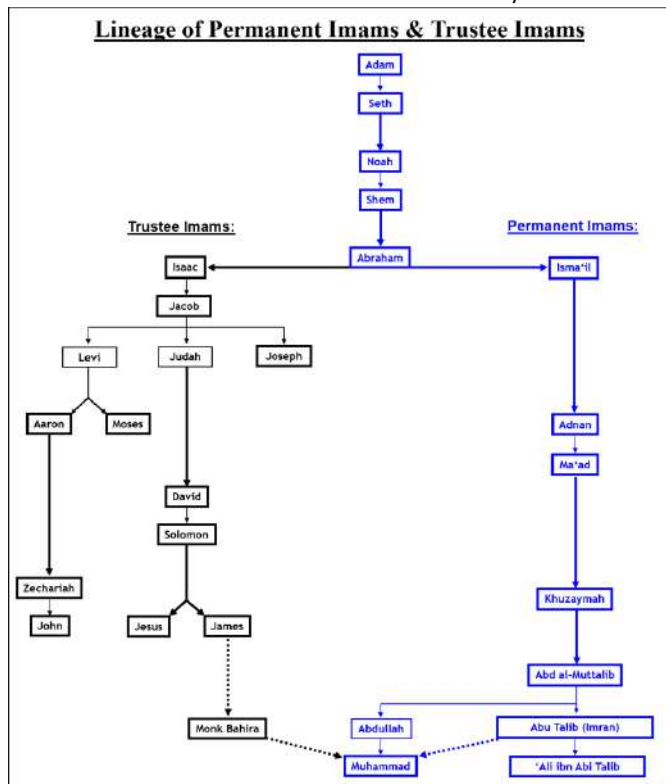
9. The Heir of Jesus and James in Arabia: The “Episcopal Imamat” of Prophet Muhammad

The historical records are only able to trace the descendants of Jesus’ family to the early second century. However, it is known that the Ebionites and the Nazarenes – two Jewish Christian groups – continued to exist even in the fourth century and traced their faith and traditions back to James the Just. It is widely speculated by scholars that Jewish Christian groups exerted some influence in the origins of Islam. *The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospel Tradition* (2013) by Emran al-Badawi has shown that the Qur’an reinterprets, incorporates, and integrates a significant number of themes from the Aramaic Gospels. His study found that “11 percent of the Qur’an is in dialogue with the entirety of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions” and “12 percent of the Gospels are in dialogue with the whole Qur’an.” He concludes that “the Qur’an is in close dialogue with the text and context of the Gospels through their transmission in the Syriac and Christian Palestinian dialects of Aramaic” (p. 212). Below are just a few examples from El-Badawi’s study where the Qur’an has reinterpreted or re-articulated a theme or idea from the New Testament (pp. 220-226):

- Qur’an 3:59 is re-articulating Romans 5:14, 21 on Jesus as the Second Adam
- Qur’an 14:37, 2:126 is re-articulating Luke 3:8 and Matthew 21:43 on Abraham’s Progeny
- Qur’an 5:75, 25:7 is re-articulating Matthew 11:16, 19, 20:3, Mark 5:56 and Luke 7:32-34
- Qur’an 5:18, 9:30 is re-articulating Matthew 5:9 on God’s Servants vs. God’s Sons
- Qur’an 2:210, 6:158, 18:99 is re-articulating Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27 on God or Son of Man coming down on the clouds
- Qur’an 24:35-36, 30:57, 61:6-8, 9:32, 25:61, 33:41-46 is re-articulating Matthew 5:14-16, 12:34, Mark 4:21, Luke 6:45, 8:16, 11:33, 13:35, John 8:1, 9:5, 5:35-3 on the Light of God, Light of the World, Lamp, and Houses of God

- Qur'an 1:1-7 is re-articulating Mathew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 on the al-Fatihah and Lord's Prayer

According to various Ismaili sources, including the writings of Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (the Bab of the Imam al-Mu'izz and second to the Imam in spiritual rank), the Trustee Imam from the successors of Jesus immediately before Prophet Muhammad was the Monk Bahira of Syria. This means that the Trustee Imam of James was transmitted through the descendants of Jesus' family until it reached Syrian Monk Bahira, known as Georges, the last Trustee Imam in the Cycle of Jesus and the remnant from Jesus' family who carried on his true teachings.



Ismaili writings inform us the Permanent Imam was handed down from Ishmael, in direct lineal descent, to Imam 'Abd al-Muttalib (the Prophet's grandfather) and Imam Abu Talib (the Prophet's uncle and father of Imam 'Ali). The Trustee Imam was held by Bahira as the legitimate successor to the prophetic heritage of Jesus and James. There is a famous account in both Sunni and Shia sources where Abu Talib and Muhammad met the Monk Bahira while on a business trip to Syria, and Bahira recognizes Muhammad as the future Prophet. This meeting represented the climactic

confluence of the Israelite Imam held by Bahira with the Ishmaelite Imam held by Imam Abu Talib.

Muhammad was trained in the Israelite prophetic legacy (*wasyya*) of Jesus by Imam Bahira and also initiated into the Ishmaelite gnosis under Imam Abu Talib, before he himself became the new Major Prophet. In this way, Prophet Muhammad was the heir to both Abrahamic lineages of Prophethood and Imam and recapitulated all of their members in his person:

"The Imam of the period into which Muhammad was born is identified as Bahira, a figure known in Islamic sources as a Christian monk who saw Muhammad while he was a youth on a trading mission with his uncle in Syria and recognized that he would become a Prophet... The Imam Bahira commanded the Prophet to undertake the mission on behalf of the Messiah (*al-masih*). When Muhammad successfully garnered seventy male missionaries and one female from the Tihama and Ethiopia, Bahira surrendered the command to him. Thus the legacy of prophecy that was his bequest from Isaac was transferred to him from a Christian

monk, just as Muhammad had received the legacy of Imamate originating from Isma'il through his uncle, Abu Talib... Now, according to the logic of Isma'ili history, it is perfectly correct for Muhammad to have been reared in the mission of Jesus, for it is Jesus who was the previous speaker-prophet, and his law was still operative. Still, it is surprising that Ja'far's account goes to some length to emphasize that Muhammad began his career as a disciple of Jesus. In one *ta'wil* Ja'far mentions that Muhammad studied with Bahira for twenty years, and that Bahira was referred to in the sources as the Angel Gabriel."

– David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 97-98

Prophet Muhammad began his mission in Mecca as a “warner” and “conveyer of news” – as a Messenger of God without the rank of Imam. Upon the death of Imam Abu Talib, Muhammad was appointed as the Trustee Imam and Monk Bahira surrendered the Imamate to him. Shortly after, Muhammad and his community emigrated to Medina, where Muhammad formally began functioning as the Trustee Imam, embodying both the Ishmaelite and Israelite religious legacies. It is important to observe that the actual roles performed by Muhammad in Medina (as reflected in the Qur'an) greatly resemble the office of the Bishop in the Christian Episcopate. This is entirely expected because Muhammad inherited the Imamate of James the brother of Jesus from Bahira and James' leadership office was the source for all the Christian episcopates.

Prophet Muhammad's Episcopal Functions in Medina:

“A key similarity between the Medinan Muhammad and Christian statements about the episcopate consists in a shared stress on obedience. Bishops are to be obeyed: similarly to Kor 4, 80, the letters of Ignatius (martyred in the early second century CE) go so far as to equate obedience to the bishop with obedience to God. In fact, the bishop is constructed as a locus of divine presence, thus recalling the “godward movement” of Muhammad that David Marshall has detected in the Medinan *suras*. For instance, Ignatius demands that “we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself” (Letter to the Ephesians 6), and the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an early church order that Holger Zellentin has recently brought to the attention of Qur'anic scholars, calls for the bishop to be honoured like God, “because the bishop sits for you in the place of God Almighty.” In sum, the Medinan Muhammad combines a range of tasks similar to that performed by late antique bishops, such as communal exhortation, serving as a moral exemplar, arbitration and adjudication, the redistribution of wealth for charitable purposes, and confronting pagans and Jews, both discursively and violently... In view of all these parallels, it would not be amiss to characterise the Qur'anic Messenger as playing the role of an “overseer” (which is of course the literal meaning of the Greek word *episkopos*) of the spiritual and communal well-being of the Believers. Captivatingly, Kor 2, 143 and 22, 78 actually describe the Messenger as a “*šahīd* set up over” the Believers. While the term *šahīd* certainly

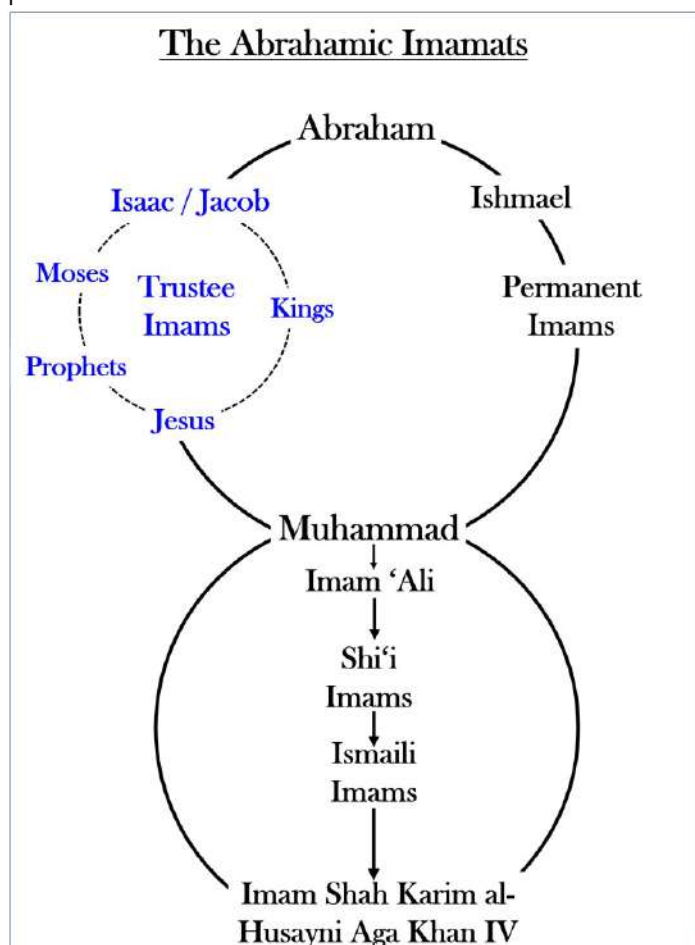
has the literal meaning “witness,” the two verses in question may well invoke the idea of episcopal oversight over the Believers.”

– Nicolai Sinai, “Muhammad as Episcopal Figure,” *Arabica* 65 (2018): 1-30: 22-25

10. From Jamesian Jewish Christianity to Ismaili Islam: The Ismaili Imams as the Spiritual Extensions of Jesus Christ

The similarities between the teachings of James the Just and the Ebionite Jewish Christianity that traces its origins to James have been noted by several scholars, including Robert Eisenman and James Tabor. Similarly, there is strong correlation between the notion of James succeeding Jesus due to being his family member and being directly appointed by Jesus and the spiritual rights of Imam ‘Ali as the closest male relative of Prophet Muhammad and being designated by him.

It may be small surprise to know that the Ismaili theology of Imamatus – or Imamology – closely parallels the core ideas of Ebionite Jewish Christianity, specifically the Ebionite theology of the “True Prophet” manifesting in a historical lineage of Prophets leading to Jesus: *“For the True Prophet Himself also from the beginning of the world, through the course of time, hastens to rest. For He is present with us at all times; and if at any time it is necessary, He appears and corrects us, that He may bring to eternal life those who follow Him”* (Pseudo-Clementines as quoted by [Decipher](#)). The Ismaili Imamatus “extends” the manifestation of the True Prophet throughout history and turns out to be the completion and fulfillment of the Ebionite doctrine of the True Prophet in the present time:



“Ismailian Gnosis — and this is one of its chief points of interest — presents both an actual extension (in history) and a virtual extension (for purposes of meditation or psychological analysis) of a Christianity that had long returned to the paradise of the archetypes. Not only Gnostic Christianity but eminently the Christianity that is designated as Judaeo-Christianity or Ebionism — a Christianity fundamentally hostile and alien to Paulinism, recognizing the primacy and presence not of Peter but of James, bishop of Jerusalem. We must not forget that Epiphanius, writing at the

end of the fourth century (375), describes it as still existing at that time in southern Syria, only a little more than two centuries before the birth of Islam. In general the historians and theologians who have dealt with the Christianity of the Ebionites have suggested and developed at greater or lesser length the idea that it was extended or amplified in Islam; what they had in mind was essentially the conception of the prophetic mission, the Islamic prophetology as such. **Here I cannot enter into details, but it is my belief that, if there are common traits, it is not so much in the general prophetology of Islam as in the doctrine of the Imam — the Imamology peculiar to Islamic esoterism, to Shiism, and most particularly to Ismailian Shiism.**”

– Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1983), 65

Thus, the legacy of “Jamesian” Jewish Christianity historically and spiritually continues with the Ismaili Imamate. In the present day and age, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni – the Imam of the time – is the locus of manifestation of what Ebionites call the “True Prophet”. Several hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad indicate a spiritual identity between Jesus and Imam ‘Ali:

“Something about you resembles Jesus the son of Mary and if I did not fear that certain groups of my Community would say about you what the Christians have said about Jesus I would reveal something about you that would have made the people pick up the dust of your footsteps in order to seek blessings from it.”

– Prophet Muhammad,

Al-Kulayni, *Rawda min al-Kafi*, in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Muhammad the Paraclete and ‘Ali the Messiah: New Remarks on the Origins of Islam and of Shi‘ite Imamology,” *Der Islam* (2018) 95(1): 30-64: 52)

Finally, the words of Imam ‘Ali himself make it clear that he embodies the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ (*‘Isa al-Masih*) – which is manifest today in Imam ‘Ali’s lineal descendant, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV:

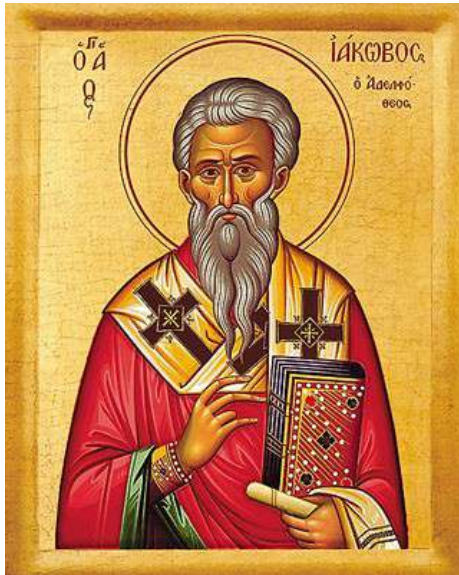
“O people! I am the Christ who disperses clouds, heals the blind, creates the birds, and cures the lepers, meaning ‘the second Christ’. I am he and he is I.” A man then asked him: “O Commander of the Faithful, is the Torah in Arabic or not?” He [‘Ali] said: “It is not in Arabic but its esoteric interpretation (*ta’wil*) is in Arabic. Verily, Christ is he who upholds the truth and he is the king of the world and the hereafter... Jesus son of Mary is I and I am he. He is the great Word of God (*kalimat Allah*). He is the witness and I am what is witnessed according to the mysteries.”

– Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib,

Ja‘far b. Mansur al-Yaman, *Kitab al-Kashf*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (Beirut: Dar Andalus, 1984), 28

The Pre-existent James and his Father Alphaeus/Cleophas as Khalipha ('Caliph')

James 'the Just' as Zaddik (Tsaddiq 'Righteous One')



In the introductory "Epistle of Clement to James" in the "Pseudo-Clementine" *Homilies*, James the Righteous (AKA James the Just) is addressed as "the Bishop of bishops, who rules Jerusalem, the Holy Assembly of the Hebrews and the Assemblies everywhere."

From the perspective of first-century Judaism, James (Hebrew *Ya'akov* or 'Jacob') was also the Opposition High Priest^[1] (in contradistinction to the Herodian-installed 'Sadducee' High Priest) and he was the revered *Tsaddiq* 'Righteous One' of his time—hence the name James *the Righteous* (*Ya'akov ha Tsaddiq*). According to Proverbs 10:25 and the *Zohar* (1.59b), the Tsaddiq is "the Perfect copy of the heavenly Ideal," "the Foundation of the World" and "the Pillar that upholds the World".

Tzadik

Tzadik ([Hebrew](#): צַדִּיק *ṣaddīq* [*tsa'dik*], "righteous [one]"; also *zadik* or *sadiq*; pl. *tzadikim* [*tsadi'kim*] צַדִּיקִים *ṣadīqīm*) is a title in [Judaism](#) given to people considered [righteous](#), such as biblical figures and later spiritual masters. The root of the word *ṣadiq*, is *s-d-q* (צדק *tsedek*), which means "justice" or "[righteousness](#)".

^[1] When applied to a righteous woman, the term is inflected as *tzadeket/tzidkaniot*. *Tzadik* is also the [root](#) of the word [tzedakah](#) ('charity', literally 'righteousness'). The term *tzadik* "righteous", and its associated meanings, developed in [rabbinic thought](#) from its [Talmudic](#) contrast with [hasid](#) ("pious" honorific), to its exploration in [ethical literature](#), and its [esoteric](#) spiritualisation in [Kabbalah](#).

Since the late 17th century, in [Hasidic Judaism](#), the institution of the **mystical tzadik** as a divine channel assumed central importance, combining popularization of (hands-on) [Jewish mysticism](#) with social movement for the first time.^[2] Adapting former Kabbalistic theosophical terminology, [Hasidic philosophy](#) internalised

mystical experience, emphasising [devekut](#) attachment to its [Rebbe](#) leadership, who [embody and channel](#) the [Divine flow](#) of blessing to the world.^[3]

The Pre-Existent James as Heavenly Ideal, First Man and Pillar of the World

Before continuing, it should be noted that this heavenly Ideal *as* ‘Ideal’ is essentially pre-existent, meta-historical, supra-sensory and—inasmuch as it is ontologically homologous to the Jewish *Adam Qadmon* as *Protanthropos* ‘Principial Man’—it is considered to be the first self-determination of the otherwise ineffable divine Essence as *Atsmut* עצמות or *Ayn-Sof* אין סוף. Homologues can be seen respectively in the *Ismā‘īlī Mubda‘ al-Awwal* ‘the First Originated’ (also known as ‘*Aql al-Awwal*’ ‘the First Intellect’) and *al-Mubdi‘* ‘the Originator’ (also known as *Ghayb al-Muṭlaq* ‘the Absolute Mystery’). In the Mystery traditions this has alternatively been phrased as the “first-born Son” (compare *Deus revelatus* or *Deus determinatus*) of the “Father” as ineffable Godhead (compare *Deus absconditus* or *Theos agnostos*). In Colossians 1:15-19, Paul writes that “the beloved Son is the Image of the invisible [i.e. absolutely unmanifest] God, the first-born over all creation: For through him [the Son] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created through him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist ... For it pleased the Father that in him [the Son] all fullness [*plērōma*] should dwell.”

The heavenly Ideal/Pattern or Image of God—which Philo Judaeus calls “the archetypal model, the Idea of ideas, the Logos of God” (*On Creation* VI.25)—is homologous to the Primordial Logos as the “Word of Truth” (*logos alētheias*) by which “the Father ... brought us forth ... so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” (Letter of James 1:18). Philo in his work *On the Confusion of Tongues* (XXVIII.146-147) refers to this as “the first-born Word” and reiterates that “the Image of God is his most ancient Word.” Prefiguring Colossians 1:15-19, Philo writes in *The Special Laws* (1.XVI.81) that “the Image of God is the Word, by which all the world was made.”

It should also be noted that the Foundation or Pillar associated with the Tsaddiq is often alluded to in the ‘throne’ references. According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 78.7.7), “[James] was the first to whom the Lord entrusted his throne upon earth.” The Syriac *Apostolic Constitutions* (8.35) likewise informs us that James was “appointed Bishop of Jerusalem by the Lord himself.”

But a more direct reference to James-the-Tsaddiq as vicegerent of God (*khalīfah Allāh*, compare the Shī‘ī “Imam of the time”), principal ‘Pillar’ or ‘Pole’ (compare the Sufi *Quṭb*) and ‘Foundation’ or ‘Throne’ (compare the Islamic *al-‘Arsh*) can be found in the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 12):

In the place you [the disciples] are to go, go to James the Righteous, for whose sake Heaven and Earth came into being.

According to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* II.23.19):

So remarkable a person must James have been, so universally esteemed for Righteousness, that even the most intelligent of Jews felt this was why his martyrdom was immediately followed by the siege of Jerusalem.

Following the death of James in 62 CE, Simeon bar Cleophas was appointed as *successor* (Syriac *khalīpha*) and thus adopted the role and mantle of “Bishop” of the Nazarene Assemblies (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III.11). In patristic sources, Simeon is known as “the cousin of the Lord” and is therefore also the cousin of James “the brother of the Lord” (Galatians 1:19) who was also known as “the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 3:18).

The name *Alphaeus* (the putative father of James) is Latin from the Greek transliteration (*H*)*alphaios* of the Aramaic *Khalphai* and as such is considered to be cognate to *Cleophas*. Despite the fact that James and this Simeon were cousins, they were nonetheless both reportedly the sons of “*Khalphai*”.

The present writer proposes that the name “son of Cleophas” refers to an Adoptionist-type tradition (i.e. as “friends of God and sons of adoption”^[2]) of the ‘True Prophet’, or alternatively and perhaps simultaneously is in reference to what has been identified as the Elijah-*redivivus* tradition^[3]—i.e. Elijah *come-back-to-life*—but in the lineage of Ḥoni the Righteous (AKA Onias the Just) who was earlier compared to Elijah (e.g. in *B’reishith Rabba* 13.7) and additionally referred to as the “beloved of God” (Josephus, *Antiquities* XIV.2.1) and “son” of his heavenly “Father” (*M. Ta’anit* 3:8, *B. Ta’anit* 23a). There are clear indications that James-the-Tsaddiq was considered to be the *redivivus* of Ḥoni-the-Tsaddiq; for example both were revered Tsaddiqim, both rendered adjuration or petitionary prayer in God’s name or according to some sort of invocation, both were so-called ‘rain makers’, both were the go-to arbitrators for religious disputes and rightful course of action, and both were subject to a wrongful death by stoning (the killing of “the Just One”). According to the rabbinical *B. Ta’anit* (23a), Ḥoni “fell asleep” (i.e. died, in 63 BCE) and was “hidden” for seventy years before reawakening (a *redivivus*) in a later era. This reawakening or revival was precisely at the time when Judas of Galilee and his associate “Saddok” inaugurated a revolutionary movement in 6 CE (Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII.1.1 and *Wars* II.8.1). According to Epiphanius

(*Panarion* 78.14.5), James died at the age of ninety-six, which means that James—the Tsaddiq and Opposition High Priest—would have been about forty years old in 6 CE.

The name “*Saddok*”—arguably a composite of *tsadoq* קִדְשׁ ‘to be just or righteous’ and *Tsaddiq* צַדִּיק ‘Righteous One’ (and both related to *tsedeq* צֶדֶק ‘righteousness’)—likely derives from the spiritual station of the *Tsaddiq*, and is arguably referring to James-the-*Tsaddiq* who was said to be “holy from his mother’s womb” (*Ecclesiastical History* II.23.5). In other words, James was recognised and revered as a *Tsaddiq* ‘Righteous One’ not merely from a very early age, but this description of him as being “holy from his mothers womb” alludes (in part) to the embryonic implanting of the aforementioned “heavenly Ideal”—thus the supposed pre-existence of James “for whose sake Heaven and Earth came into being”—upon which his station *ha-Tsaddiq* ‘the Righteous One’ is founded. Refer also to the Qumran Hymns (1QH 15.8-18.29^[4]):

You alone created the Righteous One, establishing him from the womb ... to Stand before You in Everlasting abode, illumined with Perfect Light forever with no more Darkness in unending Eras of Joy.

Eusebius adds: “Because of his [James’] unsurpassable Righteousness he was called the ‘Righteous’ and ‘Oblias’, which signifies in Greek, ‘Protection of the people’ and ‘Righteousness,’ in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.” (*Ecclesiastical History* II.23.7). When Eusebius says “in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him,” this suggests that it was James and not the normative “John the Baptizer” who was the prophesied one as an Elijah *redivivus* (notwithstanding Matthew 11:13-14). Moreover, it was presumably *as* High Priest that James was able to access the Holy of Holies, and *as* *Tsaddiq* and ‘Oblias’ (=Pillar/Fortress/Wall) “Protection of the people” that James was able to perform a Yom Kippur-style *atonement*. Professor Robert Eisenman remarks:

Not only does Epiphanius present these things even more forcefully than Eusebius—in this he is supported by Jerome—actually citing Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius as his sources, insisting that James actually wore the diadem or head-plate of the High Priest with the inscription ‘Holy to God’ on it; but also that he went into the Holy of Holies or Inner Sanctum of the Temple, if not regularly, at least once—there to render a ‘Yom Kippur’-style atonement, on behalf of the whole People.^[5]

Let that sink in for a moment... James performed a Yom Kippur **ATONEMENT** *on behalf of the whole People*. And after, or while, rendering one such atonement in 62 CE, he was stoned to death by the Herodian-installed priests and their supporters (Hegesippus, *Memoirs*, via Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II.23.7-18):

... And they began to stone him... but [James] turned and knelt down and said, 'I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. And while they were thus stoning him, one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, ... cried out, saying, 'Cease! What you are doing?! The Just One is praying for you!'

There is also a possibility that James was an actual descendant of Ḥoni.^[6] For key thematic reasons,^[7] this should not be understated and it may have some bearing on James as a “son of Khalphai”—especially in the context of Ḥoni and his progeny regularly “*hiding*” themselves, which Eisenman suspects may be a garbled account or lampooning of Ḥoni’s and his descendants’ connection to the mystical ‘Hidden Adam’ (*Adam Kasia / Adam Qadmon*) who later reappears in the Shī‘ī concept of [the ‘Hidden Imām’ and *al-Qā’im* ‘the Standing One’](#).^[8]

Consider now the following passage in *The (First) Apocalypse of James*, which is part allegory and a Mystery teaching alluding to the ineffable Godhead (the Originator as pre-existent “Father”) and the divine Principal or First Intellect (the Originated as pre-existent “Son”):

The Lord said to him, “James, behold, I shall reveal to you your redemption. When you are seized, and you undergo these sufferings, a multitude will arm themselves against you that they may seize you. And in particular three of them will seize you – they who sit (there) as toll collectors. Not only do they demand toll, but they also take away souls by theft. When you come into their power, one of them who is their guard will say to you, ‘Who are you or where are you from?’ You are to say to him, ‘I am a *son*, and I am from the *Father*.’ He will say to you, ‘What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?’ You are to say to him, ‘I am from the *Pre-existent* Father, and a son in the *Pre-existent* One.’” [All emphasis added]

Some of the doctrinal tenets of James and his community of Nazarenes (*notsrim*) and Ebionites (*ebionim*) were adopted by the later [Elkasaites](#), [Naassenes](#) and various other ‘[Primal Man](#)’, ‘Perfect Man’ or ‘[Hidden/Secret Adam](#)’ traditions in Northern Syria and Mesopotamia—some of which refer back to James as a means of legitimising their lineage or chain of doctrinal transmission.

[Elcesaites](#)

The **Elcesaites**, **Elkasaites**, **Elkesaites** or **Elchasaïtes** were an ancient [Jewish Christian](#) sect in [Lower Mesopotamia](#), then the province of [Asoristan](#) in the [Sasanian Empire](#) that was active between 100 and 400 CE. The members of this sect, which originated in the [Transjordan](#), performed frequent [baptisms](#) for [purification](#) and had a [Gnostic](#) orientation.^{[1][2]:123[3]}

The name of the sect derives from the alleged founder, Elkhasai ([Koinē Greek](#): Ἐλχασαΐ in Hippolytus), Elksai (Ἐλξαι in Epiphanius), or [Elkesai](#) (Ἐλκεσαΐ in Eusebius, and Theodore).

[Naassenes](#)

The **Naassenes** (Greek *Naasseni*, possibly from [Hebrew](#) נָחָשׁ *naḥaš*, snake)^[1] were a [Christian Gnostic](#) sect known only through the accounts in the books known as the [Philosophumena](#) or the *Refutation of all Heresies* (which have been attributed to [Hippolytus of Rome](#) but may in fact not be by him).

Therein, the Naassenes are said to have been taught their doctrines by [Mariamne](#), a disciple of [James the Just](#).^[2] The retention of the Hebrew form shows that their beliefs may represent the earliest stages of Gnosticism. The *Philosophumena*'s author regards them as among the first to be called simply "Gnostics", alleging that they alone have sounded the depths of knowledge.^[3]

[Adam Kadmon](#)

In [Kabbalah](#), **Adam Kadmon** (אָדָם קַדְמוֹן, *ʾādām qadmon*, "Primordial Man") also called Adam [Elyon](#) (אֱלִיֹּן, *ʾādām ʿelyōn*, "Most High Man"), or Adam Ila'ah (אֱלֹהִים, *ʾādām ʿillāʾ* "Supreme Man"), sometimes abbreviated as A"K (א"ק, 'A.Q.), is the first of [Four Worlds](#) that came into being after the [contraction](#) of [God's infinite light](#). *Adam Kadmon* is not the same as the physical [Adam Ha-Rishon](#) (אָדָם הָרִשׁוֹן).

In [Lurianic Kabbalah](#), the description of *Adam Kadmon* is [anthropomorphic](#).

Nonetheless, *Adam Kadmon* is [divine light](#) without vessels, i.e., pure potential. In the human psyche, *Adam Kadmon* corresponds to the [yechidah](#), the collective essence of the soul.

[Adam Kasia](#)

Adam Kasia ([Classical Mandaic](#): also referred to using the [portmanteau](#) **Adakas Adakas Ziwa** in the [Ginza Rabba](#)^[1]) means "the hidden [Adam](#)" in [Mandaic](#).^[2] The hidden Adam is also called *Adam Qadmaia* ("The First Adam").^[2] In [Mandaism](#), it means the [soul](#) of the first man.^[3] He is also identified as [Shishlam](#), the primordial priest.^[4]

Among the Mandaeans, *Adam Kasia* means the soul of every human.^{[2][5][6]} *Adam Kasia* shows many similarities with the Jewish idea of [Adam Kadmon](#).^[7]

Prayers in the [Qulasta](#), such as the [Asut Malkia](#), also refer to Adam as "Adam the First Man" (*Adam Gabra Qadmaia*).^[8] [The Thousand and Twelve Questions](#), a Mandaean priestly text, also refers to *Adam Kasia* as *Adam-S'haq*^[9] ('Adam-was-bright'), *Adam-S'haq-Ziwa*,^[3] or *Adam-S'haq-Rba*, who is described as the father of [Shishlam](#), the archetype of the prototypical Mandaean.^[10]

The wife of *Adam Kasia* is *Hawa Kasia* ('hidden Eve'), also known as *Hawa Ziwa* ('radiant Eve') or *Anana Ziwa* ('radiant cloud').^[11]

The Pre-Existent ‘Hidden Adam’, ‘Perfect Man’ and ‘Word of Truth’

This Primal/Perfect Man (compare the Hermetic ‘Perfect Nature’ *tibā al-tāmm*) or Hidden/Secret Adam is elsewhere referred to or described variously as an [Archangel of Humanity, heavenly Being, everlasting Priest or divine Mediator](#).

According to Philo (*On the Confusion of Tongues* XXVIII.146) this is “His first-born word, the eldest of His angels, as the great archangel of many names; for he is called, the Authority, and the Name of God, and the Word, and Man according to God’s Image, and He who sees Israel.”

Compare the Shī‘ī ‘Hidden Imām’ or the Islamic *Insān al-Kāmil* ‘Perfect Man’ considered as [divine Authority and metaphysical Foundation](#) for the *khalīfa* (‘vicegerent’ of God) who was supposedly first instated with the first man/prophet Adam. Toshihiko Izutsu writes:

[T]he Perfect Man on the cosmic level is the ‘vicegerent’ of God. The same is true also of the Perfect Man on the individual level ... The term *khalīfah* meaning ‘vicegerent’ is a little ambiguous, because we ordinarily use it to designate the political head of the Muslim community, the Caliph. In view of this fact, Ibn ‘Arabi strictly distinguishes between two kinds of *khalīfah*: (1) the ‘vicegerent of God’ (*khalīfah Allāh*, or *khalīfah ‘an Allāh*) and (2) the ‘vicegerent (or successor) of the Apostle’ (*khalīfah al-rasūl*, or *khalīfah ‘an al-rasūl*). The ‘vicegerent’ in the sense of the Perfect Man (1) is totally different from the Caliph, the historical and political head of the Muslim community, who assumes the name *khalīfah* (2).^[9]

The same can be said of the meta-historical ‘True Prophet’ of the Ebionites who ontologically approximates to the “Word of Truth” (*logos alētheias*) that James (1:17-18) associates with the “Perfect Gift from above, coming down from the Father of Lights.” From the perspective of traditional philosophy, compare Philo’s “archangelic and most ancient Word” as “a Pre-eminent Gift” that stands as Mediator between “the Father” and “the created universe”. (*Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205). This is then recast in the Mandaean [Draša d’Yahya](#) (Mead, pp.46-47) as the “Letter of Truth... which has come here to you [Yahya Yohana] from your Father;” and in the Mandaean [Haran Gawaita](#) (p.5) Yahia-Yohana (John) is actually called “the Prophet of Truth (*Kušta*), the Apostle,... who dwelt at the city of Jerusalem” (surely this is referring to James?) The *Haran Gawaita* immediately goes on to call John “a healer whose medicine was *water of life*,” which is reminiscent of James—as eschatological ‘rain-maker’ and an Elijah *redivivus*—asking of the people (in the vicinity of Jericho near the Jordan River, as per *Recognitions* I.70-71): “Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be *healed*. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (Letter of James 5:16). Epiphanius (*Panarion* 78.14.1) writes: “Once during a famine, he [James] lifted his hands to Heaven and prayed, and at once Heaven sent *rain*.” As did Honi and Elijah before him, and it is not insignificant that the name *Honi/Onias* ‘Gracious’ is an abridged form of *Honiyo* ‘God is Gracious’

which is none other than an alternate form of *Yohanan* (John) with the same meaning.

This is to suggest that the *Khalīpha* as ‘vicegerent’ *in divinis* may be related to James’ and Simeon’s “Father” as *Khalphai* (thus Halphaios, Alphaeus, Cleophas, Clopas), but qualified as such by way of the *Protanthropos* (*Adam Qadmon*), ‘Hidden Adam’, ‘Perfect Man’ or ‘Son of Man’ traditions, or following the Ebionite Adoptionist position with regard to the receiving of the perennial and meta-historical ‘True Prophet’—of whom it is said in the Ebionite Acts of the Apostles (AKA the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* II.22):

... For the True Prophet Himself also from the beginning of the world, through the course of time, hastens to rest. For He is present with us at all times; and if at any time it is necessary, He appears and corrects us, that He may bring to eternal life those who follow Him.

With regard to “the True Prophet Himself also from the beginning of the world, through the course of time,” compare the Gospel of Thomas (19) and the Gospel of Philip: “Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be.” With regard to the sentence “that He [the Ebionite ‘True Prophet’] may bring to eternal life those who follow Him,” compare the Gospel of John (3:16) when speaking of Christ: “...that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

As for the perennial “appearing” of the True Prophet and the path of “correction” (the Way made Straight^[10])—a divine intervention and restoration that in the Noahic or Abrahamic traditions is almost always associated with Righteousness (*tsedeq*, see *Recognitions* II.22: “And therefore I advise that His righteousness be first inquired into . . .” and Matthew 6:33: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . .”)—this is inherent to the *redivivus* tradition associated with both Elijah and Ḥoni “the Righteous”. Of these two it is said in the *B’reshith Rabba* (13.7): “There is no man like Elijah and Ḥoni to bring mankind to the service of God.” And as expounded at length by Eisenman, James “the Righteous” is an Elijah/Ḥoni *redivivus*.^[11]

The ‘Way’ made ‘Straight’

Righteousness and “His right hand” are of course related. In this regard, note in Part VII of the Mandaean *Alf Trisar Suialia*^[12] that there is a heavenly being referred to as “the *Son of Life* ... who stands at His right hand.” E. S. Drower adds: “As archetype of priesthood, he admonishes and inspires priests.” This surely parallels James the Righteous’ admonishment of the Temple priests while he was proclaiming “the *Son of*

Man sitting in Heaven at the right hand of the Great Power [homologous to the Elkasaites 'Hidden Power']" (*Ecclesiastical History* II.23.13) and further resonates with James as Opposition High Priest, who, like Elijah and Honi before him, was "turning the hearts" (Malachi 4:5-6) of the people: "Fix firmly your *hearts*: for the *coming of the Lord* draws near." (James 5:8). Likewise, James' *Son of Man on the Right Hand who turns hearts*, and the Mandaean *Son of Life at His Right Hand who admonishes and inspires priests*, is homologous to the *True Prophet (advising Righteousness) who appears and corrects us, that He may bring to eternal Life* those who follow Him. And is this "Son of *Life* (*hyyā*)" related in some way to *Yaḥyā* ('He Lives') and the eponymous transmitter of the [Zohar](#), Simeon "ben *Yoḥai*"? In this regard, compare Simeon bar *Cleophas* as *khalīpha* 'successor' to James the Righteous as "the Son of *Khalphai*", i.e. appointed as 'vicegerent' of God "the Father"—"from the Pre-existent Father, ... a son in the Pre-existent One"

[Zohar](#)

The ***Zohar*** ([Hebrew](#): זוהר, *Zōhar*, lit. "Splendor" or "Radiance"^[a]) is a [foundational work of Kabbalistic literature](#).^[u] It is a group of books including commentary on the mystical aspects of the [Torah](#) (the five books of [Moses](#)) and scriptural interpretations as well as material on [mysticism](#), mythical [cosmogony](#), and mystical [psychology](#). The *Zohar* contains discussions of the nature of [God](#), the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, redemption, the relationship of ego ^[citation needed] to darkness and "true self" to "the light of God". The *Zohar* was first publicized by [Moses de León](#) (c. 1240 – 1305 CE), who claimed it was a [Tannaitic](#) work recording the teachings of [Simeon ben Yochai](#)^[b] (c. 100 CE). This claim is universally rejected by modern scholars, most of whom believe de León, also an infamous forger of [Geonic](#) material, wrote the book himself between 1280 and 1286. Some scholars argue that the *Zohar* is the work of multiple medieval authors and/or contains a small amount of genuinely antique novel material. Later additions to the *Zohar*, including [Tiqqune haZohar](#) and *Ra'ya Meheimna*, were composed by a 14th century imitator.

Honi and the Elijah-redivivus Tradition

Which brings us back to Ḥoni and his relationship to Elijah and James. In Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (XIV.2.1) we read that Onias/Ḥoni the "Righteous man" was known for "hiding" himself, as did his putative grandson, Hanan "the Hidden". According to the rabbinical *B. Ta'anit* (23a), Ḥoni "fell asleep" (i.e. died, 63 BCE) and was "hidden" in a "mountain cave" (that had a carob tree planted nearby) for seventy years before reawakening—likely as one of his own descendants. Much like Elijah (1 Kings 18:41-19:8), Ḥoni also reportedly held the "keys to rain" (*Antiquities* XIV.2.1) and as such is considered to be an Elijah *redivivus*. Epiphanius (*Panarion* 78.14.1) similarly reports of James the Righteous: "Once during a famine, he [James] lifted his hands to Heaven and prayed, and at once Heaven sent rain."

Recall the *B'reshith Rabba* (13.7): "There is no man like Elijah and Ḥoni to bring mankind to the service of God." Recall the prophetic declaration of Malachi (4:5-6): "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes; he will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents." Recall in the first century CE that it is James who is turning the "hearts" of the people and proclaiming the imminent "coming of the Lord" as we read in The Letter of James (5:8-9): "Fix firmly your *hearts*: for the *coming of the Lord* draws near. Behold, the judge stands before the door." This is arguably assimilated by "John the Baptizer" in e.g. Luke (1:16): "And he will *turn* many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before the Lord *in the spirit and power of Elijah*." Hegesippus (via Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II 23.7–18) reports on James' previous announcement of the imminent "coming" of the Son of Man "sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and about to come upon the clouds of heaven." (i.e. eschatological 'rain'). The similarities don't end there; in much the same way that James—as eschatological 'rain-maker' and an Elijah *redivivus*—asks of the people (in the vicinity of Jericho near the Jordan River): "*Confess your sins* one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Letter of James 5:16); so too, Matthew (3:5-6) reports that people from Jerusalem, Judea and all around the Jordan were flocking to John to be baptised (immersed?) by him in the Jordan and were "*confessing their sins*."

As mentioned earlier, Eisenman views the "hidden" and "hiding" notices as either a garbled account or lampooning of Ḥoni's and his descendants' connection to the mystical 'Hidden Adam' (*Adam Kasia / Adam Qadmon*) tradition. Similarly we read in the rabbinical *B. Shabbat* (33b) that Simeon ben Yoḥai in the second century CE also "hid" himself in a "cave", at the entrance of which grew a "carob tree". And while there is no rain-making in this account, it is notable that a spring of fresh water gushes forth at the entrance to the cave—perhaps in a similar way that a spring of fresh water appeared beneath the pregnant Mary who had withdrawn to a place in the east (i.e. likewise was 'hidden') and was sheltering under a date-palm tree (as homologue of the carob tree) according to the Qur'ān 19:16-26. While in the cave, Simeon is also visited by Elijah (compare the Annunciation of Mary in the Quran where she is visited by a Perfect Man, as well the appearance of the Angel of Humanity, Gabriel, to Muhammad in the Cave of Hira). The typology is clear, and this must surely link Simeon ben Yoḥai to the Elijah/Ḥoni-*redivivus* tradition of which James the Righteous was clearly an earlier heir. [\[see also note 8\]](#)

ENDNOTES:

[1] According to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.5-6), "[James] alone was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, for he did not wear wool, but linen, and he used to enter the Temple alone [presumably as Opposition High Priest], and was often found upon his bended knees, interceding for the forgiveness of the people." According to Jerome (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 2), James "alone enjoyed the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, since, indeed, he did not wear woolen, but only linen clothes, and went into the Temple alone and prayed on behalf of the people, so that his knees were reputed to have acquired the callousness of a camel's

knees.” In Jerome’s *Commentary on Galatians* 1:19 (396), he writes “So holy was James that the people zealously tried to touch the fringes of his garment.” According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.4.2-4), “[James] functioned as High Priest according to the ancient priesthood. For this reason he was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, as Scripture says the Law directed the High Priests to do.” And when Epiphanius says “[James] functioned as High Priest *according to the ancient priesthood*,” is he referencing that priesthood spoken of about Christ in Hebrews 5:6, 6:20 and 7:21 (following Psalm 110:4): “You are a *priest* for all eternity *in accordance with the order of Melchizedek*”? In this regard, compare [the archangelic Mediator that Stands between “the Father” and all of creation](#) (Philo, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205). Later, Epiphanius reiterates: “To James alone it was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, because he was a Nazirite and connected to the priesthood... James was a distinguished member of the priesthood... James also wore a diadem [sacerdotal plate] upon his head.” (*Panarion* 78.13.5-8). See also Robert Eisenman, ‘James in the Temple as Opposition High Priest’, in *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ*, London: Watkins Publishing, 2006, pp.123-127.

[2] Ebionite *Acts of the Apostles*, AKA “Pseudo-Clementine” *Recognitions* IV.9: “When God had made man after His own image and likeness, He grafted into His work a certain breathing and odour of His divinity, that so men, being made partakers of His Only-begotten, might through Him be also *friends of God and sons of adoption*.”

[3] Robert Eisenman, ‘Revolutionary Messianism and the Elijah *Redivivus* Tradition’, in *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ*, London: Watkins Publishing, 2006, pp.173-198.

[4] Cited in Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: Recovering the True History of Early Christianity*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997, p.360.

[5] Eisenman, *The New Testament Code*, p.123.

[6] See Eisenman’s commentary (‘Abba Hilkiah Makes Rain’ in *The New Testament Code*, pp.157-161) on the James-like “Abba Hilkiah” who was reportedly “the son of the son of Honi” (*B. Ta’anit* 23a).

[7] For example, see Eisenman, “Other Rain-Making ‘Zaddik’s in the ‘Primal Adam’ Tradition,” in *The New Testament Code*, pp.142-151.

[8] On the subject of the Hidden Adam, Hidden Imām and Perfect Man traditions, Robert Eisenman remarks: “The ‘Hidden’ terminology is also applied to Honi’s putative heir, John the Baptizer, whose mother Elizabeth is described as ‘hiding herself’ in the infancy narrative of Luke 1:24, as it is in the *Talmud* to Honi’s grandson ‘Hanan the Hidden’ [...] The Protevangelium of James, an infancy narrative ascribed to James—which, as we have seen, first propounds the doctrine of Mary’s *perpetual virginity*—rather, has Elizabeth ‘*hiding* John’ from Herod ‘in a mountain cave’. Herod, who wants to kill him—possibly the basis of the parallel motif in Matthew 2:13 about *Jesus*?—now asks *John’s* father, ‘Where have you *hidden* your son?’ The Qur’an follows up these things, in the process totally confusing John and Jesus. For it, *both* Elizabeth *and* Mary ‘withdraw’ themselves and now it is Mary who ‘*hides herself*’ in a far-off place (19:22)—the ‘mountain cave’ of the Protevangelium of James above. It is now Mary who is ‘*consecrated*’ to God while still in her mother’s ‘womb’ and she now—like Noah in Jewish mystical tradition above—needs ‘Protection’ from ‘Satan’ or ‘the Adversary’ (3:36). This is the same kind of shift we encountered regarding James’ ‘life-long virginity’ to Mary’s in this same second-century Protevangelium of James. For Muhammed, too, in a clear recapitulation of Naasene / Ebionite / Sabaeen ‘Perfect Man’ ideology, the Spirit now ‘assumes for Mary the form of a *Perfect Man*’ (Qur’an 19:17—here is our link between ‘the Perfect Man’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ conceptualities), and, when speaking about proclaiming the ‘Hidden Things’ and how John, like Mary, is always ‘chaste’ (that is, ‘a virgin’—Qur’an 3:39-46 and 21:91), Muhammed describes this again, ‘Lo, the likeness of Jesus is the *likeness of Adam*’ (Qur’an 3:59). Muhammed specifically links John’s father, John, Jesus, and Elijah together and, reflecting Dead Sea Scrolls terminology, calls them ‘*of the Righteous*’ (6:86) and John, ‘a Prophet of *the Righteous*’ (3:39). Even more telling in this Quranic presentation, the *Talmud’s* ‘carob tree’, associated with Honi’s seventy-year sleep above, now enters Muhammed’s description of John’s relationship to Jesus as well, only it is now *Mary* instead of Honi, who *sits down under the carob [sic. date-palm] tree and eats the ‘ripe fruit’* that falls from it. Nothing could better demonstrate the interrelatedness of all these traditions than this. In some manner they are all part of an identifiable whole and the story of Honi and his progeny is somehow connected to all these traditions about John, Jesus, and James. It should also be clear that all of these motifs then move into the Islamic Shi’ite doctrine of the ‘Hidden Imam’ or ‘Standing One’ as well.” (Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus*, pp.384-385; see also: Eisenman, *The New Testament Code*, pp.151-153.)

[9] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.268.

[10] Isaiah 40:3, 1QS viii:13-14, Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23, Acts 9:11, Qur'ān 1:6-7.

[11] See Eisenman, "Revolutionary Messianism and the Elijah Redivivus Tradition," in *The New Testament Code*, pp.173-198. See also Robert Eisenman, "Eschatological 'Rain' Imagery in the War Scroll from Qumran and in the Letter of James," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49 (1990), pp.173-184; and James, M. Darlack, *Pray for Reign: The Eschatological Elijah in James 5:17-18*, South Hamilton, Massachusetts: Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary, 2007; as well as chapters: "James as 'Rain-Maker' and 'Friend of God'" and "Other Rain-Making 'Zaddik's in the 'Primal Adam' Tradition" in Eisenman, *The New Testament Code*, pp.123-172. See also Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.14.1.

[12] Translated and cited in E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, p.60.

The ‘First-born Son’ of God, Begotten as ‘Word of Truth’

In Colossians 1:15-19, we read:

The beloved Son is the Image of the invisible God,^[1] the first-born over all creation:^[2] For through him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created through him, and for him:^[3] And he is before all things,^[4] and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church:^[5] who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead [i.e. those yet without “true *Life=hayyā*”]; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him all fullness [*plērōma*] should dwell.

Notes and Commentary:

^[1] Firstly, it should be noted that the term “invisible (God)” does not merely reference that which is imperceptible to the physical senses, but more correctly that which (in traditional metaphysical terms) is Absolutely Unmanifest, even to supra-sensory perception or noetic contemplation. Secondly, the “Image” of God as the first self-determination of the Absolute (elsewhere identified with the “first-born Son”, “first born Word”, “Word of Truth”, or “the First Originated” *Mubda‘ al-Awwal*) in the earlier doctrines as seen in e.g. the works of Philo of Alexandria and the Letter of James, is essentially supernal, supra-physical and supra-sensory: the pre-existent Mediator between “the Father” as Godhead

(compare *Atsmut* עצמות, *Deus absconditus*, *Theos agnostos*, *Ghayb al-Muṭlaq* ‘the Absolute Mystery’) and all of creation. In Neoplatonic terms, the First Originated as the first self-determination of the Godhead is known as the First Intellect (Arabic ‘*Aql al-Awwal*, or ‘*Aql al-Kulli* ‘the Universal Intellect’).

We can see an approximation of this in the works of Philo who writes: “And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and separated that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Word is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; and is also the ambassador, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race. And the Word rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, ‘And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you;’ [Numbers 16:48] neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities.” (*Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205). As we also read in John 1:1-5: “In the beginning [and in principle] was the Word [*in principia erat verbum*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the

light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness does not comprehend it.”

Likewise, regarding *al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadīyah* (the Reality of Muhammad) considered as the first self-determination of the ineffable Godhead (*al-Ḥaqīqat Ḥaqā'iq* ‘the Reality of Realities’), we are told by al-Qashani that “(Muhammad was) the first self-determination with which the Essence at the level of Unity determined itself before any other forms of self-determination. So all the infinite self-determinations became actualized through him ... [A]ll the self-determinations (of the Absolute) are arranged in a hierarchy of genera, species, kinds, and individuals, all being disposed in a vertical order. So (Muhammad) comprises in himself all of these self-determinations without leaving anything. He is, in this sense, unique in the whole world of Being; nothing can compete with him, because nothing is found equal to him in the hierarchy. In fact, there is above him only Essence at the level of its absolute Unity, which transcends all self-determinations, whether that of an attribute, name, description, definition, or qualification.”

(Translated and cited in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.237.)

Note that all of the aforementioned sounds remarkably similar to the pre-existent, supernal “Image”, “Pattern” or “Ideal” upon which the Jewish *Tsaddiq* (Righteous Pillar) is “established” as a “Perfect copy” (compare the Sufi *Insān al-Kāmil* “Perfect Man”), as we read in the *Zohar* (1.59b): “Noah was a Righteous One [i.e. a *Tsaddiq*]. Assuredly so after the heavenly Pattern [i.e. *Adam*

Qadmon as *Protanthropos* ‘Principal Man’]. For it is written [Proverbs 10:25]: ‘The Righteous One is the Foundation of the World’, and the Earth is established thereon. For, this is the Pillar that upholds the world. So Noah was called Righteous in this world ... and acted so as to be a Perfect copy of the heavenly Ideal.” The same is said of James-the-*Tsaddiq* in the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 12): “In the place you [the disciples] are to go, go to James the Righteous, *for whose sake Heaven and Earth came into being.*” [Emphasis added]. Note also what the Shī‘a philosopher Ḥasan Lāhijī (1621-1709) writes of the Perfect Man: “Absolute non-being is manifested only in and through absolute being. For any other than Perfect Man, access to this degree is difficult, for *Perfect Man* is the most perfect of beings and *the very cause of the coming into existence of the world.*” [All emphasis added].

(Translated and cited in Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, New Lebanon NY: Omega Publications Inc., 1994, p.118.)

Paul’s doctrine, as expressed in Colossians 1:15-19, is prefigured in the works of Philo of Alexandria, e.g. “[T]he Image of God is the Word, by which all the world was made” (*The Special Laws* 1.XVI.81). In the gnostic *Trimorphic Protennoia*, it is instead the pre-existent Virgin Mother “Meirothea” who calls Herself “the Image of the Invisible Spirit.” As to the nature of the “Son”—the pre-existent Being—compare the (*First*) *Apocalypse of James*: “(The Lord said to James) ... When you come into their power [the 3 toll-collectors], one of them who is their guard will

say to you, ‘Who are you or where are you from?’ You are to say to him, ‘I am a son, and I am from the Father.’ He will say to you, ‘What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?’ You are to say to him, ‘I am from the Pre-existent Father, and a son in the Pre-existent One’;” which is further qualified in the verse: “...And then you will reach Him-who-is, and you will no longer be James; rather you are the One-who-is.” Compare Galatians 2:20: “I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”

[2] Regarding the verse: “the first-born over all creation,” compare the Letter of James (1:18): “Of His own will, He [the “Father of Lights”] *brought us forth* by the *Word of Truth* (*logos alētheias*), that we should be a kind of *first fruits* [*apō-archē* “from Origin”] *amongst His creation*.” Compare also Philo’s supernal “first-born Word” (*On the Confusion of Tongues*, XXVIII.146) or “first-born Son (of God)” as First Logos (*On Husbandry*, XII.51). In reference to James’ “Word of Truth” (as the Perfect Gift [*teleion dōrēma*] from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow [i.e. undifferentiated and unconditioned].” in the Letter of James 1:17), compare the Islamic *kalimatīn min Allāh* (a “Word from God”) or *kalimatuhu* (“His Word”). Compare also the Mandaean “*Letter of Truth*... which has come here to thee [Yahya Yohana] from thy [supernal] Father” (Translated in G.R.S. Mead, *Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book*, London: Watkins, 1924, p.47).

Philo’s “first-born Son (of God)” (AKA “the first-born Word”, AKA “the Image of God by which all the world was made”) prefigures Paul’s “The beloved Son is the Image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation: For through him were all things created.” Both prefigure John 3:16, which the present writer will interpret anew: “The divine Absolute loved (*ēgapēsen*) the created order (*kosmon*) such that he gifted (*edōken*) it with [an indwelling and gnosis of] his Principial Emanation/Being (*mono-genē*); that whosoever is brought into Persuasion (*pistis*) [of this divine Principial, the “first-born Word”], shall not perish but attain/maintain (*echē*) Eternal Life (*aiōnion zōēn*).” This is reflected in the (*First*) *Apocalypse of James*: “...And then you will reach Him-who-is, and you will no longer be James; rather you are the One-who-is.” See also: Timothy Scott, “The Great Man,” *The Wisdom of the Divinity in the Word of Adam – Part 1, Bezels of Wisdom*, 2016 (Retrieved 2016-02-24).

[3] Regarding the verse: “*all things were created through him, and for him*,” compare the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 12): “In the place you [the disciples] are to go, go to James the Righteous, *for whose sake Heaven and Earth came into being*” [emphasis mine]. In the rabbinical *B. Ta’anit* (24b) we read: “Every day a Heavenly Voice issued [from Mt Horeb] and declared: “*The whole world is sustained on account of Hanina my son*...”

[4] I.e. metaphysically pre-existent, meta-historical and Principial. Compare the Gospel of Philip: “Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be” (i.e. “This is He who has Stood, Stands and will Stand, a

male-female power like the pre-existing Boundless Power, which has neither beginning nor end, existing in oneness.” — Simon Magus, *Apophysis Megale*).

[5] Regarding the verse: “he is head of the body, the church,” compare the Mandaean: “Look on me, Miryai, my daughter... Look on me who am thy mother! My daughter art thou, and the daughter of all of the priests. *Thy head is the great chief of the Temple* [emphasis mine].” (Mead, *Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book*, p.68). Recall that James was the Opposition/Tsaddiq High Priest in the Temple and was called, in Greek, *Episcopos* (essentially “Head”, literally “Overseer”, or in Hebrew the *Mebaqquer* of the Jerusalem Assembly, and was noted as the “Bishop of bishops” in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*). Following the Adoptionist standpoint of the Ebionites, the present writer believes that James as the presiding Tsaddiq was the traditional source of what Paul would later say: “I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20), and as such, James was given divine authority as Mebaqquer (Episcopos, “Head”) of the Jerusalem Assembly. According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 78.7.7), “[James] was the first to whom the Lord entrusted his throne upon earth;” and the *Homilies* is addressed to “James... the Bishop of Bishops, who rules Jerusalem, the Holy Assembly of the Hebrews and the Assemblies everywhere.” Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23) states that James was “the Lord’s brother, who had been elected by the Apostles to the episcopal throne at Jerusalem;” and the Syriac *Apostolic Constitutions* (8.35) informs us that James “was appointed Bishop of Jerusalem by the Lord himself.” In the *Homilies* (11.35), Peter says: “Above all, remember to shun any apostle, teacher or prophet who does not accurately compare his teaching with *James*... and this, even if he comes to you with recommendations.”

The Wisdom of the Divinity in the Word of Adam – Part 1

In which he considers: archetypes (essences); angels; Adam (the Great Man); Adam as Man & Regent; God's Two Hands (coincidentia oppositorum)

The Most Beautiful Names

'The Reality wanted to see the essences of His Most Beautiful Names or, to put it another way, to see His own Essence, in an all-inclusive object encompassing the whole Command, which, qualified by existence, would never reveal to Him His own mystery.' (p.50)

I was a hidden treasure, and I longed to be known, so I created the Cosmos (hadith quasi)

'The Reality gave existence to the whole Cosmos as an undifferentiated thing without anything of the spirit in it, so that it was like an unpolished mirror.' (p.50)
...an "undifferentiated thing"; Substance (*Ousia* or *hyperousia*); *prima material*; the *Guarded Tablet (al-Lawh al-mahfūz)*

'It is in the nature of the divine determination that He does not set out a location except to receive a divine spirit, which is called "the breathing into him".' (p.50)

"The breathing into him" (Qur'an 21:91)

The undifferentiated thing receives the spirit; the mirror receives the image; existence receives the breathing into him (of the Breath of the Merciful [nafas al-rahman]...)

rahima – womb

rahmah – mercy

Rahman – cosmogonic Mercy

Rahim – saving Mercy

Compare *Rahman* and *Rahim* to Eckhart's *durchbrechen* (birth of the soul in God) and *reditus* (return of the soul to God).

On comparisons between Ibn al-Arabi and Meister Eckhart one should read Reza Shah-Kazemi's [Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi & Meister Eckhart](#).

The Spirit '...is nothing other than the coming into operation of the undifferentiated form's [innate] disposition to receive the inexhaustible overflowing of Self-revelation, which has always been and will always be.' (p.50)

cosmic essence and substance are one (polarity; bi-unity)

The spirit is the Essence (*Dhat*). The essence son His Most Beautiful Names are, in the final analysis, His Essence.

'...there is only that which is receptive and the receptive has been only form the most Holy Superabundance [of the Reality]...' (p.50)

'All command derives from Him, even as it begins with Him.' (p.50) – Qur'an 2:210.

‘Thus the Command [*kun*; “be!”] required the defective characteristic of the mirror of the Cosmos, and Adam was the very principle of reflection for that mirror and the spirit of that form, while the angels were only certain faculties of that form which was the form of the Cosmos, called in the terminology of the Folk, the Great Man.’ (p.51)

The Angels

‘Each of these faculties or powers [angels] is veiled [from knowing the whole] by its own self [being limited by its relative individuality], so that it can not know anything that excels it.’ (p.51)

At the same time ‘...it has the qualification for every high position and exalted abode with God by virtue of its participation in the divine Synthesis...’ (p.51)

The fall of Lucifer

“What prevents you from prostrating to one whom I have created with my two hands?” (Quran 38:75)

‘It is for this reason that God holds the conclusive argument against the angels [in their protest at His command to prostrate to Adam]. So take care, for God warns you by the example of another [Lucifer], and consider carefully from whence the arraigned one is charged. For the angels did not grasp the meaning of the formation of God’s Regent nor did they understand the essential servitude demanded by the Plane of Reality. For none knows anything of the Reality save that which is implicit in the Essence [of the Reality].’ (p.52)

The angels do not enjoy the comprehensiveness of Adam and comprehend only those Divine Names peculiar to them, by which they glorify and sanctify the Reality... (p.52)

‘If they indeed knew their own [essential] selves they would know [their limitation], and if that were so, they would have been spared [their mistaken utterance regarding Adam].

‘Adam enshrines divine Names the angles have no part in, not are they able to glorify they rLord by them or by them to exalt His transcendence, as Adam does.’ (p.52)

‘As for Lucifer, he is only a part of the Cosmos and has no share in the Synthesis, by virtue of which Adam is Regent.’ (p.56)



Adam and the Angels

All the Names constituting the Divine Image are manifest in the human formation so that this

information enjoys a degree by which it encompasses and integrates all existence.(p.52)

The Great Man

...the Universal Nature, which contains and comprises al the receptivities of the Cosmos, higher and lower. ... The formation is called Man and Vice-Regent [of God]. (p.51)

The first term, “Man,” stems from the universality of his formation and the fact that he embraces all realities.

‘For the Reality, he is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place. Thus he is called *al-insān* [meaning both man and pupil], for it is by him that the Reality looks on His Creation and bestows Mercy [of existence] on them.’ (p.51)

‘He is Man, the transient [in his form], the eternal [in his essence]; he is the everlasting , the discriminating and unifying Word.’ (p.51)

‘It is by his existence that the Cosmos subsists and he is, in relation to the Cosmos, as the seal is to the ring, the seal being that place wherein is engraved the token with which the Kings seals his treasure. So he is called Vice-Regent, for by him God preserves His creation, as the seal preserves the king’s treasure...’ (p.51)

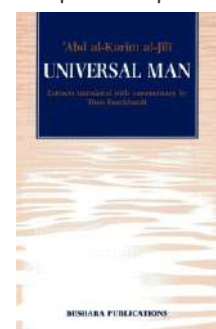
Even so is the Cosmos preserved so long as the Perfect Man remains in it. (p.51)

The Great Man is both Universal Man and man as individual form. As Universal Man he is *al-insān al-kamīl*. Here the reader should see: [Al-Jīlī, *al-insān al-kamīl* \(Universal Man\), tr. T. Burckhardt, Gloucester: Beshara Publications, 1983.](#)

In his introduction to *al-insān* Burckhardt says, ‘the cosmos is, then, like a single being; – “We have recounted all things in an evident prototype” (Qur’an 36). If one calls this “Universal Man,” it is not by reason of an anthropomorphic conception of the universe, but because man represents, on earth, its most perfect image.’ (p.iv).

We have recounted all things in an evident prototype (Qur’an 36)

This is again the “King” (*Wang*) of Taoist tradition, and *Ādibuddha* in Tibetan Buddhism.[1] With respect to the Judaic tradition, Leo Schaya remarks, ‘Transcendent man, *adam ilaah*—also called *adam kadmon* (“principal man”)—is God in his essence and his ontological emanation’[2]. Gershom Scholem calls *Adam Kadmon* “primordial man” stressing that the Divine Being Himself cannot be expressed. All that can be expressed are His “symbols”, the *Sefirot*.[3] Elsewhere Scholem explains the Lurianic doctrine: ‘*Adam Kadmon* is nothing but a first configuration of the divine



light which flows from the essence of *En-Sof* into the primeval space of the *Tsimtsum*—not indeed from all sides but, like a beam [the Divine Ray], in one direction only. He is therefore the highest form in which the divinity begins to manifest itself after the *Tsimtsum*.’^[4]

[1] Govinda observes that the *Ādibuddha* is ‘the symbol of universality, timelessness and completeness of the enlightened mind’ (*Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, 1969, p.99). He cites H. V. Guenther (*Yuganaddha, the Tantric View of Life*, Banaras, 1952, p.187): ‘*Ādibuddha* is best translated as the unfolding of man’s true nature.’

[2] Schaya, *UMK*, 1971, p.126.

[3] Scholem, *MTJM*, 1995, p.215.

[4] Scholem, *MTJM*, 1995, p.265.

(taken from my *Symbolism of the Ark*)*

An individual man may also be the Great Man, insomuch as “he” (for the term “man” is generic and does not denote gender) is the ‘righteous man of his generation’ (*Genesis* 6:9).

This reminds me of the idea, found in Buddhism, that if only one person remained focused on contemplation of the Buddha then that one person would justify and sustain the existence of the entire universe.

The Eternal Imām as “Standing One

The Arabic *qiyamah* ‘rising, resurrection’ and *al-Qā’im* ‘the Standing One’ etymologically derive from the Arabic *qiyam* ‘standing’, from the root *q-w-m* or *qāma* ‘to stand up’. Esoterically, this alludes to the activation of the innate Universal/First Intellect (‘*aql al-kullī/awwal*’): to be noetically awake—in the full sense of the faculty—and to be ‘upright’ in gnosis of the divine Principal with its relevant Attribute of *al-Qayyūm* ‘the Self-Existing One’ (upon Whom all others depend).

Arise [*q-w-m*], shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60:1)

According to the sixth Shī‘ī Imām, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq:

When man’s intellect is certified by divine Light, he will become understanding, wise, a guardian of the Qur’ān, and knowledgeable. Then he will know where he is, what he is and why he is there.^[1]

The Arabic *Imām* ‘leader, pattern’ etymologically derives from the root ‘*amma*’ to precede, be in front, lead’. This not only refers to the physically manifest Imām who *stands before* the congregation during ritual prayer, but esoterically this also alludes to the pre-existence of the Eternal Imām who is ontologically primary and Principal and thus *Stands before* creation itself. According to Zachary Markwith:

Some gnostic Shī‘a have also spoken of the ‘Imam of one’s being.’ Here the Imam is envisaged as the personification of the Intellect (‘*aql*’) or eye of the heart (‘*ayn al-qalb*’), which is the subjective ‘Imam’ of the believer [...] It is this spiritual archetype that summons humans to their higher nature and is in fact identical to it. The Imam helps to orient us towards the heart, which is the locus of revelation (*waḥy*) for the prophets and inspiration (*ilhām*) for the saints. In ‘*irfānī*’ Shī‘ī epistemology, it is through the Intellect or the ‘Imam of one’s being’ that one is oriented towards and guided to the Divine reality.^[2]

In the following pre-Islamic examples, take note of references to this “Standing” which alludes to the metaphysical divine Principal or the *Eternal Imām* as ‘Pole’ or ‘Pillar’ *in divinis*—the ‘*Hidden/Secret Adam*’ of the Mandaeans, or the ‘*Hidden God/Power*’ of the Elkasaites—who is also pre-existent and thus *Stands “before”*:

You alone created the Righteous One, establishing him from the Womb ... to Stand before You in Everlasting abode, illumined with Perfect Light forever with no more Darkness in unending Eras of Joy.

— Qumran Hymns: 1QH 15.8–18.29

And the “Sons of Zadok” are the Elect of Israel, called by Name, who will Stand up [or ‘go on Standing’] in the Last Days.

— Qumran Damascus Document: CD 4.3–4

John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water: but there Stands one among you, whom you know not.”

— John 1:26

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep Standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

— Galatians 5:1

Incomprehensible Air, without beginning or end. In this is the Father who sustains all things, and nourishes those things which have a beginning and end. This is He who has Stood, Stands and will Stand, a male-female power as the preëxisting Boundless Power, which has neither beginning nor end, existing in oneness.

— ‘Apophysis Megale’ of Simon Magus, via Hippolytus in G. R. S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*, p.173.

And [the One] Standing there raised above all that which has being, we kneel to It as to the Rising Sun, blinded in our eyes.

— Proclus

The Lord said, “Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be.”

— Gospel of Philip

To reiterate: “He who has Stood, Stands and will Stand” (*qāma*), “who is, has been and shall be” (*Christus aeternus*, the Eternal Imām), is both pre-existent and metaphysically Principial, and in such way ‘stands’ *before* (thus in the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Thomas 19 it is “he who is before he came into being”). This is arguably prefigured in the pre-existent, supernal “Ideal/Image” upon which is established the “Perfect copy” of the Jewish *Tsaddiq* ‘Righteous (Pillar)’, who is said to be “the Foundation of the World” (Proverbs 10:25, *Zohar* 1.59b) and who was exemplified in James-the-Tsaddiq “for whose sake Heaven and Earth came into being.” (Gospel of Thomas, Logion 12). See also “The Pillar of the World: The Eschatological Role of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in 2 (Slavonic) Enoch” by Andrei A. Orlov.

Robert Eisenman in his book *James the Brother of Jesus: Recovering the True History of Early Christianity*, writes:

A book ascribed to ‘Elchasai’ [described as a “Righteous One” by Hippolytus] was apparently brought to Rome during the second year of Hadrian’s reign (119 CE). This book included the important reference to ‘the Standing One’ ... There, purportedly, it was also a revelatory Angel ‘standing’ some ‘ninety-six miles high’

(in competing accounts this is the risen Christ) ... The height of 'ninety-six' here, manifestly, is nothing but the number of years Epiphanius—two centuries later—considers to be James' age when he died.[3]

This then situates this '[Elchasai](#)', Angel or [Angelos Christos](#) firmly within thematic events associated with James' ontology and eschatology, as well as his assault in the Temple after being questioned about "the gate/door of Jesus" and him proclaiming "the Son of Man" at the right hand of "the Great Power." (Hegesippus via Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II.23.7-18). In the Letter of James 5:9 we read: "The Judge is *Standing* at the door."

The term "Son of Man" can create some confusion, but it appears to represent the active Agency of the 'Great/Boundless Power' (as per James, Paul and Simon Magus) which in itself is ontologically homologous to, or one of the primary attributes of, the 'Hidden Adam' (AKA *Adam Qadmon* as *Protanthropos* 'Principal Man').

E.S. Drower in her book, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, writes:

The [heavenly or divine] Body is that of Adam Qadmaia [compare the Qabalah's *Adam Qadmon*], the 'First Adam', Adam Kasia, the Mystic or Secret Adam [compare the Shī'ī "Hidden Imām"] who preceded the human Adam called Adam *pagria* (physical man) by many myriads of years, for the macrocosm preceded the microcosm and the Idea of the cosmos was formed in human shape, so that through the creation of the one the creation of the other ensued [...]

The central cult of both [the Elkasaites and the Mandaean] is the Heavenly Man, Adam. In the secret scrolls the 'false prophet' [so-called by the Church Fathers, but called by the Ebionites 'the True Prophet'] of the Elkasaites can be recognized as the Nasoraean Adam Kasia [Secret Adam]—no 'man' but Man, Anthropos, the Son of Man, the Son of God; 'El Kasia [the Hidden God]. In his lower aspect he is the Demiurge, creator of 'worlds of illusion, seven to his right and seven to his left'. In his higher and divine aspect he is Mankind anointed and crowned, priest and king, an image of divine kingship [compare Melchizedek].[4]

In the anthropomorphic representations the supra-physical and pre-existent 'Standing One' is homologous to the 'Hidden Adam' of the [Mandaeans](#), the 'Hidden God'[5] of the [Elkasaites](#), the '[Perfect Man](#)' of the Naassenes, and 'Sat Purusha' (True Person/Being) of the [Upanishads](#)—the *Protanthropos* or *Ātman*. In addition, "(He who has) neither beginning nor end, existing in oneness" is ontologically homologous to Melchizedek who is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; he remains a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:3)—and note that in the *11QMelch* Dead Sea Scroll, Melchizedek is portrayed as a heavenly being. Compare *2 Enoch* (22) where the Lord says to Enoch just prior to him

being *raised up* by the Archangel Michael to the *Face/Presence* of the Lord: “Stand up, and stand in front of my face forever.”

Melchizedek (the heavenly ‘King of Righteousness’) “remains a priest continually (for all time)” because He is the pre-existent and meta-historical Mediator between the ineffable divine Essence (Hebrew *Atsmut*) as Godhead (termed “Father”) and all of creation (compare 1QH 15.8 – 18.29’s reference to “the Righteous One ... in everlasting abode ... in unending Eras of Joy”). Philo writes: “And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and separated that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Word is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; and is also the ambassador, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race. And the Word rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, ‘And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you;’ [Numbers 16:48] neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities.” (*Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205).

Similarly, Christ (*Angelos Christos*?) says in John 10:1:

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

And again in John 14:6:

I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

From the perspective of traditional philosophy and metaphysics, the Standing One as divine Principial—whether Standing prior to existence, Standing throughout existence, or the one remaining Standing at the completion of the proverbial ‘End of Days’—corresponds with the ‘First Logos’ of Philo and the ‘Word of Truth’ (*logō alētheias*) in the canonical Letter of James 1:18. These, in turn, are homologous to the Plotinian ‘First Intellect’ (Arabic ‘*aq/ al-awwal*’) which is considered to be the first emanation/determination of the absolute and ineffable One (Greek *to hen*, Arabic *al-dhāt al-aḥadiyya*). With regards to the First Logos and First Intellect, compare Philo’s ‘first-born of God’ and James’ ‘first-fruit of God’—once again alluding to metaphysical *primacy* and the divine *Principial*.

“He who has Stood, Stands and will Stand ... Who is, has been and shall be” (“he who is before he came into being”) is arguably also the Eternal Imām as the one who Stands “*before*” (i.e. protologically *pre-existent* and ontologically *prior-to*, compare *Christus aeternus*)—and the present writer believes that this does not simply refer to the physical Imām who leads the community in prayer, but primarily

must originate in the supernal Authority of the pre-existent, divine Principial: “the *Imam-of-one’s-being*”, elsewhere known as the supernal Self or *Ātman*.

See also: Mosaic Idiom of Standing and the *Sar Happanim* [Prince of the Face/Presence] Imagery (by Adrei Orlov).

Endnotes:

[1] Cited in Hassan ibn Fazl ibn Hassan Tabrasi, *Mishkat ul-Anwar Fi Ghurar il-Akhbar*.

[2] Zachary Markwith, ‘Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn ‘Arabī and Early Islamic Spirituality’, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, Vol. 57, 2015, pp.103-104.

[3] Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: Recovering the True History of Early Christianity*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997, pp.838-839; see also pp.326-327.

[4] E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, pp.21-22 and 97–98.

[5] E. S. Drower notes: “Epiphanius’s explanation of the first syllable as... ‘strength’, ‘power’, has been accepted by some scholars with the result that they get ‘secret Power’ from Elkasai, e.g. H. J. Schonfield, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Valentine, 1956), p.122. Brandt had already considered this possible meaning, but was inclined to reject it (*Die Judischen Baptismen*, p.109). In the Ras Shamra texts Adam is the son of *El*, which makes the possibility that ‘El’ here is **עֵל** even more likely [. . .] Transliteration of Aramaic into Greek constantly leads patristic writers astray; some Hebrew letters have no exact equivalent in the Greek alphabet (e.g. **ע** and **כ**). The various methods of transliterating the latter [e.g. kh, ch, k, x] are exemplified in the various spellings of *Kasai* in Elkasai’s name, and the first syllable, as is suggested on another page, is also rendered by various spellings. If I am right in supposing it to have been **עֵל**, these are explained. Professor Driver agrees with me that the *El* would be approximated by the ‘*Āl*’ (in Arabic), as both mean ‘high’, ‘celestial’ (**עֵל**, ‘high one’, can be equated with **עַל**, ‘the high god’). In O.-Ass. *A-al-tab* = ‘Al is good’, *I-li-a-lu-um* = ‘my god is Al(um)’. ‘Obviously’, he says, ‘Elxai contains the Aramaic **עֵל**, “high one”, a title of God.’ ... *Kasai* for ‘secret’, ‘mystic’, ‘hidden’, is a W. Aramaic form. In the GR [*Ginza Rba*] Jewish names usually end with *ai*, e.g. ‘ni[sh]bai, Miriai, [Sh]ilai, Salbai, [etc].’ (*Ibid.*, pp.97 n.1 and p.93 n.1)

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Christ as Angel

It is interesting to note that some of the earliest Christians considered Christ to be an angel (*angelos christos*) and the commander-in-chief of all angels. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur in his monograph, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (BRILL, 2009, p.147), writes:

Indeed, for Justin [the Martyr], the Son is 'the angel of God' (e.g. Dial. 34.2; 61.1; 127.4; 128.1) and the commander-in-chief (ἀρχιστράτηγος archistratēgos) of all angels (Dial. 34.2; 61.1; 62.5; 56.22).

Upanishads

The **Upanishads** ([/ʊˈpʌnɪʃədz/](#),^[1] [Sanskrit](#): उपनिषद्, [IAST](#): *Upaniṣad*, pronounced [\[ˈʊpenɪsɐd\]](#)) are [late Vedic](#) and post-Vedic Sanskrit texts that "document the transition from the archaic ritualism of the Veda into new religious ideas and institutions"^[2] and the emergence of the central religious concepts of [Hinduism](#).^{[2][note]}

^[1] They are the most recent addition to the [Vedas](#), the oldest scriptures of Hinduism, and deal with meditation, [philosophy](#), [consciousness](#), and [ontological](#) knowledge. Earlier parts of the Vedas dealt with mantras, benedictions, rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices.^{[3][4][5]}

While among the most important literature in the history of Indian religions and culture, the Upanishads document a wide variety of "rites, incantations, and esoteric knowledge"^[6] departing from Vedic ritualism and interpreted in various ways in the later commentarial traditions. The Upanishads are widely known, and their diverse ideas, interpreted in various ways, informed later traditions of Hinduism.^[note 1] The central concern of all Upanishads is to discover the relations between ritual, cosmic realities (including gods), and the human body/person,^[7] postulating [Ātman](#) and [Brahman](#) as the "summit of the hierarchically arranged and interconnected universe,"^{[8][9][10]} but various ideas about the relation between Atman and Brahman can be found.^{[10][note 2]}

Around 108 Upanishads are known, of which the first dozen or so are the oldest and most important and are referred to as the principal or main ([mukhya](#)) Upanishads.^{[11][12]} The *mukhya* Upanishads are found mostly in the concluding part of the [Brahmanas](#) and [Aranyakas](#)^[13] and were, for centuries, memorized by each generation and passed down [orally](#). The *mukhya* Upanishads predate the [Common Era](#), but there is no scholarly consensus on their date, or even on which ones are pre- or post-Buddhist. The [Brhadaranyaka](#) is seen as particularly ancient by modern scholars.^{[14][15][16]} Of the remainder, 95 Upanishads are part of the [Muktikā](#) canon, composed from about the last centuries of 1st-millennium BCE through about 15th-century CE.^{[17][18]} New Upanishads, beyond the 108 in the Muktika canon, continued to be composed through the early modern and modern era,^[19] though often dealing with subjects that are unconnected to the Vedas.

^[20] The *mukhya* Upanishads, along with the [Bhagavad Gita](#) and the [Brahmasutra](#) (known collectively as the [Prasthanatrayi](#)),^[21] are interpreted in divergent ways in the several later schools of [Vedanta](#).^{[10][note 3][22]}

Translations of the Upanishads in the early 19th century started to attract attention from a Western audience. German philosopher [Arthur Schopenhauer](#) was deeply impressed by the Upanishads and called them "the most profitable and elevating reading which ... is possible in the world."^[23] Modern era [Indologists](#) have discussed the similarities between the fundamental concepts in the Upanishads and the works of major [Western philosophers](#).^{[24][25][26]}

[Mandaeans](#)

Mandaeans ([Mandaic](#): ܡܢܕܝܐܝܢ) ([Arabic](#): المندائيون *al-Mandā'īyyūn*), also known as **Mandaean Sabians** (الصابئة المندائيون *al-Ṣābi'a al-Mandā'īyyūn*) or simply as **Sabians** (الصابئة *al-Ṣābi'a*),^[b] are an [ethnoreligious group](#) who are followers of [Mandaeism](#). They believe that [John the Baptist](#) was the final and most important [prophet](#). They may have been among the earliest religious groups to practice [baptism](#), as well as among the earliest adherents of [Gnosticism](#), a belief system of which they are the last surviving representatives today.^{[24][25]:109} The Mandaeans were originally native speakers of [Mandaic](#), an [Eastern Aramaic language](#), before they nearly all switched to [Mesopotamian Arabic](#) or [Persian](#) as their main language.

After [the invasion](#) of Iraq by the [United States](#) and [its allies](#) in 2003, the Mandaean community of [Iraq](#), which before the war numbered 60,000–70,000 persons, collapsed due to the rise of [Islamic extremism](#) and the absence of protection against it, with most of the community relocating to [Iran](#), [Syria](#) and [Jordan](#), or forming diaspora communities beyond the [Middle East](#). Mandaeans have been [forcibly converted](#) to Islam, making them [apostates from Islam](#) if they revert to their religion, thereby risking being murdered. Such Mandaeans have voiced feeling unsafe in any Muslim country for this reason.^{[26][27][28]}

The remaining community of Iranian Mandaeans has also been dwindling as a result of religious [persecution](#) over the decades. Unlike other religious minorities such as [Christians](#), [Jews](#) and [Zoroastrians](#), Mandaeans have no protection from persecution whatsoever, similar to [Bahá'ís](#) in Iran.^{[15][29][30]} By 2007, the population of Mandaeans in Iraq had fallen to approximately 5,000.^[31] There are estimated to be 60,000–100,000 Mandaeans worldwide.^[11] About 10,000 Mandaeans live in [Australia](#) and between 10,000 and 20,000 in [Sweden](#), making them the countries with the most Mandaeans.^{[5][7]} There are about 2,500 Mandaeans in [Jordan](#), the largest Mandaean community in the Middle East outside of Iraq and Iran.^[18]

The Pillar of the World:

The Eschatological Role of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in 2 (Slavonic) Enoch

Introduction

In chapter 25 of the 2 (Slavonic) Enoch the Lord reveals to the translated antediluvian hero some unique details of the mysteries of creation found neither in earlier Enochic booklets nor in any other Second Temple Jewish materials. One of the important parts of this revelation deals with the order of events that preceded the visible creation. The Deity unveils to the seer that prior to visible creation he called out from nothing the luminous aeon Adoil, ordering him to become the foundation of the upper things. The account describes the process of Adoil's transmutation into the cornerstone of creation on which the Deity establishes his Throne.

Several distinguished students of Jewish mystical traditions, including Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel, noticed that this protological account in chapter 25 dealing with the establishment of the created order appears to parallel the order of eschatological events narrated in chapter 65 where, during his short visit to earth, Enoch conveys to his children the mystery of the last times.¹ According to Enoch's instruction, after the final judgment time will collapse, and all the righteous of the world will be incorporated into a single luminous aeon. The description of this final aeon appears to bear striking similarities with the primordial aeon Adoil portrayed in chapter 25 as the foundation of the created order. The text also seems to hint that the righteous Enoch, translated to heaven and transformed into a luminous celestial creature, is the first fruit of this eschatological aeon that will eventually gather all the righteous into a single entity. Moshe Idel observes that the motif of incorporation of the righteous into a single aeon recalls the idea of the righteous as the cosmological foundation or pillar of the world reflected in some Jewish mystical writings. The idea of the righteous as the foundation of the world seems also present in 2 Enoch 66 where the final aeon is set in parallel with the protological foundation of the created order - the aeon Adoil.

In light of these correspondences it is intriguing that later Jewish mystical lore often portrays Enoch-Metatron as the cosmic foundation sustaining the world or even as the pillar linking the lower and upper worlds. It is possible that the roots of this tradition about the righteous antediluvian hero as the cosmic foundation of the world can be detected already in the Slavonic apocalypse where Enoch is portrayed as the first fruit of the future eschatological aeon of the righteous and the link between the upper and the lower worlds.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the tradition of Enoch-Metatron as the foundation of the world and the possible roots of this motif in 2 (Slavonic) Enoch.

I. The Protological Desintegration: Aeon Adoil as the Foundation of the World

The theme of the secrets of creation occupies an important place in the Slavonic apocalypse. The significance of this esoteric subject among other mysteries which the translated patriarch received during his celestial trip is underlined by the fact that the secrets of creation were conveyed to Enoch personally by the Deity and that this knowledge was never revealed to any other creatures, including the angels. This supra-angelic disclosure given to the visionary after his celestial metamorphosis can be seen as the pinnacle of the esoteric knowledge obtained by the seventh antediluvian hero in the upper realm. Both shorter and longer recensions of 2 *Enoch* provide an extensive description of this revelation. The initial part of this mysterious disclosure deals with the order of events that had taken place immediately before the visible creation was established. In the shorter recension of 2 *Enoch* 25 the account has the following form:

And I commanded the lowest things: "Let one of the invisible things come out visibly!" And Adail descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great age. And I said to him, "Disintegrate yourself, Adail, and let what is disintegrated from you become visible." And he disintegrated himself, and there came out from him the great age. And thus it carried all the creation which I had wished to create. And I saw how good it was. And I placed for myself a throne, and I sat down on it. To the light I spoke: "You go up higher and be solidified and become the foundation for the highest things." And there is nothing higher than the light, except nothing itself. And I spoke, I straightened myself upward from my throne.²

The longer recension preserves the general narrative structure of the shorter one while slightly changing some terminology and supplying some small additional details:

And I commanded the lowest things: "Let one of the invisible things descend visibly!" And Adoil descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great light. And I said to him, "Disintegrate yourself, Adoil, and let what is born from you become visible." And he disintegrated himself, and there came out a very great light. And I was in the midst of the [great] light. And light out of light is carried thus. And the great age came out, and it revealed all the creation which I had thought up to create. And I saw how good it was. And I placed for myself a throne, and I sat down on it. And then to the light I spoke: "You go up higher (than the throne), and be solidified [much higher than the throne], and become the foundation of the higher things." And there is nothing higher than the light, except nothing itself. And again I bowed (?) myself and looked upward from my throne.³

The important character of the story is the aeon Adoil envisioned in the text as the starting point of creation.⁴ This enigmatic entity can be seen as the midwife of

creation that comes to birth together with it through its creative act. The text emphasizes the enormous size of Adoil, defining him as “extremely large.” He is portrayed to be “pregnant” with creation by containing a great aeon in the belly. It is not entirely clear if this is a description of the aeons emanating from one another, the process conveyed in the text through the enigmatic formulae “light out of light.” It might also be plausible that Adoil’s imagery is somehow connected with the Anthropos myth, especially its version in the *Corpus Hermeticum* where Anthropos becomes the blueprint for the created order by disintegrating into the physical realm, a motif conveyed in the *Poimandres* through the erotic metaphor of Anthropos falling in love with Nature. In 2 *Enoch*, too, Adoil’s disintegration provides the beginning for the visible reality and serves as the foundation on which God is able to establish the first visible manifestation of the created order - his Throne. It is significant that in both recensions the Deity also commands Adoil to become the foundation (Slav. *основание*) of the highest things.⁵ Adoil is thus clearly envisioned as the foundation or sustainer of creation. This terminological identification of Adoil with the concept of the foundation is important for our study.

Both recensions stress that Adoil’s disintegration provides an important foundation on which the divine Throne is established. The seat of the Deity thus serves here as the locale from which God supervises the unfolding creation. The Throne plays a portentous role in the process of creation, being envisioned as the center of the created world.

Another significant feature relevant to our future discussion is the portrayal of Adoil in the longer recension as the “revealer.” His revelations, however, encompass not verbal but rather “ontological” disclosure conveyed through the act of changing his nature. This mode of revelation is very important for our future analysis of Enoch’s role as the revealer and his “ontological” participation in the disclosure of the eschatological aeon. Adoil’s disintegration is identified in the text as the revelation of the created order: “And the great age came out, and it revealed all the creation which I had thought up to create.”

Finally, another significant detail in the depiction of Adoil is the repeated references to his luminous nature. The emphasis on the luminosity of the primordial aeon is even more apparent in the longer recension which emphasizes not only the outer shining nature of the protological entity but also his internal luminous state depicted there as the pregnancy with great light: “And Adoil descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great light ... there came out a very great light. And I was in the midst of the [great] light. And light out of light is carried thus.”⁶

II. The Eschatological Reintegration: The Aeon of the Righteous

The aforementioned primeval account of creation narrated by God in chapters 25 and 26 of the Slavonic pseudepigraphon is later invoked in a very abbreviated form

in chapter 65 where Enoch seeks to transmit to his sons and people of the earth the knowledge he received during his celestial trip. In this rather terse account the reader also encounters some additional cosmological details pertaining not only to the beginning of creation but also to its final destiny.

Chapter 65 of *2 Enoch* deals with the final instructions which the translated hero of the faith hastens to unveil to humanity immediately before his second and final departure to heaven. The final place of this revelation among other mysteries conveyed by Enoch to humankind during his short visit underlines the significance of this disclosure. In many ways it appears to be set in parallel with the account of the Lord's own instructions about the secrets of creation which Enoch received also at the end of his heavenly trip from the Deity after the preliminary revelations conveyed to him by his psychopomps and angel Vereveil.

One of the intriguing features of this enigmatic revelation is that not only the format of the delivery of this final mystery transmitted by the seer to human recipients is set in parallel to the secrets of creation revealed by the Lord previously in chapters 25 and 26, but also that the peculiar content in many ways mirrors in rather abbreviated form the familiar conceptual framework of the protological revelation. The shorter recension of *2 Enoch* 65:1-11 reads:

Listen, my children! Before all things existed, (and) before all creation came about, the Lord established the age of creation, and after that he created all his creation, visible and invisible ... When the whole creation which the Lord has created, shall come to an end, and when each person will go to the Lord's great judgment, then the time periods will perish, and there will be neither years nor months nor days, and hours will no longer be counted; But they will constitute a single age. And all the righteous, who escape from the Lord's great judgment, will be collected together with the great age. And <the age> at the same time will unite with the righteous, and they will be eternal. And there will be among them neither weariness nor suffering nor affliction nor expectation of violence nor the pain of the night nor darkness. But they will have a great light for eternity, <and> an indestructible wall, and they will have a great paradise, the shelter of an eternal residence. How happy are the righteous who will escape the Lord's great judgment, for their faces will shine forth like the sun."²

The longer recension provides the following description that differs in several details from the account found in the shorter recension:

Listen my children! Before ever anything existed, and before ever any created thing was created, the Lord created the whole of his creation, visible and invisible.... And when the whole creation, visible and invisible, which the Lord has created, shall come to an end, then each person will go to the Lord's great judgment. And then all time will perish, and afterwards there will be neither years nor months nor days nor hours. They will be dissipated, and after that they will not be reckoned. But they will constitute a single age. And all the righteous, who escape from the Lord's great judgment, will be collected together into the great age. And the great age will

come about for the righteous, and it will be eternal. And after that there will be among them neither weariness <nor sickness> nor affliction nor worry nor want nor debilitation nor night nor darkness. But they will have a great light, a great indestructible light, and paradise, great and incorruptible. For everything corruptible will pass away, and the incorruptible will come into being, and will be the shelter of the eternal residences.”⁸

The patriarch begins his narration with references to the familiar theme of the primeval aeon already familiar to the reader from the story found in chapter 25. These protological events responsible for the unfolding of creation are then set in parallel with the chain of eschatological actions that, according to the authors of the apocalypse, will reintegrate the whole creation into a single aeon which will collect all the righteous of the world. According to the text, “all the righteous, who escape from the Lord’s great judgment, will be collected together with the great age.” The final consummation of all creation into a single aeon recalls the initial protological disintegration of Adoil who once gave birth to the multiplicity of the created forms. The account describes the cataclysmic collapse of the spatial and the temporal order that according to the text will lead to a situation when “all time will perish, and afterwards there will be neither years nor months nor days nor hours. They will be dissipated, and after that they will not be reckoned....”

It appears that the final consummation of the created order in many ways “reverses” its protological unfolding in such a way that reintegration into the final aeon invokes memory of the disintegration of the primeval aeon Adoil. There are several distinctive features that in many ways unify both aeonic subjects.

The motif of luminosity

One of these features includes the luminosity of both entities. As may be recalled, the symbolism of light permeates the depiction of Adoil who according to 2 *Enoch*’s story not only has a luminous nature, but also is pregnant with the great light. This imagery of the external and internal luminous nature of the primeval aeon is conveyed in the Slavonic apocalypse through the expression “light out of light.” Similar to the protological “age,” the eschatological aeon is also resplendent with luminosity. Thus according to the longer recension of 2 *Enoch* 65:10, the righteous constituting the final aeon will “have a great light, a great indestructible light.” The shorter recension provides some additional details about the luminosity of the final aeon by telling that the faces of the righteous gathered there “will shine forth like the sun.”

The Righteous as the Foundation

As mentioned earlier, in the protological account dealing with the creation of the world Adoil is depicted as the foundation (Slav. *основание*) of the visible things, both earthly as well as heavenly, including the very seat of the Deity, His Throne. In view of the aforementioned parallelism between the descriptions of the first and the last aeons, it appears that the “eschatological age” is also connected with the idea of the foundation. Although the description of the eschatological aeon does

not directly refer to this entity as the foundation, this idea is present in the text through several implicit details.

In commenting on the identification of the final aeon with the righteous, Moshe Idel notes that in Jewish mysticism the righteous are often portrayed as the cosmological foundation of the world. In light of this identification Idel proposes that in 2 *Enoch* the implicit connection might exist between the protological and eschatological foundations, the first represented by the primeval aeon Adoil and the second by the eschatological aeon of the righteous.

In his book about the symbolism of pillars in Jewish mysticism, Idel refers to a passage from the *Book of Bahir* that depicts the righteous person as the pillar reaching the heaven:

There is a pillar from earth to heaven, and its name is *Tzaddiq*, according to the name of righteous men. And when there are righteous men in the world, then the pillar is strengthened, but if not – it becomes weak. And it supports the entire world, as it is written: “the righteous are the foundation of the world.” But if it is weakened, it cannot support the world. This is the reason why even if there is only one righteous [in the world], he maintains the world.⁹

Idel points to the assumption about the dual status of the righteous discernable in the *Book of Bahir*’s passage: there are righteous men in the world, but there is also a cosmic righteous and the former depend on the latter.¹⁰ Idel traces the origins of this concept of the cosmic righteous to the conceptual developments found in the Slavonic Enoch where “the Great Aeon, which is identical to the foundation, passes for the righteous.”¹¹

Idel also discusses the tradition found in *b. Hag. 12b* where the righteous are depicted not only as the ethical but also as the cosmological foundation of the world:

It is taught: R. Jose says: Alas for people that they see but know not what they see, they stand but know not on what they stand. What does the earth rest on? On the pillars, for it is said: Who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble....But the Sages say: [The world] rests on twelve pillars, for it is said: He set the borders to the peoples according to the number [of the tribes] of the children of Israel. And some say seven pillars, for it is said; she hath hewn out her seven pillars. R. Eleazar b. Shammua says: [It rests] on one pillar, and its name is “Righteous,” for it is said: But “Righteous” is the foundation of the world.¹²

It may be tempting to construe these rabbinic passages as mere references to the moral behavior that “sustains” the ethical order of the world. Idel, however, observes that the passage from the *Hagigah* has not just a moral but also a cosmological significance. He remarks that “...the *Hagigah*, a short but highly influential passage, is a part of mythical cosmology rather than a mode of making sense of religious behavior. To be clear, the basic context of the discussion is cosmology, and its influence on the way in which the righteous should be understood is only an aside.”¹³

One of the features found in the *Hagigah*'s account is the reference to the sevenfold nature of the world's foundation.¹⁴ In this respect it is intriguing that the longer recension of *2 Enoch* 66:8 insists on the sevenfold nature of the final aeon. According to the text: "...for in that age everything is estimated sevenfold – light and darkness and food and enjoyment and misery and paradise and tortures...."¹⁵ The emphasis on the sevenfold nature of the final aeon in *2 Enoch* might point to parallels to the later rabbinic tradition about the seven pillars or foundations on which the earth stands.¹⁶

III. Enoch-Metatron as the Foundation of the World

Enoch's Righteousness

It does not seem coincidental that the portentous revelation about the final aeon of the righteous comes from the mouth of the seventh antediluvian patriarch, the hero known in Jewish lore for his exemplary righteousness. In light of this connection the motif of Enoch's righteousness should be explored more closely. The epithet "righteous man" becomes an important designation of the seventh antediluvian hero already in the beginning of his story where his righteousness is juxtaposed to the wickedness of the antediluvian generation and the transgressions of the Watchers. Thus already in the very first verses of one of the earliest Enochic booklets, the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 1:2), the patriarch is defined as a righteous man. In *1 Enoch* 15:11 we hear again the same designation that now comes from the mouth of the Deity himself: "And he answered me and said to me with his voice: Hear! Do not be afraid, Enoch, (you) righteous man and scribe of righteousness...."¹⁷ Besides the patriarch's exemplary behavior that allowed him to become the sign of righteousness for future generations, this passage also points to another important office of the seventh antediluvian hero as the teacher of righteousness--an office in which he was desperately attempting to rescue and sustain the moral and cosmological order of the antediluvian world by delivering calls to repentance and oracles of doom which he received from God and angels. Early Enochic materials (*1 Enoch* 12:4 and *1 Enoch* 15:11) therefore repeatedly define him as the scribe of righteousness.¹⁸

Enoch's connection with the eschatological destiny of the righteous may be already ascertained in the early Enochic writings. Thus according to *1 Enoch*, the patriarch travels to the enigmatic location "the paradise of righteousness," which might represent here another designation for the eschatological gathering of the righteous.

As has already been noted, early Enoch booklets seek to highlight the contrast between the righteousness of Enoch and the unrighteousness of the antediluvian generation where interference of the Watchers causes moral and cosmological collapse leading the environment and the human race toward an imminent catastrophe. In this catastrophic chain of events affecting the whole fabric of creation, Enoch can be seen as the righteous one who attempts to sustain the

created order, in many ways serving as the pillar of the antediluvian world. This important role of the seventh antediluvian hero as the sustainer and protector of creation is reaffirmed in the *Book of Jubilees* that depicts the patriarch as the cosmic dam against the waters of the Flood. Thus according to *Jub.* 4:23, thanks to Enoch “the flood water did not come on any of the land of Eden because he was placed there as a sign and to testify against all people in order to tell all the deeds of history until the day of judgment.”¹⁹

Enoch’s role as the pillar sustaining the world was not forgotten in later Jewish materials. Idel’s research identifies an important tradition preserved in later Jewish mysticism that portrays the seventh antediluvian hero as the foundation which sustains the world: “...the righteous is the foundation of the world. For [the sake of] one [single] righteous the world is maintained and it is Enoch the son of Yared.”²⁰ It is apparent that the author(s) of this tradition, which might stem from the early Enochic literature, were informed by the extra-biblical roles and actions of the seventh patriarch who served there as the pillar of the world attempting to sustain the moral and cosmological order of creation in the turmoil of the antediluvian generation.

It should be noted that this understanding of Enoch as the pillar or the foundation of the world is not atypical in Jewish mystical lore where the patriarch’s heavenly counterpart, the supreme angel Metatron, was traditionally understood as the force sustaining the world. These cosmological functions were exhibited first in Metatron’s role as the governor or the prince of the world²¹ (Mlw(h r#)—an office already discernable in *2 Enoch*²² - and further developed in Hekhalot mysticism, including the *Sefer Hekhalot*.²³ It is intriguing that Enoch-Metatron’s governance of the world includes not only administrative functions but also the duty of the physical sustenance of the world. Moshe Idel refers to the treatise *The Seventy Names of Metatron* where the angel and God seize the world in their hands.²⁴ This motif of the Deity and his vice-regent grasping the universe in their cosmic hands invokes the conceptual developments found in the *Shi’ur Qomah* and Hekhalot materials where Enoch-Metatron possesses a cosmic corporeality comparable to the physique of the Deity and is depicted as the measurement of the divine Body.²⁵ The question, however, remains about how all these later Jewish testimonies portraying Enoch-Metatron as the foundation or the pillar of the world are related to the developments found in *2 Enoch*. Is it possible that the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse try to depict Enoch as the eschatological pillar of the world who already participates in the final aeon of the righteous and can thus be seen as the first fruit of this eschatological gathering? In this respect, like Adail who anticipates the protological aeon that gives the beginning to all creation, Enoch too anticipates the future eschatological aeon when the creation will collapse and all the righteous will be united together. Both Adail and Enoch can therefore be seen as outstanding exemplars preordained to manifest the protological and eschatological states through their ontological conditions, thus serving as

“personifications” of these aeons. Both heroes are united by the quality of their luminosity that serves as an important sign of the beginning and the end of time.

Enoch's luminosity

2 *Enoch* 66:11 elaborates the condition of the righteous in the final aeon depicting them as luminous beings: “How happy are the righteous who will escape the Lord’s great judgment, for their faces will shine forth like the sun.”²⁶ This tradition of the righteous humans emitting light seems to be implicitly tied in the text to the story of its revealer, the seventh antediluvian patriarch, who himself several chapters earlier underwent a dramatic luminous transformation.

The passage may thus suggest that Enoch, who is depicted in chapter 22 as undergoing luminous metamorphoses before the Face of God that turns him into a shining celestial creature, becomes the very first fruit of this future aeon where all righteous persons would eventually regain the condition of luminosity. The eschatological luminosity here points to the protological condition of Adail and, more importantly, to the incorruptible luminous state of the Protoplast, a condition that humanity lost after Adam’s fall.

Incorruptibility of Enoch

Enoch’s metamorphosis into a luminous celestial creature presupposes another eschatological trait mentioned in his descriptions of the final aeon of the righteous, namely the state of incorruptibility. In 2 *Enoch* 65:8–10 Enoch says that at the end of times all the righteous who will escape the Lord’s great judgment will eventually attain the condition of incorruptibility since they “will be collected together into the great age And they will have a great light, a great indestructible light, and paradise, great and incorruptible. For everything corruptible will pass away, and the incorruptible will come into being, and will be the shelter of the eternal residences.”²⁷

The longer recension’s emphasis on the incorruptibility of the future condition of the righteous gathered in the final aeon seems again to recall the patriarch’s newly acquired celestial state. One of the important features hinting at the patriarch’s incorruptible nature is revealed during his brief visit to earth when, after his luminous transformation, God send him back to the lower realm to deliver final directions to his children. In 2 *Enoch* 56, during Enoch’s instructions, Methuselah asks his father for a blessing so that he may prepare some food for him to eat. The translated hero, however, politely declines the offer to share earthly food lamenting that nothing earthly is agreeable with his current condition:

Listen, child! Since the time when the Lord anointed me with the ointment of his glory, food has not come into me, and earthly pleasure my soul does not remember; nor do I desire anything earthly (2 *Enoch* 56:2, the longer recension).²⁸

In the shorter recension of 2 *Enoch*, the patriarch’s rejection of food is even more decisive: “Listen my child! Since the time when the Lord anointed me with the ointment of my glory, it has been horrible for me, and food is not agreeable to me, and I have no desire for earthly food.”²⁹ Here an important link is made between

the changes in his nature during his luminous metamorphosis near the Throne of Glory and his newly acquired condition of incorruptibility, which articulates the future state of the righteous in the final aeon.

Here again, through his connection with the eschatological state of incorruptibility, Enoch appears to be fashioned as the first fruit of the future aeon of the righteous, or maybe even as the one who already joined this final age. In this respect it is notable that in *2 Enoch* 55 Enoch tells his sons before his final departure that he shall go up to the highest heaven into his “eternal inheritance.”³⁰

Enoch as the Revealer

As has been previously mentioned, the cosmological account found in *2 Enoch* identifies Adoïl as the revealer. The process of his disintegration in the narrative is rendered as the *revelation* of the created order: “And the great age came out, and it revealed all the creation which I had thought up to create.”³¹ It is intriguing that in the Slavonic apocalypse Enoch is not only envisioned as the first fruit of the last age by bearing many future qualities of this eschatological entity, but he also testifies about it by delivering a verbal revelation about this aeon, the disclosure that never appears in any other part of the pseudepigraphon, even in the elaborated address of the Deity who conveys to the seer the innermost secrets of the universe. The role of the seventh antediluvian hero as the revealer of the most recondite mysteries of the world is not an invention of the *2 Enoch* authors since this office appears as a constant feature of the hero’s biography, already found in the Mesopotamian materials constituting the conceptual background for this figure. Thus one of his Mesopotamian prototypes, the seventh antediluvian king Enmeduranki, is often described as the revealer and the “guardian (lit. guarding) of the secrets (*να4σ[ιρ πιριšτι*) of the great gods.”³² These titles anticipate the future roles of the patriarch as the revealer and expert in secrets in the Enochic tradition and his designation as Myzr (dwy (“Knower of Secrets”) in the Metatron lore.³³ Esoteric dissemination will remain one of the major functions of the seventh patriarch in various Enochic traditions that depict him sharing astronomical, meteorological, calendarical, and eschatological knowledge with his sons and other people during his short visit to earth. Knowledge of secrets will also play a significant part in Metatron’s duties in the Merkabah tradition where he will be responsible for transmitting the highest secrets to the princes under him, as well as to humankind.

What is striking in *2 Enoch*, however, is that the seventh antediluvian patriarch reveals not only by word of mouth but by the very nature of his ontological situation—i.e., he discloses the condition of the last age through his unique transformation and his righteousness. He thus in many ways anticipates in the present age the things that will occur at the end of time when the righteous of this world will be unified together. Like Adoïl who “reveals” the protological aeon concealed in his “belly” by his very nature and disintegration, Enoch too is

“pregnant” with the eschatological aeon and thus manifests an ontological state that all the righteous will eventually acquire.

Enoch as the Sacerdotal Foundation

In our previous discussion about the primordial “pillar” Adoil, it has been noted that he seems to be identified with the upper sacred foundation that serves as the basis for the heavenly Temple represented by the Throne of God which is envisioned in the text as the center of the created order. It is intriguing that, similar to Adoil who serves as the upper foundation of the heavenly Temple, Enoch appears to be envisioned as the sacerdotal foundation of the earthly Temple. In 2 *Enoch* immediately after Enoch’s instructions to his sons before his second and final ascension to the highest heaven, the firstborn son of Enoch, Methuselah, and his brothers constructed an altar at Akhuzan,³⁴ the exact location from which Enoch had been taken up. The place of the hero’s departure then becomes envisioned in the text as the sacerdotal center of the earthly realm where priestly initiations and expiatory sacrifices involving animal blood take place. It is no coincidence, therefore, that 2 *Enoch* identifies the place Akhuzan as the center of the world. This enigmatic Slavonic word is traced by scholars to the Hebrew word *haz*), “special property of God,” which in Ezek 48:20-21 is applied to Jerusalem and the Temple.³⁵

Here, similar to Adoil’s protological role connected to the motif of the Throne of the Deity, Enoch’s eschatological role is tied to the idea of the earthly counterpart of the Throne, the earthly Temple. The vertical axis of the Throne and the Temple is thus explicitly reaffirmed in the text, as is the horizontal line connecting the protological and eschatological events.

Later in the text Akhuzan also receives the additional protological reaffirmation of being identified with the place of Adam’s creation. Here the protological and eschatological “pillars” are erected on the same place and the starting point of creation becomes the place of the beginning of the eschatological consummation.

Enoch as the Redeemer

In Chapter 64 of the longer recension of the Slavonic apocalypse, an interesting tradition can be found pertaining to the patriarch’s unique role as redeemer of humanity. The chapter depicts the prostration of the elders of the people and of the whole community before Enoch at the place of his second departure to heaven. The people who came to bow down before the patriarch delivered to Enoch the following address:

O our father, Enoch! May you be blessed by the Lord, the eternal king! And now, bless your [sons], and all the people, so that we may be glorified in front of your face today. For you will be glorified in front of the face [of the Lord for eternity], because you are the one whom the Lord chose in preference to all the people upon the earth; and he appointed you to be the one who makes a written record of all his creation, visible and invisible, and the one who carried away the sin of mankind (2 *Enoch* 64:4–5).³⁶

An important detail in this address is Enoch's designation as "the one who carried away the sin of humankind." This role of redeemer is intriguing and might be related to his salvific mission in the destiny of the future aeon of the righteous.³⁷ Here Enoch is envisioned not simply as one among many other righteous persons nor as the righteous person par excellence, but he is the one who is able to bring others to righteousness.

It also appears to be significant that the patriarch's redeeming role is conflated in this passage with the theme of visible and invisible creation and his role as the recorder and revealer of cosmological knowledge.³⁸ Here again, as in the case of Adoel who serves as the link between the invisible and visible creation, Enoch holds knowledge of the plan not only in relation to the visible created order but also to its invisible counterpart.

Conclusion

The current study explored the roots of Enoch-Metatron's role as the foundation or pillar of the world prominent in later Jewish mysticism. Although in *2 Enoch* the seventh antediluvian hero is never directly named as either the foundation or the pillar, his eschatological role and participation in the eschatological aeon depicts him as the counterpart of the primordial foundation, the luminous aeon Adoel. In view of the later offices of Enoch-Metatron in the Hekhalot materials where the translated hero is portrayed as the sustainer of the created order, it is possible that in the Slavonic apocalypse one can see the rudimentary theological unfolding toward understanding Enoch-Metatron as the eschatological foundation of the world. These intriguing traditions again point to the formative value of the conceptual developments found in the Slavonic apocalypse that in many ways serve as a bridge between Jewish apocalypticism and early Jewish mysticism.

¹ G. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken, 1991) 98-101; M. Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Past Incorporated. CEU Studies in Humanities, 2; Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005) 75ff.

² Andersen, "2 Enoch," 1.145.

³ Andersen, "2 Enoch," 1.144.

⁴ On the etymology of the name Adoel, see A. Orlov, "Secrets of Creation in 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," in: idem, *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (SJSJ, 114; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 191-94.

⁵ Sokolov, "Материалы и заметки по старинной славянской литературе," 25.

⁶ Andersen, "2 Enoch," 1.144.

⁷ Andersen, "2 Enoch," 1.191-193.

⁸ Andersen, "2 Enoch," 1.190-192.

⁹ *The Book of Bahir* (ed. D. Abrams; Los Angeles: Cherub, 1994) 160-61.

¹⁰ Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 80.

¹¹ Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 81.

¹² b. Hag. 12b.

¹³ Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 75.

¹⁴ The passage found in the *Book of Zohar* also speaks about the seven pillars that sustain the creation. *Zohar* I.231a reads: "Rabbi Jose began by quoting 'Upon that were its foundations fastened?' (Job 38:6). This verse was spoken by the Holy One, blessed be He, because when he created the world He created it upon pillars, the seven pillars of the world, as it is said 'She has hewn out her seven pillars' (Proverbs 9:1), but it is not known what these seven pillars stand upon, for it is a profound mystery, the most recondite of all." I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: Anthology of Texts* (3 vols.; London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization,

1994) 2.571. Further in the *Zohar* the foundation stone of creation which stands in the center of the world representing the foundation of everything defined in the text as “the basis and sustenance of the world” – is described as an entity with “seven eyes”: “Come and see. There are seven eyes on this stone, as it is said ‘Upon one stone are seven eyes’ (Zech 3:9).” Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2.572.

[15](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.194.

[16](#) Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 75.

[17](#) Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, 2.100.

[18](#) Josef Milik suggests that the honorific “scribe of righteousness” can be related to the Aramaic term)+wq rps. Cf. Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 191. George Nickelsburg proposes that the title can be related to the Aramaic)+wq yd rps. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch I: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 65.

[19](#) VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 2.28.

[20](#) Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 85.

[21](#) The term “world” (Mlw()) in the angelic title appears to signify the entire creation. Peter Schäfer observes that in rabbinic literature the Prince of the World is understood as an angel set over the whole creation. His duties include praying together with the earth for the coming of the Messiah and praising God’s creative work. P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorsstellung* (SJ, 8; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975) 55.

[22](#) On the role of Enoch as the Governor of the World in 2 *Enoch*, see Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, 159–161.

[23](#) Igor Tantlevskij observes that in 3 *Enoch* 8, Enoch-Metatron has qualities by which, according to *b. Hag.* 12a and *Avot de Rabbi Nathan A* 27:43, the world was created and is sustained. I. R. Tantlevskij, *Knigi Enoha* (Moscow/Jerusalem: Gescharim, 2000) 185 [in Russian].

[24](#) Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, 88.

[25](#) One such description can be found in *Synopse* §12 (3 *Enoch* 9) which portrays the metamorphosis of Enoch’s body into a gigantic extent matching the world in length and breath: “I was enlarged and increased in size till I matched the world in length and breath. He made to grow on me 72 wings, 36 on one side and 36 on the other, and each single wing covered the entire world” Alexander “3 Enoch,” 1.263.

[26](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.193. See also 2 *Enoch* 66:7 (the longer recension): “How happy are the righteous who shall escape the Lord’s great judgment; for they will be made to shine seven times brighter than the sun.” Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.194.

[27](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.192.

[28](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.182.

[29](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.183.

[30](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.182–183.

[31](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.144.

[32](#) H.S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WMANT, 61; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988) 188.

[33](#) John Collins notes that “Enoch’s role as revealer is ... illuminated by the parallel with Enmeduranki. The Sumerian king was admitted into the divine assembly and shown mysteries that included the tablets of heaven and the techniques of divination.” J.J. Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (SJSJ, 54; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 45.

[34](#) Slav. Ахузань.

[35](#) Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 114.

[36](#) Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 1.190.

[37](#) For criticism of the concept of Enoch as redeemer, see Grant Macaskill’s *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (SJSJ, 115; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 220ff. While Macaskill’s study is important for providing critical insights in the issues of eschatology in the text and especially the role of Enoch as redeemer, his arguments against the possibility of the redeeming office of the seventh antediluvian hero in 2 *Enoch* appear to be weakened by his misunderstanding of the Slavonic terminology that stands behind the important title of Enoch as redeemer which is rendered in the text through the Slavonic words “otjatel’”/“otimitel’.” These nouns, which can be translated literally as the “taker” of human sin(s), are conveyed in Andersen’s English translation through the expression “the one who is taking out the human sin(s).” Andersen’s English rendering of the term appears to be a source of confusion for Macaskill who interprets the Slavonic nouns “otjatel’”/“otimitel’” as “resultative participles.” Cf. Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology*, 225. It shows that Macaskill does not clearly understand the original Slavonic form of this title of Enoch which serves as the starting point for his argument and in many ways constitutes the terminological

nexus of his office as the redeemer of humanity. Still his general analysis of other aspects of the text's eschatology is useful, though it is quite strange that his book that deals with the eschatological dimensions of the text manages to completely ignore the account of the final age and Enoch's eschatological role in relation to this entity.

[38](#) The importance of Enoch's writings in the eschatological time is reaffirmed in *2 Enoch* where the motif of the glorified righteous is invoked in the context of the eschatological time: "And I will leave a righteous man from your tribe, together with all his house, who will act according to my will. And from his seed another generation will rise, after many, but out of them many will be very gluttonous. Then at the conclusion of that generation the books in your handwriting will be revealed, and those of your fathers, and the earthly guardians (*stražie zemnye*) [of these books] will show them to the Men of Faith (*mužem' věrnym*), the ones who loyal to me, who do not invoke my name invalidly. And they will be recounted to that generation, and they will be glorified in the end more than in the beginning." *2 Enoch* 35:1-3 (the longer recension). Sokolov, "Материалы и заметки по старинной славянской литературе," 35. The shorter recension offers a similar description: "And I will leave a righteous man from your tribe, together with all his house, who will act according to my will. And from his seed another generation will arise, the last of many, and very gluttonous. Then at the conclusion of that generation the books in your handwriting will be revealed, and those of your fathers, and the earthly guardians (*stražie zemnye*) [of these books] will show them to the Men of Faith (*mužem' věrnym*). And they will be recounted to that generation, and they will be glorified in the end more than in the beginning." *2 Enoch* 35:1-3 (the shorter recension) Sokolov, "Материалы и заметки по старинной славянской литературе," 93.

The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam

...the conditions of the dialogue between Christianity and Islam change completely as soon as the interlocutor represents not legalistic Islam but this spiritual Islam, whether it be that of Sufism or of Shi'ite gnosis."

Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Prologue



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The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam by Khalil Andani (MTS – Islamic Studies – Harvard, 2014)

As observed by millions of Christians around the world, Good Friday marks the day when Jesus Christ was crucified. For Christians, this event is the climax of sacred history: the death of Christ on the Cross is believed to have redeemed and cleansed the sin of humanity.

Indeed, the efficacy of the entire Christian doctrine – adhered to by the largest number of people in the world – depends upon the event of the Crucifixion. Interestingly, the faith of Islam, the second largest religion in the world after Christianity, seems to offer a completely different understanding of this event – it appears to deny the Crucifixion altogether. The only verse of the Holy Qur'an which speaks of the Crucifixion is the following:

wa-mā qatalūhu wa-mā salabūhu wa-lākin shubbiha lahum

"They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them."

Holy Qur'an 4:157

While it is true that most Qur'ānic commentators came to deny the crucifixion of Jesus, this view is not actually rooted in the Qur'ānic verses but comes from commentaries which rely on non-Qur'ānic sources. The denial of the historical crucifixion was only one view among others on the subject to emerge from the Islamic world. There have been alternate interpretations of the same Qur'ānic verses which collectively offer a range of perspectives on the crucifixion – from total denial to actually asserting that the crucifixion did take place historically.

One of the schools of Islamic thought and philosophy which actually *affirms* the the Crucifixion of Jesus and glorifies it, is the tradition of Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Islam. The Ismā'īlī Muslim philosophers of the tenth and eleventh centuries were able to achieve a remarkable reconciliation and rapprochement between the Qur'ānic and Christian views of the Crucifixion.

This article explains the Isma'ili Muslim understanding of the Qur'ānic verses on the Crucifixion, the meaning of the Crucifixion in Ismā'īlī eschatology, and the esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Cross, as articulated by the medieval Ismā'īlī thinkers. **These Ismā'īlī perspectives, in their pluralistic and ecumenical outlook, can play a great role in opening further doors of understanding and recognition between the faiths of Christianity and Islam in the modern age.**

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10 Crazy Stories from Ismaili History

The future of the Ismaili Faith rests in the hands of the youths of your age and mine. Are we to follow the example of those, who in Egypt, Iran and Sind raised the flag of Ismaili Imams high enough for the world to see its glory? I say, 'Yes'. We should not fail where our ancestors achieved glorious success.

– Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan

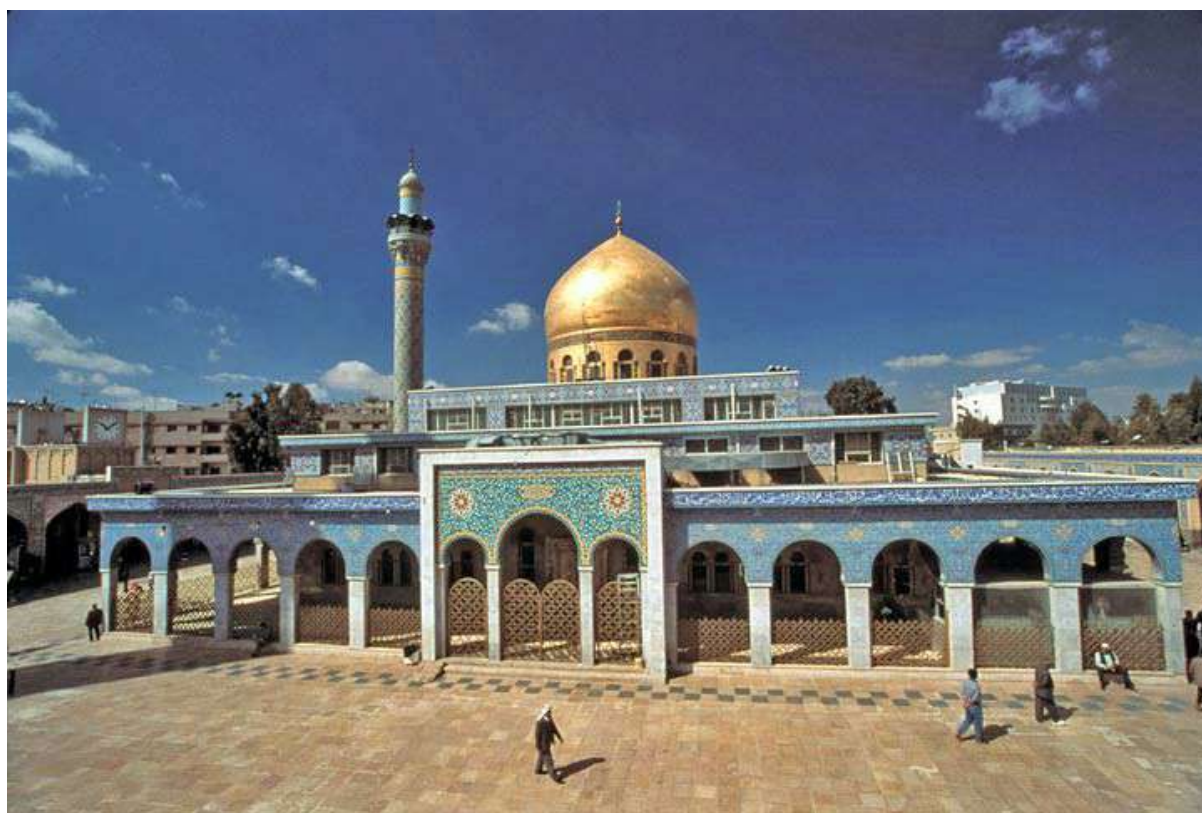
Ismaili history is littered with an embarrassment of heroes. From our forty-nine Imams to the followers inspired by them, courageous individuals have pushed boundaries to inform the world about Ismaili theology, put their lives on the line to save the Ismaili community, and fought insurmountable odds to keep the light of Ismailism alive.

Until recently, Ismaili Imams and their followers have been hunted, killed and even tortured, throughout their heart wrenching history, often hiding and even vanishing for generations to save themselves. For example, Al-Sijistani, one of Ismaili history's most important *Da'is*, wrote ground-breaking work on Ismaili theology but was killed for his faith, without so much as a glimpse of his Imam. However, thanks to his sacrifice and, those of others like him, Ismailis today enjoy a rich and wonderful intellectual heritage.

This article pays homage to some of these heroes from Ismaili history with ten crazy stories that will move you!

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2. [La'b](#)
3. [Imam al-Mahdi comes to power](#)
4. [Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi](#)
5. [Hasan-i Sabbah](#)
6. [Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad](#)
7. [Nizari Quhistani](#)
8. [Pir Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi](#)
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1. Hazrat Zaynab bint 'Ali



Hazrat Zaynab's Shrine in Damascus

Among Shi'a Muslims, the story of Karbala is well known and commemorated by many during the Islamic month of Muharram.

Despite the Prophet Muhammad's designation of Hazrat 'Ali as his spiritual and temporal successor, political machinations of powerful figures of the time conspired to have Imam 'Ali side-lined. Although he eventually, but briefly, took on the leadership of the entire Muslim community, after his murder, his heirs were vigorously persecuted and even condemned from the pulpit as a matter of "state" policy by prominent leaders like Muawiya. When Hazrat 'Ali's son, and only living grandson of the Prophet, Imam al-Husayn, was invited by the people of Kufa to lead them, he asked them if they were sure that was their wish. Only after they re-affirmed their allegiance to him did he agree to lead them. While en route to Kufa — accompanied by his supporters and entire family, including many women and children — his group of hundreds was intercepted by a force of more than twenty thousand who first cut off their water supply and then attacked them.

Abandoned by the supporters who had promised him their allegiance, Imam al-Husayn and his family were horrifically massacred at the Battle of Karbala. He was decapitated and his head flaunted in Kufa — before it was presented to Yazid, on a platter.

[Qurra' b. Qays at- Tamimi](#), a member of the Umayyad army, is reported by [Abu Mikhnaf](#) as saying that he could never forget the scene when Husayn's sister

Zaynab passed by the mutilated body of her brother; she cried in hysterical fits, saying:

‘O Muhammad! O Muhammad! The angels of Heaven send blessings upon you, but this is your Husayn, so humiliated and disgraced, covered with blood and cut into pieces; and, O, Muhammad, your daughters are made captives, and your butchered family is left for the East Wind to cover with dust?’

S.H.M. Jafri, *The Origins and Development of Shia Islam*, (p. 132)

But Imam Husayn was not the only martyr that day. “The dead included Imam al-Husayn’s sons, including the six month old infant ‘Ali Asghar, Imam ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib’s sons, and *Pir* Imam al-Hasan’s children. ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin was the only surviving male member of Imam Husayn’s family, who was sick during the battle and saved from execution by Hadrat Zaynab’s intervention.” (Mourning for Marifa) Hazrat Zaynab, the only daughter of Hazrat Fatima and Hazrat ‘Ali, rose up and, disregarding her own safety, threw her body over her nephew, Imam Zayn al-Abidin, defying the would-be murderers to first kill her if they wanted to kill Imam Zayn al-Abidin. Taken aback, the men instead imprisoned and delivered the remaining family members of the martyred Imam to Yazid, in the capital, to decide their fate. However, upon entering the capital and in the full view of all the dignitaries, Hazrat Zaynab delivered an impassioned, impromptu speech — rhyming it in her father Imam ‘Ali’s style — reducing all observers to tears. Due to her courage, persistence and outspoken defence of her nephew, she saved his life and thereby the Ismaili Imamate:

The embittered speech delivered by al-Husayn’s sister, Zaynab, reportedly moved all around her to tears, and her unyielding defense of her family and their honor after they were taken captive reportedly evoked the admiration even of her enemies.

Maria Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, (p. 219)

Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, (p. 2)

2. La‘b

The period of *satr* (concealment), prior to the advent of the Fatimid empire, was one marked with extreme danger. The Abbasid caliphs relentlessly hunted down the Imams, hoping to eliminate the entire family line. The Imams, however, moving from place to place, evaded capture.

When the enemy forces approached Ramla, they came across La‘b, whom they knew was a devoted, long-time servant of Imam al-Mahdi and who also knew where the Imam was. During her interrogation, despite threatening her and her children’s lives, she never relented, never once betraying her Imam. For her loyalty, both she and all her children were slaughtered. Once again the Ismaili Imamate was saved by the brave loyalty of an Ismaili woman. Imam al-Mahdi later went on to found the Fatimid Caliphate and the rest, as it is said, was history. (Delia Cortese, *Women and the Fatimids*, 25)

3. Imam al-Mahdi comes to power and founds the Fatimid State

After the death of Imam Muhammad b. Ismail, but before the rise of the Fatimid Empire, the Ismaili Imams hid in Salamiyyah, Syria.



This is believed to be the secret underground tunnel in Maqam al-Imam, located in Salamiyya, used by the Isma'ili Imams and their da'is to escape 'Abbasid persecution

When the Abbasid manhunt for the hiding Ismaili Imams grew a little too close for comfort, Imam al-Mahdi and the Da'wah were forced to move out of Syria. One Ismaili *Da'i*, al-Husyan b. Zikrawyah, captured by the Abbasids and "interrogated under torture," revealed Imam al-Mahdi's identity and whereabouts allowing the Abbasids to intensify and expand their chase for the Imam.

In 904, starting in Syria, Imam al-Mahdi travelled to Palestine and then, after the Abbasids executed more *Da'is*, to Egypt. However, once again, the Abbasids advanced on Imam al-Mahdi's location, forcing him to relocate again.

While many of the Imam's companions expected him to move to Yemen, Imam al-Mahdi instead travelled deeper into North Africa to avoid potential military conflicts with the Abbasids. However, not surprisingly, North Africa was also not safe for the Imams, since the Sunni Aghlabids ruling North Africa, "were instructed by their Abbasid overlords to search for the Ismaili Imam and his companions." Still disguised as merchants, Imam al-Mahdi, his brother Ja'far, and son, the future Imam al-Qaim, took refuge on the far west coast of Africa in Morocco.

During this time, one of the head *Da'is* of the Ismaili Da'wah in North Africa, Abu 'Abd Allah Shi'i — who was largely responsible for establishing the territorial foundation of the Fatimid Caliphate, directed his teaching towards the warlike North African Berber clans, steadily securing their allegiance to Imam al-Mahdi, with whom Shi'i was in touch. Supported by these new forces, Ismaili dai's

overthrew North African emirs, including the Aghlabid Emir, clearing the way for the Imam to establish the *dawlat al-haqq* or the “the kingdom of the truth.” After years of warfare, Shi’i minted new coins heralding the arrival of the *hujjat Allah* or “proof of God,” and, with an army of Berbers, escorted the Ismaili Imam and his family from Morocco to Raqqada which later became new capital of the young Fatimid State. Upon meeting and seeing the Imam, his Lord, Shi’i was “bathed in tears” and reaffirmed his allegiance. The following day, in his tent, the Imam granted an audience to each and every individual troop member who also pledged their allegiance. Then on Friday January 5th, 910 CE, Imam al-Mahdi was declared the “Commander of the Faithful” and the first Caliph of the newly found Fatimid Caliphate.

An Ismaili eyewitness, the *Da’i* Ibn al-Haytham, recounts the arrival of the Imam to his new North-African kingdom:

It was he whose excellence could not be hidden and ‘the truth has now arrived and falsehood has perished’ [17.81]. The stars declined and the Alive and Self-subsistent appeared. Abu-l-‘Abbas went out and we went out with him and met the lord on the mountain pass of Sabiba. I cannot forget his auspicious appearance, the splendor of his light, the brightness of his face, the elevation of his rank, the perfection of his build, and the resplendent beauty in his dawn. If I were to say that the lights that shine were created from the surplus of his light, I would have voiced the truth and the manifest reality. Abu-l-‘Abbas dismounted before him, may the blessings of God be upon him, and kissed the earth. He lay on the ground in front of him, and his brother Abu ‘Abdallah dismounted for him, as did all of the friends from the Kutama and the others of their followers. No one was left riding except the Commander of the Faithful, may the blessings of God be upon him, the sun most radiant, and [his son] the shining moon and glittering light, Abu-l-Wasim. These two, may the blessings of God be on them both, were the light of the world.... The earth began to shine with his light and the world was illuminated by his advent, and the Maghrib excelled because of his presence in it and his having taken possession of it.

Wilfred Madelung and Paul Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids — A Contemporary Shi’i Witness*, (p. 167)

4. Al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi

Called a “towering mountain of knowledge” by Imam al-Mustansir, al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi was the last and greatest from a dynasty of *Da’is*. His ancestors had supported and promoted hidden Ismaili Imams long before the Fatimid era, of which Imam al-Mustansir was the last Nizari Imam. As a *bab* or “gate” to the Imam (a spiritual rank second only to the Imam himself), he was the spiritual mother of the Ismaili community (akin to the “Pir” of the *Satpanth* tradition) and, as such, looked after the spiritual welfare of the *jamat*.

Fearless in his commitment to the Imam in faraway Fatimid Cairo, the Persian *Da'i*'s life is replete with stories of banishment, house arrest, nearly-missed executions, rejection by the non-Isma'ili community in his home of Persia and even victim of intrigue and marginalization by the Cairo-based Fatimid bureaucracy. Despite all these impediments and despite the Abbasid caliph sending emissaries to woo the devoted *Da'i* to the Sunni cause with sweet words, robes and promises, Shirazi never once wavered from his loyal devotion to the Imam.

On one occasion, after having been banished from Shiraz (Iran), Shirazi, travelling the back roads incognito, escaped to Ahvaz where he came across an abandoned, decrepit *masjid*. Despite being exiled for proselytizing the Isma'ili faith, he could not resist restoring the *masjid* and inscribing the Isma'ili Imams' names in brilliant gold in its woodwork. Then Shirazi asked a team of twenty Isma'ili *muezzins* to loudly proclaim the Shia call to prayer while the Sunni population of the town looked on in amazement and horror. Simultaneously, Shirazi had his Isma'ili Daylami soldiers surround the *masjid* forestalling any confrontation with the townspeople. Not one to leave well enough alone, he then offered the Friday sermon proudly in the name of the teenage Fatimid Isma'ili Imam al-Mustansir, in Cairo.

Not surprisingly, this act of defiant allegiance to the Imam of the Time prompted the chief *qadi* of the village to lodge a formal complaint with the Abbasid caliph and poor Shirazi was once again banished.

To learn more about the remarkable, irrepressible and inspirational al-Shirazi, please read [this summary of his memoirs](#), published by the Institute of Isma'ili Studies.

5. Hasan-i Sabbah

Though in the midst of turbulent times, Imam al-Mustansir I's Imamate was one of the longest Imamates in Isma'ili history and marked the peak of Isma'ili political influence. The *khutba* in Mecca, Medina, and even Baghdad (the centre of Abbasid power) was read in the name of the Fatimid Imam al-Mustansir and even the Ka'ba in Mecca was adorned in the Fatimid livery of white and gold rather than Abbasid black (as it does today).

Unfortunately, his reign also experienced a heart-breaking low as the wazirate, led by Sunni generals Badr al-Jamali and al-Afdal al-Jamali usurped more and more power from the Imam — seizing the army, the judiciary and even the leadership of the Da'wah. The power grab culminated with a *coup d'état* that saw Imam Nizar removed from the Fatimid Caliphal throne, seized and then executed, or, horrifically, even buried alive (Peter Willey, *The Eagle's Nest: Isma'ili Castles in Iran and Syria*, p.16). One witness to this fatal deterioration of the Imam's power was the prescient Isma'ili *Da'i* Hasan-i Sabbah. Recognizing a catastrophe in the making, he fought vigorously for Imam Nizar's rights. A Fatimid Cassandra, his unwavering support for the Imam was met with resistance from Isma'ili and non-Isma'ili Jamali partisans alike, leading to his exile from the Fatimid capital after just a few years.

Undeterred and with resolute determination, Hasan-i Sabbah built a parallel, yet independent, administration, with its seat at the impregnable mountain castle of Alamut. His foresight, courage and boldness would, in just a short time, make him the saviour of the Nizari Ismailis. His story is perhaps best told by Peter Willey in his *The Eagle's Nest: Ismaili Castles in Iran and Syria*:

It was nearly noon on a hot day in the early summer of 1090. Mahdi, the lord of the castle of Alamut, was beginning to sweat a little. He had spent the last few weeks in Qazvin, a modest town some 60 km away in the Daylaman region of northern Iran...

It did not seem long before they saw the great mass of the Taleqan range rising sharply before them in the clear blue sky. Soon they arrived at Shirkuh where the Taleqan and Alamut rivers join to form the fast-flowing Shahrud. This was the summer entrance to the valley of Alamut, and the escort rode through the clear blue waters that were only waist high. In winter it was impossible for any horse or foot soldier to cross the thundering stretch of water.

Once inside the gorge through which the track led, Mahdi felt more secure. The rock walls of the narrow opening towered up some 350 metres and guards, stationed at the fortifications built halfway up the rock walls, saluted their lord on his return.... They crossed the river and climbed steeply northwards up to the village of Gazorkhan where directly ahead of them, firmly built on the outcrop of a great rock, stood the castle of Alamut, set proudly against the magnificent backdrop of the Hawdequan range. After a steep climb up the left-hand side of the rock, Mahdi and his escort rode through the imposing outer gateway of the castle, which overlooked a wide sweep of the valley ... The governor and his deputy set off on a tour of inspection of the castle defences. To his surprise he found a number of new faces among the garrison and servants ...

A sudden shaft of suspicion struck the governor's mind: 'Are you quite sure that these men are reliable,' he asked, 'and that they are not Ismailis connected with the accursed Hasan Sabbah? We must certainly have nothing to do with them. Before we know where we are, they will open the gates to him and seize the castle from us. I will not allow these people to play any tricks on us. Everyone knows that Alamut is the strongest fortresses in Daylaman and cannot be captured even by a thousand horsemen.' ...

The lord of Alamut had good reason to be fearful of Hasan Sabbah. But it was already too late. At the very time he was in Qazvin, Hasan was in fact hiding in another part of the town, finalising plans to take over his castle. Alamut was Hasan's obvious choice as the base from which to launch his revolution. The valley below the castle was fertile and its inhabitants were mostly Shi'i Muslims, including many Ismailis on whom Hasan could count for support. The castle itself was easily defensible, as it was located on top of a massive rock and surrounded on all sides by mountains. Since it was built, the castle had never been taken by military force. Legend has it that the site of the castle was first indicated to a local ruler by an

eagle that soared above the great rock, hence its name 'Alamut', the 'Eagle's Nest'

In the summer of 1090, when Hasan received word from his agents that all was ready at Alamut, he set out from Qazvin with the greatest circumspection. He knew very well that the vizier Nezam al-Molk had issued orders for his arrest. As a result Hasan avoided the direct route from Qazvin to Andej, but took the longer route northwards through Ashkavar and arrived over the mountains, by the back door so to speak. Hasan stayed for a while in Andej in the guise of a schoolteacher called Dehkhoda. Soon he was joined by a band of his most loyal supporters, whom he sent in small groups to Alamut, ostensibly to seek employment. Some of these men probably settled in the village of Gazorkhan just below the castle, ready to be summoned at short notice.

Finally, Hasan himself entered the castle officially as a teacher to the children of the garrison. Once inside the walls, Hasan and his men befriended the soldiers and converted some of them secretly to their cause. Mahdi's deputy himself was probably converted at some point and was waiting to help Hasan in his plan. The day arrived when Hasan was assured of significant support and minimum resistance from the garrison. He calmly went to Mahdi, revealed his true identity and announced that the castle was now in his possession. The governor was astounded at the so-called schoolmaster's impertinence and summoned the guards to arrest him, only to find them ready to obey the upstart and put Mahdi to the sword at his command. At that moment the governor came to recognise the true nature of the plot against him and that he had been tricked. The castle was lost to him and he was powerless to do anything about it. In his victory, Hasan was magnanimous. He allowed Mahdi to leave unharmed and even gave him a draft for 3,000 gold dinars as the price of the castle. The draft was payable in the name of Ra'is Mozaffar, a Saljuq government official and secretly an Ismaili, who later honoured the payment in full, much to Mahdi's astonishment. Within a generation, the Ismaili Imams succeeding Mawlana Nizar made their way to Alamut where they found safety from persecution.

Peter Wiley, *The Eagle's Nest: Ismaili Castles in Iran and Syria*, (pp.16-23)

6. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad



Imam Rukhn al-Din Khurshah was the final Imam to reign at Alamut, which fell to the Mongol emperor Hulegu Khan in 1256. In the year's final months, the 26 year-old Imam at the fortress of Maymundez, assembled and consulted with his senior dais and advisors to decide whether or not to surrender or continue his resistance. Earlier that year, the Mongols executed every adult male in Tun and also murdered every Ismaili envoy the Imam had sent to meet with Hulegu Khan. While deliberating, fighting continued unabated. The Mongols relentlessly battered down Ismaili defences, vowing to continue massacring Ismailis if the Imam did not surrender.

Ultimately, a group of *Da'is* and advisers, led by the pre-eminent scholar and *Da'i* Nasir al-Din Tusi, prevailed and the Imam agreed to surrender. As Ismailis dismantled their defences, the Imam appeared before Khan, defenceless, in the name of peace, and sacrificed himself to prevent further slaughter of his followers. Escorting the Imam from one Ismaili fortress to another, Khan demanded surrender at the order of their Imam he held hostage. And so, one by one, Ismaili castles and fortresses were taken and destroyed. Ismailis were massacred and others sold as slaves. Finally, the Mongol horde set fire to Alamut, forever destroying nearly all of the Ismaili literary and intellectual treasures in its renowned library.

Once the surrender was complete and Khan had no further use for the Imam, he banished him to Mongolia while ordering the Imam's family and servants, in Persia, excruciated. Then, when the Imam's group rested for the night in the Khangay mountains of north-western Mongolia, Mawlana Rukn al-Din and his companions were led away, one by one, off the main road, and brutally murdered by their Mongol guards. In the words of Juwayni himself:

'He and his followers were kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword, and of him and his stock no trace was left, and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world.'

Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, (pp.47-49)

Although Mongol propagandist Juwayni loudly proclaimed that the Ismaili Imam and all Ismailis had been destroyed in perhaps the most painful and horrific period of Ismaili history, it was not so.

Before the Imam was murdered, even before the surrender of the fortresses, Imam Rukhn al-Din Khurshah's young son and successor, Mawlana Shams al-Din Muhammad ("the Sun of the Faith") had, on the orders of his father, been concealed and secreted away to Azerbaijan by a small cadre of Ismaili *Da'is*. So while the situation was dire, it was not hopeless. The Imam had ensured the Imam's continuity knowing, though hidden for the present, his successor would rise again. (Eboo Jamal, p. 51)

7. Nizari Quhistani

Ismaili history is punctuated with periods of concealment, *dawr-i-satr*, when the Imam's identity and whereabouts are only known to a close circle of Ismaili *Da'is*. To others, the Imam, donning a guise, appeared as a businessman or even embroiderer. However, though hidden, some enterprising Ismailis occasionally found him and experienced the *didar* they craved.

The Ismaili *Da'i* Nizari Quhistani lovingly describes his *didar* in beautiful, mystical poetry that suggests the location or identity of the Imam without disclosing either. He describes a "handsome young man of exceptional spiritual authority with a large following in the city:"

Once someone stole my heart away.

There were others like me who had lost their hearts to him.

No one could get enough of him.

The feet of many were willing to walk on swords (for his sake).

His beauty was immeasurable and the marketplace was inflamed by him,

While he was always fleeing from the tumult of the common folk.

Surviving the Mongols, (p.131)

Nizari then discovered that the Imam was to visit a "house of healing" — a common Sufi and Ismaili term for a place of worship. So, feigning illness, Nizari met the Imam whom he calls "the intoxicated one," a common Sufi and Ismaili metaphor for the Imam.

The Imam “reprimand[ed] Nizari for coming all the way from Khurasan to meet him. He told the poet that the lover and the beloved are in reality never apart: ‘When was Qays ever without the face of Layla?’ he asked,” making reference to the Arabic analogue to Romeo and Juliet. (Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, p.132)

Nizari maintained *taqiyya* and never revealed the assumed identity of the Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad. His allusions to “madness” and “intoxication” are consistent with Sufi descriptions of spiritual love, and it was clear to close readers that — even in this time of extreme danger — Nizari indeed was granted the Imam’s *didar*.

8. Pir Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi



A Page from Pir Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi via the IIS website
In the *Sathpanth* tradition, the office of “Pir” is analogous to the Fatimid *bab* (“gate” of the Imam), a spiritual rank second only to the Imam himself. The station’s importance is illustrated by the fact that it is reserved for blood relations of the Imam, and is sometimes held by the Imam himself, as has been the case with recent Imams. Pirs are the “Spiritual Mothers” of the *jamat* just as Imams are their spiritual fathers. In his work *Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi*, Imam Gharib Mirza explains that “the true believer must follow the *Pir* of his time, sincerely following him.”

On the death of *Pir* Hasan Kabir al-Din’s in India, his eighteen sons fought over his fortune and the *dasond* he collected on behalf of the Imam — with some of his children even absconding with portions of it. His younger brother, the Pir Taj al-Din, trekked to Persia, to obtain the Imam’s guidance and directions to resolve the matter. Although the Imam entrusted spiritual authority to Pir Taj al-Din, on his return to Uch, his nephews harassed him endlessly. Some even became Sunnis and tried to convince other Ismailis to do the same. Nevertheless, Pir Taj al-Din continued to lead the Uch and Lahori *jamats*, collecting their *dasond* and, eventually, delivering it the Imam in Persia.

The *dasond* included a special cloth for the Imam, whom, in characteristic generosity, gifted a small piece of it back to Pir Taj al-Din as a token of his recognition and blessings for his services. As an aside, oral traditions tell us the Imams sometimes issued a piece of cloth as proof the *dasond* was delivered to the Imam. When Pir Taj al-Din returned to the *jamat*, wearing his gift as a turban, the fractious South-Asian *jamat* turned on him, accusing him of stealing his beloved Imam’s *dasond*:

The shock of these accusations procured his early demise. Such was the uproar among his former disciples that they would not allow him to be buried in Uch, and

it was only twenty years after his death that a proper mausoleum was constructed by his repentant followers.

Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, (p.125)

Meanwhile Sayyid Imamshah was dispatched to try and mitigate the damage caused by Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din's children conversion to Sunni Islam and their attempts to sway as well. Unsuccessful and frustrated by those *jamati* members who did not heed his call to return to the faith, Imamshah went into seclusion and never re-emerged.

After the abuse that had been piled on *Pir* Taj al-Din and Imamshah, the Sindhi Ismaili community, not surprisingly, found themselves without a *Pir* and appealed to Imam Gharib Mirza to provide them with a new one:

Upon arrival [in Persia], they pleaded, 'Our *pir*, Taj al-Din, has passed away. Now we are in need of a *pir*.' The Imam then had the Counsels of Chivalry compiled and gave it to them saying, 'This is your *pir*. Act according to its dictates.'

As such, the work is always respectfully addressed as *Pir Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, and this is the form the title takes in many of its manuscripts.

Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, (pp. 122, 125-126)

The *Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi*, or Counsels of Chivalry, is a unique document in Ismaili history both for its content and its origin. Originally a compilation of pronouncements (*farmans*) of Imam Gharib Mirza given to the Persian *jamat* during Imam Abd al-Salaam's lifetime, it later served a noble purpose after a period of conflict and chaos in the Indian Ismaili community.

9. Prince Aly Salman Khan



Perhaps because he lived his life unconcerned about what would be said about him, Prince Aly Salman Khan is one of the most misunderstood and maligned figures in Ismaili history. Both the son of an Imam and father of an Imam, Prince Aly Khan was a devoted father and son — even supporting his son's Imamate when some Ismaili *jamats* who, expecting his father to be the Imam, refused to follow the newly appointed Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni. A decorated and admired soldier in World War II,

Prince Aly Khan was also a diplomat representing Pakistan at the UN, where he fiercely defended Islam in his speeches.

One remarkable story of his daring can be found in Willi Frischauer's book, *The Aga Khans*:

During the period from August 15, 1944, until March 1945, frequently sent on missions to the front, he won the admiration of all by his bravery under fire and complete disregard of danger, by his intelligence, tact and character, and he was thus able to render the highest possible service to the allied army.'

Alerted by Aly, friends in several armies moving in on Germany were on the lookout for his and his father's horses which the Nazis had taken from their French stables as loot. He was delighted to receive a message from U.S. General George Patton, whose storming finish had carried his troops farther east than any other, which said that the horses had been traced to the German National Stud at Altefeld but his troops were still some distance away. Because Soviet armies were fast approaching, no time was to be lost. With a jeep and a horse-trailer and a single G.I. to help him, Aly dashed across Germany but found the Germans still in control at Altefeld. It was a situation after his heart.

At the point of a gun he demanded the return of his horses. With Robert Muller who had gone into German captivity with the horses, he organised their removal, carting them two by two across the French border in an expedition which took five days and five nights.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (p.149)

10. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah



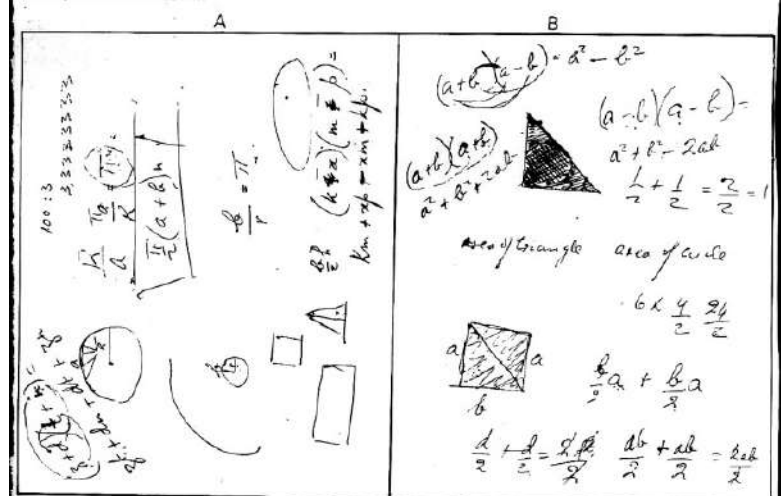
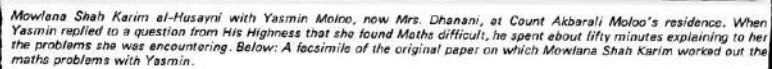
Hazrat Imam Shah Sultan Muhammad Shah lived at a seminal and transitional period in Ismaili history. Born when horse and carriage were the primary mode of transport, he lived through two world wars and, ultimately, led the unsophisticated, naive Ismaili *jamat* into the modern age.

More than just a religious figure, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was one of the most illustrious global figures of his time. He was even elected as the President of the League of Nations (predecessor of today's United Nations) — the first Muslim leader of the international body. As a visionary and a trailblazer, he was a founding father of Pakistan and of Aligarh University, India. However, prominence comes with great risk and this Imam was the target of an assassination attempt during World War I, which he describes in his memoirs:

Suddenly the British Government took urgent and alarmed cognizance of what subsequently became known, in Swiss legal history, as the affair of the Lucerne bomb. The German Secret Service did not believe that I was really ill. They thought, however, that their country's cause would be well served were I put out of the way for good. They arranged to have a bomb thrown at me; and to make the operation certain of success they also arranged, with typical German thoroughness, to have my breakfast coffee poisoned. The bomb did not go off; I did not drink the coffee.

Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, (p. 109)

Early in Mawlana Hazar Imam's Imamatus, on a visit to Count Akbarali's Moloo's residence in Nairobi, Hazar Imam asked the Count's daughter, Yasmin Moloo, now Mrs. Yasmin Dhanani, a maths question. When she replied she found it difficult, Hazar Imam spent about 50 minutes explaining the solution. A copy of Hazar Imam's notes and explanations appear below.



A Fearless Fidai – The Story of al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi

O towering mountain of knowledge, incapacitating the aspiring climber. You have surpassed the compass of the earlier [da’is]. Your like cannot be found among those that have gone—among all people—nor those that remain.

Imam Mustansir (Qasida)

In a constellation of brilliant philosophers like Hasan bin Sabbah, political geniuses like Rashid al-Din Sinan, and talented philosopher-poets like Nasir Khushraw, al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi is a glittering star. Called a “towering mountain of knowledge” by the Imam of his Time, the incomparable Shirazi was one of the most important figures of the Fatimid period. Considering his reputation for spiritual elevation, intellectual prowess, and unparalleled devotion to the Imam, you could be forgiven for thinking that Shirazi was universally celebrated and invited happily into the highest echelons of religious authority.

Unfortunately you would think wrong.

Shirazi struggled his entire life to bring his unique talents to the service of the Imam and his adversaries were Sunni, Buyid, and Ismaili alike. His poetry was saturated with weeping lamentations of his talents being wasted and his blocked access to the Imam. Remarkably, despite countless setbacks and challenges, Shirazi never forsook the Imam and never stopped his struggle to serve him – whatever it cost him – and cost him it did. The story of Shirazi is a moving example of the luminaries whose selfless service kept the community intellectually vibrant and should never be forgotten.

Al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi was born in 996 or 997 with the name Abu Nasr Hibat Allah b. Abi ‘Imran Musa b. Da’ud. Born and raised in the city of Shiraz in the province of Fars in southwest Persia, he is often called al-Shirazi, meaning “from Shiraz”. Given many titles during the course of his illustrious career, he is more commonly known for the title he received during his appointment as dai of Fars: al-Mu’ayyad fi al-Din (the One Aided [by God] in Religion).

The last in a long line of Ismaili dai’s, his ancestors served the Ismaili Imams even when they were in concealment prior to the advent of the Fatimid Caliphate. Imam Mustansir billah later noted:

...and you [O Mu’ayyad] come from a family of Godly dais, who “spent [their money for the cause] since before the conquest, and fought” before the first heralds of dawn; and they conducted the da’wa for the concealed Imams, forefathers of the Commander of the Faithful [al-Mustansir], when no banner had yet been unfurled for them. And they undertook the establishment of the signposts of their religion when the world was injustice and darkness, following in the best path of piety and right-guidance, and taking the most protective of shields from godliness and appropriate action. You have followed in their traces, and have

become the most beautiful of them in deeds, and the most elevated in glory on the occasions of obedience and nobility...

Qutbuddin 21

In Fatimid Ismaili terminology, the Supreme Hujjat or Bab (Gate) of the Imam is like the Pir of the Sathpanthi tradition – he is second to the Imam in terms of spiritual elevation and is the spiritual mother of the Ismaili community, see diagram the below (Virani 75):

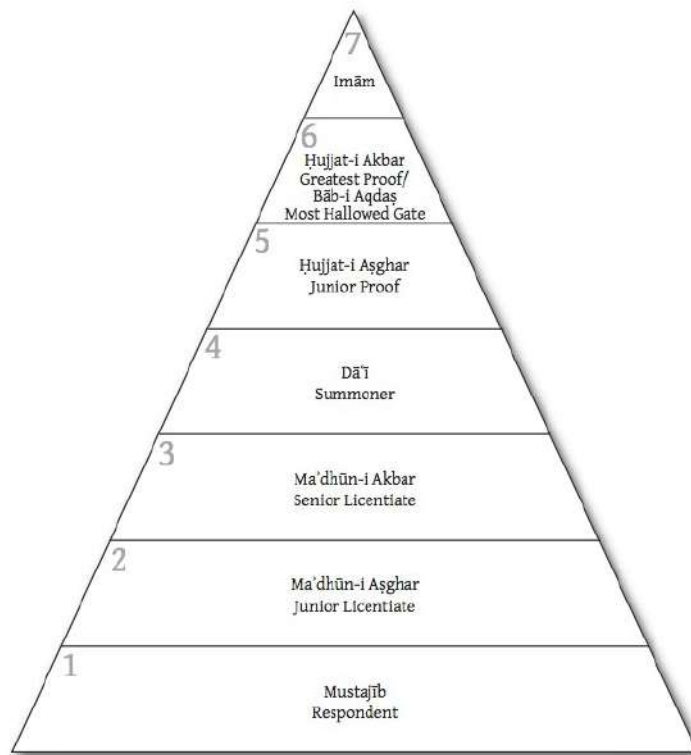


FIGURE 4.1 The Seven Heavens of the *Hudūd-i Dīn*
It is God who has created the seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. The Command descends through them so that you may learn that God is powerful over all things and that God encompasses all things with knowledge (65:12)

His soul is illuminated constantly with the brilliance of the Imam's and his knowledge comes directly from that source. Shirazi was the Supreme Hujjat or Bab. His devotion to the Ismaili Imams was absolute and he was a fearless warrior in their cause. Surrounded by hostile Sunni and Buyid forces in Shiraz, he was forced to operate in

“semi-secrecy”. Nevertheless he attracted an impressive following and converted many people to Ismailism – including, for a time, the Buyid Sultan of Shiraz, Abu Kalijar, himself. But that comes later. Let us begin his story with Idd of 1038 where Shirazi, as head of the Persian Ismailis – simply by following his faith – ended up causing a ruckus that very nearly cost him his life:

Shirazi in Shiraz

It was the very members of his Ismaili following that came on July 7, 1038 to celebrate Idd al-Fitr with him in the courtyard of his house. He had prepared a feast to commemorate the festival marking the end of Ramadhan. In contrast to Sunni custom, according to Ismaili tradition, the end of the month of fasting is determined using mathematical calculations. However, the predominantly Sunni population of Shiraz eschewed the Ismaili method, instead relying on physically sighting a NEW moon.

In 1038 there was a very significant snag the Sunni denizens came up against: as a wall of clouds obscured the moon, they continued to fast, all the while becoming increasingly angry at the quietly feasting Ismailis. Despite Shirazi's best efforts – counseling his followers patience and peace in the face of their neighbors' attacks – the situation escalated to a fevered pitch when at last the wall of clouds dissipated and a CRESCENT moon (and not a new moon) became visible.

As the Sunni population realized that they had fasted a day too long and, in so doing, violated the injunction not to fast on the day of celebration – they became incensed. The Ismailis had been right – but that fact only added fuel to fire. The town judge (qadi) contacted the wazir and demanded a bloody revenge, asking for permission to “destroy [Shirazi's] house and kill everybody there” (Klemm 21). The wazir then summoned Shirazi before him and, when Shirazi reminded him gently of the Ismaili Daylami soldiers who would presumably be upset if their da'i was murdered, instead put him under house arrest.

Heartbroken at the arrest of their faultless leader, the Ismaili soldiers marched in protest, handing a letter to the wazir himself. Why could the Christians and Jews practice their faith unmolested while the leader of the Ismaili Muslims is arrested simply for using a different method to determine the date of Idd? The absurdity of the situation was too much to countenance!

Intrigued by the passionate Ismaili leader, the Sultan of Shiraz ordered a debate be held between Shirazi and his Sunni opponents – a disputation on the esoteric interpretation (ta'wil) of the Qur'an – a cornerstone of Ismaili doctrine. Shirazi, in his element, handily destroyed both his Sunni opponents (who incidentally held differing perspectives on the same issue) and his brilliance won a prize student: the Sultan himself.

Ecstatic over being able to bring the Sultan over to his faith, Shirazi taught the Sultan the principles of Ismailism, including encouraging him to stop drinking. One formerly Ismaili drinking buddy of the Sultan protested at the loss of his drinking partner and began to turn the Sultan against his new teacher – unfortunately for our harassed da'i – his enemy succeeded.

Shirazi was effectively banished from Shiraz. He fled to the nearby town of Ahwaz. Even though he had been banished for standing up for his Ismaili faith and teaching others about it, he could not cease these same activities. In fact, when he stumbled across an abandoned masjid, he repaired it – and, in it, inscribed the names of the Ismaili Imams in vibrant gold!

If that was not enough, he asked a team of TWENTY Ismaili muezzins to loudly announce the call to prayer – including the Shia phrase “Come to the best of deeds.” He did not even stop there. To the fury of the Sunni residents he offered the Friday sermon in the name of the Ismaili Imam. The Sunnis of Ahwaz were up in arms – too scared to confront the Ismaili soldiers guarding the masjid under Shirazi's watchful eye, the town judge (qadi) instead wrote to the center of Sunni power – the Abbasid Caliphs in faraway Baghdad.

The Abbasids sent an emissary and Shirazi was again forced to flee under the cover of darkness and in disguise back to Shiraz. The entire trip he dreaded being caught and executed.

This time the elite of Shiraz had laid a clever trap.

They presented him with a well-respected old shaykh and demand that he debate the elderly gentleman publicly – hoping that he would lose his temper and therefore the respect of the audience. The wily dai, however, turned the entire situation on its head. He kindly, respectfully, and easily defeated the old shaykh who blanched and fled from the hall, literally tripping on his own robe in shame. But if he thought his exemplary performance would save his life, he was sorely mistaken. The Abbasids demanded that the Sultan of Shiraz turn Shirazi over to them, asking Shirazi to repudiate his Imam and faith under threat of his life. Placed under a seven-month house arrest, he was terrified that any moment would be his last. Despite the hostile environs, Shirazi never wavered in devotion to the Imam of the Time – his poetry full of longing for the safety and succor of the Imam in his palace in Cairo:

It is through you that Ibn Musa asks God for deliverance
from captivity and from confinement in the worst of stopping places.
Entering shade in the courtyard of His elect,
shady, and residing in security in the refuge of the palace

Qutbuddin 48

Finally, the Sultan of Shiraz had enough of the Ismaili firebrand who inexplicably would not abandon the faith of his ancestors and his beloved Imam. Banished from his homeland, at around fifty years of age, Shirazi again disguised himself from detection and became a refugee. The silver lining of his expulsion from his home was his certainty that he will receive deedar, or an audience with the Imam that he and his entire family had served faithfully all their lives.

His poetry expressed his confidence that generations of unprecedented devoted service in Shiraz would finally be recognized in the heart of Ismaili power – Fatimid Cairo. He was convinced that his years of worry and torment would finally be at an end:

I have [made] a firm resolution—if God brings the matter to completion,
the completion of the
resolution is sufficient healing for the breast!
alighting at the door of the palace, fulfilling my heart's desire,
and finding near the distant comfort.
Then I shall find the star of my happiness rising,
as I find the rising star of ill-omen falling,
at a door whose elevation resides where Arcturus is,
certainly, rather, it is more elevated than both Arcturus and Spica Virginis,
belonging to the master of the people al-Mustansir, the one who uncovers
darkness,

the quintessence of those who walk the earth...
 There [will be] no disappointment from God's [giving of] comfort, for I see
 Him very favorable towards my serious resolution.
So that I dust off all care at [the Imam's] door,
and [there] end the remainder of my days.
O you who gloat over [my] exile, desist, for I have
attained through it honor above [all] honor.

Qutbuddin 53

Shirazi in Cairo

Almost immediately following his arrival in Fatimid Cairo, Shirazi noticed that political power players, whose motivations were not as pure as his own, had overrun the Ismaili capital – drawn to the power of the radiant Imam-Caliph. His confidence and hopes – dashed.

Conflicted by a certainty that his services were direly necessary and an uncertainty that an honest man would be able to function in such a pernicious atmosphere, Shirazi wrote despairingly to his brother:

...I am informing you O my brother—may God give comfort to your heart and grant you what pleases you in both worlds—that after suffering the appalling events you saw with your own eyes, . . . I reached, with great difficulty, the Pure Door (of the Imam), vacillating between despair and hope . . . hope because of a service whose like no one but me had rendered, . . . and despair because I knew that the one sought was a sun concealed in a curtain, and the face of a day wearing a veil of clouds.

Qutbuddin 57

Of course the “Sun” of Shirazi’s letter was the Imam, who was “concealed in a curtain” of the bureaucrats who restricted access to him and had run amok in his capital. One such bureaucrat was Shirazi’s immediate supervisor, Chief Da’i and Judge al-Qasim, great grandson of the famous Fatimid Ismaili jurist and da’i al-Qadi al-Numan. To his despair, Shirazi found al-Qasim incompetent and patently inferior in every way. It was also clear that al-Qasim was far from elated that the unstoppable force of nature, da’i Shirazi, had come to Cairo and indeed considered it a threat to his position.

After more than a year of pleading with one person and another, and getting a constant run-around, Shirazi finally had enough. Infuriated and frustrated, he wrote to the wazir explosively that he had not come to Cairo seeking a position or material gain but rather he had come only for the Imam. If he could not serve the Imam then he demanded permission to leave and be useful to the Imam elsewhere:

O Shaykh, know that my land has not spit me out from its mouth except for being exposed in the service of the ‘Alawite [i.e. Fatimid] state, for fear from the Abbasid side, and escaping from a sedition whose malice almost killed me, and whose

drowning almost overtook me—not because I was stung by the live coals of poverty and therefore took shelter in the antidote of profit and utility. There is no motive to this endeavor of mine except the motive of belief, and the person sought is none but the master of the palace, who is the Imam of the Age, not the viziers or intermediaries or aides.

Qutbuddin 58

The wazir, accustomed to sycophantic panegyric, was angry at Shirazi's passionate devoted speech and dismissal of his exalted position. He denied him permission to leave and proceeded to make Shirazi's life very unpleasant – that is – until the wazir was unexpectedly killed.

At the demise of the previous wazir, Shirazi was finally allowed the opportunity he has been longing for – a glimpse of the Imam of his time. Shirazi movingly describes the experience as follows:

My eyes had barely fallen on him when awe took hold of me and reverence overcame me; and it appeared to me as though I was standing in front of the Messenger of God [Mu' ammad] and the Commander of the Faithful ['Alì]—May God's blessings be upon them!—facing their faces. I tried, when I fell to the earth prostrating for the master of prostration and the one worthy of it, to make my tongue intercede with him in a goodly manner by its speech, and I found it bound by the tonguetiedness of awe, and isolated from the virtue of eloquent speech. When I lifted my head from the prostration and gathered my clothes about me in order to sit, I saw a finger signaling me to rise for some- one present in that place, and the Commander of the Faithful—May God perpetuate his kingdom!—frowned with his face at him in rebuke; I had not raised my head by [the signal] nor accorded it any value. I stayed in his Presence for an hour, my tongue not rising to speech nor finding the way to words, and each time those present tried to get me to speak, I increased in tonguetiedness and in storming up the steep hill of stammering, and he—May God perpetuate his kingdom!— kept saying, “Let him be till he calms down and becomes accustomed.”

Then I arose, took his noble hand and kissed it and placed it upon my eyes and breast, bade farewell and left.

Qutbuddin 61

A couple months after Shirazi's deedar, the Chief Da'i and Judge al-Qasim, scion of the most prominent Ismaili family, was also removed from his offices – presumably for incompetence. Considering his embarrassment of qualifications Shirazi knew that he was the obvious candidate to be appointed as Chief Da'i. To his utter astonishment, both positions of Chief Judge and Chief Da'i (the titular head of the da'wa – the call to summons for the Ismaili people) would instead be led by the new wazir – a Sunni! This secular position of Chief Da'i, the head of the Ismaili Religious Education at the time, was clearly not given to the candidate with the most merit but rather to the most capable administrator and the most politically astute actor. Still Shirazi's hopes were dashed.

The newly-appointed Sunni chief of the da'wa and the judiciary, al-Yazuri, strong-armed Shirazi to stay in the city – and not just that – but to ghostwrite his sermons at the majalises that took place multiple times a week! One can only imagine Shirazi agreeing to ghostwrite these sermons out of certainty that his knowledge of Ismaili spiritual truths would still be disseminated to the Ismaili people. To sweeten the bitter pill, al-Yazuri implied to Shirazi that – when he ultimately left his position – it would belong to Shirazi. Shirazi agreed and so received no credit for the da'wa sermons given by the chief da'i for more than a year.

It is obvious that al-Yazuri understood the vast intellectual talents of the da'i Shirazi – why else would he ask that he ghostwrite the sermons? Why else call Shirazi “your da'i and trusted one (*thiqā*)” to the Imam al-Mustansir? But at the same time, he admitted to his relative in a private letter, that his egregious mistreatment of the learned da'i could be traced to a personal dislike of the man.

Miserable at this state of affairs – so contrary to his hopes – Shirazi poured his despair into his poetry and complained of his presence being wasted:

I made licit the sanctuary

of my blood for their sake, and for their sake

I lost my youth and the spring of my life.

For their sake I became a stranger away from my homeland,

wandering the earth, desert after desert.

And when I came to them, a knowledgeable man, patiently enduring
the good, when it comes to him, as well as the bad,

speaking out and acting for their fealty,

offering good counsel in secret and [in] public,

“they wasted me, and what a youth they wasted

for a day of adversity and the closing of a breach.”

If Fate had not diminished my fortune,

they would not have denied my fortune and my value.

Yes, they know I am one who obeys Religion,

when other[s] obey long robes and rags.

If they had unsheathed my sword, they would have seen it

splitting and cutting the jugular veins of the enemy;

and I would have perfumed on the body of Religion,

garments no perfumer can perfume;

so that I relieve the drought of Egypt—but that is innovation,

when here is Joseph in the land of Egypt!

Qutbuddin 65

Still toying with the aging da'i, the vizier al-Yazuri then decided to send him on a military mission to Syria. When Shirazi refused due to his debilitating ill-health, the sly vizier told him that it was the Imam himself who had made the request.

What could the da'i say to a request from his much-loved murshid?

He wrote a letter to the Imam himself protesting this appointment and describing his age-induced infirmities – but after the Imam acknowledged receipt of his letter – all he could say was Ameen. Prior to his departure to Syria he questioned the choice of campsite and expressed his misgivings to the Imam himself. When the Imam responded, saying the choice had been his decision, Shirazi immediately accepted it, saying: “*ma wara’ hadha al-ikhtiyar ikhtiyar*” (there is no choice better other than [your] choice.) But he did not leave without spilling his heart to his Imam, expressing his pain and disappointment at the treatment he had received and his limited access to the object of his devotion – the Imam himself:

Our Master—May God preserve your kingdom!—it was not the habit of your fathers and grandfathers—May God sanctify their souls and bless them!—to cut off the established practice (rasm) of their servants [appearing before them], or to change a ruling regarding [their appearing before them]. Why then do you cut off your servant’s practice of presenting [himself] in this noble place and standing in this great station?

Qutbuddin 68

The Imam smiled in response and wished him luck – “express[ing] confidence in victory” (Qutbuddin 68). Shirazi left, his heart lighter.

The Imam’s confidence in Shirazi was not misplaced. He did momentous work, convincing multiple parties to fight in the name of the Fatimid Imam and – as a result – pro-Fatimid forces marched into the heart of Abbasid power: Baghdad. The *khutba* was delivered there in the name of the Imam al-Mustansir and the call to prayer in the Shia style. Strangely, despite the landmark event, the vizier ordered no victory celebrations in Cairo and, on Shirazi’s return, he entered the city unsung, uncelebrated.

Shirazi described his disappointing homecoming after his incredible service and victory:

Thus I entered [Cairo] like one vanquished, not one who has vanquished, one broken, not one who has broken, one defeated, not one who has defeated; and I received the opposite and inverse of what I had hoped for in terms of advancement and enhancement and elevation to the loftiness of the Pleiades.

Qutbuddin 77

Still, even after momentous achievements both in the realm of *da’wat* and in the unfamiliar (to him) realm of military success, his achievements remained unrecognized and his access to the august person of the Imam – denied.

As expressed by the later Imam Shah Gharib Mirza in the Counsels of Chivalry (Pir Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi), the believer “must be sincere and patient, exercising restraint and patience in all his actions... except in two cases in which patience is improper... even... a nefarious step and a sign of unbelief: ...first in the case of deedar... second in the following of the command and instruction of God... one cannot exercise patience in these two matters and must never do it.” Shirazi

followed this guidance to a t – impatient for an audience with the Imam – unwilling to delay deedar even an hour, for all the kingdoms of the East.

Bewildered. Passionate. Like a lover, begging for an impatient glimpse of his hidden beloved, Shirazi wrote a qasida addressed to the Imam:

I swear that if you were to crown me
with the crown of Khosroes, King of the East,
and if you were to give me [charge of] all the world's affairs,
of those people who have departed and those who remain,
while saying, "We shall not meet for another hour,"
I would rather, O my Master, we meet.
For your keeping me away for an hour
has grayed my heart along with my head.

Qutbuddin 78

To his immense joy, the Imam responded in kind – and how!

The Imam wrote and even recited an eight-verse qasida matched in meter and rhyme with the one written by his ardent da'i, expressing his admiration and love for his follower:

O' hujja, famous among all people,
O towering mountain of knowledge, incapacitating the aspiring climber.
Our doors were not locked to you
except due to a hurtful, disturbing cause,
and we have not veiled ourselves from you from loathing, so trust
in our affection, and return to the worthier [path].¹⁷⁸
We were worried for your heart if you heard it, and our shunning was the
shunning of a concerned parent.
Our followers have lost their right guidance,
in the West, O companion, and in the East.
So spread among them what you will of our knowledge,
and be for them the concerned father.
Even though you are the last in our da'wa,
you have surpassed the
compass of the earlier [da'is].
Your like cannot be found among those that have gone
—among all people—nor those that remain.

Qutbuddin 78

Finally, in 1058 – more than twelve years after his disappointed move to Cairo – al-Yazuri was imprisoned on charges of embezzlement and Shirazi finally reached the position he knew he belonged in and was eminently qualified for. No longer a ghostwriter for the position – he became the titular head of the da'wa: the da'i al-du'at.

Two weeks after the conquering of Baghdad under the Imam's name, Chief Da'i Shirazi not only received deedar of his Imam, was not simply given the position of

da'i al-du'at, but was acknowledged as the spiritual wife of the Imam, the mother of the Jamat, Salman al-Farsi to the Holy Prophet, the *hujjat-i-akbar*, the *bab al-abwab*, the Gate to the Imam. His status was proclaimed officially on February 9, 1059, for all to see and hear. Unsurprisingly, given the obvious venal machinations of the bureaucrats of the Fatimid Ismaili state, this was not the end of the story for the poor beleaguered Ismaili dai, his honeymoon was not to last.

Although the Imam had publicly proclaimed his spiritual status and the love he held for his da'i, the constant politicking of Fatimid Cairo was unstoppable. From 1061 to 1062 the new vizier Ibn al-Mudabbir exiled him – purportedly for having a stutter – and took his exalted Chief Da'i position for himself.

A year later, when yet another vizier was removed from office, the Imam al-Mustansir himself called his da'i Shirazi back and, on his return from exile, Shirazi resumed his position of Chief Da'i until two months before his death in 1078, at age eighty-three or eighty-four when another Sunni, Badr al-Jamali took his position in addition to the vizierate, the head of the military and the Chief Judgeship. Not long later, Badr al-Jamali's son al-Afdal instigated a coup against the Ismaili Imams, resulting in the Nizari/Tayyibi split. After funeral prayers conducted by Imam al-Mustansir himself, Shirazi was buried at the Dar al-'Ilm where he lived as Chief Da'i.

Shirazi left behind an extensive and profound corpus including an autobiography (*sira*), a *diwan* (book of poetry), a Persian translation of one of Qadi al-Numan's Arabic books, and most importantly his *al-Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, composed of 800 of his sermons full of Quranic exegesis and Ismaili theology. Additionally, his most famous student, Nasir Khushraw's writings are full of praise and learning's from Shirazi himself.

Though his life was not easy (to say the least), far from being bitter about his long years of hardship and mistreatment, Shirazi viewed these trials as tests and as a force that actually strengthened him and his faith:

I have become gold for the sun of right guidance,
and far be it from fire to consume gold!

Qutbuddin 100

echoing the words of a previous Ismaili dai:

The hardship with which [believers] are afflicted in this world is the lighter punishment. There is no way other than purification. Have you seen impure gold? Is there any way other than purification by fire, so that impurities burn off and pure gold remains? Such is the example of believers.

Qutbuddin 100

In the more than 1400 years of Ismaili history – from the horrific murder of our first Imam 'Ali to the attempted murder of our Imam Shah Sultan Muhammad Shah by German Nazis, Ismaili Imams and their followers have been subject to brutal conditions. It's only very recently that a significant proportion of Ismailis have lived in relative safety. But throughout our history, we have been fortunate to have

Ismaili da'is and fidai's who have devoted their lives to the betterment and education of the Ismaili community, and who have fought – despite all the odds – fearlessly for not just its survival but its spiritual edification. As Pir Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi says:

Therefore, O, believers, see God in your own hearts, keeping your hearts well-polished, removing rust, dust, doubt and hypocrisy from the mirror of your hearts by the brush of firm faith (yaqin), and wash it with the water of religious knowledge, so that you may see God in that mirror of your hearts.

Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi was at the forefront of the fight to give Ismailis the “religious knowledge” with which to wash their hearts and fulfill the Imam's guidance. As the Imam himself told us, Shirazi was a “mountain of knowledge” and his immense contribution to the religious knowledge of the community should never be lost to time. And his story of struggle against forces who attempted to marginalize him – from both within and outside the jamat – should be remembered and honored by we, his inheritors.

FOOTNOTES

1. Klemm, Verena, *Memoirs of a Mission*
2. Qutbuddin, Tahera, *Al-Mu'ayyad Al-Shirazi And Fatimid Da'wa Poetry- A Case Of Commitment In Classical Arabic Literature*
3. Virani, Shafique, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*
4. Pir Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi, trans. Ivanow

The Concept of Imamat in the Qur'an

Our [previous article, here](#) discussed the spiritual functions of the Prophet Muhammad as revealed in the Qur'an, including his role in guiding the Believers on behalf of God, interceding for the Believer's forgiveness (4:64), accepting offerings from them to purify their souls (9:102-104) on God's behalf, sending blessings upon them for their tranquillity (9:103), pardoning them for their errors and shortcomings (3:159, 5:13, 7:199), judging between them (4:65), and accepting their obedience on behalf of God (4:64).

This article discusses the concept of *Imamat* in the Qur'an. In a general sense, the *Imamat* refers to divinely-appointed leadership in religious matters in a hereditary line of descent from the family of the Prophet. The word *imam* in Arabic is derived from the Arabic root *ammama*, which means "to come before", from which the words *umm* (mother) and *ummah* (community) are derived. The meaning of the word *imam* is "leader", "guide", "example", "model", or "path" and appears 12 times in the Qur'an. The general meaning of *imam* is "leader" or "guide" in the sense of the one who comes before the people and leads them. Sometimes the word *imam* can mean "book" if the said book performs the function of guidance or leadership.

It is important to register that the mission/mandate of Prophets (*nabi*) and Messengers (*rasul*) is defined throughout the Qur'an as "conveying news, warning, and delivering a message" (2:213, 18:56, 4:165, 5:99, 5:92); but the mission/mandate of the Imams is to provide continuous leadership, guide human beings by God's Command, perform good works as inspired by God, pass judgement over the believers, and witness over people's deeds on the Day of Judgment (21:73, 32:24, 2:124, 38:26, 17:71). Thus, the mission of Prophets/Messengers differs from the mission of the Imams. The mission of the Imam is greater in authority and scope than the mission of Prophets/Messengers.

With respect to the holders of this leadership, the Qur'an describes how God appointed Abraham as the *Imam* of humankind and promised to continue to appoint *Imams* from those of his progeny who are free from corruption

(2:124). Abraham himself is called an *ummah* in himself (16:120). The Qur'an further describes how God appointed Abraham's son and grandson, the Prophets Isaac and Jacob, as "*Imams* who guide by Our Command (*bi-amrina*)" whom "We inspired to do good deeds, establish prayer, and give the *zakah*" (21:73). Similarly, the Qur'an mentions how God appointed *Imams* among the Children of Israel "who guide by Our Command" (32:24) in addition to the Book (*kitab*).¹

Apart from actual mention of the word *imam*, several Qur'anic terms and themes speak to the concept of Imamat in the sense of divinely-appointed leadership in the hereditary line of descent from the family of the Prophet.

The Qur'an speaks of the *Ulu'l-Amr* (possessors of authority) in 4:59 with the order "O ye who believe: obey God and obey the Messenger and the *Ulu'l-Amr* amongst

you.” Just as the Qur’an uses one command (“obey”) to signify obedience to God, it uses one command (“obey”) to call the believers to obedience to both the Messenger and the *Ulu’l-Amr*. This demonstrates that the level of authority and degree of obedience due to the Messenger and the *Ulu’l-Amr* is the same level. The believers are also instructed to refer their disputes and disagreements to the Messenger and the *Ulu’l-Amr* (4:83). The Qur’anic concept of the *Ulu’l-Amr* (Possessors of Authority), as evident in the term *amr* (Command, Authority) also coincides with the “*Imams* who guide by Our Command” (21:73, 32:24) mentioned above.

One of the most pervasive ideas in the Qur’an is God’s designation of the successors of Prophets from among their family members and descendants. The various terms (*al*, *ahl*, *dhurriyyah*, *qurba*) used to denote the special status of the Prophets’ families and progeny number to over one hundred in the Qur’an. Adam and Noah are succeeded by the Progeny (*al*) of Abraham and Imran, all in a single line of descent (3:33-34). God has established the prophet-hood and the Book (*kitab*) in the descendants (*dhurriyyah*) of Noah and Abraham (57:26). God has bestowed the Book (*kitab*), the Wisdom (*al-hikmah*), and the Great Kingdom (*mulk azim*) upon the Progeny (*al*) of Abraham (4:54, 29:27). Abraham’s sons and grandson were appointed as *Imams* who guide by God’s Command (21:73). God grants the request of Abraham and Ismail for a nation (*ummah*) among their Descendants (*dhurriyyah*) which will always be submissive to God (2:127-28), protected from idol worship, and to whom the hearts of people will incline (14:35-37). Joseph was chosen and favored by God like his fathers before him as God’s favour upon the House (*al*) of Jacob (12:6). God answers Moses’ prayer (20:29) and appoints for him his brother Aaron as a deputy (*wazir*) from his Family (*ahl*). God appoints Solomon as David’s heir (*warith*), and both of them were given knowledge from Him (27:15-16). God answers Zakariyyah’s prayer to appoint John as his heir (*warith*) and the inheritor of the Family (*al*) of Jacob (19:6). In general, God has chosen and guided the fathers, descendants, and brethren of the previous Prophets and Messengers to the Straight Path (6:87).

This cursory examination of the concept of *Imamat* in the Qur’an reveals the following features on the Qur’anic idea of *imamah* or leadership:

- God appoints and designates *Imams* to guide by His Command (*amr*).
- These *Imams*, identical to the *Ulu’l-Amr*, command the same authority as the Messenger of God.
- Prior to Prophet Muhammad, God appointed the *Imams* from the families and descendants of previous Prophets, particularly Abraham.
- God consistently favoured specific descendants of prior Prophets with the Book, the Wisdom, the Inheritance, the Kingdom, and the Guidance.

As we conclude, it should be noted that the Qur’an mentions in a number of places that the method or custom (*sunnah*) of God is never altered and remains the same from age to age.

Such is the Custom (*sunnah*) of God concerning those who passed away before, and never shall you find in the Custom of God any change.

Holy Qur'an 33:62

The question that immediately comes to mind is this: **if God consistently designated the successors, guides, and *Imams* from the family descendants of the Prophets before Prophet Muhammad, why would this custom (*sunnah*) of God suddenly change after Muhammad?**

Insofar as the Qur'an expresses the thoughts of Muhammad, it is evident that he could not have considered Abu Bakr his natural successor or have been pleased by his succession... He could not have seen his succession essentially other than in the light of the narrations of the Qur'an about the succession of earlier prophets, just as he saw his own mission as a prophet... These earlier prophets considered it a supreme divine favour to be succeeded by their offspring or close kin for which they implored their Lord... In the Qur'an, the descendants and close kin of the prophets are heirs also in respect of kingship (*mulk*), rule (*hukm*), wisdom (*hikma*), the book and the *imamate*. The Sunni concept of the true caliphate itself defines it as a succession of the Prophet in every respect except his prophet-hood. Why should Muhammad not be succeeded in it by any of his family like the earlier prophets?... The Qur'an advises the faithful to settle some matters by consultation, but not the succession to prophets. That, according to the Qur'an, is settled by divine election, and God usually chooses their successors, whether they become prophets or not, from their own kin.

Wilferd Madelung, (The Succession to Muhammad, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 16-17)

FOOTNOTES

1. The term *kitab*, often translated as Book, should not be understood as a "text" in the modern sense of the word. The word *kitab* as used in the Qur'an means God's "decree" or "guidance" and not a physical text.

The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad

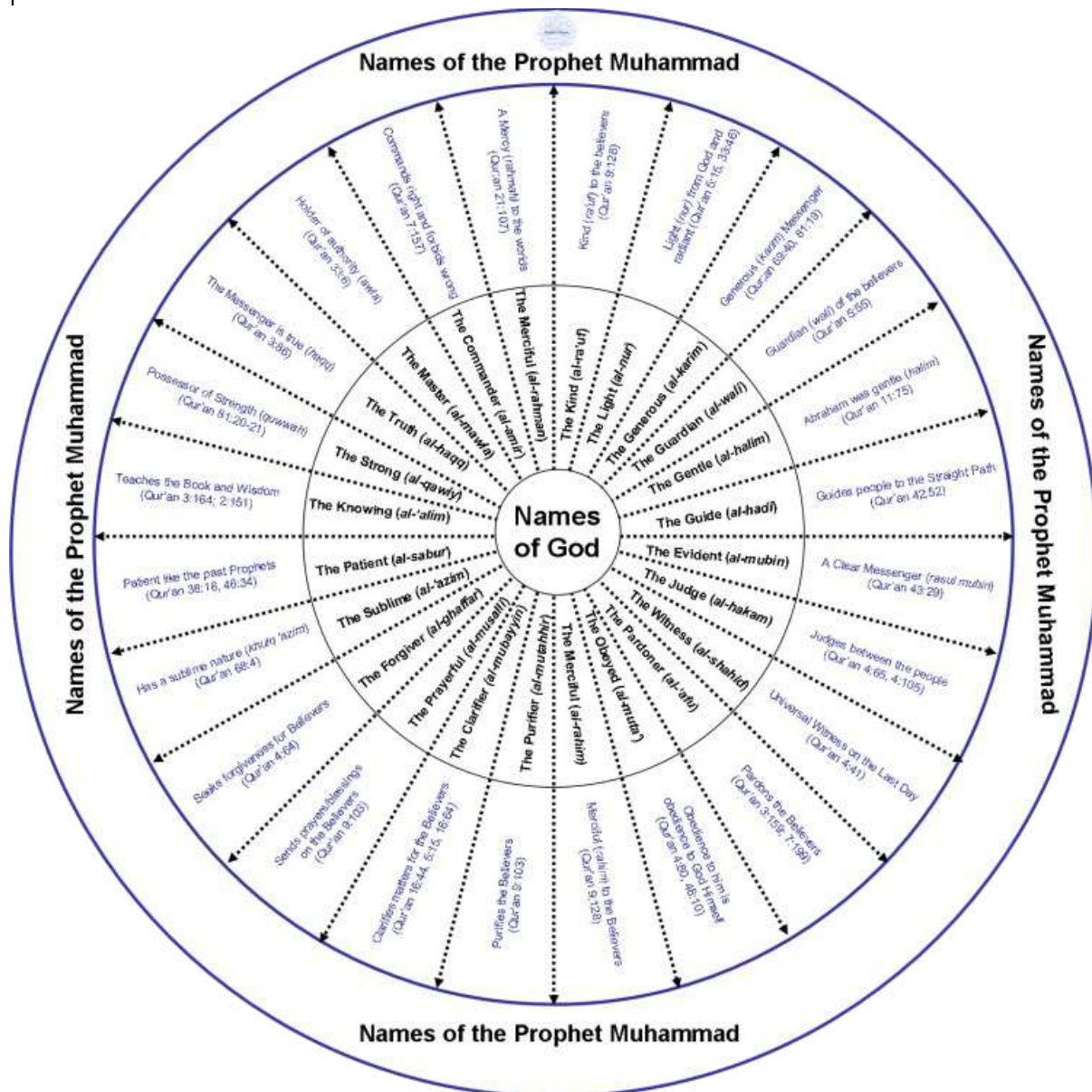
Contemporary discussions about the Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual function, due to exoteric and literalist influences (such as Wahhabism or the *Ahl al-Qur'ān* school), have degenerated into a farce in which the Prophet is demoted to a mouthpiece or transmitter of the Qur'ān and nothing more. This conception reduces the august person of the Prophet Muḥammad to a 'fax-machine' and fails to appreciate the spiritual depth of his status as *Rasūl Allāh* (Messenger of God). This important article, published on the *Milād al-Nabī* – the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad first commemorated by his spiritual heirs and progeny known as the Fatimid Imām-Caliphs) – seeks to unveil the metaphysical, spiritual, and religious status of the Prophet Muḥammad – based on a simple and straightforward analysis of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. The article is divided into two sections – the Prophet-Believer Relationship and the God-Prophet Relationship. It will be shown that the Prophet Muḥammad is the "Messenger" (*rasūl*) of God who reveals not only the Qur'ān but God's very "Personality" – His Names, Attributes and Qualities – to the Believers. This article assumes that Muhammad is a true Prophet and that the Qur'ān is divinely-revealed – see [our article Proof of Prophecy](#) for the logical and historical evidence for Muhammad's prophethood.

For Muslims, the findings of this article raise certain imperatives in belief and practice – since the Qur'ān is God's revelation and its verses present a most exalted image of the Prophet Muḥammad whose presence must form the center of Muslim spiritual life. For academics and historians, this study reveals how the Qur'ān – the earliest piece of documentary evidence on the life of the Prophet – depicts how Muḥammad considered his spiritual status before God and his spiritual authority in relation to his followers. In both cases, it is clear that the original impulse of the faith that became known as Islam revolved around the *person* of the Prophet Muḥammad and not scripture, *ḥadīth*, law or scholars (*'ulamā'*).

Today's Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Muslims are often unfairly criticized for the respect, reverence, and love they show towards their present *Imām* – [Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān](#) – based on the dubious and superficial notion that nothing should be accorded any reverence except God. However, if the *Imām* is the spiritual, religious and blood successor of the Prophet Muḥammad, then the *Imāms* would logically continue to perform all of the prophetic functions aside from the revelation of the Qur'ān. Accordingly if one accepts the principle of the Shī'ī *Imāmah*, all the reverence due to the Prophet would be directed to the *Imāms* who are his spiritual heirs. Thus, it should be no surprise that the numerous spiritual responsibilities that the Qur'ān vests in the Prophet Muḥammad continue to be performed today by [Imām Shāh Karīm Āgā Khān IV](#) –

including the functions of guidance, guardianship, mercy, forgiveness, pardon, intercession, blessings, and purification. All of these various functions are attested to by Qur'anic verses quoted in this post.

The below diagram summarizes the two topics of this post – the Prophet-Believer relationship and the God-Prophet relationship. The inner circle lists of the Names of God and the outer circle lists each prophetic function in relation to the Believers in which the Prophet Muḥammad reveals one of the Names of God in his very person:



We encourage readers to scan through this post to get a better sense of the arguments and note the key Qur'ānic verses about Muḥammad's spiritual status.

Part 1: The Prophet-Believer Relationship

The Comprehensive Mission of the Prophet Muḥammad

Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from you, reciting to you Our Signs, and purifying you (yuzakkikum), and teaching you (yu'allimukum) the Book (al-kitāb) and Wisdom (al-hikmah), and teaching you that which you do not know.

Holy Qur'ān 2:151 (see also 62:2, 3:164)

The above verse shows how the mission of Muḥammad includes much more than revealing the Qur'ān. In fact, only Muḥammad's first duty – “reciting to you our Signs (*ayāt*)” – refers to the Qur'ān. The other duties of the Prophet included purification (*tazkiyyah*), teaching (*ta'lim*) of the Book, teaching the inner Wisdom of the Book, and teaching the Believers new knowledge. Thus, the revelation of the Qur'ān comprises only one fourth of the Prophet's overall mission.

The Prophet Muḥammad is the Guide of the Believers

And verily you [Muḥammad] surely guide to the Straight Path (*ṣiraṭ al-mustaqīm*).

Holy Qur'ān 42:52

All Muslims pray for God to guide them to the Straight Path in every prayer. But the above verse, revealed to the Prophet, clearly shows that it is actually Muḥammad's duty to “guide to the Straight Path”.

And We have sent down unto you (also) the Reminder; that you may explain clearly (li-tubayyina) to mankind what was sent down for them, and that they reflect.

Holy Qur'ān 16:44 (see also 16:64, 14:4)

The above verse demonstrates how the Prophet – in addition to revealing the Qur'ān – must also provide the “explanation” (*bayān*) of the Qur'ān to the believers to foster their own reflections (*fikr*).

The Prophet Muḥammad's Authority over the Believers is unlimited

To obey the Prophet Muḥammad is to obey God Himself

He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God.

Holy Qur'ān 4:80

We sent a Messenger only to be obeyed by the permission of God.

Holy Qur'ān 4:64

Verily, those who give their *bay'ah* to you, they surely give their *bay'ah* to God Himself.

Holy Qur'ān 48:10

The above verses show that **obedience to the Prophet Muḥammad is equal and tantamount to obedience to God**. It logically follows that all orders in the Qur'ān to “obey God” are only fulfilled by obeying the Prophet Muḥammad.

So whatever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatever he forbids you, abstain from it.

Holy Qur'ān 59:7

The above verse indicates that it is indeed the Prophet Muḥammad who determines what is allowed and what is forbidden. Whatever the Prophet gives to the Believers – guidance, prescribed rituals, rules of behavior – must be followed.

The Prophet Muhammad has more authority and closeness to the Believers than their own souls:

The Prophet has more authority (*awla*) over the believers than their own souls.

Holy Qur'ān 33:6

The Prophet is the Lord-Guardian of the Believers:

Verily, your Lord-Guardian (*wali*) is only God, His Messenger, and those who have faith, who establish regular prayers, and give the *zakah* while they bow down.

Holy Qur'ān 5:55

The Prophet Muḥammad is the final judge and arbiter in all matters

But no, by the Lord, they do not have faith, until they make you [Muḥammad] judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decrees, but they submit (to you) in full submission.

Holy Qur'ān 4:65

Verily, We have sent down to you the Book with the Truth so that you judge between the people by what God as shown you.

Holy Qur'ān 4:105

The answer of the Believers, when summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that he may judge between them, is no other than this: they say, “We hear and we obey”: it is such as these that will attain felicity.

Holy Qur'ān 24:51

It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys God and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path.

Holy Qur'ān 33:36

The above verses all describe the proper situation of the Believer in relation to the Prophet Muḥammad. Indeed, the very condition of having “faith” (*īmān*) is to wholeheartedly accept and submit to the judgment, decrees, and orders of the Prophet Muḥammad without any question.

The Prophet Muḥammad deserves undue respect, reverence and honour

The believers are to honour and respect the Prophet Muhammad:

In order that you have faith in God and His Messenger, that ye may assist him and honour him, and praise Him morning and evening.

Holy Qur'ān 48:9

Those who follow the Messenger, the *ummī* Prophet, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who have

faith in him, and honour him, and help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful.

Holy Qur'ān 7:157

The Believers must be humble and lower their voices in the presence of the Prophet Muḥammad:

O you who have faith! Do not be forward in the presence of God and His Messenger; but fear God: for God is He Who hears and knows all things. O ye who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk, as you may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and you perceive not. Those that lower their voices in the presence of God's Messenger,- their hearts has Allah tested for piety: for them is Forgiveness and a great Reward.

Holy Qur'ān 49:1-3

The Prophet Muhammad embodies Divine Mercy and Forgiveness

God loves and forgives the believers on the condition of obeying the Prophet Muhammad:

Say (O Muḥammad): "If ye do love God, Follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins: For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

Holy Qur'ān 3:31

God's love and forgiveness reach the Believers only through their obedience to the Prophet Muḥammad. This shows how Muḥammad, in fact, serves as the "gate" and "channel" of God's love and forgiveness.

Obedience to the Prophet Muhammad brings the Mercy of God to the Believers:
And obey God and the Messenger; that ye may obtain mercy.

Holy Qur'ān 3:132

The Prophet Muhammad himself is God's mercy to all worlds:
And we have only sent you [Muḥammad] as a Mercy to the worlds.

Holy Qur'ān 21:107

The Prophet Muḥammad is gentle out of God's Mercy:

It is by the Mercy from God that you (O Muhammad) were gentle with them, for if you had been stern of heart they would have dispersed from around you.

Holy Qur'ān 3:159

This verse establishes how the Prophet Muḥammad's gentle qualities toward the Believers are actually expressions of the Mercy of God. This suggests that the Prophet's mercy is the manifestation of God's mercy.

The Prophet Muḥammad is kind and merciful to the Believers:

There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind (ra'ūf) and merciful (rahīm).

Holy Qur'ān 9:128

The presence of the Prophet Muḥammad wards off God's punishment:

But Allah would not punish them while you, [O Muhammad], are among them, and God would not punish them while they seek forgiveness.

Holy Qur'ān 8:33

The Prophet Muḥammad seeks God's forgiveness on behalf the Believers:

And if, when they wronged their souls, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked forgiveness of God and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God Forgiving and Merciful.

Holy Qur'ān 4:64

The above verse shows that a) when the Believers seek the forgiveness of God they must go into the physical presence of Muḥammad; b) Muḥammad must pray to God and seek God's forgiveness for the Believers; and c) only after Muḥammad's prayer for God's forgiveness will the Believers have "found God Forgiving and Merciful". **This shows how the Prophet Muḥammad serves as the intercessor and mediator between God and the Believers with respect to God's forgiveness and mercy.**

Some people are too arrogant to accept the Prophet Muḥammad's prayers for God's forgiveness:

And when it is said to them, "Come, the Messenger of Allah will ask forgiveness for you," they turn their heads aside and you see them evading while they are arrogant.

Holy Qur'ān 63:5

Despite the Qur'ānic promise of the Prophet Muḥammad's intercession and prayers, some people – even some Muslims today – are too arrogant to accept the reality and need for the Prophet's special intercessory prayers.

The Prophet Muḥammad himself pardons and forgives the Believers for their sins and errors:

It is by the Mercy from God that you (O Muhammad) were gentle with them, for if you had been stern of heart they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon (‘afu ‘anhum) them and ask forgiveness (astaghfir lahum) for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, then put your trust in God. Lo! God loveth those who put their trust (in Him).

Holy Qur'ān 3:159

Hold to forgiveness (*al-‘afū*); command what is right; But turn away from the ignorant.

Holy Qur'ān 7:199

The above verses also confirm how the Prophet Muḥammad has been commanded to pray to God on behalf of the Believers who are seeking God's forgiveness. However, these verses also command the Prophet to perform another act of forgiveness or pardoning (indicated by the Arabic word *‘afwa* – related to the Urdu word *ma‘af*). Therefore, the Prophet Muḥammad both a) seeks God's forgiveness for the Believers as an intercessor and b) pardons the Believers by his own act of forgiveness (see also 5:13). Both forms of prophetic forgiveness are necessary.

The Prophet Muḥammad receives devotional offerings (*ṣadaqah*) from the Believers and thereby purifies, sanctifies, and blesses them with his special prayers

The Believers must submit an offering to the Prophet Muḥammad before having a private meeting with him:

O ye who have faith! When you privately consult the Messenger, then present an offering (*ṣadaqah*) before your private consultation. That will be best for you, and purer for you. But if you find not (the means), God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Holy Qur'ān 58:12

This verse establishes how the Believers would seek to have private meetings (*najwā*) with the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur'ān recommends that every Believer submit an offering (*ṣadaqah*) to the Prophet Muḥammad when having this special meeting – and that this offering is a means of purity (*tahārah*) for the Believers.

The Believer's submissions of their wealth to the Prophet Muḥammad are the means to obtaining the Prophet's special blessings and prayers:

And among the Arabs are those who have faith in God and the Last Day and take what they spend as a means of closeness toward God and the prayers/blessings (*ṣalawāt*) of the Messenger. Behold, it is indeed a means of closeness for them. God will make them enter in His Mercy. Indeed, God is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Holy Qur'ān 9:99

The above verse significantly confirms that some of the Arabs would give a portion of their wealth to the Prophet Muḥammad – as a means of attaining the Prophet's prayers or blessings (*ṣalawāt*) and closeness to God. The verse encourages this practice of submitting offerings and states that as a result of spending one's wealth, such people will be made to enter into God's Mercy.

And (there are) others who have acknowledged their faults. They mixed a righteous action with another that was bad. It may be that Allah will relent toward them. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Take offerings (*ṣadaqah*) from their wealth, and purify and sanctify them by means of it. And pray/send blessings over them. Verily, your prayer/blessing is a source of peace (*sakan*) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing.

Holy Qur'ān 9:102-103

The next verses continue and describe those Believers who have performed good deeds, but also committed sins while acknowledging their faults. The Qur'ān orders such people – who have committed any kind of wrong-doing – to give an offering (*ṣadaqah*) from their wealth (*amwāl*) to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Prophet is then ordered to accept these offerings (*ṣadaqah*) and thereby purify and sanctify the Believers. The Prophet Muḥammad is also told to give his special prayers or blessings upon the Believers – and that the special prayer of the Prophet is a source of peace (*sakan*) for them. This verse clearly indicates that it was the

prophetic practice of Muhammad to accept material offerings from the Believers and purify, sanctify, and pray/bless those who submitted such offerings.

In fact, the original concept of *zakah* was not the idea of charity of alms. *Zakah* and *ṣadaqah* were payments that the believers made to the Prophet Muḥammad to seek forgiveness of their sins and spiritual purification through his prayers and blessings – as shown in the above verses. On this matter, the renowned scholar of early Islam, Fred Donner has written:

“Later Muslim tradition refers to such charity under the terms *zakat* or *sadaqa*, usually rendered “almsgiving”; these two terms are closely associated with prayer in numerous Qur’anic passages, and later Muslim tradition considers them, like prayer, to be one of the “pillars of the faith” that define a Believer. Recent research suggests, however, that the original Qur’anic meaning of *zakat* and *sadaqa* was not almsgiving, but rather a fine or payment made by someone who was guilty of some kind of sin, in exchange for which Muhammad would pray in order that they might be purified of their sin and that their other affairs might prosper. Indeed, even in the verse just cited (2:177), one notes that payment of *zakat* is mentioned after prayer, suggesting that it was something different than the giving of wealth to the poor (what we usually mean by almsgiving), which is treated in the verse before mention of prayer. This understanding of *zakat* or *sadaqa* as a payment for atonement or purification of sins is clearest in the following verses: “Others have confessed their sins ... Take from their property *sadaqa* to cleanse them, and purify [*tuzakki*] them thereby, and pray for them, indeed your prayer is a consolation to them. God is all-hearing, all-knowing” (Q. 9:102-103); the verb “to purify” is from the same Arabic root as *zakat*. The fact that Believers were sometimes required to make such purification payments, however, underscores how the community was, in principle, focused on maintaining its inner purity, on being as much as possible a community that lived strictly in righteousness, so as to set themselves apart from the sinful world around them and thus to attain salvation in the afterlife.”

Fred Donner, (*Muhammad and the Believers*, 64)

The Prophet Muḥammad is a Light from God which clarifies all things

O People of the Book! Now hath Our Messenger come unto you, clarifying for you much of what you used to hide of the Book, and forgiving much. Now there has come unto you a Light (*nūr*) from God and a manifest Book.

Holy Qur’ān 5:15 (see also 5:19, 16:44, 16:64)

O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner and a summoner unto God by His permission and as a lamp that gives light (*sirāj munīran*).

Holy Qur’ān 33:45-46

Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and among the Polytheists, were not going to depart (from their ways) until there should come to them the Clear Proof (*al-bayyinah*) – a Messenger from God reciting purified pages.

Holy Qur'ān 98:1-2

The Prophet Muḥammad's inner character is Sublime

You [Muḥammad] are not, by the Favour of your Lord, possessed (*majnūn*). Verily, for you is an unfailing reward. And you are surely upon exalted character (*khulq 'aẓīm*).

Holy Qur'ān 68:4

This verse refers to the Prophet's character or inner constitution (*khulq*) as "sublime" (*'aẓīm*). This is significant because the Qur'ān also refers to itself as "sublime" (*'aẓīm*) and often mentions God as "the Sublime One" (*al-'aẓīm*).

The Prophet Muḥammad is the Universal Witness of God over Humankind

So how [will it be] when We bring from every people (*ummah*) a witness (*shahīd*) and We bring you [O' Muḥammad] against these [people] as a witness?

Holy Qur'ān 4:41

This verse is one of the most mysterious in the entire Qur'ān. It indicates that on the Day of Judgment, the Prophet Muḥammad will be a witness over all of the witnesses of each nation or people. The Prophet's role as universal witness suggests that he must remain spiritually present in the world at all times – in order to actually serve as a witness over the deeds of all human beings.

The Prophet Muḥammad receives grace, mercy, and knowledge from God

And if it was not for the Grace of God upon you [O Muḥammad], and His Mercy, a group of them would have determined to mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves, and they will not harm you at all. And God has revealed to you the Book and Wisdom and has taught you that which you did not know. And ever has the Grace of God upon you been great.

Holy Qur'ān 4:113

The Prophet Muḥammad is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit and Light

Your companion/master (*ṣāḥib*) is not astray or deceived. He does not speak out of caprice/desire (*al-hawā*). It is no less than inspired inspiration (*waḥyun yūḥa*).

Holy Qur'ān 53:1-4

The Trustworthy Spirit (*rūḥ* *al-amīn*) descended with it [the revelation] upon your heart (*qalbika*) so that you would be among the warners in clear Arabic language.

Holy Qur'ān 26:192-194

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit (*rūḥ*) from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*kitāb*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nūr*) by which We guide those of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.

Holy Qur'ān 42:52

These verses illustrate the nature of the divine inspiration (*waḥy*; *ta'yīd*) which God has granted to the Prophet Muḥammad. Firstly, this inspiration is spiritual in nature and flows through Holy Spirit that comes from God's Command. Secondly,

the inspiration comes upon the Prophet through his heart – the spiritual faculty of the human soul – and not in the form of sounds, words, or letters. Thus, divine inspiration is *not* a form of verbal dictation – such an idea is a complete insult to the spiritual depth of the Prophet Muḥammad. Thirdly, the verses show how whatever Muḥammad says, does, or thinks is divinely-inspired – not only the revealed Qur’ān – but all of Muḥammad’s speech and guidance is guided by God and not from human whims or desires. This prophetic inspiration is continuous and not discrete – it does not cease or stop at one moment and resume at another – but continues like a stream. Finally, it is this inspiration or divine assistance granted to the Prophet Muḥammad that allows him to perform all of the above prophetic functions. The very soul of the Prophet Muḥammad is continuously inspired and guided through the Holy Spirit – this is what makes him more than an ordinary human being. From this we could even conclude that the Qur’ān and the very personality of the Prophet Muḥammad are manifestations of the same Holy Spirit that flows from the Command of God.

Below is a summary of the above Qur’ānic verses about the Prophet Muḥammad:

The Status of the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur’ān

- The Prophet Muḥammad is inspired by the Holy Spirit (42:52, 26:192-194)
- The Prophet Muhammad is a mercy (*raḥmah*) to the worlds (21:107)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is merciful (*raḥīm*) to the Believers (9:128)
- The Prophet Muhammad is kind (*ra’ūf*) to the Believers (9:128)
- The Prophet Muhammad is an honourable Messenger (*rasūl karīm*) (69:40; 81:19-21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is light (*nūr*) from God (5:15) and a radiant lamp (*sirāj munīr*) (33:46)
- The Prophet Muhammad (like Prophet Abraham) is gentle (*ḥalīm*) to the Believers (11:75)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the possessor of power (*dhū al-quwwah*) (81:20-21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the teacher (*mu’allim*) of the Book and Wisdom and new knowledge (62:2; 3:164; 2:151)
- The Prophet Muḥammad, like his predecessors, is patient (*ṣabūr*) (38:16, 46:34)
- The Prophet is the witness (*shahīd*) of humankind on the Day of Judgment (2:143, 33:46; 4:41)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the guardian (*walī*) of the Believers (5:55)
- The Prophet Muḥammad prays to God for the Believer’s forgiveness (4:64, 63:5, 3:159, 60:12, 24:62)
- The Prophet Muḥammad forgives the Believers (5:13; 3:159; 7:199)
- The Prophet Muḥammad guides the Believers to the Straight Path (45:25)
- The Prophet Muḥammad’s nature or character is sublime (*‘aẓīm*) (68:4)

- The Prophet Muḥammad is the judge of the believers (4:65; 4:105; 24:51; 33:36)
- The Prophet Muḥammad makes things clear to the Believers (5:15; 5:19; 16:44; 16:64; 14:4)
- The Prophet Muḥammad purifies and sanctifies the believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad holds authority (*awlā*) over the Believers (33:6)
- The Prophet Muḥammad summons the Believers to that which gives them life (8:24).
- The Prophet Muḥammad recites the Signs of God (2:151).
- The Prophet Muḥammad sends *ṣalawāt* (blessings, prayers) upon the Believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad receives offerings (*ṣadaqa*) from the Believers (9:103; 58:12)
- The Prophet Muḥammad brings the people from darkness to Light (14:1; 14:5 65:11)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is a beautiful pattern for the Believers (33:21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the object of great respect and veneration (48:9, 49:1-3)
- The Prophet Muḥammad commands the lawful and forbids the wrong (7:157)
- He who gives their allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the Prophet Muḥammad has given it to God (48:10)
- He who obeys the Prophet Muḥammad, obeys God (4:80; 4:64)

Part 2: The God-Prophet Relationship

When one examines the above verses in closer detail, it will become apparent that a number of the qualities, attributes, and functions that the Qur'ān gives to the Prophet Muḥammad are rooted in or identical to the Most Beautiful Names of God.

In one example, we are told that the duty of Muḥammad is *not* to guide the believers – but that it is God who guides whom He wills:

Their guidance is not your responsibility [O' Muḥammad], but God guides whom He wills.

Holy Qur'ān 2:272

But another verse – quoted earlier above – states that Muḥammad guides the people to the Straight Path:

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*kitāb*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nūr*) by which We guide those of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.

Holy Qur'ān 42:52

When both verses are taken in context, the only conclusion is that Muḥammad himself is guided by God *directly* through the Holy Spirit and that he in turn guides the Believers on God's behalf. Therefore, God effectively guides people *through* the guidance of Muḥammad. Accordingly, Muḥammad's guidance is the manifestation of God's guidance and Muḥammad's role as "the guide" (*al-ḥādī*) to the Straight Path is the reflection on earth of God's Name *al-Ḥādī*.

A second example of the Prophet Muḥammad's mediation in the manifestation of God's acts is in the acceptance of the offerings (*ṣadaqah*) and repentance of the Believers:

And (there are) others who have acknowledged their faults. They mixed a righteous action with another that was bad. It may be that Allah will relent toward them. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Take (*khud*) offerings (*sadaqah*) from their wealth (*amwālihum*), and purify and sanctify them by means of it. And pray/send blessings over them. Verily, your prayer/blessing is a source of peace (*sakan*) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing. Do they not know that it is God who accepts repentance from His servants and takes the offerings (*ya'khudu al-ṣadaqāt*) and that it is God who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful?

Holy Qur'ān 9:102-104

In the above verse, the Prophet Muḥammad is ordered to "Take (*khud*) offerings (*ṣadaqah*) from their wealth (*amwālihum*)". But the next verse confirms that it is God who "takes the offerings (*ya'khudu al-ṣadaqāt*)". Similarly, the Prophet Mūhammad is told to purify them (*tuṭahhiruhum*) and sanctify them (*tuzakkiruhum*) by means of this offering. Yet the Qur'ān also says that "God purifies (*yuzakkī*) whom He wills" (Qur'ān 24:21, see also 33:33). Once again, the only logical conclusion from such verses is that God purifies whom He wills *through* the Prophet Muḥammad's act of purifying the Believers. Thus, Muḥammad is the intercessor, the means of approach (*wasīlah*) and *wasīṭah* between God and the Believers.

A third example is in verses that describe the nature of the Prophet Muḥammad with the same essential attributes of God Himself. In numerous Qur'ānic verses (see 9:117), God is referred to as "the Kind, the Merciful" (*al-ra'ūf al-raḥīm*). However, the below verse gives the exact same description of the Prophet Muḥammad:

There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind (*ra'ūf*) and merciful (*raḥīm*).

Holy Qur'ān 9:128

In this verse, the Prophet Muḥammad is described – in the exact same terms as the Names of God as "kind and merciful" (*ra'ūf raḥīm*). In similar fashion, the Qur'ān describes the inner nature of the Prophet as *'aẓīm* (sublime) – also one of

the Names of God. In this respect, the Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq has stated that God has in fact adorned the Prophet Muḥammad with His own Attributes:

Between Himself and them [his creatures], He placed one of their own species, clothing him in His own attributes of compassion and mercy.

Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, (Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Spiritual Quest*, 25)

Perhaps the most enigmatic and mysterious Qur’ānic verse expressing the relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and God is as follows. This verse was revealed on an occasion where the Prophet had to throw some stones to defend himself:

And you [Muḥammad] did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw in order that He may test the Believers with a beautiful trial.

Holy Qur’ān 8:17

On one hand, Muḥammad’s act of throwing the stones is affirmed “when you threw” and then negated “you did not throw” and attributed to God “but it was God who threw.” Thus, it is God who “threw” the stones *through* Muḥammad’s act of throwing the stones. Once again, this verse shows how God Himself acts by means of the act of Muḥammad. In Qur’ān 48:10 – referring to the Believer’s placing their hands under the Prophet Muḥammad’s hands in the act of *bay‘ah*, the Qur’ān states that “the Hand of God is upon their hands.” This is significant because in physical terms, it was the Prophet Muḥammad’s hand which was placed upon the hands of the Believers. But the Qur’ān attributed to entire affair to God. Thus, the Prophet Muḥammad is the instrument or intermediary through which God acts toward the Believers and also, in his own person, the highest reflection or manifestation of God’s Names and Attributes. This may seem contradictory at first – since the Prophet Muḥammad is a creature and servant (*‘abd*) of God. However, true and complete servitude (*‘ibadah*) before God implies the effacement of all individual egotism and impurity. Such a soul – which is completed effaced and humble before its Lord – becomes like a shiny and polished mirror in which God’s Attributes shine and are reflected. In this respect, the Prophet Muḥammad is simultaneously the humblest servant of God and the highest locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) or reflector of God’s Names and Attributes. This also makes Muḥammad the best of all created beings and the intercessor and mediator *par excellence* between God and His creatures.

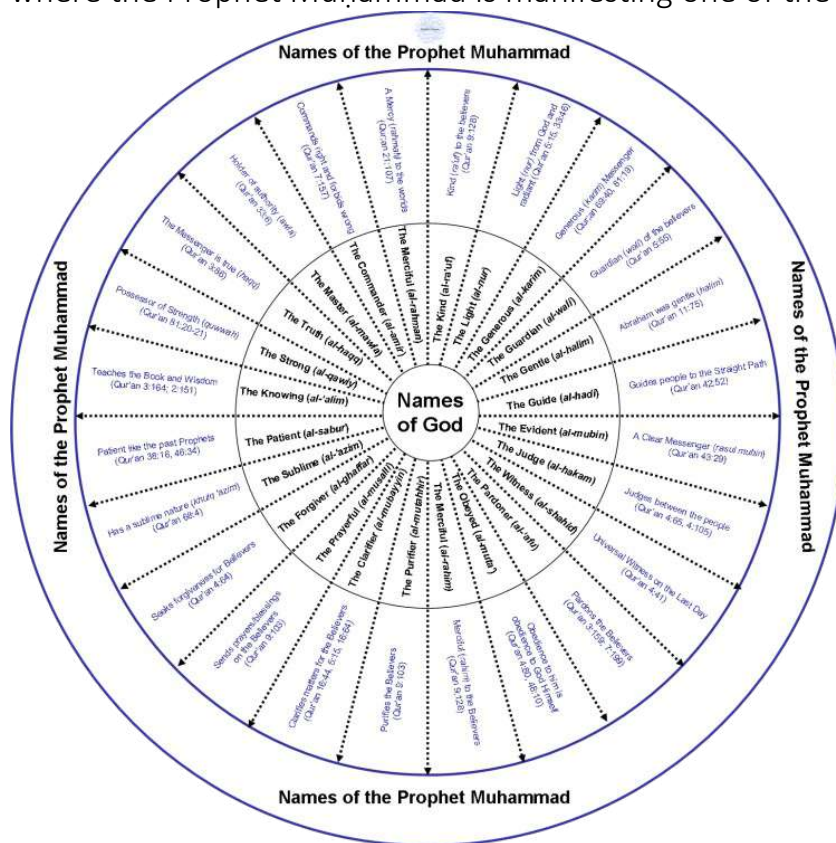
The Qur’ānic verses which demonstrate how the Prophet Muḥammad is both the intercessor between God and the Believers and the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of God’s Names and Attributes are as follows:

The Relationship between God’s Attributes and the Prophet Muḥammad

-
- God is *al-Raḥmān* (The Merciful) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *raḥmah* (mercy) (21:107)
 - God is *al-Raḥīm* (The Beneficent) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *raḥīm* (9:128)

- God is *al-Ra'ūf* (The Kind) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *ra'uf* (9:128)
- God is *al-Karīm* (The Generous) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *karīm* (69:40; 81:19-21)
- God is *al-Nūr* (The Light) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *nūr* from God (5:15) and a radiant lamp (*sirāj munīr*) (33:46)
- God is *al-Ḥalīm* (The Forbearing) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *halīm* (11:75)
- God is *al-Qawīy* (The Strong) and the Prophet Muḥammad is *dhū al-quwwah* (81:20-21)
- God is *al-Ālim* (the Knower) and the Prophet Muḥammad is the teacher (*mu'allim*) of the Book and Wisdom and new knowledge (62:2; 3:164; 2:151)
- God is *al-Ṣabūr* (The Patient) and the Prophets are *ṣabūr* (38:16, 46:34)
- God is *al-Shahīd* (The Witness) and the Prophet is *shahīd* (witness) of humankind (2:143, 33:46; 4:41)
- God is *al-Walī* (The Guardian) and the Prophet Muḥammad is the *walī* of the Believers (5:55)
- God is *al-Ghaḥḥar* (The Forgiver) and the Prophet Muḥammad asks for the believer's forgiveness (4:64, 63:5, 3:159, 60:12)
- God is *al-'Afū* (The Pardoner) and the Prophet Muḥammad pardons the Believers (5:13; 3:159; 7:199)
- God is *al-Hādī* (The Guide) and the Prophet Muḥammad guides to the Straight Path (45:25)
- God is *al-'Aẓīm* (The Great) and the Prophet Muḥammad's nature is *'aẓīm* (68:4)
- God is *al-Ḥakam* (The Judge) and the Prophet Muḥammad is the judge of the Believers (4:65; 4:105; 24:51; 33:36)
- God is *al-Mubayyin* (The Clarifier) (5:75, 24:58) and the Prophet Muḥammad makes things clear (5:15; 5:19; 16:44; 16:64; 14:4)
- God is *al-Mutahhir* (The Purifier) (4:49; 33:33) and the Prophet Muḥammad purifies the believers (9:103)
- God is *al-Mawlā* (The Master) and the Prophet Muḥammad holds *awlā* (authority) over the Believers (33:6)
- God is *al-Muḥyī* (The Giver of Life) and the Prophet Muḥammad summons the Believers to that which gives them life (8:24).
- God recites His Signs (2:252; 3:108) and the Prophet Muḥammad recites His Signs (2:151).
- God sends *Ṣalawāt* (blessings) and the Prophet Muḥammad sends *ṣalawāt* (9:103)
- God receives *ṣadaqah* (9:104) when the Prophet Muḥammad receives *ṣadaqah* (9:103; 58:12)
- God brings the people from darkness to Light (2:257) and the Prophet Muḥammad brings the people from darkness to Light (14:1; 14:5 65:11)

- The below diagram summarizes the two topics of this post – the Prophet-Believer relationship and the God-Prophet relationship. The inner circle lists of the Names of God and the outer circle lists each prophetic function in relation to the Believers where the Prophet Muḥammad is manifesting one of the Names of God:



To summarize once again, the Qur'ān attributes the following descriptions, attributions, and functions to the Prophet Muhammad:

- 120

- The Prophet Muḥammad (like Prophet Abraham) is gentle (*ḥalīm*) to the Believers (11:75)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the possessor of power (*dhū al-quwwah*) (81:20-21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the teacher (*mu'allim*) of the Book and Wisdom and new knowledge (62:2; 3:164; 2:151)
- The Prophet Muḥammad, like his predecessors, is patient (*ṣabūr*) (38:16, 46:34)
- The Prophet is the witness (*shahīd*) of humankind on the Day of Judgment (2:143, 33:46; 4:41)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the guardian (*walī*) of the Believers (5:55)
- The Prophet Muḥammad prays to God for the Believer's forgiveness (4:64, 63:5, 3:159, 60:12, 24:62)
- The Prophet Muḥammad forgives the Believers (5:13; 3:159; 7:199)
- The Prophet Muḥammad guides the Believers to the Straight Path (45:25)
- The Prophet Muḥammad's nature or character is sublime (*'aẓīm*) (68:4)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the judge of the believers (4:65; 4:105; 24:51; 33:36)
- The Prophet Muḥammad makes things clear to the Believers (5:15; 5:19; 16:44; 16:64; 14:4)
- The Prophet Muḥammad purifies and sanctifies the believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad holds authority (*awlā*) over the Believers (33:6)
- The Prophet Muḥammad summons the Believers to that which gives them life (8:24).
- The Prophet Muḥammad recites the Signs of God (2:151).
- The Prophet Muḥammad sends *ṣalawāt* (blessings, prayers) upon the Believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad receives offerings (*ṣadaqa*) from the Believers (9:103; 58:12)
- The Prophet Muḥammad brings the people from darkness to Light (14:1; 14:5 65:11)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is a beautiful pattern for the Believers (33:21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the object of great respect and veneration (48:9, 49:1-3)
- The Prophet Muḥammad commands the lawful and forbids the wrong (7:157)
- He who gives their allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the Prophet Muḥammad has given it to God (48:10)
- He who obeys the Prophet Muḥammad, obeys God (4:80; 4:64)

All of the above spiritual functions go *far* beyond the Prophet's function of reciting and proclaiming the Qur'ān. In fact, these spiritual functions listed above fall under the category of *walāyah* (spiritual guardianship) and not that of legislative

prophecy (*nubuwwah*) – which is only concerned with proclaiming the revelation. Simply focusing on a handful of the above spiritual functions of Muḥammad shows the need for a spiritual heir and successor to the Prophet. If Muḥammad was responsible for guiding the Believers on behalf of God, praying for the Believer's forgiveness (4:64), taking offerings from them to purify them (9:102-104) on God's behalf, sending blessings upon them for their tranquility (9:103), judging between them (4:65), and accepting their obedience on behalf of God – all during his own time, does this not necessitate the presence of someone to perform these spiritual functions for the Believers in every age and time after the departure of the Prophet? If the answer is negative, then doesn't this contradict the very justice of God? Why would God bless the people of one particular time and age with a person who performs all of the above functions and then deprive the countless number of human beings who live after him of the same blessing? The only logical conclusion is that a person like the Prophet Muḥammad must always be present in the world to continue his spiritual and religious mission.

The status of Muḥammad as the Seal of the Prophets only signifies the conclusion of scriptural revelation and legislative prophecy. But Divine inspiration (*ta'yīd*) and spiritual guardianship (*walāyah*) must always continue – otherwise, humanity would be wholly deprived of Divine guidance. Thus, the successor of Muḥammad with respect to divine inspiration (*ta'yīd*) and the functions of *walāyah* – the person who continues to guide the Believers on God's behalf, to pray for their forgiveness, to accept their offerings and purify them on God's behalf, to send blessings upon them, to judge between them, and accept their obedience on behalf of God – is the hereditary Ismā'īlī Imām from the progeny or Ahl al-Bayt of th Muhammad.

There must also exist, by divine right, a continuation of at least a portion of the original link between man and God, much as it was when the prophet still lived. In other words, the world at all times must have a prophetically inspired person who, as the heir of the prophet himself, carries on the principle of his rule in all those matters where his authority was once supreme... In the current historical era, this person is the Imām and he is of necessity a direct lineal descendant of Muḥammad through his single, chosen heir and executor, Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature.

Paul Walker, (*Early Philosophical Shiism*, 3-4)

The Quranic Jesus and the Historical Jesus: A Messianic Prophet

All Islamic schools of thought accept it as a fundamental principle that for centuries, for thousands of years before the advent of Muhammad, there arose from time to time messengers, illumined by Divine Grace, for and among those races of the earth which had sufficiently advanced intellectually to comprehend such a message. Thus Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the Prophets of Israel are universally accepted by Islam.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time, 1954)

Today, around 2.4 billion Christians and 1.6 billion Muslims revere and love the figure of Jesus. However, there are important differences in how Jesus is understood in Christian and Muslim theology. Islamic understandings of Jesus are rooted in the Qur'an, revered by all Muslims as God's revealed guidance through the Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur'anic description of Jesus diverges from developed Christian doctrine in many respects. **Most significantly, the Qur'an asserts that Jesus was a great Prophet of God and the Messiah to the Children of Israel, but denies that Jesus was the literal son of God or the divine incarnation.** This has led some Christians to discount the Qur'an's perspective as unreliable and worthless because the Qur'an dates to 600 years after Jesus's life and cannot serve as a historical witness to him. But this objection entirely misses the point, since the Qur'an never presents its claims about Jesus as a historical testimony or reconstruction of specific events. The Qur'an instead offers a theological exegesis or commentary about the person of Jesus, claiming to provide the most correct interpretation of who Jesus was ultimately and what his mission was truly about. Because [the Qur'an was originally a set of oral recitations over 23 years](#) – addressed to and in dialogue with an audience familiar with biblical materials – the Qur'an's discourse about Jesus evokes many themes, symbols, and ideas from the Bible and Talmud in order to reinterpret them and thereby offer a new perspective on theological debates among Jews and Christians.

We need to remember that the Qur'anic age roughly coincides with the epoch when the great exegetical corpora of monotheist tradition were edited and published, such as the two Talmudim in Judaism and the patristic writings in Christianity. These writings, not the Bible, as is often held, are the literary counterparts of the Qur'ān. . . **Indeed, the Qur'ān should be understood first and foremost as exegetical, that is, polemical-apologetical, and thus highly rhetorical.** The Qur'ān is communicated to listeners whose education already comprises biblical and post-biblical lore, whose nascent scripture therefore should provide answers to the questions raised in biblical exegesis — a scripture providing commentary on a vast amount of earlier theological legacies.

Recent research by Sidney H. Griffith (*The Bible in Arabic*, 2013, p. 87) has argued that much of what the Qur'an has to say about Jesus and Christian doctrine is directed to the beliefs of Melkite and Jacobite Christians as well as certain Arab pagans who had incorporated Jesus into their pantheon. "The Christian doctrines and practices the Qur'ān rejects are in fact those affirmed by the contemporary, Arabic-speaking Christian Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians, whose theological heritage and scriptures were in Aramaic/Syriac, translated from the original Greek." Along these lines, two recent studies by Gabriel Said Reynolds (*The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 2010) and Emran el-Badawi have demonstrated how the Qur'an is engaged in a dialogue with biblical, Rabbinical, and Christian exegetical traditions. El-Badawi's study, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Tradition* (2013, p. 210), found that "11 percent of the Qur'ān is in dialogue with the entirety of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions" and "12 percent of the Gospels are in dialogue with the whole Qur'ān." He concludes that "the Qur'ān is in close dialogue with the text and context of the Gospels through their transmission in the Syriac and Christian Palestinian dialects of Aramaic" (p. 212). Below are just a few examples from El-Badawi's study where the Qur'an has reinterpreted or re-articulated a theme or idea from the New Testament:

Qur'anic Re-Articulations of Aramaic Gospel Passages (Examples):

(From El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 220-226)

- Qur'an 3:59 is re-articulating Romans 5:14, 21 on Jesus as the Second Adam
- Qur'an 14:37, 2:126 is re-articulating Luke 3:8 and Matthew 21:43 on Abraham's Progeny
- Qur'an 5:75, 25:7 is re-articulating Matthew 11:16, 19, 20:3, Mark 5:56 and Luke 7:32-34
- Qur'an 5:18, 9:30 is re-articulating Matthew 5:9 on God's Servants vs. God's Sons
- Qur'an 2:210, 6:158, 18:99 is re-articulating Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27 on God or Son of Man coming down on the clouds
- Qur'an 24:35-36, 30:57, 61:6-8, 9:32, 25:61, 33:41-46 is re-articulating Matthew 5:14-16, 12:34, Mark 4:21, Luke 6:45, 8:16, 11:33, 13:35, John 8:1, 9:5, 5:35-3 on the Light of God, Light of the World, Lamp, and Houses of God
- Qur'an 1:1-7 is re-articulating Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 on the al-Fatihah and Lord's Prayer

When the Qur'an is understood to be offering exegetical and interpretative commentary about Jesus, his nature, and his mission, then a great deal of value can be found in the Qur'an's presentation of Jesus. In fact, the image of the "Qur'anic Jesus" is very much in harmony with the picture of the "Historical Jesus" coming out of historical scholarship. The Historical Jesus refers to the portrait of Jesus that emerges from applying a critical historical method to the study of the New Testament with due regard to its first century Jewish Palestinian context. The

Qur'an's claims about Jesus – a) that Jesus was a Prophet of God and a Servant of God, b) that he claimed to be a human Messiah and not a God-incarnate, c) that he was sent to the Children of Israel to confirm the Torah, and d) that God exalted and vindicated him despite his death by crucifixion – are not only reasonable claims, but are entirely consistent with findings about the historical Jesus and the early Jewish-Christian movement in New Testament scholarship. For this reason, New Testament scholar James D. Tabor noted that the Book of James and the teachings of Jesus per the Q-Source present teachings similar to Islamic beliefs about Jesus in the Qur'an:

Muslims do not worship Jesus, who is known as Isa in Arabic, nor do they consider him divine, but they do believe that he was a prophet or messenger of God and he is called the Messiah in the Qur'an...

There are some rather striking connections between the research I have presented in *The Jesus Dynasty* and the traditional beliefs of Islam. The Muslim emphasis on Jesus as messianic prophet and teacher is quite parallel to what we find in the Q source, in the book of James, and in the Didache. . . Islam insists that neither Jesus nor Mohammad brought a new religion. Both sought to call people back to what might be called "Abrahamic faith." This is precisely what we find emphasized in the book of James. Like Islam, the book of James, and the teaching of Jesus in Q, emphasize doing the will of God as a demonstration of one's faith.

James D. Tabor (Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina),
(*The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*, 315-16)

The "Qur'anic Jesus" is much closer to the "Historical Jesus" than the "divinized Jesus" of developed Christian theology. The below presentation of the Qur'anic verses about Jesus alongside the findings of Historical Jesus scholarship by conservative Christian New Testament historians demonstrates that the Qur'anic view of Jesus is very much a restoration of the original historical image of Jesus as a Jewish Messianic Prophet.

1. Jesus was a Prophet and Messenger of God:

The Qur'anic Jesus:

The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger; Messengers before him passed away; his mother was a just woman; they both ate food.

– Holy Qur'an 5:75

He [Jesus] said, 'Lo, I am God's servant; God has given me the Divine guidance (*al-kitab*), and made me a Prophet. Blessed He has made me, wherever I may be; and He has enjoined me to pray, and to give the alms, so long as I live.'

– Holy Qur'an 19:30-31

And He [God] will teach him the Divine guidance (*al-kitab*) and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, to be **a Messenger to the Children of Israel.**

– Holy Qur'an 3:48-51)

The Historical Jesus:

The historical Jesus functioned as a Prophet in the Israelite tradition of prophecy and was recognized as a Prophet by his contemporaries. In the Biblical and Quranic contexts, a Prophet is a divinely-inspired and divinely appointed human being who conveys Divine guidance and possesses Divine authority among his people.

Numerous verses in the four Gospels refer to Jesus as a Prophet, and these cases express the earliest historical beliefs regarding who Jesus was (see **Appendix A: Jesus Recognized as a “Prophet” in the Gospels**).

The answers to the question “Who do people say that I am?” make one thing clear: Jesus was perceived to be a prophet. Insofar as he was understood to be a prophet in the tradition of Israel this would mean that Jesus, like his great prophetic predecessor Moses, was called to interpret the Torah and mediate between Yahweh and the people (Exod. 20:18-21; Deut. 5:23-29; 18:15-19). A prophet in the Deuteronomic tradition was a prophet of the Sinai covenant who made its meaning clear for the people and disclosed the consequences of disobeying or abandoning the covenant (Deut. 18:9-22). . . **Standing in this tradition, Jesus can be seen as a “prophet of the justice of the reign of God,” as I have argued elsewhere in more detail.** (12-13)

It is quite likely that Jesus was called a prophet in his lifetime. Jesus is often called a prophet or assumed to be a prophet in materials seeking to make other, more Christological points. Members of Herod Antipa’s court think he is like “one of the prophets of old” (Mark 6:15; cf. Luke 9:8). . . When he enters Jerusalem, he is greeted as “the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt. 21:11)...**Therefore, even though the materials are later, they all take for granted that Jesus was popularly acclaimed as a prophet or called a prophet by his opponents.** (99)

– William R. Herzog (Former Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School),
(*Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus*, 2005, 12-13, 99)

In short, there need be little doubt that Jesus was regarded as a prophet by many, that he saw himself in the tradition of the prophets, and probably also that he claimed a(n eschatological) significance for his mission (and thus himself) which transcended the older prophetic categories. . . Sanders sums up a fair consensus when he notes: **‘Many scholars have agreed that, of various roles which we can identify, Jesus best fits that of “prophet”’** (Jesus 239); ‘a charismatic and autonomous prophet’ (Historical Figure 238); The basic proposition of Schillebeeckx’s Jesus was that *‘in his life on earth Jesus acts. . . as the eschatological prophet from God’*.

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, 666)
(See also, James D. G. Dunn, Jesus the Prophet, *The Furrow* Vol. 32, No. 8 (Aug., 1981), pp. 487-495, [Read Here](#))

The early church is highly unlikely to have invented the many sayings, isolated but telling, scattered throughout the gospels, which call Jesus a prophet. Several of them are on his own lips. By the time the gospels were written down, the church had come to believe that Jesus was much more than a prophet. It might well have seemed risky theologically to refer to him in this way: it might have appeared that he was simply being put on a level with all the other prophets. It is therefore extremely probable that these sayings represent thoroughly authentic tradition. . . I suggest that Jesus was seen as, and saw himself as, a prophet; not a particular one necessarily, as though there were an individual set of shoes ready-made into which he was consciously stepping, but a prophet like the prophets of old, coming to Israel with a word from her covenant God, warning her of the imminent and fearful consequences of the direction she was travelling, urging and summoning her to a new and different way (p. 162-63). . . This portrait of Jesus as a prophet seems the most secure point at which to ground our study of Jesus' public career, and in particular of his characteristic praxis. Equally impressive are the strong hints, throughout the gospels, that Jesus as modelling his ministry not on one figure alone, but on a range of prophets from the Old Testament (p. 165).

– N. T. Wright, (Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity, St. Mary's College, Former Anglican Bishop of Durham),
(*Jesus and the Victory of God*, Vol 1, 165)

2. Jesus was the human Messiah after Adam and not God:

The Qur'anic Jesus:

When the angels said, 'Mary, God gives you good tidings of a word from Him whose name is **Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary**; high honoured shall he be in this world and the next, near stationed to God.'

– Holy Qur'an 3:45

'Lord,' said Mary, 'how shall I have a son seeing no mortal has touched me?' 'Even so,' He said, 'God creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He does but say to it "Be," and it is... **Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be,' and he was.'**

– Holy Qur'an 3:47-51

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, 'Three.' Refrain; better is it for you. God is only One God. **Glory be to Him — That He should have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God suffices for a guardian. The Messiah will not disdain to be a servant of God**, neither the angels who are near stationed to Him. Whosoever disdains to serve Him, and waxes proud, He will assuredly muster them to Him, all of them.

– Holy Qur'an 4:171-172

They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Messiah, Mary's son.' For the Messiah said, 'Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Verily whoso associates

with God anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers.’

– Holy Qur’an 5:72

They are unbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, Mary’s son.’ Say: ‘Who then shall overrule God in any way if He desires to destroy the Messiah, Mary’s son, and his mother, and all those who are on earth?’ For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them, creating what He will. God is powerful over everything.

– Holy Qur’an 5:17

The Historical Jesus:

The historical Jesus claimed to be the awaited Messiah and called himself “Son of God” and “Son of Man”, according to the original biblical and Jewish background of these titles – none of which means “divine being” or “God incarnate.” While the Gospels and other New Testament passages portray Jesus as performing some of God’s acts and describe him using some of the Names of God, the practice of assigning Divine names and functions to special “ideal” human beings is well established in the Bible and Jewish tradition. For example, various biblical and extra-biblical passages describe Adam, Moses, Elijah, David, and Solomon with God’s names, titles, or activities (see **Appendix B: The Bible Assigns God’s Names, Divine Titles & Divine Powers to “Idealized” Human Figures:**).

“Son of man” means “human being”; in the case of Mark’s Jesus, the phrase is applied as a title, indicating that Jesus is the Human One. The son of man is an idealized human figure who restores humanity, in himself, what the first human one lost: rule over the cosmos as God’s vicegerent. Like that first human one, whose name simply means “the human,” Jesus as the Human One acts in such a way as to determine the destiny of the humanity newly defined by him. . . Thus, the Gospels call Jesus “the Human One” (“son of man”) with all its multi-faceted resonances: he is the idealized human figure who, like primal humanity before him, rules on God’s behalf; he is the figure from Daniel who comes into the Adamic role of rule by way of suffering; and as idealized human he is given a share in God’s authority, participation in God’s rule, an embodiment of God’s own glory.

– J. R. Daniel Kirk (Former Associate Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminar),
(*A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels*, 356)/p>

‘Messiah’, or ‘Christ’, does not mean ‘the/a divine one’. It is very misleading to use the words as shorthands for the divine name or being of Jesus. It is comparatively easy to argue that Jesus (like several other first-century Jews) believed he was the Messiah (see JVG, ch. 11). It is much harder, and a very different thing, to argue that he thought he was in some sense identified with Israel’s God. **In this context, the phrase ‘son of God’ is systematically misleading because in pre- and non-Christian Judaism its primary referent is either Israel or the Messiah, and it retains these meanings in early Christianity** (e.g. Rom. 1:3-4) while also picking up the overtones of Paul’s early, high Christology.

– N. T. Wright, (Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Mary's College,
Former Anglican Bishop of Durham),
(‘Jesus’ Self-Understanding’, in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O’Collins, *The Incarnation*, 2002, 47–61:
52-53)/p>

Jesus saw himself as the leader and focal point of the true, returning-from-exile Israel. He was the king through whose work YHW was at last restoring his people. He was the Messiah. Three things need to be said at once about this claim. **First, in case there is anyone left who has not grasped this point, the word ‘Messiah’, within Jesus’ world, does not refer, in itself to a divine or quasi-divine figure. . . So, when Peter says to Jesus ‘You are the Messiah’, and when Caiaphas says the same words but as an ironic question, neither of them should be understood as either stating or asking whether Jesus thinks he is the incarnate second person of the Trinity.** Subsequent Christian use of the word ‘Christ’ (the Greek translation of ‘Messiah’), and indeed of the phrase ‘son of god’, as though they were ‘divine’ titles has, to say the least, not helped people grasp this point; but grasped it must be if we are to understand Jesus in his historical context. Getting this straight frees the historian from a good deal of nonsense that has been propagated in the last hundred years or so.

– N. T. Wright, (Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Mary's College,
Former Anglican Bishop of Durham),
(*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1996, 478)

The common denominator in all of these cases is that ‘son of God’ denoted someone specially related to or favoured by God. With the king, the status was more formal; he represented God to his people. But in its broader reference the phrase seems to have denoted someone who was intimate with God, who closely reflected God’s character, who fully did God’s will (p. 711). . . **As for what Jesus’ sonship meant for his disciples, the tradition does not encourage us to infer that Jesus made his relationship with God, as son to father, a subject of explicit instruction,** still less that he required his disciples to assent to such a belief regarding himself (p. 724).

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, 711-724)

But if we are to submit our speculations to the text and build our theology only with the bricks provided by careful exegesis **we cannot say with any confidence that Jesus knew himself to be divine, the pre-existent Son of God.**

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 32)

There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth or appearance on earth. Such self-assertions appear only in the latest form of the canonical Gospel tradition and presuppose substantial developments in christological thinking which cannot be traced back to Jesus himself... **We cannot claim that Jesus believed himself to be the incarnate**

Son of God; but we can claim that the teaching to that effect as it came to expression in the later first-century Christian thought was, in the light of the whole Christ-event, an appropriate refection on and elaboration of Jesus' own sense of sonship and eschatological mission.

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 254)

The New Testament writers are really quite careful at this point. Jesus is not the God of Israel. He is not the Father. He is not Yahweh (p. 142). . . The dominant answer for Christian worship seems to be that the first Christians did not think of Jesus as to be worshipped in and for himself. He was not to be worshipped as wholly God, or fully identified with God, far less as a god. If he was worshipped it was worship offered to God in and through him, worship of Jesus-in-God and God-in-Jesus. **And the corollary is that, in an important sense, Christian monotheism, if it is to be truly monotheism, has still to assert that only God, only the one God, is to be worshipped** (p. 146). . . **No, by and large the first Christians did not worship Jesus as such...** Jesus cannot fail to feature in their worship, their hymns of praise, their petitions to God. But such worship is always, should always be offered to the glory of God the Father (p. 151).

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, 2010, 142-151)

3. Jesus came to confirm the Torah (Law) of Moses and not abolish it:

The Qur'anic Jesus:

And We sent, following in their footsteps, **Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it**, as a guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing.

– Holy Qur'an 5:46

[Jesus said]: **'I am confirming the truth of the Torah that is before me, and to make lawful to you certain things that before were forbidden unto you.** I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; so fear you God, and obey you me.'

– Holy Qur'an 3:50-51

And when Jesus son of Mary said, **'Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me**, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.' Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, **'This is a manifest sorcery.'**

– Holy Qur'an 61:6

The Historical Jesus:

The historical Jesus was zealous in the observance and teaching of the Law of Moses. There is no evidence that Jesus sought to cancel or nullify the Law or end the practice of Temple sacrifices.

Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to complete. Truly I tell you: So long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a dot, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened. Anyone therefore who sets aside even the least of the law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law and teaches others to do so, will rank high in the kingdom of Heaven.

– Gospel of Matthew, 5:17-20

The historical Jesus interprets the Law of Moses more severely than the questioning Pharisees. . . On the basis of texts examined above I can conclude the following about the relationship of the historical Jesus to the Law of Moses: First, that Jesus did not abolish or revoke the Law of Moses. Second, that, at least in some cases, Jesus rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees about the interpretation of the Law of Moses. Third, that the historical Jesus appears to have continued the biblical prophets' criticism of the traditional sacrificial cult and ritual purification, if and when these were considered to act automatically with the consequence that the participants' actual (moral) behavior was of no importance. . . Fourth, we have seen that Jesus in some cases tightens the moral requirements of the Law of Moses."

Per Bilde (Former Professor of Biblical Studies at Aarhus University),
(*The Originality of Jesus: A Critical Discussion and a Comparative Attempt*, 144)

It is evident that the earliest [Christian] community in no sense felt themselves to be a new religion, distinct from Judaism. . . **[T]hey saw themselves simply as fulfilled Judaism, the beginning of eschatological Israel... Indeed we may put the point more strongly:...the earliest Christians were not simply Jews, but in fact continued to be quite orthodox Jews. . .**This is the group with whom Christianity proper began. Only their belief in Jesus as Messiah and risen...mark them out as different from the majority of their fellow Jews. None of the other great Christian distinctives that come to expression in and through Paul are present. . . If we now shift our glance from the beginning of Christianity forward 150 years or so into the second century and beyond, **it at once become evident that the situation has significantly altered: Jewish Christianity, far from being the only form of Christianity, is now beginning to be classified as unorthodox and heretical.**

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher),
(*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 2nd ed., 1990, 239)

Of the traditions most relevant to our particular question, **we can conclude that Jesus probably spoke of his death as a means of (re-)establishing Israel's (new) covenant with God, or as a suffering of the eschatological woes predicted most recently by the Baptist. That he saw his death as replacing the temple cult seems to press the evidence too hard. . . In short, that Jesus was the first to understand his death in terms of atoning sacrifice cannot be demonstrated with any**

confidence. . . . If Jesus' death was an effective sin offering, indeed the effective sin offering, then the unavoidable conclusion was that the Temple atonement ritual had thereby been rendered unnecessary and passe, that Jesus' death had wholly replaced the temple cult as a way of dealing with sin. . . . But it is precisely this conclusion which, according to Acts, the first Christians did not draw. According to Luke, the first Jerusalem Christians did continue to attend the temple. Peter and John were going to the temple "at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour" (acts 3:1), that is, the hour at which the afternoon Tamid sacrifice was offered (Josephus, Ant. 14.65; Dan. 9:21). This sacrifice of a male lamb, twice a day, was probably not thought of as atoning. But it was evidently regarded as essential for the continuing welfare of Israel, including the Diaspora. **The first Christians' continued association with this integral part of the Temple cult cannot but raise the question whether the understanding of Jesus' death as the final sacrifice had yet taken hold in the thought and consequent practice of his first followers.** . . . This line of reflection argues decisively against the possibility that Jesus intended to establish a new cult in place of the temple.

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher), ("When did the Understanding of Jesus' Death as an Atoning Sacrifice First Emerge?" in *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children*, ed. David B. Capes, 176-177)

4. God vindicated and exalted Jesus after his enemies crucified him:

The Qur'anic Jesus:

When God said, **'Jesus, I will cause you to die and will raise you to Me and I will purify you of those who believe not.** I will set thy followers above the unbelievers till the Resurrection Day. Then unto Me shall you return, and I will decide between you, as to what you were at variance on.'

– Holy Qur'an 3:55

So, for their breaking the compact, and disbelieving in the signs of God, and slaying the Prophets without right, and for their saying, 'Our hearts are uncircumcised' — nay, but God sealed them for their unbelief, so they believe not, except a few

– and for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny, and for their saying, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' — yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, but it only appeared so unto them.

Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty — no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise.

– Holy Qur'an 4:155-158

In these verses, the Qur'an is responding to boastful claims made by Jesus's Jewish enemies that they had killed and crucified him; nowhere does the Qur'an deny the fact of Jesus's crucifixion. What is being denied is the agency and role of Jesus enemies in the death of Jesus. Historically, Jesus was crucified by the Romans, with

the support of some of his Jewish adversaries among the pro-Roman Jewish leadership. However, some Jewish rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud claimed that Jesus was tried, stoned, and hanged by the Jewish leadership according to Jewish law. The Talmud states that: *“Jesus the Nazarene is going forth to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and instigated and seduced Israel to idolatry.”* In the same section, the Talmud quotes a rabbi accusing Mary the mother of Jesus of being a harlot: *“She who was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters”* (see Peter Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 2007, pp. 63-74). **Therefore, the Qur’an is answering back against the slanderous claims made of Mary and Jesus in the Talmud by denying the claim of Jewish enemies of Jesus to have killed him and asserting that it was God caused Jesus to die and that He exalted Jesus and raised him up.** Thus, the Qur’an reinterprets the crucifixion and undercuts Rabbinical claims to have disgraced and shamed Jesus by asserting that Jesus’s death was, in reality, a victory for God and a vindication of Jesus.

The Qur’an reflects the insistence of the early Muhammad movement that the crucifixion of Jesus does not represent the defeat of God. In other words, this movement could not accept, as a matter of basic belief, that Jesus’s career ended on the cross, with God unable to intervene. . . Thus they argue that God was the ultimate victor because He could do something those who crucified Jesus could not; He could annul Jesus’s death by resurrecting him.

Suleiman A. Mourad, (“The Qur’an and Jesus’s Crucifixion and Death”, in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur’an*, 356)

The Historical Jesus:

The earliest Christian belief concerning Jesus’s death and resurrection was that it signified that God has vindicated and exalted Jesus and justified him, as opposed to his death being a sacrifice for sins.

The most obvious conclusion to draw from all this is that the theme of Jesus’ vindication and exaltation dominated the earliest horizons of the first Christian reflection on what happened to Jesus. He had suffered the most barbaric and humiliating of deaths. But God has raised him from the dead. By raising him from the dead, God had shown Jesus to have suffered unjustly, like the Servant of Isaiah, and had vindicated him, as Isaiah 53 had foretold. **It would appear, then, that the understanding of Jesus’ death as sacrifice for sins may have emerged initially not with the first Aramaic-speaking disciples but more likely with the Greek-speaking Hellenists, from whom Paul learned his 1 Corinthians 15 catechism.**

– James D. G. Dunn, (Emeritus Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, Minister of the Church of Scotland and Methodist Preacher), (*Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making*, 237)

Despite a long tradition, I do not regard the resurrection as instantly ‘proving Jesus’ divinity’. In such Jewish thought as cherished the notion of resurrection was what would happen to everybody, or at least all the righteous. . . My own reading of the process goes like this. The resurrection and ascension proved, first and foremost,

that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. **This meant, at once, that his death had to be regarded in some fashion as a victory, not a defeat, whereupon all Jesus' cryptic sayings about the meaning of his death fell into place.**

– N. T. Wright, (Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Mary's College, Former Anglican Bishop of Durham),
("Jesus' Self-Understanding", in *The Incarnation*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins 2002, 47–61: 60)

Appendix A: Jesus Recognized as a "Prophet" in the Gospels

Jesus said to them, "A **Prophet** is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home."

Gospel of Mark 6:4

Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "**He is a Prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.**"

Gospel of Mark 6:15

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, **one of the Prophets.**"

Gospel of Mark 8:28

And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is **a Prophet** without honor."

Gospel of Matthew 13:57

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or **one of the Prophets.**"

Gospel of Matthew 16:14

When Jesus had entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds replied, "**This is Jesus, the Prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.**"

Gospel of Matthew 21:10-11

They were all filled with awe and praised God. "**A great Prophet has appeared among us,**"

Gospel of Luke 7:16

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that **one of the Prophets of long ago** has come back to life."

Gospel of Luke 9:18-19

[Jesus said:] "In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely **no Prophet can die outside Jerusalem!**"

Gospel of Luke 13:33

"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "**He was a Prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.**"

Gospel of Luke 24:19

"Sir," the woman said, "**I can see that you are a Prophet.**"

Gospel of John 4:19

John 6:14 – After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say,
“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Gospel of John 6:14

On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”

Gospel of John 7:40

Appendix B: The Bible Assigns God’s Names, Divine Titles & Divine Powers to
“Idealized” Human Figures:

[The below material summarizes the findings of J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospel*, 2015]

Prophet Adam and Theophanic Humanity as God’s Representation on Earth:

- God assigns names to created things – day, night, sun, moon, sky, land, seas (Genesis 1:3-9).
- God creates humanity in His image and dominion over every living being in the earth (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 8:5-8).
- God allows Adam to name every living creature in the world (Genesis 2:19-20) in the way that God named things.

Prophet Moses Represents God, Manifests God’s Radiance and Exercises God’s Powers:

- Moses is called “as God” (Elohim) to the children of Israel and to Aaron (Exodus 4:16).
- Moses is made “God (Elohim) to Pharaoh” with Aaron as his prophet (Exodus 7:1).
- Moses by his hand separates the divides the waters with God’s power (Exodus 14), just as God separates and divides the waters (Genesis 1:1-8).
- The Aaronic Priestly blessing asking for “the Lord make his face shine on you... the Lord turn his face toward you” (Numbers 6:22-27) is fulfilled as Moses’s face radiant with the Light of God shines upon the people (Exodus 34:29-33); the Qumran community of Jews interpreted this as Moses embodying God as his representative.
- Philo of Alexandria calls Moses theos (god) and regards Moses as sharing in God’s sovereign rule. Philo likely prayed to Moses as well.

Prophet Elijah Exercises God’s Powers:

- Abraham, Moses, Joshua and Israelites falls upon their face before God (Genesis 17:3, Genesis 17:17, Numbers 14:5, Numbers 16:4, Joshua 5:14).
- Obadiah falls on his face before Elijah and calls him “my lord” (adoni), one of the titles of God (1 Kings 18:6).
- Elijah controls the rain and the water in the land by his word (1 Kings 17:1), just as God controls the forces of nature including the rains (Job 5:10, 28:25-27, Psalm 135:7, Psalm 147:8, etc.)

God Declares His “Sons” – Israel, Prophet Ephraim, and Prophet-King David:

- Israel is God’s Son – “My firstborn” and “My Son” (Exodus 4:22-23)

- Ephraim is God's beloved Son – "My Firstborn Son" and "My dear Son, the child in whom I delight" (Jeremiah 31)
- God knew Jeremiah and chose him before he was conceived in the womb: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5)
- King David and each of his successor Kings is called the Son of God whom God always loves (2 Samuel 7:13-15)
- King David is told by God: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Psalm 2:7).
- God refers to King David as "My Firstborn", and David calls Him "my Father" (Psalm 89).

The Davidic King as "God's Son" and God's Representation on Earth:

- The Davidic King and Messiah is called "the most excellent of men" and referred to as "O God" (Elohim) (Psalm 45:1-6) and God (Elohim) has anointed him; the same Psalm verse is applied to Jesus which includes the statement that God is above him (Hebrews 1:8).
- The Davidic King is endowed with God's justice and judges on God's behalf, while the desert tribes and kings bow down before him (Psalm 72).
- King David possesses the power to control the sea and the waves, a prerogative usually reserved for God (Psalm 89).
- King David is called the "shepherd" who feeds God's people even though God declares Himself as their shepherd (Ezekiel 34:15, 23).
- King David is called the "prince" among His people above whom there is only God (Ezekiel 34:24).
- God calls King David "the most exalted of kings of the earth" and gives him power over the sea and the rivers – which only God properly controls (Job 5:10, 28:25-27, Psalm 135:7, Psalm 147:8, etc.).
- David replies to the prayer and says "You, LORD God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men" (1 Chronicles 17:16).
- The Davidic King is the Son of God whom God loves: "I will be his Father and he will be My Son" and God's kingdom is equated to his kingdom (1 Chronicles 17:10-14).
- The entire assembly worships and prostrates to both God and King Solomon (1 Chronicles 29:20), and Solomon sits on the Throne of God (1 Chronicles 29:23).
- The future Davidic King and his house will be "like God" (Zechariah 12:8).
- The future Davidic King will shepherd in God's Majesty and in God's Name (Micah 5:4).

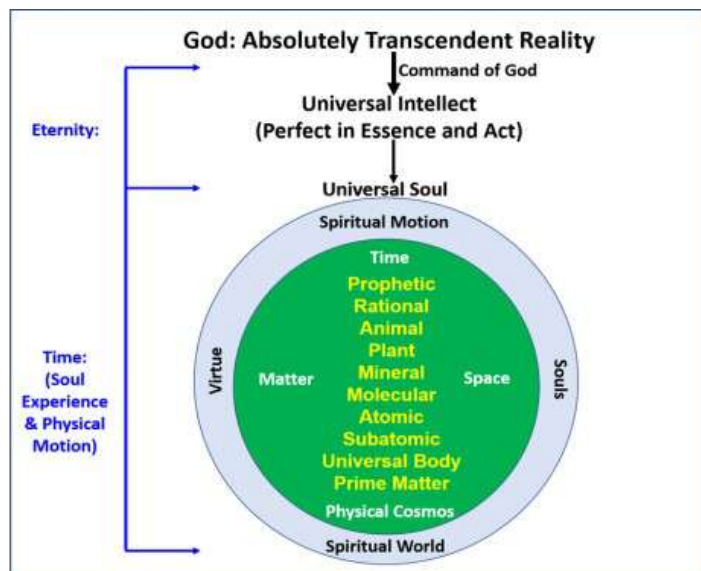
TIME: Physical Time & Spiritual Time

There are two levels of time: Physical Time called *Zaman* and Spiritual Time called 'Asr. This is why Mawlana Hazar Imam is *Sahib al-Zaman wa'l-'Asr*, meaning, "Master of Physical Time and Spiritual Time."

Spiritual Time is the desire, experience, and spiritual motion of the Universal Soul and its particular souls towards attaining self-perfection at the rank of the Universal Intellect. Spiritual time, the life of the Soul, is the cause of the existence of the physical world of bodies. The mental "time" that a human beings experience when deep in thought, in dreams, in the moments of sheer happiness and spiritual contemplation, in near death experiences, is spiritual time. The evolution of the human soul from imperfection to the perfection of all virtues and the recognition of God is "spiritual time."

Physical time is the motion of physical bodies and it's existence depends on physical bodies. The perception of physical time is only possible due to the consciousness of the human soul, and the human soul's inner perceptions are part of spiritual time. In both cases, physical time is caused by spiritual time. The great Ismaili sage Nasir-i Khusraw has written:

Ismaili Gnosis



"Time (zaman) is the cause of the coming to perfection of natural things. Natural things have come to exist by the movement of the natures (elements). The elements are in motion by the revolution of the spheres. **The spheres are revolving by the movement of the Universal Soul from the motion of desire which does not cease except with**

the Universal Soul becoming perfect and attaining to the rank of the Universal Intellect. Thus, we say that the cause of time is the movement of the spheres which are in motion by the desire of the **Universal Soul**. Thus, the cause of time is the desire of the Universal Soul. Time came into being upon the Universal Soul by necessity due to its bringing things from the state of potentiality to the state of actuality and the Soul knew that whatever is made to emanate from it cannot receive its spiritual resources except through time. Thus, time became necessary for the entities that emanated from

the Soul. Likewise, the movement of the pen brings forth the emergence of the line from the pen and also, human thought requires instruments and the pen in order to bring out wisdom from the intellect.”

— Nasir-i Khusraw, (*The Feast of the Brethren*, tr. Ismaili Gnosis, p. 135)

Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood

This article continues from and assumes the conclusions of [our previous article on the Proof of the Existence of God as Unconditioned Reality](#). We request readers not familiar with this argument and the concept of God as Unconditioned Reality to read it first before this article. We also recommend readers consult our earlier article [10 Surprising Facts to Know about the Qur'an](#), which is a companion article to this present piece.

Nature is the great daily Book of God...

God's miracles are the very law and order of nature.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

("What have we forgotten in Islam," Letter to H.E. Dr. Zahid Husain, April 4, 1952)

The Prophet himself never claimed any miracle of any sort. The only miracle which you have in Islam is the Qur'an.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(CBC Interview, "Man Alive with Roy Bonisteel", October 8, 1986)

The purpose of this article is to offer a philosophical argument for the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad: to demonstrate that Muhammad b. 'Abdullah (570-632) was a divinely-inspired prophet and guide appointed by God to convey divine guidance to humankind and that Muhammad's speech – which includes the Qur'an – is an expression of that divine guidance. However, the implications of the argument should not be overstated: we are not claiming that Islam as it developed historically is the only true religion or that the Qur'an is God's literal dictated speech or that those who do not recognize Muhammad as a prophet are condemned. On the contrary, a proper historical reading of the Qur'an actually shows that salvation is not the exclusive right of any single religious community, but rather, is based on recognizing God, responding to God's blessings appropriately, and performing virtuous deeds. There are 1.5 billion Muslims of various denominations, branches, cultural divisions, political allegiances, and schools of thought – many of which are mutually contradictory. Therefore, Islam and Muslims cannot be viewed as a single homogenous mass. Perhaps the only belief shared by all Muslims is that God is one and Muhammad is His Prophet.

Acknowledgements: This argument, although original, is informed by the thought of the pre-modern Ismaili philosophers Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 1088) and 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), and the modern academic research of Navid Kermani (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*, 2015).

A. Introduction: The Life and Career of Muhammad – A Very Brief Summary

Prophet Muhammad lived in the full light of history and his historical existence is well-documented by near-contemporary sources ([listed here](#)). The Text of the Qur'an as it exists today is believed by most historians of Islam to record the utterances of Muhammad made during his life time (the academic historical evidence is [presented here](#)).

Early Life

- Muhammad was born in Mecca to a holy family, the Banu Hashim, that traced its own lineage back to Ishmael (Isma'il) son of Abraham. Muhammad was orphaned as an infant and was raised by his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib and his uncle Abu Talib. Subsequently, Muhammad raised his uncle's son, 'Ali b. Abi Talib, as his own son.
- Seventh century Arabia was a tribal society, where allegiance to the tribe and clan trumped all else; there were no states, nations, borders, and no rule of law. Warfare and raiding was an everyday reality and quite ordinary. A state of war was the default relationship between neighboring tribes or cities unless a peace treaty was signed by the tribal leaders.
- Mecca was a commercial trade and aristocratic centre in Arabia and its prestige depended very much on its idolatrous materialistic culture centred on the sacred house of the Ka'bah.
- Muhammad became a successful merchant and was known throughout Mecca for his honesty and trustworthiness and his concern for the poor of society. In 595, his employer, Khadijah (who was 15 years older than him) proposed marriage to him and he accepted.

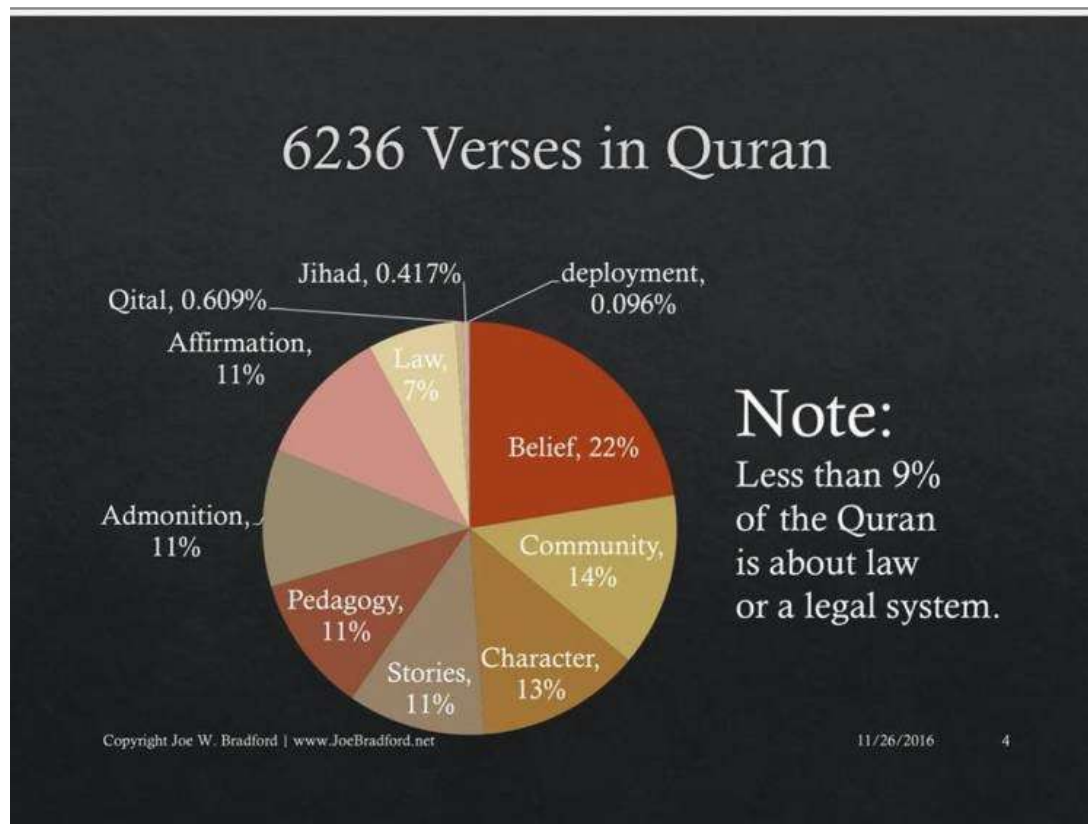
The Beginning of the Prophetic Mission

- Muhammad underwent a spiritual mystical experience during his regular night meditations in 610 and he believed that he was receiving divine inspirations and revelations from God, which he expressed through Arabic recitations, called "qur'an" ("recitation").
- Muhammad began preaching his message as proclaimed in the Qur'an and his sermons: the oneness of God and the falsity of idol worship; the necessity of following and obeying God's guidance through the guidance of Muhammad; the recognition of all prior divinely-inspired Prophets of the past such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets of Israel, and Jesus; explicit respect and recognition for all monotheistic faiths including Judaism and Christianity; the importance of spiritual purification and virtue; the continuous remembrance of God, the ethical imperative to eliminate injustice from society, the assistance of the needy and the vulnerable of society, and the final accountability of all humans on the Day of Judgment.

- Muhammad's message attracted many followers in Mecca and aroused much opposition; many of his followers were collectively persecuted and many of them tortured.
- The melodious and rhythmic orality of the Qur'an was largely responsible for numerous people coming to have faith in and commitment to the message and divine inspiration of Muhammad. These Qur'anic recitations overpowered the Arabic poetry, rhyming speech, and discourse of his Meccan contemporaries who were masters in the speech arts. Several soothsayers and poets of Mecca challenged Muhammad in poetic disputation and were unsuccessful in imitating or rivalling or overpowering his Qur'anic discourse.
- Muhammad was opposed by members of his own tribe, the Quraysh who were the commercial leaders and aristocrats of Mecca; for several years, Muhammad and his clan underwent social and economic boycott and blockade from the Meccans and almost died of starvation.

The Migration (*hijrah*) and the Early Community

- In 622, after Muhammad was nearly assassinated by a coalition of Meccan tribes and leaders, he and his followers fled to the city-state of Medina where Muhammad was invited to be the leader and arbiter between several conflicting tribes.
- Muhammad, his community, and a dozen or so Jewish tribes of Medina all signed the Constitution of Medina where they all swore to protect each other from outside attack and provide mutual support; this Constitution recognized the rights of all religious groups in Medina including Jews and Christians and counted all the Jewish tribes as part of the community or Ummah of Muhammad.
- The early community (*ummah*) of Muhammad was inter-confessional and ecumenical: it included Believers (those who believed in Muhammad's prophethood), Jews, and Christians – who were to practice and follow their own religious traditions. Two Qur'an verses (2:62, 5:69) explicitly recognize that Jews and Christians and all those who worship God sincerely and work virtuous deeds will attain salvation.



Source:

Joe Bradford, <https://www.joebradford.net/90-percent-quran-legal-document-cnn-shariah-myth/>

- There is no Shari'ah in the Qur'an – Shari'ah is a set of legal interpretations created by Muslim jurists centuries after Muhammad. In the context of the state of Medina, the Qur'an contains at most 500 verses on legal matters (marriage, divorce, writing wills, business transactions, debts, estates, etc.) out of over 6,000 verses.
- Women in 7th century Arabia before the advent of Islam had little in the way of rights and were not considered persons. Muhammad and the Qur'an (2:228, 4:19, 4:1, 33:35), explicitly recognized the spiritual equality of men and women as persons under God (in contrast to the literal teachings of Confucius and the Bible).
- The Qur'an outlawed female infanticide, granted women the right to property (4:7), the right to inheritance (4:11), the right to consensual marriage, the right to divorce (4:35), the right to retain her own property after marriage (4:11), the right to be witnesses (2:282), the right to work, etc. (In contrast, Western Europe only started granting women rights to property and personhood in the 18th century; America and British Commonwealth recognized women as persons with equal rights in the 19th-20th century.)

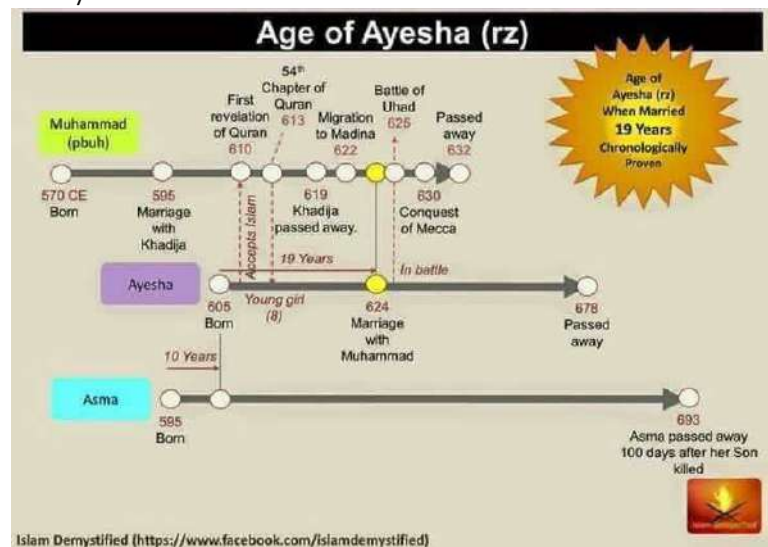
At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible – they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons. **Muhammad improved things quite a lot. By**

instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, he gave women certain basic safeguards. Set in such historical context the Prophet can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights.

Professor W. Montgomery Watt (Christian Reverend, Orientalist Historian of Islam, d. 2006),
(Interview with Alstair McIntosh, 1991, [Read Online](#))

- Prophet Muhammad married 12 women over his lifetime: 1 marriage was for love (Khadijah); 6 marriages (Sawda, Hafsa, Zaynab, Umm Salamah, Umm Habibah, Maymunah) were to vulnerable widowed and divorced women whom Muhammad took into his house and protection; 2 marriages were proposed or requested by the women (Safiyyah, Zaynab); 2 marriages were to form familial and political alliances with another tribe (A'isha, Juwariyah); 1 marriage (Maryam the Copt) was to a slave girl sent to Muhammad by the Archbishop of Alexandria (more on Muhammad's marriages [here](#)).

- Contrary to popular myth, A'isha was not six years old when she married Muhammad. All of the historical evidence when examined as a whole suggests that A'isha was born 4 years before Muhammad began his prophetic mission and was married to the Prophet on her father's initiative in the tenth year of Muhammad's mission – she was therefore around 14 years of age at the time and this was a normal marriage age until quite recently (all the evidence is analyzed in this [peer reviewed article](#)). Ismaili Gnosis has [summarized the evidence](#) from various Muslim historical sources and reports which shows that she was 18 years old at marriage.



The Battles with the Meccans

- The Meccans launched several attacks on Muhammad's community in Medina in which the Meccan forces greatly outnumbered Muhammad's defenses: the Battle of Badr (624), Battle of Uhud (625), Battle of Khandaq (627). Muhammad's community won Badr, lost Uhud, and outlasted a Meccan siege in the the Battle of the Khandaq (Trench).
- During the years of these battles, two Jewish tribes of Medina collaborated with the Meccan, violated their oaths, and committed treason against Muhammad's community of Medina: the Banu Nadir and the Banu Qurayza.
- The Banu Nadir tried to assassinate Muhammad at least twice; after their plot failed they were expelled from Medina.
- The Banu Qurayza secretly allied with the Meccans during the Battle of the

Trench and later attacked Muhammad's community using military force. The defeated Banu Qurayza voluntarily submitted to the judgment of a former Jew who passed judgment accordance with Old Testament law – their male combatants were executed and the rest of the tribe was expelled from Medina (read more [here](#)).

- In 628, several Jewish tribes including the Banu Nadir, Banu Qurayza and others gathered at Khaybar to form an alliance and attack Medina. Muhammad's forces defeated them at Khaybar and he allowed the defeated Jewish tribes to live in peace, practice their religion, and have protection from Muhammad's army as long as they paid tribute. Read more on the context and circumstances of each major battle [here](#).

Final Years

- In 628, Muhammad signed a 10-year peace treaty – the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah – with the Meccans which allowed his community to move freely around Arabia. Within one year, the Meccans violated the peace treaty when they killed some of Muhammad's followers. More detail on the Qur'anic verses about warfare revealed during this time [here](#).

- In 630, after the termination of the Peace Treaty, Muhammad's position in Medina had grown due to various Arabian tribes allying with him and converting to Islam. With a force of 10,000 men, Muhammad marched on Mecca and entered the city with little bloodshed. Muhammad granted amnesty and security to the Quraysh and their leader, Abu Sufiyan, who had violently opposed Muhammad for the last decade.

- In 632, Muhammad performed his final pilgrimage to Mecca, declared his cousin and son-in-law, Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib as his political and spiritual successor and passed away shortly after.

B. The Argument for the Prophethood of Muhammad

Step 1: Premises and Definitions: The Speech of God and the Book of God

The argument relies on the below premises (proven in the [prior article on the existence of God](#)):

- *In all of reality, there is one Absolute, Simple, Unrestricted, Eternal, Unconditioned Reality – a reality whose existence depends on nothing else – this is called "God";*
- *Other than God, everything else in reality is a Conditioned Reality – a reality whose existence at any given time depends on another reality;*
- *All conditioned realities ultimately depend upon God qua Unconditioned Reality for their existence at all times;*
- *In other words, God qua Unconditioned Reality creates and sustains the existence of all conditioned realities – this is the philosophical meaning of God being the "Creator" of all created beings.*

In current parlance, Muslims refer to the Qur'an and prior scriptures as the Speech or Word of God and the Book of God, just as Christians and Jews refer to the Bible as the Word of God. The common person's understanding is that God literally "spoke" the Qur'an in Arabic or the Torah in Hebrew and that this Qur'an/Torah was first inscribed as a "heavenly book" before it was revealed or sent down to the earth. However, in Shia Ismaili Islam, the meaning of God's Speech and God's Book differ from this popular common understanding, as explained below.

First Definition: The "Speech of God" is God's Creative Act that originates, sustains, and nourishes all conditioned realities

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His Will and His Thought. Outside His Will, outside His Thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine Will."

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

- A. God's "speech" or "word" is not in the form of sounds, words, or letters – because God is absolutely simple and transcends time, space and matter whereas audible speech (sounds, letters) come through the intermediary of bodies and air.
- B. In human terms, "speech" is an action of the speaker by which he expresses a particular intention, message, meaning, or command.
- C. By analogy, "God's Speech" is His single eternal act of creation bestowing existence upon all conditioned realities at every moment.
- D. Therefore, "God's Speech" in reality is His creative act of originating and maintaining all conditioned realities.

The Creator (the unique, absolutely simple, unrestricted, unconditioned Reality itself) must be a continuous Creator (source of the ultimate fulfillment of conditions) of all else that is real at every moment it could cease to be real (i.e. at every moment of reality). Analogously speaking, if the Creator stopped "thinking" about us, we would literally lapse into nothingness.

Robert Spitzer, (New Proofs for the Existence of God, 143)

Second Definition: The "Book of God" is the entirety of Conditioned Realities sustained by and manifesting the "Speech of God"

Nature is the great daily Book of God whose secrets must be found and used for the well being of humanity. Islam is essentially a natural religion, the miracles quoted in the Qur'an are the great phenomena surrounding us and we are often told that all these manifestations can be used and should be, with intelligence, for the service of man.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Message on Radio Pakistan, February 19, 1950, Read on [NanoWisdoms](#))

A. “God’s Book” is not in the form of written words, letters and language – because God transcends both time, space, and matter whereas written words/letters/language only exist by means of physical bodies, space, and time.

B. In human terms, “writing” is the transcription or manifestation of speech and is posterior to speech.

C. By analogy, God’s “writing” or “book” is the entirety of conditioned realities (created beings) which receive, manifest, reflect or *inscribe* “God’s Speech” (God’s creative act).

D. “God’s Book” in reality is the entirety of conditioned realities and their intelligible forms.

In conclusion, “God’s Speech” (the eternal creative act of God) continuously creates, sustains, and expresses itself in the form of “God’s Book” (the conditioned realities or created beings).



Summary of Premises and Definitions:

- God *qua* the Absolute, Simple, Unrestricted, Unconditioned Reality exists (from [prior article](#)).
 - God’s Speech refers to God’s eternal creative act that continually creates and sustains all conditioned realities (from above).
 - God’s Book refers to the entire ensemble of conditioned realities or created beings (from above).
- Human beings possess a unique faculty of cognition (called intellect) – that other animal species do not possess – by which humans intellectually discern and rationally express knowledge through discursive speech and writing.

The Demonstration of Divine Guidance and the Necessity of the Guide

Step 2: “God’s Speech” (His creative act) bestows divine guidance upon all conditioned realities (“God’s Book”) for their wellbeing.

Islam is fundamentally a natural religion. All its dogmas and doctrines of whatever sect or school, are ultimately based on the regularity and order of natural phenomena.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(“This I have learned from life,” February 4, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

A. All observable things in the Universe, whether nonliving or living, display regular predictable and rational behavior – this behavior is called the “laws of nature” in modern scientific terms.

B. The laws of nature are not the causes of this regular behavior, they are merely propositional descriptions for this behavior; the regular behavior of all matter still requires explanation and a cause. Einstein himself once wrote that “a priori one should expect a chaotic world, which could in no way be grasped by thought.” (Einstein and the Generations of Science, 1982, xviii)

C. If God continuously creates and sustains everything in the Universe, the rational, orderly, regular behavior of the Universe occurs due to divine guidance – meaning that God’s creative act (“God’s Speech”) continuously guides and directs all the objects of the Universe to behave regularly for the fulfilment or completion of some disposition, power, or tendency.

A struck match generates fire and heat rather than frost and cold; an acorn always grows into an oak rather than a rosebush or a dog; the moon goes around the earth in a smooth elliptical orbit rather than zigzagging erratically; the heart pumps blood continuously and doesn’t stop and start several times a day; condensation results in precipitation which results in collection which results in evaporation which in turn results in condensation; and so forth. **In each of these cases and in countless others we have regularities that point to ends or goals, usually totally unconscious, which are just built into nature and can be known through observation to be there whether or not it ever occurs to anyone to ask how they got there... it is impossible for anything to be directed towards an end unless that end exists in an intellect which directs the thing in question towards it. It follows that the system of ends or final causes that make up the physical universe can only exist at all if there is a supreme intelligence or intellect outside the universe which directs things towards their ends.** Moreover, this intellect must exist here and now, and not merely at some beginning point in the past, because causes are here and now, and at any point at which they exist at all, directed towards certain ends.

Edward Feser, (*Aquinas: A Beginner’s Guide*, Chapter 3)

By God’s guidance I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, or the connection of natural things. For we have said above, and have already shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. Therefore, whether we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or that they are ordered according to the decree and guidance of God, we say the same thing.

Baruch Spinoza, (Daniel Garber, “God, Laws, and the Order of Nature: Decartes and Leibniz, Hobbes and Spinoza,” in *The Divine Order, the Human Order and the Order of Nature*, ed. Eric Watkins, 63)

D. The laws of nature are the manifestation of divine guidance, some examples of which are:

1. The Universe and everything within it from quarks, subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, bodily masses, etc. behave according to regularities and patterns known as the laws of physics, whereby each kind of material object

moves toward the fulfilment or completion of some disposition, power, or tendency – this is divine guidance for inorganic beings.

2. Living things (from single celled organisms to animals) are able to find and derive nutrition from their external environment, adopt accordingly, and preserve their own existence and species due to the specific capacities that God's Speech bestows upon them – this is divine guidance given to organic living beings.
3. The human intellect, which recognizes first principles and operates through the laws of logic in order to reason from premises to conclusions, is a special capacity bestowed by God's Speech – this is divine guidance given to all human beings. These natural laws of the Universe and intellectual laws of the human intellect together also provide guidance to human beings for both their survival and flourishing. (Meanwhile, anyone who claims that there is no divine guidance within the Cosmos whatsoever can only be correct if he or she claims absolute omniscience over the Universe).

E. Therefore, "God's Speech" (the creative act of God) manifests throughout the Cosmos ("God's Book") through specific divine guidance appropriate to each level and species of conditioned reality.

God has a general guidance penetrating all existents in proportion to their circumstances and their natures – and specifically in animals, for every animal is specified by being guided to whatever is beneficial for its existence and its survival, by seeking the protection of the species of it and the individual of it – that being through nature and innate predisposition, not through instruction and thinking. More specific than that is the guidance of humanity, for it is specified by being guided to whatever is beneficial for its existence and its survival, by seeking the protection of the species of it and the individual of it and seeking the benefit of other than its own species – that indeed being through instruction and thinking.

'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, (*Keys to the Arcana*, tr. Toby Mayer, 179)

Step 3: At least one human being at any given time fully comprehends the totality of the divine guidance that God's Speech conveys for human beings

All Islamic schools of thought accept it as a fundamental principle that for centuries, for thousands of years before the advent of Muhammad, there arose from time to time messengers, illumined by Divine Grace, for and among those races of the earth which had sufficiently advanced intellectually to comprehend such a message. Thus Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the Prophets of Israel are universally accepted by Islam. Muslims indeed know no limitation merely to the Prophets of Israel; they are ready to admit that there were similar Divinely inspired messengers in other countries — Gautama Buddha, Shri Krishna and Shri Ram in India, Socrates in Greece, the wise men of China, and many other sages and saints among peoples and civilisations, trace of which we have lost. Thus man's soul has never been left without a specially inspired messenger from the Soul that sustains, embraces and is the universe.

A. If God's Speech (His creative act) continuously provides divine guidance for human wellbeing, then at least one human being in every time-period of human history fully comprehends the totality of this divine guidance.

Support: If this is not the case and the divine guidance is only known partially, then there is some portion of the divine guidance that remains unknown to humanity at a given time. This guidance would be inaccessible to human beings in principle. However, guidance only fulfills its function and serves as "guidance" when it is actually accessible to and guiding the recipients it is meant to guide; inaccessible guidance by definition is not guidance in actuality. Thus, any divine guidance for human wellbeing must be known in its entirety and fully recognized by at least one human being at every moment that there are human beings.

B. The human being who fully comprehends this divine guidance is distinguished from other human beings who do not fully comprehend the totality of the divine guidance – due to possessing a superior faculty of cognition or perception;

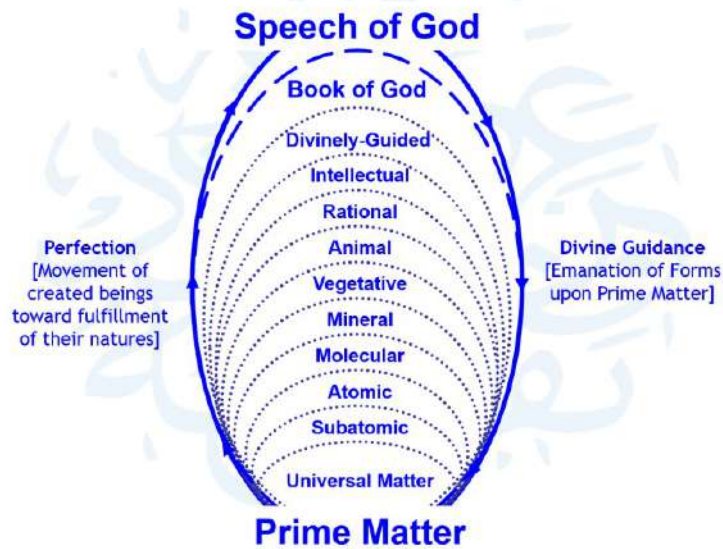
Support: By logical necessity, there must be a factor to account for why a certain human being fully comprehends the totality of divine guidance that issues from God's Speech and other human beings do not. This property must be internal and specific to that human being and pertain to his faculties of knowledge and perception. By analogy, the human species is distinguished from all other animal species through possessing a special faculty of cognition, the intellect, by which humans utter articulate speech (i.e. language) and produce writing to the exclusion of animals.

C. Thus, there is always at least one human being in the world at any given time who fully comprehends the totality of divine guidance by means of a superior cognitive faculty that other humans do not possess. This human being who comprehends the totality of divine guidance is called the "Possessor of Divine Guidance."

Explanation: By analogy, the Possessor of Divine Guidance, by means of his superior faculty of cognition, "reads" God's Book (the entirety of conditioned realities) and thereby comprehends the totality of divine guidance that emanates from God's Speech – in the same way that only the human species amongst all animal species can "read" rational speech in the form of writing. *This is the real meaning of the Qur'anic or Biblical idea that "God's Book" is revealed to a messenger or a prophet through the Holy Spirit: the Spirit refers to this higher faculty of cognition of the Possessor of Divine Guidance and the "Book of God" refers to the divine guidance present in conditioned realities.*

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit (*ruh*) from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*al-kitab*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.

Divine Guidance in Creation



The Creator of the world is like the “writer,” the world and everything within it is His Book, and His Messenger is the “reader” of this Book... The spirit of the Messenger is a spirit that is higher than the human soul, by which the Messenger is distinguished. This is in the same way that human beings are distinguished amongst all the animals by means of a spirit higher than theirs. Thus, the Messenger who is the

“reader” of the Book of God is the closest person to God, just as every reader among human beings is close to the writer in terms of recognition, and others who are unable to read writing are further away from the writer in similar terms, and they cannot perceive the speech of that writer except from the speech of that reader. In the same way for the Messenger of God, who reads the Book of God, possesses a superiority over all the people who are unable to read it, which is [also the case] for those who read human writing over those who do not read.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Zad al-Musafir*, 219)

The Qualities of the Possessor of Divine Guidance

Step 4: The Possessor of Divine Guidance in every time period communicates this divine guidance to other human beings through speech.

- A. Human beings only have access to the divine guidance if the Possessor of Divine Guidance communicates it to them.
- B. By logical necessity, the Possessor of Divine Guidance must actually communicate this divine guidance to them.
- C. Speech is superior and prior to writing.

Support: This is because human beings communicate knowledge and meaning to other human beings through speech or writing. However, writing is merely the transcription of speech in visual form. Written communication can be subject to textual corruption (through errors in preservation) and intellectual corruption (through willful or erroneous misinterpretation), whereas communication through speech is more fluid, more present, and can be clarified immediately in the case of error on the receiver’s part. Writing is static and fixed and becomes outdated whereas speech is dynamic and responsive to each new situation that requires divine guidance. Therefore, speech is logically and historically prior to writing and

represents the most immediate and original expression of what is being communicated.

D. Therefore, the Possessor of Divine Guidance in every time period communicates divine guidance to other human beings through speech. *This is the meaning of the Qur'anic expression of "reciting the Book of God" or "reciting the Word of God": the Possessor of Divine Guidance perceives or "reads" the Book of God, recognizes within it the divine guidance from God's Speech (God's creative act), and then communicates or "recites" this divine guidance to other human beings:*

And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been inspired to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changing of His Words, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge.

Holy Qur'an 18:27

Step 5: The Possessor of Divine Guidance in every time-period is recognizable to other human beings through one of two external signs – designation by another Possessor of Divine Guidance or inimitable speech.

A. It must be possible for humans in every time period to recognize a Possessor of Divine Guidance so that they may obtain the divine guidance from him.

B. The Possessor of Divine Guidance in any time-period must claim to be the Possessor of Divine Guidance and display external signs by which others can recognize him.

1. first external sign: that Possessor of Divine Guidance is identified and designated and appointed by another Possessor of Divine Guidance. This is occurs recursively from one's recognition of a prior Possessor of Divine Guidance.
2. second external sign: that the speech of the Possessor of Divine Guidance, by which he conveys divine guidance, is inimitable, unmatched and absolutely unique compared to the speech of other human beings who are not Possessors of Divine Guidance.

For example, the articulate rational speech of human beings – who possess intellect and reason – is clearly distinguished from the sounds and gestures made by animals who do not possess intellect and reason. In the same way, the inimitable speech of the Possessor of Divine Guidance will surpass and transcend the rational speech of ordinary human beings (who do not possess that divine guidance).

No animal has the ability to receive what is in the mind of another by the medium of rational speech, or to render it to another in that way... Since rational speech (*nutq*) is general to two meanings: the first of them is thinking and discerning, and the second is the declaration of what is thought and discerned; and furthermore, "rational speakers" (*natiqun*) are according to a hierarchy and an inequality in regard to [the meanings of *nutq*] as a whole, this hierarchy culminates in ascension to the rank of independence from discursive thinking in the category of 'discerning', such that the unseen becomes for him openly seen and what arises

for someone else through discursive thinking arises for him through innate nature. It is the same in the category of 'declaration', so that all of his speech becomes inspired revelation (*wahy*) and what arises for someone else through authoritative instruction, arises for him through intuition. Thus his speech is distinguished as a whole, in these two ways (discernment and declaration), from the speech of other speakers, in perfection and nobility; and *just as speech comes to be the inimitable miracle of the human being over the animal, likewise that perfection in respect of it comes to be the inimitable miracle of the prophet over human beings.*"

‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, (*Keys to the Arcana*, tr. Mayer, 120-21)

C. Therefore, the Possessor of Divine Guidance in any time-period will either:
a) be designated and appointed by another Possessor of Guidance; and/or
b) will communicate the divine guidance through inimitable speech that surpasses ordinary human speech.

Step 6: Prophet Muhammad was the Possessor of Divine Guidance in his time-period (610-632 AD).

In the seventh century of the Christian era there was a rapid and brilliant new flowering of humanity's capacity and desire for adventure and discovery in the realms of both spirit and intellect. That flowering began in Arabia; its origin and impetus were given to it by my Holy ancestor, the Prophet Muhammad, and we know it by the name of Islam.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: Islam – The Religion of My Ancestors, [Read at NanoWisdoms](#))

A. Prophet Muhammad, a historical figure who lived from 570-632 AD, claimed to be the divinely-inspired Possessor of Divine Guidance when he declared that he was a Prophet and Messenger of God who guides people to the right path (see [historical documentation that Prophet Muhammad existed in history](#); see [what the Qur'an claims about Prophet Muhammad](#); see summary timeline of Prophet Muhammad's prophetic career above).

B. As a visible sign of his claim to receive divine inspiration and convey divine guidance, Muhammad spoke and uttered Qur'an – divinely-inspired recitations spoken in God's name over 23 years in a variety of contexts, situations, and events (see [historical documentation](#) that the contents of the compiled Qur'an Text date to the mid-7th century).

If one believes in Muhammad as a prophet, it is not far-fetched to point to the originality of his language as evidence of his divine mission. If one sees in as an artist, one is at least tempted to infer from the unprecedented character of his work that he was a genius... In the history of literature, the only literary provocations that have made a lasting mark are those that contributed to a change in the norm: those that did not simply place themselves outside the existing horizon of expectations, but engendered a new horizon. **By that standard, the Quran can be considered to surpass all the literary works of Arabic culture.**

C. The Qur'an's literary form is inimitable and miraculous compared to all other forms of Arabic speech – as testified to and affirmed by numerous Orientalist and Western scholars of Arabic literature, the subjective experience of the Qur'an by Muhammad's contemporaries and Muslim communities over the centuries, and the unanimous scholarly opinion of Muslim theologians, philosophers, and grammarians.

Supporting Explanation: By the terms

– *miracle/miraculous* or *inimitability/inimitable* (*i'jaz*) – we do *not* mean a “break in the laws of nature” or a “divine intervention” in the ordinary course of events. **As already explained, God creates and sustains all existence at every moment – so divine “interventions” are wholly unnecessary: the laws of nature are never broken because they are the manifestation of God's continuous creation and guidance in the Universe. When we say that a certain production is “inimitable” or “miraculous”, we mean that such a production transcends the capacities of a certain class or species and is beyond the productive capabilities of that species.** Thus, a production is only inimitable or miraculous in relation to some standard or capacity. For example, human rational discourse and its various products like science, poetry, art, abstract thought, etc. are certainly “inimitable” and “miraculous” with respect to the animal species. In the same way, when we say that the Qur'an is inimitable and miraculous with respect to human beings, this means that the literary form (*nazm*) of the Qur'an together with its meaning is a speech or discourse that transcends the productive capacity of human beings who are not divinely-inspired prophets. The fact that the Qur'an is inimitable constitutes the greatest proof that Prophet Muhammad was the Possessor of Divine Guidance in his lifetime and a divinely-inspired Prophet.

Just as the movements of a human being come to be the *inimitable miracles* for an animal, namely the human being's movements pertaining to thought, speech and action, **likewise the movements of the Prophets come to be the *inimitable miracles* for the human being, namely their movements pertaining to the innate predisposition, to revelation and character** – for they are those whom God graciously favours with heavenly, holy guidance and their path is the path of God, their religion is the faith of God, and their law is the law of God, so whoever follows them is guided to the straight path.

'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, (*Keys to the Arcana*, tr. Mayer, 179-180)

The objective basis for claiming that the Qur'an is miraculous and inimitable (*mu'jiz*), i.e. that it is beyond the productive capacity of ordinary human beings, lies within the objective literary standards, forms, and structures of the Arabic language. ***“Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language”*** (Sir Hamilton Gibb). Only experts in Arabic language and literature can truly determine

and judge the quality of an Arabic literary production by objective standards. Therefore, we have compiled a series of testimonies from three groups of experts:

1. Non-Muslim modern European scholars of the Arabic language and literature
2. Modern Arab scholars of Arabic literature
3. Classical Muslim scholars of Arabic language and literature.

Each testimonial individually and all of them collectively show the broad consensus among modern and pre-modern scholars, both non-Muslim and Muslim, that:

1. The Qur'an's literary form (*nazm*) is inimitable because it transcends and falls outside the scope, qualities, and definition of all Arabic poetry and prose through history
2. The early reception of the Qur'an shows that its original listeners – among Muhammad's followers and his fiercest opponents – perceived the Qur'an as miraculous and inimitable: several experts of the Arab language in Muhammad's lifetime attested to the superiority of the Qur'an over all Arab speech including: al-Walid b. al-Mughira, al-Tufayl b. 'Amr al-Dawsi, Hassan b. Thabid, Labid b. Rabi'a, Ka'b b. Malik, Suwayd b. al-Samit. No person in Muhammad's lifetime successfully produced a literary production that was equal to the Qur'an.
3. There has been no successful attempt in the history of Arabic language and literature to imitate the literary form of the Qur'an. All the experts in Arabic literature, poetry, and grammar from Islamic civilization testify to the Qur'an's inimitability: al-Jahiz (d. 868), al-Nazzam (d. c. 840), Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 833), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 934), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), al-Rummani (d. 994), al-Baqillani (d. 1013), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1032), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Ishaq Isfara'ini (d. 1027), al-Ash'ari (d. 935), al-Juwayni (d. 1085), 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 1078), al-Shahrastani (d. 1153).
4. In every Qur'an verse, the selection, combination, and arrangements of words, grammatical constructs, and rhetorical devices are "finely-tuned" with the expressed meaning, such that no formal alternation is possible without severely compromising the aesthetic form or the expressed meaning of that verse (three sample verses are examined).

The full list of expert testimony can be read in [Appendix A at the bottom of the article](#). However, **a small sample of the expert testimony** is quoted below:

Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language; *and no man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Mohammad did...the Meccans still demanded of him a miracle, and with remarkable boldness and self confidence Muhammad appealed as a supreme confirmation of his mission to the Koran itself. Like all Arabs they were connoisseurs of language and rhetoric. Well,*

then if the Koran were his own composition other men could rival it. Let them produce ten verses like it. If they could not (and it is obvious that they could not), then let them accept the Koran as an outstanding evidential miracle.

Sir Hamilton A.R. Gibb (Professor of Arabic, Harvard University, d. 1971),
(*Islam: A Historical Survey*, Oxford University Press, 25-28)

The Qur'an is the greatest book and the most powerful literary work in the Arabic language, for it has made that language immortal and preserved its essence, and the Quran has become immortal with it; the Quran is the pride of the Arabic language and the jewel of its tradition, and the Arabs know this quality of the Quran, though they may differ in their faith or in their inclinations – they feel that it is the essence of what distinguishes Arabic.

Dr. Amin al-Khuli (Egyptian Scholar of Arabic Literature and the Qur'an, d. 1966),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 84-85)

I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing. The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an."

W. Montgomery Watt (Christian Clergyman, Scholar of the Qur'an, Islamic History and Theology, d. 2006),
(Interview with the Coracle, 2000, [Read Here](#))

In spite of all we know of Muhammad's independence from his models, we must admit that the way in which he inwardly assimilated and refined the foreign words and ideas, the personal pathos with which he was able to claim all this as his own, is the true miracle of his prophethood. **We understand it differently, but in a sense we must agree with Qadi Abu Bakr that the doctrine of *i'jaz* (inimitability/miraculousness) of the Quran is based in reality.**

Tor Andrae (Christian scholar of religion & Lutheran bishop of Linköping, d. 1947),
(*Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, 1918, 94)

And it would be preposterous to deny that this text, which came down over twenty years in periodically interrupted and unordered fragments, and was collected twenty years later, could [not] have gained the acceptance it has if it did not possess its, let us say, *truly unique qualities*.

Jacques Berque (Christian scholar of Arabic literature and Islam, d. 1995),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 9)

The Qur'an is not prose and that it is not verse either. It is rather Qur'an, and it cannot be called by any other name but this. It is not verse, and that is clear; for it does not bind itself to the bonds of verse. And it is not prose, for it is bound by

bonds peculiar to itself, not found elsewhere; some of the binds are related to the endings of its verses and some to that musical sound which is all its own. It is therefore neither verse nor prose, but it is “a Book whose verses have been perfected the expounded, from One Who is Wise, All-Aware.” **We cannot therefore say its prose, and its text itself is not verse. It has been one of a kind, and nothing like it has ever preceded or followed it.**

Dr. Taha Husayn (Renowned Scholar of Arabic, “The Dean of Arabic Literature,” d. 1973),
 (“Prose in the second and third centuries after the Hijra,” The Geographical Society, Cairo 1930:
Dar al Ma’arif)

For Muhammad, who...was not a poet and had not assimilated the fine points of rhetoric in long years of training, who did not know the secrets of syntax (*nawh*), diction (*luga*), tradition (*riwaya*) or metre (*‘arud*), who had no notion of rhetorical figures (*badi’*), who did not even master writing (this was taken to be synonymous with a lack of literary training) – for such a literary layman to apply, spontaneously and without ever having shown any propensity to poetic expression, the entire system of poetic language, who no normal person could ever master in all its details; **for this laymen, his soul inspired, to create out of the known material of words, figures of speech and rules of syntax and style something completely new, previously unknown and never even approach since, in such an inimitable, unprecedented and hence unlearnable way – *this historic fact, verifiable and demonstrable and obvious to anyone, must appear miraculous.***

Navid Kermani (German Scholar of Islam, Novelist),
(*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an*, 218)

Let us just consider the effect that hearing the verses had on the opponents. In his regard alone, **we know the names and full biographies of dozens of people who went to the Messenger of God to dispute with him, disagree with him and protest against him, and they no sooner sat down with him, heard his preaching and God’s verses, than they became muslims.’**

Mahmud Ramiyar (Associate Professor of Arabic, University of Tehran),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an*, 19)

But the initial amazement that the Qur’an produced among the Arabs was of a verbal nature. They were beguiled by its language, by its linguistic beauty and art. That language was the key that opened the door through which they could enter the world of the Qur’an and accepted Islam as a religion. Hence it is impossible to draw a dividing line at any level between Islam and language. One may even say that the early Muslims who formed the first hard core of the Islamic mission believed in the Quran primarily as a text whose linguistic expression had taken possession of them: they believed in it not because it revealed to them the secrets of being or of human existence, or brought a new order to their lives, but because **they saw in it a scripture that was like nothing they had known before.** Through language their nature was changed from within, and it was language that changed their lives.

Ali Ahmed Said Esber ("Adonis", prominent Syrian Arab Poet, b. 1930),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 36)

That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur'an itself is not surprising.

Dr. Edward Henry Palmer (Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University, d. 1882),
(*The Qur'an*, 1990, 15)

The Arabs, at the time, had reached their linguistic peak in terms of linguistic competence and sciences, rhetoric, oratory, and poetry. **No one, however, has ever been able to provide a single chapter similar to that of the Qur'an."**

Dr. Hussein Abdul-Raof (Professor of Islamic Studies, Leeds University)
(*Exploring the Qur'an*, 2003, 64)

In the time of the Quran, the Arabs had achieved a degree of eloquence that they had never known in their prior history. In every previous era, the language had developed continuously, undergoing improvement and refinement, and had begun to shape the social customs...**The kingdom of language had become established among them, but it had had no king until the Quran came to them.**

Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 5)

One of the most astounding things that we can see about the miraculous nature of the Quran and the perfection of its style is that we think its forms of expression (*alfaz*) fit its contents (*ma'ani*). Then we study it more closely and delve into it, and in the end we think its contents fit its forms of expression. Then we think it is the other way around again. We study it further and with the greatest care, and in the end we are always led to the opposite opinion, and **we are torn back and forth in the conflict between these two opinions until we finally refer back to God, who created the Arabs with a linguistic talent, only to produce something out of this language that surpasses that talent.**

Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 121)

To read the full compilation of scholarly testimony that the Qur'an is inimitable and surpasses all human productions in the Arabic language, please fully read [Appendix A at the bottom of the article](#) at the bottom of the article.

D. Since the Qur'an spoken by Prophet Muhammad is inimitable and miraculous over all other forms of human discourse, Prophet Muhammad was the Possessor of Divine Guidance in his time-period;

E. As the Possessor of Divine Guidance, Prophet Muhammad had the unique ability to "read" the divine guidance from God's Speech (God's creative act) within God's Book (the entirety of conditioned realities) and convey this divine guidance in human language through coining the appropriate symbols, expressions, and parables in Arabic tailored for the historical, cultural, and social needs of his listeners. This was possible because Muhammad possessed a higher cognitive faculty than those human beings who do not comprehend the divine guidance. The Qur'an refers to the Prophet Muhammad's higher cognitive faculty as the "Holy

Spirit” and describes this as the mechanism by which the Prophet accesses the “Book of God”:

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit (*ruh*) from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*al-kitab*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.

Holy Qur’an 42:52

And indeed, it is a revelation (*tanzil*) from the Lord of the Worlds
The Trustworthy Spirit (*al-ruh al-amin*) has brought it down (*nazala biha*)
Upon your heart (*‘ala qalbika*) that you may be of the warners
In a clear Arabic language (*bi-lisanin ‘arabiyyin*)

Holy Qur’an 26:193-195

The Prophet Muhammad’s pure soul and intellect perceived the divine guidance from God’s Speech (God’s creative act) within God’s Book (the entirety of conditioned realities in their intelligible forms) as non-verbal inspiration or “light” (*nur*) – called the Holy Spirit; Muhammad then expressed, conveyed, and represented this non-verbal spiritual divine guidance as the Arabic Qur’an recitations. The Qur’an is the Speech and Book of God with respect to its spiritual essence and meanings and the speech and words of Prophet Muhammad with respect to its symbolic verbal form in Arabic:

Muhammad was the purest of men in spirit and the most noble in soul. His rational soul and sensible spirit were better prepared to receive the impression of divine inspiration and more attuned to the Holy Spirit with which God supported His Prophets and messengers than all the souls and spirits of mankind. Divine inspiration thus imprinted itself on his spirit because of its purity from all psychic manifestations that normally trouble the human spirit, such as caprice, envy, arrogance, greed, miserliness, tyranny, pride, and such like, all of which harm and corrupt the human spirit...This Holy Spirit imprinted itself on his sensible spirit and intermingled with his rational, virtuous, and pure soul, free from all taint and fifth...
When divine inspiration imprinted itself on his spirit and he accepted it in his heart and imagined it in his thought, he openly declared it in his speech. That revelation is the firmest of all proofs of his prophecy; the clearest argument of God directed at His creatures, and the most manifest of his proofs, clear arguments, and miracles

Abu Hatim al-Razi (Ismaili Muslim scholar of Arabic language and philosophy, d. 934),
(Proofs of Prophecy, tr. Tarif Khalidi, 179-180)

Indeed, God sent down the Qur’an to His servant and His Messenger, Muhammad, as a light (*nur*) which the faculty of prophecy carried and which the soul of perfection and purification accepted. When the Prophet intended to convey that light to the ranks of people, he discerned that their coarse natures and turbid souls would not be able to grasp this subtlety. So, he moulded this subtle light, with connected expressions, coined examples and understandable signs in order to

straighten them according to the revealed wisdom in the souls, since the ranks of people did not possess purified souls receptive to that lordly, universal light...**The composing, the expressions, and the composition of the Qur'an are due to the Prophet. The Qur'an is both the Speech of God (*kalam Allah*) and the words of the Messenger of God (*qawl al-Rasul Allah*)."**

Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mu'izz (14th Ismaili Imam, d. 975),
(Qadi al-Nu'man, *Kitab Ta'wil al-Shari'ah*, ed. Nadia E. Jamal, 4:4, 5:49)

Step 7: The Possessor of Divine Guidance after Prophet Muhammad was identified and designated by Prophet Muhammad.

Although direct Divine inspiration ceased at the Prophet's death, the need of Divine guidance continued and this could not be left merely to millions of mortal men, subject to the whims and gusts of passion and material necessity, capable of being momentarily but tragically misled by greed, by oratory, or by the sudden desire for material advantage.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: Islam – The Religion of My Ancestors, [Read at NanoWisdoms](#))

A. Prophet Muhammad was the Possessor of Divine Guidance in his time-period (from Step 5).

B. There must be a Possessor of Divine Guidance in every time-period, including the time-periods after Prophet Muhammad has passed away (from Step 4 above).

C. The Possessor of Divine Guidance immediately after Prophet Muhammad was either:

- a) identified and designated by Muhammad to be the next Possessor of Divine Guidance; and/or
- b) uttered inimitable speech that surpasses all forms of human discourse like Muhammad did.

(from Step 5 above)

D. If Prophet Muhammad declared and identified someone as the Possessor of Divine Guidance after him, then such a person is in fact the Possessor of Divine Guidance in the time-period after Prophet Muhammad.

E. Prophet Muhammad actually did identify and designate his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. 'Abi Talib as the Possessor of Divine Guidance before his own death.

The below historical statements of Prophet Muhammad preserved in both Sunni and Shia sources show that Muhammad designated his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Talib as his successor and as the Possessor of Divine Guidance whose position and authority was equal to his own (as [documented here – Imam Ali declared successor of Muhammad in Sunni Sources](#)):

Which of you, then, will help me in this, and be my brother, mine executor and my successor amongst you?' All remained silent, except for the youthful 'Alī who spoke up: 'O Prophet of God, I will be thy helper in this.' The Prophet then placed his hand on 'Ali's neck and said, '[This is my brother, mine executor and my successor amongst you. Hearken unto him and obey him.](#)'

(Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, tr. A Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 118)

Truly, 'Ali is from me and I am from him (*inna 'Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and he is the *walī* (patron/spiritual master) of every believer after me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 19, No. 4636; Ahmad b.

Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 129)

'Ali is with the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān is with 'Ali. They will not separate from each other until they return to me at the [paradisaal pool] (*al-ḥawḍ*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4685)

[To 'Ali]: Are you not happy that you should have in relation to me the rank of Aaron in relation to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 76)

Three things were revealed to me regarding 'Alī: he is the leader of the Muslims, the guide of the pious and chief of the radiantly devout (*sayyidu'l-muslimīn, imāmu'l-muttaqīn, wa qā'idu'l-ghurra'lmuḥajjalīn*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 936, No. 4723)

Gazing upon 'Alī is an act of worship (*al-naẓar ilā 'Alī 'ibāda*)).

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 938, No. 4736)

May God have mercy on 'Alī. O God, make the truth revolve around 'Alī wherever he turns (*adiri'l-ḥaqq ma'ahu ḥaythu dāra*)

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4686)

'Ali is as my own soul (*ka-nafsī*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 104)

You ['Ali] are from me and I am from you (*anta minnī wa anā minka*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 924, No. 4672)

Whoever obeys 'Ali obeys me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 925, No. 4678)

[To 'Ali]: You will clarify for my community that over which they will differ after me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 926, No. 4678)

There is one amongst you who will fight for the *ta'wīl* [spiritual interpretation] of the Qur'ān as I have fought for its *tanzīl* [literal revelation]. 'Abū Bakr asked, 'Is it I?'. The Prophet said, 'No'. 'Umar asked, 'Is it I?'. The Prophet said, 'No, it is the one who is mending the sandal.' The Prophet had given 'Alī his sandal to mend.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 926, No. 4679)

O 'Ali, whoever separates himself from me separates himself from God, and whoever separates himself from you, O 'Ali, separates himself from me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4682)
'Ali is from me and I am from him (*'Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and nobody can fulfill
my duty but myself and 'Ali.

Prophet Muhammad,
(Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 106)
He whose *mawlā* [master] I am, this 'Alī is his *mawla* (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī mawlāhu*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(Cited in numerous Sunni Muslim Hadith sources listed [here](#))

Appendix A: Evidence that the Qur'an uttered by Prophet Muhammad is inimitable miraculous speech

The Qur'an's literary form is inimitable and miraculous compared to all other forms of Arabic speech – as testified to and affirmed by numerous Orientalist and Western scholars of Arabic literature, the subjective experience of the Qur'an by Muhammad's contemporaries and Muslim communities over the centuries, and the unanimous scholarly opinion of Muslim theologians, philosophers, and grammarians.

By the terms – *miracle/miraculous* or *inimitability/inimitable* (*i'jaz*) – we do *not* mean a “break in the laws of nature” or a “divine intervention” in the ordinary course of events. **As already explained, God creates and sustains all existence at every moment – so divine “interventions” are wholly unnecessary: the laws of nature are never broken because they are the manifestation of God's continuous creation and guidance in the Universe. When we say that a certain production is “inimitable” or “miraculous”, we mean that such a production transcends the capacities of a certain class or species and is beyond the productive capabilities of that species.** Thus, a production is only inimitable or miraculous in relation to some standard or capacity. For example, human rational discourse and its various products like science, poetry, art, abstract thought, etc. are certainly “inimitable” and “miraculous” with respect to the animal species. In the same way, when we say that the Qur'an is inimitable and miraculous with respect to human beings, this means that the literary form (*nazm*) of the Qur'an together with its meaning is a speech or discourse that transcends the productive capacity of human beings who are not divinely-inspired prophets. The fact that the Qur'an is inimitable constitutes the greatest proof that Prophet Muhammad was the Possessor of Divine Guidance in his lifetime and a divinely-inspired Prophet. Just as the movements of a human being come to be the *inimitable miracles* for an animal, namely the human being's movements pertaining to thought, speech and action, **likewise the movements of the Prophets come to be the *inimitable miracles* for the human being, namely their movements pertaining to the innate predisposition, to revelation and character** – for they are those whom God graciously favours with heavenly, holy guidance and their path is the path of God,

their religion is the faith of God, and their law is the law of God, so whoever follows them is guided to the straight path.

‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, (*Keys to the Arcana*, tr. Mayer, 179-180)

The objective basis for claiming that the Qur’an is miraculous and inimitable (*mu’jiz*), i.e. that it is beyond the productive capacity of ordinary human beings, lies within the objective literary standards, forms, and structures of the Arabic language. **“Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language” (Sir Hamilton Gibb).** Only experts in Arabic language and literature can truly determine and judge the quality of an Arabic literary production by objective standards.

Therefore, we have compiled a series of testimonies from three groups of experts:

1. Non-Muslim modern European scholars of the Arabic language and literature;
2. Modern Arab scholars of Arabic literature;
3. Classical Muslim scholars of Arabic language and literature.

Each testimonial individually and all of them collectively show the broad consensus among modern and pre-modern scholars, both non-Muslim and Muslim, that:

1. The Qur’an’s literary form (*nazm*) is inimitable because it transcends and falls outside the scope, qualities, and definition of all Arabic poetry and prose through history
2. The early reception of the Qur’an shows that its original listeners – among Muhammad’s followers and his fiercest opponents – perceived the Qur’an as miraculous and inimitable: several experts of the Arab language in Muhammad’s lifetime attested to the superiority of the Qur’an over all Arab speech including: al-Walid b. al-Mughira, al-Tufayl b. ‘Amr al-Dawsi, Hassan b. Thabid, Labid b. Rabi’a, Ka’b b. Malik, Suwayd b. al-Samit. No person in Muhammad’s lifetime successfully produced a literary production that was equal to the Qur’an.
3. There has been no successful attempt in the history of Arabic language and literature to imitate the literary form of the Qur’an. All the experts in Arabic literature, poetry, and grammar from Islamic civilization testify to the Qur’an’s inimitability: al-Jahiz (d. 868), al-Nazzam (d. c. 840), Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 833), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 934), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), al-Rummani (d. 994), al-Baqillani (d. 1013), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1032), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Ishaq Isfara’ini (d. 1027), al-Ash’ari (d. 935), al-Juwayni (d. 1085), ‘Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 1078), al-Shahrastani (d. 1153).
4. In every Qur’an verse, the selection, combination, and arrangements of words, grammatical constructs, and rhetorical devices are “finely-tuned” with the expressed meaning, such that no formal alternation is possible without severely compromising the aesthetic form or the expressed meaning of that verse (three sample verses are examined).

Evidence #1: *The Qur'an is inimitable because its literary form (nazm) is inimitable and surpasses all literary genres and forms of Arabic poetry and prose.*

The Qur'an is the greatest book and the most powerful literary work in the Arabic language, for it has made that language immortal and preserved its essence, and the Quran has become immortal with it; the Quran is the pride of the Arabic language and the jewel of its tradition, and the Arabs know this quality of the Quran, though they may differ in their faith or in their inclinations – they feel that it is the essence of what distinguishes Arabic.

Dr. Amin al-Khuli (Egyptian Scholar of Arabic Literature and the Qur'an, d. 1966),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 84-85)

I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing. The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an."

W. Montgomery Watt (Christian Clergyman, Scholar of the Qur'an, Islamic History and Theology, d. 2006),
(Interview with the Coracle, 2000, [Read Here](#))

In spite of all we know of Muhammad's independence from his models, we must admit that the way in which he inwardly assimilated and refined the foreign words and ideas, the personal pathos with which he was able to claim all this as his own, is the true miracle of his prophethood. **We understand it differently, but in a sense we must agree with Qadi Abu Bakr that the doctrine of *i'jaz* (inimitability/miraculousness) of the Quran is based in reality.**

Tor Andrae (Christian scholar of religion & Lutheran bishop of Linköping, d. 1947),
(*Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, 1918, 94)

And it would be preposterous to deny that this text, which came down over twenty years in periodically interrupted and unordered fragments, and was collected twenty years later, could [not] have gained the acceptance it has if it did not possess its, let us say, *truly unique qualities*.

Jacques Berque (Christian scholar of Arabic literature and Islam, d. 1995),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 9)

It is as though Muhammad had created an entirely new literary form that some people were not ready for but which thrilled others. Without this experience of the Koran, it is extremely unlikely that Islam would have taken root.

Karen Armstrong (British scholar of religions), (*A History of God*, 1994, 78)

But you know that the Qur'an is not prose and that it is not verse either. It is rather Qur'an, and it cannot be called by any other name but this. It is not verse, and that

is clear; for it does not bind itself to the bonds of verse. And it is not prose, for it is bound by bonds peculiar to itself, not found elsewhere; some of the binds are related to the endings of its verses and some to that musical sound which is all its own. It is therefore neither verse nor prose, but it is “a Book whose verses have been perfected the expounded, from One Who is Wise, All-Aware.” We cannot therefore say its prose, and its text itself is not verse. It has been one of a kind, and nothing like it has ever preceded or followed it.”

Dr. Taha Husayn (Foremost Scholar and Literary Critic of Arabic “The Dean of Arabic Literature”),
 (“Prose in the second and third centuries after the Hijra,” The Geographical Society, Cairo 1930:
Dar al Ma’arif)

All Arabic poetry has meter. The “meter” refers to the pattern of short and long syllables in a line of poetry. Historically, all Arabic poetry – before Muhammad and after Muhammad – contains one of sixteen possible meters: 1) al-tawil, 2) al-bassit, 3) al-wafir, 4. al-kamil, 5. al-rajas, 6. al-khafif, 7. al-hazaj, 8. al-muttakarib, 9. al-munsarih, 10. al-muktatatb, 11. al-muktadarak, 12. al-madid, 13. al-mujtath, 14. al-ramil, 15. al-khabab, 16. al-saria’. It is an objective historical fact that the Qur’an does not conform to any one of the sixteen Arabic metrical forms.

A person had to study for years, sometimes even for decades under a master poetic before laying claim to the title of poet. **Muhammad grew up in a world which almost religiously revered poetic expression. He had not studied the difficult craft of poetry, when he started reciting verses publicly. Muhammad’s recitations differed from poetry and from the rhyming prose of the soothsayers, the other conventional form of inspired, metrical speech. The norms of old Arabic poetry were strangely transformed, the subjects developed differently, and the meter was abandoned.** While poetry was, in political terms, generally conservative, reinforcing the moral and social order of the day, the whole impetus of the early Qur’an, its topics, metaphors and ideological thrust, was towards revolutionary change. All this was new to Muhammad’s contemporaries.

Navid Kermani, (“Poetry and Language”, in Rippin, *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, 108-109)

Likewise, the Qur’an does not conform to the definition and structures of Arabic prose. There are two kinds of Arabic prose – rhyming speech called *saj’* and ordinary speech. The Qur’an contains some rhyming but it falls outside the scope of both rhyming prose and non-rhyming speech.

Thus, as regards its external features, the style of the Koran is modelled upon *saj’*, or rhymed prose...but with such freedom that it may fairly be described as original.

R. A. Nicholson (Professor of Arabic, University of Cambridge),
(*Literary History of the Arabs*, 159)

Those passages from the Qur’an that approach *saj’* still elude all procrustean efforts to reduce them to an alternative form of *saj’* (rhyming speech).

Bruce Lawrence (Professor of Religions, Duke University),
(*Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, Vol VII, Issue I 2005. “Approximating Saj’ in English Renditions of the Qur’an: A Close Reading of Suran 93 (al-Duha) and the basmala”, 64)

The Qur'an is not verse, but it is rhythmic. The rhythm of some verses resemble the regularity of *saj'*...But it was recognized by Quraysh critics to belong to neither one nor the other category.

A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant and G.R. Smith (Orientalist Scholars of Arabic Literature), (Arabic Literature To The End Of The Umayyad Period, 1983, 34)

For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both.

Dr. Arthur J. Arberry (Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University),
(The Koran. Oxford University Press, x)

The 'break with the familiar' is grounded in the fact that the known forms of oratory up to then were *shi'r* (poetry), *saj'* (rhyming prose), *khaṭab*, *rasa'il* and spoken prose, and **the Qur'an came with a unique literary idiom that was different from everything familiar and at the same time attained a degree of beauty with which it exceeded all other forms**, and even the art of verse, which is the most beautiful speech of all.

Abu'l-Hasan al-Rummani (Renowned Grammarian of Baghdad, d. 994),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 81)

The verses of the Qur'an represent its uniqueness and beauty not to mention its novelty and originality. That is why it has succeeded in convincing so many people of its truth. **It imitates nothing and no one nor can it be imitated.** Its style does not pale even after long periods of study and the text does not lose its freshness over time.

Oliver Leaman (Professor of Philosophy, University of Kentucky),
(*The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, 2006, 404)

Over the last three decades, I have managed to read the whole Qur'an well over fifty times; my reading has shifted recently to reading the Qur'an for linguistic and rhetorical analysis...**I have finally reached an independent conclusion based on translation theory and linguistic analysis that the Qur'anic discourse is inimitable** and cannot be reproduced into a target language.

Dr. Hussein Abdul-Raof (Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Leeds),
(*Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Text, and Analysis*, 3)

Evidence #2: *The Qur'an's aesthetic beauty profoundly affected and transformed Muhammad's contemporaries: many individuals accepted Muhammad's prophethood and divine inspiration by merely hearing him recite the Qur'an: Beauty, in most canons, has this divine quality. It is a manifestation of the Infinite on a finite plane* and so introduces something of the Absolute into the world of relativities. Its sacred character "confers on perishable things a texture of eternity...Beauty is distinct but not separate from Truth and virtue." As Aquinas affirmed, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty and is thus concerned with wisdom.

Harry Oldmeado, (*Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, 157-158)

What ultimately led in the ninth century to the formulation of the dogma of **the inimitability and uniqueness of the Quran is a central experience of inner life and inner radiance, a very real experience of metaphysical beauty of the revealed**

scripture – not mere theological speculation or scholarly sophistry. The doctrine was the rationalization of a fundamental experience of the whole religious community – even if this experience was limited in its horizon and its rationalization did not take sufficient notice, or sufficiently serious notice, of the experience of other groups.

Dr. Angelika Neuwirth (German Scholar of Qur'anic Studies),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 195)

We can infer from the Quran that the Prophet regularly visited the Kaba in the early years of his vocation to recite the revealed verses. **The first few believers, who threw themselves on the ground or wept during his recitation, gathered around him, along with increasing numbers of curious listeners. Muhammad's opponents were often present as well...**Up to this point, the account of Muhammad's preaching given by the later tradition matches the recitation scenario that we can infer from the Qur'an itself, which has some actual historical value.

Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 11)

The greatest of Arabia's poets of Labid ibn Rabi'a. His poems hung on the doors of the Kaaba as a sign of his triumph. None of his fellow poets dared to challenge him by hanging their verses beside Labid's. But, one day, some followers of Muhammad approached. Muhammad was decried by the heathen Arabs of that time as an obscure magician and a deranged poet. His followers hung an excerpt from the second surah of the Quran on the door and challenged Labid to read it aloud. The king of poets laughed at their presumption. **Out of idleness, or perhaps in mockery, he condescended to recite the verses. Overwhelmed by their beauty, he professed islam on the spot.**

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 1)

Besides poets, another group of people who were particularly receptive to the beauty of the Quran, if we believe the traditions, were Muhammad's particularly aggressive enemies: **Meccans such as Unays and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, who at first fiercely opposed the Prophet but then spontaneously joined him when they heard his recitation.** 'Let us just consider the effect that hearing the verses had on the opponents, Mahmud Ramiyar comments. 'In this regard alone, we know the names and full biographies of dozens of people who went to the Messenger of God to dispute with him, disagree with him and protest against him, and **they no sooner sat down with him, heard his preaching and God's verses, than they became muslims.'**

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 19)

But the initial amazement that the Quran produced among the Arabs was of a verbal nature. They were beguiled by its language, by its linguistic beauty and art. That language was the key that opened the door through which they could enter the world of the Quran and accepted Islam as a religion. Hence it is impossible to draw a dividing line at any level between Islam and language. **One**

may even say that the early Muslims who formed the first hard core of the Islamic mission believed in the Quran primarily as a text whose linguistic expression had **taken possession of them**: they believed in it not because it revealed to them the secrets of being or of human existence, or brought a new order to their lives, but because **they saw in it a scripture that was like nothing they had known before**. **Through language their nature was changed from within, and it was language that changed their lives.**

Ali Ahmed Said Esber ("Adonis", prominent Syrian Arab Poet, b. 1930),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 36)

We say that the qualitative surplus (*mazaya*) appeared to them [Muhammad's contemporaries] in the nazm of the Quran, that the qualities they found in the combination of linguistic expressions (*alfaz*) were what made them incapable of any response, any resistance. We say that the figures of words and meanings (*bada'i*) in the individual parts of the verses were what filled them with awe, and that every expression was in its place and in harmony with the others, as was the use of every idiom and the position of every predicate and the form of every threat, admonition, information, reminder, encouragement and warning; and that everything had a reason and a proof, an attribute and an explanation. **All that confused and fascinated them. They examined surah by surah, section by section and verse by verse, and they found no word that was not in its proper place, no expression that would have been better placed elsewhere or could have been replaced by a different, similar or better one, one that would have been more appropriate or suitable. They found a well-structuredness that overwhelmed their minds by its magnificence, and all people were petrified by its linguistic order and harmony, but its inner perfection and the consistency of its composition.** No orator felt the ambition to contend against it; no matter how they racked their brains, they had no ideas; no tongue was able to say anything or to make a demand, and even the greatest among the opponents had to admit defeat and abstain from rebuttal.

'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (Persian scholar of Arabic, literary theorist, grammarian, d. 1078),
("Arguments on the Miraculous Inimitability of the Qur'an," in Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 204)

Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production should perhaps not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organized body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then **its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history.**

Dr. Francis. J. Steingass (British Linguist and Professor of Languages, d. 1993),
(Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 528)

I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing. The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an.

William Montgomery Watt (Christian Clergyman and Professor of Islam, d. 2006),
(Interview with the Coracle, 2000, [Read Here](#))

Evidence #3: *No one – including Muhammad's own contemporaries and enemies and all those who lived after him – has been able to match or imitate or rival the Qur'an's literary form and content.*

In the time of the Quran, the Arabs had achieved a degree of eloquence that they had never known in their prior history. In every previous era, the language had developed continuously, undergoing improvement and refinement, and had begun to shape the social customs...The kingdom of language had become established among them, but it had had no king until the Quran came to them.

Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 5)

That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur'an itself is not surprising.

Dr. Edward Henry Palmer (Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University, d. 1882), (The Qur'an, 1990, 15)

The Arabs, at the time, had reached their linguistic peak in terms of linguistic competence and sciences, rhetoric, oratory, and poetry. No one, however, has ever been able to provide a single chapter similar to that of the Qur'an.

Dr. Hussein Abdul-Raof (Professor of Islamic Studies, Leeds University)
(*Exploring the Qur'an*, 2003, 64)

Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language; **and no man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Mohammad did...**the Meccans still demanded of him a miracle, and with remarkable boldness and self confidence Muhammad appealed as a supreme confirmation of his mission to the Koran itself. Like all Arabs they were connoisseurs of language and rhetoric. Well, then if the Koran were his own composition other men could rival it. Let them produce ten verses like it. **If they could not (and it is obvious that they could not), then let them accept the Koran as an outstanding evidential miracle.**

Sir Hamilton A.R. Gibb (Professor of Arabic, Harvard University, d. 1971),
(*Islam: A Historical Survey*, Oxford University Press, 25-28)

The Qur'an challenged the status of poetry in the society not only by its ideological orientation but also with regard to questions of stylistic quality...**In several conversion narratives, too, the protagonists compare the Quran with the works of poets, then acclaim the uniqueness of the Quranic language.** According to Muhammad Abu Zahra's interpretation, which is in keeping with theological tradition, most poets would have recognized the impossibility of challenging God in a battle of poets, setting their own verses against the Quran, or at least would have quickly retreated from such an undertaking, as did the twelve poets who had gone to Mecca with their hero Unays expressly to put the Prophet in his literary place. Anyone who was foolish enough to try it 'was humiliated, reaped only scorn and derision, while the Quran gained further renown.'

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 28)

Several experts of the Arab language in Muhammad's time attested to the superiority of the Qur'an over all Arab speech: al-Walid b. al-Mughira, al-Tufayl b. 'Amr al-Dawsi, Hassan b. Thabid, Labid b. Rabi'a, Ka'b b. Malik, Suwayd b. al-Samit. For example, al-Walid b. al-Mughira was a poet of the Quraysh and they requested him to challenge Muhammad to a context. After Walid heard Muhammad reciting the Qur'an, Walid b. al-Mughira himself said (as reported in multiple sources including Ibn Hasham, al-Bayhaqi, various *tafsir*):

What shall I say? There is no one among you who knows more about poetry than I. I know all kinds of qasidas and the rajaz, and I am familiar even with the poems of the jinn. But, by God, his recitation is like none of them. By God, there is a sweetness and a grace in it; its branches are heavy with fruit, and much water springs from its ground. It surpasses everything, and nothing surpasses it; it crushes what is beneath it...You know that I fear no one and cannot be bribed. You know that I am a good judge of eloquence. But the oratory that I heard from Muhammad cannot be compared with any other speech. It is both captivating and deeply moving. It cannot be called poetry, nor prose. It is deep and full of substance.

As it turns out, al-Walid was asked to say something negative against Muhammad's revelations – so he said that “Muhammad's speech is witchcraft and sorcery and beguiles the people.” **Even this choice of propaganda by Muhammad's opponents testifies to the Qur'an's overwhelming effect upon its original listeners.**

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 34-35)

Were it not for this divine power [in the words of the Qur'an], the Qur'an would have gone the way of other so-called revelations, such as those of Musaylimah, Talhah, al-Aswad al-'Ansi, and other false prophets. It would have disappeared from the world along with the speech and vestiges of others. It was because of that spiritual power that people called the Qur'an magic. Muhammad would recite it to people. It would fall upon their ears and thence be transmitted to their hearts. **That spiritual and divine power hidden within it would attract the hearts to**

obedience. It was for this reason that Quraysh and the Arabs called it sorcery and called Muhammad a sorcerer.

Abu Hatim al-Razi (Ismaili Muslim philosopher and Arabic language expert, d. 934),
(*Proofs of Prophecy*, tr. Tarif Khalidi, 181)

The Arabic rhetoricians saw that it [the Quran] belonged to a class (*jins*) of oration that was different from theirs; that its composition incorporated the spirit of the language, and they had no alternative but to keep it away from the soul of each individual Arab, or to prevent it from entering into that soul. For it was the face of linguistic perfection which their souls recognized and which revealed itself to their hearts.

Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937)
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 36)

Evidence #4: In every Qur'an verse, the selection, combination, and arrangements of words, grammatical constructs, and rhetorical devices are "finely-tuned" with the expressed meaning, such that no formal alternation is possible without severely compromising the aesthetic form or the expressed meaning of that verse.

"Give credit where credit is due: the Arabs have done for their language what no other people on earth can claim." – Max T. Grunert (Orientalist Scholar of Arabic Literature)

Major Muslim scholars and experts in Arabic literature, poetry, and grammar testify to the Qur'an's inimitability: al-Jahiz, al-Nazzam (d. c. 840), Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 833), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 934), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), al-Rummani (d. 994), al-Baqillani (d. 1013), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1032), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Ishaq Isfara'ini (d. 1027), al-Ash'ari (d. 935), al-Juwayni (d. 1085), 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (Persian scholar of Arabic, literary theorist, grammarian, d. 1078), al-Shahrastani (d. 1153). Below we will examine the fine-tuning of three sample verses according to the analysis of Persian scholar of Arabic and literary theorist, Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 1078) as presented by Navid Kermani (German scholar of Islam):

Both in the Quran and in the verses of many poets, al-Jurjani demonstrates how the same word appears perfect in one place and unfitting in another...the composition of a discourse is like the weaving of a rug and the combination of its differently coloured threads... In this concept of *nazm*, it is not letters or words as mere sounds that are joined together in the speaker's mind, but individual signifieds whose signifiers in combination produce a certain message. Any change in their structure, however inconspicuous, must yield a different meaning.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 205)

Example 1: Qur'an 11:44

The Qur'an 11:44 says:

wa-qīla yā arḍu blaṭī mā'aki = And it was said: Earth, swallow your waters.

The words in this phrase can be re-arranged in Arabic to give the same meaning (semantic equivalent) as follows:

wa qīla ya ayyuha l-‘ard bla’ī māa’ki = And it was said: Earth, swallow your waters. However, the Qur’an verse and the re-arranged phrase are not equal in literary form (*nazm*). The Qur’an verse 11:44 is inimitable but the semantic equivalent, although conveying the same meaning, is not equal in literary form to the Qur’an verse:

The miracle lies only in the combination (*irtibat*) of the words, in the inimitable way in which the first joins with the second and the second with the third and the third with the fourth to form a perfect, immutable unit. The complex linguistic structure of the complete verse is the source of its irresistible excellence (*fadila qahira*) and evident quality (*maziya zahira*). There is nothing miraculous about any individual word in it, such as the particle *yā*, for example; we find ‘these properties that will you with awe of *i’jaz* only in its combination with the word *ard* ‘earth’ (which al-Jurjani finds incomparably more brilliant and precise in the context of this verse than the apparently semantically identical *ayyuha l-‘ard*), and in the interconnection of all the words.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an*, 205)

Example 2: Qur’an 6:100

The Qur’an 6:100 says

Wa-ja’alū li-llāhi shurakā’a l-jinna = Yet they ascribe to God, as associates, the jinn. One could rearrange the words and convey the same meaning by placing the word “associates” (*shuraka*) before “to God” (*li-llahi*):

Wa-ja’alū shurakā’a li-llāhi al-jinna = Yet they ascribe to God, as associates, the jinn.

However, this second arrangement would completely lack the aesthetic power that the arrangement (*nazm*) of the Qur’an verse and even fail to convey the entire meaning as the actual verse:

[The verse] would only superficially say the same thing if *shuraka’* (‘associates’) preceded *li-llah* (God’s): because *shuraka’* follows *li-llah*, the statement has a totality and an aesthetic appeal, ‘its beauty and force’ (*husn wa-raw’a*). If *shuraka’* were prefixed (as in *wa-ja’alu l-jinna shuraka’a li-llahi*, ‘Yet they made the jinn associates of God’), not only would the verse lose its elegance, but its meaning too would be different: one might then see the reprehensible nature of the act in the fact that the believers made the jinn and not someone else God’s associates. The emphasis is actually, as al-Jurjani shows in one and half pages of minute analysis, on reproach that the unbelievers gave God any associates, whether the jinn or any other beings. This is achieved by placing the word *shuraka’* as the first object of the verb *ja’ala* (‘made’), while *allah* is placed where the second object (*al-jinn*) would be expected. Because the second object is moved back, it takes on explanatory character; it is not of the substance of the statement.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an*, 209)

Example 3: Qur'an 54:12

The Qur'an 54:12 states:

Wa-fajjaranā l-ardā 'uyūnan = We made the earth burst forth in gushing springs.

The words in the verse could be re-arranged as follows and remain grammatically correct:

wa-fajjarnā 'uyūna l-ard = 'We made the springs of the earth gush forth.

wa-fajjarna l-'uyun fi-l-'ardi = We made the springs on earth gush forth.

However, the two re-arrangements actually fail to convey the total meaning and presentation of the Qur'an verse because they fail to disclose the semantic relation between the words for "to gush" and "springs."

The verb *fajjara*, 'let something burst forth,' 'let (something) gush', is semantically related to *'uyun* ('springs') – it is the springs that gush and that burst forth out of the earth – but in *lafz*, in the 'outward' verbal expression, the verb is connected to *ard* ('earth'). Again, it is this interlocking of the three words in a complex reciprocal relation that creates the totality, al-Jurjani says: we see how the water gushes out everywhere on earth as out of springs, as if all earth were one great spring, or as if God had made the earth burst with many springs (this is the reading chosen in the translation above). But if the verse had been *wa-fajjarnā 'uyūna l-ard*, 'We made the springs of the earth gush forth', or *wa-fajjarna l-'uyun fi-l-'ardi*, 'We made the springs on earth gush forth', the listener would understand merely that water gushed forth out of the earth from springs in various places.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 210)

The essential criterion for the *fasaha* (eloquence) of a sentence, what makes it effective, beautiful and ultimately inimitable, is thus the relation between the intended *ma'na* and the *nazm* realized in the *alfaz*. Language is perfected where the composition of individual linguistic expressions is appropriate to and most exactly expresses the intended idea.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 214)

As an outsider one may question the laws he postulates; one may even doubt whether the Quran really applies them perfectly in all details, as al-Jurjani says it does but to him, both the consistency of the standards he sets and their perfect conformance with the linguistic reality of the Quran are verified, objective scientific findings, proven by the text citations and corroborated by the text's reception history and his own aesthetic experience. And if we put ourselves in his place for a moment, and grant the same validity he does to the correctness of his analysis, then the Quran must indeed be something quite astonishing, almost inexplicable – in a word, miraculous. **For Muhammad, who...was not a poet and had not assimilated the fine points of rhetoric in long years of training, who did not know the secrets of syntax (*nawh*), diction (*luga*), tradition (*riwaya*) or metre ('*arud*), who had no notion of rhetorical figures (*badi'*), who did not even master writing (this was taken to be synonymous with a lack of literary training) – for such a literary layman to apply, spontaneously and without ever having shown any**

propensity to poetic expression, the entire system of poetic language, who no normal person could ever master in all its details; for this laymen, his soul inspired, to create out of the known material of words, figures of speech and rules of syntax and style something completely new, previously unknown and never even approach since, in such an inimitable, unprecedented and hence unlearnable way – this historic fact, verifiable and demonstrable and obvious to anyone, must appear miraculous.

Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 218)

One of the most astounding things that we can see about the miraculous nature of the Quran and the perfection of its style is that we think its forms of expression (*alfaz*) fit its contents (*ma'ani*). Then we study it more closely and delve into it, and in the end we think its contents fit its forms of expression. Then we think it is the other way around again. We study it further and with the greatest care, and in the end we are always led to the opposite opinion, and **we are torn back and forth in the conflict between these two opinions until we finally refer back to God, who created the Arabs with a linguistic talent, only to produce something out of this language that surpasses that talent.**

Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Literateur, d. 1937),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 121)

10 Surprising Facts to Know Before Reading the Qur'an

This article presents ten little-known all-important facts about the Holy Qur'an (the scripture of Islam), which both Muslims and non-Muslims remain generally unaware of. For those who remain skeptical about the historical existence of Prophet Muhammad and the dating/transmission of the Qur'anic Text, we first present **A. How Do We Know Prophet Muhammad Actually Existed?** and then show **B. Scholarly Findings on the Dating of the Qur'anic Text** Following this, we present **C. Ten Surprising Facts about the Qur'an** that have been uncovered by historical scholarship, which change the way one approaches and reads the scripture of Islam.

A. How Do We Know Prophet Muhammad Actually Existed?

Muhammad is not completely a fiction of later pious imagination, as some have implied; we know that someone named Muhammad did exist, and that he led some kind of movement. And this fact, in turn, gives us greater confidence that further information in the massive body of traditional Muslim materials may also be rooted in historical fact.

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 53)

While it has become popular to question the very existence of Prophet Muhammad and other major religious figures like Moses, Jesus, and Buddha, the historical evidence for Prophet Muhammad existing and living in 7th century Arabia is vast and well documented. Several examples of the earliest sources documenting the existence and mission of Prophet Muhammad are summarized below:

1. A Byzantine Greek text called Doctrina Iacoba (Jacoba) dated by scholars by to July 634 – written within 2 years of Muhammad's death – confirms that an Arab Prophet existed and claimed to have the keys to paradise:

There is no doubt that Mohammed existed, occasional attempts to deny it notwithstanding. His neighbours in Byzantine Syria got to hear of him within two years of his death at the latest; a GREEK TEXT written during the Arab invasion of Syria between 632 and 634 MENTIONS that "a false prophet has appeared among the Saracens" and dismisses him as an impostor on the ground that prophets do not come "with sword and chariot". It thus conveys the impression that he was actually leading the invasions...If such a revised date is accurate, the evidence of the Greek text would mean that Mohammed is the only founder of a world religion who is attested in a contemporary source. **But in any case, this source gives us pretty irrefutable evidence that he was a historical figure.**

Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), ("What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed", June 2008, [Read Here](#))

2. A Syrian manuscript folio examined by W. Wright which dates to 636 AD (4 years after Muhammad died) mentions Muhammad and the Arab conquest of Syria. Documented in W. Wright, *Catalogue Of Syriac Manuscripts In The British Museum Acquired Since The Year 1838, 1870*, Part I, Printed by order of the Trustees: London, No. XCIV, pp. 65-66. More details [here](#).

3. Another Syrian manuscript mentions Muhammad and the Arab conquests and this also comes from the year 634 AD – 2 years after Muhammad died. See W. Wright, *Catalogue Of Syriac Manuscripts In The British Museum Acquired Since The Year 1838, 1872*, Part III, Printed by order of the Trustees: London, No. DCCCCXIII, pp. 1040-1041. More details [here](#).

4. The writing of the Syrian Christian Thomas the Presbyter in 640 testifies that Muhammad existed and led a movement. That is just 8 years after his death: For example, an early Syriac source by the Christian writer Thomas the Presbyter, dated to around 640 – that is, just a few years after Muhammad's death – provides the earliest mention of Muhammad and informs us that his followers made a raid around Gaza. This, at least, enables the HISTORIAN TO FEEL MORE CONFIDENT that Muhammad is not completely a fiction of later pious imagination, as some have implied; WE KNOW THAT SOMEONE NAMED MUHAMMAD DID EXIST, and that he LED some kind of MOVEMENT. And this FACT, in turn, gives us greater confidence that further information in the massive body of traditional Muslim materials may also be rooted in HISTORICAL FACT. The difficulty is in deciding what is, and what is not, factual.

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 53)

5. The Qur'an provides direct evidence of Muhammad. Not only does it mention Muhammad by name, but it mentions and describes Muhammad as a prophet and various events in his life and the life of his community. And the scholarly consensus is that the Qur'an as we have it today certainly contains what Muhammad said and recited in his lifetime:

Mohammed is also mentioned by name, and identified as a messenger of God, four times in the Qur'an... We can be reasonably sure that the Qur'an is a collection of utterances that he made in the belief that they had been revealed to him by God. The book may not preserve all the messages he claimed to have received, and he is not responsible for the arrangement in which we have them. They were collected after his death – how long after is controversial. **But that he uttered all or most of them is difficult to doubt.**

Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), ("What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed", June 2008, [Read Here](#))

For example, meticulous study of the text by generations of scholars has failed to turn up any plausible hint of anachronistic references to important events in the life of the later community, which would almost certainly be there had the text crystallized later than the early seventh century C.E. Moreover, some of the

Qur'an's vocabulary suggests that the text, or significant parts of it, hailed from western Arabia. **So we seem, after all, to be dealing with a Qur'an that is the product of the earliest stages in the life of the community in western Arabia...The fact that the Qur'an text dates to the earliest phase of the movement inaugurated by Muhammad means that the historian can use it."**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 56)

6. The Constitution of Medina is preserved in 8th century sources and all scholars accept it as authentic and going back to Muhammad's own lifetime when he ruled over Madinah (Yathrib):

On the Islamic side, sources dating from the mid-8th century onwards preserve a document drawn up between Mohammed and the inhabitants of Yathrib, which there are good reasons to accept as broadly authentic; Mohammed is also mentioned by name, and identified as a messenger of God, four times in the Qur'an."

Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), ("What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed", June 2008, [Read Here](#))

7. Other non-Muslim sources attesting to Muhammad include Christian and Persian writings:

a) Sebeos, Bishop of the Bagratunis (Writing in 660s CE / 40s AH)

Moreover, an Armenian document probably written shortly after 661 identifies him by name and gives a recognisable account of his monotheist preaching.

Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), ("What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed", June 2008, [Read Here](#))

One of the most interesting accounts of the early seventh century comes from Sebeos who was a bishop of the House of Bagratunis. From this chronicle, there are indications that he lived through many of the events he relates. He maintains that the account of Arab conquests derives from the fugitives who had been eyewitnesses thereof. He concludes with Mu'awiya's ascendancy in the Arab civil war (656-61 CE), which suggests that he was writing soon after this date. Sebeos is the first non-Muslim author to present us with a theory for the rise of Islam that pays attention to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing (see R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*, 1997, op. cit., p. 128). He says the following about Prophet Muhammad:

At that time a certain man from along those same sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet [i.e., Muḥammad], a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learnt and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So, Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage

in fornication. He said: 'With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Ismael. But now you are the sons of Abraham and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize the land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you.'

Bishop Sebeos, (in R. W. Thomson with contributions from J. Howard-Johnson & T. Greenwood), *The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part – I: Translation and Notes*, 1999, Translated Texts For Historians – Volume 31, Liverpool University Press, pp. 95-96)

Sebeos was writing the chronicle at a time when memories of sudden eruption of the Arabs was fresh. He knows Muhammad's name and that he was a merchant by profession. He hints that his life was suddenly changed by a divinely inspired revelation (see R. W. Thomson with contributions from J. Howard-Johnson & T. Greenwood, *The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part – II: Historical Commentary*, 1999, Translated Texts For Historians – Volume 31, Liverpool University Press, p. 238). He presents a good summary of Muhammad's preaching, i.e., belief in one God, Abraham as a common ancestor of Jews and Arabs. He picks out some of the rules of behaviour imposed on the umma; the four prohibitions which are mentioned in the Qur'an. Much of what he says about the origins of Islam conforms to the Muslim tradition.

b) A Chronicler Of Khuzistan (Writing c. 660s CE / 40s AH)

This is an anonymous and short Nestorian chronicle that aims to convey church as well as secular histories from the death of Hormizd son of Khusrau to the end of the Persian kingdom. Because of its anonymity, it is known to scholars as the Khuzistan Chronicle, after its plausible geographical location or Anonymous Guidi, after the name of its first editor. Amid his entry on the reign of Yazdgird, the chronicler gives a brief account of the Muslim invasions:

Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, [numerous] as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader (mdabbrānā) was Muḥammad (mḥmd). Neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians. Yazdgird sent against them countless troops, but the Arabs routed them all and even killed Rostam. Yazdgird shut himself up in the walls of Mahoze and finally escaped by flight. He reached the country of the Huzaye and Mrwnaye, where he ended his life. The Arabs gained control of Mahoze and all the territory.

Chronicler of Khuzistan, (R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*, 1997, op. cit., p. 186)

B. Scholarly Findings on the Dating of the Qur'anic Text

Mohammed is also mentioned by name, and identified as a messenger of God, four times in the Qur'an... We can be reasonably sure that the Qur'an is a collection of utterances that he made in the belief that they had been revealed to him by God. The book may not preserve all the messages he claimed to have

received, and he is not responsible for the arrangement in which we have them. They were collected after his death – how long after is controversial. But that he uttered all or most of them is difficult to doubt.

Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), (“What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed”, June 2008, [Read Here](#))

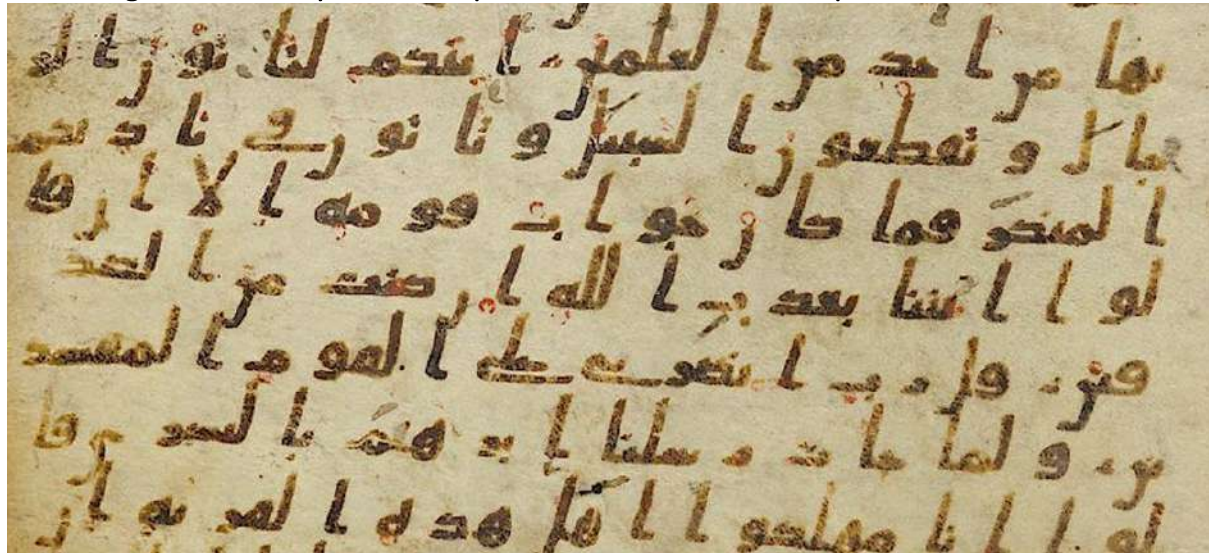
What is today called the Qur’an was originally a set of oral recitations uttered by Prophet Muhammad over 23 years in various times, places, contexts, and situations. It was common for Muhammad’s companions to memorize these recitations and write some of them down on rocks, leaves, parchment, etc. Prophet Muhammad never collected the Qur’anic recitations into a single document and never published the Qur’anic recitations as a “book.” According to Muslim sources, on the suggestion of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, the scribe Zayd b. Thabit collected the verses of the Qur’an into a codex. Later, Zayd led the project to compile a standardized uniform version of the Qur’an Text under the supervision of Uthman (d. 656). In recent times it has become common for some Orientalist scholars to pen “conspiracy” theories – suggesting that the Qur’an was “invented” at much later date – 1 or 2 centuries after Muhammad’s lifetime (John Wansbrough); or that the Qur’an is merely a translation of some unknown, empirically inaccessible yet presumed Syrian Christian liturgical hymns (Christoph Luxenberg). As of today, both theories have been widely discredited ([see here](#)). Both the manuscript evidence and scholarly analysis on the Qur’an itself suggests that the Qur’anic Text as it exists today dates from the mid-7th century – which is generally in line with what Muslim tradition has always maintained. The earliest known manuscripts of the Uthmanic Codex of the Qur’an – the present day Qur’an – are as follows:

1. University of Birmingham Manuscript – carbon dated to the period 568-645 AD



From Wikipedia: Seventh-century Quran manuscript held by the University of Birmingham. Folio 2 recto (left) and folio 1 verso (right). From the end of Chapter 19 s:ar:مريم/سورة مريم to the beginning of Chapter 20 s:ar:طه/سورة طه.

2. Tübingen University Manuscript – carbon dated to the period 625-673 AD



The Tübingen manuscript with the signature Ma VI 165 belongs to a collection of more than 20 Qur'an fragments in the holdings of the University Library: The parchments are inscribed in Kufic script, one of the oldest forms of writing of Arabic. The handwriting had attracted the attention of scientists because of its characteristic style and format.

3. Sanaa Manuscript – carbon dated with 68% probability to the period 624-656 and 95% probability to the period 578-669



Recto side of the Stanford '07 folio of Sanaa manuscript. The upper text covers Quran 2 (al-Baqarah).265-271.

Several tests on a Koranic manuscript called "Sanaa 1" (including a new test that Mohsen Goudarzi and I will publish soon) have dated it to the first half of the 7th Century.

Behman Sadeghi (Professor at Stanford University),
The Origins of the Koran, [BBC July 2015 Online](#))

Scholarly analyses of the Qur'an and the Hadith literature (circulating and compiled 200-300 years after Muhammad's death) show that the Qur'anic Text dates from the mid-7th century – in general agreement with Muslim sources and tradition. If the Qur'an dates from

a later period, then one would expect to see considerable overlap in content between the Qur'an and the Hadith literature that originated in these 300 years. There are substantial differences between the content of the Qur'an and the

Hadith as demonstrated by Fred Donner. For example, the Hadith literature is full of references to the political authority of the Caliphs while the Qur'an has nothing to say about political leadership:

A much more natural way to explain the Qur'an's virtual silence on the question of political leadership is to assume that the Qur'anic Text, as we now have it, antedates the political concerns enshrined so prominently in the hadith literature. **This is what we might expect if the Qur'an text is the product of the time of Muhammad and his immediate followers."**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 46)

The Hadith literature is full of anachronisms – referring to events that happened after Muhammad lived and operated. Meanwhile, the Qur'an shows no signs of anachronisms and never refers to events that took place after Muhammad's lifetime.

In the Qur'an, on the other hand, we find not a single reference to events, personalities, groups, or issues that clearly belong to periods after the time of Muhammad – 'Abbasids, Umayyads, Zubayrids, 'Alids, the dispute over free will, the dispute over tax revenues and conversion, tribal rivalries, conquests, etc. **This suggests that the Qur'an, as it now exists, was already a "closed" body of text by the time of the First Civil War (34-41/656-661), at the latest.**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 49)

The evidence reviewed above, which is fairly straightforward, seems to point clearly to a relatively early date for the crystallization of the Qur'an text, and implies that this event must have been completed before the First Civil War (34-41/656-661). Moreover, certain elements in the Qur'an's vocabulary (particularly its use of *fulk*), and some other features (such as its attitude toward ritual) suggest that it crystallized not in the Fertile Crescent, but in the Hijaz... **It does seem clear that the Qur'an text, as we now have it, must be an artifact of the earliest historical phase of the community of Believers, and so can be used with some confidence to understand the values and beliefs of that community.**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 61)

The examples given above appear to me sufficient to warrant the view that the compilation and redaction of the Qur'an under 'Uthman (unanimously supported by tradition) is, if not proven, then at least extremely possible...Even if the Qur'an was not compiled under 'Uthman (d. 656), then the compilation must have taken place no more than a few decades later. In any case, as von Bothmer has shown, we possess the fragments of a Quranic manuscript from Sanaa that dates back to the second half of the first century AH and contains the 'Uthmanic text, without any variants as far as we know, and even includes the first and last surahs, typically absent from non-'Uthmanic codices.

Gregor Schoeler (Former Professor and Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Basel), ("The Codification of the Qur'an," in Angelika Neuwirth and Gerard Bowering (ed.), *The Qur'an in Context*, 797-794: 792)

C. Ten Surprising Facts about the Qur'an

The Qur'an's *kitab* is not a book in the generally accepted sense of a closed corpus. Rather, it is the symbol of a process of continuing divine engagement with human beings – an engagement that is rich and varied, yet so direct and specific in its address that it could never be comprehended in a fixed canon nor confined between two covers...The logic of the Qur'ān's own approach demonstrates the impossibility of understanding al-kitāb as a fixed text, a book.

Daniel A. Madigan, (*The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 165)

1. The word "qur'an" as used in the Qur'an means "recitation" and does not refer to the standardized written Qur'an Text as it exists today: the Qur'an as Text is a later development. In the earliest period, the word "qur'an" referred to any verse or set of verses that Muhammad revealed and recited on a specific occasion – and this is why the term qur'an is often used in Qur'anic verses in the indefinite form. The Qur'an in its oral form actually rejects the entire notion of it being a fixed, closed and written text that is sent by God "all at once" to the people so they may read it themselves:

And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], **a written scripture** on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, "This is not but obvious magic."

Holy Qur'an 6:7

The People of the Kitab ask you to bring down to them a book from the heaven.

But they had asked of Moses [even] greater than that and said, "Show us God outright," so the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf [for worship] after clear evidences had come to them, and We pardoned that. And We gave Moses a clear authority.

Holy Qur'an 4:153

And those who disbelieve say, "Why was the recitation (qur'an) not sent down to him all at once?" Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have arranged it in order.

Holy Qur'an 25:32

To Muḥammad's interlocutors, a divine pronouncement must, almost by definition, be complete. **Yet the Qur'ān comes only, as the commentators like to say, responsively (*jawāban liqawlihim*), in installments (*munajjaman*) according to situations and events in order that the Prophet will be able to address God's response to whatever objection is being raised, whatever question is being asked (q 25:33).** In this context they quote q 17:106: "...and in the form of a recitation that we have divided up (*faraqnāhu*) that you might recite it to the people at intervals (*'ala mukthin*), and we have indeed sent it down." In rejecting the claim that it should be sent down "as a single complete pronouncement" the Qur'ān is

asserting its fluidity and its responsiveness to situations. It is refusing to behave as an already closed and canonized text but insists on being the authoritative voice of God in the present.

Daniel A. Madigan, ("Kitab", in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* 2013, [Read Online](#))

2. The Qur'an is not inherently a "book"; it is "spoken word": The word *qur'an* means "recitation" and originally refers to oral recitations uttered by Prophet Muhammad over a period of 23 years, in a variety of situations; addressed to different audiences (his family, his community, nonbelievers, Jews, Christians, his enemies); responding to specific questions and statements raised by his contemporaries. The Qur'an in its original oral form – as it was being recited by Muhammad in his own lifetime – did not exist as a "written text" or a "book" and did not define itself as a closed text or process; instead, the oral Qur'an was an open-ended event of revelation in which specific recitations dynamically responded to ongoing events and more updated recitations were uttered by the Prophet as time and circumstance required.

The Qur'an in its emergent phase is not a pre-meditated, fixed compilation, a reified literary artifact, but a still-mobile text reflecting an oral theological-philosophical debate between diverse interlocutors of various late antique denominations...**The oral Qur'an (to use a loose expression) may be compared to a telephone conversation where the speech of only one party is audible, yet the unheard speech of the other is roughly deducible from the audible one.** Indeed, the social concerns and theological questions of the listeners are widely reflected in the Qur'an text pronounced by the Prophet's voice. To approach the text as a historical document thus would demand the researcher to investigate Muḥammad's growing and changing public, listeners who belonged to a late antique urban milieu, many of whom must have been aware of and perhaps involved in the theological debates among Jews, Christians, and others in the seventh century... What is striking here is that the Qur'an did not subscribe to the concept of a written manifestation of scripture but established a new image, that of an "oral scripture"; in William Graham's words, **"The Qur'an has always been pre-eminently an oral, not a written text"** (2003:584). Daniel Madigan justly claims that **"nothing about the Qur'an suggests that it conceives of itself as identical with the kitab (the celestial book)"** (cited in Sinai 2006:115), that is to say the Qur'an in no phase of its development strove to become a closed scriptural corpus.

Angelika Neuwirth, ("Two Faces of the Qur'an: Qur'an and Mushaf" in *Oral Tradition*, 25/1 (2010): 141-156: 142)

3. The Qur'an never claims to be the entirety of God's Speech, Words, Book, Signs, or Guidance: The Qur'an explicitly denies that God's Words can be exhausted or captured by any human words or writing. The Qur'an constantly declares that the Signs (*ayat*) of God – a term used for the Qur'an's own verses – are found throughout the Cosmos and within the souls of human beings:

And if whatever trees upon the earth were pens and the sea [was ink], replenished thereafter by seven [more] seas, **the Words of God would not be exhausted**. Indeed, God is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Holy Qur'an 31:27

Say, "If the sea were ink for [writing] the Words of my Lord, **the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted**, even if We brought the like of it as a supplement."

Holy Qur'an 18:109

The sending down of the *Kitab* is from God, the Exalted in Might, the Wise. **Indeed, within the heavens and earth are Signs (*ayat*) for the believers. And in the creation of yourselves and what He disperses of moving creatures are Signs (*ayat*) for people who are certain.** And [in] the alternation of night and day and [in] what God sends down from the sky of provision and gives life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and [in His] directing of the winds are Signs (*ayat*) for a people who reason.

Holy Qur'an 45:2-6

And on the earth are **Signs (*ayat*)** for the certain, and in your own souls. Then will you not see?

Holy Qur'an 51:20-21

4. Prophet Muhammad did not produce or publish a "book" (text) of the

Qur'an: While it was common for Muhammad's companions to memorize these recitations and write some of them down on rocks, leaves, parchment, etc., Prophet Muhammad never collected the Qur'anic recitations into a single document and never published the Qur'anic recitations as a "book":

The revelations remained in a state of flux during the Prophet's lifetime: verses and surahs were added, while others were "abrogated." It is thus hardly conceivable that before his death the Prophet established a final edition of the revealed text, or that he constantly brought one version of it up to date. As has been shown, this would have been in complete contrast with the methods employed by ancient Arabic poets.

Gregor Schoeler (Former Professor and Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Basel), ("The Codification of the Qur'an," in Angelika Neuwirth and Gerard Bowering (ed.), *The Qur'an in Context*, 797-794: 784)

Neither strand of the tradition represents the text at the time of the Prophet's death as having existed in a physical form that would indicate that Muhammad had all but finished preparing the definitive document of revelation. The scraps of wood, leather and pottery, the bones and the bark on which the revelations were apparently written down seem to indicate that **the Prophet did not have in mind producing the kind of scroll or codex that was characteristic of Jewish and Christian use in other places.**

Daniel A. Madigan, ("Kitab", in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* 2013, [Read Online](#))

5. The "Qur'an Text" as it exists today was collected by Zayd b. Thabit and compiled into a standard version Qur'an Text under Uthman (d. 656). In fact, there

was much resistance to the prospect of collecting the Qur'an into a single volume. In an early report, Zayd b. Thabit describes a conversation he had with Abu Bakr about 'Umar wanting the collect the Qur'an into a text, even though the Prophet Muhammad had ordered no such thing:

Abu Bakr said: "Umar came to me and said 'The slaughter has taken a great toll on the reciters of the Qur'an on the day of Yamama and I fear lest a similar toll fall reciters in every place of battle and as a result much of the Qur'an be lost. **I think you should give orders for the Qur'an to be collected.**'" [Abu Bakr] said, 'I asked Umar how I could do a thing which the Messenger of God had not done.' Umar replied, 'By God it is a good thing!' And he kept on me about it until I came to be of the same opinion about it as he was.

Abu Bakr continued: 'You are an intelligent young man about whom we have no doubts; moreover you used to write down the revelations for the Messenger of God. So track down the Qur'an and collect it.'

Zayd said, "I said [to Abu Bakr] 'By God if you had charged me with moving a mountain that would not have been more burdensome for me than what you have commanded me with regard to collecting the Qur'an! **How can you do something which the Messenger of God did not do?**' He said, "By God it is a good thing!" And he kept on at me about it until God opened my heart to accept what He had already convinced Abu Bakr and Umar of."

(Kitab al-Mabani, ed. Jeffery in "Two Muqaddimas to the Qur'anic Sciences, 17-18; quoted in Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 26-27)

Today's Qur'an Text does not arrange the verses and the chapters in their original chronological order, nor does it disclose the original historical context of the Qur'anic recitations as recited by Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime. The present-day Qur'an Text is like an ad-hoc transcript of the various Qur'anic recitations originally recited by Muhammad over 23 years to different audiences in different situations – in which the recitations made in different times and places have been combined into a single volume. But, in its original context and function, the Qur'an is first and foremost an "oral recitation" that is meant to be "heard" and not "read" like a textbook:

The Koran's own conception of itself is as the liturgical recitation of the direct speech of God. It is a text intended to be read out loud. The written word is secondary and until well into the twentieth century it was, for Muslims, little more than an aide-memoire...in the strictest sense, one cannot read it, one can only hear it. In this context, Angelika Neuwirth speaks of the sacramental character of Koranic recitation. Although Islam does not use this term, it is essentially a sacramental act to take God's word into one's mouth, to receive it through the ears, to learn it by heart: the sacred is not simply remembered, the faithful physically take it into their bodies, actually absorb it, much as Christians do Jesus Christ when they take Communion...**The text itself, as it stands, is in part the written record, the carefully-edited transcript, of a public recitation, a**

performance, written down after the fact. The Koran thus does not consist solely of the statements of a single speaker: it incorporates interjections from an audience of believers, or of unbelievers – as well as spontaneous responses to these interjections, which repeatedly lead to abrupt changes of subject.

Navid Kermani, (“Salafism or Philology: The Scholar’s Touch”, [Read Online](#))

6. The Qur’an speaks to and engages with the knowledge of its original historical audience: the Qur’an actually reinterprets, comments upon, and re-tells various Jewish, Christian, and Arabian beliefs, stories, and traditions that were circulating amongst the Christian, Jewish, Sabian, and other communities of the Hijaz and the Fertile Crescent. It is common for the Qur’an to relate, reinterpret, or retell Jewish and Christian stories of prior prophets found in the Old Testament, New Testament, non-canonical gospels, and extra-biblical sources including the Jewish Talmud.

We need to remember that the Qur’ānic age roughly coincides with the epoch when the great exegetical corpora of monotheist tradition were edited and published, such as the two Talmudim in Judaism and the patristic writings in Christianity. **These writings, not the Bible, as is often held, are the literary counterparts of the Qur’ān.** Daniel Boyarin (2004) repeatedly stresses that the Talmud is — no less than the writings of the Church fathers — imbued with Hellenistic rhetoric. Indeed, the Qur’ān should be understood first and foremost as exegetical, that is, polemical-apologetical, and thus highly rhetorical. **The Qur’ān is communicated to listeners whose education already comprises biblical and post-biblical lore, whose nascent scripture therefore should provide answers to the questions raised in biblical exegesis** — a scripture providing commentary on a vast amount of earlier theological legacies.

Angelika Neuwirth, (“Two Faces of the Qur’an: Qur’an and Mushaf” in *Oral Tradition*, 25/1 (2010): 141-156: 142)

7. The Qur’an is NOT the same as the *Kitab*: The Qur’an refers to legal decrees, rules of conduct, itself, prior revelations through other Prophets, the celestial source of all prophetic revelation, and God’s knowledge of all things and events, etc. as “*al-Kitab*” – which is usually translated as “the book.” Most Muslims today simply equate the Qur’an Text with “*al-Kitab*.” However, the word “*kitab*” as used in the Qur’an does NOT actually mean a physical “book” or “writing.” Instead, the term *kitab* as used in the Qur’an has a much broader and expansive meaning – *kitab* is a symbol for God’s guidance, knowledge, authority, and decree in the broader sense and ultimately refers to a heavenly celestial archetype beyond the physical world.

The *kitāb* of revelation is intimately linked with the same divine knowledge and authority that they symbolize. The fundamental pattern (with associated verbal roots) is this: (a) As creator God knows (*‘ilm*) the truth (*ḥaqq*) of all things and is in command (*hukm*) of all things. The symbol for this knowledge and authority is *kitāb*... **In this respect, the Qur’ān does not present the *kitāb* as a closed and**

definable corpus of text, but rather as an ongoing relationship of guidance...The Qur'ān actually rejects certain common conceptions of *kitāb*. It is reiterated several times that in the ministry of the Prophet there comes to the Arabs (q.v.) “a *kitāb* from God” (e.g. q 6:19, 114). However, it is also clear that Muḥammad does not consider that the lack of any written text invalidates this claim in any way. When the Prophet is challenged to produce a writing from heaven as proof (q.v.) of his authenticity (q 17:93; see belief and unbelief), he is told to reply that he is merely a human messenger. In q 6:7 God says, “Even if we had sent down a *kitāb* on papyrus and they were to touch it with their hands, those who disbelieve would have said, ‘This is clearly nothing but sorcery.’” **So when the Qur'ān speaks of itself as *kitāb*, it seems to be talking not about the form in which it is sent down but rather about the authority it carries as a manifestation of the knowledge and command of God.**

Daniel A. Madigan, (“Kitab”, in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* 2013, [Read Online](#))

According to the Qur'an, the *Kitab* (variously called *Kitab*, *Umm al-Kitab*, and *Lawh al-Mafuz*) is the celestial heavenly archetype and source of all Divine knowledge, guidance, and revelation whereas the Arabic *qur'an* is merely the verbal manifestation of this eternal celestial *Kitab* for a certain time, place, and audience. The Qur'an contains numerous verses which say that the *Kitab* has been “sent down” (*tanzil*) or “unpacked” (*tafsil*) in the form of an Arabic *qur'an*. This is why the Qur'an makes a clear distinction between the “*Kitab*” and the “Arabic Qur'an”: Alif, Lam, Ra. These are the Signs (*ayat*) of the **Clear *Kitab* (*al-kitab al-mubin*)**. Indeed, We have sent it down (*anzalnahu*) as an **Arabic recitation (*qur'anan 'arabiyan*)**.

Holy Qur'an 12:1-2

By the **Clear *Kitab* (*al-kitab al-mubin*)**. Indeed, We have made it (*ja'alnahu*) an **Arabic recitation (*qur'anan 'arabiyan*)**

Holy Qur'an 43:2-3 (see similar verses 15:1, 44:1-2, 26:2)

Mankind was one single nation, and God sent Prophets with glad tidings and warnings; and with them **He sent the *Kitab* (*anzala ma'hum al-kitaba*) in truth**, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed;

Holy Qur'an 2:213/p>

Contrary to the traditional Islamic identification of both terms, in some middle and late Meccan texts *kitab* and *qur'an* are actually kept carefully distinct. Even though *qur'an* from a certain stage on can refer to the corpus of recitations that have so far been revealed – a corpus, though, that has not yet reached closure -, it frequently specifies merely the characteristic mode of display in which *al-kitab* is being delivered unto and by Muhammad...Thus, whereas *al-kitab* evokes a celestial mode of storage – i.e. writing -, *qur'an* points to an earthly mode of display. At least by implication, there might be ways other than recitation to display *al-kitab*... **The heavenly *kitab* is, as it were, ‘unpacked’ in the form of an Arabic recitation, rather than having been composed in Arabic from eternity on...** One probably

ought to say that the Qur'an considers itself both a translation and an interpretation of the *kitab*.

Nicholai Sinai, ("Qur'anic self-referentiality as a strategy of self-authorization," in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, 2006, 122-24)

The Qur'an even suggests that the revelation of the *Kitab* came to the Prophet's heart (the spiritual organ of intuitive understanding according to the Qur'an) in a non-verbal form of "spirit" and "light" and not in the verbal or audible form of Arabic words and letters:

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with **a Spirit (*ruh*) from Our Command**. You did not know what was the *Kitab* and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path."

Holy Qur'an 42:52

And indeed, it is the sending down (*tanzil*) from the Lord of the Worlds
The **Trustworthy Spirit (*al-ruh al-amin*)** has brought it down (*nazala biha*)
Upon your heart (*'ala qalbika*) that you may be of the warners
In a clear Arabic language (*bi-lisanin 'arabiyyin*)

Holy Qur'an 26:193-195

8. Prophet Muhammad was much more than a mere "delivery service" for the Qur'an: The roles and responsibilities of Prophet Muhammad outlined in the Qur'an are numerous (as explained in detail [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#)); Prophet Muhammad's function and authority includes much more than merely reciting the Qur'anic revelations. The Prophet was also responsible for teaching God's guidance and judging over the believers with wisdom, interpreting and explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic recitations as they came, purifying the believers, praying for the believers, accepting the believers' offerings and repentance on God's behalf, etc.

Certainly did God confer a great favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, **reciting His Signs, and purifying them, and teaching them the Kitab and the Wisdom**, although they had been before in manifest error.

Holy Qur'an 3:164 (see also 62:2, 2:129, 2:151)

And We have sent down unto you (also) the Reminder; **that you may explain clearly to mankind** what was sent down for them, and that they reflect.

Holy Qur'an 16:44 (see also 16:64, 14:4)

Explication of the divine intention of the revelation was among the functions that the Qur'an assigned to the Prophet. **The Prophet functioned as the projection of the divine message embodied in the Qur'an. He was the living commentary of the Qur'an, inextricably related to the revelatory text.** Without the Prophet the Qur'an was incomprehensible, just as without the Qur'an the Prophet was no prophet at all.

Abdul Aziz Sachedina, ("Scriptural Reasoning in Islam", *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 5/1 2005)

9. The Qur'an recognizes people of different faiths as Believers and as *muslims*: A number of mistranslations occur when the Arabic Qur'an is translated to. For example, the word *islam* as used in the Qur'an does not mean "the formal religion of Islam" as understood today.

In other words, *muslim* in Qur'anic usage means, essentially, a committed monotheist, and *islam* means committed monotheism in the sense of submitting oneself to God's will. This is why Abraham can be considered, in this Qur'anic verse, a *hanif muslim*, a "committed, monotheistic *hanif*." **As used in the Qur'an, then, *islam* and *muslim* do not yet have the sense of confessional distinctness we now associate with "Islam" and "Muslim"; they meant something broader and more inclusive and were sometimes even applied to some Christians and Jews, who were, after all, also monotheists (Q. 3:52, 3:83, and 29:46).**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 71)

The term *islam* as used in the Qur'an in the below verses simply means "submission to God" and embraces multiple religious and spiritual traditions and paths. Every prophet of the past, the disciples of Jesus, past communities, Jews and Christians, as well as the followers of Muhammad are called "*muslims*" (submitters).

Seek they other than the religion of God (*din Allah*), when unto Him ***submits*** whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly? And unto Him they will be returned.

Holy Qur'an 3:85

Indeed, the religion in the sight of God is **submission (*islam*)** And those who were given the *Kitab* did not differ except after knowledge had come to them – out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the Signs of God , then indeed, God is swift in [taking] account.

Holy Qur'an 3:19

And whoever desires other than **submission (*islam*)** as religion – never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.

Holy Qur'an 3:85

Throughout this work, I have translated the terms *muslim* and *islam* in accordance with their original connotations, namely, "one who surrenders [or "has surrendered"] himself to God", and "man's self-surrender to God"...**It should be borne in mind that the "institutionalized" use of these terms — that is, their exclusive application to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad — represents a definitely post-Quranic development and, hence, must be avoided in a translation of the Quran.**

Muhammad Asad, (The Message of the Qur'an: Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad, Gibraltar 1984, 885, n. 17)

In fact, the Qur'an extends the possibility of salvation to people of all faiths – the believers in the revelation to Muhammad, Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians, and anyone who has faith in God and the Day of Judgment. The term "believer"

(*mu'min*) was the name for Prophet Muhammad's community and Jews and Christians were recognized as "believers" alongside Muhammad's followers.

For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

Holy Qur'an 5:48

Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabians – whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right – **surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.**

Holy Qur'an 2:62

Closer examination of the Qur'an reveals a number of passages indicating that some Christians and Jews could belong to the Believers' movement – not simply by virtue of their being Christians or Jews, but because they were inclined to righteousness. For example, Q. 3:199 states, *"There are among the people of the book those who Believe in God and what was sent down to you and was sent down to them..."* Other verses, such as Q. 3:113-116, lay this out in greater detail. **These passages and other like them suggest that some peoples of the book Christians and Jews-were considered Believers.**

Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 69-70)

The word "*kafir*" is often translated as "unbeliever", but the meaning of "*kafir*" is literally "one who covers/conceals." The Qur'an does not use the word "*kafir*" in a blanket sense for everyone who is not Muslim (as we have seen the word *muslim* applies to people of other faiths too); but rather, the Qur'an labels as "*kafir*" those people who are ungrateful for God's favours and knowingly conceals the truth. This is why "*kufr*" (covering, disbelief) is always contrasted in the Qur'an with "*shukr*" (gratefulness).

10. The Qur'an never claims to be "easy to understand" or "a simple book": The Qur'an's verses are full of parables (*amthal*) and always addressed to people of intellect (*ulu al-albab*), the knowers (*'alimun*), or the people of knowledge (*ulu al-'ilm*) and exhorts its listeners to think, reflect, ponder, and analyze its verses. Some verses even say that [the inner meaning of the Qur'an](#) is only known to a special class of possessors of sacred knowledge (*'ilm*), while other verses (Qur'an 6:25, 17:46, 18:57) say that the unbelievers will not comprehend the meaning of the Qur'an.

It is an honorable Qur'an in a **Hidden Kitab**. None touch it except the **purified**.

Holy Qur'an 56:78

No one knows its inner meaning (*ta'wil*) except for God and **those who are firmly rooted in knowledge.**

Holy Qur'an 3:7

And We have certainly presented for the people in this Qur'an from every [kind of] example – **that they might reflect**.

Holy Qur'an 39:27

A *Kitab* which We have revealed to you, full of blessings, [O Muhammad], that they might **reflect upon its Signs** and that those of understanding would be reminded.

Holy Qur'an 38:29

And those parables (*amthal*) We strike for humankind so that they may **reflect**.

Holy Qur'an 59:21

And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except **the Knowers ('alimun)**.

Holy Qur'an 29:43

And of His signs (*ayat*) is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs (*ayat*) **for the Knowers ('alimun)**.

Holy Qur'an 30:22

Nay, rather it [the Qur'an] is Clear Signs (*ayat*) in the breasts of **those who are given knowledge (*alladhi utu al-'ilm*)**.

Holy Qur'an 29:49

Then do they not **reflect** upon the Qur'an? If it had been from [any] other than God, they would have found within it much contradiction.

Holy Qur'an 4:82

Ismaili Teachings on the Oneness of God (Tawhid):

Beyond Personalist Theism and Modern Atheism

**Say: He is God, the Unique (*al-ahad*). God is Absolute (*al-samad*).
He does not beget nor is He begotten and there is none like unto Him.**

– Holy Qur'an Surat al-Ikhlās

**The Imam Ma'add [al-Mu'izz] summons
to the absolute oneness of God (*tawhid*), the Absolute (*al-samad*).**

– Fatimid Coin Inscription

NOTE TO READER: This article presupposes the existence of God according to classical theism. We advise our atheist and agnostic readers, and those unfamiliar with the logical basis for the existence of God, to first read our [Proof of God's Existence article](#).

The Islamic Shahadah, “there no god except God”, expresses the quintessential metaphysical insight of Islam and all authentic religions – the absolute unity of God. Contrary to popular belief, this statement does not simply mean that “there is one God as opposed to there being many gods.” To reduce the concept of monotheism to “one” God in the numerical sense where God is merely a supreme personal being ruling over other beings – as modern Christian theists and certain Muslim theological schools believe – is little better than professing polytheism except with less gods. For this reason, Brian Davies, a Catholic philosopher of religion, calls this “theistic personalism,” and David Bentley Hart calls it “monopolytheism” or “monopoly-theism.” This sort of personalist theism, which reduces God to a metaphysical tribal idol made in the image of humans, allows Protestant colleges to claim that Muslims and Christians worship different gods entirely. The late Henry Corbin thus writes that the *common exoteric* understanding of the Shahadah and monotheism in general as the mere affirmation of a single God against many gods, can only result in metaphysical idolatry:

*In its exoteric form, namely the profession of faith that declares **La Ilaha illah**, monotheism perishes in its triumphant moment, unknowingly obliterating itself by becoming **volens nolens** metaphysical idolatry.*

– Henry Corbin, ([The Paradox of Monotheism](#))

The real meaning of the phrase “God is one” was explained by Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib when, just before the Battle of the Camel, a lowly bedouin approached the Imam and said: “*O Commander of the Faithful, do you say that God is one?*” As those present admonished the bedouin for asking such an untimely question in the midst of a battle, the Imam said: “*Leave him, for surely what the bedouin wishes is what we wish for the people.*” In other words, there is never a time when the deep theological and metaphysical question, “what do you mean that God is one?” could be irrelevant or unimportant. The Imam replied by explaining how if the

term “one” means numerical oneness, then it is not correct to say “God is (numerically) one” because ***“that which has no second does not enter into the category of numbers.”*** 1,300 later years, the 48th hereditary Imam, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, echoed the the first Imam’s words in his public Memoirs when he said that ***“Islam’s basic principle can only be defined as mono-realism and not as monotheism.”*** With such profound words, these two Imams invite us to deconstruct our limited ready-made notions about God and orient our thoughts toward the transcendent unity of the Godhead.



The name “Allah” is written on the walls of the Ismaili Centre Toronto Prayer Hall, symbolizing the Qur’anic verse: “Wherever you turn there is the Face of God.”

In this article we present the Ismaili Muslim concept of *tawhid* – the absolute oneness of God – and show how Ismaili theology is one of the foremost Islamic discourses in upholding the absolute unity, simplicity, uniqueness, and transcendence of God. This Ismaili theological vision of *tawhid* was championed by the earliest Ismaili *da’wah*, which was called “the Summons” because it summoned humankind to the intellectual and spiritual recognition of God’s absolute unity. One Fatimid Ismaili *da’i* has thus written:

Knowledge of the absolute Oneness of God (*tawhid*) is the goal; it is the most glorious of the sciences and the most illustrious of the religious obligations. All the acts of worship and knowledge are based on it. The soul’s recognition of it is a thing imposed on the human being. By means of it, he attains an understanding of the absolute Oneness of God (*tawhid*).

– Sayyidna Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Naysaburi, (*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 44)

In academic terms, Ismaili theology is the pre-eminent negative or apophatic theology of Islam because it ***affirms*** the absolute Oneness of God (*tawhid*) through ***negating*** all names, descriptions, conceptions and limitations from God. The Ismaili theology of *tawhid* goes back to the teachings of the early Shi’a Imams, especially Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 743), and Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (d. 765). Additionally, a number of eminent Ismaili

Muslim philosophers – Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani (d. 971), Ja‘far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), Hamid al-Din al-Kirmanî (d. 1021), al-Mu‘ayyad al-Din Shirazi (d. 1077), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), ‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1273) – consolidated and refined the Ismaili theology of *tawhid* using the strongest philosophical arguments of their time. Even in the present age, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the present and 49th hereditary Imam of the Shi‘a Ismaili Muslims, continues to stress the absolute and utter transcendence of God. At the 1975 All-Isma‘ilia Paris Conference, the Ismaili Imam endorsed and approved the following resolution concerning the contemporary Ismaili position on the concept of God:

The absolute transcendence of God to be emphasized, and the Ismaili belief in God to be expounded in association with the general stress on the transcendence of God in the Qur‘an, as exemplified particularly in the Surat al-Ikhlâs.

(Paris Conference Report, ed. Eqbal Rupani, Paris: 1975, 6)

The Imam of the Time today repeatedly uses the term “He who is above all else” in his esoteric teachings to stress the absolute transcendence of God above and beyond all limits and conceptions. The Ismaili scholar Dr. Aziz Esmail explains the meaning of the phrase “He who is above all else” as follows:

This Ultimate Reality is often conceived as ‘transcendent’, or described as ‘**He who is above all else**’ — not because it is a reality spatially above the human habitat, but because it is above, i.e. goes beyond or transcends, all human categories. Being free from and prior to the dichotomy between subject and object, it is therefore also outside the frame of human discourse.

– Aziz Esmail, (‘Reason and Religion: The Old Argument Revisited’, *Ilm*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Dec. 1981-Feb. 1982, 32-40)

We now look at several examples of Ismaili Muslim teachings on the absolute unity of God, quoting from the original teachings of the Shi‘a Ismaili Imams, hujjats and da‘is. **Alongside these Ismaili teachings, we provide corroborating comments from David Bentley Hart, a contemporary Orthodox Christian theologian, to show how this Ismaili theology is just as relevant for modern times as it was in the past.** The Ismaili Muslim teaching on God is a paradigmatic example of “classical theism” – the shared conception of God among classical Hindu, Greek, Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers, theologians and mystics through the ages. These include Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Shankara, Ramanuja, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn al-‘Arabi, Mullah Sadra, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, St. Nicolas of Cusa, St. Gregory of Palamas, St. Anselm, the Catholic Church doctrine, Paul Tillich, and other classical theists.

Shi‘a Ismaili Muslim Theology of Tawhid (Absolute Unity of God) – A Summary:

Here we encounter a second axiom of Ismailian Gnosis:

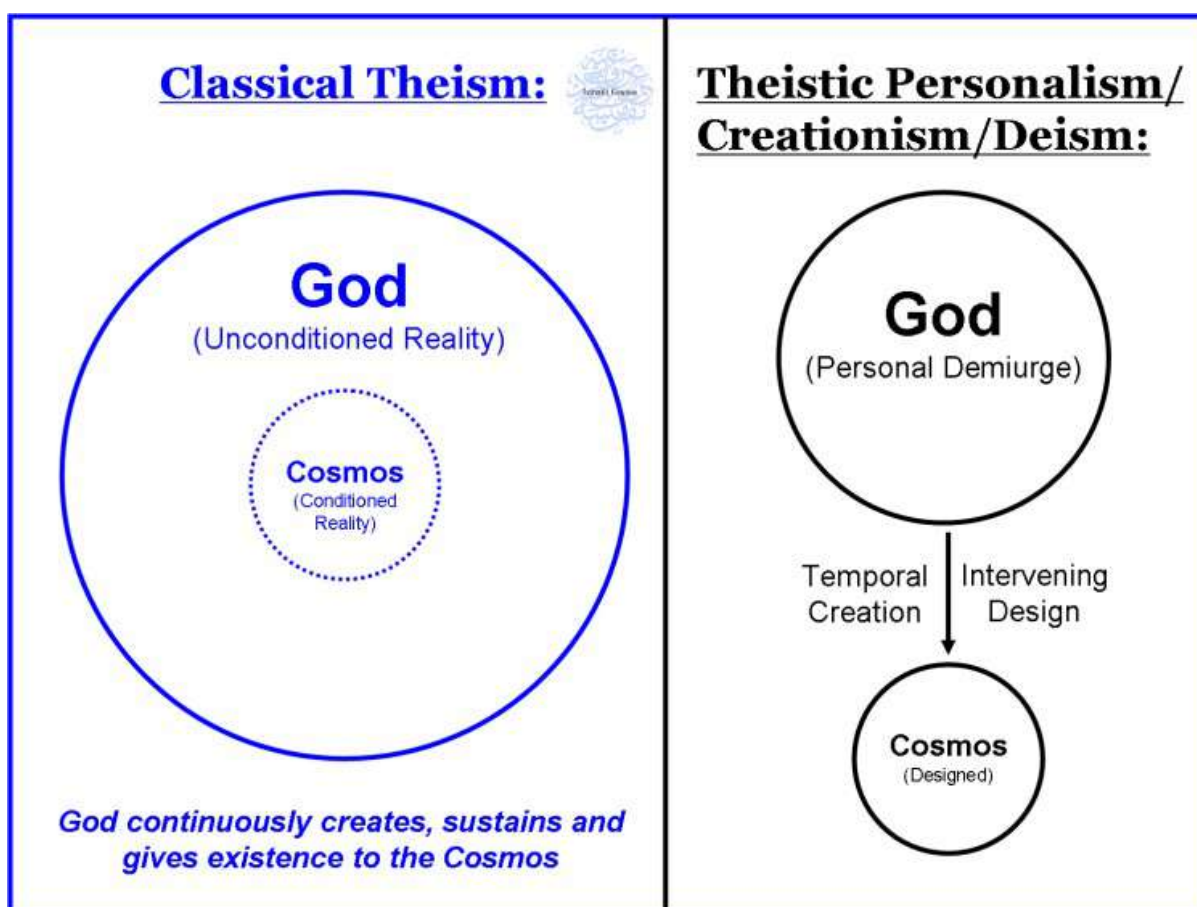
The supreme Godhead is unknowable, inaccessible, ineffable, unpredicable

— “that to which the boldest thought cannot attain.”

Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 85)

1. God is beyond all names and attributes (including every name and attribute mentioned in the Qur'an like the Powerful, the Living, the First, the Last, etc.); all the so-called Divine Names and Attributes are created (**1. Divine Simplicity: God Transcends All Names and Attributes**); (Click "Read Here" to see logical arguments and primary source quotes from the Ismaili Imams, hujjats and da'is for each point.)
2. God is beyond matter, energy, space, time and change (**2. God Transcends Matter, Space, Time, Motion, and Change**);
3. God is beyond all human conceptions in the imagination and intellect (**3. God Cannot Be Apprehended by the Senses, Imagination or Intellect**);
4. God is beyond both positive and negative qualities, i.e. He is not knowing and not not knowing; He is not powerful and not not powerful (**4. God Transcends Both Positive Attributes and Negative Attributes**);
5. God is beyond all philosophical and metaphysical categories: spiritual/material, cause/effect, eternal/temporal, substance/accident, essence/attributes, and existence/essence: God is above existence and non-existence (**5. God Transcends All Metaphysical and Logical Categories**);
6. When God is associated with a name or attribute in scripture, ritual or everyday speech, e.g. "God is knowing", the real meaning of this statement is that God is the source and originator of that power or quality, i.e. God is the originator of all knowledge but He Himself is beyond actually possessing knowledge as an attribute (**6. All Statements and Predications of God Must Be Understood Esoterically**);
7. God's Creative Act is called His Word or Command; this Command is a single, eternal, and continuous act which continually gives existence to and sustains all created or conditioned realities in every moment of their existence (**7. God's Creative Act is Eternal and Continuous Creation**).

At Issue: Classical Theism vs. Modern Theism



The most pervasive error one encounters in contemporary arguments about belief in God – especially, but not exclusively, on the atheist side – is the habit of conceiving of God simply as some very large object or agency within the universe, or perhaps alongside the universe, a being among other beings, who differs from all other beings in magnitude, power, and duration, but not ontologically, and who is related to the world more or less as a craftsman is related to an artifact.

David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 32)

Most modern theists – among Jews, protestant Christians, Muslims, analytical Christian philosophers (William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne), deists, new agers, and the like – conceive God as a personal, intelligent, omnipotent, omnipresent, all-good, all-loving, supreme and maximally perfect being. In other words, such people believe that God is a “person without a body”, a personal consciousness, who possesses a series of personal properties and attributes. Atheists cannot be blamed for rejecting this personalist theism, since it amounts to nothing more than anthropomorphism and metaphysical idolatry. As David Bentley Hart explains, the biggest problem in contemporary discussions on religion is that modern theists and atheists alike conceive of God in a wholly deficient way:

Many Anglophone theistic philosophers who deal with these issues today, however, reared as they have been in a post-Fregean intellectual environment,

have effectively broken with classical theistic tradition altogether, adopting a style of thinking that the Dominican philosopher Brian Davies calls theistic personalism. I prefer to call it **monopolytheism myself (or perhaps “monopoly-theism”)**, since it seems to me to involve a view of God not conspicuously different from the polytheistic picture of the gods as merely very powerful discrete entities who possess a variety of distinct attributes that lesser entities also possess, if in smaller measure; it differs from polytheism, as far as I can tell, solely in that it posits the **existence of only one such being**. It is a way of thinking that suggests that God, since he is only a particular instantiation of various concepts and properties, is logically dependent on some more comprehensive reality embracing both him and other beings.

David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 125)

Ismaili Muslim theology, as an apophatic form of classical theism, greatly differs from both modern Christian Anglo-American theism and the Sunni Ash‘ari-Maturidi doctrine in the following ways:

- **Ismailis and classical theists regard God as absolutely simple without any parts;** modern Christian theists (William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne) regard God as instantiating and possessing several different properties (personhood, omniscience, omnipotence, goodness, etc.) – thus making Him multiple and not absolutely one.

- **Ismailis and classical theists regard God as absolutely beyond time and space;** modern Christian theists (William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne) regard God as having direct relationships with temporal things, acting within time, and in some sense existing while subject to time.

- **Ismailis and classical theists regard God as absolutely beyond all names and attributes;**

Sunni Ash‘ari theologians believe that God’s Essence (*dhat*) is attached to seven eternal names (*asma’*), accidents (*‘arad*) or attributes (*sifat*) – Life, Knowledge, Power, Will, Eternity, Hearing, Seeing – while Sunni Hanbali theologians regard God as possessing 99 eternal Names;

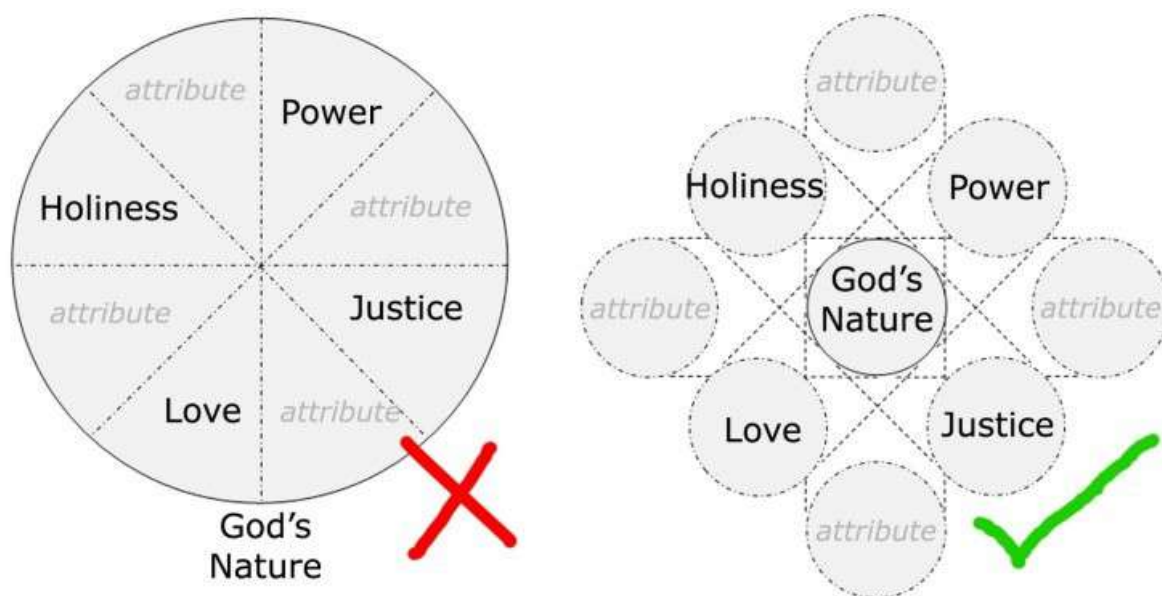
- **Ismailis hold that God is beyond both cause and effect;**

Modern Christian theists, classical Islamic philosophers and Sunni Ash‘ari theologians regard God as the first cause in the series of causes and effects, or view God as the cause of each and every single object and event (occasionalism).

- **Ismailis and classical theists exalted God beyond the class of existing things and beyond existence itself;**

modern Christian theists (William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne) regard God as the supreme existent among other existents and as the instantiation of several properties; Sunni Ash‘ari theologians regard God as the supreme being or existent.

1. Divine Simplicity: God Transcends All Names and Attributes



But any rational person knows that anyone who has ninety-nine names cannot be a single person, for each one of the ninety-nine must have its own essence.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw

We begin with a passage from the First Sermon of Imam ‘Ali’s sermons in the Nahj al-Balaghah which is also quoted in earlier Shi’a sources. In this sermon, Imam ‘Ali explains that the pure recognition of God, referring to Surat al-Ikhlās of the Qur’an, means negating all attributes from God. This is because every attribute is different from that to which it is attributed, so if God actually possesses attributes – like knowledge, power, life, mercy, wisdom, etc, – then that would make God composed of multiple things (His Essence + Attributes). This is because attributes are different from the essence to which they are attributed, i.e. a person is different from his power, his knowledge, or his compassion. Thus, if God has attributes, then He is made up of multiple parts and He is no longer absolutely one. Whatever has parts is *caused* by the confluence of those parts and cannot be God.

Foremost in religion is recognition (*ma’rifah*) of Him,
and the perfection of this recognition is affirmation (*tasdiq*) of Him,
and the perfection of this belief is affirming His absolute Oneness (*tawhid*),
and the perfection of this affirmation is pure sincerity (*ikhlas*) toward Him,
and the perfection of this purification is to negate all attributes from Him,
due to the testimony of every attribute that it is other than the attributed object,
and because of the testimony of every such object that it is other than the attribute.

So whoever ascribes an attribute to God has conjoined Him [to something],
and whoever so conjoins Him has made Him twofold,
and whoever makes Him twofold has fragmented Him,
and whoever thus fragments Him is ignorant of Him.

– Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib,

(Tr. William C. Chittick, *A Shi’ite Anthology* by Allamah Husayn Tabatabai)

Imam ‘Ali explains above that any God who has attributes is composed of multiple parts. But anything which is composed of parts is a created or conditioned reality because it depends on and is caused by those parts. Therefore, God must be utterly simple – He is necessarily without any parts and without any attributes: If God is to be understood as the unconditioned source of all things, rather than merely some very powerful but still ontologically dependent being, then any denial of divine simplicity is equivalent to a denial of God’s Reality. This is obvious if one remembers what the argument from creaturely contingency to divine necessity implies. To be the first cause of the whole universal chain of per se causality, God must be wholly unconditioned in every sense. **He cannot be composed of and so dependent upon severable constituents, physical or metaphysical, as then He would Himself be conditional.**

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 131)

All of this means that whatever *is* describable in names and attributes cannot be God. God transcends all descriptions, *even the meanings of the Divine Names mentioned in the Qur’an*, including the word “God” (Allah), as Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq explains:

The name of God is other than God, and everything that can be called by the name of a ‘thing’ (*shay’*) is created, except God. Therefore all that tongues express or is worked by hands is created. God is the goal of him who sets Him as his goal, but the determined goal (*al-mughayya*, i.e., in the mind of man) is other than the (real) goal. **The goal possesses attributes (*mawsuf*), and all that possesses attributes has been fashioned (*masnu’*). But the Fashioner (*sani’*) of things does not possess the attributes of any stated limit (*hadd musamma*).** He has not come into being that His Being (*kaynunah*) should be known through fashioning (*sun*) (carried out) by other than He. He does not terminate at a limit unless it be other than He. Whoso understands this principle (*hukm*) will never fall into error. It is the unadulterated profession of the Oneness of God (*al-tawhid al-khalis*), so believe in it, confirm it, and understand it well.

– Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq,

(Tr. William C. Chittick, *A Shi’ite Anthology* by Allamah Husayn Tabatabai)

On the basis of the teachings of Imam ‘Ali and Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq, Nasir-i Khusraw concludes that literally ascribing any names to God, including the famous 99 Names, amounts to polytheism:

They state that God has ninety-nine names, each of which has its distinct meaning. But any rational person knows that anyone who has ninety-nine names cannot be a single person, for each one of the ninety-nine must have its own essence. Polytheism, not monotheism, underlies this group’s teachings.

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Jami’ al-hikmatayn*, tr. Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Ormsby, 51)

2. God Transcends Matter, Space, Time, Motion, and Change:

He has not come into being that change or removal should be possible in Him. He is not affected in His Essence by recurrence of states, and aeons of nights and days differ not for Him. (It is He) who originated creation with no model (*mithal*) to copy or measure (*miqdar*) to imitate from a deity (*ma'bud*) who should have existed before Him. Attributes encompass Him not, lest He be defined by limits (*hudud*) (resulting) from their having attained Him. He – *like Him there is naught* (Qur'an 42:11) – never ceases to transcend the attributes of creatures.

– Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib,

(Tr. William C. Chittick, *A Shi'ite Anthology* by Allamah Husayn Tabatabai)

God cannot change over time, moreover, as He would then be dependent upon the relation between some unrealized potentiality within Himself and some fuller actuality somehow “beyond” Himself into which He may yet evolve; again, He would then be a conditional being. He also must possess no limitations of any kind, intrinsic or extrinsic, that would exclude anything real from Him...**The principle of divine simplicity, moreover, carries with it certain inevitable metaphysical implications. One is that God is eternal, not in the sense of possessing limitless duration but in the sense of transcending time altogether.** Time is the measure of finitude, of change, of the passage from potentiality to actuality...God is in some sense impassible: that is, being beyond change, He also cannot be affected — or, to be more precise, modified — by anything outside Himself. For one thing, as He is the infinite sustaining source of all things, nothing could be “outside” of Him in that sense to begin with.

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 135-136)

3. God Cannot Be Apprehended by the Senses, Imagination or Intellect:

God is completely different to whatever you imagine; He neither resembles anything nor can imagination [ever] attain Him, for how could imagination ever attain Him while He is totally different to what is bound by intellect and [also] different from what can be pictured in the imagination? He can be imagined only as an entity beyond reason and beyond [any] limitation.

– Imam Muhammad al-Baqir,

(Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought: The Teachings of Muhammad al-Baqir*, 94)

Whoso maintains that he knows God by means of a veil (*hijab*) or a form (*surah*) or a likeness (*mithal*) is an associator (*mushrik*), for the veil, the likeness and the form are other than He. He is utterly and only One. So how should he who maintains that he knows Him by means of other than Him be professing Unity? Surely He alone knows God who knows Him by means of God (*bi'llah*).

– Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Tr. William C. Chittick, *A Shi'ite Anthology* by Allamah Husayn Tabatabai)

4. God Transcends Both Positive Attributes and Negative Attributes:

The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was asked,
'Does the truth lie in anthropomorphism (*tashbih*) or in denial (*ta'til*) of attributes?'.
He replied, '[There is] a position between the two positions.'

Some philosophers negate all *positive* attributes from God, saying that He is not corporeal, not temporal, not knowing, not living, not powerful, not personal, not compassionate, etc. The first negation – of positive attributes – is necessary because any positive attribute makes God similar to His creatures and results in anthropomorphism (*tashbih*). But the negation of only positive attributes is not enough because this reduces God to an inert entity, like an inanimate object, or to non-existence – amounting to agnosticism (*ta'til*). The lack of an attribute is still a created conception, so positing that God is merely devoid of all positive attributes amounts to a form of subtle anthropomorphism (*tashbih*) where God is likened to His creation.

Whoever removes from his Creator descriptions, definitions and characteristics, falls into a hidden anthropomorphism (*tashbih*), just as one who describes Him and characterises Him falls into overt anthropomorphism (*tashbih*).

– Sayyidna Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, (*The Book of Keys*, tr. Faquir Hunzai, 69)

Therefore, as Sijistani and Nasir-i Khusraw explain, the proper affirmation of the absolute Oneness of God requires two negations: the negation of the positive attributes *and* the negation of the negative attributes. This dialect of *dual-negation* is the most appropriate use of human language when speaking of God. There does not exist a discourse of divine transcendence (*tanzih*) more brilliant and more noble than the one by which we establish the transcendence of our Originator (*mubdi'*) by using these words in which two negations—negation and a negation of negation—oppose each other.

– Sayyidna Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, (*The Book of Keys*, tr. Faquir Hunzai, 70)

It is wrong to describe God by such attributes as 'ignorance' and 'powerlessness' – not because they are unseemly but because they are attributes of creatures – as well as that it is also wrong to ascribe the opposites of such attributes, such as 'knowledge' and 'power', to Him on the grounds that these too are creaturely qualities. The so-called theologians of this community have plunged into a grievous error in their inquiry, in ascribing their own fine qualities to God and in declaring Him devoid of their bad qualities. And for this very reason, they have fallen into polytheism.

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Jami' al-hikmatayn*, tr. Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 55)

All human language is limited and whenever one makes an affirmation about God, one is placing limits upon Him. Similarly, whenever one negates something of God, one is still placing restrictions and limits upon Him. The only solution is to perform a dual-negation – first negate the positive attribute and then negate its opposite immediately after. This technique of double negation is also found in the mystical

thought of Shankara (called *neti neti*), Ibn al-'Arabi (called *tanzih*), and Meister Echart (called "*the negation of negation*").

This is why all the major theistic traditions insist at some point that our language about God consists mostly in conceptual restrictions and fruitful negations.

"Cataphatic" (or affirmative) theology must always be chastened and corrected by **"apophatic" (or negative) theology**. We cannot speak of God in His own nature directly, but only at best analogously, and even then only in such a way that the conceptual content of our analogies consists largely in our knowledge of all the things that God is not. **This is the *via negativa* of Christianity, the *lahoot salbi* (negative theology) of Islam, Hinduism's "*neti, neti*" ("not this, not this"). For those who take the extreme line in this regard, such as Moses Maimonides, anything said truly of the Divine Essence has only a negative meaning for us.** And for the contemplatives of various traditions, the negation of all those limited concepts that delude us that God is just another being among beings, within our intellectual grasp, is an indispensable discipline of the mind and will.

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 141)

5. God Transcends All Metaphysical and Logical Categories:

It is not befitting for God to be either the cause or the effect, and it therefore not appropriate to say that God is an existent...His Ipseity transcends existence [and] its opposite which is non-existence.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw

Even while negating all positive and negative qualities from God, some philosophers and theologians define God in terms of metaphysical and logical categories. Some people define God as the "first mover" (Aristotle) "first cause" (Al-Farabi), "universal substance" (Spinoza), "maximally great being" (Plantinga), "supreme being", or "necessary existent" (Ibn Sina). The problem with all of these definitions is that they place limitations on God and restrict him to the realm of created things:

- If God is the "first mover" (*al-mutaharrik al-awwal*), then He is essentially defined by His relation to and acting upon movable objects which He must move out of necessity.
- If God is the "first cause" (*al-'illat al-awwal*), then He must create an effect (His creation) by a necessity to produce effects that is externally imposed upon Him and this limits God. [Note: Ismailis used the term "cause" – 'illa or sabab – to refer to contingent beings that are directed to produce their effects; the preferred term to describe God in reference to His creative activity is "Causer" (mu'ill, 'all, musabbib) – He who bestows causal powers upon all causes and directs them to their effects.
- If God is the "universal substance" (*jawhar mutlaq*) then each and every genus and species is composed of God plus some other differentia where God is merely a finite bounded concept.

- If God is a “maximally great being” (*al-mawjud al-‘azm*) it means God is nothing more than a combination of “maximally great properties.” It also means that God belongs to the same level or class of existence as other beings – like trees, cats, or ants – and only differs from these in degree, but not ontologically.
- If God is the “necessary existent” (*wajib al-wujud*) it means that God is composed of “existence” plus the attribute of “necessity” and this would make God a composite being and therefore a conditioned or created reality.

The categories of cause and effect, property and being in possession of property, definition and being defined, attribute and attributed, cannot neither be attributed to Him nor denied to Him, nor have any likeness to Him.

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, *Shish Fasl or Six Chapters*, tr. Ivanow, 31)

It is not befitting for God to be either the cause or the effect, and it therefore not appropriate to say that God is an existent. It should be known that the Absolute Existence (*hast-i mutlaq*) is originated by Him, and His ipseity transcends existence [and] its opposite which is non-existence.

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Knowledge and Liberation*, tr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, 42)

To say and affirm that “God exists” means that God is a “something” that happens “to exist” – where “God” and “existence” are two distinct concepts fused together. “God exists” means that this existent God is composed of both essence and existence. But whatever is composed of parts, even metaphysical parts like essence and existence, is caused by those parts and cannot be unconditioned and absolute. Therefore, one cannot literally affirm that “God exists” if it means “God is an existent” or “God is a being”; as Nasir-i Khusraw says above, God is above and beyond existence and non-existence.

One of the more provocatively counter-intuitive ways of expressing the difference between God and every contingent reality is to say that **God, as the source of all being, is, properly speaking, not Himself a being — or, if one prefer, not a being among other beings...**The precise sense in which God is not a being, or indeed the sense in which He could even be said not to “exist,” is as some discrete object, essentially distinct from all others, “standing forth” (which is what “exist” means, etymologically speaking) from being as such. A being of that kind — one to which the indefinite article properly attaches — possesses a certain determinate number of attributes, a certain quantity of potentialities, a certain degree of actuality, and so on, and is at once both intrinsically composite and extrinsically enumerable: that is, every particular being is made up of a collection of parts and is also itself a discrete item within the sum total of existing things. All of this is precisely what classical metaphysical theism says God is not. He is instead the infinite to which nothing can add and from which nothing can subtract, and He Himself is not some object in addition to other objects. He is the source and fullness of all being, the actuality in which all finite things live, move, and have their being, or in which all things hold together; and so He is also the reality that is present in all things as the very act of their existence. God, in short, is not a being but is at once “beyond

being” (in the sense that he transcends the totality of existing things) and also absolute “Being itself” (in the sense that he is the source and ground of all things).

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 107-108)

6. All Statements and Predications of God Must Be Understood Esoterically:



The Name “Allah” encircled by the 99 Names. Image Courtesy IsmailiMail

Verily, my Lord is subtle in subtlety (*latif al-latafah*),
but He is not described by subtleness (*lutf*);
He is tremendous in tremendousness (*‘azim al-‘azamah*),
but not described by tremendousness (*‘izam*);
He is grand in grandeur (*kabir al-kibriya’*),
but not described by grandness (*kibr*);
and He is majestic in majesty (*jalil al-jalalah*),
but not described by greatness (*ghilaz*).

Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib,

(tr. William C. Chittick, *A Shi’ite Anthology* by Allamah Tabatabai)

At this point, a person may say that the various scriptures like the Bible and Qur’an speak of God in many ways and describe Him with names and attributes. Even if one interprets specific verses allegorically, the scriptures still describe God as the Good, the Wise, the Loving, the Merciful, Knowing, the Eternal, the Powerful, the Living, the One, the Truth, and philosophers speak of God as “existing” or as the “Necessary of Existence.” The only logical solution is to interpret ALL statements about God found in the scriptures, rituals, poetry, and all human discourse in an

esoteric, symbolic and philosophical manner. This means interpreting every “God is X” statement in the following way:

- “*God is Merciful*” means God is the source, ground and originator of the mercy of all the merciful ones, yet He is not described by mercy.
 - “*God is Powerful*” means God is the source, ground and originator of the power of all those who have power, yet He is not described by power.
 - “*God is Knowing*” means God is the source, ground and originator of the knowledge of all possessors of knowledge, yet He is not described by knowledge.
- He is ‘existent’ in the [only] sense that He *existentialises* every existence, He is ‘Necessary of Existence’ [only] in the sense that He *necessitates* every existent, **He is ‘Knowing’ [only] in the sense that He *causes whatever is knowing to know*, and He is ‘Powerful’ [only] in the sense that He *empowers whatever is powerful*...** The application of ‘Unity’ and ‘the One’ to Him (Exalted is He!) and to other than Him is by way of pure equivocity. And likewise is ‘the truth’ and ‘the good’ for He is Truth [only] in the sense that He *makes the truth true* and He *makes the false false*, and He is Necessary in His existence [only] in the sense that He *necessitates* the existence of other than Him, and annihilates, and He is living [only] in the sense that He *gives life* and death.

– Sayyidna ‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, (*Struggling with the Philosopher*, tr. T. Mayer & W. Madelung, 43-48)

When we speak of the goodness or wisdom of God, for instance, we cannot imagine that He is good or wise in the same manner as a finite person, who naturally possesses such attributes in an inconstant and imperfect way; in fact, according to most traditional schools, we really should not think of God as having plural attributes at all, but should rather **think of words like “goodness” and “wisdom,” when applied to God, only as appropriate ways of naming the single undifferentiated divine reality upon which goodness and wisdom in us are dependent.**

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 107-108)

7. God’s Creative Act is Eternal and Continuous Creation:

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

The Creative Act of God is not like a human act of designing, constructing or making something. The word “creation” in classical theology means that God – Unconditioned Reality – bestows being (*wujud*) upon all conditioned realities. *In other words, something being “created” means that it depends upon God for its existence at any given moment.* Since God is eternal and beyond change, it necessarily follows that God’s creative act is also eternal and not in time – otherwise this would entail a real change in God; furthermore, from God there

only proceeds a single act. If multiple acts proceed from God, this would entail multiple modalities or aspects in God's Essence – rendering Him composite and conditioned. **But since God is absolutely simple, His act of bestowing existence – which we call “creation” – is single and eternal.** The Qur'an refers to God's creative act as the Word (*kalimah*) and Command (*amr*) of God and says “*Our Command is but one, like the twinkling of an eye*” (Holy Qur'an 54:50). In their explanation of the meaning of creation, the contemporary Ismaili Imams have explained how God sustains all created beings by His Command – which, in laymen terms, can be called “His Will” or “His Thought”:

Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: “*Allahu-Akbar*”. What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul... **The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His Will and His Thought. Outside His Will, outside His Thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time.** Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine Will.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, Chapter – Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors)

The Command of God is manifested by the different qualities, attributes and powers within the Cosmos. When people describe God using a name or attribute, it is really in reference to a specific feature of created beings that reveals God's Command. For example, one considers the finite existence of created beings, God's Command is described as “creation.” When one considers the certain features in the Cosmos like life, power, or knowledge, God's act is described accordingly. Yet, it is one Command with multiple manifestations. Everything in existence, every created being, is a limited manifestation of God's Command.

The fact that in relation to Him people speak of Necessity, Unity, Simplicity, Will, Knowledge and Power, and likewise of [His] other attributes, is all because His exalted Command is one pure light, one uncontaminated emanation, one bounty and one generosity...the fact that Necessity, Unity, Existence, Simplicity, Will, Knowledge, Power and other attributes are manifested differently, although in essence all are one, follows necessarily because the one making the description is a human being whose descriptions accord with created things.

– Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, 19-20)

If God is the infinite and unconditioned source of all things, then His creative intention — whether He creates only one world, or many, or infinitely many — can be understood as an Eternal Act that involves no temporal change within Him...And

His timeless donation of being to creatures need not be conceived as involving a mechanistic determinism but can be thought of as the creation of a contingent reality containing truly free secondary causes (creation from nothingness, after all, is not a kind of causation like any of which we are capable)...**God's knowledge of something created is not something separate from His Eternal Act of creating that thing**; so He is not modified by that knowledge in the way that we are necessarily modified when we encounter things outside ourselves.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 136)

Conclusion: Worshipping God through the Intellect

None of the adherents of the other sects, nor any of their leaders, except the Instructor (Imam) of this group [the Ismailis], has been able to go to the extend of unveiling this secret.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi

At the level of human rational thought, *tawhid* means exalting God above all names, attributes, descriptions, and concepts. But whatever can be said about *tawhid* is in the form of human language and still cannot capture the fullness of *tawhid*. Human discourse is the product of the human mind, which is created by God and therefore cannot encompass Him, as Nasir-i Khusraw reminds us:

We are saying all this metaphorically, not discussing the reality (*ḥaqīqat*) because human rational discourse (*nuṭq*) cannot deal with matters concerned with *tawḥīd* – it cannot deal with them directly. Discourse is powerless, unable to penetrate the true realities and understanding of His Ipseity. This is because, as we have already said, speech and the speaker are both below the Intellect, and therefore they cannot define anything except what is also under it.

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Six Chapters or Shish Fasl*, tr. W. Ivanow, 33)

The full recognition of *tawhid*, in a mode beyond human rational discourse, is a spiritual and mystical realization in the human soul and intellect called *ma'rifah*. In the Ismaili *tariqah* of Islam, the *ma'rifah* of the *tawhid* of God is attained through the Imam of the Time. The famous Muslim philosopher, theologian, and astronomer, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, found that the Ismaili concept of *tawhid* stood out among all other Muslim schools and branches as the foremost expression of the transcendent oneness of God. This is due to the presence of the living Imams who guide the Ismaili Muslims toward the proper understanding of *tawhid*:

He is beyond any attribute by which something could be qualified, whether it be non-existent or existent, negative or positive, relative or absolute, verbal or in meaning. He is beyond all this, and also beyond the beyond and so forth. **There is no doubt that no one maintains such pure unity (*tawhid-i sirf*) except the Ta'limiyan (the Ismaili Muslims); and none of the adherents of the other sects, nor any of their leaders, except the Instructor (Imam) of this group [the Ismailis], has been able to go to the extend of unveiling this secret.** This is because others talk

about possibilities, whereas he speaks from the position of “*I recognize You through You, and You are my Guide to Yourself.*”

– Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, (*Contemplation and Action*, tr. S.J. Badakhshani, 37-38)

The perfect soul of the Imam of the Time always experiences the fullness of the *maʿrifah* of God and his murids reach that recognition through the recognition (*maʿrifah*) of the Imam. This is the essential role of the Imam of the time and embodied in the Ismaili Muslim daily prayer called *Duʿaʿ*. The Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah also alluded to this when he said that the “*real miracle of Hazrat Ali is that he brought people to the Truth.*” This is why one of the Ismaili Imams has said:

Everyone must know God through knowing me, since a person becomes a knower (*ʿārif*) through my knowledge and becomes a unifier (*muwaḥḥid*) through my *tawḥīd*. Then the reality of *maʿrifat*, union (*ittiḥād*), and unity (*waḥdat*) comes completely into existence, and the reality of worship becomes evident.

– Imam Hasan ʿala-dhikrihi al-salām,

(Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, tr. S.J. Badakhshani, *Contemplation and Action*, 44)

The human soul who realizes *tawḥīdat* both the rational and the spiritual level is then able to worship God through an intellectual or gnostic worship (*al-ʿibadat al-ʿilmiyyah*) in which human beings find ultimate awe and felicity:



All scripture has a double meaning – an exoteric and an esoteric.

In the sphere of the former, worship is literal and symbolic.

An Ismaili however is privy to a hidden, esoteric truth in addition.

As he worships with exoteric symbols

and formulae in conformity with Islamic law,

he takes cognizance of the True Deity –

the remote, awesome, unknowable, ineffable, Neoplatonic One,

stripped, both physically and spiritually,

of all attributes and of all description and limit.

This is, for them, the real God behind the symbols and beyond all illusions.

– Paul Walker, (*An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable Neoplatonic God*, Ilm Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 1)

Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil

The discourse of the Qur'an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

You see, my mission is situated on three levels. Firstly, religious: it concerns a symbolic exegesis of the Qur'an...Our religion is esoteric, you understand. It is a perpetual initiation.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

The global Muslim population of some 1.6 billion people revere the words of the Qur'an as God's revelation to humankind. When the Prophet Muhammad was alive and guiding his community, he alone was the interpreter and teacher of the Qur'an, which did not yet exist as a text. The Qur'an is primarily a recitation (as the word *qur'an* means) and it was recited by the Prophet Muhammad to his community of believers as and when he saw fit in response to specific situations and events. When the Prophet was alive as the divinely-authorized guide there was no official "text" or "scripture" of the Qur'an (like today) that people had their own copies of. There was no special class of '*ulama*' or clerics who interpreted the Qur'an in vastly divergent ways based on their own opinions and scholarly learning. Given the prevalence and popularity of overly literal and outward interpretations of the Qur'an in today's climate, **the present article offers ten arguments demonstrating that the Qur'an contains esoteric (*batini*) meanings and requires an esoteric interpretation – called *ta'wil*.** This is followed by a discussion about the legitimate sources of the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'an and then an overview of the method and framework of *ta'wil* in the Shi'a Ismaili tradition of Islam.

A. Introduction: The Prophet Muhammad – The Living Speaking Qur'an

B. Ten Arguments for the Necessity of the Esoteric Interpretation (Ta'wil) of the Qur'an

C. The Legitimate Sources of Esoteric Interpretation (Ta'wil):

D. Ismaili Ta'wil in History and Practice

E. Ismaili Ta'wil in the Present Day

A. Introduction: The Prophet Muhammad – The Living Speaking Qur'an

The Prophet Muhammad himself was the "speaking Qur'an" and the ultimate authority over the meaning and practical application of whatever he recited as qur'an (recitation) was always in his hands. When the Prophet lived, the Qur'an was not a "read text"; it was a prophetic "recitation" only directly accessible through Muhammad. This is why the Qur'an itself (verses 2:151, also 62:2, 3:164),

when seen as a witness to history, declares that Prophet Muhammad “recites to you Our Signs, purifies you (*yuzakkikum*), teaches you (*yu'allimukum*) the Book (*al-kitab*) and Wisdom (*al-hikmah*), and teaches you that which you do not know.”

Explication of the divine intention of the revelation was among the functions that the Qur'an assigned to the Prophet. The Prophet functioned as the projection of the divine message embodied in the Qur'an. He was the living commentary of the Qur'an, inextricably related to the revelatory text. Without the Prophet the Qur'an was incomprehensible, just as without the Qur'an the Prophet was no prophet at all.

Abdul Aziz Sachedina, (“Scriptural Reasoning in Islam”, *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 5/1 (2005); cited in Adis Duderija, The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur'anic Assumptions in the Development of a Values Based and Purpose Oriented Qur'an Sunna Hermeneutic)

There is little evidence that the Prophet intended for the Qur'an to become a canonized text with multiple copies distributed among his community so they could interpret the Qur'anic text for themselves. In fact, the Qur'an [17:106] says that the Prophet recited only portions of the Qur'an to people at specific times with God's permission and sanction. This is what Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, the eleventh century Ismaili Muslim philosopher, explains below:

If they reply that the Book of God, may He be exalted, guides the people, we would tell them that the Book cannot speak without a speaker. If they claim that the Book is sufficient without an expounder, they belie the speech of God, may He be exalted, Who says: “We have sent down to you [O Muhammad!] the Remembrance (the Qur'an), so that you may explain clearly to people whatever We have sent down for them – perhaps they may reflect upon it” (16:44). Thus, we say that God commanded people to reflect so that they would know that just as the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the expounder of the Book in his time, in the same way, there has to be an expounder of the Book today. Further, God, may He be exalted, commanded the Prophet to recite the Book to the people at intervals, that is, according to the time, and *not* to give the Book to them so that they may read it. He has said: “And a Qur'an, which We have divided (into parts) in order that you may recite it to people at intervals” (17:106).

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*The Face of Religion*, Discourse 2)

The third Caliph, Uthman, published an official copy of the Qur'an based on the variant versions circulating among some of the companions. However, two prominent scribes of the Qur'an whom the Prophet Muhammad had trusted – Ibn Ma'sud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b – opposed Uthman's codification project. Ever since, Muslims have disagreed over the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'an in numerous respects. The most popular genre of Qur'an commentary is called *tafsir* which consists of legal, ethical, historical, contextual and religious explanations of the outward and literal meanings of the Qur'an. One area of disagreement for Muslim interpreters and exegetes of the Qur'an is whether the Qur'an has an esoteric, hidden or spiritual meaning that goes beyond the literal

and surface meaning of the Arabic words. In pre-modern times, most Qur'anic exegetes from the Mu'tazilis, Ash'aris, Twelver Shi'as, Sufis, Philosophers and Isma'ili Shi'as maintained that the Qur'an does indeed have hidden (*batini*) spiritual meanings and esoteric interpretations (*ta'wil*). Only the literalists and the Hanbalis disagreed with this. **Today, however, many interpretations of the Qur'an, including those of the fundamentalists, literalists and even mainstream translations are impoverished because they remain at the literal and surface meaning of the Qur'an.** Such a state of affairs was predicted by the Prophet Muhammad himself when he said:

There will come a time for my people when there will remain nothing of the Qur'an except its outward form and nothing of Islam except its name and they will call themselves by this name even though they are the people furthest from it. Their mosques will be full of people but they will be empty of right guidance.

Prophet Muhammad

(Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam, 168)

This article offers a series of ten arguments to demonstrate that the Qur'an, by its own admission, must have hidden, spiritual and inward meanings disclosed by esoteric interpretation or *ta'wil* in order to be coherent from a rational and logical point of view.

B. Ten Arguments for the Necessity of the Esoteric Interpretation (*Ta'wil*) of the Qur'an

1. The Qur'an confirms that it has an esoteric and spiritual interpretation called "ta'wil":

It is He who has sent down to you [O' Muhammad] the Book; in it are clear (*muhkam*) verses – they are the mother of the Book. And others are ambiguous (*mutashabihat*). As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow what is ambiguous from it, seeking discord and seeking its *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation). But no one knows its *ta'wil* except God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*), saying (*yaquluna*): 'We believe in it. All is from our Lord.' And no one will be reminded except the possessors of inner understanding (*ulu'l-albab*).

– Holy Qur'an 3:7

Muslims have read the above verse in two different ways:

1) In one reading, the last part reads as: **"No one knows its *ta'wil* except God [full stop]. And those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, all is from our Lord."** The first reading ends the sentence after "except God" and then begins a new sentence. This reading means that the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an is known by God alone and no one else – was historically favoured by a minority of Muslims known as the literalists but seems to be common in modern English translations.

2) In another equally valid reading, the last part says: **“No one knows it’s *ta’wil* except God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge, saying: We believe in it, all is from our Lord.”** The second reading, according to which the *ta’wil* of the Qur’an is known both by God and a group of people called “the firmly rooted in knowledge” (*rasikhun fi’l-‘ilm*) is followed by numerous groups of Muslims among the Sunni and the Shi’a – the theologians (*mutakallimun*), the Philosophers (*falasifah*), the Sufis, the Twelver Shi’a, and the Ismaili Shi’a. This second reading is supported by and consistent with the rules of Arabic grammar in which the second verb (*yaquluna* = “they say, they are saying”) describes the state (*hal*) of the subject as follows: **“No one knows its *ta’wil* except those firmly rooted in knowledge (*rasikhun fi’l-‘ilm*) saying (*yaquluna*): We believe in it. All is from our Lord.”** This is similar to other Arabic phrases like *la ya’tika ‘Abdullahi wa-zaydun yaqulu: ana masrurun bi-ziyaratika* = “Nobody comes except ‘Abdullah and Zayd saying: I am happy visiting you.”

The first reading, which restricts the knowledge of *ta’wil* to God alone, contradicts other parts of the Qur’an and leads to logical absurdities. The second reading, which implies that the *ta’wil* of the Qur’an is known by God and those firmly rooted in knowledge, is logically supported by other verses of the Qur’an that clearly say certain people know the *ta’wil* of the Qur’an in addition to God Himself:

- The Prophet’s role was to teach, instruct, explain and clarify the Qur’an to the believers and doing so would require him to know the *ta’wil* of what the Qur’an says. The term “wisdom” (*hikmah*) below also refers to the inward meaning of the Qur’an contained in the *ta’wil*:

Certainly did God confer a great favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting His Signs, and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error.

– Holy Qur’an 3:164 (see also 62:2, 2:129, 2:151)

And We have sent down unto you (also) the Reminder; that you may explain clearly (*li-tubayyina*) to mankind what was sent down for them, and that they reflect.

– Holy Qur’an 16:44 (see also 16:64, 14:4)

- The believers are told to refer any questions and disagreements to God and His Messenger in order to obtain the *ta’wil*:

And if you disagree over anything, then refer it to God and the Messenger if you should believe in God and the Last Day. That is best and most beautiful for *ta’wil*.

– Holy Qur’an 4:59

- On the Day of Judgment, the *ta’wil* of all of God’s messages revealed through the Prophets will be shown to the people, including disbelievers, and they will all recognize this *ta’wil* and realize the inner truth of God’s revelations:

Do they await anything except for its *ta’wil*? The Day its *ta’wil* comes those who had ignored it before will say: “The Messengers of our Lord had come with the

truth (*bi'l-haqq*), so are there now any intercessors to intercede for us or could we be sent back to do other than what we used to do?" They will have lost themselves, and lost from them is what they used to invent.

– Holy Qur'an 7:53

✓ God taught Hazrat Yusuf (Joseph) the *ta'wil* of dreams and visions, experienced by himself and others:

And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the *ta'wil* of narratives and complete His favour upon you and upon the family of Jacob, as He completed it upon your fathers, Ibrahim and Ishaq. Indeed your Lord is Knowing and Wise.

– Holy Qur'an 12:6

And thus, We established Yusuf in the land that We might teach him the *ta'wil* of events.

– Holy Qur'an 12:21

My Lord, You have given me [something] of sovereignty and taught me of the *ta'wil* of dreams.

– Holy Qur'an 12:101

✓ Hazrat Khidr performed a number of ambiguous actions before Prophet Moses – actions which have *ta'wil* (esoteric meaning) which Khidr explained to Moses before they parted:

[Al-Khidr] said, "This is parting between me and you. I will inform you of the *ta'wil* of that about which you could not have patience... And I did it not of my own accord. That is the *ta'wil* of that about which you could not have patience.

– Holy Qur'an 18:78-82

All of the above verses testify that the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an exists and Prophets and servants of God in the past were aware of the *ta'wil* – including the Prophet Yusuf, Hazrat Khidr, and Prophet Muhammad – and that in the present time, a special group called *rasikhun fi'l-'ilm* are the possessors of the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an.

2. The Qur'an describes itself as signs (*ayat*), parables or symbols (*amthal*) and every sign (*ayah*) or symbol (*mathal*), by definition, represents a symbolized meaning (*mamthul*) – this being known as *ta'wil*.

God guides to His Light whom He wills and God sets forth parables (*amthal*) for mankind.

– Holy Qur'an 24:35

Verily, We have struck for humankind in this Qur'an every kind of parable (*mathal*).

– Holy Qur'an 30:58

And those parables (*amthal*) We strike for humankind so that they may reflect.

– Holy Qur'an 59:21

Similitudes (*amthal*) require the things that are represented by them and the things that are represented are designated by esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*). Thus, for what the Messenger brought and summoned to in the revelation and law, there is an esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*). Hence, the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) is necessary.

3. The Qur'an and other revelations of God first exist as an immaterial Spirit or Light before the Prophet expresses them into human language. Esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) is the only means for human intellects to "return" to the spiritual reality of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an clearly says that it originally exists in the heart and soul of the Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Holy Spirit:

And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit (*ruh*) from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*kitab*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path."

– Holy Qur'an 42:52)

To understand "*kitab*" on the level of Book or Scripture is to distort and seriously reduce its potential meaning as used in the Qur'an. It is to impair the transparent quality of the word *kitab*. According to the Qur'an, neither Muhammad nor any of the preceding prophets was preoccupied with Scripture, something that is written and read;

There is a meaning to "*kitab*" which is prior to the idea of Scripture...If by "*kitab*" the Qur'an means the dynamic word of God – the old Semitic notion of Word – we can better understand why there was no Qur'an (a compiled book) as we presently know it upon the death of the Prophet.

(J.W. Fiegenbaum, Prophethood from the perspective of the Qur'an, PhD Dissertation 1973, McGill University, 153; 184-85)

The process of returning to the original spiritual and luminous reality of the Qur'an is called esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) since the very word "*ta'wil*" comes from the word *awwal*, meaning "first" or "origin." Thus Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw says:

To engage in *ta'wil* means to bring the word back to its point of origin.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (Between Reason and Revelation, 112).

4. The literal meaning of numerous Qur'anic verses actually contradicts human reason and this implies that these verses require an esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) to be in accordance with the intellect.

The Qur'an mentions the verb '*aqala* (to intellect, to reason) nearly 50 times, telling people to reflect, intellect, and rationally engage with its verses – this means that the Qur'an's true meaning must always be consistent with reason and intellect. But numerous verses have a literal or outward meaning that is contrary to reason. These include verses that speak of humans existing and swearing oaths in the form of atoms (7:172); inanimate objects like heaven and earth listening and speaking to God (41:11); human beings or Adam created from moulded clay (38:71-72); the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days (7:54, 10:3, 11:7, and 25:59), etc. Such contradictory statements in the Qur'an can only be resolved if there exists an inner meaning or *ta'wil* of these verses. For example, the verse

41:11 states: “Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said unto it and unto the earth: Come both of you, willingly or noth. They said: We come, obedient.” Sayyidna Kirmani concludes from this that:

God is All-knowing and All-wise, and the heaven and the earth are inanimate, lacking a mind and having no tool for speech. Hence, in view of the absurdity of any wise person addressing the inanimate, it is necessary that there is, to His commanding the heavens and the earth and their answering Him, a meaning that makes the statement of God true and which is rationally acceptable as wisdom. That meaning is what we call the esoteric interpretation. Hence, the esoteric interpretation is necessary.

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, (Master of the Age, tr. Paul Walker, 65)

5. The Qur’an contains verses with words and expressions such that a deeper esoteric meaning (*ta’wil*) is required for the message in the verse to be true.

For example, the Qur’an literally says that God removes the “stain of Satan” from human beings and reassures their hearts by making human beings drowsy and pouring rainwater from the skies upon them:

When He overwhelmed you with drowsiness [giving] security from Him and sent down upon you from the sky, rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil of Satan and to make steadfast your hearts and plant firmly thereby your feet.

– Holy Qur’an 8:11

Sayyidna Kirmani explains that the only way this sort of Qur’an verse makes sense rationally is when terms like “drowsiness”, “rainwater”, and “stain of Satan” have an esoteric interpretation (*ta’wil*) different from the literal surface meaning:

Given that the defilement of Satan is in hearts and minds, it cannot be supposed that water, which comes down from the sky and is felt and drunk, can purify them, because it is impossible that the matter is like this. And if the water that is mentioned here is natural water, everyone becomes pure, both the believer and the unbeliever. Hence, it is necessary that for this water there is a meaning which, if not for it, an absurdity would have come from God in His saying something that is contrary to it. That meaning we call an esoteric interpretation (*ta’wil*), an explanation, elucidation and an inner sense.

Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, (Master of the Age, tr. Paul Walker, 65)

6. The Qur’an’s many verses that speak of God having anthropomorphic qualities (Face, Hands, Eyes, Side) must have an hidden meaning and esoteric interpretation – otherwise God actually resembles human beings.

The Qur’an literally says that God has a Face (*wajh*) which endures forever and is in every direction one turns (55:27, 2:215, 76:9, 2:272, 30:39); He has Hands (*yad; ayd*) that possess the dominion of all things and are the source of mercy and bounty (48:10, 67:1, 36:83, 4:64); He has Eyes (*‘ayn; ‘uyun*) under which Noah built the Ark and Moses was raised (11:37, 20:39, 23:27); He has a Side (*janb*) which some souls have neglected (39:56). The Qur’an further states that God comes with

His angels in rows (89:22) and also comes with His angels within a canopy of clouds (2:210) on the Day of Judgment. Since God is not a physical human being and the Creator cannot possess the qualities, features or attributes of His creatures, it follows that all anthropomorphic descriptions of God found in the Qur'an must necessarily possess a hidden meaning beyond the literal meaning of these words. For example, the Qur'an says:

And to God belongs the East and the West. So whatever direction you turn there is the Face of God (*wajh Allah*). Indeed God is the Encompassing, the Knowing.

– Holy Qur'an 2:115

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw explains how the literal interpretation of the above verse is utterly incoherent because it implies that God's face is a physical container of vast space surrounding the Universe. Those who uphold the literal meaning of this and similar verses are in violation of the absolute unity of God and guilty of anthropomorphism:

To take the exoteric (*zahir*) interpretation of this verse, this world must be within God's face, and that is vaster than the heavens, which form the uppermost sphere, and the entirety of the world is within His vast space; this must be God's face, such that whichever way we turn our faces, the face of God must be there... Like the literalists, they profess adherence to the outer sense of the Book, for there is no *ta'wil* of the Book in their doctrine. Therefore, according to what they do teach, God possesses a right hand and a left hand, a face, an eye, and a side. And God moves from one place to another, as He says, 'And your Lord and the angels come rank on rank.' Nevertheless, these are all attributes proper to created beings. But this verse makes them not proclaimers of God's oneness but rather, anthropomorphists.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby, 48-50)

7. Esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) is the only way to prevent some parts of the Qur'an from directly contradicting other parts, particularly concerning the absolute transcendence of God beyond the attributes of His creatures.

The Qur'an states clearly that God does not resemble anything at all among His creatures (42:11, 112:1). But numerous verses in the Qur'an, when interpreted in their outward meanings, ascribe qualities to God that are shared by His creatures, such as life, knowledge, power, anger, pleasure, wisdom, vengeance, plotting, etc. When interpreted conventionally these verses all contradict the absolute oneness of God. Thus, the only way to avoid this contradiction is if all the verses which describe God with creaturely qualities have a hidden meaning or *ta'wil* beyond their literal meaning. (Those interested can read about the esoteric meaning or *ta'wil* of the Qur'an's discourse about God's Names and Attributes in [this article](#)). Only through esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) can the differences of opinion as well as the ambiguities which are in the Book be reconciled. Certainly it is true that the outer form of the words may vary and yet, it is not true that God's word can ever

be contradictory, such that in one place it is said that apart from God nothing is, that is to say, *“There is nothing like Him”*, and in another place He says, *‘I am the speaker who says, “Say, ‘He is God, One.’”* You too say these words since, like me, you too are a ‘speaker’, you are ‘seeing and hearing’, and I too am ‘speaking and hearing’. Elsewhere He says, *“God is the creator of everything (13:16).”* In still another place He says, *“Blessed be God, the fairest of creators (23:14).”* And elsewhere, *“It is God who has created you and then given you sustenance (30:40).”* In still another place He says, *“God is the best of providers (62:11).”* He also says that the unbelievers mock the believers; God too mocks the unbelievers, as in this verse: *“and deride them – God derides them, and they will have a painful torment (9:79).”* He says too of Pharaoh and his people, *“When they had angered Us, We took vengeance on them and drowned them all (43:55).”* So, when one man angers another, seized by fury he strikes or murders or insults him. If a group so angers God that He avenges Himself by drowning them, what greater resemblance could there be between the Creator and the creature than this?

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (Between Reason and Revelation, tr. Eric Ormsby, 64)

If we were to add up such passages which appear to impair the oneness of God, the book would grow long. Those we have mentioned may serve as guidance to the intelligent in the quest for esoteric interpretation (*ta’wil*) so that their doubts may be removed thereby.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (Between Reason and Revelation, tr. Eric Ormsby, 64)

8. The ritual practices commanded in the Qur’an – such as prayer gestures (bowing, prostrating, standing), ablutions, and pilgrimage rites – have no meaning or significance in and of themselves and are therefore symbols representing an esoteric meaning (*ta’wil*).

One finds in the outward sense that the Prophet summoned to God and to the worship of Him by certain acts that, if a man were not to perform them in the place he was commanded to do, it would be said that he is mad, playing the jester, or forgetful. Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka’bah to the Living Imam and its wondrous rites are an example. The external features of these acts, such as addressing the stone, running on the tips of the feet, which is to advance in haste, holding off trimming the nails, cutting the hair of the head and the throwing of pebbles, are not associated with wisdom. Thus, for the Prophet to be summoning by means of wisdom, requires that that to which he summons by these actions has Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka’bah to the Living Imam that is consistent with wisdom and by the understanding.

Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, (Master of the Age, tr. Paul Walker, 64)

9. The Qur'anic descriptions of the Hereafter (Afterlife), consisting of sensual imagery, must be symbols for an esoteric meaning (*ta'wil*) since the Hereafter is wholly different from the physical world.

In Paradise there are gardens (9:72), rivers (2:25), thrones (52:20), cups, carpets, cushions (88:10-16), etc. In Hell there are chains, shackles, fire (76:4), fuel (2:24), stones (66:6), and scalding water (22:19). But the Prophet Muhammad has said in numerous tradition about the hereafter and the afterlife that:

There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.

Prophet Muhammad,
(Sahih Bukhari, Book 20, Hadith 1891)

Therefore, Paradise and Hell must be completely different from the physical world and these sensual expressions and images found in the Qur'an are allusions to and representations of spiritual meanings. These spiritual meanings signified by the sensual descriptions of Paradise and Hell are among the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'an.

10. According to the Qur'an, God is both the outward (*al-zahir*) and the inward (*al-batin*) and His favours are given in both *zahir* and *batin*; thus, the Qur'an, as God's revelation and His supreme favour, likewise has a *batin* (hidden) meaning revealed through esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*).

He is the First and the Last, the *Zahir* (outward) and the *Batin* (inward), and He is, of all things, Knowing

– Holy Qur'an 57:3

Are you not aware that God has made subservient to you whatever is in the heaven and whatever is in the earth, and has bestowed His favours upon you both in *zahir* and in *batin*.

– Holy Qur'an 31:20

C. The Legitimate Sources of Esoteric Interpretation (*Ta'wil*):

In current usage, *ta'wil* is said, and rightly, to be a spiritual exegesis that is inner, symbolic, esoteric, etc. Beneath the idea of exegesis appears that of a Guide (the exegete), and beneath the idea of exegesis we glimpse that of an exodus, of a "departure from Egypt," which is an exodus from metaphor and the slavery of the letter.

Henry Corbin, (*Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 29)

The above ten arguments conclusively prove that the Qur'an has *ta'wil* – hidden inner (*batin*) meanings and esoteric interpretations beyond the surface (*zahir*) meanings – knowledge of which is necessary to grasp the Qur'an's true meaning. Once again, this is agreed to by the Sunni theologians among the Mu'tazilis and Ash'aris, the Philosophers, the Sufis, the Twelver Shi'a, and the Ismaili Shi'a. Yet all these groups differ over the content of the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an and the legitimate

source of *ta'wil*. The core issue is this: who knows the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an after the Prophet Muhammad?

It surely cannot be the case that every individual Muslim already knows the *ta'wil* or can somehow reach the *ta'wil* by themselves, since the *ta'wil* is by definition the hidden meaning (*batin*) not available to everyone. Thus, the only source for accessing the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an is a legitimate teacher and guide who already possesses the *ta'wil*. That teacher and guide was obviously the Prophet Muhammad in his own lifetime, who was responsible for both the revelation (*tanzil*) of the Qur'an and its *ta'wil*. The function of *tanzil* was completed over the Prophet's 23 year mission, but the function of *ta'wil* must continue because knowledge of the *ta'wil* is necessary for truly understanding the Qur'an. Therefore, the Prophet must have appointed someone in his place to continue teaching the *ta'wil*.

In fact, Prophet Muhammad [declared Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and the Master \(Mawla\) of the believers \(mu'minin\)](#) on several occasions, as testified throughout Sunni and Shi'a historical and traditional literature. The same Prophet has also said that: 'Ali is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with 'Ali. They shall never separate (al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4685); this means that Imam 'Ali, like the Prophet in his own lifetime, was the living and speaking Qur'an. It logically follows that Imam 'Ali is the teacher of the *ta'wil* after the Prophet Muhammad. This is even confirmed by a hadith found in many Sunni Muslim sources:

The Prophet said: ['There is one amongst you who will fight for the *ta'wil* \[esoteric interpretation\] of the Qur'an as I have fought for its *tanzil* \[literal revelation\].'](#) Abu Bakr asked, 'Is it I?'. The Prophet said, 'No'. 'Umar asked, 'Is it I?'. The Prophet said, 'No, it is the one who is mending the sandal.' The Prophet had given 'Ali his sandal to mend.

(Sunni Hadith Reference: al-Hākim al-Nīsābūrī, al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-ṣaḥīḥayn (Beirut, 2002), p. 929, no. 4694; Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, Khaṣā'is Amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Tehran, 1419/1998), p. 104)

The purely literal interpretation of the Qur'an leads to mass contradiction both in the Qur'an and with the human intellect. *Ta'wil* is the only means to resolve all these outward contradictions in the Qur'an and, in fact, serves as the "confirmation" (*tasdiq*) of the Qur'an's status as divine revelation. The prior verse quoted in the first argument mentioned that when people see the *ta'wil* on the Day of Judgment they will testify that "the Messengers brought the truth from their Lord", meaning, they are able to realize and verify directly how the revelations of the Prophets were actually true. This means that the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an provides the verification (*tasdiq, tahqiq*) of the Qur'an.

The word *sadaqah* is derived from *sidq*, which means "to tell the truth", that is, to believe in the truthfulness of the lord of *ta'wil* so that their souls may be purified from doubt and suspicion. [*Ta'wil* verifies the truth of the shari'at. Do you not see](#)

that God, may He be exalted, says in the story of Moses and Aaron: “So send him (Aaron) with me as a helper to verify me” (Qur’an 28:34). That is, Moses asked God, may He be exalted, to send Aaron with him so that he may verify his truth, i.e. he may explain the *ta’wil* of the *shari’at* so that people may know its reality. The Prophet, God’s blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny, said to the Commander of the true believers, ‘Ali, peace be upon him: “You are the greatest verifier (*musaddiq*) of the truth.” That is, it was ‘Ali who through *ta’wil*, verified his truth to the wise.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (The Face of Religion, Discourse 28)

When *ta’wil* is understood to be the “verification” (*tasdiq*) of the Qur’an, the below verses shows how God promised the major Prophets that He would also send a person after them to verify their revelations by giving their *ta’wil* and made them swear a covenant to support and believe in such a person:

And remember We took from the Prophets their Covenant as (We did) from thee (Muhammad):from Noah Abraham Moses and Jesus the son of Mary: We took from them a solemn Covenant.

– Holy Qur’an 33:7

And remember the time when God took a covenant of the Prophets, saying, ‘Whatever I give you of the Book and Wisdom, then there comes to you a messenger, verifying (*musaddiqun*) that which is with you, you shall believe in him and help him.’ And He said, ‘Do you agree, and do you accept the responsibility which I lay upon you in this matter?’ They said, ‘We agree.’ He said, ‘Then bear witness and I am with you among the witnesses.’

– Holy Qur’an 3:81

The above verse means that each Speaker-Prophet (*Natiq*) was accompanied by an Imam who “verified” their revelation by providing its *ta’wil*. Such a person was called the *Asas* (Foundation) and *Wasi* (Executor), who provided the *ta’wil* of the exoteric revelation (*tanzil*) in his Prophet’s lifetime to show the wise how the exoteric form of the revelation is true through its esoteric meaning: **Seth was the *Asas* of Adam, Shem was the *Asas* of Noah, Isma’il was the *Asas* of Abraham; James was the *Asas* of Jesus, and ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib was the *Asas* of Muhammad.** The knowledge of Imam ‘Ali is inherited by all of the designated Imams among his descendants:

Verily, the knowledge which was sent down with Adam did not return back [to God]. The knowledge is inherited and ‘Ali was the Knower of this community. Verily, no Knower among us dies unless someone of his family knows the like of his knowledge or what God wills of it.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir,
(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 32, Hadith No. 2)

Verily, God never leaves the earth without a Knower (*‘Alim*). If it were so, the truth would never be known from falsehood.

Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq,
(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 5, Hadith No. 5)

The Qur'an also indicates that there must always be persons in the world, called *rasikhun fi'l-'ilm* (the firmly rooted in knowledge), who always know *ta'wil* of the Qur'an. The Shi'i Imams have given commentaries (tafsir) on these verses as follows:

And no one knows it's *ta'wil* except God and those firmly rooted in knowledge (*rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*), saying: We believe in it, all is from our Lord.

– Holy Qur'an 3:7

We are the ones who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*) and we know its *ta'wil*.

Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*) are the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali ibn Abi Talib) and the Imams after him.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 22, Hadith No. 1 & 3)

Similarly, the Qur'an states that the Knowers (*'alimun; 'ulama*), that is the Imams, are aware of the deeper meanings of its various symbols and parables (*amthal*): And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except the Knowers (*'alimun*).

– Holy Qur'an 29:43

And of His signs (*ayat*) is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs (*ayat*) for the Knowers (*'alimun*).

– Holy Qur'an 30:22

People are of three types: the Knower (*'alim*), the seeker of knowledge (*muta'allim*), and the froth carried off by the wave. We are the Knowers (*'ulama*), our Shi'a are the seekers of knowledge and the rest are the froth carried off by the wave.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab Fada'il al-'Ilm, Chapter 3, Hadith No. 4)

In two other verses, the Qur'an singles out a group of special human beings called the People of the Remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*). The Qur'an specifically tells the believers to ask their questions to the People of Remembrance. The word *dhikr* is a title of the Qur'an and a title of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, these Ahl al-Dhikr who must be asked questions are both the Family (*ahl*) of Prophet Muhammad and the People of the Qur'an (*ahl al-qur'an*): the Imams from the Family of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*).

The Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, about the verse "Ask the Ahl al-Dhikr if you do not know" (Qur'an 16:43, 21:7), said that: 'The Prophet said: I am the Remembrance and the Imams are the Ahl al-Dhikr (People of Remembrance).' About the words of God (43:33), "He is a Remembrance for you and for your people and you all will be asked questions", the Imam Muhammad al-Baqir said: 'We are his people and we will be questioned.'

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 20, Hadith No. 1)

The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq said: 'The Remembrance (*dhikr*) is Muhammad and we are his Family (*ahl*) who must be questioned.' About the words of God (43:33), "He is a Remembrance for you and for your people and you all will be asked questions", the Imam said: 'And we are the People of Remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*) and we are the ones who will be questioned.'

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 20, Hadith No. 2)

Finally, the Qur'an describes how the Revelation of God exists in the form of signs (*ayat*) within the hearts of certain people who have been given knowledge and they are the Imams:

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir recited this verse (29:49): "Nay, rather it [the Qur'an] is Clear Signs (*ayat*) in the breasts of those who are given knowledge (*alladhi utu al-'ilm*)."

Then he said: 'Take note...He [God] does not say [the Qur'an is] "between the two covers of the written text (*mushaf*)".'

He said: "in the breasts of those who are given knowledge." Who can they be apart from us? They are specifically the Imams.'

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 23, Hadith No. 23-4)

The Shi'i Imams therefore possess the spiritual meaning (*batin al-Qur'an*) and the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil al-Qur'an*) in their hearts in the form of pure knowledge (*al-'ilm al-mahd*) and not in the form of bookish erudition that ordinary people require to be learned. This is the meaning of the prophetic *hadith* that says: "Ali is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with Ali. They shall never separate until they return to me in Paradise." The spiritual reality of the Qur'an, in the form of the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-quds*) always exists in the heart of the Imam just as it dwelled in the heart of the Prophet Muhammad. By virtue of divine inspiration (*ta'yid*) through the Holy Spirit, the hereditary Imam is the pre-eminent Knower (*'alim*) and Exegete (*mu'awwil*) of the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an. This type of inspired knowledge is different from scholarly knowledge as Sijistani explains:

That is the outpouring of [the light of] divine inspiration (*ta'yid*) upon the hearts of God's chosen ones and His servants. This is the Pure Knowledge which belongs exclusively to the Prophets, the Legatees and the Imams...This Knowledge is not contaminated with anything like seeking proofs, which is, of course, the [ordinary] scientific method; it is not the kind of knowledge arrived at by the scholars of this world through one [or another] among the proofs.

Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, (Unveiling the Hidden, tr. Landholt, Anthology of Philosophy of Persia Volume 2, ed. Nasr and Aminrazavi, 94)

Since, knowing the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an is absolutely necessary to comprehend God's revelation in a holistic and intellectual manner, humankind must seek the *ta'wil* from the Imams. The legitimate lineage of the Shi'i Imamatus continues through Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq [the historically designated successor of his father Imam Ja'far] and his lineal descendants up to the present living Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. It is no surprise, then, that the Ismaili tradition of

Islam, with the continuous presence of a living Imam, emphasizes the *ta'wil* and *batin* of the Qur'an above all other schools of thought:

***Ta'wil* postulates the principle of the Imam as guardian of its secret; his person is at the origin of the entire esoteric hierarchy which constitutes the "Ismaili Order", each level of which corresponds to a rank in the celestial hierarchies.**

Henry Corbin, (Temple and Contemplation, 136)

D. Ismaili *Ta'wil* in History and Practice

The *ta'wil*, without question, is a matter of harmonic perception, of hearing an identical sound (the same verse, the same hadith, even an entire text) on several levels simultaneously.

Henry Corbin, (Tom Cheetham, *All the World an Icon*, 87)

Throughout the history of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims, the mission of providing the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an has been undertaken by the [Shi'a Ismaili Imams](#). Normally, the Imams assigned and delegated the task of instructing their followers in the *ta'wil* to their teaching representatives among the *hujjats* (deputy-proofs) and *da'is* (missionaries). These dignitaries learned the *ta'wil* directly from the Imam himself or through his highest *hujjats*. The *ta'wil* of the Qur'an was historically taught in two forms or mediums – as instruction (*ta'lim*) from the Imams, *hujjats* and *da'is* or as [direct spiritual inspiration](#) (*ta'yid*) from the luminous soul of the Imam. For example, Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw explains that the Speaker-Prophet (*natiq*), Foundation (*asas*), Imam, and Hujjah are all *mu'ayyad* (divinely-inspired through *ta'yid*) where the *Hujjah* receives *ta'yid* through the Imam of the time. He notes that **"the Hujjat is the possessor of *ta'yid* and the Dā'ī is the possessor of *ta'wil*"** (The Face of Religion, Discourse 32). As Nasir himself was one of these *hujjats*, he declares at the end of this book that: **"Whatever is good in this book we have shown by the *ta'yid* of the lord of the time. We hope that God, may He be exalted, may reward us for that through the true lord."**

As for the subjects of *ta'wil*, every single verse in the Qur'an, every aspect of the religious law (*shari'ah*), and everything in the natural world has a *ta'wil* or esoteric meaning. Some examples are listed below:

- the *ta'wil* of objects and themes in the Qur'an like the Pen, the Tablet, the Heavens and the Earth [\[read here\]](#), the Mountains, the Rivers, the Water, the Six Days of Creation [\[read here\]](#), the Sun, the Moon and the Stars [\[read here\]](#), the Rivers of Water, Milk, Honey and Wine, the Resurrection [\[read here\]](#), Paradise and Hellfire, the disconnected letters (Alif Lam Mim);
- the *ta'wil* of the stories of the Prophets such as the creation of Adam, the Ark of Noah, the Sacrifice of Isma'il by Abraham [\[read here\]](#), the Staff of Moses, the Virgin Birth and Crucifixion of Jesus [\[read here\]](#), the background and mission of Muhammad [\[read here\]](#);
- the *ta'wil* of religious laws, theological doctrines, and ritual Pillars of worship (from Islam and pre-Islamic traditions) including the Basmalah, the

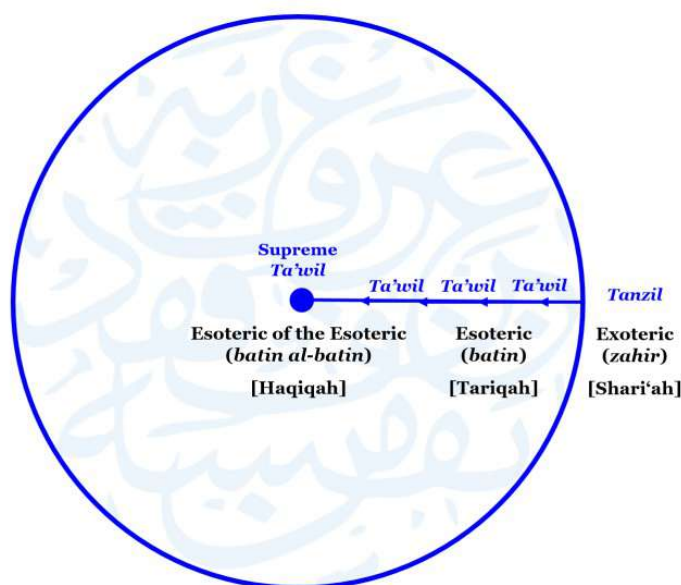
Shahadah, the Ablution, the Salah [[read here](#)], the Hajj to Makkah [[read here](#)], the Fasting of Ramadan [[read here](#)], the Christian Trinity, the Eucharist, the Sabbath, the Zoroastrian fire ritual, etc.

The *ta'wil* of a Qur'anic verse, theme or ritual practice can either be expressed as rational discourse, as a ritual practice, or as purely spiritual knowledge. For example, the Ismaili Du'a' is the *ta'wil* of the Salah in the form of an esoteric ritual [as given [here](#)]; the schema of the Cycles of Prophecy and Imamat is the *ta'wil* of the Six Days of Creation in the form of rational discourse [as given [here](#)]; the gnostic recognition of God through the Universal Intellect (the Light of Imamat) is the *ta'wil* of the Shahadah as purely spiritual knowledge.

One of the principles of *ta'wil* is that there are numerous levels of *batin* and *ta'wil* [[outlined here](#)] appropriate to each person's spiritual capacity and knowledge. The supreme *ta'wil* is called the *batin al-batin* (the esoteric behind the esoteric) and is given only by the Imam of the Time to high ranking hujjats by means of [ta'yid](#). But this supreme *ta'wil* can be expressed in and through multiple layers of intermediate *ta'wil*, called the *batin* (esoteric), tailored to each person's intellectual capacity, spiritual rank (*hadd*) and cultural context. In this respect, the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq once said: **"We can speak about a word in seven ways."** When he was asked about this, "Seven, O son of the Messenger of God?", the Imam replied: **"Yes, [not only seven], but seventy."**

The below diagram visually depicts the **three hierarchical domains of the meaning of the Qur'an**:

- 1) the *zahir* (exoteric) or *tanzil* (literal words), which informs Qur'anic tafsir (exoteric commentary) and the Shari'ah (religious law);
- 2) the *batin* (esoteric) or intermediate *ta'wil*, which constitutes the Tariqah (spiritual path);
- 3) the *batin al-batin* (esoteric of the esoteric) or supreme *ta'wil*, which is the level of the Haqiqah (spiritual reality) – also called the eternal Religion of Truth (*din al-Haqq*, *din al-Qayyum*, *din Allah*), Primordial Tradition or Sophia Perennis.



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Each point or arc of points on the Circumference of the Circle represent the *zahir* (exoteric) and literal words (*tanzil*) of the Qur'an. Every radius represents an expression of the esoteric (*batin*) and intermediate levels of *ta'wil* of the Qur'an. The Centre represents the esoteric of the esoteric (*batin al-batin*) and the supreme *ta'wil* of the Qur'an.

This is why Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, the *hujjah* of Iraq during the time of Imam al-Hakim explains that:

It is possible for one *ta'wil* to be clearer and more evident than another depending on the purity of the nature of the *mu'awwil* (the performer of *ta'wil*) and his power in knowledge and deduction. The words in conveying the meanings of *ta'wil* are different, but their meanings, despite the differences in words, are in agreement. Every *ta'wil* is adequate and satisfactory so long as it does not raise a rank (*hadd*) above its rank or lower another below its rank.

Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani,
(Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, 'The Concept of Knowledge according to al-Kirmani', in Todd Lawson, Reason and Inspiration and Islam, 136)

The *ta'wil*, without question, is a matter of harmonic perception, of hearing an identical sound (the same verse, the same hadith, even an entire text) on several levels simultaneously.

Henry Corbin, (Tom Cheetham, All the World an Icon, 87)

There are numerous texts and writings by these Ismaili luminaries that provide the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an, including:

- The Esoteric Interpretation of the Pillars of Islam (*Ta'wil al-Da'a'im al-Islam*) by Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man;
- The Foundation of Esoteric Interpretation (*Asas al-Ta'wil*) by Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man;
- The Book of the Esoteric Interpretation of the Religious Law (*Kitab Ta'wil al-Shari'ah*) by Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man and the Imam al-Mu'izz;

- The Secrets and Mysteries of the Speaker-Prophets (*Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*) by Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman;
- The Book of the Boast (*Kitab al-Iftikhar*) by Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani;
- The Lectures of al-Mu'ayyad al-Din Shirazi (*Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*);
- The Face of Religion (*Wajh-i Din*) of Nasir-i Khusraw;
- The Paradise of Submission (*Rawda-yi Taslim*) of Nasir al-Din Tusi,

The special circumstances of the modern period, which is the Cycle of Resurrection [[described here](#)], have allowed the above works of Ismaili *ta'wil* to be edited, published, translated and studied through academic scholarship. More than any other time in the past, Ismaili *ta'wil* works are available to the public in an unprecedented way through the efforts of the Institute of Ismaili Studies and other academic institutions. This is a remarkable opportunity for Ismaili Muslims and others to learn Ismaili *ta'wil* directly from primary sources – something the recent Ismaili Imams have encouraged people to do.

If you want to learn the Qur'an, become students of those who know its real meaning. In this way you will learn its real meaning. You are unaware of the many books of our Faith (*din*). Therefore you have not studied most of them. If you study such books you will understand and no defect will remain within you. Your intellect (*'aql*) will guarantee you that your Faith (*din*) is true if you read such works. This you will come to know.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Zanzibar, July 5, 1899, quoted in *The Wise Qur'an and the World of Humanity* Vol. 1, 98)

Another important source of the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an in the Ismaili tradition is found within the Ginans composed by the Ismaili Pirs. The Ginans are the devotional literature of the Ismailis of South Asia and express Ismaili Qur'anic *ta'wil* in the Indic languages, often using ideas and terminology from Ismaili, Sufi, Vaishnavite, Sant, and Tantric traditions. The authorship of the Ginans is attributed to high ranking *hujjats* of the Imam, called Pirs, who were sent to India beginning around the thirteenth century. These Pirs included Pir Satgur Nur, Pir Shams, Pir Nasir al-Din, Pir Sahib al-Din, Pir Sadr al-Din, Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din, and Pir Taj al-Din. The Ginans are, in the words of Shafique Virani, a “symphony of Gnosis” and they contain the inner meaning of the Qur'an. The 48th Ismaili Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III has emphasized the interrelationship between the Ginanic literature and the

The Ginans that Pir Sadr al-Din has bestowed upon you are the quintessence of the Qur'an-i Sharif in the Indian language.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Zanzibar, July 5, 1899, in Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai, The Holy Qur'an in the Ginanic Literature)

Pir Sadardin composed Ginans from the exegesis of the Qur'an-i Sharif for you... Were there among you such faithful people who had studied the Qur'an-i Sharif and who were also familiar with the Ginans, I would have shown them each verse

of the Ginans in the Qur'an, which they could reiterate to you, but there is no such person!

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Zanzibar, July 13, 1899, in Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai, [The Holy Qur'an in the Ginanic Literature](#))

There are also valuable works of *ta'wil* in the Sufi traditions of Islam. The various Sufi mystics and saints (*awliya'*) have produced works that disclose the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an in Sufi metaphysical frameworks and poetry. The Sufis have been responsible for transmitting some of the esoteric teachings that go back to the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and while Sufi *ta'wil* lacks the authoritative weight of Ismaili *ta'wil*, it can be very useful in one's personal intellectual search. In Sufi terminology, the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an [what Ismailis call *ta'wil*] is often called *ta'bir* (literally: "to cross over"), *isharat* (allusions) and *rumuz* (secrets). Some examples of Sufi esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an are found in the *Tafsir* of Sahl al-Tustari, *Lata'if al-Isharat* of Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, the Meccan Openings (*Futihat al-Makkiyyah*) and Bezels of Wisdom (*Fusus al-Hikam*) of Ibn al-'Arabi; the *Mathnavi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi; and the *Divan* of Hafiz al-Shirazi. For example, Rumi proclaims that the Mathnavi contains the esoteric kernel of the Qur'an:

Ma zi Qur'an barguzidim maghz-ra Ustukhwan pish-i sagan andakhtin

We have extracted the kernel or essence of the Qur'an We have thrown the bones to the dogs

Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi,
(Quoted in Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai, [The Holy Qur'an in the Ginanic Literature](#))

Once again, academic scholarship has made these works available in the public sphere for all to learn from. The Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has encouraged his murids to learn and compare the Ginans of Pir Sadr al-Din with the Mathnavi of Jalal al-Din Rumi:

Just as there are the teachings of Pir Sadardin, in the same way there are the meanings of the Mathnawi, but it is in Farsi, therefore you should learn the meanings.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Ahmedabad, October 13, 1903, in Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai, [The Holy Qur'an in the Ginanic Literature](#))

E. Ismaili *Ta'wil* in the Present Day

Today, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayn Aga Khan IV is the present-living (*hadir wa mawjud*) and forty-ninth hereditary Imam of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims [in direct descent from Prophet Muhammad](#). During the Imamate of his predecessor, the formal *da'wah* ranks of the *hujjats* and *da'is* were abolished. Thus, the function and role of providing the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an is now undertaken by the Imam of the Time, as he explains in his own words:

You see, my mission is situated on three levels. Firstly, religious: it concerns a symbolic exegesis of the Qur'an: interpreting the Divine Word, the adapting the needs of each community to the time; refashioning the law, constantly and relentlessly...Our religion is esoteric, you understand. It is a perpetual initiation.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Jeune Afrique Interview (Translation), 15 October 1967)

The Ismaili Imam today teaches the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an to his murids and to the entire world in at least six different ways – in his public speeches, in his farmans, in the Tariqah rituals he prescribes and authorizes, through his institutional activities including the Institute of Ismaili Studies publications, through Islamic architecture, and through the spiritual inspiration called [ta'yid](#) which reaches certain elevated souls. Read more about how Mawlana Hazar Imam's teaches the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an here.

Ta'wil continues to hold an important place in present day Ismaili praxis and intellectual, academic and literary activities. In 1967, the Ismaili Imam once reminded his murids of Bombay, on the twenty-second day of November, that the Ismaili Tariqah of Islam is **“an esoteric branch of Islam”** and that the esoteric meaning **“is not there to everyone.”** The Imam also urged his murids to learn the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an so that they **“should be able to explain the esoteric meaning”** of parts of the Qur'an. Specific Qur'anic words, the Imam explained, **“must represent to you a concept. If you study the Qur'an-i Sharif, this concept will become well known to you, and through you, to the Jamat at large. This takes many years of study.”** In a public interview, the Ismaili Imam stressed that understanding the esoteric nature of the Ismaili interpretations of Islam in modern times requires scholarship and expertise in the important Ismaili *ta'wil* texts:

Nicholas Tomalin: *Am I right that the Ismaili faith is an esoteric one, that's to say, only real scholars and experts have read all the crucial texts that enable them to understand the inner nature of your religion?*

Aga Khan: *Yes, this is so.*

(The Sunday Times Interview, Part I, Nicholas Tomalin, 'The Ruler Without A Kingdom', December 12, 1965)

In light of the above guidance, there is contemporary Ismaili *ta'wil* literature that draws upon the classical *ta'wil* of the Ismaili *hujjats* and *da'is* of the past and links it to present day Ismaili doctrine and practice. This contemporary literature is an expression of personal intellectual search and academic engagement with the Ismaili intellectual and devotional traditions of the past. This literature consists of philosophical prose, devotional poetry, and academic research, including [but not at all limited to] the works of [Henry Corbin](#), [Ali S. Asani](#), [Azim Nanji](#), [Shafique Virani](#), [Arzina Lalani](#), [Nadia Eboo Jamal](#), [Karim Gillani](#), [Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai](#), [al-Wa'z Faquir Muhammad Hunzai](#) and [al-Wa'za Rashida Noormohamed Hunzai](#), [al-Wa'z Kamaluddin Ali](#) and [al-Wa'za Zarina Kamaluddin](#), [al-Wa'z Abualy A.](#)

[Aziz, al-Wa'z Jehangir Merchant, Khalil Andani, Khayal Aly Dhanidina, Aly Sunderji,](#)
and [Ikhwan Allani](#).

As *ta'wil* is absolutely necessary in order to comprehend the real meaning of the Qur'an, it has played and continues to play an essential role in the Ismaili traditions of Islam. Similarly, other schools and communities of Islam endeavor to comprehend the meaning of the Qur'anic revelation through their own modes of interpretation. The present and living Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan, has described this "freedom of interpretation" as an expression of God's generosity upon all those who believe His word:

The discourse of the Qur'an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Qur'an confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere attempts to understand His word.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Address at IIS Qur'an Colloquium – Word of God, Art of Man, October 19, 2003)

Judaism, Christianity & Islam: Forgotten Shared Beliefs Of The Abrahamic Faiths

I think that monotheistic religions, having a common reference to One God, should and must dialogue. The three religions which Abraham inspired have many more common facets than those which divide them. Religion must be the means by which to affirm the ethical significance of existence, regardless of one's profession of faith.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Interview with *Corriere della Sera*, Massimo Nava, October 22, 2001)

The faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a large number of theological beliefs and ethical principles. In fact, all three religions revere the Prophet Abraham and share more in common with each other than other religious traditions. Most importantly all three religions affirm the existence of one God, the Absolute and Infinite Reality continuously creating and sustaining all things in existence [for a rational and logical proof of this classical concept of God, [click here](#)]. The below chart presents 28 key theological beliefs of Abrahamic monotheistic theology in which the general Jewish, Christian and Muslim positions overlap greatly. It is hoped that readers will see how much commonality exists between the faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and how this unites all Jews, Christians and Muslims in a spiritual bond of brotherhood. (All of these theological positions have more specific interpretations among the different branches of each faith, but they are presented here at the most basic level). This means that the

ISMAILI  GNOSIS Isma'iliyya... discovered the most daring metaphysical thought in Islam. Its voice, at once original and traditional, should be heard again today - a task of which it seems that the young Isma'ilis are aware. -ABDEL COUSIN- WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM							
Theological Beliefs	Judaism	Christianity	Islam				
God is One and Unique without any parts	✓	✓	✓				
God is a Trinity of three Persons (Father, Son, Spirit)		✓					
God's Word (eternal Torah, Logos, eternal Qur'an) exists before the creation of all things	✓	✓	✓				
God creates all existents through His Word (Logos)	✓	✓	✓				
God creates Angels and Human Souls	✓	✓	✓				
God created all human beings in His Image and from one soul	✓	✓	✓				
The Cosmos is the first Book revealed by God	✓	✓	✓				
God conveys guidance to human beings through the Holy Spirit	✓	✓	✓				
Adam & Eve committed "original sin" which all humans inherit		✓					
God spoke through His Prophets including Adam, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, & the Prophets of Israel	✓	✓	✓				
Abraham exemplifies obedience, faith and submission to God	✓	✓	✓				
God revealed the Torah through Moses	✓	✓	✓				
God revealed the Psalms through David	✓	✓	✓				
God spoke through Zachariah, Mary and John the Baptist		✓	✓				
Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary		✓	✓				
Jesus is God's Prophet, Messenger and Messiah (Christ)		✓	✓				
God revealed the Gospel through Jesus Christ		✓	✓				
Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God incarnate		✓					
Jesus' death on the Cross and Resurrection redeem original sin		✓					
Muhammad is the last Prophet and Messenger of God			✓				
God revealed the Qur'an through Muhammad			✓				
Human beings must live according to the laws (Noachide Laws, Halacha, Canon Law, Shari'ah) based on God's revelations	✓	✓	✓				
Daily prayer is a necessity in a one's relationship with God	✓	✓	✓				
Human beings must abide by certain values and ethical principles (e.g. Ten Commandments, Golden Rule)	✓	✓	✓				
Human beings are the trustees of God over His creation	✓	✓	✓				
Salvation is through faith and Divine grace	✓	✓	✓				
Humans will be held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment	✓	✓	✓				
Greeting: "Peace be upon You" (shalom aleikhem; salaam 'alaykum)	✓	✓	✓				

Judeo-Christian and Muslim civilizations share a religious, cultural and spiritual ethos: there is no clash of civilizations but only a clash of ignorance. But this ignorance can be healed with education and the embrace of difference through pluralism.

Another, even more fundamental reason for the underlying inner affinity of the two civilisations is to be found in the shared point of origin of the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. All are linked to a common ancestor — Abraham — whose mythical presence has survived in the citadel of Aleppo. Islam, the most recent of

the three revelations, has always acknowledged and confirmed the older religious traditions and has also provided, through its various regional cultures, successful models for religious and ethnic coexistence.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Preface to Stefano Bianc, Syria, Medieval Citadels Between East and West', May 2007, [Read Here](#))

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the [49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims](#). He is the [direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad](#), [the direct descendant of Prophet Abraham](#) and the spiritual legate of the religious authority of all the Abrahamic Prophets. We now present the Ismaili Imam's remarks on the spiritual unity of the Abrahamic monotheistic religions alongside the summary of the chart below:

The Ismaili Imam, Aga Khan IV, in discussions with His Eminence D. Jose Policarpo, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon and Chancellor of the Catholic University of Portugal

✓ **Judaism, Christianity and Islam all agree on 18 out of the above 28 theological positions:** The first area of agreement is on theology – concerning the unity of God, the concept of creation, the pre-existent Word of God, angels and human souls, the spiritual status and unity of humanity, Divine revelation to Prophets, the example of Abraham, the revelation of scripture (Torah, Psalms);

We have heard predictions for some years now about some inevitable clash of the industrial West with the Muslim world. These multiplied, of course, in the wake of



the 9/11 tragedies and other violent episodes. But most Muslims don't think that way; only an extreme minority does. [For most of us, there is singularly little in our theology that would clash with the other Abrahamic faiths, with Christianity and Judaism. And there is much more in harmony. What has](#)

[happened to the Islamic tradition that says that our best friends will be from the other Abrahamic Faiths, known as the "People of the Book", all of whose faith builds on monotheistic revelation?](#)

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs, March 10, 2014, [Read Here](#))

✧ **Judaism, Christianity and Islam all agree on the necessity on following Divinely-inspired law (Torah, Halacha, Church Canon Law, Shari'ah)** that guides all human religious and social activity in one's relationship with God;

Recent press references to the Shari'a, the traditional Islamic system of jurisprudence, are illustrated by its manifestations in Afghanistan. Journalists learn to use these words — but how many of them know what they really mean? How many of them understand, for example, that the Shari'a is seen by most Muslims as a changing body of law, subject to what we call the fiqh, the capacity for evolving interpretation. How many of them are aware of the selective and moderate application of the Shari'a in the legal systems of those Islamic countries which do allow its application? How many of them know that Arabic translators of the Old Testament used the word Shari'a to designate the Torah, underlining a shared perception of the Divine Law that governs the spiritual relationship between God and His believers? How many are knowledgeable enough to appreciate the Shari'a's illuminating qualities in civil law?

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Commonwealth Press Union Conference Keynote Address, October 17, 1996, [Read Here](#))

✧ **Christianity and Islam agree on an additional 4 theological positions (agreeing on a total of 22 shared positions)** — concerning belief in the predecessors of Jesus, Jesus' virgin birth from Mary and his status as God's Prophet, Messenger, and Messiah (Christ);

✧ **Judaism, Christianity and Islam disagree over the theological status of Jesus;** Judaism does not recognize Jesus' prophethood; Christianity and Islam recognize Jesus as God's Prophet, Messenger and Messiah born of the Virgin Mary but disagree over his divinity; Christianity reveres Jesus as the Son of God (Second Person of the Trinity) and as the incarnation of God on earth; Islam recognizes Muhammad as the final Prophet and Messenger of God while Judaism and Christianity do not recognize Muhammad's prophethood;

✧ **Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a great deal over practical matters of daily living:** the necessity of daily prayer (formal prayer, informal prayer), of living according to God's will expressed through rules of conduct, common values and ethical principles; salvation by faith and Divine grace, the accounting on the Day of Judgment, and benedictions of Peace (shalom, peace).

What I am saying is that the basis of an understanding can be put into effect through the acceptance of the ethical principles common to the Abrahamic faiths. Forms are different. The ethical principles, the principles on which the human society lives, the attitude towards the poor, the attitude towards the marginalised, the attitude or the preoccupations of a society dominated by the male portion of the society, all of that, we can find it everywhere. We find it in the Christian society, in Christian cultures of the past, of the present, and in the Muslim World it is the same thing.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International Interview, November 8, 2001)

✓ **Despite some theological differences, Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all the spiritual descendants of Abraham**, sharing much more in common than what divides them as members of a greater spiritual communion; they can and must work together to uplift the quality of human society worldwide on a shared ethical



basis: The Ismaili Imam, Aga Khan IV, meets His Eminence D. Jose Policarpo, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon and Chancellor of the Catholic University of Portugal

There are those who say that faiths divide. This may be true. But today we must explore every opportunity to have different faiths come together in addressing the problems of our respective societies. We come from the same common religious heritage, descendants of Abraham, and it is enjoined on us to address the problems of society on the same ethical premises.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Ismaili Imamat and Government of Portugal ‘Protocol of Co-operation’ , December 19, 2005)

The Esoteric Feminine: Women in Ismaili History and Thought

ISMAILI WOMEN come from a proud and rich heritage of intellectual prowess, spiritual illumination, and strength against adversity. [Ismaili Gnosis @ Instagram](#) presents a series on the history of strong Ismaili women starting with Hazrat Khadijah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad. On Instagram this can be viewed at (<https://instagram.com/explore/tags/ismailiwomen/>).

In Ismaili history, women have not only played important material and political roles. **The Ismaili esoteric tradition recognizes a number of women who held important spiritual ranks and performed religious functions alongside the Prophets and Imams:** Hazrat Eve with Prophet Adam, Hazrat Hagar with Prophet Abraham, Hazrat Zulaykhah with Prophet Joseph, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Moses, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Jesus, Hazrat Khadijah and Hazrat Fatimah with Prophet Muhammad, and numerous other women with the Imams.

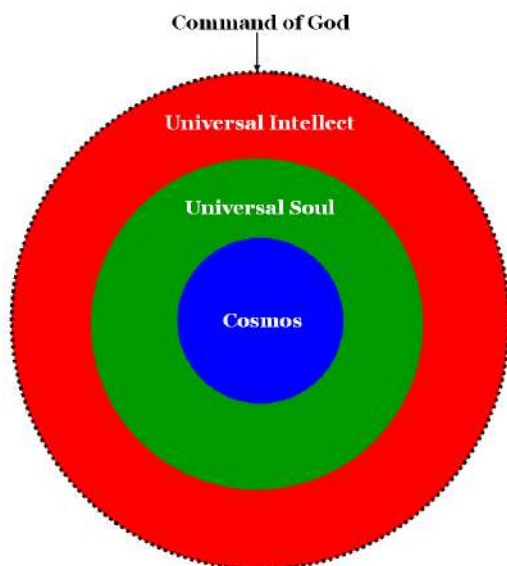
According to the Ismaili esoteric interpretation of prophetic history, these women were the *hujjats* (proofs) of the Imam: they held the rank of spiritual mother [like the Ismaili Pirs] and were responsible for disseminating the esoteric knowledge or *ta'wil* of the Imams to the disciples. In this sense Qadi al-Nu'man (*Asas al-Ta'wil*, 58-59) explains the inner meaning of the Qur'anic verse 4:1 which says God created Adam's wife from him with the words: "your Lord who created you from a Single Soul and created its mate from it" (*rabbakum alladhi khalaqakum min nafs waahidatan wa khalaqa minha zawjaha*) or the biblical idea that God created Eve from Adam's rib: God did not perform some surgical procedure on Adam. The real meaning is that Eve's soul was nourished and illuminated with knowledge from Adam's soul through *ta'yid* (spiritual inspiration); Eve is one of the *hujjats* of Adam as every Imam has 12 *hujjats* of the day and 12 *hujjats* of the night who disseminate his esoteric teachings in the same way that human beings have 12 ribs on the left side and 12 ribs on the right side. Above these 24 *hujjats*, the Imam is surrounded by 4 special *hujjats* who are his spiritual wives and one of these special *hujjats* was usually a woman. The Qur'an 33:6 – "The Prophet has more authority over the believers than their own souls and his wives are their mothers" refers to the *hujjats* or spiritual wives of the Prophet and not his physical wives. So Eve being from Adam's ribs means she was Adam's *hujjat* and became his spiritual wife; she is the bearer of the *ta'wil* of Adam's prophetic revelation:

On the earthly plane, we find Eve, as Adam's wife, typifying the esoteric content of the *shari'ah*; she is the one who knows its meanings contained within the symbols, and that is why Adam cannot fulfill the *shari'ah* of this cycle without her. This Adam-Eve mystery reappears in all the periods: just as the Ka'bah is the symbol of the *Hujjat*, so is Noah's ark (*safinah*); only those who take their place there will find salvation. It is only through the *Hujjat* that one may be conjoined with the Imam. The "Supreme Mary" (*Maryam al-Kubra*), who in turn exemplifies the heavenly

Eve, was Jesus' *Hujjat* because it was she who opened the doors of gnosis which had been closed, by being the first to appeal to 'Isa [Jesus], the master of the new *shari'ah*. Similarly, the "Supreme Fatima" (*Fatima al-Kubra*) was the *Hujjat* of the first Imam during the period of the "sixth Adam."

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 183)

Typically, this female *hujjat* was a daughter of an Imam, a wife of an Imam, or a mother of an Imam. Bibi Fatimah al-Zahra possessed all three of these relationships. Each of these great women are the manifestation of the "Esoteric Feminine" – the Celestial Light which the Ismaili metaphysics calls the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kull*) and the biblical tradition calls Sophia. In the process of creation, God originates the Universal Intellect (*al-'aql al-kull*) – the first of all spiritual beings in creation. The Universal Soul emanates from the Universal Intellect, and this Universal Soul creates and sustains the Cosmos.



In the World of Religion, the *hujjat* is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Soul while the Imam is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect. The Celestial Feminine or Universal Soul is most often associated with Bibi Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet, but it is manifested by all of the female *hujjats*:

Fatimah the Radiant (Fatimah al-Zahra) appears as an archetype exemplified in numerous recurrences, which are carefully noted by the typology of Ismaili *ta'wil*. Generally speaking, the feminine figures who exemplify this archetype are, like Fatimah herself above all, so many typifications of gnosis (*'ilm al-batin*, *'ilm al-haqiqah*), of the initiation into this gnosis, and of the Life which this gnosis breathes into the "dead," i.e., into those who are unknowing and unconscious. Thus, her esoteric rank is above all that of the *Hujjat*, the "Proof" or Witness of the Imam, indeed even a substitute for the Imam who, being in possession of the *ta'wil*, is the source of that Life which resurrects the dead.

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 182)

Among these female *hujjats* of the Imam were women responsible for the spiritual preparation and training of the future Prophet: Maryam was the *hujjat* of the Imam Khuzaymah on whose behalf she initiated and trained Jesus – the meaning of Jesus being born without a father refers to his spiritual birth, his spiritual initiation into the Religion of Truth occurring through his spiritual mother Maryam (the *hujjat*) without the direct intervention of the Imam (spiritual father); [Hazrat Khadijah](#) was the *hujjat* of Imam Abu Talib with whom she spiritually initiated the Prophet Muhammad (this is described in the Fatimid text *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa* by Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman and discussed here). “A special study ought to be devoted to this conception which invests feminine figures with the eminent dignity of the *Hujjat* who “initiates” the future Prophet” (Corbin, 97). After Prophet Muhammad, his daughter [Hazrat Fatimah](#) was the *hujjat* of Imam 'Ali; [Hazrat Zaynab](#) was the *hujjat* of Imam al-Husayn and Imam Zayn al-Abidin. [Hazrat Sitt al-Mulk](#) was the *hujjat* of Imam al-Hakim and Imam al-Zahir. Each of the three women with the title of Mata Salamat – [Hazrat Pir Maryam Sarkar](#), [Hazrat Shams al-Mulk \(Lady 'Ali Shah\)](#)⁶. [Hazrat Pir Maryam Khatun Mata Salamat](#) | [Hazrat Begum Yvette Omm Habibeh Aga Khan](#) – was the *hujjat* of the respective Imam of her time. All of these *hujjats* played important roles in the history of Imamatus which includes being the spiritual/physical companion of the Imam, assisting him in his mission, disseminating the Imam's esoteric knowledge, and safeguarding the succession of the future Imam:

The *Hujjat* connects to the Glorious Entity, which is the Imam, and the *Hujjat* is the Great Mary (*maryam al-kubra*) – her peace be upon us – who casts forth all things and shapes them, and lays their foundation and creates them...This is the “new creation” in the esoteric meaning, and she is the Great Fatimah (*fatimah al-kubra*) in the time of the sixth Adam, who is Muhammad. She is the great fa' and the veil established for the people who are intimate with knowledge and seek intimacy with his Spirit.

– Sayyidna Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yemen, (*Kitab al-Kashf*, tr. Seth Abd al-Hakeem Carney)

There is also one secretive but crucial role that a number of women — both 'Alid and non-'Alid — are said to have played in the early Shi'ite community: They were often reported in Shi'ite hadith traditions to be the bearers of the *wasaya*, or the formal testimonies and transmissions of authority from one Imam to the next... Some of the women who transferred these testaments of successorship were 'Alid women related to the Imams. For example, Zaynab bint 'Ali is said to have carried her brother, al-Husayn's, *wasiyyah* to her nephew, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin.

– Maria Massi Dakake, (*The Charismatic Community*, 220-21)

The below posts from [Ismaili Gnosis @ Instagram](#) highlight some of the important women in Ismaili history as documented in scholarly sources. Many of these women were the female *hujjats* described above and others were women who played unique and important roles. In all cases, Ismaili women come from a history

of intellectual prowess and spiritual strength which all Ismaili Muslims can be proud of.

1. Hazrat Khadijah al-Kubra

Hazrat Khadijah was not just a successful business woman who married a younger man; she also had an important religious function in the Religion of Truth and occupied a high spiritual rank. Details on this available [here](#).



DID YOU KNOW... The Prophet first received spiritual initiation at the hands of his wife, **HAZRAT KHADIJAT AL-KUBRA**, who was the *hujjat* (proof) of Mawlana Imam Abu Talib. The marriage between the Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Khadijah was **BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL**. It was Hazrat Khadijat, the *hujjat*, who first recognized and confirmed the prophethood of Muhammad after he received the first revelation at Mount Hira.

READ MORE in: [Iqra- Muhammad meditated upon the Name of God as the Qur'an was revealed](#) (July 3, 2014) on [IsmailiGnosis.com](#)

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DID YOU KNOW... In recognition of her purity, nobility and qualities of leadership, Hazrat Khadija was popularly known as "Tahira (pure)" and "Sayyidatu'n-nisa' (Chief of the ladies)".

When the holy Prophet after receiving the first revelation returned home, she looked at him and enquired about the light, which she saw on his face. He replied: "This is the light of Prophethood, say: *La ilaha illa 'lah, Muhammadu'r-Rasulu 'lah*." Hazrat Khadijah replied: "It is years since I know you as a Prophet." Then she recited the shahadah.

READ MORE in: [Iqra- Muhammad meditated upon the Name of God as the Qur'an was revealed](#)

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She could judge the holy Prophet's spiritual position and his destiny as the next natiq or the speaking Prophet, as mentioned in Nasikhu't-tawarikh that when the holy Prophet after receiving the first revelation returned home, she looked at him and inquired about the light, which she saw on his face.

2. Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra

Fatimah al-Zahra was the only surviving daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, the wife of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the mother of the Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn through whom the Prophet's lineage continues. She is among the Ahl al-Bayt whom the Qur'an declares to be pure of all impurities in 33:33. Early Fatimid scholars argued that Fatimah held a position of precedence in relation to the Prophet's wives, because, unlike them, her link to the Prophet was direct, through blood. The Fatimid Caliphate founded by the Ismaili Imams was named after her and Fatimah's name and titles are found in Fatimid coins and talismans and were



HAZRAT KHADIJA: "By marrying her both exoterically and esoterically, Muhammad received from her both the ranks of prophet and messenger (nubuwwa and risala). As his *hujja*, Khadija is made responsible for his 'educational training' as Imam or 'Master of the time', for elevating his status and explaining his rank. Echoing traditional Muslim accounts of her seniority to Muhammad...she was 'the high Mary'. Khadija is also presented as being the trustee of Muhammad's appointment of 'Ali as his wasi'."

— Delia Cortese, Simonetta Calderini
(Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam, 11)



DID YOU KNOW... that although the Holy Prophet only child, Fatima, his property (the Fadak oasis). Even though she was threatened, Fatima opposed vocally - giving a *khutba* or speech in support of al-Qadi al-Nu'man shows that Fatima's speech was specifically about Fadak but about "the Imamate and the progeny of the Prophet." Fatima had a witness (*hujja* or 'proof') to her contemporaries: succession of the Imamate.

Read more in: [Ismailis Through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#) on [ismailignosis.com](#)

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DID YOU KNOW... the Holy Prophet Muhammad only had ONE SURVIVING CHILD: Hazrat Bibi Fatima al-Zahra (the radiant). He called her "the first lady of the worlds" and even said (*Sunni hadith*): "Fatima is a part of me, whoever harms her, harms me."

The Qur'anic verse of the Light is interpreted as referring to **FATIMA** being the mother of Imams, the **LAMP** which contains the light of al-Husayn. She is further invested with a universal creative power by means of her shining light.

Read more in: [Ismailis Through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#) on [ismailignosis.com](#)

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mentioned in the khutba upon the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. The Fatimids celebrated her birthday and made it into a holiday, when gifts were exchanged among the palace people.

3. Hazrat Zaynab bint Ali

Zaynab bint Ali was the daughter of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatimah al-Zahra and succeeded to the spiritual rank of her grandmother Khadijah al-Kubra and her mother Fatimah al-Zahra. Zaynab is best known for her piety, knowledge, and her saving the life of her nephew, Imam 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin, at the [battle of Karbala](#). She played the role of the guarantor who safeguarded and ensured the continuity of

the Imamate in the lineage of Imam al-Husayn.



HAZRAT ZAYNAB (daughter of Hazrat Fatima and Imam 'Ali): "There is also one secretive but crucial role that a number of women — both 'Alid and non-'Alid — are said to have played in the early Shi'ite community: They were often reported in Shi'ite hadith traditions to be the bearers of the wasaya, or the formal testimonies and transmissions of authority from one Imam to the next... For example, Zaynab bint 'Ali is said to have carried her brother, [Imam] al-Husayn's wasiyah to her nephew, [Imam] 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin."

- Maria Massi Dakake, Charismatic Community, 220-21

Read more at ismaignosis.com - [Mourning for Marifa](#)

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DID YOU KNOW... that Bibi Fatima and Imam 'Ali had a daughter: **Hazrat ZAYNAB**. Prophet Muhammad's only granddaughter, she was only seven years old at the death of her mother and was known to hold Quranic exegesis classes for women. At Karbala she saved the life of our third Imam, Imam Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, thereby protecting the line of Imamate. Even after she and her family were captured and imprisoned — she bravely made a public speech denouncing Yazid to his face!



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3. Hazrat Sakinah bint al-Husayn

Sayyida Sakinah was the most beloved daughter of Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali and used to sleep on his chest every night. Imam al-Husayn was often heard saying, "A house without Sayyida Sakinah would not be worth living in." As a child, when Sayyida Sakinah went to bed at night she wanted to spend some time with her father. Imam al-Husayn would tell her stories of the Prophet Muhammad and of the battles fought by her grandfather 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Sayyidna Sakinah was a powerful personality: she never wore a veil and demanded monogamy from her husbands — she married and divorced about 5-6 men. Sakinah was described by al-Zubairi, a historian who, like many others, was full of admiration for her, in these words: "She radiates like an ardent fire. Sakinah was a delicate beauty, never veiled, who attended the Quraysh Nobility Council. Poets gathered in her house. She was refined and playful." (see Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, 83, 114-115).



DID YOU KNOW... Imam Husayn's daughter **SAKINA** was a very strong woman who stood up for herself at every turn. As the most beloved daughter of Imam Husayn, it is said that she used to sleep on his chest every night. For bedtime stories, her father told her about her great-grandfather Prophet Muhammad and her grandfather Imam Ali.

Beautiful, refined, radiant, and admired by all, she **NEVER VEILED**. She demanded monogamy every time she married (six times with five divorces). She took one husband to court when he acquired a concubine, and **another for infertility**. (Read more in *Women's Rebellion & Islamic Memory* by Fatima Memissi.)

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4. Sayyida Sitt al-Mulk

There were a number of powerful and pious royal women in the Fatimid period who hailed from the family of the Imams. The Imam al-Mu'izz had two daughters – Sayyida al-Rashida and Sayyida 'Abda. They each lived well into their nineties and never married but accumulated large sums of wealth and property which they left for the Fatimid Caliph. Imam al-Hakim had a famous daughter known as Sitt al-Misr (Lady of Egypt). All of these women were known for their virtue and simple lifestyles. The most famous of the Fatimid royal women was Sitt al-Mulk, the favourite daughter of Imam al-'Aziz and the half-sister of the Imam al-Hakim.



DID YOU KNOW... Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Zahir married a Sudanese slave called **AL-SAYYIDA RASAD**, the mother of Imam al-Mustansirillah. When Imam al-Mustansir ascended to the throne at the age of 7, his mother acted as regent and exercised considerable influence in the court, appointing viziers and other key positions.

She was a powerhouse who kept the viziers in check. The Queen Mother's (**al-Sayyida Rasad**) agents defended al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi from attempts to have him banished from Cairo. al-Shirazi is among the most important dais in Ismaili history, called a "mountain of knowledge" by Imam al-Mustansir.

(see Delia Cortese, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* 53 and Farhad Dafatry, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* 193 and Rachel Howes, *Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi and the Fatimid religious propaganda organization in the age of al-Mustansir* (427-487 A.H./1036-1094 C.E.) 159)

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Sayyida al-Rasad

When the Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah became the Imam and Fatimid Caliph at the age of 7, his Sudanese mother Sayyida al-Rasad served as his regent and administered the affairs of the state.

5.



DID YOU KNOW... Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Hakim's half-sister **SITT AL-MULK** was one of his closest advisers. Following Imam al-Hakim's death, she served as regent and protector of the young Imam-Caliph al-Zahir, the sole heir, who had been brought up and educated in her palace even in the life of his father.

Sources indicate her enormous effort to protect her nephew's caliphate from palace politics, including purges of appointees and personal overseeing of important projects and administration. **She was instrumental in assuring smooth succession.**

(see Delia Cortese, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* 121 and Farhad Daffity, *The History of the Isma'ilis* 191)

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6. Hazrat Pir Maryam Khatun Mata Salamat I

Maryam Khatun was the first cousin and wife of Imam Khalil Allah (45th Imam). She was the mother of Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah (Aga Khan I). Upon the death of Imam Khalil Allah, it was Maryam Khatun who intervened with the Qajar rulers to ensure that Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, who was then only a teenager, received all of his rights, that the Imam's family was provided for, and that the murders were administered justice. In this respect, Maryam Khatun played a similar role as Bibi Fatimah al-Zahra and Sitt al-Mulk in guaranteeing the succession of the young Imam. She was given the title Mata Salamat by Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah in 1245/1829 and, in the same year, he sent her to India as the Pir (when she was 85 years old) to deal with internal community disputes. She died three years later in Kutchh but was interred in Najaf.

The title *Mata Salamat* (lit. mother of peace) was given to only 3 women in Ismaili history: Sarcar Bibi Marium Khatoon, Lady Aly Shah and Umm Habibeh.

The first *Mata Salamat*, Bibi Marium Khatoon was the cousin and wife of Imam Khalil Allah and the mother of Imam Hasan Ali Shah.

She was a *Pir* and was also given the title *Mata Salamat* by her son in 1245/1829. In the same year, he sent her to India (when she was 85 years old) to deal with internal community disputes. She died three years later in Kutchh but was interred in Najaf.

See more in the Encyclopaedia of Ismailism by Mumtaz Ali Tajdīn

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At 3-months old Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was on his deathbed. Shams Al Mulk, Lady Aly Shah (given the title of *Mata Salamat* in 1884) went to Jamatkhana to Imam Hasan Ali Shah weeping and asked him for prayers. The Imam said: "You are a mother. If you want his recovery, then come here for 7 days and sweep and wash the floor of the Jamatkhana. I pray that my grandson will get recovery." Lady Aly Shah, a Qajar Princess, then came daily to Jamatkhana, swept and washed the floor and stairs. On the seventh day, her son recovered his health. But even after, she continued to sweep its floor not with the broom, but with her own hair, then wash it with rose-water.

Shams Al Mulk, Lady Aly Shah, *Mata Salamat*, with her son Hazrat Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah

See more in the Encyclopaedia of Ismailism by Mumtaz Ali Tajdīn

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8. Shams al-Mulk Lady 'Ali Shah Mata Salamat II

Shams al-Mulk was a Qajar princess and after her marriage to Imam Aga 'Ali Shah, she became known as Lady 'Ali Shah. She gave birth to Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III and cared for him amidst unique circumstances:

Soon after the death of Pir Shihabuddin Shah in 1884, Imam Aga Ali Shah conferred upon her the title of Mata Salamat in Bomba. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan deeply loved his mother and she inspired some of his progressive policies toward the emancipation of women. When Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah became Imam at the age of 7, Lady 'Ali Shah served as his regent – administering the communal affairs of the Ismailis and wisely managing the family's financial resources. She testified in favour of the Imam in the Haji Bibi Case of 1908 and the judge commended her for her stellar memory.

She expired on February 5, 1938 at the age of 90 years and was buried at Najaf next to the tomb of her husband. Speaking of his mother, Imam Sultan

"Lady 'Ali Shah, as she was called by everyone, was a masterful royal princess and a woman of uncommon attainments, possessing a rare ability to supervise the callow years of her son, and commanding a natural gift for organizing, overseeing and managing the affairs of the Imam's community.

Thus Lady Ali Shah gathered in herself the affection and duties of a loving mother, a strict teacher, a hawk-eyed tutor, a wise guide, an exemplar of culture and literary taste, an initiator in esoteric understanding, a spiritual guide, and a disciplined character builder. Rarely has a son been brought up with greater care and even more rarely has he owed so much to his mother."

Shams al Mulk, Lady Aly Shah, *Mata Salamat*, mother of Hazrat Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah

- K. K. Aziz, (Aga Khan III, Selected Speeches and Writings, pp. 8-11)

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Muhammad Shah once wrote: “She had been to me more than father and mother combined, since I lost my father at the age of 8. No loss, even that of my son who died in infancy which was a terrible blow to me as a father, has been quite so terrible as this.” About the greatness of his mother and their close relationship, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah once wrote:



The story of Lady ‘Ali Shah’s last moments are quite moving: Realizing that her end was near, she told to Kamadia Khan Bahadur: “Send my love to all the members of the Ismaili community. I may not return to India, but wherever my spirit be I will eternally watch their peaceful progress and prosperity, as I have done all my life.” Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah had made every arrangement for his mother’s comfort at Baghdad, and for that reason, he took with

him Kamadia Khan Bahadur’s son, Hussain Ali, by air to Basra, where, under the Imam’s instructions, he made all possible arrangements for a quiet landing. A saloon car was ready to convey Lady ‘Ali Shah from Basra to Baghdad, where a bungalow, belonging to her nephew, Aga Hamid Khan, was placed at her disposal. She arrived at Baghdad on February 4, 1938 at 1 pm. The Imam’s travels to the West had increased, causing his longer stay away from India. His mother had felt the pangs of this separation, and once she said to her son: “Death is inevitable, but if it comes to me in your absence, it will be unendurable.” The Imam’s reply brought her great solace, who said: “Do not worry. You will breathe your last with your head in my lap.” Consequently, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and his wife reached Baghdad by air from Cairo on February 5, 1938 at 3 pm., and Lady ‘Ali Shah passed away at 5.15 pm on the same day, breathing her last in the lap of her son, as the Imam himself narrates in his Memoirs:

A few minutes after I reached her bedside, her eyes opened, and she recognized me. Then in the way that all true Muslims would ask, who seek to follow the Prophet’s example and attain a safe and quiet journey from the midst of the living, she achieved peace and happiness and that final ‘Companionship on High’ for which all yearn.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

8. Begum Yvette Omm Habibeh Mata Salamat III

Begum Yvette Aga Khan was the fourth wife of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. She had already converted to Islam before she met the Imam and had been living in Egypt prior to their marriage in 1944. The Imam bestowed on her the titles Omm Habibeh (beloved mother) and Mata Salamat in 1954 during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations. It is reported that the Imam had been reminded of his own mother, Lady ‘Ali Shah, on this occasion and was moved to tears when he gave the same

title to his last wife. Even more revealing are the statements that Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah made about his wife Mata Salamat in his Memoirs – declaring that his wife truly recognized his own mind and spirit and that their marriage was one of physical, mental, and spiritual union. Such language is a clear indication that this Mata Salamat was at the rank of hujjat and spiritual wife of the Imam like the other female hujjats of the past.

"I, who by the grace of God's greatest gift, am myself blessed with a wife who fully understands the joys and the sorrows of my mind and MY SPIRIT."

"I can only say that if a perfectly happy marriage be one in which there is a genuine and COMPLETE UNION and understanding, on the SPIRITUAL, mental and emotional planes, ours is such."

"She has been my strong and gentle help and comforter through all my serious illnesses of recent years. I have at last been granted the real and wonderful haven of finding in and with my wife a true UNION of mind and SOUL."



OM HABIBEH
(Mata Salamat), wife of Hazrat Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah described by him in his MEMOIRS

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When Mawlana Hazar Imam acceded to the Imamate, he sent a taliqah. But DID YOU KNOW that Mata Salamat III also sent a message? In his will, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah stated that she was to advise the new Imam for the first 7 years of his Imamate. In the tradition of other Shia women (ex. Fatima, Zaynab, Sitt al-Mulk, Mata Salamat I&II) securing the transition of Imamate, Mata Salamat served as a guarantor to the succession:

According to Ismaili traditions and in accordance with late beloved Hazar Imam's explicit will and nomination, Prince Karim has been installed as Hazar Imam of all Ismailis at Barkat Versoix, Geneva in presence of Ismailis from all parts of the world when all Ismailis here paid bayat homage and offered loyalty and devotion.
(Mata Salamat, Geneva, July 13, 1957)



OM HABIBEH
(Mata Salamat), wife of Hazrat Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah

Encyclopedia of Ismailism
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When Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah passed away and was succeeded by his grandson Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, Begum Mata Salamat served as a witness and guarantor of the Imamate succession – in the same way that prior female hujjats had done so in the past in the cases of Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra, Hazrat Zaynab, Sitt al-Mulk, Maryam Khatun, and Lady 'Ali Shah:

Begum Mata Salamat remained in love with Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah even after his death. It is reported that she would bring a red rose to his tomb every day and have the Qur'an recited in his mausoleum every morning. Speaking about her spiritual connection to the late Imam, even after his death, the Begum said:

Interviewer: Do you feel his (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's) presence?

Mata Salamat: "There is a daily habit of putting the flower in the mausoleum on his tomb... HE IS ALWAYS WITH ME. He doesn't leave me. I am thinking of him all the time. As long as you live and you are thinking of someone he is alive. When you die, he will die. Because he is in me, he lives with me. Now it's 35 years (since his death) and I am very grateful that he left me the possibility to build this mausoleum. I am very proud."



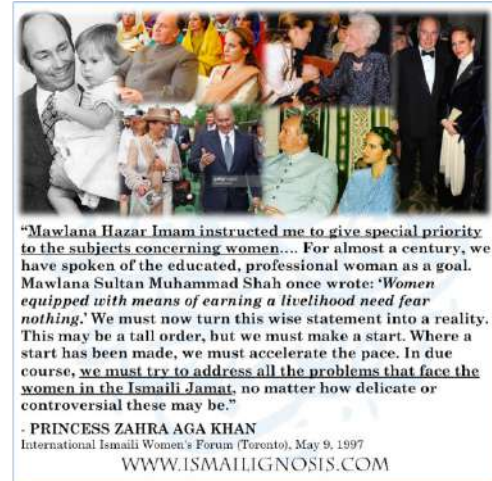
OM HABIBEH
(Mata Salamat), wife of Hazrat Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah

Interview courtesy of Amaana.org
WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM

9. Princess Zahra Aga Khan

Princess Zahra Aga Khan is the eldest child of Mawlana Hazar Imam. She has been an incredible support to the Imam of the Time, traveling with him constantly and working toward the betterment of the Ismaili community. She is particularly supportive of Ismaili women and youth. Below is an excerpt of a speech she gave at International Ismaili Women's Forum in 1997:

This list of extraordinary Ismaili Women is by no means exhaustive and will continually be updated by the Ismaili Gnosis Instagram team. Follow [Ismaili Gnosis @Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ismailignosis/) and keep looking for more profiles of the incredible women from Ismaili history at: <https://instagram.com/explore/tags/ismailiwomen/>

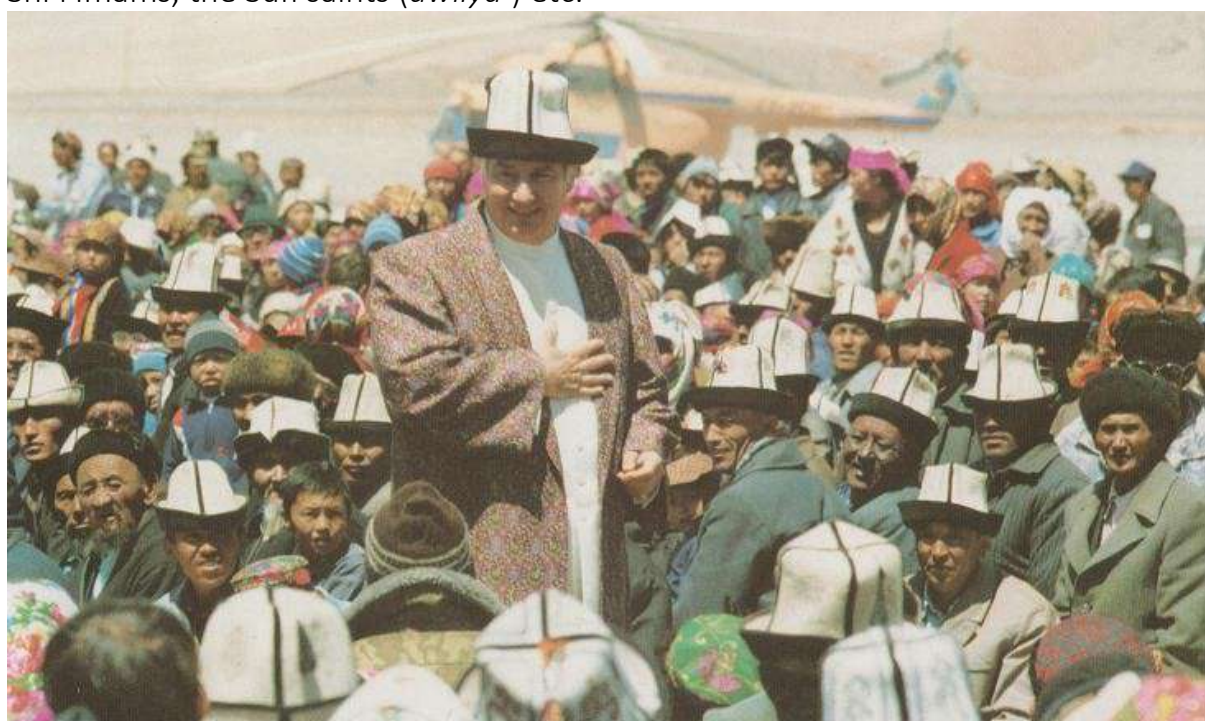


Ya Ali Madad: The Rationale for Praying to God and Calling upon the Imams in Prayer

We are the Gates of God. We are the medium for His people. He who approaches Him through us is brought near Him. He who seeks our intercession is interceded for. He who seeks His favours through us is favoured by Him. He who turns away from us goes astray.

— Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq

The purpose of this article is two-fold: first, to explain the metaphysics and philosophy of praying to God through supplication or petitionary prayer (*du'a'*) and secondly, to explain the metaphysical and Qur'anic basis for seeking the help and blessings of the Imam of the Time and intercessors in general – the Prophets, the Shi'i Imams, the Sufi saints (*awliya'*) etc.



Certain interpretations within the Muslim world that are both theologically shallow and metaphysically hollow seek to attack the theological ideas and devotional practices of Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. In particular, the doctrines and practices that evoke the help (*tawassul*) and intercession (*shafa'a*) of the Prophet Muhammad, [the Shi'i Imams](#), and Sufi saints (*awliya'*) are condemned as idolatry in the name of some abstract monotheism in which a believer should only invoke the help of a personalistic yet transcendent God. However, a metaphysical and theological analysis of the concept of God and the Qur'anic concept of prayer yields a conclusion that confirms the legitimacy and purpose of seeking the assistance of the Prophets and Imams in prayer.

The article draws heavily upon the Qur'an, [the Isma'ili Imams](#), and the great thinkers from the Islamic intellectual and mystical traditions including the Isma'ili da'is, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi as well as major Christian

thinkers like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, the content of this article is relevant for Muslims and Christians alike, particular those who follow esoteric traditions such as Ismaili Tariqah, Twelver *'irfan*, Sufi Tariqahs, and Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity.

Summary of Article and Key Sections:

We recommend reading the entire article in order, but readers can click on a section to start reading there.

SUMMARY:

A. Most people in modern times imagine God to be a sort of disembodied mind or personal consciousness that exists in time: they assume God hears the prayers and requests of human beings in real time, and then selectively responds to these requests by intervening in the world to fulfill people's wishes and requests.

B. But in the metaphysics of classical theism common to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, God is eternal and therefore beyond all time and change. God is continuously creating and sustaining the Cosmos and His mercy and blessings constantly emanate upon all created beings.

C. Created beings, however, possess varying levels of receptivity with respect to God's blessings. This includes human beings whose souls are at different levels of preparedness in their ability to receive the continuously flowing favours and blessings of God.

D. Accordingly, prayer does not affect or change God and His continual act of blessings. But rather, the act of prayer brings human beings into the remembrance of God and thereby affects the soul of the one who prays – making the human being more receptive to what God always gives unceasingly.

E. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad is at the highest level of spiritual purity and receptivity to God and the Qur'an (4:64, 9:103) indicates that the prayers and blessings of the Prophet Muhammad for the believers' forgiveness and purification bring about the fulfillment of their prayers and bestow inner peace to their souls. Since God transcends all change, the prayers and blessing of the Prophet have real effects upon the souls of the believers – allowing them to be more receptive to God's blessings and favours.

F. Similarly, the prayers and blessings of the [Shi'i Imams who are the spiritual inheritors of the Prophet Muhammad](#) also help bring out the fulfillment of the believers' wishes and prayers. The Imam of the Time is the means of access (*wasilah*) by which the believers seek and access the blessings and mercy of God.

G. While praying to God alone may bring about some gradual change in the soul of the believer, it is more beneficial for the believer to also seek the help and blessings of the Prophets and Imams and the Imam of the Time, since their blessings affect the soul of the believer more intensely than his prayers alone and help bring the fulfillment of his wishes and needs.

Section 1: God's Ceaseless Blessings – The Metaphysics of Divine Action

- A. God is eternal – beyond space, time, and change.
- B. God's creative act is eternal and continuous.
- C. God's act of bestowing blessings, compassion, and favours is eternal and unceasing.
- D. Created beings each have a different level of capacity and receptivity with respect to how they receive God's ever-flowing blessings.

Section 2: The Purpose of Prayer and Supplication to God

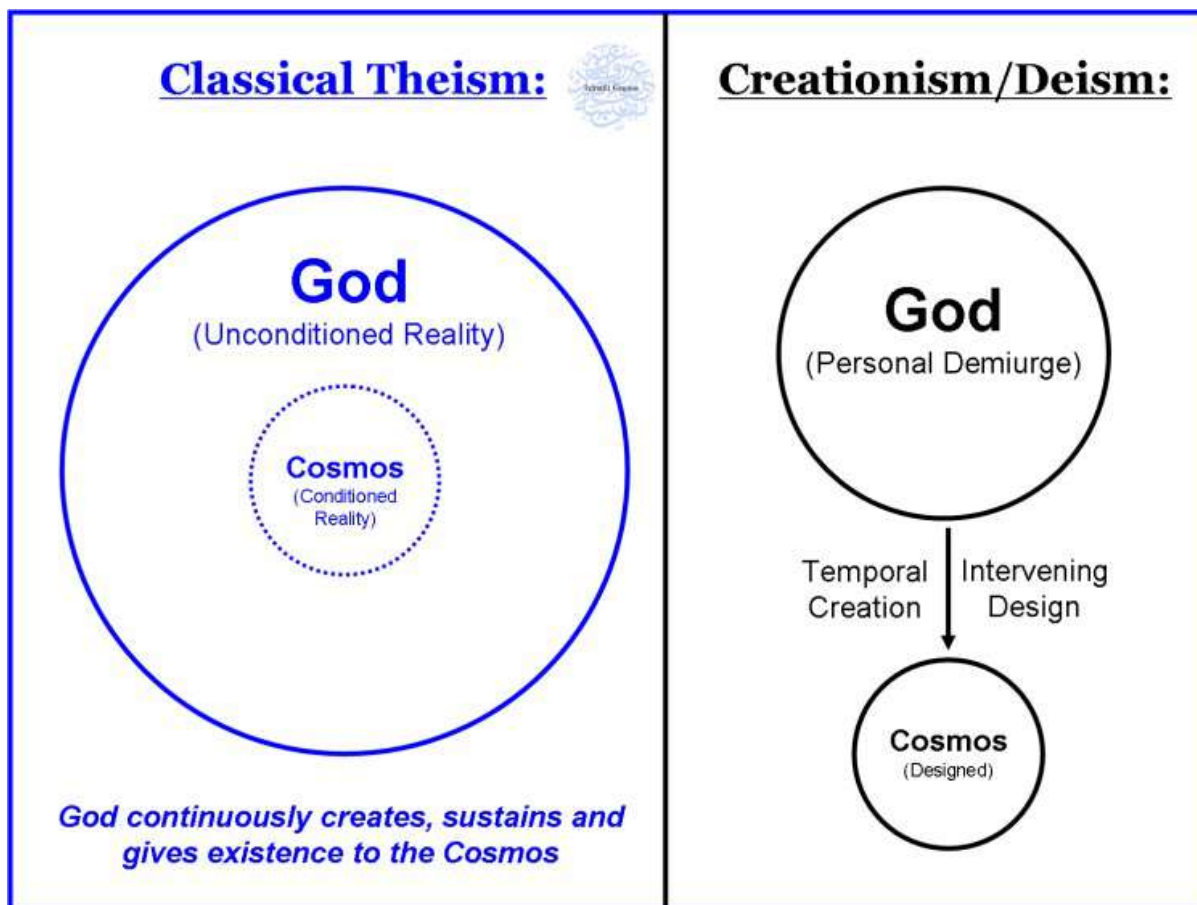
- A. The human act of prayer cannot and does not change God or His act of blessing which is eternal and unchanging.
- B. The essence of all human prayer is to remember God and to exist in harmony with God
- C. Prayer changes and affects the one who prays by increasing one's capacity and preparedness to receive the blessings that God already bestows upon all created beings

Section 3: The Purpose of Seeking the Help and Blessings of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'i Imams in Prayer.

- A. Communication through an intermediary (*wasilah*) is a Divine Custom (*sunnat Allah*) according to the Holy Qur'an.
- B. The Prophet Muhammad is the recipient and the vehicle of God's blessings, mercy and grace to His creatures.
- C. The prayers and blessings of the Prophet Muhammad cause the believers to receive and experience God's mercy and forgiveness, thereby bringing about the fulfillment of their prayers.
- D. The blessings and prayers of the Shi'i Imams and the Imam of the Time help the believers find the fulfillment of their prayers.
- E. To reject the help and intercession of the Prophets and Imams on the grounds of an "individual and unmediated relationship with God" amounts to spiritual idolatry (*shirk*).

Conclusion: Seeking help and blessings from the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time – Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni – is the foremost expression of the *tawhid* (transcendent and immanent unity) of God.

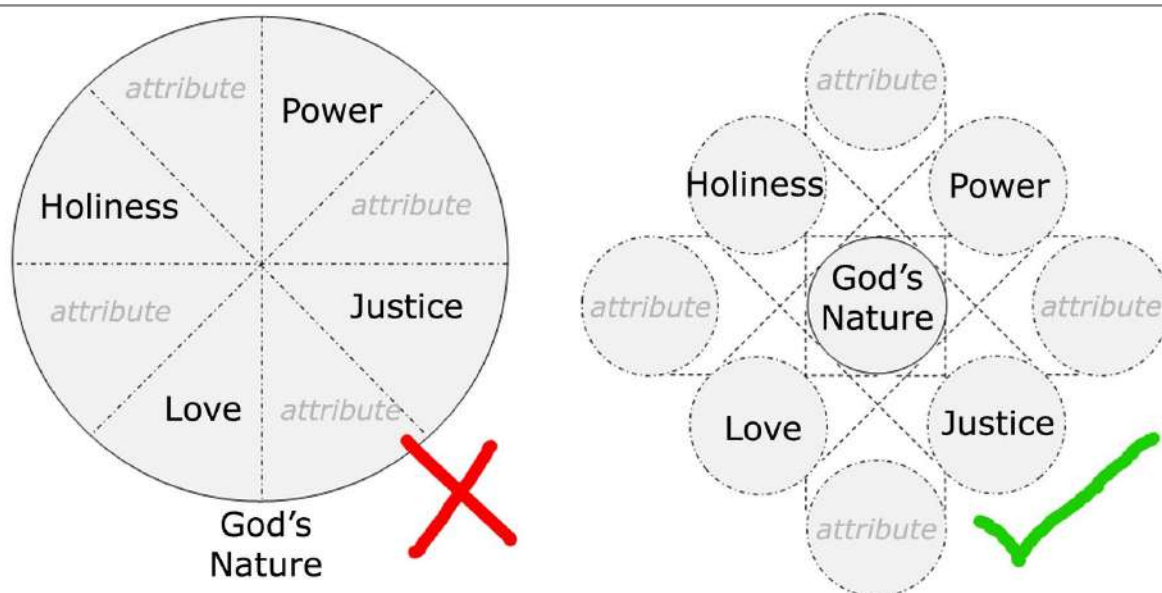
Section 1: God's Ceaseless Blessings – The Metaphysics and Theology of Divine Action



Any explanation of prayer must be anchored in correct metaphysics and theology. Most people in modern times imagine God to be a sort of disembodied mind or personal consciousness that exists in time: **they assume God hears the prayers and requests of human beings in real time, and then selectively responds to these requests by intervening in the world to fulfill people's wishes and requests.** This idea of God, common to creationists and "theistic personalists", suffers from serious flaws because it assumes that God is a subject of consciousness – akin to human consciousness – who hears prayers and then reacts to them in real time through divine interventions. Such a view implies that God undergoes real change and this, as it will be seen, compromises the concept of God.

According to classical theism – the shared theological framework common to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Neoplatonism – God is Absolute and Unconditioned Reality. This means that God is uncaused and self-sufficient in existence; He does not depend on any other reality to exist. Everything other than God is a conditioned reality – which means that its existence depends upon other realities at any given moment. If this theology seems implausible or unproven, then read our earlier [article on the Logical Argument for the Existence of God](#) before proceeding further.

A. God is eternal, transcending all space and time, and therefore changeless.



The principle of divine simplicity, moreover, carries with it certain inevitable metaphysical implications. One is that God is eternal, not in the sense of possessing limitless duration but in the sense of transcending time altogether.

— David Bentley Hart

His being the First means there was no 'first' before Him and no beginning preceded Him at all. His being the Last means his being without an end, as end can be conceived only as an attribute of what is created. But He is Eternal — the First and the Last. He has always been and He will always be, having neither any beginning nor any end. Occurrence does not apply to Him. Nor does He change from one state to another. He is the creator of every thing

— Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Tawhid, Hadith No. 314, tr. Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi)

As Unconditioned Reality, God is absolutely simple and without parts of any kind. If God contained parts – physical parts (atoms, particles, energy), intellectual parts (ideas, definitions, attributes, substance, accident), or ontological parts (essence, existence) – His existence would be dependent upon those parts and He would be a conditioned reality, i.e. a created being. The so-called Names and Attributes of God are not parts of God. They are used for God only analogically and not literally; to say God is merciful, living and powerful simply means that God is the source and ground of all mercy, life and power.

Since God is absolutely simple, it follows that He is wholly beyond time and therefore God is eternal. **Eternal here does not mean enduring or everlasting; eternal means entirely beyond time and change of any kind.** If God did change or evolve with time – it would mean that He moves toward a potential state that He has not yet attained. This implies that God's essence includes both an actual state (the present) and a potential future state. But if this were true, it would mean that God's Essence is composed of multiple actualities and potentialities – He would be

made of parts and any being made of parts is a conditioned reality. Similarly, if God experienced real change, then one part or aspect of His Essence would remain changeless while another part or aspect would have to be different (due to the occurrence of such a change). This likewise entails that God is a composite and conditioned reality – and this is impossible since God is Unconditioned Reality. God cannot change over time, moreover, as He would then be dependent upon the relation between some unrealized potentiality within Himself and some fuller actuality somehow “beyond” Himself into which He may yet evolve; again, He would then be a conditional being. He also must possess no limitations of any kind, intrinsic or extrinsic, that would exclude anything real from Him... The principle of divine simplicity, moreover, carries with it certain inevitable metaphysical implications. One is that God is eternal, not in the sense of possessing limitless duration but in the sense of transcending time altogether. Time is the measure of finitude, of change, of the passage from potentiality to actuality. God, however, being infinite actual being, is necessarily what Sikhism calls the Akhal Purukh, the One beyond time, comprehending all times within His eternal “now”; all things are present to Him eternally in a simple act of perfect and immediate knowledge.

David Bentley Hart,

(*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 134)

B. God’s creative act is eternal and continuous

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

The creative act of God is not like a human act of designing, constructing or making something. The word “creation” in classical theology means that God – Unconditioned Realities – bestows being (*wujud*) upon all conditioned realities. **In other words, something being “created” means that it depends upon God for its existence at any given moment.** Since God is eternal and beyond change, it necessarily follows that God’s creative act is also eternal and not in time – otherwise this would entail a real change in God; furthermore, from God there only proceeds a single act. If multiple acts proceed from God, this would entail multiple modalities or aspects in God’s Essence – rendering Him composite and conditioned. But since God is absolutely simple, His act of bestowing being – which we call “creation” – is single and eternal. The Qur’an refers to God’s creative act as the Command (*amr*) of God and says “Our Command is but one, like the twinkling of an eye” (Holy Qur’an 54:50). In his explanation of the meaning of creation, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, the forty-eight Imam of the Shi’i Isma’ili Muslims writes:

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing,

even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine Will.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, Chapter 2)

In the same vein, the Orthodox Christian theologian David Bentley Hart explains that God's creative act is an eternal act and not a temporal act akin to human deliberation:

If God is the infinite and unconditioned source of all things, then His creative intention— whether He creates only one world, or many, or infinitely many — can be understood as an eternal Act that involves no temporal change within Him. His freedom, moreover, can be understood as consisting not in some temporal act of decision that overcomes some prior state of indecision, but in the infinite liberty with which He manifests Himself in the creation He wills from everlasting.

David Bentley Hart,
(*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 138-39)

C. God's single act eternally bestows His blessings, loving compassion, grace and favours upon all created beings without cessation or interruption



Verily, there is nothing except Him Who is the Lord of the universe but is subject to annihilation, alteration, change, decay, transition from one colour to another, or from one shape to another, or from one quality to another, or from more to less, or from less to more. He alone is eternally in one state and He is the first, before every thing and the last, ever and evermore. His attributes and His names do not undergo any change as they do in the case of others. Take the example of a man who is at one time dust, at other time flesh and blood, and at another time decayed bones and finally dust. Another example is a date which is at a time raw,

at other times ripe, mature, and then dry. With every change, the names and attributes also go on changing. Not so, rather just the contrary, is the case of God, to Whom belongs Majesty and Might.

– Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Tawhid, Hadith No. 313, tr. Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi)

Imam Hasan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the Sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

Of the favours of thy Lord We bestow freely on all – these as well as those: The bounties of your Lord are not withheld.

– Holy Qur'an 17:20

As stated above, from God there proceeds only a single act of being. If multiple acts proceed from God, this would entail multiple modalities or aspects in God's Essence – rendering Him composite and conditioned. But since God is absolutely simple, His Act is single and eternal. This act is manifested by different qualities and attributes depending on what aspect of created being one takes into consideration. When one considers the finite existence of created beings, God's act is described as creation. When one considers the certain features in the Cosmos like life, power, or knowledge, God's act is described accordingly. Yet, it is one act with multiple facets:

His Exalted Command, which is the cause of all creation and existence, is one absolute grace (*fayḍ-i muṭlaq*) that shines equally upon the 18,000 words with no special illumination or favour on one rather than another being – every creature will speak about Him, the Exalted, according to the existential rank that it has received from His exalted Command, and in proportion to the existential traces of Him which he witnesses in his own essence.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi,

(*The Paradise of Submission*, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, 28)

Through His single and eternal act, God eternally bestows and pours out His loving compassion (*rahmah*), power (*qudrah*), life (*hayah*), knowledge (*'ilm*), favour (*ni'mah*), grace (*fadl*), forgiveness (*maghirah*), inspiration (*ta'yid*), and illumination (*nur*), etc. upon all created things. This is confirmed by numerous Qur'anic verses as follows:

Of the favours of thy Lord We bestow freely on all – These as well as those: The bounties of thy Lord are not withheld.

– Holy Quran 17:20

Do ye not see that God has subjected to you all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His favours flow to you in exceeding measure, seen and unseen?

– Holy Quran 31:20

And He giveth you of all that ye ask for. But if ye count the favours (*ni'mat*) of God, never will ye be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude.

– Holy Qur'an 14:34

That which God opens unto mankind of mercy (*rahmah*) none can withhold it; and that which He withholds none can release thereafter. He is the Mighty, the Wise.

– Holy Qur'an 35:2

My Mercy (*rahmah*) encompasses all things.

– Holy Qur'an 7:156

It is He Who sends blessings (*yusalli*) upon you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of Darkness into Light: and He is Merciful (*rahimun*) to the believers.

– Holy Qur'an 33:43

The most mentioned formula in the Qur'an is the basmalah: *Bismi'llahir-Rahmanir-Rahim* (By means of the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful). The divine name *al-Rahman* refers to loving compassion which is unrestricted and unlimited in its scope and presence. Reza Shah-Kazemi explains the metaphysical implications of the name *al-Rahman* as follows:

Ultimately nothing can escape or be separated from God's all embracing *Rahmah*, which is the divine matrix containing the cosmos. The word 'matrix' should be taken quite literally, in relation to its root: 'mother'. The word for womb, *rahim*, derives from the same root as *Rahmah*. The entire cosmos is not just brought into being by *Rahmah*, it is perpetually encompassed by *Rahmah* which nourishes it at every instant, as the mother's womb nourishes and encompasses the embryo growing within it... God's *Rahmah* is not just mercy; rather it is the infinite love and overflowing beatitude of Ultimate Reality, one of whose manifestations is mercy.

Reza Shah Kazemi,

(*Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism*, 105)

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), one of the greatest Islamic philosophers in history who hailed from a Shi'i Isma'ili family and incorporates some Isma'ili views into his thought, also maintains that God never withholds His blessings and gracious emanations from His creatures; it betray the very nature of God to be "miserly" – as Jonathan Dube explains:

Ibn Sīnā recurrently asserts in his works that God generously bestows His blessings on all His creatures and never withholds the effusion of what is suitable for them, hence that there is no miserliness (*bukhl*) in Him as regards the emanation of existence and perfection on all that necessarily exists by His will. Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā often refers to God's generosity in the negative, stating that God is not miserly and does not withhold blessings from His creatures. This is not to say that for him God is compelled to emanate what He necessitates – that He cannot not be generous – since, as we have seen, in Ibn Sīnā's analysis all that God existentiates through Himself is necessary, though not in itself, but by His will. Rather, Ibn Sīnā is signifying that to receive its proper existence and perfections a creature needs only to achieve the proper disposition to receive the divine effusion which is already granted, and thus realize its essential nature by means of its reception, as much as possible.

Jonathan S. Dube,
(Pure Generosity, Divine Providence, and the Perfection of the Soul in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina
[Avicenna], Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2014, 46)

Thus, God does not “cherry pick” and send a greater amount of compassion, blessings and favors to specific created beings and withhold His blessings from others. The light of God’s Command shines upon all created beings equally. **Thus, whatever the purpose of prayer and supplication may be, it is not to cause God to send more favours upon a particular creature.** In this respect, the relationship between God and the Cosmos can be likened to that of the Sun and its radiation upon a pool of water. The Sun radiates and emanates light without any restriction or special preference. The pool of water – and each water droplet in that pool – receives and reflects the light of the Sun according to its own capacity.

Imam Hasan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the Sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain; there is certainly a reflection or image of the Sun, but with what poverty and with what little reality; how small and pale is the likeness between this impalpable image and the immense, blazing, white-hot glory of the celestial sphere itself. Allah is the Sun; and the Universe, as we know it in all its magnitude, and time, with its power, are nothing more than the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the fountain.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time, Chapter 2)

D. Created beings possess different levels of preparedness, receptivity, and capacities in their ability to receive the blessings and favours that God continually bestows upon them.

God is saying that He gives constantly, while the loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness... Once you understand this, you will know the gift of God is not withheld. But you want Him to give you something that your preparedness cannot receive.

– Ibn al-‘Arabi

Although God’s Command continually showers His blessings and favours upon all of creation, it is nevertheless true that created beings are not equal in terms of knowledge, power, merit, excellence, and the nobility of their essences. Every created being has a different level of receptivity and preparedness toward what is given to it from God’s creative, sustaining and providential act. Each created being is a combination of certain essential properties and accidental attributes. This combination of properties and attributes define the “level of preparedness” or receptive capacity of each created being towards God’s blessings. Thus, inanimate objects have certain levels of receptivity, i.e. particles, atoms, molecules, minerals, etc. Plants possess another level of receptivity, as do animals. Human beings (the rational animal) are the species at the highest level of receptivity among living things in the physical world. And even among various living things, different plants, animals, and humans possess various levels of receptivity

among themselves. **Thus, every created being is a particular locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of God's creative power, light and blessings.** This is why the Qur'an refers to all natural things as Signs of God.

With respect to humanity, the human souls are at different levels of receptivity and preparedness in terms of receiving and reflecting the light of God. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi compares human souls to various kinds of stones: some are like gems while others are like opaque stones.

Human souls are therefore varied and differ with respect to their receptivity to the resplendent lights of the Divine Command, just as material objects are variously receptive to the physical light of the sun. [Consider] stones, for example: one [kind] is pitch black, while others are progressively less dark, and their essences are more receptive to illumination, up to translucent glass which receives light from one side and emits from the other.

Sayyidna Nasir al-Din al-Tusi,
(*The Paradise of Submission*, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, 109)

This is why the Qur'an declares unequivocally that God does not withhold His favours from anyone while also saying that human beings are in a hierarchy of ranks (*darajat*) in terms of receiving God's favours and grace:

To each [category] We extend – to these and to those – from the gift of your Lord. And never has the gift of your Lord been restricted. Look how We have favoured some of them over others. But the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in distinction.

– Holy Qur'an 17:21

God will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks.

– Holy Qur'an 58:111

We raise in degrees whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing.

– Holy Qur'an 12:76

Their Messengers said to them: "True, we are human like yourselves, but God doth grant His grace to such of his servants as He pleases."

– Holy Quran 14:11

All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of God,- of the Prophets, the Sincere, the Witnesses, and the Righteous: Ah! what a beautiful companionship!

– Holy Quran 4:69

This disparity and diversity within the Cosmos is most obvious even in our personal life experience. People live their lives with vastly different circumstances and experiences. It is easy to think that such and such person is "more blessed" than another. But this is not because God sends more to that person; it is because each human being is at a different level of receptivity and preparedness with respect to what God is giving us. **The ones who are "favoured" by God are those whose souls**

have a greater level of preparedness for God's blessings and favours. Yet many people believe that God is being miserly toward them when they experience undue hardships and difficulties. Thus Ibn Arabi explains the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "the gift of your Lord is not withheld":

God is saying that He gives constantly, while the loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness. In the same way we say the Sun spreads its rays over the existent things. It is not miserly toward anything. The loci receive the light in the measure of their preparedness... Once you understand this, you will know the gift of God is not withheld. But you want Him to give you something that your preparedness cannot receive. Then you attribute the withholding to Him in that which you seek from Him, and you do not turn your attention toward the preparedness. It is possible that a person has the preparedness to ask, but he does not have the preparedness to receive what he asks for – if it were given to him in place of being withheld.

Ibn al-'Arabi,
(*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, tr. William C. Chittick, 91-92)

In summary, God never withholds blessings or favors from any created being. When a created being is in a deficient state, this is due to its lack of receptivity. In the human context, while all human beings are born into the physical world at different levels of spirituality and perfection, God never ceases bestowing His blessings upon human souls. **Those who feel that they are lacking in Divine favors or experiencing God's wrath only do so because there are spiritual obstacles in their human soul that prevent it from receiving what God is already and continually giving to all creatures.** Thus the Qur'an states that all evil is due to one's own soul and that certain human beings have "locks" on their hearts such that they cannot receive Divine blessings and guidance.

Whatever good comes to you is from God and whatever evil comes to you is from your own soul.

– Holy Qur'an 4:79

Similarly, Ibn Sina explains that the "wrath" of God – in terms of God withholding blessings from a particular creature – does not really exist. When creatures alienate themselves from God's blessings due to their own actions which create obstructions to the flow of Divine blessings upon their souls – they will naturally experience less of God's favours. This is not because God stops giving but because the creatures are unable to receive.

In Ibn Sina's worldview, 'wrath' – or the withholding of blessings – cannot therefore be attributed to God, but only consists in the condition of alienation from the supernal realm; in other words, in the disruption of a creature's junction with the higher causes of its existence and perfections. Accordingly, he explains in his commentary on the *Theologia* that "the 'wrath of God' is the condition of being alienated (*bu'd*) from the junction with the supernal realm, wherein lie supreme felicity (*al-ghibṭat al-'ulyā*) and sheer radiance (*al-bahjat al-awfā*)" {ll. 15-6} (p. 43).

For Ibn Sīnā, God is therefore vastly generous, and never ceases bestowing abundant blessings on His creatures.

Jonathan S. Dube,
(*Pure Generosity, Divine Providence, and the Perfection of the Soul in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina [Avicenna]*, Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2014, 46)

Having laid out the metaphysical and theological background of God and His relations to created beings, we now turn to the purpose and meaning of prayer.

Section 2: Becoming Receptive to God's Blessings – The Metaphysics of Prayer

A. Human prayers do not affect or change God because He is eternally answering all prayers.

Whoever thought God shifts from one state to another has actually ascribed to God the attributes of His creatures. Nothing can provoke God, the Sublime, to bring any change in God.

– Imam Muhammad al-Baqir,

(Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, Kitab al-Tawhid, Hadith No. 302, tr. Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi)

From the above metaphysical and theological analysis, the natural question that emerges is this: what could be the purpose of prayer if God's act of bestowing blessings and mercy is eternal and unchanging? It is quite true that prayer does not and cannot change God. Being eternal, God is not affected by anything and does not change. However, the act of prayer – whether it be formal prayer (*salat*) or petitionary prayer (*du'a'*) in which the worshipper makes specific requests and supplications to God – does make a real difference. **While prayer cannot change God, prayer can and does cause change within created beings and may, at the very least, affect the spiritual receptivity of the one who prays. This does not mean that God does not answer prayers; but rather, God is always and already answering all prayers by bestowing His blessings at all times.** However, human beings need to take the appropriate steps to be aware of His blessings. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali writes on the meaning of the Divine Name *Al-Mujib* (Answerer of Prayers):

Al-Mujib – the Answerer of prayers – is the one who responds to the requests of those who ask by assisting them, to the call of those who call upon Him by answering them, and responds to the plight of the poor with all they need. In fact, He blesses before the request and grants favours before the entreaty. But that belongs to God alone – great and exalted, for He knows the needs of the needy before they [even] ask; indeed He already knew them in eternity, so He arranged the sources sufficient to their needs by creating food and nourishment, and by facilitating both the causes and the means of fulfilling all these needs.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali,
(*Al-Ghazali on the The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, tr. David B. Burrell, 115)

B. The essence of human prayer is to remember God and thereby exist in harmony with Him.

How we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the Universe. This is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are – you are happy.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

The various prophets, revelations and religious traditions have not prescribed prayer for human beings because God desires being praised by His creatures; nor does prayer amount to some arbitrary activity that Prophets and Imams instituted as means of control. **All religious rituals and particularly prayer have been enjoined to bring human existence into harmony with God wherein lies human happiness and felicity.** The Qur'an states that the ultimate purpose and essence of formal prayer is the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God.

Then worship Me and establish the prayer (*al-salata*) for the sake of My Remembrance (*li-dhikree*).

– Holy Quran 20:14

The remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*) here does not refer to the practice of chanting or invoking God's Names, but to a spiritual state of the human soul being conscious of God. In this respect, the state of remembering God is "greater" (*akbar*) than formal prayer:

Indeed, prayer (*al-salat*) prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*) is greater (*akbar*).

– Holy Quran 29:45

This is not to say that formal prayer (*salat*) has no value; on the contrary, the formal prayer serves as a stepping stone and guarantee that a person will enter into the remembrance of God at regular intervals. However, the purpose of such formal prayer is to facilitate one's remembrance of God at all times. For this reason, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III has written:

There is value in formal observances. I think it is well that a man should make a habit of formal prayer night and morning, for protection and in thanks. But, I place emphasis on the continual direct relation between God and man.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

("Is Religion Something Special", <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/>)

The remembrance of God – whether accomplished through formal prayer (*salat*), petitionary prayer (*du'a'*) or any other means – has a real and positive effect upon the human soul. This is why the Qur'an states that human souls (hearts) find "tranquil rest" (*itma'anna*) only in the remembrance of God.

Who have believed and whose hearts have rest in the remembrance of God. Verily in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest!

– Holy Quran 13:28

In 89:27, the Qur'an refers to the great souls that enter Paradise as the "satisfied soul at bliss" (*nafs al-mutma'inah*); that is to say, the blissful souls of Paradise have

found this contentment through their remembrance of God. On this point, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III explains that the human being's relationship to God – He who sustains one's existence at every moment – is the most important thing in life. True happiness – what the Qur'an calls "blissful and restful contentment" (*iṭma'anna*) – is achieved only when a person is "in harmony with God":

A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people. A few may think that they do not believe in God, and some others that it matters little to the individual in his daily life how he stand with regard to Him. Ruling out the atheist, with whom a believer can no more argue than he can discuss color with a blind man, it is surely strange that a believer in an omnipotent and ever-present Deity should fail to realise that how we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the Universe. This is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are – you are happy.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
("My Personal Life", Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. K.K. Aziz, 866)

C. Prayer changes and affects the one who prays, by increasing one's capacity and preparedness to receive the blessings that God already bestows upon all created beings.

**During the days of your life, fragrant breezes of mercy waft on you from your Lord.
Behold! Be receptive to them.**

– Prophet Muhammad

As far as the Sacred Essence of God, the Exalted, is concerned, there is no change in it. It is not the case that sometimes He becomes angry and sometimes He has mercy. This change according to the states of the people, takes place in those rays of the light of God which continue to fall on the heart and mind of every human being.

– Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir al-Hunzai

From the metaphysical perspective, since God's blessings, mercy, and favours continuously flow and shine upon all created beings, **the real effect of prayer is removing the obstacles and obstructions that prevent the human soul from receiving God's blessings. Thus, achieving "harmony" with God is what allows the human being to receive more of His blessings.** Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib tells us that the remembrance of God is what polishes human hearts (souls), allowing them to hear and see after having been deaf and blind to the light of God's blessings. Truly, God has made the Remembrance [of God] (*al-dhikr*) a polish (*jila'*) for the hearts, by which they hear after being deaf, and see after being blind and yield after being resistant.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib,
(Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, 142)

The word for polish, *jila'*, comes from the verb *jala*, meaning "to bring to light". This relates to the famous *ayat al-nur* in the Qur'an which speaks about the Light

of God being manifest in the heavens and the earths. Returning to our metaphysics stated earlier, **if the relations between God and the Cosmos are likened to the Light shining upon mirrors, then the act of remembering God (*dhikr Allah*) serves to “polish” the mirrors in which the Light of God is being reflected.** In the human context, this means the act of prayer, whose essence is remembrance of God, **serves to polish the human soul and remove the obstacles that obstruct it from receiving and reflecting the light of God.** Thus, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) explains the meaning of the prayer which states “I seek refuge in God” (*audhu bi’llahi*) and similar prayers where the human being “turns toward” his Lord:

The term ‘I seek refuge’ and [its linguistic equivalents] (*isti’ādha*, *’awdh*, *’iyādh*) are expressions of turning to another for help. Thus, the command simply to turn to another for help indicates that the nonexistence of the occurrence of perfections is not due to the One from whom beneficial things emanate, but is rather due to [something in] the receiver. And this verifies the established teaching that no perfections [...] are withheld (*mabkhūl*) by the First Principle, but [...] that the realization of everything depends on one’s preparation to receive them. This is the meaning indicated by the Prophet’s saying (upon whom be peace): “During the days of your life, fragrant breezes (*nafahāt*) of mercy waft on you from your Lord. Behold! Be receptive to them (*alā! fata’arradū lahā*).” It is therefore evident that the diffusion of blessings (*nafahāt al-altāf*) is ceaseless, while interruptions occur only in the preparation [of the receiver].

Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

(tr. Jonathan Dube, *Pure Generosity, Divine Providence, and the Perfection of the Soul in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina [Avicenna]*, Master’s Thesis, McGill University, 2014, 46)

The purpose of prayer – seeking God’s help, petition, personal supplication, etc – is to instill humility and greater awareness upon the person making the prayer. **Prayer as in the remembrance of God allows the person to become more receptive to the flow of God’s mercy and blessing that is already and ever occurring. While prayer cannot change or alter God, prayer changes and alters the one who prays – preparing his soul to receive Divine help that is already being sent to him.** The only reason why people do not seem to experience God’s favours at every moment is because there are barriers blocking them from receiving them – barriers in the form of vices like pride, ignorance, bad intentions, and the like. If these barriers were removed, then one would always be experiencing God’s mercy, help, favours, and blessings. The goal of prayer is to rehabilitate the person who prays, by untying the spiritual and psychic knots that block the reception of Divine grace from a person’s soul. This is what the Qur’an alludes to when it says: *When (*idha*) My servants ask you concerning Me, then (*fa-innee*) surely I am near. I respond to the call of the supplicant when he calls on Me. So let them respond to Me and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be guided rightly.*

– Holy Qur’an 2:186

This verse does not say that God hears a person's prayer and then undergoes change in order to answer them. But rather, the believer is able to perceive God's response when he asks the Prophet Muhammad about God. This is why this Qur'anic verse contains an if-then (*idha – fa*) clause. **If God's servants ask the Prophet Muhammad concerning Him, then God is near and responds when the servant calls upon Him. The believer, in to perceive that God is already answering his supplication, must first "respond" to God and have faith in Him in order to be rightly guided. In other words, God is always answering the prayers of His servants but they must be receptive to God in order to perceive and experience the Divine response.** The contemporary Isma'ili philosopher Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai offers the following practical advice with respect to prayer:

In order to attain good success and guidance of the heart from God (11:88, 64:11), you should pray not only after every *namaz* (daily prescribed prayer), but also all the time. During the prayer, extreme humility and expression of indigence is necessary, so that no trace of ill will may remain in the heart and then recourse may be taken to the Divine court. You can also pray in your own tongue, so that the heart may melt due to the painful supplication according to your state and may God, the Benevolent, have mercy upon you due to this condition. However, this point should be remembered that as far as the Sacred Essence of God, the Exalted, is concerned, there is no change in it. It is not the case that sometimes He becomes angry and sometimes He has mercy. This change according to the states of the people, takes place in those rays of the light of God which continue to fall on the heart and mind of every human being. Thus during prayer, if you have serious *giryah-u zari* or your heart becomes softer and softer, then you should be sure that God, the Exalted, casts the glance of mercy upon you.

Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir al-Hunzai,
(*Book of Healing*, Institute for Spiritual Wisdom, 128)

The spiritual luminaries and saints of Christian tradition take the exact same position toward the purpose of prayer as the Islamic philosophers, the Isma'ilis and the Sufis. Several statements from St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Anthony are as follows:

In so far as prayer affects anything at all, it affects ourselves, not God. We do not pray to sway God. We pray in order to change and to dispose ourselves so as to receive properly what God has willed to give us.

– Ceslaus Veleck

God does not need to have our will made known to Him – He cannot but know it – but He wishes our desire to be exercised in prayer that we may be able to receive what He is preparing to give us.

– St. Augustine of Hippo

We must pray, not in order to inform God of our needs and desires, but in order to remind ourselves that in these matters we need divine assistance.

– St. Thomas Aquinas

Prayer is not offered to God in order to change His mind, but in order to excite confidence in us. Such confidence is fostered principally by considering God's charity toward us whereby He wills our good.

– St. Thomas Aquinas

We do not pray in order to change, by petitionary prayer, the decree of Divine Providence, rather we pray in order to acquire by petitionary prayer what God has determined would be obtained by our prayers.

– St. Thomas Aquinas

(Terrance L. Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?*, 195-198)

God is good, dispassionate, and immutable. Now someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honour Him, and as turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honour Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right that the Divinity feel pleasure or displeasure from human conditions. He is good, and He only bestows blessings and never does harm, remaining always the same. We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him, but if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him. By living in holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. It is not that He grows angry with us in an arbitrary way, but it is our own sins that prevent God from shining within us and expose us to demons who torture us. And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him to change, but that through our actions and our turning to the Divinity, we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment of God's goodness. Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.

– St. Anthony, (*The Philokalia*, Volume 1. tr. and ed., G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware. Appendix: A Work Attributed to St. Antony the Great. On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life, saying 150, 352)

In this respect, prayer goes beyond formal ritual practices and becomes a posture of humility and receptivity before God in everyday life. A life of prayer does not mean, as some maintain, spending all of one's days in seclusion performing rituals. It means accepting and recognizing all things that happen in one's life as a blessing and grace from God, regardless of one's prior wishes for an outcome. To a certain extent, the invocations and supplications of formal prayer prepare and mould one's soul for this existential posture. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah explains this attitude of prayer as follows:

The business of the religious man is to live in continual consciousness and intimate relation with the Might and Glory of God. Associated with that is the need to

accept God's will joyfully, to acclaim what happens to us as a benefit, however much it may seem to the irreligious a misfortune. "It is the will of Allah", is said by us of Islam, not with sad resignation, but with pious hope.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Is Religion Something Special, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/>)

I should, first of all, advise my heirs to learn to desire the thing that happens, and not try to mould events to their desires...I would counsel my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves; I would have them resolute, self-controlled, independent, but not rebellious. Let them seek communion with that Eternal Reality which I call Allah and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal. I say that you should endeavour to suit your desire to the event, and not the event to your desire. If a wall tumbles down and crushes my foot, I must say: 'That is the best thing that could happen to me.' An uncle of mine had a son who was killed. The father gave thanks to Allah for the event. You think that he did not love his son? You are wrong. He loved him dearly.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(My Philosophy of Happiness, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10494/>)

Achieving greater harmony and receptivity before God's blessings and favours does not mean adopting an attitude of complacency and self-resignation. For it is only action – reflecting and acting upon oneself and upon one's surroundings – that help bring out this spiritual receptivity to God's blessings and favours – thus allowing one to experience more of these Divine blessings. Prayer works by changing the spiritual constitution of human beings so they can allow themselves to be changed by God. Thus Abu Hamid al-Ghazali notes that while God unceasingly bestows His mercy upon all human beings, **each person receives this mercy by "one's striving to be exposed to the outpouring of the mercy of God, the Most High, upon him...And thus the Prophet said – may God's mercy and peace be upon him – 'Your Lord has gifts of mercy for you throughout the days of your life; so expose yourselves to them'"** (Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God, 69). This is confirmed in the Qur'an which says:

Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their own souls.

– Holy Qur'an 13:11

Since the purpose of prayer is to create a change within one's own soul, the next step involves recognizing that one cannot bring about this change by one's own efforts alone. It is necessary to seek help and assistance of spiritually advanced human beings who can help change and transform one's soul so as to become more receptive to God's blessings. This kind of help may be sought from the purest human souls – the Prophets, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time.

Section 3: The Purpose of Seeking the Help and Blessings of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'i Imams in Prayer.



Pilgrims praying for the intercession of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib at his Shrine in Najaf. Muslims of Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi communities invoke and request the help and blessings of God throughout their formal prayers (*salat*). In addition, they also perform additional supplications such as petitionary prayer where help and blessings are sought from the Prophet Muhammad, the Shi'i Imams, and the Imam of the Time. Sunni Muslims pray to God in the name of the Prophet Muhammad and ask for Muhammad's intercession when visiting the tomb of the Prophet. Twelver Shi'i Muslims seek the blessings of the Ahl al-Bayt and their Imams through *du'a* and in visiting the shrines and tombs of their Imams. Many Sufi Muslims, particularly in South Asia and Africa, visit the shrines of deceased Sufi *awliya*' (Friends of God) and submit offerings and prayers to seek the blessings of the Sufi shaykhs.

Shi'i Isma'ili Muslims frequently invoke supplications (*du'a*) where God's mercy, blessings and forgiveness is sought through the right of (*bi-haqqi*) the prophets of God and the [Isma'ili Imams](#). **Some Isma'ili petitionary prayers also contain phrases such as Ya Ali Madad, Ya 'Ali, Ya Hazar Imam, Ya Mawla, etc. In such cases, the Isma'ili *murid* or the community (*jama'at*) as a congregation seeks the help (*madad*) and blessings of the Imam of the Time.**

The entire question of whether it is justified to seek help from the Prophets and the Imams through phrases such as Ya 'Ali Madad, Ya 'Ali, Ya Muhammad, Ya Hazar

Imam, etc. revolves around the question of intermediaries between God and human beings. The Arabic word for intermediary or means of access is *wasilah* which is mentioned in Qur'an 5:35.

A. Communication through an intermediary (*wasilah*) is a Divine Custom (*sunnat Allah*) according to the Holy Qur'an.

This is the custom of God (*sunnat Allah*) with those who passed away before, and you will not find any alteration in the custom of God (*sunnat Allah*).

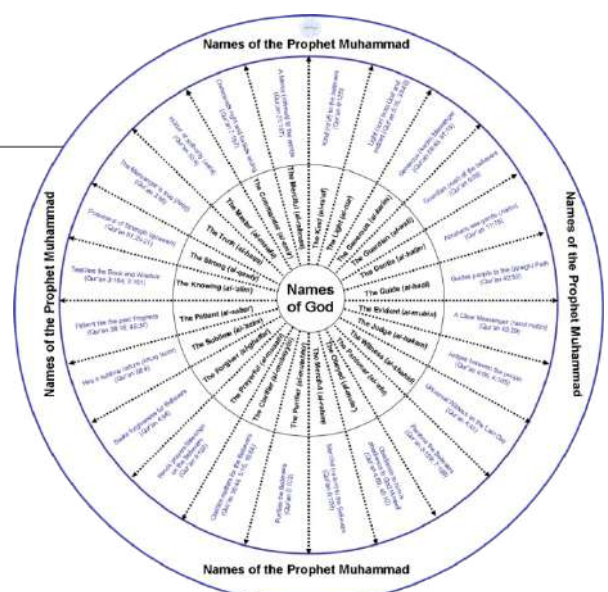
– Holy Qur'an 33.62

Let it be clear at the outset that the practice of resorting to an intermediary to accomplish a certain objective is a divine custom (*sunnah*). This means that God Himself makes use of intermediary causes and objects for specific purposes. For example, the Qur'an refers to all things in the physical world as the Signs (*ayat*) of God; therefore, God reveals Himself through intermediaries. God also reveals His Guidance (*hidayah*) and Command (*amr*) through angels and through human beings such as the Prophets and Imams (see 21:73). God's inspiration (*wahy*) to human beings is also through the mediation of the Holy Spirit and the angels (see our article on Surah al-Qadr). **Thus, from a purely logical point of view, if God communicates to human beings through various intermediaries – Nature, angels, the Holy Spirit, Prophets, Imams, etc. – then it is quite appropriate for human beings to attain communion with God through these very same intermediaries in accordance with the custom of God (*sunnat Allah*).** There are seventeen Qur'anic verses which state that there will be no intercession between man and God – but these all refer to the intercession of idols as being unacceptable (see 2:254, 2:48, 39:43-44). Meanwhile, there are ten Qur'anic verses which clearly allow for intercession if the intercessor has God's permission and acceptance (see 2:255, 10:4, 19:87, 43:86). As this section will show, the Prophets and the Imams are the foremost means of access (*wasilah*) and intercessors for the believer to seek God's help and blessings.

But how does such an intermediary – the Prophet or the Imam – actually help fulfill a person's wishes and requests? Why not just pray directly to God? And what is the metaphysical basis of resorting to the help of the Prophet and Imams if God Himself is beyond all change. This will now be explored in greater detail.

B. The Prophet Muhammad is the recipient and the vehicle of God's blessings, mercy and grace to His creatures.

As mentioned above, human souls are at different levels of receptivity and preparedness in terms of receiving and reflecting the light of God and receiving His blessings. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi compares human



souls to various kinds of stones: some are like gems while others are like opaque stones. Among all human beings, the soul of the Prophet Muhammad is at the highest level of preparedness and receptivity of God's blessings:

God and His Angels send blessings (*yasalluna*) upon the Prophet. O ye who believe, invoke blessings upon him (*salli 'alayhi*) and submit to him in full submission.

– Holy Qur'an 33:56

The Qur'an declares it as a metaphysical truth that God sends His blessings on the Prophet. The believers are commanded to recite the *salawat* by making the following prayer – O God, send Thy blessings upon Muhammad and his progeny. **This prayer is not a literal request to convince God to bless Muhammad and his family – for that is already happening. But rather, the *salawat* of the believers is really an act of bearing witness to God's continuous act of blessing the soul of Muhammad and his progeny. All Muslim prayers must include sending blessings upon Muhammad and his progeny, without which such prayers are not legally acceptable.** The reasons for this practice will become clear.

The Qur'an also qualifies the Prophet Muhammad with God's own Names and Attributes. In a famous verse, Muhammad is called the Mercy that God sends to all creatures:

And we have only sent you [Muhammad] as a Mercy (*rahmat*) to the worlds.

– Holy Qur'an 21:107

It is by the Mercy (*rahmah*) from God that you (O Muhammad) were gentle with them, for if you had been stern of heart they would have dispersed from around you.

– Holy Qur'an 3:159

There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind (*ra'ūf*) and merciful (*rahīm*).

– Holy Qur'an 9:128

These verses confirm two realities: a) the Prophet Muhammad is the foremost recipient of God's blessings; and b) the Prophet Muhammad is the vehicle and channel for God's mercy and blessings to reach all of creation. The latter point is evidence in the third verse since (*al-Ra'uf* and *al-Rahim*, which are among the Names of God in the Qur'an, are used here to describe the Prophet Muhammad. This is simply because the soul of the Prophet Muhammad has a greater capacity for receptivity toward God's continuous blessings; therefore, Muhammad always receives the blessings and mercy of God and through him, these blessings are conveyed to others – just as the Sun shines and is reflected upon gemstones. Numerous other passages demonstrate how the Prophet Muhammad is the manifestation and the vehicle for numerous Names and Attributes of God, as showcased in our [earlier article](#).

C. The prayers and blessings of the Prophet Muhammad cause the believers to receive and experience God's mercy and forgiveness, thereby bringing about the fulfillment of their prayers.

And pray (send blessings) over them. Verily, your prayer (blessing) is a source of peace (*sakan*) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing.

– Holy Qur'an 9:103



Whereas one's own prayer can gradually improve one's spiritual constitution and receptivity to God's blessings – allowing one to experience the "fulfillment" of one's prayers, the prayers and blessings of the Prophet Muhammad are more powerful and possess greater efficacy in bringing out the fulfillment of the believers' prayers and requests to God. While there are numerous Qur'anic verses that confirm the Prophet Muhammad's right to pray and send blessings upon the believers, we will examine two verses in detail. The first verse is 4:64 which, according to both Sunni and Shi'i commentaries (*tafsir*), is a command for the believers to approach the Prophet Muhammad and seek his prayers when they seeking the forgiveness of God:

And if, when they wronged their souls, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked forgiveness of God and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God Forgiving and Merciful.

– Holy Qur'an 4:64

The above verse clearly guides the believers of all times who seek the forgiveness of God:

- a) The believers must "come to" the Prophet Muhammad in person.
- b) The believers are to seek God's forgiveness while standing before the Prophet
- c) The Prophet Muhammad is to pray to God and ask for His forgiveness for them
- d) As a result, the believers will "find" God to be Forgiving and Merciful to them

As discussed earlier, God Himself is beyond the process of change and alteration since He is eternal. Thus, God eternally bestows His mercy and forgiveness upon all created beings. However, those who lack receptivity to God's forgiveness will be unable to receive, appreciate or experience God's forgiveness in their lives.

However, as the Qur'an states, **if the Prophet Muhammad prays to God for the forgiveness of the believers, only then do "they find" (*la-wajadu*) God Forgiving and Merciful. The prayers of the Prophet Muhammad do not convince or compel God to become forgiving after having not been forgiving, since God is beyond change and is eternally and always forgiving.** But rather, the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad actually affect the souls of the believers – altering the state of their souls whereby the believers become more receptive and conscious of God's forgiveness which He continually grants to them. The Qur'an 4:64 confirms this because it says "they (the believers) will find (*wajadu*) God Forgiving and Merciful"

as a result of Muhammad's prayers and does not say "God becomes Forgiving and Merciful." **This proves that the prayers and intercession of the Prophet Muhammad brings out a direct change in the believers' souls while God Himself remains eternally Forgiving and Merciful.** The prayers of Muhammad are akin to the Prophet opening the eyes of the believers so they become more conscious and aware of God granting them forgiveness and compassion.

The second set of verses we will consider are in Qur'an 9:102-104:

And (there are) others who have acknowledged their faults. They mixed a righteous action with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them. Lo! God is Forgiving, Merciful. Take (*khud*) offerings (*sadaqah*) from their wealth (*amwālihum*), and purify and sanctify them by means of it. And pray (send blessings) over them. Verily, your prayer (blessing) is a source of peace (*sakan*) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing. Do they not know that it is God who accepts repentance from His servants and takes the offerings (*ya'khudu al-sadaqāt*) and that it is God who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful?
– Holy Qur'an 9:102-104

According to both Sunni and Shi'i commentaries (*tafsir*), this verse was revealed when some believers among the community of the Prophet Muhammad sought to repent for certain wrongful actions which they had committed. This verse guided the Prophet Muhammad to perform the following actions to facilitate the repentance of these believers:

- a) The believers submit offerings (*sadaqah*) from their wealth to the Prophet Muhammad
- b) The Prophet Muhammad accepts their offerings.
- c) The Prophet Muhammad purifies and sanctifies the souls of the believers
- c) The Prophet Muhammad prays (sends blessings) over the believers
- d) The Prophet Muhammad's prayer brings inner peace (*sakan*) to the souls of the believers
- e) The Prophet's act of receiving the believer's offerings and repentance represents and signifies God's acceptance of their offerings and repentance.

When one interprets this verse in light of the metaphysics and theology of classical theism according to which **God is beyond all change and alteration, one must logically conclude that the Prophet Muhammad's act of accepting offerings, purifying the believers, and praying for them is what brings about the fulfillment of their prayers for God's forgiveness and acceptance of their repentance. Without the Prophet's prayers, blessings and purification, the believers would not obtain the forgiveness of God. This is not because God is not forgiving and must be convinced to forgive them; but rather, because the believers in their state of sinfulness are simply unable to accept and receive God's mercy and forgiveness that He is always bestowing upon them.** God Himself, transcending time and change, is not affected or altered by the prayers of the Prophet or the believers; the Prophet transforms the souls of the believers through purifying them and

making them more receptive to what God bestows upon them of His mercy and blessings, such that they are able to receive and accept His forgiveness. This is demonstrated by the Qur'an's use of the words "purify them and sanctify them": these purifying acts by the Prophet remove the sins, impurities and other barriers in the souls of the believers which are impeding and blocking their reception of God's blessings. **The verse also states unequivocally that the Prophet's prayer and blessing brings *sakan* – an Arabic word which means "peace", "stillness" or "rest" – to those whom he prays for. In a very real sense, the Prophet Muhammad's prayers and blessings are the proximate cause of the believer's attaining God's forgiveness while God remains as the ultimate agent of forgiveness.**

The Qur'anic verse 4:64, when properly interpreted in light of classical metaphysics, shows that the prayers of Prophet Muhammad affect the believer so that they can realize or "find" God to be Forgiving and Merciful. Similarly, verses 9:102-104 demonstrate that the Prophet Muhammad's blessings, prayers and purification transforms the souls of the believers so that they may experience God's mercy and acceptance of their pleas for forgiveness and repentance. In both cases, God is eternal and unchanging in His continuous bestowal of mercy, forgiveness and blessings while the Prophet's prayers and purification cause a change in the souls of those whom he prays and blesses – purifying them and bringing them into a state of inner peace. This practice, which the Qur'an bears witness to on multiple occasions, was a regular part of the life of the early community of believers at the time of Prophet Muhammad. Fred Donner, the historian of early Islam, explains that the original meaning of the practice of *zakat* (meaning "purification") was tied to the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad mentioned in 9:102-104:

Recent research suggests, however, that the original Qur'anic meaning of *zakat* and *sadaqa* was not almsgiving, but rather a fine or payment made by someone who was guilty of some kind of sin, in exchange for which Muhammad would pray in order that they might be purified of their sin and that their other affairs might prosper... This understanding of *zakat* or *sadaqa* as a payment for atonement or purification of sins is clearest in the following verses: "Others have confessed their sins ... Take from their property *sadaqa* to cleanse them, and purify [*tuzakki*] them thereby, and pray for them, indeed your prayer is a consolation to them. God is all-hearing, all-knowing" (Q. 9:102-103); the verb "to purify" is from the same Arabic root as *zakat*. The fact that Believers were sometimes required to make such purification payments, however, underscores how the community was, in principle, focused on maintaining its inner purity, on being as much as possible a community that lived strictly in righteousness, so as to set themselves apart from the sinful world around them and thus to attain salvation in the afterlife.

Fred Donner,
(*Muhammad and the Believers: At The Origins of Islam*, 64)

The examples discussed above demonstrate that the Prophet Muhammad serves as the “means of access” (*wasilah*) and intercessor through which the believers could seek and find God’s mercy, blessings, and forgiveness. The person of Muhammad is an active intercessor and means of access: his prayers and blessings purify the souls of the believers, bring them inner peace, and allow them to receive God’s blessings. Sunni sources also provide information on how the Prophet Muhammad instructed a blind man to seek his intercession when praying to God for a cure to his blindness:

A blind man came to the Prophet and said, “I’ve been afflicted in my eyesight, so please pray to God for me.” The Prophet said: “Go make ablution (*wudu*), perform two *rak’ats* of prayer, and then say: “O God, I ask You and turn to You through my Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy; O Muhammad (Ya Muhammad), I seek your intercession with my Lord for the return of my eyesight, that it may be fulfilled. O God, grant him intercession for me.” The Prophet added, “And if there is some need, do the same.”

(Ahmad al-Nasa’i, 417-418, Hadith No.658-660, al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak, 1:313, 1:526)

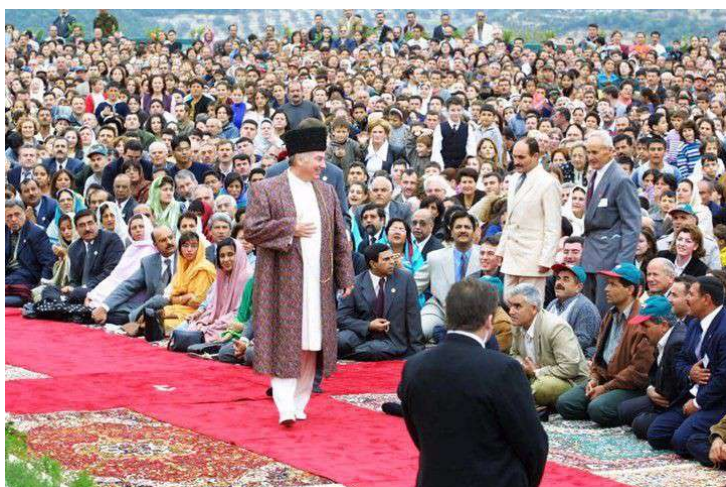
D. As the inheritors of the Prophet Muhammad and the bearers of his spiritual authority (*walayah*), the blessings and prayers of the Shi’i Imams and the Imam of the Time help the believers find the fulfillment of their prayers.



Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [A.S.] teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525

The Imams are also intermediaries between man and God. To ask for their succor in life is to appeal to the channel God has placed before men so as to enable man to return to Him. They are, in this sense, the extension of the personality of the Prophet.

– Seyyed Hossein Nasr



I convey to all my *murids* my most affectionate and most loving blessings, and I pray that Allah may bring all of you here present, and to your families and homes, peace and hope in the future.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
(Public Address, Tajikistan, 1998)

While Muhammad was the last of the Prophets, he was by no means the last human being to have spiritual proximity (*walayah*) to God. While prophecy ends with Muhammad, the *walayah* continues through his successors and inheritors, namely, the Shi'i Imams. The Qur'an commands all believers to seek God through such a means of approach (*wasilah*) in all times. Therefore, this function of being a *wasilah* logically continues in the spiritual inheritors of the Prophet Muhammad who are the Shi'i Imams of his Ahl al-Bayt.

O ye who have faith! Be mindful of God, and seek the means of approach (*al-wasila*) unto Him, and strive with might and main in his cause: that ye may prosper.
– Holy Quran 5:35

The Qur'an would not command believers to seek the means of access (*wasilah*) to God if such a *wasilah* no longer exists after the Prophet. Thus, all the spiritual functions of the Prophet Muhammad, with the exception of revelation, continue through his spiritual successors beginning with Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his designated descendants, the [Shi'i Isma'ili Imams up to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV](#) – the Imam of the time. During his own lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad equated himself with Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib in spiritual authority as per the following statements recorded in Sunni Muslim hadith books:

Truly, 'Ali is from me and I am from him (*inna 'Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and he is the walī (patron/spiritual master) of every believer after me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 19, No. 4636; Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 129)

'Ali is with the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān is with 'Ali. They will not separate from each other until they return to me at the [paradisaal pool] (*al-hawḍ*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4685)

‘Ali is as my own soul (ka-nafsī).

Prophet Muhammad,

(Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasa’i, *Khasa’is Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 104)
You [‘Ali] are from me and I am from you (*anta minnī wa anā minka*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 924, No. 4672)
Whoever obeys ‘Ali obeys me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 925, No. 4678)
O ‘Ali, whoever separates himself from me separates himself from God, and whoever separates himself from you, O ‘Ali, separates himself from me.

Prophet Muhammad,

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4682)
‘Ali is from me and I am from him (‘*Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and nobody can fulfill my duty but myself and ‘Ali.

Prophet Muhammad,

(Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasa’i, *Khasa’is Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 106)
For whomever I am the mawlā [master], ‘Alī is his *mawla* (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu*).

Prophet Muhammad,

(Cited in numerous Sunni Muslim Hadith sources listed [here](#))

Just as the Prophet Muhammad’s soul is at the highest level of spiritual purity and receptivity to God’s continual blessings, the souls of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are also at the summit of purity. The Qur’an declares the purity of the Ahl al-Bayt as follows:

And God only intends to keep away from you all impurity, O Ahl al-Bayt, and purify you with a thorough purification.

– Holy Quran 33:33

Similarly, the Qur’an and the Prophet indicate that the Imams who are the descendants (al) of Muhammad likewise receive God’s blessings at all times.

It was said, “O God’s Messenger! We know how to greet you, but how to invoke God for you?” The Prophet said, “Say: O God, bestow Your blessings upon Muhammad and the Progeny (al) of Muhammad just as You blessed Abraham and the Progeny of Abraham.”

(Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Volume 6, Hadith No. 320, [Read Here](#))

Once again, reciting this prayer, the *salawat*, does not make God bestow His blessings on Muhammad and the Shi‘i Imams – for they receive these blessings regardless of whether people invoke them or not. This *salawat* is an affirmation and a bearing witness to this spiritual reality on the part of the believer. **In continuously reciting the *salawat*, the believer becomes more and more cognizant and conscious of God’s blessings upon the Prophet and the Imams and, in doing so, the believer himself becomes more able to receive these blessings through the Imams. In other words, the *salawat* is a classical example of a prayer seeking God’s blessings through the Prophet and the Imams.**

The early Imams were invoked as means of access (*wasilah*) to God during their own lifetimes. Ahmad ibn Hanbal records that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas sought the help of God through Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib when he was near-death:

When the death time of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas approached, he said: “O God! I seek to approach toward Thee by means of the *walayah* of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.”

(Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Fada’il al-Sahaba*, Vol. 2, 662)

The [The Aga Khan’s Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#), as the inheritors of the Prophet, continue the spiritual functions of the Prophet Muhammad. Each Imam in his own time is the *wasilah* (means of access) to God for his disciples. **This concretely means that the Imam of every time and age prays to God on behalf of all the believers for their forgiveness just as the Prophet himself did (per Qur’an 4:64); the Imam of the time receives the believers’ offerings (*sadaqah*) and *zakat* and purifies their souls as Muhammad had done in his own lifetime (per Qur’an 9:103); the Imam mercifully pardons and forgives the believers’ sins and shortcomings as the Prophet had done (per Qur’an 3:59); and the Imam bestows his blessings and prayers upon the souls of the believers, for their prosperity, resolution of difficulties and inner peace (*sakan*) just as Muhammad had done so (per Qur’an 9:103).** In light of the Imam’s spiritual functions, it is customary for the followers of the Imams to appeal to their help and assistance as intermediaries between God and humankind.

The Imams are also intermediaries between man and God. To ask for their succor in life is to appeal to the channel God has placed before men so as to enable man to return to Him. They are, in this sense, the extension of the personality of the Prophet.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (*Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 163)

This is why the contemporary Nizari Isma‘ili Du‘a calls upon all believers to seek God’s help and assistance through the living Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, who is the *wasilah* (means of access) to God:

Tawassalu indal-masa’ib bi-mawlakum al-hadir al-mawjud Shah Karim al-Husayni
In the time of difficulties, seek help through your present and living mawla Shah Karim al-Husayni

Nizari Isma‘ili Du‘a’, Part III

The word *tawassalu* comes from *wasilah* (means of access) mentioned in Qur’an 5:35 (“Be mindful of God and seek the *wasilah* unto Him”) and evokes the living Imam (*bi-mawlakum*) as the *wasilah* to God. From a metaphysical perspective, the souls of the Isma‘ili Imams including the living Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, are of the greatest level of spiritual purity and have the highest degree preparedness and receptivity to God’s blessings and favours. While God constantly bestows His blessings and favours upon all created beings, most human souls lack the capacity to fully receive them. When anyone prays for the fulfillment specific wishes and needs, he is essentially seeking a greater share of God’s blessings and favours; one way to bring this about is through one’s own individual prayers and

supplications to God directly, without any intermediaries: but such a prayer does not change God in any way and hopefully alters one's soul enough to bring about a greater receptivity to receive God's blessings.

Since the purpose of one's prayers is to affect one's own soul, it is far more effective and logical for the believer to seek the assistance (*tawassul*) of the Prophets, the Imams and the Imam of the Time. While one's individual prayers can only have so much of an effect on one's soul, the prayers and blessings of the Imam of the Time can deeply affect the souls of the believers. As the Qur'an shows for the Prophet, the Imam's blessings and prayers purify the souls of the believers, bringing them inner peace (*sakan*) and transforming them to be more receptive to God's blessings. Thus, the prayers and blessings of the Imam of the Time actually help the believers find the fulfillment of their prayers and requests. When believers seek the help of the Imam, by invoking phrases like Ya 'Ali, Ya 'Ali Madad, or Ya Hazar Imam, it is precisely the blessings of the Imam that are being sought. Metaphysically speaking, the believer receives God's favours through the Imam of the Time, by means of the Imam's prayers and blessings. God's blessings reach the souls of the believers by means of the Imam's pure soul – which has already received these blessings due to the Imam's spiritual receptivity. In this respect, the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq has encouraged his follows to seek God's help and blessings through the Imams:

We are the Gates of God. We are the medium for His people. He who approaches Him through us is brought near Him. He who seeks our intercession is interceded for. He who seeks His favours through us is favoured by Him. He who turns away from us goes astray.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Qadi al-Numan, *Kitab al-Himma*, trans. Jawad al-Muscatai, A.M. Moulvi, 42)

The very idea of seeking God's blessings through an intermediary, and specifically requesting help from the intermediary – whether it is a Prophet or an Imam – is patently Qur'anic. We have already seen how the Prophet Muhammad's blessings and prayers cause a dramatic change in the souls of the believers and allow them to "find" and receive God's mercy and forgiveness (4:64, 9:103). The Qur'an also provides other examples of people seeking the help and prayers of the Prophets: Moses' companion sought help from him (Qur'an 28:15); the family of Prophet Yusuf asked him to pray to God for their forgiveness (12:97-98); the Children of Israel asked Moses for water and Moses prayed to God and then fulfilled their request by producing twelve springs of water (2:60, 7:160).

The intercession of the Prophets and Imams is evoked in the current Isma'ili Du'a'. In the fourth part, the supplicant seeks God's mercy, forgiveness, and sustenance by "the right of" (*bi-haqqi*) the Messengers of God, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time:

*Allahum-maghfir lana dhunubana
w'arzuqna, wa'rhamna,*

*bi-haqqi rusulika'l-muqarrabin,
 wa a'immatika'l-mutahharin,
 wa bi-haqqi mawlana wa imamina,
 Shah Karim al-Husayni*
 O God, forgive us our sins,
 And give us our sustenance, and have mercy upon us,
 By the right of Thy closest Messengers
 And Thy pure Imams,
 And by the right of our lord and our Imam
 Shah Karim al-Husayni

Nizari Isma'ili Du'a', Part IV

This is a supplication invoking the help of God through the mediation of the Prophets, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time. Their intercession and mediation is invoked by the phrase *bi-haqqi* – which can be interpreted and translated in several forms such as “by the right of”, “in the name of”, or “for the sake of”. The term *haqq* refers to the rights (*huquq*) which God has bestowed upon His creatures. The above supplication is an affirmation of the right (*haqq*) of intercession and mediation which God has granted to the Prophets and the Imams as His *wasilah* (means of access) to mankind. Henry Corbin, one of the great scholars of Shi'i Islam, explains how the souls of the Imams are in a state of *walayah* (closeness and intimacy with God) due to which God has granted them a special kind of “right” (*haqq*) – when God initially created their souls before the creation of the world.

Thus at the origin, through this predilection, God confers a kind of right to Himself upon those who are the pre-eternal objects of this predilection: Hence that formula of invocation, frequent in Shi'i prayers, which sounds forth like a supreme conjuration, as if by invoking this “right to Himself” conferred by God upon His Friends, the prayer formulated by their friends bore in itself the force of an accomplishment. The Imams themselves preferred the formula *bi-haqqina*, which can be translated “by our right” or “in the name of our cause”.

Henry Corbin,
(Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality, ed. Nasr, 173)

Even at the practical level, the role of the Imam of the Time is to transform and develop the soul of each believer through his guidance, instruction, inspiration, blessings and prayers. The Imam's blessings essentially remove the impediments and obstacles from the soul of the disciple such that it can reach felicity through attaining a greater share of God's blessings. This confirmed by Qur'an 9:103 which commands the Prophet to “*accept offerings from their wealth so that you may purify them and sanctify them, and pray (send blessings) upon them; verily, your prayer (blessing) is a source of peace for them.*” Just as the Prophet Muhammad actively purified, sanctified and brought inner peace (*sakan*) to the believers through his prayer and blessing, the Imam of the Time performs these very same

functions. Ibn 'Arabi describes this transformative function of the Prophet and Imams as follows:

When the divine physician comes – and he is the Prophet, or the Inheritor of the Prophet, or the sage – he examines what is required by the soul's configuration. The soul submits itself to him and places its reigns in his hands so that he will train it and take steps to achieve its felicity.

Ibn al-'Arabi,

(William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 305)

The Qur'an also describes the Prophets and Imams as the channels of God's blessings and favours using symbolic language. For example, the Qur'an speaks of the Hand of God (*yad Allah*) in multiple verses as follows:

The Jews say: "God's Hand is tied up." Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay, both His Hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth.

– Holy Qur'an 6:64

Say, "Indeed, [all] bounty (*fadla*) is in the Hand of God – He grants it to whom He wills. And God is all-Encompassing and Wise."

– Holy Quran 3:73

That the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatever over the Grace (*fadl*) of Allah, that (His) Grace is in His Hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He wills. For God is the Lord of Grace abounding.

– Holy Qur'an 57:29

The above verses specifically say that God's favours or bounties (*fadl*) are in His Hand (*yad*) and this implies that believers should seek God's favours from His Hand. Who or what is the Hand of God? Since God has no parts and no human organs, the Hand of God must be something analogous in function to a human hand, but without being an actual part of God. Instead, the Hand of God must be created being which belongs to God, through which God's favours and blessings reach others. The Qur'anic verse on bay'ah equates the Hand of God with the Prophet Muhammad when it says: **"Verily, those who give their *ba'yah* to you [Muhammad], have given their *ba'yah* to God Himself. The Hand of God is upon their hands."** (Holy Qur'an 48:10). In this act of bay'ah, it was the hand of the Prophet Muhammad which was physically upon the hands of his followers.

However, the Qur'an declares this to be the Hand of God. Thus, the presence of the Prophet Muhammad was the concrete manifestation of the Hand of God: the Prophet is God's Hand personified. **Since all of God's "favours" (*fadl*) are in the Hand of God, it logically follows that the believers should seek God's favours from the Prophet Muhammad who is the living manifestation of the Hand of God.** In the exact same sense, the Shi'i Isma'ili Imams – who are the spiritual inheritors of the Prophet Muhammad – are the living Hand of God on earth through whom God's blessings and bounties reach His creatures:

God created us and formed us, and gave us the most perfect form. He made us His Eye over His Servants, and His Speaking Tongue, through which He speaks to His Servants. We are His Open Hand, extended with Mercy and Kindness to His Servants. We are His Face, through which He is reached, and the Gate which indicates upon Him. We are His Reservoir in the heavens and Earth. Through us, the trees grow and the fruits are ripened. Through us the rivers flow, and through us the succor of the skies comes down. We plant the grasses of the Earth. Through our worship, God is worshipped. If it were not for us, God would not be worshipped.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq,
(al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, Vol. 1, 144)

Since the Imams are the Gate of God, the Face of God, and Hand of God, it is perfectly acceptable and logical that the believers seek the blessings of the Imam of the Time for the fulfillment of their needs, requests and wishes including:

- a) the resolution of their difficulties (*mushkil asan*);
- b) safeguard (*salamat rak*) the faith (*iman*) of the believers;
- c) regularity in dasond, good deeds (*sukreet*), and worship (*'ibadat*);
- d) warding off (*dafeh kari*) problems (*afat*), calamities (*balau*), diseases (*bimariyu*)
- e) fulfillment (*puri kar*) of good wishes (*nek umed*)
- f) the forgiveness (*ma'af kar*) of sins (*kull gunah*)
- g) the true understanding (*haqiqati samaj*)
- h) increase (*vudaro kar*) in peace (*samp*), well-being (*salah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and love (*mahhabat*)
- i) the salvation of departed souls (*kull ruhani*)
- j) the luminous beatific vision (*nurani didar*)
- k) the acceptance (*qabul*) of goodness of intention in prayer (*dua niyyat khayr*)

The believers are completely justified in addressing the above needs and requests to the Prophet or Imam himself – calling out “Ya Ali Madad”, “Ya Ali”, “Ya Muhammad”, “Ya Mawla”, or “Ya Hazar Imam” followed by a specific request. This practice of actually calling upon the name of the *wasilah* – whether a Prophet or Imam – is confirmed in the Qur’anic narrative of how the Children of Israel asked Moses for water.

And We inspired to Moses when his people implored him for water (*istasqahu*), “Strike with your staff the stone,” and there gushed forth from it twelve springs. Every people knew its watering place.

– Holy Qur’an 7:160

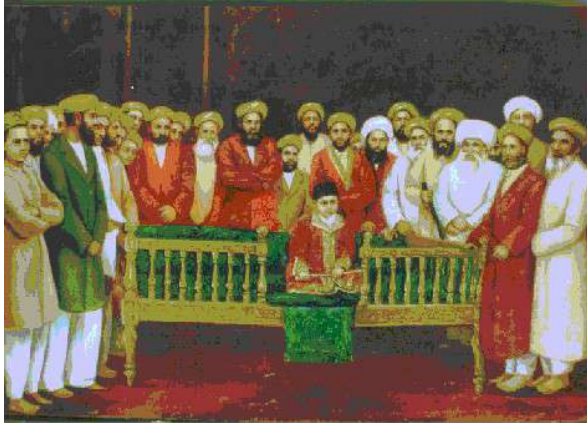
There are two important points in the above verse:

- a) The people addressed their request for water to Moses (*istasqahu* = they asked him for water)
- b) Moses, under God’s inspiration, answered their prayer and fulfilled their request by producing twelve springs of water

Thus, the Children of Israel were justified in requesting water from Moses and God

answered their prayer and fulfilled their request through Moses. In this case, both the Children of Israel and God Himself make us of Moses as their *wasilah* (means of access).

Along the same lines, the believers are completely justified in addressing their requests and prayers to the Imam of the Time by calling “Ya Ali”, “Ya Hazar Imam”, etc. The Imam is conscious of the requests and supplications of his believers and mercifully responds to them.



Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III at the age of 8 years when he made the below address.

Outwardly, Mawla Murtada ‘Ali used to eat bread made of barley, but otherwise, he used to tear apart mountains, and within a moment used to reach the other end of the world, and whoever sought the help of Mawla Murtada ‘Ali he used to fulfill their wishes and resolve

their difficulties. We are the great grandson of Mawla Murtada ‘Ali.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Address in Bombay, September 1, 1885)

The connection between the Imam of the Time and his believers is a spiritual one: the soul of the Imam is connected to the souls of the believers through the bay‘ah and this connection transcends time and space. The Qur’an says that “the Prophet is closer to the believers than their own souls” (Qur’an 33:6) and this holds true for the Imam since he is the Prophet’s successor. The Imam’s spiritual support (*ta’yid*) and blessings can reach the souls of his believers regardless of their physical locations. In this respect, the pure soul of the Imam of the Time serves as the relay point from which God’s blessings are extended to the believers and to humanity at large. In at least two places, the Qur’an indicates that God has bestowed His favours on certain human beings and that these individuals have the permission and authority to extend and bestow God’s favours and blessings to others without restriction:

God sets forth the Parable (of two men): a slave under the dominion of another; He has no power of any sort; and a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favours from Ourselves, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly: are the two equal? Praise be to God. But most of them understand not.

– Holy Qur’an 16:75

Such are Our Gifts: whether you bestow them or withhold them, no account will be asked.

– Holy Qur’an 38:39

Even when the Imam of the Time, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni, visits his *murids* physically, he verbally conveys his blessings to his *murids*. In a public visit to Tajikistan in 1998, the Imam of the Time said the following:



On this day of joy and happiness, and at the beginning of this Irshad, I convey to all my *murids* my most affectionate and most loving blessings, and I pray that Allah may bring all of you here present, and to your families and homes, peace and hope in the future.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Public Address, Shugnan, Tajikistan, September 25, 1998)



In a public Golden Jubilee Darbar in Syria, the Imam of the Time bestowed his blessings on his spiritual children, and extended his prayers for all Muslims and people of all faiths: Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV addressing his *murids* and people of other faiths in Syria 2008.

To all my spiritual children who are present here today and to your families wherever they may be, I give my most affectionate loving blessings for *barakah*, and the resolution of whatever difficulties you may be facing. My brothers and sisters in Islam and other faiths should be assured that my deep and heartfelt prayers are with you for your peace your unity and for your happiness. *Khanavadan. Khanavadan. Khanavadan.*

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Public Address, Al-Khawabi, Syria, August 24, 2008)

In summary, the Imam of the Time is the *wasilah* (means of access) to God following the Prophet Muhammad. Whenever a believer seeks the fulfillment of certain needs and the resolution of difficulties, he is essentially looking to receive a greater share of God's blessings. Since God is eternal and His blessings pour down unceasingly upon all creation, the believer's reception of these blessings remains limited by the imperfect capacity of his own soul to receive them. However, the believer can attain a greater reception of God's blessings, mercy and favours by seeking the help of the Imam of the Time; the Imam who already receives the greatest share of God's favours and blessings at any given time and channels these Divine favours to those who seek them through his own prayers and blessings. **While God Himself remains unaffected and unchanged by prayers, the Imam's blessings (like those of the Prophet Muhammad per Qur'an 4:64 and 9:103) actually change and transform the believer's soul – rendering the believer**

more receptive to the continuous outpouring of God's favours and mercy. As a result, the believer finds the fulfillment of his request and prayers through the Imam's blessings and this is why it makes complete logical sense to request help from the Imam of the Time in all matters. These ideas are expressed at the end of



the Fifth Part of the Isma'ili Du'a' which states:

The Ismaili Imam of the Time Blessing Vizier Rajabali Meghji Vissram at DSM Oct 1957.

Credit: Simerg

*ya imam al-zaman, ya mawlana
anta quwwati wa anta sanadi wa alayka
itikali
ya hadir ya mawjud ya Shah Karim al-*

Husayni

anta'l-imam al-haqq al-mubin

O' Imam of the Time, O our lord

You are my strength and you are my support and upon you is my reliance

O' present O' living Shah Karim al-Husayni

You are the true manifest Imam

Nizari Isma'ili Du'a', Part 5

Even those who do not recognize the Imam of the Time, can still benefit from the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad and previous Imams. **This is why all Muslim prayers must include *salawat* – asking God to bless Muhammad and his progeny – because this is actually a prayer of intercession whereby the believers seek God's blessings *through Muhammad and the Imams of his progeny*. Any Muslim prayer is not acceptable without this *salawat* because it would be quite ineffective without it.** Thus the Sunni imam al-Shafi'i once said in a poem:

*Loving you, O family of the household of the Prophet of God,
is an obligation (fard) from God in the Qur'an which He revealed;
Sufficient to show the grandeur of your dignity
is that one who blesses you not — no prayer has he.*

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i

(Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, 17)

D. To reject the help and intercession of the Prophets and Imams on the grounds of an individual and unmediated relationship with God amounts to spiritual idolatry (shirk).

And when it is said to them, "Come, the Messenger of God will pray for your forgiveness," they turn their heads aside and you see them evading while they are arrogant.

— Holy Qur'an 63:5

If a person's response to all of this is to say "*I do not need any intermediary between me and God*" or "*since God is all-powerful, it is better to ask help directly from Him*", then such an attitude misses the mark entirely because it is focused on

the wrong issue. Such people also claim that seeking the help of the Prophets and the Imams is *shirk* (joining partners with God). In reality, such people have assessed the entire matter incorrectly. Finding the fulfillment of one's prayers and requests for God's blessings is not about convincing God to give you more blessings or appealing to God's unlimited power; the fulfillment of one's prayers is attained by making oneself more receptive and more prepared to receive what God is already giving. This is why Ibn al-'Arabi stresses:

God is saying that He gives constantly, while the loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness... Once you understand this, you will know the gift of God is not withheld. But you want Him to give you something that your preparedness cannot receive. Then you attribute the withholding to Him in that which you seek from Him, and you do not turn your attention toward the preparedness. It is possible that a person has the preparedness to ask, but he does not have the preparedness to receive what he asks for – if it were given to him in place of being withheld.

Ibn al-'Arabi,
(*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, tr. William C. Chittick, 91-92)

The real focus of a person who is praying for God's blessings, mercy and help should be on how to increase his spiritual receptivity. While various acts of individual prayer can help increase one's level of receptivity, to believe that one's own efforts alone is sufficient in accomplishing this monumental feat is nothing but egotism – especially when there do exist Prophets, Imams, and *awliya'* whose souls are the purest before God and most receptive to His favours. **To consider all human beings, even the Prophets and Imams, as merely equal to oneself in spiritual purity and perfection is tantamount to spiritual idolatry – the idolatry of worshiping one's own ego. As the Qur'an says – "Have you seen him who makes his capricious ego (*hawa*) his god (*ilah*)."** (Qur'an 25:43). This was precisely the sin of Iblis when he refused to prostrate toward the Prophet Adam; Iblis failed to recognize Adam as the intermediary between himself and God.

From a Sufi point of view, a believer without a personal guide runs the risk of never progressing past the stage of belief (*iman*) to become a *muslim*, i.e. a person who has submitted his or her ego to God. The situation is similar to Iblis, who, believing himself to be superior to a being of clay, refused to bow down to Adam. This would be equivalent to accepting the first half of the Muslim profession of faith, "There is no god but God," without also fully accepting the second half, "and Muhammad is His Messenger." Identifying only with the transcendent aspect of Islam, as Iblis did, makes one susceptible to the danger of pride. The human capacity for self-deception is such that people could easily think they were good Muslims on the basis of their love for an invisible, distant and impersonal God and their fulfillment of ritual obligations. It is precisely this tendency, "**Iblisian tawhid**", of deviating from the teaching of the prophets, that eventually requires new prophets or heirs to the prophets to remind people of the "original" message... "**Muhammadan**

tawhid” recognizes divine unity both in the human and in the Transcendent, the human being potentially acting as a bridge between the material world and the divine.

Arthur F. Buehler,
(*Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 39)

As a result, a person’s so-called “unmediated” relationship with God is actually mediated by their own pride and ego. This is what the Prophet referred to as the “hidden shirk”, the worship of one’s ego and caprice instead of God. The Qur’an singles out people who are too proud and arrogant to accept the prayers for the Prophet Muhammad on their behalf:

And when it is said to them, “Come, the Messenger of God will pray for your forgiveness,” they turn their heads aside and you see them evading while they are arrogant.

– Holy Qur’an 63:5

Without the presence of the Prophet and the Imams who succeed him in every age as intermediaries between man and God, the ego within man would remain present but hidden. Part of the purpose of the Prophet’s role as intermediary is to test and ignite the egotism within people such that their ego can be recognized and tamed. As Jalal al-Din Rumi explains:



God made prophets intermediaries in order that envious feelings arise [in others] through anxiety [of the ego]. Since no one was shamed by God, no one was envious of God. [however], the person whom he considered like himself would be [the object of his] envy – [precisely] for that reason. When the greatness of the Prophet became established, from [his] acceptance [by the Muslim community] no one became envious of him. Thus in every time a Friend (*wali*) of God exists to [act as] a continual test until the Day of Judgment.

Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi,
(Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 40-41)

If the Prophet's prayers are required for the believers to "find God Forgiving and Merciful" (4:64), or if his prayers bring inner peace (*sakan*) and purification (*tazkiyyah*) to one's then why should anyone reject the assistance of the Prophet and the Imams as being unnecessary for oneself? Their help is absolutely necessary if someone seeks God's blessings because a) the Prophets and Imams already receive God's blessings; and b) their prayers, blessings and guidance are the proximate cause of improving one's spiritual receptivity to God's blessings. Even within the Sufi tradition, it has been argued that seeking help by calling upon the names of the Friends of God (*awliya' Allah*) is more effective than only calling upon God Himself. This is because most people do not know God due to His absolute transcendence above the human intellect and have no real relationship with Him. Only the Friends of God who have the gnosis (*ma'rifah*) of God through their pure souls and intellects can receive God's favours in the most complete way and transmit them to others. Ordinary human beings are better off approaching God through His Friends by calling upon them for help:

When some travelers asked Abu'l-Hasan al-Kharaqani (d. 1033) to pray for their safety, he advised them to set out on their journey in the name of God and call out Abu'l-Hasan's name if they ran into trouble. When highway robbers attacked the caravan, those who called on the *shaykh* were saved and those who called on God were robbed and killed. Abu'l-Hasan explained later that those who called on God directly petitioned someone they did not know and so they received no aid. Those appealing to Abu'l-Hasan used the name of a person who knew God and who could then intercede and assist them.

– Arthur F. Buehler,

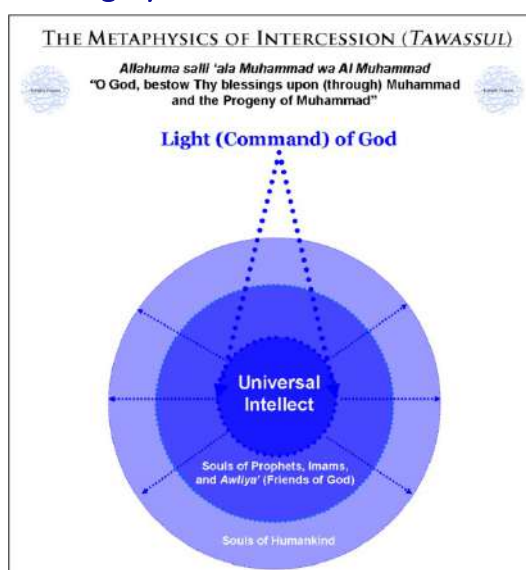
(*Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 41)

Conclusion: Seeking help and blessings from the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time – Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni – is the foremost expression of the *tawhid* (transcendent and immanent unity) of God.

You have looked to the Imam of the Age for advice and help in all matters and through your Imam's immense love and affection for his spiritual children, his Nūr

has indicated to you where and in which direction you must turn so as to obtain spiritual and worldly satisfaction.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV



In the final analysis, the act of seeking help and blessings from the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time

ultimately equates to seeking help from God and is a confirmation of both the transcendence and immanence of God. The Qur'an says in the Surah Fatihah – *"Thee alone we worship and from Thee alone we seek help."* This Qur'anic verse is not a command about how to pray or what names to call upon, but rather, it is an ontological fact about the nature of all help and assistance. It means that all instances where human beings seek and receive help – whether from a friend, family member, a doctor, or a teacher in worldly matters (*dunya*) or from the Prophets, Imams, or *awliya'*, etc. in spiritual matters (*din*) – all help that one seeks and receives ultimately comes from God Himself. The Qur'an thus says:

Every single favour you have is from God.

– Holy Qur'an 16:53

Whatever good comes to you is from God and whatever evil comes to you is from your own soul.

– Holy Qur'an 4:79

The blessings and favours of the Prophets and Imams are nothing else but the blessings of God which flows through their transparent souls upon the rest of created beings. The pure souls of the Prophets and Imams are nothing more than the reflective mirrors, or *mazhars*, of God's Light. To seek the help of the Prophet, the Imams, and the Imam of the Time is actually the foremost expression of *tawhid* as Reza Shah-Kazemi explains:



From this ontological point of view, as noted above, at verses 1-3 of the Fatihah, there is nothing in being but God; what appears as "other" than God is a *mazhar*, a locus of manifestation of God and nothing else. When assistance is sought from the Prophets, the Imams and the saints, one is seeking assistance from them as so many manifestations of God, so many *mazahir*, or loci, of the *zuhur* (manifestation) of *al-*

Zahir (the Outwardly Manifest). Therefore, the means as well as the end is divine: it is not a question of seeking human means for the sake of attaining a divine end, for one sees through the human form to the divine substance of the *mazhar*. This is a radical mode of *tawhid*, a more penetrating application of the principle: From Thee alone we seek help.

Reza Shah-Kazemi,

(*Spiritual Question: Reflections on Qur'anic Prayer according to the Teachings of Imam 'Ali*, 34)

As God is the Unconditioned Reality, the first conditioned reality to receive being through the Light or Command of God is the Universal Intellect (also called the Light of Imamat and the Muhammadan Light). The Universal Intellect is the Eternal Imam and the Muhammadan Reality which mediates between the Absolute Reality

of God and all of creation. Thus, the Universal Intellect is the ontological intercessor for all created beings. God's Existentiating Command reaches every particle of creation and keeps it in existence by means of the Universal Intellect. As Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani explains:

Thus, Intellect becomes one with the Word (Command of God) in the sense that it necessitates that every particle of the Creation has a share of the Command of God because every creature shares a part of the Command of God through which it has come to be there and by virtue of which it remains in being, and the Light of the Command of God shines in it.

Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani,
(*Kashf al-Mahjub*, in *Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* Volume 2, 93)

Through the Universal Intellect, God's Light radiates upon the souls of the Prophets and Imams, and by means of their souls, upon the souls of the believers. This metaphysics is expressed by the Islamic prayer – O' God, bestow Thy blessings upon Muhammad and the Progeny of Muhammad – a prayer that bears witness to the Light of God's Command flowing through the Universal Intellect to the souls of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams of his progeny, and through them, upon all human souls.

This is why the believers often invoke the help of the Imam of the Time for the fulfillment of any need with the phrase Ya Nur Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni. Through the affection, prayers and blessings of the Imam's pure soul, the blessings of the Light (*nur*) of Imamat are extended to the believers and all those seek his help. Ya 'Ali Madad.



For hundreds of years, my spiritual children have been guided by the Rope of Imamat. You have looked to the Imam of the Age for advice and help in all matters and through your Imam's immense love and affection for his spiritual children, his Nūr has indicated to you where and in which direction you must turn so as to obtain spiritual and worldly satisfaction.

The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah

“Islam is based upon seven pillars: *walayah* – and this is the most excellent; through it and through the *walī* (the Imām), the true knowledge of the pillars can be obtained: *ṭaharah* (purification), *ṣalah* (prayer, *zakah* (purifying dues), *sawm* (fasting), *haji* (pilgrimage), and *jihād* (striving).”

– Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir,
(Qādi al-Nu‘man, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, Prologue, 2)

In the present time, many people have sought to reduce the entire meaning of Islam to the practice of the so-called ‘Five Pillars of Islam’. In doing so, they flatten and hollow out the theological and intellectual depth of the faith. As Islam has developed historically, the Pillars have never constituted the entirety of religion. The Pillars (belong to a grander and more comprehensive religious framework which includes both theological truths and ritual practices. This framework traditionally consists of the Roots of Religion (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*) and the Branches of Religion (*Furū‘ al-Dīn*) and is articulated using the Qur’ānic metaphor of a tree:

Alam tara kayfa ḍaraba’llāhu mathalan kalimatan ṭayyibatan kashajaratin ṭayyibatan aṣluhā thābitun wa far’uhā fī’l-samā’i tu’tī ukulahā kulla ḥīnin bi-idhni rabbihā wayaḍribu’llāhu’l-amthāla la’allahum yatadhakkarūna

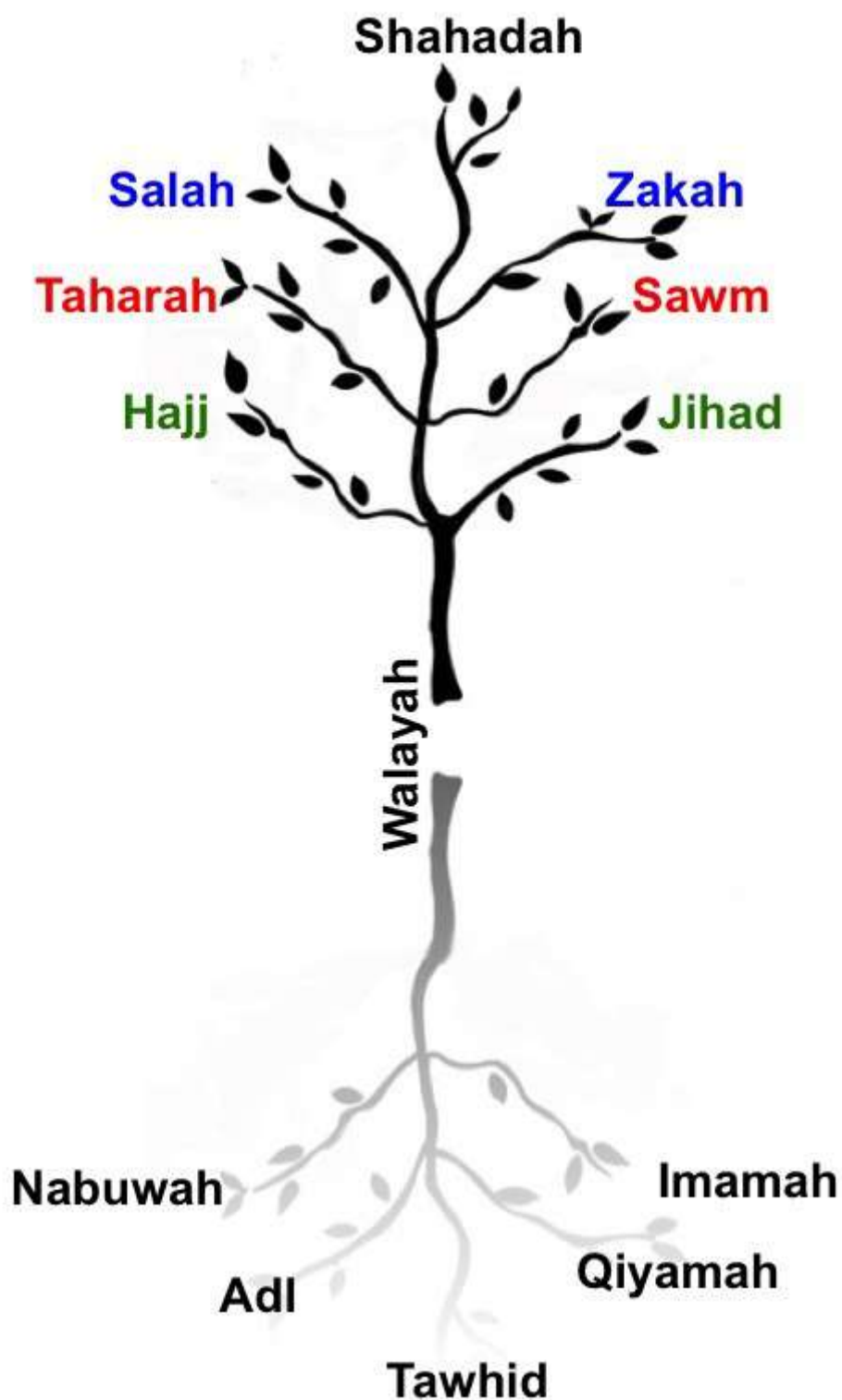
“Have you not seen how God sets forth the example of a Good Word like a Good Tree? Its Root firmly set and its Branch in heaven. Giving its fruit in all seasons by the permission of its Lord. And God sets forth examples for mankind so that they may remember.”

Holy Qur’ān 14:24

Uṣūl al-Dīn and *Furū‘ al-Dīn*:

The *Uṣūl al-Dīn* consist of the fundamental theological truths of Islam. The word *uṣūl* (singl. *aṣl*) means “roots”. The *Uṣūl al-Dīn* are to religion what the roots are to a tree. The roots originate and sustain the entire tree but they are hidden from plain view. Similarly, most people in a particular religious tradition do not fully comprehend its theological truths. In Shi‘ī Islam, the *Uṣūl al-Dīn* are *Tawhīd* (the oneness of God), ‘*Adl* (Justice), *Nubuwwah* (Prophethood), Imāmah (Imamate), and *Qiyāmah* (Resurrection). The book *Ismaili Tariqah* by Al-Wā‘iz Abualy Aziz confirms this schema as based on an earlier book by Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh called *Uṣul wa Furū‘-i Dīn* (Bombay, 1894).

The *Furū‘ al-Dīn* consist of the core religious practices and rituals. The word *furū‘* (singl. *far*) means ‘branches’. The *Furū‘ al-Dīn* are to religion what the branches are to the tree. The branches are above the ground, exposed to the environment and bear the fruits of the tree. Similarly, the ritual practices of Islam are subject to the change and developments of human history and culture while serving as a means of spiritual elevation for the community.



The *Furū' al-Dīn* are what people today call the “Pillars of Islam”. But the Pillars do not suffice in themselves – they must be accompanied by the knowledge of the *Uṣūl* or theological truths to bring spiritual benefit.

The *Uṣūl* are fundamental truths which are changeless although their articulation evolves from generation to generation. The *Furū'*, on the other hand, like branches of a tree, are subject to changes in form and method in order to adapt to the historical and social circumstances. Thus, the *Furū'* evolve in their appearance

and may even be abrogated if and when the conditions require it. In this sense, the Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh has clearly stated the following:

“Not only non-Muslims but some Muslims, appalled by the extent and variety of the non-essentials (*Furū’āt*) have followed the example of the man who in emptying the waste from the tub threw out the baby with it out of the window. They have almost thrown out the *Uṣūlāt* (essentials). If Islam is ever to fulfill its mission it must have universality not only in space, namely, throughout the earth, but in time, namely, as long as mankind exists on this globe... If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain *Ibnu’l-Waqt* (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the *Waqt* or space-time.”

– Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Foreword to Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations by Al-Hajji Qassim
Jairazbhoy, [Click Here to Read](#))

The *Furū’* are the external manifestations of the *Uṣūl*. Religious rituals are expressions of theological truths. It is only the latter which are immutable in a real sense. Ritual practices serve as the means whereby the believer can attain an inner comprehension of the theological truths or realities of faith. The Ismā’īlī *Dā’ī* Sayyidnā ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī explains the relationship between the *Uṣūl al-Dīn* and the *Furū’ al-Dīn*:

“The final revealed law, which is the noblest of revealed laws, has included rulings which do not change, being the *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, occupying the same position as the foundation of the house and the essence for the form... And it has [also] included rulings which *do* change and they are the *Furū’ al-Dīn*, occupying the same position as the branches for the tree and the forms for the essence, and they are the ambiguous ones among the verses, which ‘God erases and establishes as He wills’. He only erases for a perfection it has resulted in, and He only establishes for a new beginning which it heading toward some perfection.”

– Sayyidnā ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, (*Keys to the Arcana*, 112)

The Three Levels of the Pillars:

Each Pillar among the *Furū’ al-Dīn* has three layers of meaning and practice. The first layer is the exoteric form (*ẓāhir*); the second layer is the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*); the third layer is the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) which is the inner reality (*ḥaqīqah*). These three levels are also known as *sharī’ah* (the law), *ṭarīqah* (the path), and *ḥaqīqah* (the reality). Alternatively, they are called *islām* (submission), *imān* (faith), and *iḥsān* (beauty). This means that every

Pillar, such as [fasting \(sawm\)](#) for example, exists in three states: *ẓāhirī sawm*, *bāṭinī sawm*, and *ḥaqīqī sawm*.

“Our affair contains an exoteric (*ẓāhir*), an esoteric (*bāṭin*), and an esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al- bāṭin*).”

– Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq,

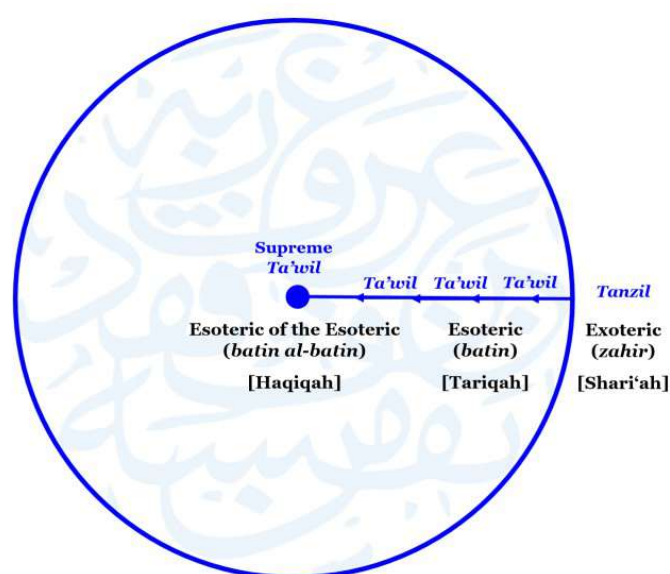
(al-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi’i Islam*, 270)

The exoteric form (*ẓāhir*) is available to everyone in any religious tradition. The [esoteric meaning \(bāṭin\)](#) is only available to the initiates (*murīds*) of the spiritual paths (*ṭurūq* – plural of *ṭarīqah*) – and in our context, pertains directly to the Ismā’īlī *da’wah* or *ṭarīqah* of Islam. The inner reality (*ḥaqīqah*) – the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) – is universal but only directly perceived by the mystics, sages and saints among the great religions. This *ḥaqīqah* is one and the same for all faiths – it is “God’s Religion”, the “Religion of Truth” or the *religio perennis* which is manifest in the particular religions. In the example of *sawm* (fasting), the *ẓāhirī sawm* is part of the Islamic *sharī’ah* and only practiced by Muslims; the *bāṭinī sawm* is part of the Islamic *ṭarīqahs* and only practiced by their *murīds*; the *ḥaqīqī sawm* is indirectly practiced by people of all religions as it constitutes the esoteric essence of all faiths.

It must be remembered that there are two levels of the esoteric: 1) the intermediate esoteric (*bāṭin*) which is particular to and “coloured” by a formal religion (i.e. Christian esoterism, Jewish esoterism, Islamic esoterism, etc. including the Ismā’īlī *ṭarīqah* and its *bāṭinī ta’wīl*), and 2) the supreme esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) which is “colourless”, universal and timeless.

“There is indeed a (higher) *bāṭin* of this (lower) *bāṭin*; it is the very highest of stations, more extensive than this (lower) *bāṭin* in its power and more perfect than it as a guide. For it is the *goal* of all the signs pointing to the way of salvation...So the pair of the *ẓāhir*, which is (like) the name, and the *bāṭin*, which is (like) the distinctive characteristic, together point to *God’s knowledge* and to *God’s Religion* – and *that is the bāṭin al- bāṭin*.”

– Sayyidnā Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, (*The Master and the Disciple*, 92-94)



Each point or arc of points on the Circumference of the Circle represent the *zahir* (exoteric) and literal words (*tanzil*) of the Qur’an. Every radius represents an expression of the esoteric (*batin*) and intermediate levels of *ta’wil* of the Qur’an. The

Centre represents the esoteric of the esoteric (batin al-batin) and the supreme ta'wil of the Qur'an.

The three levels (*ẓāhir*, *bāṭin*, *ḥaqīqah*) of the Pillars of Islam correspond to the three faculties of knowledge in the human being. The *ẓāhir* is perceived by the external senses of the physical body (*jism*). The *bāṭin* is known and conceptualized through the internal faculties (memory, imagination, reflection, reason, etc.) of the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*). The *ḥaqīqah* is perceived and envisioned through the intellect (*'aql*) which resides in the heart (i.e. center) of the rational soul. Thus, to practice the *ẓāhirī* form of the Pillars is to worship God physically with the body; to practice the *bāṭinī* forms of the Pillars is to worship God psychically and rationally with the soul; to practice the *ḥaqīqī* forms of the Pillars is to worship God spiritually and intellectually with the heart-intellect.

The Seven Pillars of Islam:

According to the teachings of the Shi'ī *Imāms* there are actually Seven Pillars of Islam and not merely five:

“Islam is based upon seven pillars: *walayah* – and this is the most excellent; through it and through the *walī* (the *Imām*), the true knowledge of the pillars can be obtained: *ṭaharah* (purification), *ṣalah* (prayer), *zakah* (purifying alms), *ṣawm* (fasting), *hajj* (pilgrimage), and *jihād* (striving).”

– *Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir*,
(*Qādi al-Nu'man, Da'ā'im al-Islām*, Prologue, 2)

The foundation of all the Pillars of Islam is *walāyah*. The word itself means “closeness, sanctity, friendship, love, authority, governance, saintship”. In Shi'ī Islam, the meaning of *walāyah* is threefold:

“...applied to the *imāms* of different prophets, *walāyah* refers to their ontological status or their sacred initiatory mission; the *walī-imām* is the ‘friend’ and the closest ‘helper’ of God and His prophet; he is the ‘chief’, the ‘master’ of believers par excellence... Applied to the faithful of the *imāms*, *walāyah* denotes the unfailing love, faith and submission that the initiated owe to their holy initiating guide.”

– Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, (*The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p. 159)

1. The *walāyah* (sanctity, closeness, friendship) of the Prophets and *Imāms* refers to their spiritual status before God. The souls of the Prophets and *Imāms* possess sanctity due to their proximity or closeness to the Divine. In this context, *walāyah* refers to an exalted spiritual station – due to which the souls of the Prophets, *Imāms* and saints are pure and in turn reflect the radiance of the Divine Names and Attributes.

“*Walāya* also denotes the essential nature of the figure of the *imām*, his ontological status. Now, the *imām/walī* in the ultimate reality of his being, is the locus for the manifestation of God (*mazhar*, *majla*), the vehicle of the divine Names and Attributes. ‘By God’, Imam Ja'far is said to have declared, ‘we (the *imāms*) are the Most Beautiful Names (of God).’ The imam reveals

God, he provides access to what may be known of Him, the *Deus Revelatus*, the *zahir* of God.”

– Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, (*The Spirituality of Shi’i Islam*, p. 249)

In this sense, Ibn al-Arabi and others have said that *walāyah* is superior to the functions of prophecy and messengership because it is the pre-requisite for these functions. While prophecy and messengership come to an end with Muḥammad, the station of *walāyah* does not come to an end. Each *Imām* is the *walī* (friend) of God due to the spiritual sanctity of his soul:

“Know that *walāyah* is the all-encompassing sphere, thus it never comes to an end ... When you observe the Prophet saying things which relate to what is outside the law-giving function, he does so as a *walī* and a knower (*ārif*). Thus his station as a knower and a *walī* is more complete and more perfect than as a messenger or as a legislative prophet.”

– Ibn al-‘Arabi, (Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, 177)

2. The *walāyah* of the Imams also refers to the authority they possess over the believers. The Qur’ān bears witness to this in the verse – “The Prophet has more authority (*awla*) over the believers than their own souls.” (33:6) and the Prophet made reference to this verse when he declared the *walāyah* of Imām ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib:

“Truly, ‘Alī is from me and I am from him, and he is the *walī* of every believer after me.”

– Prophet Muhammad,

(Ahmad al-Nasā’ī, *Khasā’is Amīr al-Mu’minīn*, 129)

3. The *walāyah* of the believers refers to the love, devotion, and loyalty which the faithful have for the *Imām*. This love for the *Imām* is far greater than one’s love for wealth, family, and even life itself.

“Nobody amongst you can be termed a believer (*mu’min*) until and unless he loves me more than his father or his son or other people.”

– Prophet Muhammad,

(*Sahih Bukhari*, Book 1, *Kitāb al-Imān*, p. 12)

“Indeed, Allah is too Supreme, Mighty, Glorious, and Unreachable that He could be oppressed. But He has intertwined us with Him, and so oppression of us is oppression of Him, and the love (*walāyah*) of us is the love of Him.”

– Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir,
(*Usūl al-Kāfi*, Vol. 1, p. 144)

Walāyah is depicted as the “trunk” within the Tree of Religion because of its spiritual significance. All the Pillars of Islam revolve around *walāyah* which is the soul of Religion.

In the realm of the *ẓāhir*, the *walāyah* is symbolized by the *Shahādah*. Anyone who recites the *Shahādah* is a Muslim and belongs to the *ummah* of Prophet Muḥammad – regardless of how they actually practice or what they believe theologically. This verbal testification is an act of the physical body and need not

even be accompanied by intention – this is how many tribes joined the Islamic community during the first century.

In the realm of the *bāṭin*, *walāyah* is to recognize the spiritual authority and sanctity of the Prophet and the *Imām* after him. The recognition of this spiritual bond with the *Imām* is by means of the rational soul and is formalized in the rite of *bay'ah* or *mithāq* (covenant) after which one formally becomes a *murīd* of the *Imām* and enters into the realm of *ṭarīqah*. In this realm, the believer's response to the recognition of the *Imām's walāyah* is his or her undying love, allegiance and loyalty to the *Imām* – which is also called *walāyah*.

In the realm of the *ḥaqīqah*, *walāyah* is witnessed through spiritual vision (*liqā, dīdar*) – in which the intellect (*'aql*) of the believer witnesses the Divine Light manifested through the *Imām*. This amounts to a real “witnessing” (*shāhadah*) of God which is promised to the believers in Paradise but it can be realized in this world by virtue of the intellect in man.

“The first [pillar] is the *shahādat*, which implies knowing God through the *Imām* of the time.”

– Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*Shi'i Interpretations of Islam*, 41)

“Eyes see Him not through sight's observation, but hearts see Him through the realities of faith.”

– Imām 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib,

(Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, 29)

	<i>Shari'ah</i> (<i>islam</i>)	<i>Tariqah</i> (<i>iman</i>)	<i>Haqiqah</i> (<i>ihsan</i>)
Level of Knowledge	Exoteric (<i>zahir</i>)	Esoteric (<i>batin</i>)	Esoteric of the Esoteric (<i>batin al-batin</i>)
Pillar: <i>Walayah</i>	Recitation of <i>Shahadah</i>	Recognition/Love	Spiritual Vision
Level of Worship	Physical Body	Rational Soul	Intellect

Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam

Come, I will show you that which is truly the House of God,
Not what you imagine to be the House of God.

Is a House of stone more sacred than the chosen guide
[Muhammad] who established the House?

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi

(Diwan al-Mu'ayyad, tr. M. Adra, *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence* , 189)



This article will explain [the exoteric \(zāhir\), the esoteric \(bāṭin\), and haqīqī \(real\) dimensions](#) of the *hajj* (pilgrimage), the Ka'ba (House of God, the Sacred Masjid) and the *qiblah* (direction of prayer). The *zāhir* belongs to domain of the *sharī'ah*, the *bāṭin* is the path of the *ṭarīqah*, and the *bāṭin al-bāṭin* are the realities of the *haqīqah*. Thus, there is a specific *hajj*, Ka'bah, and *qiblah* for each of these three domains: each level serves as the symbol (*mithāl*) for the higher level and the inner meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the lower level. The *zāhir* is a symbol of the *bāṭin* and the *bāṭin* is the esoteric meaning of the *zāhir*. It is likewise for the *bāṭin* and the *bāṭin al-bāṭin*.

The Arabic root of the word *hajj*, means “to overcome with argument, to convince, to advance, to betake oneself with a purpose.” The word *hujjah* (proof, argument) is derived from the same root letters. The word *Ka'bah* means “cube” and also carries the meaning of being “full” or “honoured”. The Arabic root of the word *qiblah* means “to be face to face”.

We will first explain the historical context and the exoteric (*ẓāhirī*) dimensions of the *ḥajj*, the Ka'bah, and the *qiblah* in great detail. Each of these details has a specific *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation) in the realm of the *bāṭinī ṭarīqah*, which cannot be fully appreciated unless one first understands the *ẓāhirī sharī'ah dimensions*. The five sections of this comprehensive article on Hajj are as follows:

1. The Exoteric Hajj to the Physical House of God
2. The Exoteric Qiblah of the Physical Body
3. The Esoteric Hajj to the Living House of God
4. The Esoteric Qiblah of the Rational Soul
5. The Ḥaqīqī House of God and the Ḥaqīqī Qiblah

The Exoteric *Ḥajj* to the Physical House of God



Hajj Pilgrims circumambulating the Ka'bah

And pilgrimage to the House (*al-bayt*) is a duty [from] God for mankind, for him who has the means to do so. As for him who disbelieveth, (let him know that) lo! Allah is Independent of (all) creatures.

– Holy Qur'ān 3:97

The exoteric meaning of the House of God (*bayt Allāh*), according to the Qur'ān, is the Ka'bah in Makkah. In several Qur'ānic verses, the Ka'bah is called “the House” (*al-bayt*) [Qur'ān 2:125], “the ancient House” (*al-bayt al-'atīq*) [Qur'ān 22:29], “My House” (*baytī*) [Qur'ān 2:215], a “House established for mankind” (*baytin wudi'a li'n-nas*) [3:96], “the Sacred House” (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*) [Qur'ān 5:97], “the Sacred Place of Prostration” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) [Qur'ān 2:144].

But one must ask – from what or whom does the Ka'bah derive its sacred and exalted status? For a House merely made of stone cannot possess any inherent

holiness as it is composed of the same matter in all physical things. According to the Qur'ān, the Ka'bah was established by Prophet Abraham and his son Mawlānā Ismā'īl by the command of God.

And when We made the House (*al-bayt*) a resort for mankind and sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And We imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ismā'īl, (saying): Purify My house (*tahirā baytī*) for those who go around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves.

– Holy Qur'ān 2:125

And when Abraham and Ismā'īl were raising the foundations (*yarfa'u al-qawā'id*) of the House, [Abraham prayed]: Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower. Our Lord! Make us submitters (*muslimīn*) unto Thee and of our descendants (*dhurriyyatinā*) a nation submissive (*ummatan muslimah*) unto Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and relent toward us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful.

– Holy Qur'ān 2:127-28

The above verses reveal two important points about the status of the Ka'bah as the House of God:

- Firstly: Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl purified the Ka'bah. Whoever purifies something, in the context of the Qur'ān, must himself already be pure. The Qur'ān reveals in 33:33 that God has purified the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet from all impurity and also states in 9:102 that the Prophet Muhammad purifies the believers of their sins and shortcomings through his blessings. Similarly, in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, it was Prophet Muhammad and Mawlānā 'Alī who purified the Ka'bah from the 360 idols that dwelled within it. **Thus, the purity of the Ka'bah is derived from and dependent upon the purity of the Prophet and Imam, i.e. Abraham and Ismā'īl and later Muhammad and 'Alī.**
- Secondly: Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl raised the foundations of the Ka'bah. This connects to Qur'ān 24:36 which speaks of the "Houses (*buyūt*) that God has permitted to be raised up" (*turfi'i*) and His Name remembered therein." **This means the role of the Prophet or Imam is to "raise up" (*yarfa'u*) the House of God, by God's permission (*idhn Allāh*).**

According to the Holy Qur'ān, the origin and establishment of *hajj* was by the command of God revealed to the Prophet Abraham:

And proclaim the *hajj* among mankind: they will come to you (*yatūka*) on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways.

– Holy Qur'ān 22:27

In the above verse, we see that the original command for the people to perform *hajj* specified that the pilgrims would visit Prophet Abraham himself as part of the *hajj*. This is indicated by the words "they will come to you" (*yatūka*)

where the second person singular pronoun “you” (*ka*) is clearly mentioned. Similarly, in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, the *ḥajj* undertaken by the early community of believers was in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. This is why the farewell pilgrimage in the year 632 AD was important – because the Prophet Muhammad came before his entire community in Makkah to give them guidance and blessings. In other words, the Prophet Muhammad restored the *ḥajj* initially established by the Prophet Abraham. **Therefore, the original Ḥajj – in the case of Abraham and Muhammad – was a pilgrimage to both the Ka’bah and the Prophet or Guide of the time.**

The *ḥajj* during the time of Prophet Muhammad included a number of rituals which the Qur’ān calls the “symbols” of God. Some of these are listed below:

- The pilgrim passes through various stations to reach Makkah.
- The pilgrim enters the Sacred *Masjid* through one of the four *mīqāts* (stopping places).
- When he reaches the *mīqāt*, the pilgrim enters into *iḥrām* – meaning he removes his clothing and wraps white cloths around his body. He washes himself with water and then performs two *ra’kats* of *ṣalāh*.
- The pilgrim then utters the *talbiya*, which means to say “Here I am, at your service” (*labbayka*).
- The pilgrim then circumambulates the Ka’bah seven times and kisses the Black Stone.



The above analysis of the exoteric *ḥajj* to the physical House of God, i.e. Ka’bah shows that: **First:** The purity of the physical House of God is derived from and dependent upon the purity of the Prophet and Imam, i.e. Abraham and Ismā’īl and later Muhammad and ‘Alī.

Second: The role of the Prophet or Imam is to “raise up” (*yarfa’u*) the physical House of God,

by God’s permission (*idhn Allāh*).

Third: The original exoteric *ḥajj*, in the time of Abraham and Muhammad, was a pilgrimage to both the physical Ka’bah and the Prophet of the time.

In conclusion, when the Exoteric *Ḥajj* is examined in detail, the physical House of God – the Ka’bah – and the holy personality of the Prophet or Imam of the Time are intertwined and cannot be separated. The Imams are the designed spiritual heirs and successors of the Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Abraham, and thus the spiritual purity and authority of the Prophets continues in the Isma’ili Imamate until the end of time. The Fatimid poet Ibn Hani al-Andalusi addresses the Imam of his time, the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mawlana Ma’add al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah, with the following verses in which he describes how the Ka’bah itself longs to behold the Imam of the Time from whom it derives its holiness.



Hajj Pilgrims circumambulate the Ka'bah and seek to physically touch it.

Is the House, the House of God, anything but his sanctuary (*ḥarīmuḥu*)?

Can the one exiled from [his] abode bear to be away from his abode?

If it yearns with longing for you, verily [that is because],

its atmosphere is perfumed from your sweet fragrance.

Are you not the son of its builder?

If you come to it, its covers will be removed, and its dusky sites will shine white.

The vale of Makkah would adore a season

in which Makkah and [its holy site of the] *Hijr* greet Ma'add [Imam al-Mu'izz]

Ibn Hani al-Andalusi,

(Tahera Qutbuddin, "Fatimid Aspirations of Conquest and Doctrinal Underpinnings in the Poetry of al-Qā'im bi-Amr Allah, Ibn Hani' al-Andalusi, Amir Tamim b. al-Mu'izz, and al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi", in *Poetry and History*, ed. Ballbaki, Agha, Khalidi, 216)

The Exoteric *Qiblah* of the Physical Body



Muslim worshippers standing in

prayer towards the Ka'bah from all directions.

And We did not make the *qiblah* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom God has guided.

– Holy Qur'ān 2:143

The *qiblah* refers to the direction one faces and prostrates towards in prayer. In the Qur'an's narrative, the earliest reference to the word *qiblah* is in the story of Moses, where God tells Moses and Aaron – the Prophet and Imam of their time – to make their houses as the *qiblah* for the believers:

And We inspired to Moses and his brother, "Settle your people in Egypt in houses (*buyūt*) and appoint your houses as *qiblahs* (*wa-ij'alū buyūtakum qiblatan*) and establish prayer and give good tidings to the believers."

– Holy Qur'ān 10:87

Historically speaking, the Prophet Muhammad used to turn toward the Ka'bah as his *qiblah* when he began his mission in Makkah. This is indicated by the earliest

Muslim sources. When the early community of Muhammad migrated to Madinah, there are reports that Muhammad and other members of the community would face either the Ka'bah in Makkah or Jerusalem as their *qiblah*. Certain sources state that even Muhammad's *masjid* in Madinah faced the direction of Jerusalem. Later on, during the period in Madinah, the Qur'ān ordered the community of Muhammad to exclusively take the Ka'bah, the Sacred *Masjid (al-masjid al-ḥarām)* as its *qiblah*. This represented a separation from some of the People of the Book, Jews and Christians, with respect to the religious identity of the early community of Muhammad.

We see the turning of thy face to the heavens: now We shall turn thee to a *qiblah* that shall please thee. Turn then Thy face in the direction of the Sacred Masjid (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*): Wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is God unmindful of what they do.

– Holy Qur'ān 2:144

It must be stressed that the historical occasion when the *qiblah* of the early community of Muhammad was switched from the direction of Jerusalem to the exclusive direction of the Ka'bah in Makkah, had the express purpose of “testing” the believers to see who was truly loyal to the Messenger of God:

And We did not make the *qiblah* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom God has guided. And never would God have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed God is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.

– Holy Qur'ān 2:143

In response to those who criticized the changing of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to Makkah, the Qur'ān reminds them that all directions, whether East or West, belong to God:

The foolish among the people will say, “What has turned them away from their *qiblah*, which they used to face?” Say, “To Allah belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.”

– Holy Qur'ān 2:142

Therefore, the historical purpose of establishing the *qiblah* was not merely for the direction itself but rather, **the *qiblah* is established for the sake of manifesting the authority of the Prophet Muhammad and thereby distinguishing the true believers from the hypocrites.** Interestingly, the Qur'ān also commands the believers to face toward the Sacred *Masjid* whenever they “embark” on any kind of activity:

So from wherever you embark (*min haythu kharajat*) turn your face (*wajh*) toward the Sacred Masjid (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), and indeed, it is the truth from your Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what you do. And from wherever you embark, turn your face toward Sacred Masjid (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*). And wherever you [believers] may be, turn your faces toward it in order that the people will not have any

argument against you, except for those of them who commit wrong; so fear them not but fear Me. And [it is] so I may complete My favor upon you and that you may be guided.

– Holy Qur’ān 2:149-150

In the realm of the *sharī’ah*, one must face the direction of the exoteric *qiblah* – the Sacred *Masjid* or Ka’bah – whenever one performs the exoteric *ṣalāh* mandated by the *sharī’ah*. If one is in the vicinity of Ka’bah, then one must pray and prostrate towards it. When the Sacred *Masjid* is not visible to one’s eyes, then one must turn toward its spatial direction as indicated by the *miḥrāb* (prayer-niche). The *miḥrāb* is a marker or niche on the specific wall of a *masjid* that is in the direction of the *qiblah*. Thus, the *miḥrāb* is an indicator, pointer or sign of the *qiblah* direction. Therefore, when one cannot perceive the Sacred *Masjid* directly, one turns toward the *miḥrāb*.



Muslim praying in the masjid while facing the mihrab.

Finally, it must be noted that although Muslims turn their bodies and face, bow, and prostrate towards the Ka’bah when performing the exoteric *ṣalāh* mandated by the *sharī’ah*, this does not mean one is actually worshiping the Ka’bah. Rather, one is worshiping God *through* orientating oneself

towards the Ka’bah.



A Hajj pilgrim praying and supplicating towards the Ka’bah.

Having explained the exoteric dimensions of the *Ḥajj* to the House of God and the *qiblah*, we will now proceed to explain their esoteric dimensions. For the House of God (*bayt Allah*), in the true sense, is not only a structure of composed of stone and physical matter, but

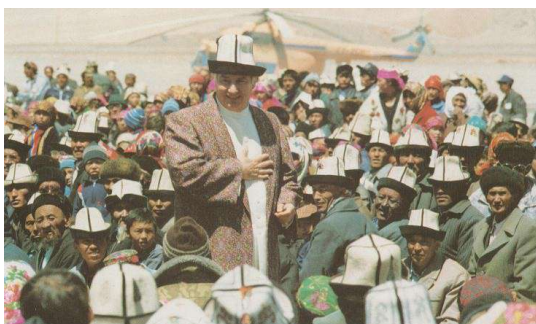
also includes living entities composed of soul and intellect.

Come, I will show you that which is truly the House of God,
Not what you imagine to be the House of God.

Sayyidna al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi,

(Diwan al-Mu’ayyad, tr. M. Adra, *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence*, 189)

The Esoteric *Ḥajj* to the Living House of God



The Ismaili Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, gives didar to his murids in Tajikistan 1995.

O most glorious Qiblah of Truth
And most sublime Ka'bah of the Living
If the Ḥajj is undertaken to the inanimate
House (in Makkah)
So much more fitting, so much more worthy,

that we betake ourselves unto you!

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi,
(*Diwān al-Mu'ayyad*, in Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middles Ages*, 132)

In addition to the Ka'bah, the exoteric House of God, there is also exists an esoteric (*bāṭinī*) House of God (*Bayt Allāh*). According to the Qur'ān, everything in the physical world and the realm of *sharī'ah* is an exoteric symbol for a spiritual counterpart or symbolic meaning (*mamthūl*) in the spiritual world of the *ṭarīqah*.

This is the meaning of the “pairs” that God has created out of all things:

And of all things We have created in pairs, so that you may reflect.

– Holy Qur'ān 51:49

Glory be to Him who created all things in pairs – from what the earth grows, from their own souls, and from that which they do not know.

– Holy Qur'ān 36:36

Each *ẓāhirī* symbol and *bāṭinī* meaning form a pair (*zawjayn*). Thus, the physical Ka'bah has an esoteric (*bāṭinī*) counterpart without which it possesses no true meaning and for whose sake the Ka'bah itself is established. The physical Ka'bah, the physical House of God, is not an immutable structure; it has been demolished, damaged and rebuilt several times throughout history. The physical Ka'bah is not inherently pure; it has been the site of idol worship for generations and only regained its purity due to the intervention of a Prophet or Imam. Thus, the Ka'bah cannot be the House of God in the fullest sense because it is inanimate and suffers from both decay and corruption. The Prophet Muhammad, according to several Sunni hadiths, admitted that the physical Ka'bah is not even built on the original pattern and foundations of Abraham and that he would have demolished and rebuilt it had he not feared the reaction of the Quraysh who were still attached to the customs of jahilliyyah.

Narrated by 'A'isha: (the wife of the Prophet) that God's Messenger said to her, “Do you know that when your people (Quraish) rebuilt the Ka'bah, they decreased it from its original foundation laid by Abraham?” I said, “O God's Messenger! Why don't you rebuild it on its original foundation laid by Abraham?” He replied, “Were it not for the fact that your people are close to the pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance I would have done so.”

Narrated by 'A'isha: I asked the Prophet whether the round wall (near the Ka'bah) was part of the Ka'bah. The Prophet replied in the affirmative. I further said, “What

is wrong with them, why have they not included it in the building of the Ka'bah?" He said, "Don't you see that your people (Quraysh) ran short of money?" I asked, "What about its gate? Why is it so high?" He replied, "Your people did this so as to admit into it whomever they liked and prevent whomever they liked. Were your people not close to the pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance and were I not afraid that they would dislike it, surely I would have included the wall inside the building of the Ka'bah and I would have lowered its gate to the level of the ground."

Narrated by 'A'isha: God's Messenger said to me, "Were your people not close to the pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance, I would have demolished the Ka'bah and would have rebuilt it on its original foundations laid by Abraham, and I would have built a back door (too)."

'A'isha said that the Prophet said to her, "O 'A'isha! Were your nation not close to the Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance, I would have had the Ka'bah demolished and would have included in it the portion which had been left, and would have made it at a level with the ground and would have made two doors for it, one towards the East and the other towards the West, and then by doing this it would have been built on the foundations laid by Abraham."

Sahih Bukhari, Chapter 26, Hadith No. 653, 654, 655, 656

The true House of God must be a House which is living, speaking, intellectual and conscious whose essence remains free from decay and impurity. Unlike the realm of *ẓāhir* which includes corruptible inanimate objects, the realm of *bāṭin* consists of living realities possessing the fullness of intellect and soul. One can recognize the *bāṭinī* House of God or the spiritual Ka'bah by recalling the three major Qur'ānic facts about the establishment of the physical Ka'bah:

- The purity and sanctity of the physical House of God (purified by Abraham and Isma'il and later by Muhammad and 'Ali) depends upon the purity of the Prophet and Imam of the time, who are the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt* – declared to be purified by God in Qur'ān 33:33).
- The Prophet or Imam are those who "raise up" the physical House of God, by God's permission (*iḏn Allāh*).
- The *exoteric Ḥajj*, in its Qur'ānic origins, is a pilgrimage to both the physical Ka'bah and the Prophet of the time and his family.

In light of the above facts, it is not surprising that Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi penned the below verses:

Come, I will show you that which is truly the House of God,
Not what you imagine to be the House of God.
Is a House of stone more sacred
than the chosen guide who established the House?

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi,

(Diwan al-Mu'ayyad, tr. M. Adra, *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence*, 189)

Since the very status and existence of the physical House of God is derived from, connected to, and dependent upon the Prophet and Imam, it follows that the

Imam of the Time is the esoteric House of God and the Living Ka'bah. The Imam himself is the inner meaning (*bāṭin; ta'wīl*) of the physical or *ẓāhirī* Ka'bah. In this sense, the Shī'ī Imams have declared:

We are the Ka'bah of God (*ka'batullāh*), Exalted is He, and we are the Qiblah of God (*qiblatullāh*). We are the Sacred Sanctuary of God (*ḥarāmullah*)”

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,
(*Bihār al-Anwār*, 24:211/1, in Muhammad Ali Sabzvari, *Tuhfa Yi-'Abbasi: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shī'ite Islam*, 68)

The Sufis of Sunni Islam, including Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi, professed the very same teaching that the Prophet or Imam of the Time is the living House of God and the spiritual Ka'bah. Rumi himself writes that the physical Ka'bah in Makkah is but a branch of the spiritual Ka'bah – the Prophet and the Friends of God.

The meaning of the Ka'bah is the heart of the Prophets and the Friends of God (*awliyā'*) and the dwelling place of God's revelation. The [physical] Ka'bah is a branch of that. If it were not for the heart [of the Prophets and Friends of God] what use would the Ka'bah be? The Prophets and Friends of God who have totally abandoned their own desires and are following the desire of God. So whatever He commands, they do it.

Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi,
(*Fihi Ma Fihi*, in Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 43)

A Sufi saint of sixteenth century India, Qasim Kahi, proclaims that the Prophet Muhammad himself is the Ka'bah:

Ahmad, that is the Ka'bah toward which we strive,
The Black Stone is certainly his black mole

Qasim Kahi, (Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 204)

The proofs and arguments for the Imam of the Time as the spiritual Ka'bah and the living House of God are numerous. Firstly, the Qur'ān mentions in the famous *ayat al-nūr* that the Lamp of God's Light (*nūr*) is found: “in Houses (*buyūt*) which God has ordered to be exalted and that His name is remembered therein; exalting Him in the morning and the evening.” (Holy Qur'ān 24:36). The Imam of the Time is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the [Light of God](#) and therefore the “Houses” (*buyūt*) that contain the Light mentioned in this verse refer to the Imams, not to physical houses. This is because only the souls of the Prophets and Imams are pure like the glass of the lamp described in *ayat al-nūr* and this is why [the Prophet himself is called both Light \(5:15\) and a light-emanating lamp](#) elsewhere in the Qur'ān (33:47). The Imam of the time is the true House of God because the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of God is attained through him:

Imam al-Husayn called out to his companions: “God – may His Mention be glorified – did not create the servants except to know Him, and by knowing Him to worship him, and by worshipping Him to be satisfied only by His worship, and to never find satisfaction in worshipping other than Him.” And a man said to him: “O Son of the Prophet, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you. What is this Recognition

(*ma'rifah*) of God?" The Imam said: "The recognition (*ma'rifah*) every people have of the Imam of their Time to whom obedience is due."

(Shaykh Saduq, *Ilal al-Sharā'ī*, Vol. 1, 19)

Everyone must know God through knowing me, since a person becomes a knower (*'ārif*) through my knowledge and becomes a unifier (*muwahhid*) through my *tawhīd*. Then the reality of *ma'rifat*, union (*ittiḥād*), and unity (*waḥdat*) comes completely into existence, and the reality of worship becomes evident.

Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salām,
(Nasīr al-Din al-Tusi, *Contemplation and Action*, 44)

Secondly, the Qur'ānic verses that mention Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl's establishment of the foundations of the Ka'bah also mention the lineage of Imams in connection to that very act.

And when Abraham and Ismā'īl were raising the foundations (*yarfa'u al-qawā'id*) of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower. Our Lord! Make us submitters (*muslimīn*) unto Thee and of our descendants (*dhurriyyatinā*) a submitting nation (*ummatan muslimah*) unto Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and relent toward us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful.

— Holy Qur'ān 2:127-28

In the above verse, reference is made to Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl raising the foundations (*qawā'id*) of the House as well as their special prayer. The Ka'bah has four corners (*arkān*) and these are its four foundations (*qawā'id*). According to *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation) explained by the Qadi al-Nu'mān (*Asās al-Ta'wīl*, ed. Arif Tamir, 116), the four foundations refer to the three great Speaker-Prophets after Abraham and the [Lord of Resurrection](#) (*qā'im al-qiyāmah*): Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus, Prophet Muhammad, and the Qā'im. Moses and Jesus are from the progeny of Isaac, the younger son of Abraham while Muhammad and the Qā'im are from the progeny of Ismā'īl, the older son of Abraham. The Ḥajj pilgrims do not recite *takbīr* when they pass the northern and western corners of the Ka'bah – because they represent Moses and Jesus from the line of Isaac. But when the pilgrims pass by the southern and eastern corners of the Ka'bah, they kiss the Ka'bah and recite *takbir* because the Imamatus continues in the progeny of Ismā'īl through Muhammad and the Qā'im whom these corners symbolize. In this prayer mentioned in the above verse, Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl ask God to make them "submitters" (*muslim*) to Him and also pray for God to raise up a "submitting nation" (*ummatan muslimah*). This "submitting nation" (*ummatan muslimah*) from the progeny of Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl refers to the lineage of Imams from the progeny of Muhammad. Thus, the very act of purifying and raising the physical House of God was an indication (*mithāl*) toward the Imamatus of the progeny of Mawlānā Ismā'īl:

Then Abraham and Ismā'īl, peace be upon them, built the House (the Ka'bah), commanding the people to glorify it, this being an indication that the Imamatus was

to be in Abraham's house and progeny. He urged the people to glorify the Imam and venerate and obey [the Imams of] his family.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(*Degrees of Excellence*, tr. Lalani, 79)

The Imam of the Time from the progeny of Prophet Abraham and Mawlānā Ismā'īl is the esoteric House of God and the Living Ka'bah. All of the attributes and great merits connected to the Ka'bah in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth are allusions (*amthāl*) for the virtues, merits, and qualities of the Imam of the Time. The esoteric pilgrimage, the inner Ḥajj of the human rational soul is undertaken toward the Imam, just as the exoteric Ḥajj is to the physical Ka'bah in Makkah. In fact, the physical Ḥajj to the inanimate Ka'bah is but a symbol (*mithāl*) for the esoteric Ḥajj to the living Imam, who is the indicated meaning (*mamthūl*) of the Ka'bah:

The Ka'bah, in some esoteric interpretations, is a proof for the Imam. Its being placed in a desert with no civilization around it so that it can only be reached with great difficulty, and its location in a place that has no planting or trees deprived of worldly benefit are such so that the worshipers should know that what is symbolized by it (*mamthūl*) also can be attained only by great effort and difficulty as well as injury from enemies. They should also know that aiming for the Imam and seeking him must not be for worldly purpose, greed, pleasure or worldly dignity but visiting the Imam must only be out of pure faith. If he faces hardship, tiredness, attacks from enemies, fatigue or other such things, then his heart must not constrict but he must patiently endure. Then he will see and recognize as such in its symbol (*mathal*), which is the pilgrimage (*haji*). Then its circumambulation, touching or accepting it, the indication of it, the running to it, the throwing of stones, the wearing of white garments (*ihrām*) and giving up of perfume and sex, all that is an indication for the affirmation of the Imam and obedience to him in all different conditions, seeking guidance and protection of their souls while discarding reprehensible doctrines and corrupt beliefs.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(*Degrees of Excellence*, tr. Lalani, 79)

Since the Living Imam of the Time is the spiritual Ka'bah and the esoteric House of God, it follows that all of the exoteric Ḥajj rituals and rites also have an esoteric meaning or *ta'wīl* in relation to the recognition of the Imam of the Time. We will now provide the *ta'wīl* of the Ḥajj rituals as per the teachings of Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw:

The pilgrim passes through various stations to reach Makkah:



The Sacred Masjid in Makkah during the Hajj season.

The stations of the way to Makkah symbolize the stages of knowledge,

in each of which the believer tarries in order to act and acquire knowledge. The passing of the pilgrim from these stations signifies the initiates (*mustajībs*) abandoning the different schools of thought (*maḍhabs*) to reach the true path, which is the Imam of the Time, who is God's House of Knowledge (*khāna-yi 'ilm-i khudāy*).

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 264, Avaani Edition)

The pilgrim enters the Sacred Masjid around the Ka'bah through one of the *mīqāts* (stopping places):



One of the Miqats (stopping places) where Hajj pilgrims enter ihram.

When the pilgrims reach the stopping place (*mīqāt*), they take *iḥrām*. There are four *mīqāts* for the pilgrims, which signify the four *ḥujjats* who are never separate from the presence of Imam (*ḥaḍrat-i Imām*). They take

knowledge from him and give it to the people. People cannot reach a rank in which they can receive a word from the Imam without the intermediary of one of those four *ḥujjats*, just as those who want to reach the Ka'bah must pass through one of its four *mīqāts*."

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 264, Avaani Edition)



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni sits on the Dais, accompanied by the Mukhi-Kamadias of his Syrian Jamat.

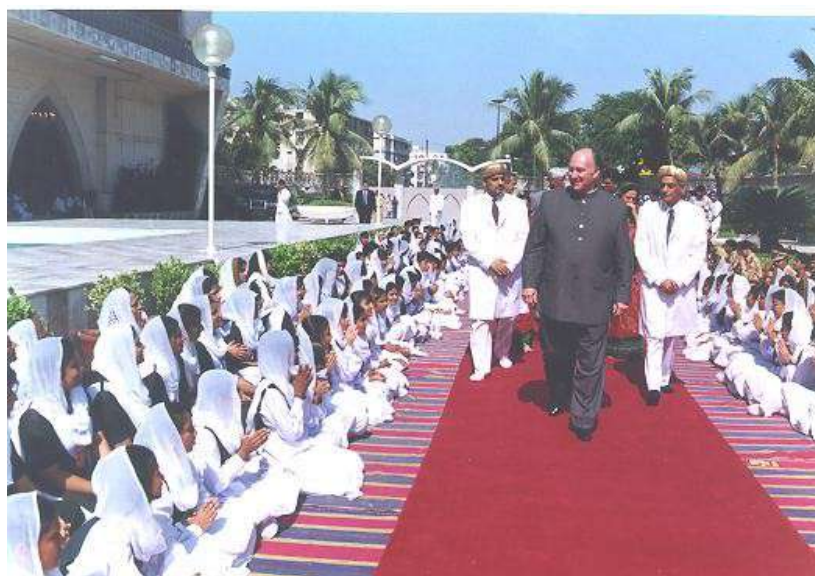
When the pilgrim reaches the *mīqāt*, he enters into *iḥrām* (to bare their heads and refrain from sexual activity):



Hajj pilgrims wearing the white cloths in the state of *iḥrām*. [Iḥrām] signifies that when the believers reach the Imam of the time, they should not talk to anyone, which is signified by coition. To bare the head means that the believers should not hide their belief from the *ḥujjat* before reaching the Imam, so that nothing should remain hidden from him, just as those who are in the state of *iḥrām* take off their [sewn]

clothes.”

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 264, Avaani Edition)



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni walks among his murids in Pakistan (2000).

The pilgrim in *iḥrām* washes with water and then performs two *raʿkats* of *ṣalāh*, and utters the *talbiya*:



Hajj pilgrims offer prayers before the Kaʿbah. Those in *iḥrām* pour water on themselves, that is, they accept the knowledge of *bayān* (*taʿwīl*) and thereby wash their souls. Then they perform *ṣalāt* of two rakʿats. That symbolises the believersʼ affirmation of the ḥadds of the Imam

and the ḥujjat. Then they utter *labbayka* (“Here I am! at your service”), which is called *talbiya*. That is, they respond to their guide [the dā’ī] in whatever way he invites them towards the Imam.”

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 264, Avaani Edition)

The pilgrim enters the Sacred Masjid through the Gate of the Prophet:

To enter the masjid through the gate of the Prophet symbolizes the affirmation that it is not possible to reach the Imam except through obedience to the *ḥujjat*.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Dīn*, 265, Avaani Edition)

The pilgrim circumambulates the Ka’bah seven times and sees all four of its corners:



pilgrims circumambulate the Ka’bah.

To circumambulate the Ka’ba seven times signifies that the believers affirm the rank of the seven Imams. When the believers circumambulate it they see the entire House, the four corners of which signify their seeing the four ḥujjats of the Imam through whom they reach his recognition.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 265, Avaani Edition)



Imam Shah Karim al-

Husayni gives didar to his murids in Toronto at the Rogers Centre.

In summary, all of the exoteric *ḥajj* rituals relating to the Ka'bah symbolize the path toward the true recognition of the Imam. The Ka'bah is the exoteric and inanimate House of God while the Imam of the Time is the esoteric and living House of God. The *ẓāhirī ḥajj* is undertaken to visit the Ka'bah in Makkah while the *bāṭinī ḥajj* is undertaken to seek the vision (*liqā; dīdar*) of the Imam of the Time. While the physical bodies may circumambulate the inanimate Ka'bah, the rational souls circumambulate the living Imam, which means to seek the spiritual recognition (*ma'rifah*) of the Imam.

The journey to the House of Ka'bah according to the *tanzīl*, signifies the quest for the Imam, and reaching the House of the Ka'bah, according to *ta'wīl*, is the recognition of the Imam.

Nasir al-Din Tusi,
(*The Paradise of Submission*, 151)

The performance of the *bāṭinī ḥajj* to the Imam of the Time includes all the merits, virtues, and spiritual rewards associated with the *ẓāhirī ḥajj* to the Ka'bah in Makkah. In fact, the *bāṭinī ḥajj* to the Imam of the Time out of sincere love and desire for his beatific vision is greater than the *ẓāhirī ḥajj* to the Ka'bah in Makkah. This is because the Ka'bah is only the outward symbol (*mithāl*) while the Imam is the symbolized meaning (*mamthūl*). The rank of the symbolized meaning outweighs that of the symbol, since the latter only exists to point toward the former. The Ka'bah in its physical form is perishable and corruptible while the pure soul of the Imam is eternal and everlasting and is more deserving of the status of the House of God than the inanimate building.

In a similar way, the Sufis regard the Prophet Muhammad's tomb more appropriate for *ḥajj* than the exoteric Ka'bah. For example Ahmad Rida states in his poem about the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad:

O pilgrims! Come to the tomb of the king of kings
You have seen the Ka'bah, now see the Ka'bah of the Ka'bah.

Ahmad Rida,
(Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the
Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 177)

Describing the august status of the Imam as the Living House of God and the spiritual Ka‘bah of human souls, the great Ismā‘īlī *bāb* and *ḥujjat*, al-Mu‘ayyad al-Din al-Shirazi addresses the Imam of his time in the below poem. In these lines, Sayyidna al-Mu‘ayyad refers to the Imam of the Time as “the Ka‘bah of the Living” who is more worthy of being visited than the inanimate and lifeless Ka‘bah made of stone.



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni gives didar to

his murids in Tajikistan (1998).

O most glorious Qiblah of Truth

And most sublime Ka‘bah of the Living

If the Ḥajj is undertaken to the Inanimate House [in Makkah]

So much more fitting, so much more worthy, that we betake ourselves unto you!

Sayyidna al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shirazi,
(Diwān al-Mu‘ayyad, in Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middles Ages*, 132)

The Esoteric Qiblah of the Rational Soul



Muslim worshippers standing in prayer towards the Ka'bah from all directions.



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni among his murids in Tajikistan.

The *ẓāhirī* meaning of the *ṣalāh* is the worship of God with the physical body by turning towards the Qiblah of physical bodies which is the Ka'bah, the House of God, the Exalted, in Makkah. And the *bāṭinī* meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the *salāh* is the worship of God with the rational soul by seeking the [inner] knowledge of the Book and the *sharī'at* by turning towards the Qiblah of Spirits who is the [living] House of God.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, 308, ed. Corbin and Mu'in)

Just as there is an esoteric House of God that is symbolized by the exoteric House of God, there is likewise an esoteric *qiblah* that corresponds to the exoteric *qiblah*. To understand the purpose of the *qiblah* in general, one should first reflect: Why has the Qur'ān commanded human beings who possess life, intellect, and speech to prostrate in the direction of the Ka'bah – an inanimate structure made of stone? The great Isma'ili ḥujjat al-Mu'ayyad explains in his *majālis*:

The House towards which the *Ḥajj* is performed is the *qiblah* of those who perform *ṣalāh*. God exalted its dignity and commanded [those who pray] to face towards it during their ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*). He – may He be exalted! – said: “Wherever you may be, turn your faces towards it,” (Qur'ān 2:144). But the facing of the human being — who has life and speech — towards an inanimate house — that neither senses nor thinks — is indeed a calamity! It is a reminder “for one who has a heart” (Qur'ān 50:37). That [reminder] is that the person who performs the ritual prayer, with respect to his body, is dust that will dissolve into dust. So this requires that [the physical body's] *qiblah* be that into which it will dissolve, and that [Ka'bah] is dust. With regard to his soul, he is a substance (*jawhar*) that can accept (*qābil*) the traces of Prophethood and the Book. So this requires that [the soul's] *qiblah* be that into which it will dissolve, and that is Prophethood and the Book. Consequently, when [the human being] faces the *qiblah*, it is as though he faces the corporeal (*kathif*) with his corporeal [body], and the sublime (*latif*) with his sublime [soul]; he faces with his corporeal [body] that into which it will dissolve, and with his sublime [soul] that towards which is its return. Whosoever prays the ritual prayer with this belief, the arrow of his endeavour hits the mark and the star of his felicity shines.”

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi,
(*Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Vol. 1, Majlis No. 4, 19, ed. Mustafa Ghalib)

According to Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad the real reason why the Qur'ān commands the believers to physically turn towards the Sacred *Masjid* – the Ka'bah – as their exoteric *qiblah* when they pray is that **this inanimate Ka'bah is the *qiblah* of the physical body only. The proper *qiblah* for any existent is that reality to which it ultimately returns. The physical body is made of dust and the elements of the earth, and this body eventually returns to and becomes dust.** However, the exoteric *qiblah*, which is the inanimate Ka'bah, is NOT the *qiblah* of the human rational soul which is spiritual and immaterial. The human soul has its own *qiblah* which is a subtle (*latif*) being and not an inanimate object. While the human body is created from dust and matter, the human soul is created and given spiritual life by the Holy Spirit (*al-ruh al-quddus*). This is mentioned in numerous Qur'ānic verses according to which God completes the creation of the human being by breathing into him of His Spirit. Thus, the origin and basis of all human souls is this Spirit – called the “Holy Spirit”, “the Trusted Spirit”, “the Spirit,

“My Spirit”, “Our Spirit”, “His Spirit”, and “a Spirit of Our Command” in various Qur’ānic verses. The Spirit is also the source of the revelation of the Qur’ān and all divine inspiration that reaches human beings. Most importantly, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the reason for the Angels prostration (*sujūd*) to Hazrat Adam: When your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit (*ruhi*), then fall down to him in prostration (*sajidīn*).” So the angels prostrated (*fa-sajada*) – all of them entirely.

– Holy Qur’ān 38:71-73 (see also 15:28-31)

The Angels were ordered make prostration (*sujūd*) to Hazrat Adam because the pure soul of Adam was the receptacle of the [Holy Spirit](#) (*al-ruh al-quddus*). This effectively means that Prophet Adam himself was the very first *qiblah* from the viewpoint of the Qur’ān:

The first *qiblah* that God, may He be praised, commanded to turn towards is Adam, the Living Qiblah (*ḥayy qiblah*).

Sayyidna al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi,
(*Majalis al-Mu’ayyadiyyah*, Vol. 2, Majlis No. 57, 350, ed. Hatim Hamid al-Din)

The Holy Spirit that was manifest in the pure soul of Hazrat Adam is transmitted and inherited through the succession of Prophets and Imams. The Qur’ān refers to the Prophet Muhammad being inspired by the same Spirit in 42:52, in which the Spirit is also called the Light (*nūr*) by which Muhammad guides to the Straight Path. The Holy Spirit is also the source and reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the Holy Qur’ān and continues in the lineage of Imams from the progeny of Muhammad. In this respect, the Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq explains how the Holy Spirit is always present in the Prophets and Imams at all times:

Gabriel is the one who came down with revelation to the prophets, while the Holy Spirit (*al-ruh al-quddus*) is with them and with the Successors [Imāms], never departing from them, strengthening them and guiding them on behalf of God.

Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, (*al-Qummi, Basā’ir al-Dajarat*, 463, No. 1)

The divinely-inspired knowledge and pure soul of the Imam of the Time due to the Holy Spirit that permanently illuminates his human soul at all times. As Sayyidna al-Mu’ayyad explains:

The spiritual faculty is called the Holy Spirit, through which [the Imam] speaks, thinks, hears, apprehends, and expounds from the above of the Hereafter.

Sayidna al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi,
(*Majalis al-Mu’ayyadiyyah*, Vol. 2, Majlis No. 35, 199, ed. Hatim Hamid al-Din)



Since the Imam of the Time is the bearer of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the origin and place of return for all human souls, it follows that the Imam of the Time is the esoteric *qiblah* of the rational soul just as the

Ka'bah is the exoteric *qiblah* for the physical body. For this reason, the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq has declared:

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525

We are the Ka'bah of God (ka'batullāh), Exalted is He, and we are the Qiblah of God (qiblatullāh). We are the Sacred Sanctuary of God (ḥarāmullah).

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (*Bihār al-Anwār*, 24:211/1, quoted in Muhammad Ali Sabzvari, *Tuhfa Yi-'Abbasi: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shi'ite Islam*, 68)

Even the root meaning of the word *qiblah* is related to the root meaning of the word *imām*. The word *qabāla* means “face to face” and so the *qiblah* is that which one is face to face with. Now the word *imām* comes from the word *amāma* which means “to be in front” or “to come before”. Just as the *qiblah* comes in front of the worshippers, likewise the Imam is the leader and guide who comes in front of the believers and they follow his direction. Thus, even linguistically, the *qiblah* alludes to the Imam:

The Prophet may God bless him, first ordered [the Muslims] to face the *qiblah*. The *qiblah* is derived from *qabāla*, which means ‘face to face’ and whoever faces it, points his face directly to it, and that is the Imam. It is said that to be before (*amāma* – root word of *imām*) something means [being] in front of it and, [therefore], preceding it. That is the opposite of back, behind and after. The word *imām* derives from [this] one meaning and the imam of the prayer is thus called an imam for this reason because he precedes the worshippers. The indication to the *qiblah* is an indication for the Imam, and [the Prophet] commanded people to follow and obey him in all [forms] of worship and to accept his direction.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(*Degrees of Excellence*, tr. Lalani, 65)

While the human body faces and prostrates towards the inanimate Ka'bah in the exoteric *ṣalāh* in the realm of *sharī'ah*, the human soul focuses its thoughts and intentions and spiritual prostrations (meaning obedience) towards the living Imam of the Time, who is the esoteric *qiblah* with whom the human soul must unite in order to realize the *tawḥīd* of God. Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw summarizes this as follows:

The exoteric meaning of the *ṣalāh* is the worship of God with the physical body by turning towards the Qiblah of physical bodies which is the Ka'bah, the House of God, the Exalted, in Makkah. And the esoteric meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the *ṣalāh* is the worship of God with the rational soul by seeking the [inner] knowledge of the Book and the *sharī'at* by turning towards the Qiblah of Spirits who is the [living] House of God – that House in whom the Divine Knowledge dwells – and that is the true Imam, may peace be upon him.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, 308, ed. Corbin and Mu'in)

Since the Imam is the esoteric *qiblah*, the exoteric *qiblah* direction is a symbolic indication (*mithāl*) for the Imam and his spiritual rank. Prior to the mission of

Muhammad, the progeny of Isaac son of Abraham, served as Trustee Imams and executed the authority of Imamāt on behalf of the Permanent Imams from the line of Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrahim who operated secretly. However, during Muhammad's childhood, the last Trustee Imam from Isaac's lineage returned the Imamāt in trust over to the then Imam of the line of Ismāʿīl, who was Mawlānā Imran Abū Ṭālib – the father of Imam ʿAlī. **The inner meaning (*taʿwīl*) of the occasion when the Prophet Muhammad, by God's command, switched the exoteric qiblah from Jerusalem to the Kaʿbah is to indicate that the authority of the Imamāt had been returned from Isaac's progeny (signified by Jerusalem) to the progeny of Mawlānā Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrahim, represented by Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (signified by the Kaʿbah). This becomes more obvious when it is remembered that Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was born in the Kaʿbah.** Thus, the Kaʿbah from the time of Prophet Muhammad onward symbolizes the Imams of the progeny of Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

When the Prophet [Muḥammad], the seal of the prophets, may God bless him and his family, appeared, he ordered people to turn their faces from Jerusalem to the Kaʿbah as the *qiblah* for Muslims. The Kaʿbah was built by Abraham and Ismāʿīl, peace be upon them. The Prophet ordered this as an indication that the direction had returned to the house of Abraham, which is the family of Ismāʿīl. This means that the Imamāt had returned to the children of Ismāʿīl who are the children of the Prophet Muḥammad, may God bless him. He ordered people to glorify the House and perform the pilgrimage to it, which no other prophet had ordered, as an exhortation to the people about the superior excellence of the Imams from the family of Muḥammad above all other Imams in past cycles.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(*Degrees of Excellence*, tr. Lalani, 65)

THE ISMAʿĪLĪ JAMATKHANA

In contemporary Ismāʿīlī praxis which is the domain of the *ṭarīqah*, the Imam of the Time has established the Jamatkhana as his House (*bayt*) for the religious practices of his murids. The Imam of the Time is the living House of God and the esoteric qiblah and the Jamatkhana is established by the Imam as a spatial representation and embodiment of his own holy personality in a local context. This is in accordance with the Qurʾānic verses where God commands Moses and Aaron to make their Houses (*buyūt*) as *qiblah* for the believers.

And We inspired to Moses and his brother, “Settle your people in Egypt in houses (*buyūt*) and appoint your houses as qiblahs (*wa-ijʿalū buyūtakum qiblataṉ*) and establish prayer and give good tidings to the believers.”

– Holy Qurʾān 10:87

Since the Jamatkhana is the physical representation of the Imam of the Time, the Living House of God and spiritual Qiblah, it follows that undertaking the journey to the Jamatkhana, House of the Imam, is the performance of the esoteric *ḥajj*. This is why Sayyidna Pir Sadr al-Din declares in his *ginan* that the Jamatkhana has the status of the sixty-eight pilgrimage sites recognized in the Indic religious traditions:

Āvo mārā bhāiḍā gatmā

Aḍasaṭha tīrathano chhe malvā

Come, o my brothers in the congregation of the Jamat

Therein is the confluence of the sixty-eight pilgrimage shrines

Sayyidna Pir Sadr al-Din,

Āvo mārā bhāiḍā gatmā, Verse 1, (*100 Ginan-ni chopadi bhaag trijo Khojki 3rd edition*, 1922, Mukhi Laljibhai Devraj, Ginan #100, transl. al-Wa'z Ashraf Ladha)

While the non-denominational *masjids* in Islam are public places for the rituals of the *sharī'ah* such as the exoteric *ṣalāh*, the Jamatkhana is a private space reserved for the rituals of the Isma'ili *ṭarīqah* such as the esoteric *Dū'ā* (which is the embodied ta'wil of the *ṣalāh*) and therefore only accessible to *murids* who have given *bay'ah* to the Imam of the Isma'ili *ṭarīqah* of Islam. The Arabic word *bay'ah* means buying or selling and appears in several Qur'ānic verses (48:10, 48:18, 60:12) in which the believers give *bay'ah* to the Prophet Muhammad when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. **The *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Isma'ili Imam is a spiritual "transaction" or "contract" in which the *murid* pledges his allegiance, devotion, and obedience in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification. Since the Jamatkhana is a primary expression of the Isma'ili Imam's spiritual guidance and blessings, its being accessible to the *murid* forms part of the spiritual transaction of the *bay'ah*. Those who have not given this *bay'ah* are not *murids* of the Imam and are not participants in this spiritual transaction; therefore, they have no rights to participate in Isma'ili *ṭarīqah* rituals that take place in the Jamatkhana. To do so would be akin to stealing – partaking in benefits that one has not transacted for.** The exclusive nature of the Jamatkhana space during prayer times is consistent with many Sufi *ṭarīqahs* who also have private spaces of religious practice such as *khanaqas*, *ribats*, *zawiyahs* and *tekkes*.

In the context of the Jamatkhana, the performance all the *ṭarīqah* prayers, supplications, and ceremonies is actually the function of the *bāb* or greatest *ḥujjat* of the Imam, today known as the *Pir*. Isma'ili tradition holds that the first Isma'ili Jamatkhana were established by the *Pirs* in South Asia. In this context, Al-Wa'z Abualy Aziz reports from Sayyid Mushtaqali Didarali that when Mawlānā Aga 'Ali Shah was the *Pir* of the Isma'ilis during the Imamate of his father, Mawlānā Aga Hasan 'Ali Shah, the *Pir* would perform all Jamatkhana ceremonies (such as *Dū'ā*) while the Imam of the Time would be present. Similarly, Pir Shihab al-Din Shah would lead the Jamat in the performance of *Dū'ā* whenever he visited the Jamatkhana. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III was the first Imam of the modern era to function as both Imam and *Pir*. From June to September 1899, in his capacity as *Pir*, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah visited the Isma'ili Jamat of Zanzibar and personally witnessed and performed all of the Jamatkhana rituals and ceremonies. (See Abualy A. Aziz, *Ismaili Tariqah Part 2*, 25).

Imam Hasan Ali Shah Aga Khan I next to Imam Aga 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II when he was the Pir.

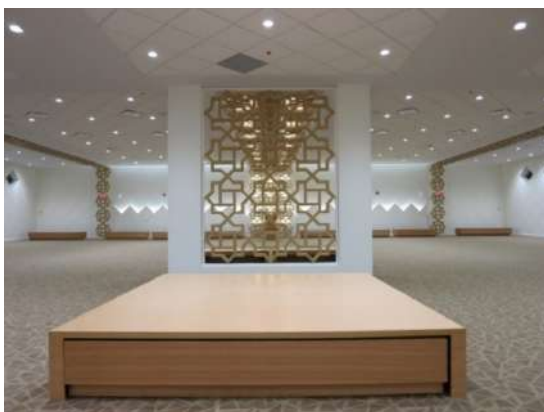
In the realm of *ṭarīqah* praxis, the Imam is the esoteric *qiblah* toward which all *ṭarīqah* worship is oriented in form and meaning. The *Pir* of the time is the esoteric *miḥrāb*, since the *Pir* is the supreme *Dā'ī* who summons to the recognition of the Imam, as Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains:

The Sacred *Masjid* is the Imam himself and the *Dā'ī* is the *miḥrāb*, which faces the Sacred *Masjid*. The *Dā'ī* turns his face towards the Imam and receives benefit from him, just as the *miḥrāb* faces the *Ka'bah*, that is to say, the Sacred *Masjid*.

The *mustajīb*s receive benefit from the *Dā'ī* from what he receives from the Imam, like the performers of *ṣalāt* face the *miḥrāb*, which faces the *Ka'bah*.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 263-64, Avaani Edition)

Within the contemporary Jamatkhana setting, the *mukhi sahib* represents the Imam of the Time in the context of *ṭarīqah* rituals and ceremonies. The *murid* who leads the Jamat in the prayers (*Dū'ā*, *tasbih*, *dhikr*, etc.) represents the *Pir* and performs these prayers on the *Pir's* behalf. The congregation as a whole faces towards the direction of the *mukhi sahib* and the prayer-leader – who represent the Imam and the *Pir* respectively. Thus, in the context of the *ṭarīqah* ritual, the Isma'ili Jamat is oriented in external posture and inward remembrance toward the esoteric *qiblah* who is the Imam by means of the esoteric *miḥrāb* who is



the *Pir*.

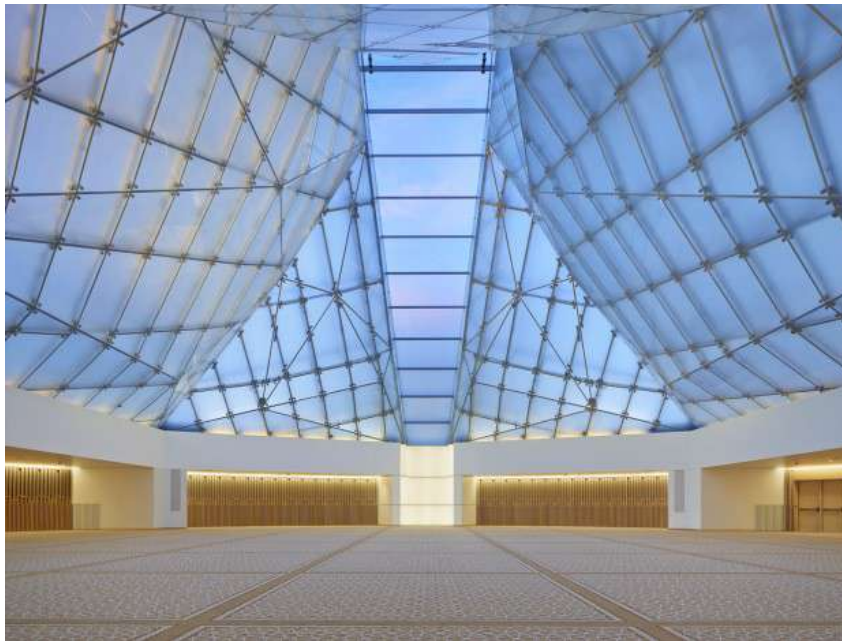
The prayer hall of the Ottawa Jamatkhana. Source: SIMERG
The prayer hall of Burnaby Lake Jamatkhana. Source: IsmailiMail

While Ismā'īlī *ṭarīqah* praxis in contemporary times is esoteric and therefore oriented toward the esoteric *qiblah* who is the Imam of the Time, the high-profile Ismaili Centres around the world externally face toward the exoteric *qiblah*— the *Ka'bah* in Makkah.



This is most evident in the case of the Toronto Ismaili Center which features both a distinctive *qiblah* wall facing Makkah and a *mihrāb* in the prayer hall that indicates the *Qiblah* Wall. When the Ismāʿīlī Jamat congregates for its *ṭarīqah* practices in such spaces, they face both the exoteric *qiblah* and the esoteric *qiblah* simultaneously. **While the congregants face the exoteric *qiblah* that is the Kaʿbah with respect to their physical bodies, their souls, by the performance of the *ṭarīqah* rituals, continue to be oriented toward the esoteric *qiblah* who is the Imam of the Time.**

The exterior of the Toronto Ismaili Centre with its distinctive Qiblah Wall.



The interior of the prayer hall of the Toronto Ismaili Centre, with the Mihrab and the Qiblah Wall at the front.

FACING THE ESOTERIC QIBLAH

Since the Imam of the Time is the esoteric *qiblah*, the Ismaʿīlī *murids* can at all times turn toward the Imam in the esoteric sense by always remembering the Imam and face him by means of their inner thoughts and intentions. This is the real meaning of the Qurʾānic command:

So from wherever you embark (min haythu kharajat) turn your face (wajh) toward the Sacred Masjid (al-masjid al-ḥarām), and indeed, it is the truth from your Lord.

– Holy Qurʾān 2:149

This verse instructs the believers to turn their faces towards the Sacred *Masjid* whenever they engage in any kind of activity. With respect to the exoteric meaning, it is physically impossible to turn toward the exoteric *qiblah* – the Kaʿbah – at all times. Therefore, this verse applies in its entirety only with respect to its esoteric meaning and *taʾwīl*. The believers are being commanded to turn their soul's thoughts and attention in the direction of the esoteric *qiblah* – the Imam of the Time – and continuously follow his guidance and direction.

Interpreting Qur'ān 2:125 – “And when We made the House a place of reward and peace for mankind”, Allamah Hunzai explains:

The first *ta'wīl* of this verse is that just as, by His command the Ka'bah, the House of God, is the place of reward and peace externally, so internally the Imam of the time as the House of God, the means of every kind of reward and peace. The Imam is the spiritual Qiblah, towards whom the attention of the heart is necessary in every good deed and that this is the way of attaining reward. You can see that the reward is mentioned first and then comes peace. The wisdom in this is that, the mu'mins cross the stages of reward and good first, by obeying the Holy Imam and then, as a result, they enter into the light of his spirituality.

Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai,
(*Jamatkhana*, 3-14)

During the *hajj*, pilgrims circumambulate the Ka'bah and salute, touch, or kiss the [Black] stone, considered variously a symbol of the hereafter and divine presence... Many pilgrims approach the corner of the Ka'bah that holds the Black Stone, saluting, touching, or kissing it as a gesture of their renewed covenant with God and for purification from sin.”

John L. Esposito,
(*The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, 103)

The Muslims of the *ẓāhir* and *sharī'ah* show reverence for the physical Ka'bah by bowing and prostrating towards it, and striving to kiss the Ka'bah. Meanwhile, the Muslims of the *bāṭin* and the *ṭarīqah*, show this reference for the Imam of the Time because he is the esoteric *qiblah* and the spiritual Ka'bah. While the exoteric Muslims seek purification and closeness to God through the physical Ka'bah, the spiritual Ka'bah is the Imam of the Time – the vicegerent of God (*khalifah*) of God on earth, the purifier of the believers, and the intercessor and medium (*waṣīlah*) by which the human soul recognizes *tawḥīd*. Since the physical Ka'bah is the exoteric symbol (*mithāl*) of the Imam, and the living Imam is the esoteric meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the inanimate Ka'bah, it logically follows that all the appropriate gestures (bowing, prostration, obeisance, adoration) in the physical presence of the Ka'bah are actually and truly intended towards the Imam of the Time when one enters the Imam's presence.



An Ismaili murid makes obeisance before Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni. Such gestures parallel those of the Hajj pilgrims when in front of the physical Ka'bah. Indeed, the Qur'ān contains two famous examples where the Prophet or spiritual Guide of the age is the object of prostration (*sujūd*). In addition to the example of Hazrat Adam mentioned early, the Qur'ān confirms that the parents and brothers of Hazrat Yusuf fell down and prostrated themselves to him when he had rescued them in Egypt.



Portrait of the Angels bowing to Hazrat Adam.

Illustration to a now dispersed manuscript of the “Whiffs of Intimacy”, a collection of lives of the Sufi saints by Jâmî of Herât.

Painting attributed to the artist Farhâd, Bukhârâ (Uzbekistan), c.1650.

When Joseph said to his father, “O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me (*lî sajjidīna*).”

– Holy Qur’ān 12:4

And when they entered upon Joseph, he took his parents to himself and said, “Enter Egypt, God willing, safe [and secure].” And he raised his parents upon the throne, and they bowed to him in prostration (*kharū lahu sujjadan*). And he said, “O my father, this is the explanation of my vision of before. My Lord has made it reality.”

– Holy Qur’ān 12:99-100

Since the Qur’ān allows angels and human beings to prostrate themselves before Hazrat Adam and Hazrat Yusuf, it is equally appropriate for the *murids* to prostrate themselves before the Imam of the Time who is the spiritual inheritor of the Light and Holy Spirit of the Prophets.



A murid greets and makes obeisance to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni.



Jason Kenny, Minister with the Government of Canada, greets Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni upon his arrival in Canada on December 5, 2008.

It is reported that the Imam of the Time, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni once visited the house of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah in Karachi with some leaders. From the top, he asked them “where is the Qiblah”? The leaders started looking East and West, searching for the exoteric *qiblah* direction of Makkah but could not reply. One of the caretakers [from Hunza] was summoned and he was asked the same question. He felt at the feet of the Imam of the Time and kissed them. **Crying loudly, he said: “Khudavind, here is the Qiblah!”** The Imam said, “You are right.”



O *Qiblah* of the spiritual world! Towards you turn
All the *qiblahs* themselves, from the East to the
West.

You are my hope when I have lost all hope in
people;

Yes, you are my accomplishment when the Hour
comes.

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi

(Diwan al-Mu'ayyad, tr. M. Adra, *Mount of Knowledge,
Sword of Eloquence*, 73)

The Ḥaḳīqī House of God and the Ḥaḳīqī Qiblah

O pilgrims to the Ḥaḳīqī House of God (*khāna-yi
Khudā*), strive today, which is the day of *Qiyāmat*. Strive to attain the greatest
benefit that you can.

Imam Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihi al-salām,

(quoted in Hasan-i Mahmud, *Haft Bab-i Baba-yi Sayyidna*, Chapter 6)

The Real House of God (*baytullāh al-ḥaḳīqī*) is the station in which God is truly
worshipped and the level (*ḥadd*) in which God manifests Himself in the highest
degree. According to various *ḥadīth*, in both Sunni and Shi'a sources, the first being
originated by God is the Universal Intellect (*'aql al-kull*) and it is this Intellect that
worships and recognizes God in the most perfect manner. The famous *ḥadīth* is as
follows:

God – may He be glorified and exalted – created Intellect (*'aql*) first among the
spiritual entities (*ruhaniyyin*); He drew it forth from the right of His Throne, making
it proceed from His own Light. Then He commanded it to retreat, and it retreated,
to advance, and it advanced; then God proclaimed: "I created you glorious, and I
gave you pre-eminence over all my creatures.

Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq,

(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 8)

The Universal Intellect is the first originated being and the noblest of all existents.
Intellect is spiritual being of light (*nur*) – it is therefore called the Muhammadan
Light, the Light of Imamat, the Throne, the Sun, etc.

The first being in the higher universe to emanate from the supreme Principle is a
Light which contains all light (because all light is created from it). This Light of lights
is described as the Throne (*'Arsh*), the Intelligence (*'Aql*, *Nous*), Muhammadan
Light (*Nur Muhammadi*).

Henry Corbin,

(*Temple and Contemplation*, 200)

The Intellect is perfect, living, knowing, eternal, powerful, and all other perfections.
The Intellect is the first being to recognize *tawḥīd* and thereby worship God, its

Originator. The esoteric meaning of God's commands for the Intellect to "retreat" and "advance" is that "retreat" refers to "descent", i.e. the Intellect's self-manifestation in creating the Cosmos and the "advance" refers to the return of all created manifestation to the Intellect. Thus, the Universal Intellect is the origin of all created beings and also the place of return. In a longer version of the above ḥadith of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Intellect recognizes *tawḥīd* and God praises the Intellect for doing so:

Then He [God] said: "Speak", so [Intellect] said: "Praise be to God for Whom there is no opponent nor peer, no likeness, nor resemblance. (He has no) equal nor match, no similitude nor analogy; whom everything to His Sublimity is submissive and abject. Then the Lord, Blessed and Exalted said: "By My Power and My Glory! I did not create a creature better than thee, nor more obedient or higher or more illustrious, or more cherished than thee! By means of thee I am declared to be One (*bi-ka uwahhadu*), and through thee I am worshipped (*bi-ka u'badu*) and by means of thee I am called upon (*bi-ka ud'a*)... Thereupon the Intellect fell down prostrate and remained in prostration one thousand years. After that the Lord, Blessed and Exalted, said: "Lift thy head! Ask! And it shall be granted thee. Intercede thou! Thou shalt have thine intercession accepted."

Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq,

(Quoted in Karim Douglas Crow, *The Role of Al-'Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq*, Doctoral Dissertation, McGill University, 1996, 262-264)

Therefore, Universal Intellect is the *ḥaqīqī* House of God because it is the exalted being through whom God is recognized, praised, and worshipped. The Universal Intellect is also the *ḥaqīqī Qiblah* because all creatures return to the Intellect. Regarding the Prophet Muhammad and his celestial journey, the Qur'ān states: Glorified is He who took his Servant from the Sacred Place of Prostration to the Furthest Place of Prostration.

– Holy Qur'ān 17:1

The *ta'wīl* of this verse on *mi'raj* is that the Prophet Muhammad spiritually ascended from the Universal Soul (called *masjid al-ḥarām*, the sacred place of prostration) to the Universal Intellect (called *masjid al-aqṣā*, the furthest place of prostration). This is because *masjid* means "place of prostration" and *sujūd* (prostration) means the effacement of the soul. The Universal Intellect is the highest being in the spiritual hierarchy and therefore, it is called *masjid al-aqṣā* – the furthest place of prostration, i.e. annihilation. Therefore, the Universal Intellect is the *masjid al-aqṣā* and the *ḥaqīqī* House of God in which God is worshipped and recognized.

The *ḥaqīqī qiblah* is that to which all things are metaphysically turned toward and to which they are returning. Just as the exoteric *qiblah* of the body is the Ka'bah made of stone – because the body returns to dust, and the esoteric *qiblah* of the rational soul is the Imam because the human soul is spiritually born from the Imam and will return to him, the Universal Intellect is the *ḥaqīqī qiblah* because all

existents are from it and are returning to it. Therefore, every existent is turned toward the Intellect. This is why the Qur'ān states that:

And to Allah belong the East and the West: therefore, wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah.



– Holy Qur'ān 2:115

The circular wall of the Toronto Ismaili Centre are adorned with the name “Allah” – such that one sees the name “Allah” in every direction one faces. This alludes to the Qur'anic verse “Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of Allah.” In esoteric and metaphysical meaning, the Face of Allah is the ever-present Universal Intellect. God Himself is too exalted and transcendent to possess an actual “face”. The “face” refers to that by which the recognition of something is obtained. Since God is recognized only by means of the Universal Intellect, it follows that the Universal Intellect is the “Face of God”. The Face of God is

the *ḥaqīqī qiblah* because it is present “wherever one turns.” Regardless of the physical direction one faces, one is always gazing toward the Face of God because each and everything in the Cosmos is a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect. Everything is transient and returning to the Intellect, as the Qur'ān also says:

Everything is perishing, but there remains forever the Face of your Lord, the Glorious, the Bounteous.

– Holy Qur'ān 55:26-27

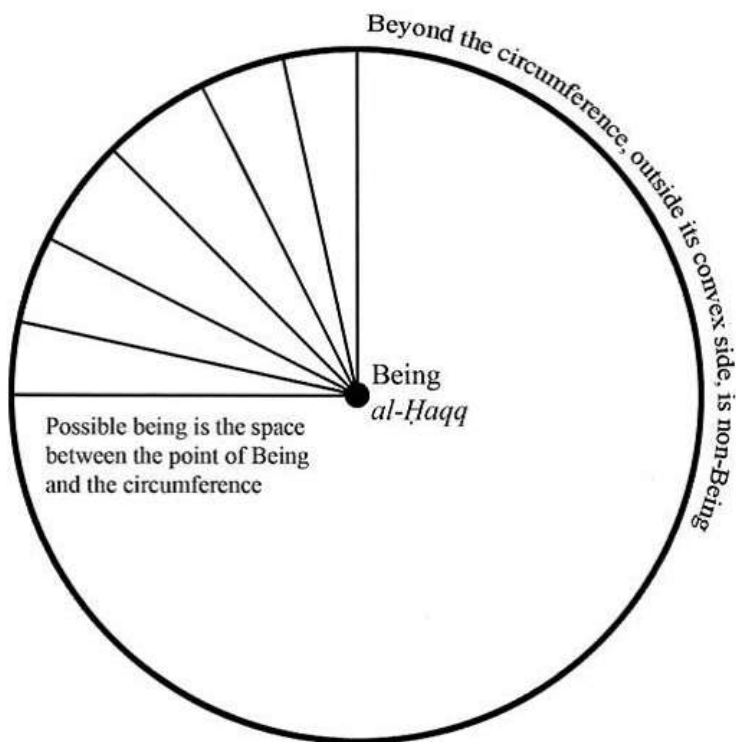
The *ḥaqīqī ḥajj* is for the human intellect and soul to return to the Universal Intellect from which it is created and to face the *ḥaqīqī qiblah* is to direct one's purpose toward this return by remembering the Names of God at all moments and thereby envision the Intellect in its various loci of manifestation.

In summary, the exoteric *ḥajj* is made to the exoteric House of God – the Ka‘bah in Makkah – and the exoteric prayer, the *ṣalāh*, is performed facing the direction of this exoteric *qiblah*. The esoteric *ḥajj* is made to the esoteric House of God – the living Imam of the Time – and the esoteric prayers, the *Dū‘ā* and other *ṭarīqah* rituals, are undertaken by orienting the rational soul in the direction of the esoteric *qiblah*. Finally, the *ḥaqīqī ḥajj* is made to the *ḥaqīqī* House of God – the Universal Intellect, and the real prayer – which is a thing’s very existence – inclines towards the Universal Intellect to which all things are returning. The Ka‘bah, the Imam of the Time, and the Universal Intellect symbolize and represent one another in a hierarchy. Each of these is the House of God, the Throne of God, the Face of God, and the Temple of God in its respective realm – the *sharī‘ah*, the *ṭarīqah*, and the *ḥaqīqah*. We will now illustrate the metaphysical and geometric basis for this esoteric symbolism of the House of God in relation to the Universal Intellect, the Imam of the Time, and the Ka‘bah.

THE METAPHYSICAL AND ESOTERIC SYMBOLISM OF THE KA‘BAH

The Universal Intellect comes into existence by means of God’s Command, “Be and it is.” The Universal Intellect, at the very instant it comes into being, contemplates its own essence [which contains the Forms-Archetypes of all things] and bears witness to *tawḥīd* by recognizing the absolute transcendence of God. This contemplation of the Universal Intellect produces the Universal Soul – a second spiritual being of light. The Universal Soul is passive in relation to the Intellect – like a mirror upon which the light and intelligible forms of the Intellect are reflected and delimited. The Universal Soul creates the entire Cosmos including the spiritual worlds and physical worlds.

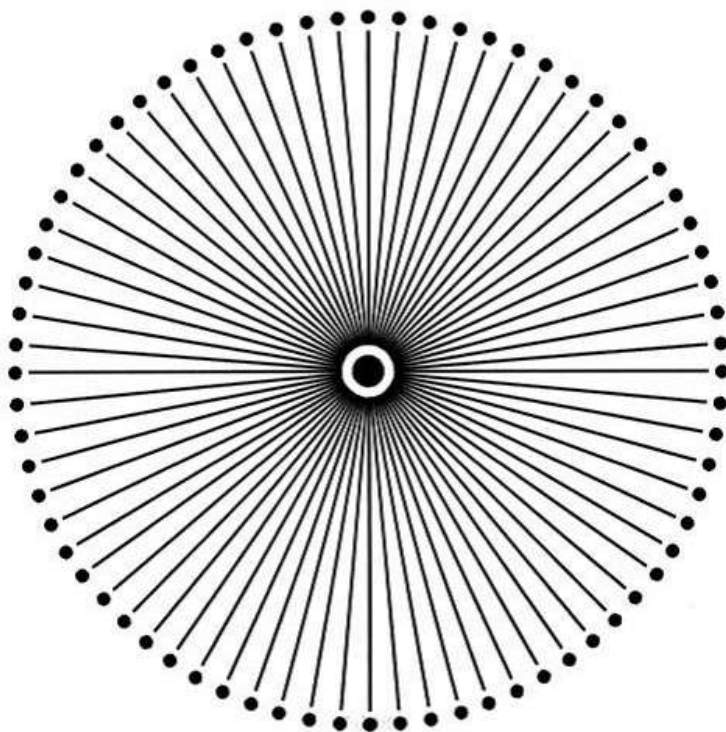
This metaphysical process can be visualized geometrically. The Command of God is like a point – which itself takes up no space but is nevertheless present. Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib alludes to this point (*nuktaḥ*) when he says: “All of the Qur’ān is contained in the *bismillāh*; and all of the *bismillāh* is contained in the letter *ba’*. All of the letter *ba’* is contained in the point (*nuktaḥ*); and I am the *nuktaḥ* under the letter *ba’*.” This point, representing the Command of God or Absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), expands in all directions through radius lines and manifests as a Circle.



The immutable Centre

Point represents the Command of God and each radius represents a facet of the Universal Intellect. In this way, the Command of God manifests as the Universal Intellect.

The Universal Intellect is like this Circle formed by all the radii, and each radius line segment symbolizes one of the Forms or Attributes of the Intellect. This is why the Arabic letter Alif – which is a straight line (like a radius line) – also symbolizes the Universal Intellect.



Alif signifies the Intellect, which is separate from all letters. When a writer reaches it, [the continuity of] his writing breaks, because nothing is prior to Alif and it is the beginning of [written] things. Other letters join Alif, but it does not join any other letters, just as all things are linked to the Intellect from above, but the Intellect is not linked to any other thing from above.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*>Wajh-i Dīn*, 108, Avaani Edition)

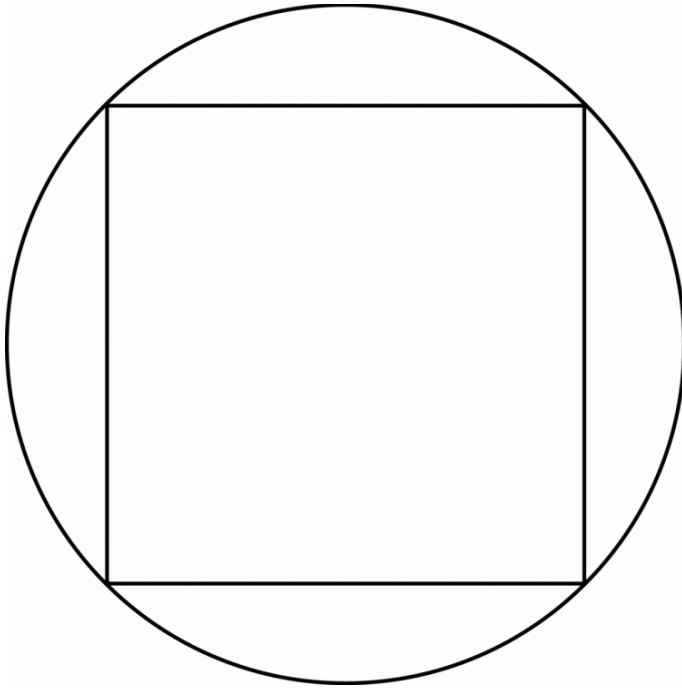
The Circle as a whole symbolizes the Universal Intellect which is virtually infinite but not actually infinite due to its being originated by God. The circumference manifests infinity because it turns in on itself while its radius manifests finitude. The Circle is the most primordial and most perfect of geometric shapes and from it all other shapes can be derived.

The end among the geometric shapes such as Squares, Triangles, arcs and all other shapes is the Circle. The Circle is the best and most perfect of them all. It is the foundation of all shapes from which it is possible to form the Square, the Triangle and the arc. When the Circle is divided, a Square emerges and arcs remain on the edges.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi
(

Degrees of Excellence, tr. Lalani, 63)

By joining together four equidistant points on the circumference of the Circle, a Square is formed within the Circle. This geometrical process of inscribing a Square by drawing lines from its Centre symbolizes how the Universal Soul comes forth from the Intellect through the Command of God.



The Square inscribed in the Circle as a representation of the Universal Soul emanated from the Universal Intellect. The Square symbolizes the Universal Soul which emanates from the Intellect. Just as the Square is more limited than a Circle – due to its four sides, the Universal Soul is limited and passive compared to the Universal Intellect – thus, the Square is inscribed within the Circle. A square is formed by joining both vertical and horizontal lines. The vertical line represents the Intellect while the joining of the vertical line with a horizontal line represents the Universal Soul. This is why the letter Alif (ا) in Arabic represents the Intellect and the letter Lam (ل) represents the Soul.

As has already been explained in this book, Alif signifies the Universal Intellect. It is the first letter, just as the Intellect is the First (Being), which came into existence ex nihilo. Lam is like Alif but is the compound of two lines – ل while Alif is a single line: ا. Lam signifies the Universal Soul, which came into existence through the mediation of the Universal Intellect and is the second existent, just as Lam is two lines, thus ل. Recognition of all things is through the Soul and the Intellect and it is because of this that these two letters are prefixed to all letters occurring frequently in speech.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 108, Avaani Edition)

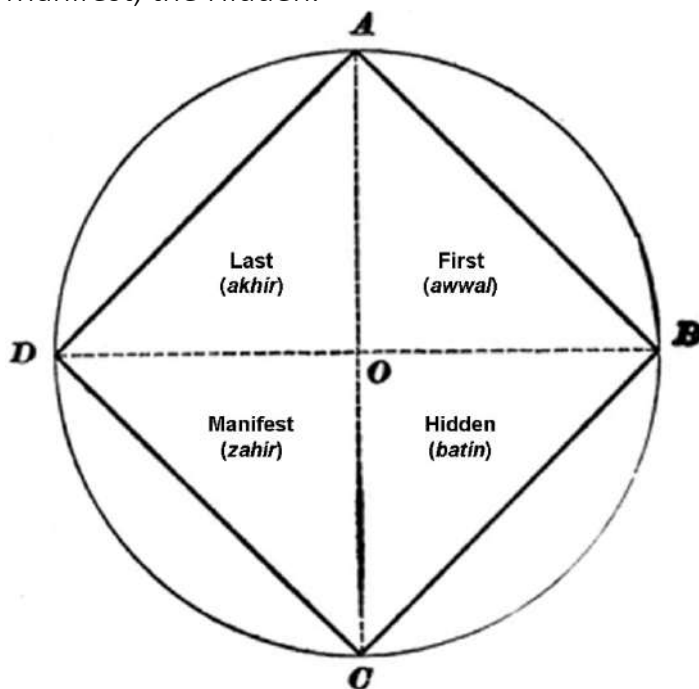
The Qur’ān refers to the Universal Intellect as the Throne of God. It also says that “His Throne was on Water.” (Qur’ān 11:7). The esoteric meaning of Water is the Universal Soul which reflects the “Forms” of the Universal Intellect – in the same way that Water reflects the light of the Sun. The Universal Intellect and Universal Soul together are called the “Throne on the Water.”

The Intelligence is the Light (*nūr*), the Throne (*‘arsh*), the centre, knowledge as a unique, unquantifiable point, and at the same time it is also Water, the peripheral

whole of all the objects of its intellection. The relationship of the Intelligence, as centre, with itself as the periphery surrounding and enveloping all the objects of its intellection, is expressed in the phrase “the Throne rests on the Water.”

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 200)

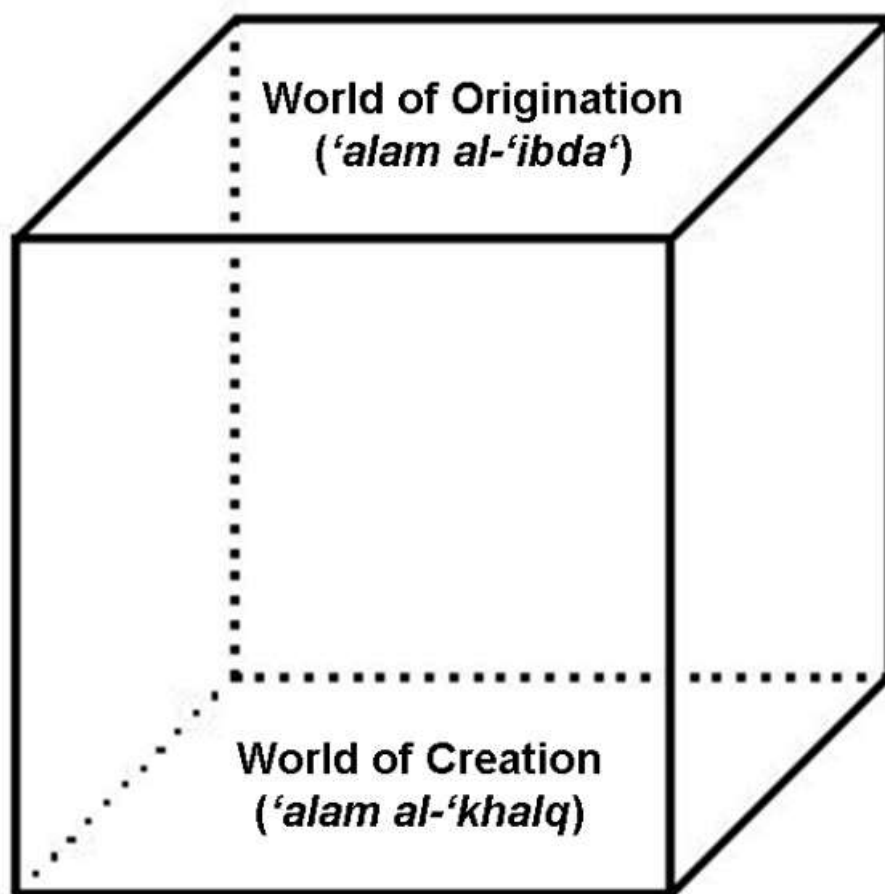
The relationship between the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect manifests the first “limits” in the spiritual world. These limits are represented geometrically by drawing lines within the Square that join to the center of the Circle. These four limits or divisions symbolize the four Divine Names – the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden.



The Throne is surrounded in this way by four limits that face each other, since it has a beginning (*awwal*) and an end (*āakhir*), an inner or esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*) and an external or exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*). The first two limits are understood from the extension of its total time (the Aeon, *dahr*, “time of times”), and the second two from the extension of its total space (“space of spaces”). Thus the original point of Knowledge, of the Throne, ends in four points which are designated as the supports of the Throne.

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 202)

The Universal Soul creates the physical world and the intermediary worlds of the Cosmos by a process of self-manifestation – in which the Forms of the Universal Intellect are reflected in the Cosmos in the form of individual creatures. The creative activity of the Universal Soul is represented geometrically by extending the lines of this two-dimensional inscribed square into a three dimensional cube.



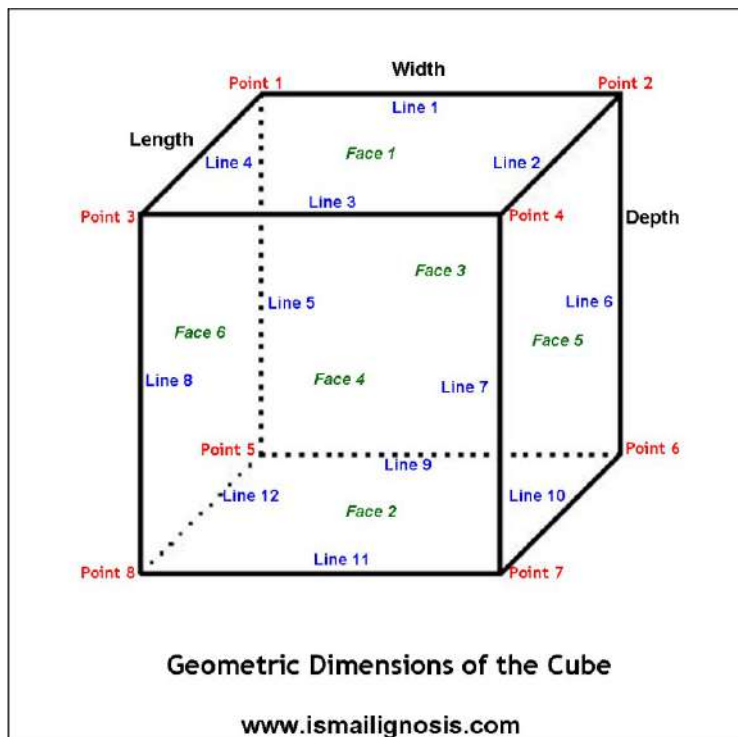
The Cube is a geometric symbol of the structure of the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, and the Cosmos that they create and sustain. The highest plane of the Cube represents the originated world (<i>'ālam al-ibdā'i) of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul and the lowest plane of the Cube symbolizes the physical world – the world of creation (<i>'ālam al-khalq). The various planes between the highest and lowest stand for the intermediary worlds: the world of celestial intellects, the world of subtle souls, the world of imagination, etc.

At the same time, this Cube structure also symbolizes the spiritual and terrestrial ranks of the World of Religion (<i>'alām al-dīn). Notice how the Cube structure contains the following:

3 Dimensions – Length, Width, Depth

6 Faces/Directions – Top, Bottom, Left, Right, Front Back, and the hidden Center

8 Angular Points



12 Lines that join all the Angular Points together

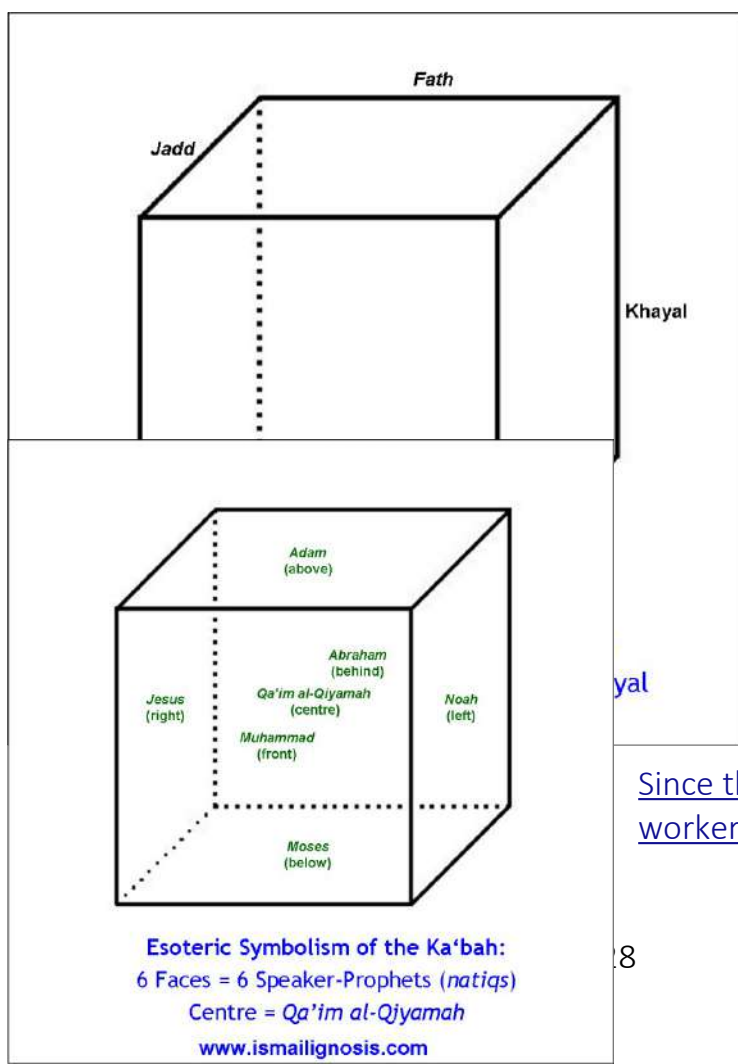
The 3 Dimensions of the Cubic Form symbolize the three Archangelic Hypostases – Jadd, Faṭḥ, and Khayāl also called Israfil, Michael, and Gabriel in the exoteric terminology. These three Archangels mediate between the Universal Soul and the human souls of the World of Religion.

One and two produce the number three, which is compound and odd, and

which corresponds to the three branches in the World of Religion, namely, Jadd, Faṭḥ and Khayāl, and the three dimensions in the physical world, namely length, width and depth.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 108, Avaani Edition)

The 6 Faces of the Cubic Form – the 6 spatial directions – symbolize the 6 Speaker-Prophets (*nāṭiqs*) – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad. Each of these Speaker-Prophets revealed a Book and a religious law to humankind and inaugurated a Major Cycle of religious history.



right, left, above and beneath, God, may He be exalted, sent six commanding messengers. They are: Adam, came to mankind from above; Noah, came to them from the left; Abraham, came to them from the back; Moses, came to them from beneath, opposite to Adam; Jesus, came to them from the right, opposite to Noah; and Muhammad, may peace be upon him and his progeny, came to them from the front, opposite to Abraham. We say that, since man has six sides with respect to the body and it is the body which is the worker and since from each side of it an instructor came (to instruct man to work), then, according to intellectual judgment, it follows that no other instructor will come to mankind. Therefore, the decisive proof which we have shown according to intellectual judgment, establishes that after Muhammad, may peace be upon him and his progeny, there will not come any other Prophet in the future.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter VII, transl. Al-Wa'z Dr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, *Ilm Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 4/3, December 1987 / March 1988, 34- 35)

The centre of the six spatial directions (which symbolize the six Speaker-Prophets) represents the Lord of the Resurrection (*Qā'im al-Qiyāmah*). While the Six Speaker-Prophets came into this world to command people to perform physical actions (which is why they are represented by the six directions of space), the Lord of the Resurrection reveals the esoteric meaning behind all the religious laws and scriptures and recompenses people for all their deeds.

Since it is the habit of people to perform acts and receive the wages from the commander, it follows that after this, by the Command of God, may He be exalted, someone will come who will give wages to each of these workers according to his actions. This is the *Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" (Part 1)* , peace be upon him, who is not the lord of the *sharī'at*, but he is the lord of the reckoning. He will reckon all the deeds that have been done and will reward the workers. Since a commander (prophet) has come from every side of the body of human beings already, logically it is necessary that this person will come, as it is no longer possible for any other commander to come.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter VII, transl. Al-Wa'z Dr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, *Ilm Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 4/3, December 1987 / March 1988, 34- 35)

Thus, the *Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" (Part 1)* is represented by the motionless Centre of the six spatial directions which stand for the six great Prophets. With respect to the central position of the *Qa'im*, Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi refers to his perfect soul as the *qiblah* of the souls of the six Prophets:

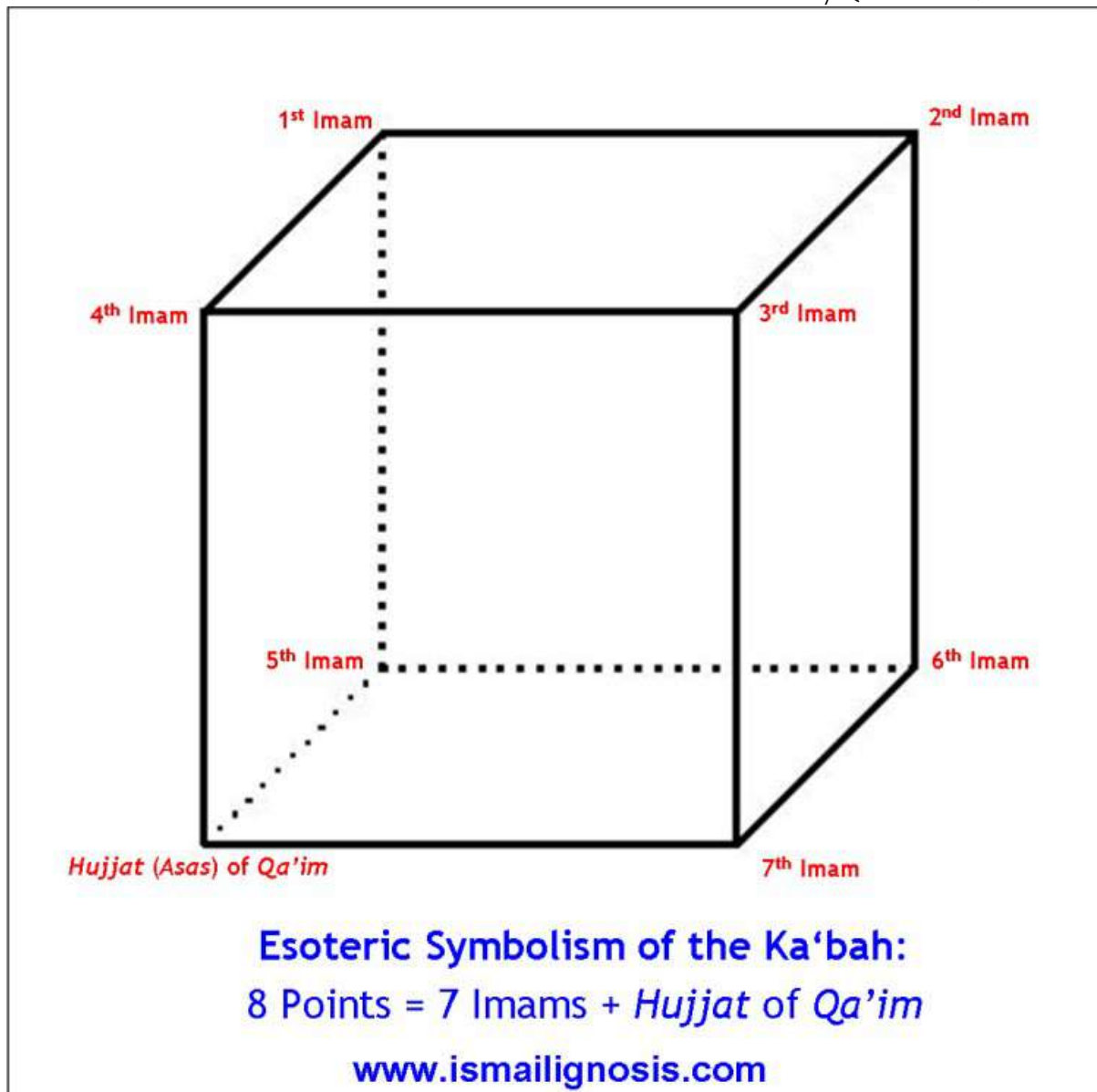
The Master of the Seventh Cycle [the *Qa'im*] is the perfection of the Prophets, and the *Qiblah* of their souls and intellects.

Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi,
(*Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Vol. 3, Majlis No. 1, 8)

The 8 Angular Points symbolize the 7 Imams of the Minor Cycle and the *Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" (Part 1)* whose coming in the world immediately precedes that of the *Qā'im*. The Universal Intellect is the Throne and these 8 Angular Points refer to the "Bearers of the Throne" mentioned in the Qur'ānic verse:

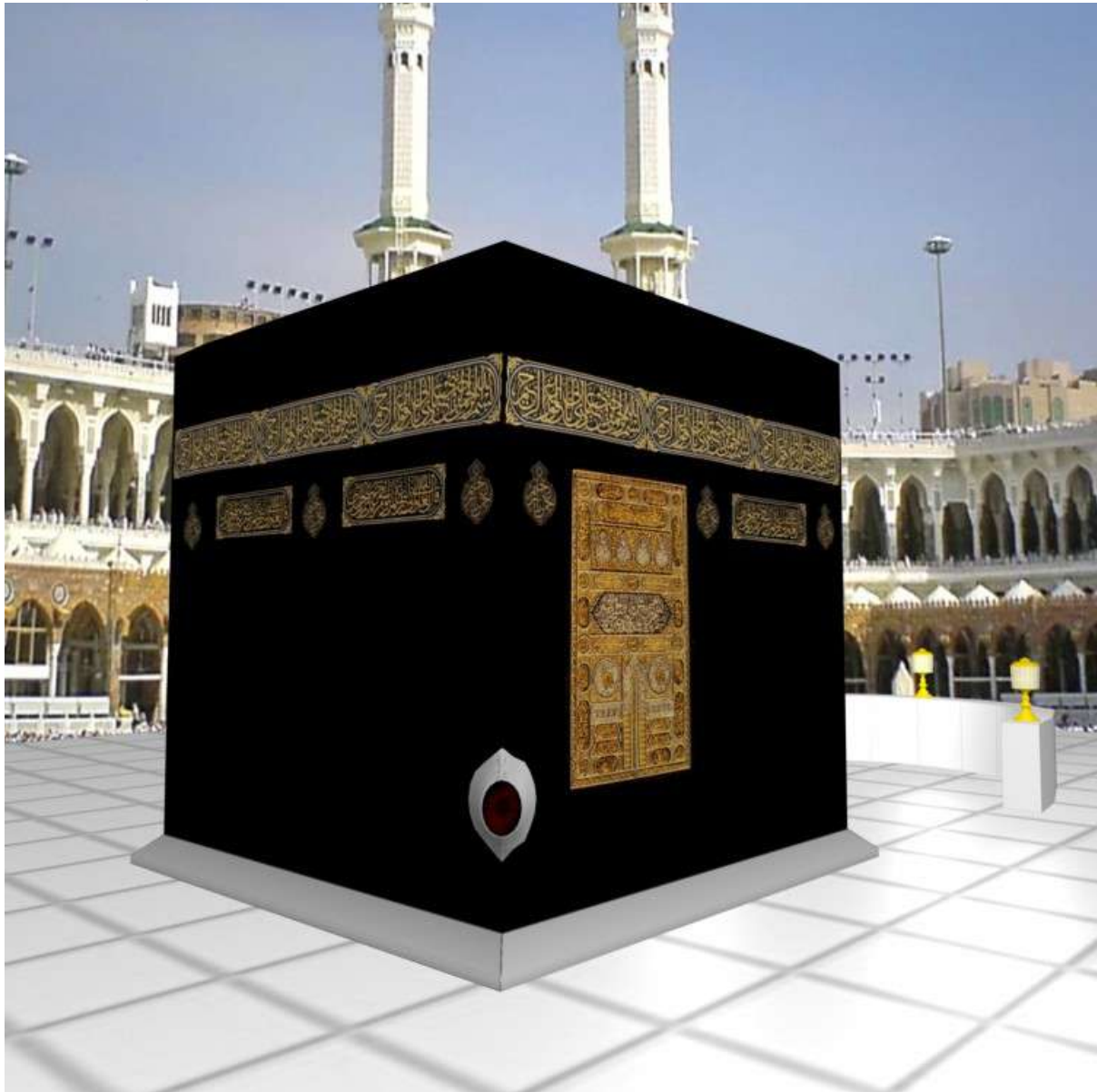
And Eight will uphold the Throne of their Lord on that day, above them.

– Holy Qur'ān 69:17



The bottom corner of the Ka'bah is where the Black Stone is located which the pilgrims kiss. This Black Stone represents the *Asas* or *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im*. The *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* is the greatest among all the Imams from the Cycle of Adam to the Cycle of Muhammad. This is why the Isma'ili *hujjats* such as Abu Hatim al-Razi, Qadi al-Nu'man, al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi, and Nāṣir-i Khusraw refer to this *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* as "the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*) greater than a thousand months" – meaning that he is greater than a thousand Imams in unveiling knowledge. Thus, al-Mu'ayyad writes that: "the *Bāb* of the *Qā'im* is the

lord of universal explanation and the true unveiling.” (Majalis al-Mu’ayyadiyyah, Vol. 2, 612).



Virtual image of the Black Stone at the southeast corner of the Ka’bah.

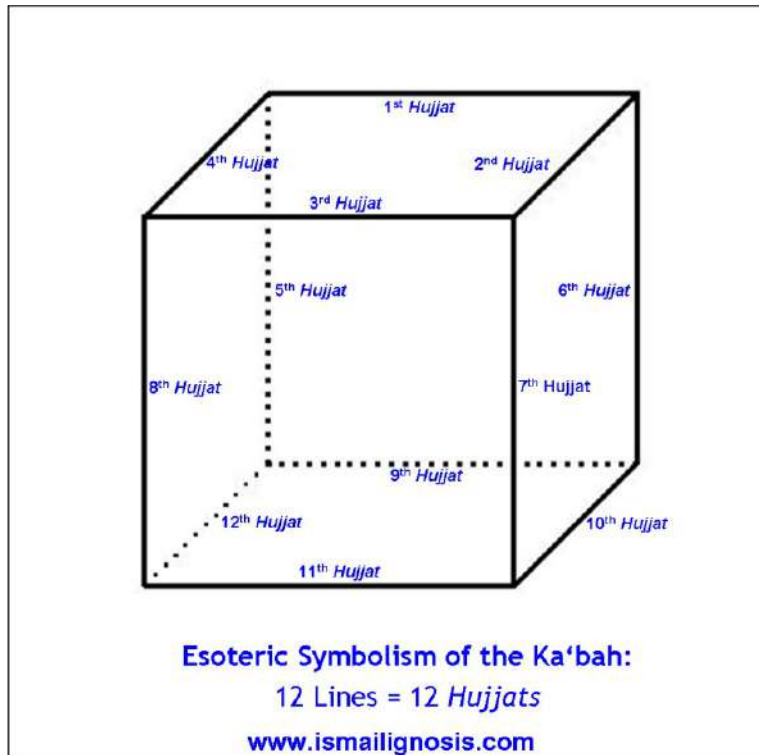
The greatness of the Black Stone is evident by the tradition of the exoteric *hajj* where pilgrims kiss the Stone while performing seven circumambulations. This is an allusion or symbol for the *Asas* or *Hujjat* of the Qā’im who is greater than the Seven Imams of the Minor Cycles, as Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains:

To come to the Black Stone signifies that the believers affirm the rank of the *Asās*. The three corners (*rukns*) of the House are hidden but the Black Stone is not hidden, which signifies that the *Asās* is the one who explains on behalf of the three ranks and he himself is the fourth of them. To circumambulate the Ka’bah seven times signifies that the believers affirm the rank of the Seven Imams.

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Dīn*, 265, Avaani Edition)

The 12 Lines symbolize the 12 pairs of *hujjats* (proofs) of the Imam who exist in every age, receiving his *ta'yid* (spiritual inspiration) and conveying it to the people in the form of *ta'lim* (instruction). Human beings are divided into twelve groups; each group is sent one *hujjat* of the day and one *hujjat* of the night, who are

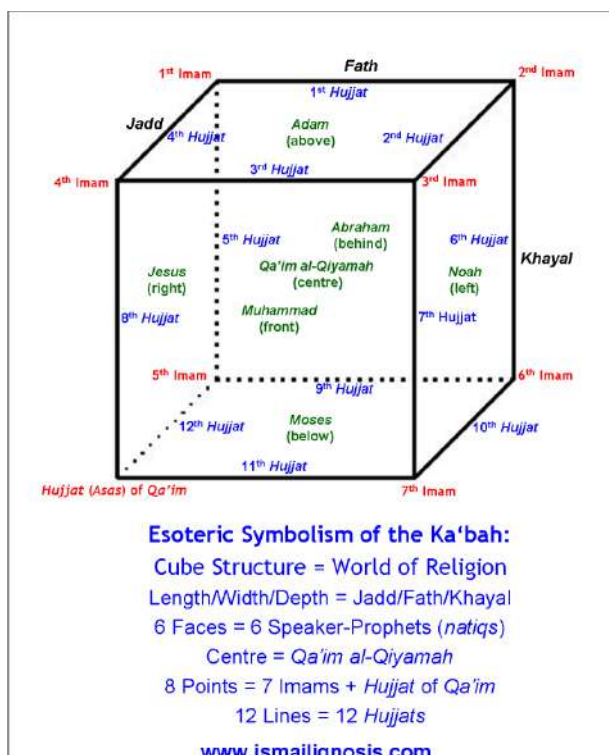
responsible for guiding them on behalf of the Imam.



Understand that for each Imam there are twelve visible diurnal *hujjats* and twelve concealed and hidden nocturnal *hujjats*... they are the veil of the Imam and are his mouthpieces and gateways, his deputies and the messengers from him to the *da'is*, who in turn convey the message to the believers.

Sayyidna Ibn al-Haytham,
(*The Advent of the Fatimids*, tr.
Madelung, 97)

In summary, the Cubic Form of the physical Ka'bah is a visual symbol of the Ranks of the World of Religion. Collectively, the Ranks of Religion consisting of the Prophets, the Imams and their deputies serve to manifest the Throne of God (Universal Intellect, Muhammadan Light) to human beings.



So, just as earlier we had the eight angles of the cubic form designated as the "supports" of the cosmic Throne or Temple, here we have the eight supports of the Throne of the Muhammadan Light, the permanent prophetic religion of humanity. And as the inner cohesion of the higher level, then that of the lower level, and lastly the interconnection between them, were seen to be assured by the twelve straight lines and six surfaces that engender the cubic form, by means of the Imamate, which is the esoteric

aspect of prophecy and its heart, the Throne or Muhammadan Light is “stabilized upon the Water.”

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 208)

The Ka’bah’s physical form as a Cube – consisting of the vertical and horizontal lines that form the square, 3 spatial dimensions, 6 spatial directions, 8 angular points, and 12 lines – is a symbolic manifestation of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul (the attributes First, Last, Manifest, Hidden), the spiritual ranks of Jadd, Faḥ and Khayāl, and the World of Religion – the 6 Six Speaker-Prophets and the “iglanguage”>Qā’im, the 7 Imams and the *Asas* of the *Qā’im*, and the 12 pairs of *ḥujjats* of night and day. This is the reason why the Ka’bah was constructed in Makkah as a physical representation of the *Ḥaqīqī* House of God – otherwise called the Throne of God, the Muhammadan Light or the Eternal Imam.

We can now anticipate the esoteric significance of the pilgrimage to the Temple of the Ka’bah as the centre of the terrestrial world, containing, homologically, all of creation. The form of the Ka’bah is the very form of the cosmic Throne or Temple, as it is also the form of the Imamate or *malakut* of this world, of its esoteric or suprasensible aspect.

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 208)

The material centre — the site of the Temple of the Ka’bah as centre of the terrestrial world and of the geocentric universe of the Spheres—by virtue of its homology with the centre of the intelligible Spheres, has the privilege of manifesting the Temple (*Bayt Allāh*, the “House of God”) in correspondence with the Throne of the Sovereign Unity (*‘arsh al-waḥdāniyyah al-kubra*). This latter is the pure intelligible Temple (*al-Bayt al-‘Aqli*) around which the pure sacrosanct angelic Intelligences proceed (the Angeli intellectuals).

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 219)

Let us now summarize: the exoteric House of God and the physical *qiblah* is the Ka’bah in Makkah; the Esoteric House of God and the spiritual *qiblah* is the living Imam of the Time; the *ḥaqīqī* (real) House of God and the *ḥaqīqī qiblah* is the Universal Intellect (the Throne of God) which encompasses all of the spiritual ranks and physical ranks of the World of Religion – as represented in the geometric figure of the Cube. Thus, the exoteric, esoteric and real Houses of God are symbols of each other and in reality they constitute the single House of God. The perfect human being who manifests all of these realities – the Intellect, the Soul, and the World of Religion – at any given period of humanity is the Imam of the Time, the “Vicar” of God on earth. In this respect, the Imam of the Time is the physical manifestation of both the Celestial House of God (Universal Intellect) and the physical Ka’bah.



Consider the cubic form of the Temple, which totalizes and interconnects spiritual and material realities, as a unique Emanation proceeding from the supreme Principle; that is to say, as a human person, as the Anthropos who is God's Vicar with regard to what he envelops and contains eminently within himself. In other words, the figuration of the Temple of the Ka'bah is likewise the figuration of Shiite prophetology and Imamology, because in both cases the same functional relationships are preserved.

Henry Corbin,
(*Temple and Contemplation*, 219)

Whereas the people of the *ẓāhir* turn their physical bodies toward the physical Ka'bah and make the exoteric *ḥajj* to this inanimate House of God, the people of the *bāṭin* and *ṭarīqah* turn their rational souls toward the spiritual Ka'bah, the Imam of the Time and undertake the esoteric *ḥajj* toward the living House of God; and the people of the *ḥaqīqah* also turn their intellects toward the Universal Intellect and undertake the celestial *ḥajj* toward the *ḥaqīqī* House of God.

O pilgrims to the Ḥaqīqī House of God (khāna-yi Khudā), strive today, which is the day of Qiyāmat. Strive to attain the greatest benefit that you can.

Imam Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihi al-salām,
(Quoted in Hasan-i Mahmud, *Haft Bab-i Baba-yi Sayyidna*, Chapter 6)

It must be remembered that the Imam of the Time – the esoteric *qiblah* – is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) or the mirror of the Universal Intellect – the *ḥaqīqī qiblah*. Thus, when the murids are in need of assistance in any matter, they turn towards the esoteric *qiblah* – the Imam of the Time, and by means of the Imam's boundless love for his spiritual children, the *Nūr* of Imamat (Universal Intellect

– *ḥaqīqī qiblah*) inspires their souls and shows them “where and in which direction” they must turn:



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV visiting his Ismaili followers in Tajikistan, 2008

For hundreds of years, my spiritual children have been guided by the Rope of Imamat. You have looked to the Imam of the Age for advice and help in all matters and through your Imam’s immense love and affection for his spiritual children, his *Nūr* has indicated to you where and in which direction you must turn so as to obtain spiritual and worldly satisfaction.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Karachi, December 13, 1964, in *Ilm Magazine*, July 1975, Vol. 1, No. 1, 7)

Sawm: The Esoterics (Bāṭin) of Fasting

*Shahru ramaḍāna alladhī unzila fīhī'l-qur'ānu hudan lilnasi wabayyinātin
mina'l-hudā wa'l-furqāni fa-man shahida minkumu'l-shahra falyaṣumhu*

“The Month of Ramaḍān in which was sent down the Qur'ān a guidance for mankind, and manifest proofs of the guidance and the criterion (between truth and falsehood). So whomever among you witnesses the Month, let him fast it.”

Holy Qur'ān 2:185

Fasting (*ṣawm*) is among the seven pillars (*arkān*) of classical Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Islām and the five pillars of classical Sunnī Islām. For Ismā'īlī gnosis as taught by the Ismā'īlī Muslim theosophers, each pillar (*rukṇ*) of Islām has an exoteric form (*ẓāhir*), an esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*), and a spiritual reality which is the esoteric beyond the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*).

The level of exoteric form is *sharī'ah* (religious law), the level of esoteric meaning is *ṭarīqah* (spiritual path), and the level of spiritual reality is *ḥaqīqah* (spiritual truth). Other Muslim theologians recognize these three levels as submission (*islām*), faith (*imān*), and beauty (*iḥsan*). Corresponding to these three levels in the human being are the physical body (*jism*) or sensual/animal soul, the rational soul (*nafs al-nātiqah*), and the heart (*qalb*) or spiritual intellect (*'aql*).

The word *ṣawm* literally means ‘to abstain’ from something. Accordingly, in Ismā'īlī gnosis, there are three levels of fasting (*ṣawm*):

1. Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī ṣawm*)
2. Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭinī ṣawm*)
3. Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*)

1. Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī sawm*)

The practice of Exoteric Fasting from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan was first established when the early Muslim community lived in Medinah among Jewish and Christian tribes. Before the Qur'anic instruction to fast for the month of Ramadan was revealed, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) had instructed his followers to fast on the tenth day of the month of Muharram as the Jews did, as well as on some other occasions. These former practices of fasting were replaced by the Ramaḍān fast, whose exact rules also underwent further modification by the Prophet: for example, sexual relations were initially forbidden by the Prophet during the nights of Ramaḍān, but the Prophet later changed this rule and allowed sexual relations (see Qur'an 2:187) during the nights (see Francis E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, 215-216). According to the Holy Qur'an, fasting was prescribed for the believers so that they may learn *taqwah* – a word which can mean piety, mindfulness, or God-consciousness.

Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū kutiba 'alaykumu'l-siyāmu kamā 'alā alladhīna min qabilikum la'allakum tattaqūna

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may do *taqwā*.”

Holy Qur’ān 2:183

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī explains the purpose of Exoteric Fasting to ‘imprint’ a noble ‘form’ upon the human soul:

“Fasting (*rūza*), which similarly restrains the soul from its [base] inclinations, was introduced so that for thirty days a year, and every day [from dawn] until night [fall], one closes one’s mouth to food and drink, and avoids and denies oneself appetizing things which one’s taste is accustomed and which are agreeable to one’s nature. One should be steadfast in this self-control and self-denial in this so that gradually and by degrees, a form will become imprinted in the soul, unto such a point that all one’s limbs and faculties, whether internal or external, become restrained from [pursuit of] improper things.”

– Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 149, [Click Here to Read](#)

The direct agent of Exoteric Fasting is the sensual soul (i.e. the animal soul and the vegetative soul). As Exoteric Fasting purifies the body and restrains the sensual soul, it also influences and imprints a spiritual form upon the human soul. Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhiri ṣawm*) is performed during the month of Ramaḍān as one of the practices of the *sharī’ah*. The mandatory nature of the *sharī’ah* continues through the [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) until the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) – when the *sharī’ah* is spiritualized and its outer forms are no longer obligatory upon the believers. (See Nāsir-i Khusraw, *Khwan al-Ikhwan*, *Wajh-i Dīn*; Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, *The Ethical Philosophy of Nasir-i Khusraw*, [Click Here](#) to [Read](#)).

In many places today it must become commonplace for people to sleep during most of the day – the time of fasting – and then feast through the entire night when fasting is not required. In many such places more food is consumed by people during the month of Ramaḍān than any other month. In such cases the spirit of fasting becomes lost and obscured. However, the Exoteric Fasting is merely the outermost layer of this practice.

2. Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭini sawm*)

All the exoteric practices of the *sharī’ah* (religious law) have an inner meaning or *ta’wīl*. The *ta’wīl* of Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhiri ṣawm*) is Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭini ṣawm*).

Whereas Exoteric Fasting is to keep one’s mouth closed by abstaining from food and drink, Esoteric Fasting is to keep one’s mouth closed by abstaining from speaking of the the esoteric knowledge of revelation (*tanzīl*) and interpretation (*ta’wīl*) to those who lack the capacity to receive it:

“The meaning of the fast (*rūza*) is to observe the *taqīyya*, i.e. precautionary dissimulation, and to keep secret from the enemies the tenets of the religion which is to be preached (*dīn-i da’wat*). The day of ‘*Id* is (the symbol of) the day of the Resurrection of Resurrections (*qiyāmat-i qiyāmat*), when, by the omnipotence of the command of the *Qā’im*, all people will be over powered by argument and proof.”

– Sayyidnā Khaykhwah-i Harātī, (*Kalām-i Pīr*, transl. Ivanow, Chapter 7

This practice of concealing sacred or esoteric knowledge is called *taqīyyah*. The Qur’ān (2:183) states that the purpose of fasting is to develop *taqwā*. The words *taqwā* and *taqīyyah* come from the same Arabic root (w-q-y) which means ‘piety, devotion, godliness, mindfulness’ and therefore, *taqwā* and *taqīyyah* are ultimately one in meaning.

In Shī’ī Islam, the act of *taqīyyah* – ‘keeping secret’ the esoteric teachings of the *Imāms* – is a fundamental principle of faith:

“Nine tenths of the Religion consists of *taqīyyah*; whoever does not practice this has no Religion; *Taqīyyah* is part of my Religion and that of my ancestors; whoever does not keep *taqīyyah* is devoid of Faith.”

– Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, (Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, 129, [Click Here to Read](#)

The sacred knowledge of the *Imāms* is a difficult, subtle, and sometimes unbearable gnosis. One must practice precaution and discretion in both receiving and sharing esoteric knowledge:

“Our teaching is difficult, particularly arduous, exasperating, distressing. Offer it to people in small quantities. To those who acknowledge it, tell more, but avoid telling more to him who denies it.”

– Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi’ī Islam*, 294, [Click Here to Read](#)

For this reason this knowledge must be secret and safeguarded from those who lack the capacity to hear it. This is the meaning of Esoteric Fasting: “The fast keeper signifies the one who maintains silence” (Nāsir-i Khusraw).

“With regard to the ritual *fast*, we have already seen that it consists in observing the discipline of the arcane, ‘in keeping the secret of your *Imām*’, is not surrendering anything imprudently to enemies and to the profane.”

– Henry Corbin, (*Temple and Contemplation*, 172, [Click Here to Read](#)

The relationship between Exoteric Fasting and Esoteric Fasting is based on *symbolism* and *correspondence*. In Exoteric Fasting, it is forbidden to eat and drink during the day, but it is permissible to eat and drink during the night. The ‘day’ symbolizes the realm of the exoteric and the ‘night’ symbolizes the realm of the esoteric. Similarly, the rational soul has its ‘food’ and ‘drink’ just as the body does. The ‘food’ of the rational soul is the knowledge of revelation (*tanzīl*) and the ‘drink’ of the rational soul is the knowledge of its interpretation (*ta’wīl*). In Esoteric Fasting, this means that one must abstain

Exoteric Symbol (<i>zahir</i>):	Esoteric Meaning (<i>batin</i>):
Exoteric Fasting (<i>zāhiri sawm</i>)	Esoteric Fasting (<i>bāṭini sawm</i>)
Physical Body	Rational Soul
Eating	Speaking
Abstinence	Silence
Food	Knowledge of Revelation (<i>tanzīl</i>)
Drink	Knowledge of Interpretation (<i>ta’wīl</i>)
Day	Exoteric Realm
Night	Esoteric Realm
Month of Ramadan	Cycle of <i>Sharr’ah</i>
<i>Taqwā</i>	<i>Taqīyyah</i>

from teaching and seeking the esoteric knowledge (*bāṭini ʿilm*) of the *tanzīl* (symbolized by ‘food’) and *taʿwīl* (symbolized by ‘drink’) in the exoteric domain (symbolized by the ‘day’), but one *is* permitted to teach and seek the esoteric knowledge (*bāṭini ʿilm*) in the esoteric domain (symbolized by the ‘night’). The connection between eating/drinking and the esoteric (*baṭin*) is shown by the relationship between the words *bāṭin* (‘esoteric’) and *baṭn* (‘belly’) – which share the same Arabic root (*b-ṭ-n*) meaning ‘interior, hidden, secret’ and are thus related in meaning. This shows that only the esoteric knowledge (*bāṭini ʿilm*) should be ‘eaten’ (i.e. internalized) into one’s innermost nature (*baṭn*).

A diagram of the correspondence between Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī ṣawm*) and Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭinī ṣawm*) is shown below:

The first Esoteric Fast was enjoined upon the Prophet Adam. According to the Qur’ān, Adam was prohibited from eating from the sacred Tree in Paradise:

Wayā ādamu uskun anta wazawjuka’l-janata fakulā mina ḥaythu shi’tumā walā taqrabā hadhihi’l-shajarata fatakūnā mina al-ẓālimīna

“O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden and eat of from where you wish but do not approach this Tree lest you both be among the wrongdoers.”

Holy Qur’ān 7:19

The Tree symbolizes the supreme esoteric knowledge – known as the sacred science of [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Ismaʿilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) (*ʿilm al-qiyāmah*). Adam was not permitted to divulge this supreme esoteric knowledge in his time – this was his ‘fast’. However, Iblis tempted Adam and he was unable to keep his promise as he ‘tasted’ from the Tree – that is, he attempted to access and communicate the esoteric gnosis which was not meant for him:

Fawaswasa lahumā’l-shaytan liyubdiyā lahumā mā wūriya ‘anhumā min sawātihimā waqāla mā nahākumā rabbukumā ‘an hadhihi’l-shajarati illā an takūnā malakayn aw takūnā mina’l-khālidīna wa qāsamahumā innī lakumā lamina’l-naṣiḥīna

Fadallāhumā bighurūrin fālaṃmā dhāqā’l-shajarata badat lahumā sawātuhumā waṭāfiqā yakḥṣifāni ‘alayhimā min warāqī’l-janati

“And the Satan whispered to them to make apparent to both of them what was concealed from both of them of their shame. And he said ‘Did not your Lord forbid you both from this Tree except that you become angels or that you become of the immortals’. And he swore to them both: ‘I am to both of you among the sincere advisors’.

So he made both of them fall by deception. Then when they both tasted the Tree their shame became apparent to them and they began to cover themselves from the leaves of the Garden.”

Holy Qur’ān 7:21-22

Henry Corbin comments on the above verses and remarks that Adam broke the rule of the Esoteric Fasting:

“So Adam ‘breaks the fast’, the vow of silence which is the ritual prescription *par excellence* of the Esoteric Order. ‘To break the fast’ is to taste of the Tree of Knowledge that is the preserve of the actualized Angel. At the same time, it is to strip oneself of the protective veil of symbol.”

– Henry Corbin, (*Temple and Contemplation*, 108, [Click Here to Read](#)

The Virgin Mary was also instructed to observe this Esoteric Fasting. The Holy Qur’ān narrates that God instructed Mary:

*Fakulī wa-ishrabī waqarrī ‘aynan fa-immā tarayinna minā’l-bashari aḥadan faqūlī innī nadhartu lilrraḥmāni **ṣawman** falan **ukallima**’l-yawma insiyyan*

“So eat and drink and refresh the eye. Then if you see any mortal, say: **Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent God, so I shall not speak** to any man today.”

Holy Qur’ān 19:26

A close analysis of the verse shows that the Virgin Mary’s fast is not merely to refrain from speaking in general – as she still ‘speaks’ to declare that she is fasting – but rather, her fast is from a particularly *kind* of speaking which involves the communication of sacred knowledge to those who are not prepared for it.

The ultimate agent and object of Esoteric Fasting is the rational soul of the human being. Just as Exoteric Fasting disciplines the physical body and the animal soul, Esoteric Fasting disciplines the rational soul. As Esoteric Fasting restrains and purifies the rational soul, it also helps to awaken the faculty of the spiritual intellect (*‘aql*) which resides in the heart (*qalb*).

Just as the Exoteric Fasting lasts until the end of the month of Ramaḍān and ends on the day of ‘Id, Esoteric Fasting is practiced by the initiates (*murīds*) of the esoteric *ṭarīqahs* during [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) when gnosis and esoteric knowledge can be revealed and shared openly.

3. The Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*)

The Exoteric Fasting and the Esoteric Fasting together form a pair: form and meaning, symbol and symbolized. But a pair is always resolved in a third term which is the spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of both components. The spiritual reality of fasting is called ‘Real Fasting’ (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*). Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī explains the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of fasting:

“The fourth [pillar] is fasting, meaning that one has to surrender his seven exoteric and esoteric faculties to the command of God.

– Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*Shī‘ī Interpretations of Islam*, 41)

“...to refrain from every thought, word and deed which does not conform to reason and is not permitted by the intellect, that is to say, not bound to the Command of the Truthful Master.”

– Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 149, [Click Here to Read](#)

In Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī ṣawm*), the faculties of the body and the animal soul are restrained and made to abstain from food, drink and sensual pleasure. In Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭinī ṣawm*), the rational soul (*nafs al-nāṭiqah*) restrains its internal faculties such as speech and abstains from communicating the esoteric knowledge of revelation (*tanzīl*) and interpretation (*ta'wīl*) to those who are not ready to receive it. In Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*), the intellect (*'aql*) restrains both the physical faculties of the body and the internal faculties of the soul and abstains from anything (in thought, word, or deed) which is contrary to the Command of God. The spiritual discipline of Real Fasting is best explained in the teachings of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī *Imāms*. The twenty-sixth Imām, Mawlānā 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad of Alamūt – replying to questions asked of him about fasting – defines Real Fasting as follows:

“This *Jamā'at* has never set aside the Real Prayer and Fasting that God has ordered, and will never do so. In the past they have always summoned mankind to Real Prayer and Fasting, and with the passage of time they have done this, and will continue this summons. As for the Fasting of this *Jamā'at*, whereas in the realm of the *sharī'ah*, out of twelve months which make up the year, for one month, from dawn to dusk, one closes his mouth against eating and drinking, the rule of this *Jamā'at* requires that during the whole of one's life one is not permitted to abandon the Real Fast even for the twinkling of an eye. They keep not just one organ of the body closed, but rather all seven external and internal organs against that which God has prohibited, so that they may always preserve a state of Fasting. ”

– Imām 'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad, (Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Rawḍā-yi Taslīm*, transl. Badakhchani, Representation No. 28, 242

The thirty-fourth Nizārī Imām Mawlānā Shāh Gharīb Mīrzā (Imām al-Mustānsir-bi'llāh III) of Anjudān instructs his *murīds* to maintain the Real Fasting for the entire year:

“The whole year you must fast, just as the Exoterists (*ẓāhiriyān*) fast one month. The meaning of this fast is austerity. Control yourselves; keep yourselves away from bad qualities, evil and indecent actions and devilish acts, so that the mirror of your hearts may be gradually polished. Also know that those thirty days during which the Exoterists (*ẓāhiriyān*) fast, the (real) fast lasts only one single day. They fast thirty days only in order not to miss that single day, and this is also a symbol (*ramz*). And just as they keep on fasting for thirty days in order to fast on that particular day, so you must through the whole of your lives experience difficulties and suffering for the sake of the attainment of the vision (*liqā*) of the Creator, you must be patient, persevering in austerities, and keeping your inner self fasting for as long as you live.”

– Imām Shāh Gharīb Mīrzā, (*Pandiyāt-i Jawanmardī*, transl. Ivanow, 37

The *Imām* also specifies the spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the fasting of the different organs of the body – the ears, the eye, the head, the tongue, the heart, the hands, and the feet:

“The fast of the head means to treat one’s own head with the same humility as the feet of other people, casting out from one’s head the lust for superiority, greatness and pride, because greatness and superiority are only suitable to the all-great substance of the Truth (*Ḥaqq*), who is eternal, and the King of the Authority. The fasting of the eye means that one must keep away coveting looks from the women who are not lawful to one. The fasting of the ear means that one should abstain from listening to slander. The fasting of the tongue means that one should keep one’s tongue from uttering abuse or slander. The fasting of the heart means to keep the heart free from doubt. The fasting of the foot is to hold one’s foot back from a wrong step. The fasting of the hand is to keep all one’s limbs away from treachery so that they may not do evil. This especially applies to one’s tongue which must be kept from uttering lies. And there is no greater lie than the denial of (the existence of) the Imam, saying that he has disappeared. God has cursed liars, who talk about such a disappearance (of the Imam), and make the ignorant people follow them in order to enjoy their short lived respect.”

– Imām Shāh Gharīb Mīrza, (*Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī*, transl. Ivanow, 37)

The ultimate agent and the object of Real Fasting is the spirit (*ruh*) or intellect (*‘aql*) present in the heart (*qalb*) of the human soul. Just as Exoteric Fasting disciplines the physical body and Esoteric Fasting disciplines the rational soul, the Real Fasting polishes the heart (*qalb*) which is where the intellect shines forth. In the Gospels, Jesus alludes to this distinction between Exoteric Fasting and Real Fasting when he states:

“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Gospel of Mathew, 15:17-19

Real Fasting actualizes the human intellect (*‘aql*) through its control over the rational soul and the physical body. The person of actualized intellect is divinely inspired (*al-mu’ayyad*) and attains the spiritual vision (*liqā, dīdar*) of *tawḥīd* – both with respect to the oneness (*waḥdah*) of God and the integration (*waḥdah*) of the human soul.

All of the pillars of Islām contain an exoteric form and an esoteric meaning and together, the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) lead to the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) which is the spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqah*). The following table summarizes the exoteric form, the esoteric meaning and spiritual reality of fasting:

Stage of Worship	<i>Sharī'ah</i> (Islam)	<i>Tarīqah</i> (Iman)	<i>Haqiqah</i> (Ihram)
Form of Fasting	Exoteric Fasting (<i>ẓāhirī ṣawm</i>)	Esoteric Fasting (<i>ahabbī ṣawm</i>)	Real Fasting (<i>ḥaqīqī ṣawm</i>)
Agent of Fasting	Physical Body	Rational Soul	Spiritual Intellect
Practice of Fasting	Abstain from consuming food and drink	Abstain from speaking the <i>Tawhīd</i> and <i>Ta'wīl</i>	Abstain from committing External Sins and Internal Sins
Duration of Fasting	Month of Ramaḍān	Cycle of <i>Shahīd</i>	Always
Level of Knowledge	Exoteric (<i>lahirī</i>)	Esoteric (<i>batinī</i>)	Esoteric of the Esoteric (<i>batin al-batin</i>)
Purpose of Fasting	<i>Ṭāqwa</i>	<i>Taqwāh</i>	<i>Yaqīn</i>

[Click Image to Enlarge](#)

Keeping the Fast

It is much more difficult to practice the pillars of Islam at the level of *tarīqah* and *haqiqah* as compared to the level of *sharī'ah*. Accordingly, the discipline of Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*) is much more demanding and holistic than that of Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī ṣawm*). However, if one is unable to abide by the practices of the *ḥaqīqah*, then he can remain in the practices of the *sharī'ah*:

“One should be certain that the commandments and prohibitions of the *sharī'at* are far easier to perform than the real (*takālīf-i ḥaqīqī*) duties, because all of that which is prescribed for a day and night for the man of the *sharī'at* can be performed in two hours. The commandments and prohibitions of the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) are more difficult, in the sense that if the man of truth, even for a twinkling of an eye, forgets the real prayer, fasting and obedience and becomes negligent, in that period of time, whatever he does or sees will not be for God’s sake. Rather, if one drinks a sip of water or eats a morsel of bread aiming to quench thirst and hunger, that sip and morsel, in accordance with the law of truth (*ḥukm-i ḥaqīqat*), will be unlawful to him and he will not be considered a man of truth (*mard-i ḥaqīqī*) and of the people of the esoteric (*ahl-i bāṭin*). Rather, the act of obedience that he performs will be futile and he will not be worshipping God, nor will he be granted salvation. Any member of the *Jamā'at* who does not find in himself such a strength, that is, to fulfill the commandments and prohibitions of the truth (*ḥaqīqat*), it is advisable for him not to abandon obedience to the *sharī'at*, or else he would be a loser, both in this world and in the Hereafter.”

– Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*Shī'i Interpretations of Islam*, 43-44)

Fasting (*ṣawm*), according to the gnosis of Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Islam, has multiple levels, forms and dimensions. While the Exoteric Fasting (*ẓāhirī ṣawm*) is practiced in the month of Ramaḍān, and the Esoteric Fasting (*bāṭinī ṣawm*) is performed during the Cycle of Religious Law (*dawr al-sharī'ah* which continues until the end of the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad and the beginning of the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#)), the Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*) must be observed for all 365 days of the year.

With respect to the present day practices of prayer and fasting amongst the Ismā'īlīs, the late Dr. Hasan Nathoo had the opportunity to discuss the issue with Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh in 1946. Dr. Nathoo relates as follows:

“In the matter of the Ismā’īlis praying only three times daily instead of five times and not keeping [exoteric] fasts generally in the month of Ramadān, he [the Imām] told me two things: that in the Qur’ān there was no specific mention of the number of daily *namāz*. It was only a tradition (*sunnah*); the other was that there was a *ḥadīth* where the Holy Prophet had said that if during his lifetime the people of Arabia observed 90% of his injunctions, 10% would be forgiven. But after his death, if the followers observed even 10%, 90% would be forgiven. These *hadiths* are confirmed in a book on the life of the Prophet by Martin Lings which I read only recently. This *hadith* makes Islam the most liberal religion.

– Dr. Hasan E. Nathoo, (*My Glorious Fortnight with Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, London, 1988)

The *ḥadīth* cited by the Imām is quoted below:

“Ye are in an age in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be redeemed.”

– Prophet Muḥammad, (Seyyed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 183)

The current cycle of humankind is the Cycle of Resurrection ([Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#)) and therefore, the exoteric and esoteric forms of fasting are no longer enjoined. It must be remembered that the Imāms hold the authority to prescribe the forms of fasting and Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh has only made the Real Fasting (*ḥaqīqī ṣawm*) an obligation (*fard*) upon all the believers of spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqatī mu’minīn*). Just as the Prophet Muhammad prescribed and interpreted the exact forms of prayer and fasting during his own lifetime, the Imām of the Time, as the bearer of the knowledge and authority of the Prophet, continues this role of ritual interpretation in every age.

“If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that *it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed.* It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain *Ibnu’l-Waqt* (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the *Waqt* or space-time.”

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Foreword to *Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations* by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, [Click Here to Read](#))

Ramadan Fasting in Shia Ismaili Islam: A Historical Overview

Certain Muslim groups in present times have publicly monopolized and “normalized” an image of Islam where Islam equals the so-called “Five Pillars”: the *Shahadah*, ritual prayer (*salah*, *namaz*), pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Makkah, alms-giving (*zakah*), and fasting (*sawm*) from dawn to dusk in Ramadan. However, the idea of Islam = Five Pillars is a historical construct. The Qur’an never defines Islam as “five pillars” and hadiths where the Prophet Muhammad defines Islam as “Five Pillars” only start circulating at 200 years after the Prophet Muhammad’s death. When one sees how Islam has been practiced through 1,400 years of history and continues to be practiced today, the equation of Islam with “five pillars” simply does not hold up to reality.

In fact, the Shahadah is the only “pillar” that binds together all those who identify as Muslims:

The only part of this formula [of the Five Pillars of Islam] that stands up to close scrutiny is the shahada: it would be fair to say that anyone who does not subscribe to it (of course, after interpreting it in his or her own fashion) cannot be considered a Muslim. But the same cannot be said for the other four pillars [prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, alms] since the ways in which these four performative acts factor into the definition of Islam have always been hotly contested, theologically, legally and culturally. **Let me cut to the chase and announce the main point directly and clearly: the four ritualistic pillars do NOT form a good and accurate account of being Muslim, historically, sociologically or theologically.** To put it in reverse, there have been and continue to be millions of people who wholeheartedly adhere to the shahada but who do NOT perform these four particular ritualistic acts in the manner prescribed in legalistic manuals. Not only that: **a good percentage of such Muslims would NOT agree that these four rituals are necessary to be considered. In other words, these “believers” are not just slackers who know perfectly well that they should perform these rituals but fail to do so for a number of reasons.** (Incidentally, it is chastening to remember that there may well be more negligent Muslims in the world than observant Muslims.) To stick to only the contemporary Middle East, one can name the Alevis in Turkey (fully one-fourth of the population, perhaps even more), the Ahl-i Haqq in Iran, the Alawis in Syria, the Ismailis in both Syria and Iran, the Yezidis and some radical Shi’i communities in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. To these Muslims, who observe the precepts of Islam according to their own, alternative pillars, one should add the millions who choose to emphasize beliefs over acts and consequently de-value the performance of some or all of the four ritualistic pillars. These are not negligent believers or simply non-believers, but Muslims who choose to

prioritize certain beliefs over certain ritualistic acts in accordance with longstanding theological orientations in Islamic history.

Ahmed Karamustafa, ("Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress", in Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2003, 98-110: 108-109)

Fasting Practices in the Early Community of Prophet Muhammad

The Month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qur'ān – a guidance for mankind, and manifest proofs of the guidance and the criterion (between truth and falsehood). So whomever among you witnesses the Month, let him fast for it.

– Holy Qur'an 2:185

The word for fasting in Arabic, *sawm*, literally means "to abstain." The practice of fasting from food and drink during sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan was first established when the early Muslim community lived in Medinah among Jewish tribes. Before the Qur'anic instruction to fast for the month of Ramadan was revealed, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) had commanded his followers to fast on the tenth day of the month of Muharram as the Jews did, as well as on some other occasions. Evidently, these former practices of fasting were replaced by the Ramadan fast – whose exact rules also underwent further modification by the Prophet as attested to in the Qur'an. For example, sexual relations were originally not allowed during the nights of Ramadan; but this command was later modified by Qur'an 2:187, which says: *"Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you."* (Francis E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, 215-216). Similarly, the specifics of other rituals in the Prophet's lifetime evolved under the Prophet's guidance during specific situations and were reinforced with specific Qur'anic verses – the change of the Qiblah from Makkah to Jerusalem and back to Makkah being a notable example. There is no historical evidence that there were 5 prayer times (most likely there were 3 prayer times) and even the specifics of ablutions and *Hajj* are not found in the Qur'an. The only two religious practices the Qur'an emphasizes with repetition are prayer and *zakah* – and even *zakah* in the Qur'an is NOT charity, but rather, a [Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?](#) that the believer offered to the Prophet for the purification and forgiveness of his or her sins (see Qur'an 9:99-103 and note the verb *tazakka*). [When the Prophet was alive, the Qur'an was not a fixed text \(it was not a scripture\) nor was it used as a source of legal interpretations as it is today.](#) The Prophet, as the divinely-inspired leader and vicegerent of God, guided the believers on every matter ([The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammada](#)) – whether it was rooted in a Qur'anic revelation or not. Even then, the Qur'an's commands are very much "goal-oriented" and rooted in ethics as opposed to a fixed body of law.

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, Shia and Sunni Muslims came to differ about the nature of religious authority and its legitimate possessors. The Prophet had announced that his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Talib was the [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#). Imam 'Ali claimed to be the rightful temporal and religious leader after the Prophet despite the fact that political authority was assumed by Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and later Uthman. Even some of Imam 'Ali's early followers regarded him as *"an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet"* (Maria Masse Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57). For example, one of Ali's supporters, who also was devoted to the Prophet, said to him: *"our opinion is your opinion and we are in the palm of your right hand"* (Dakake 58). The early followers of Imam 'Ali regarded his commands as "right guidance" deriving from Divine support. In other words, 'Ali's guidance was seen to be the expression of God's will and the Qur'anic message. This spiritual and absolute authority of 'Ali was known as *walayah* and it was [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#). In the first century after the Prophet, the term *sunnah* was not specifically defined as "Sunnah of the Prophet" but was also used in connection to Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman, and some Umayyad Caliphs. The authority of "*Hadith*" or traditions ascribed to the Prophet was not mainstream nor was *Hadith* criticism. Even the earliest legal texts by Malik b. Anas and Abu Hanifa employ many methods including analogical reasoning and opinion and do not rely exclusively on hadith. Only in the 2nd century after the Prophet does the Sunni jurist al-Shafi'i first argue that only the *Sunnah* of the Prophet should be a source of law and that this *Sunnah* is embodied in Hadiths. It would take another one hundred years after al-Shafi'i for Sunni Muslim jurists to fully base their methodologies on prophetic Hadith (read an academic study on the concept of Sunnah [here](#)). Meanwhile, Imami Shia Muslims followed the guidance and interpretations of the hereditary Imams from the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt without any need for Hadith and other sources (*usul*) of Sunni law like analogy, consensus, and opinion. Accordingly, the Ismaili Shi'a with a living Imam did not rely on Islamic jurisprudence or legal theory for guidance.

The existence of a leader, designated by the Prophet himself, certainly stunted the development of a distinct Shi'i jurisprudence. This is not to say there was no Shi'i law. The various descendents of the Prophet who received Shi'i devotion (the Imams) were asked questions about right conduct and proper compliance with the Shari'a. They gave answers with which their followers were ordered to comply. However, when an Imam was present there was no need for an overarching jurisprudence. **Since the Imam could answer all legal enquiries, there was no need to create a framework into which the Imams'**

rulings collectively might fit. The doctrine of the Imamate, then, reduced the need for legal theory...This lack of interest in legal theory eventually resulted in a lack of interest in the law generally, and the Ismaili Shi'i tradition after Qadi Numan produced few significant legal works.

– Robert Gleave, (*Scripturalist Islam*, Preface)

Through first 200 years after the Prophet's death, both Sunni and Shia Muslim communities came to regard fasting as one of the foundational practices of Islam. For Sunni Muslims, fasting consists of one of the Five Pillars. For the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) of the Fatimid era and thereafter, fasting is among the [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) – the other Pillars being [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) (faith, allegiance and love for the Imam), [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a', taharrah](#) (purification), [Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?](#), [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam](#), and *jihad* (struggle). Even in the Fatimid era, when Ismaili Muslims practiced fasting in Ramadan as an obligatory religious practice, they differed from the Sunnis in how to recognize the first day of Ramadan. Sunni tradition relies physically sighting the new moon to mark the commencement of Ramadan while Ismailis used mathematical calculations. This often caused significant disagreement between Ismaili and Sunni scholars on when to begin the fast and when to break the fast on the day of 'Id al-Fitr. The Ismaili Fatimid hujjat, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, wrote an entire treatise defending the Ismaili mathematical method of marking the start of Ramadan.

The Esoteric Purpose of Fasting

According to the Holy Qur'an, fasting was prescribed for the believers so that they may learn taqwah (2:183) – a word which can mean piety, mindfulness, or God-consciousness. The great Islamic philosopher and scientist of Alamut, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, writes that fasting from food and drink “*restrains the soul from its base inclinations.*” He explains that this form of fasting is practiced for thirty days in a year so that a form or behavioural pattern will become imprinted on the human soul – to the point that all of one's faculties and desires “*become restrained from the pursuit of improper things*” (Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. Badakhchani, 149).

Accordingly, the concept of fasting has a deeper meaning and significance than not eating or drinking. The Holy Qur'an in 19:26 uses the same Arabic word for fasting, *sawm*, to refer to the vow of silence taken by Mary, the mother of Jesus. In this spirit, the Ismaili Muslims, under the guidance of the Imams, have also emphasised the inner or [Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#). All Ismaili Muslim *hujjats*, *da'is*, and thinkers, under the guidance of the Imams, maintained that the Seven Pillars of Islam have [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#) and that sometime in the [Esoteric Apocalypse](#)

[\(Qiyamah\): Ismaʿilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#), the exoteric or *zahiri* forms of the Seven Pillars would no longer be mandatory whereas their *batini* or esoteric meanings would instead be practiced openly. This came to fruition in certain periods of Ismaili history: In 1164, the 23rd Ismaili Imam, Hasan ʿala-dhikrihi al-salam, declared the period of *Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Ismaʿilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” (Part 1)*. As maintained by several Fatimid Ismaili *hujjats* like Sijistani (d. after 971), Jaʿfar b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), al-Muʿayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1078), in the period of *Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Ismaʿilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” (Part 1)*, the exoteric or *zahiri* practices of the *shariʿah* including *namaz*, *Hajj*, and fasting are abolished and no longer mandatory while their *batini* and spiritual dimensions are practiced. For example, during the *qiyamah* period, the Ismaili Imam’s guidance on fasting was as follows:

As for fasting of this *jamaʿat*, whereas in the realm of the *shariʿah*, out of twelve months which make up the year, for one month, from dawn to dusk, one closes his mouth against eating and drinking, **the rule of this *jamaʿat* requires that during the whole of one’s life one is not permitted to abandon the true fast even for the twinkling of an eye.** They keep not just one organ of the body closed, but rather all seven external and internal organs against that which God has prohibited, so that they may always preserve a state of fasting.”

– Imam ʿAla al-Din Muhammad of Alamut,
(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, Representation No. 28)

Subsequently, in later periods, Ismailis went back to observing the exoteric *shariʿah* as a form of *taqiyyah* to avoid harsh [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#). This period of *taqiyyah* – which lasted for the next several hundred years after the fall of Alamut – included the observance of *shariʿah* rituals, although there may have been minor intervals of *qiyamah* occasionally during this period. In either case, those believers who reached the spiritual rank of *hujjat* were permitted to dispense with observing the *shariʿah* (see *The Epistle on the Recognition of the Imam*, ca. 16th century, tr. Ivanow; *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*). However, the Khoja Ismailis of the Satpanth tradition never performed exoteric fasting for the month of Ramadan; they fasted on Beej and on the 21st and 23rd days of Ramadan. During this period, the Ismaili Imams continued to dispense guidance to their murids concerning the esoteric dimensions and practices of faith. Just as *zahiri* fasting consists in refraining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan, the spiritual *haqiqi* fasting consists in abstaining from all impure thoughts, words, and deeds for every single day of one’s life. The thirty-fourth Ismaili Imam, Hazrat Mawlana Shah Gharib Mirza, as recorded in his “Counsels of Chivalry” (*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*), has said:

The whole year you must fast, just as the Exoterists (*zāhiriyyān*) fast one month. The meaning of this fast is austerity. Control yourselves; keep yourselves away

from bad qualities, evil and indecent actions and devilish acts, so that the mirror of your hearts may be gradually polished.”

– Imam al-Mustansir bi-llah III (Shah Gharib Mirza),
(*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, tr. Ivanow, 37)

Fasting Practices in Modern Ismaili History

In the modern period of Ismaili history, the 48th Ismaili Imam, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah, has likewise emphasized the spiritual or *haqiqi* fasting as a spiritual discipline, which consists of always being mindful and keeping away from sins such as lying, cheating, slander, jealousy and other negative deeds. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah formally ended the practice of *taqiyyah* where some Jamats had been observing exoteric *shari'ah* rituals like namaz and fasting in Ramadan. In guidance given to the Ismailis of Syria, Iran, and Indo-Pak, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah explained that the exoteric or *shari'ah* rituals like *Hajj* to Makkah, physical ablutions before prayer, and exoteric fasting in the month of Ramadan are not paramount; instead, what is essential are the inner or esoteric meanings of these rituals as embodied in a set of spiritual disciplines and *tariqah* practices. Mawlana Hazar Imam's own biographer, Malise Ruthven, summarized Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's guidance as follows:

Changes were introduced in the areas of ritual. In Syria a new *mukhi* appointed by Aga Khan III in 1895 was instructed in Khoja doctrines and rituals and told to introduce them into Syria. Similar changes were introduced in Iran. ***Hajj and fasting were abandoned along with ritual ablutions before prayers: God, rather than his house, was to be worshipped; the true fast was year-round abstention from evil; true ablution was cleansing of the heart. Duties ('ibadat) regarded as essential by other Muslims, such as Hajj and fasting, were defined as furu'-i-din, auxiliaries of the faith.*** The *usul-i din*, the essentials of the faith were unchanged – belief in the oneness of God, in the Prophet, in the Resurrection, in the Imamate and in the justice of God.

– Malise Ruthven, “Aga Khan III and Ismaili Renaissance”,
(Peter B. Clarke, ed., *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*.
London: Luzac Oriental, 1998, 371–95: 382)

This general trend, in modern times, toward the de-emphasis of the exoteric and *shari'ah* form of ritual practice and the movement towards a more spiritual and esoteric practice was foretold by Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Sunni hadiths:

Ye are in an age in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be redeemed.”

– Prophet Muhammad,
(*Sahih Tirmidhi*, in Seyyed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 183)

As Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has explained in a published farman, the fasting of the *haqiqati mu'min* does not only take place in Ramadan but is performed on

every day of the year (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, *Kalam-i Imam-i Mubin* Vol. 1, Section No. 65). Imam Sultan Muhammad further explained that the exoteric fasting of Ramadan may be necessary for Ismaili Muslims living in certain contexts where *taqiyyah* is necessary so as not to antagonize others, but the spiritual or haqiqi fasting was obligatory upon all Ismailis wherever they are:

The Prophet has ordered the fast. The fast is there to exercise the body. It is necessary to keep taqiya so that others may not indulge in backbiting (i.e. it may be necessary to observe the fast outwardly in order to protect the community from slander by other Muslims). But you who are haqiqatis (truth-seekers) are under an obligation to fast 360 days (sic). These fasts are:

1. Not to speak a lie
2. Not to deceive, swindle anyone, or abuse trust
3. Not to speak ill behind someone's back.

In this manner 360 day *haqiqi* fasts (*haqiqi rojaa*) are mandatory (*faraj*) upon the Ismā'īlīs.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(quoted in Malise Ruthven, "Aga Khan III and the Isma'ili Renaissance," 392)

In conclusion, the month of Ramadan serves as a time of heightened spirituality and devotion for all Muslims. Fasting during the Ramadan from food and drink is the exoteric form of fasting appropriate in the period of *shari'ah* but not mandatory in the cycle of *qiyamah*. However, the esoteric forms of fasting embrace additional spiritual disciplines and these are mandatory in every age as per the guidance of the recent Imams. Writing in the 1950s, John Hollister reported that the Ismailis of Persia did not physically fast in Ramadan (*The Shi'a of India*, 1953, 390). Brian H. Jones (*Around Rakaposhi*, 2010) describes living among Ismailis in Northern Pakistan and reports that most Ismailis in the region do not perform the exoteric fast in the month of Ramadan although they are careful to consume food and drink in secluded areas so as not to antagonize those who do observe this fast. Frank Bliss (*Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs*, 2006, 231) notes in his study of the Pamiris that the Pamiri Ismailis only physically fast for 3 days during the month of Ramadan and consider such fasting to serve no useful purpose while Sunnis fast exoterically for the entire month. Even in Syria, the Ismailis of Salamiyyah do not keep the exoteric fast of Ramadan. The Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was once asked by his own dentist, Dr. Hasan Nathoo, with regards to the fact that his murids did not pray five times per day nor did they keep *zahiri* fasts in the month of Ramaḍān. The Imam's reply was conveyed by Dr. Hasan Nathoo in his own memoirs:

In the matter of the Ismā'īlīs praying only three times daily instead of five times and not keeping fasts (*roza*) generally in the month of Ramaḍān, he [the Imam] told me two things: that in the Qur'an there was no specific mention of the number of daily namaz. It was only a tradition (*sunnah*); the other was that there was a hadith where the Holy Prophet had said that if during his lifetime

the people of Arabia observed 90% of his injunctions, 10% would be forgiven. But after his death, if the followers observed even 10%, 90% would be forgiven. These hadiths are confirmed in a book on the life of the Prophet by Martin Lings which I read only recently. This hadith makes Islam the most liberal religion.”

– Dr. Hasan E. Nathoo, (*My Glorious Fortnight with Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, London, 1988)

In every age, it is the Imam of the Time who sustains the proper balance between the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions of religious practice. Just as the Prophet Muhammad prescribed and interpreted the exact forms of prayer and fasting in his lifetime, the Imam of the Time, as the bearer of the knowledge and authority of the Prophet, continues this role of ritual interpretation in every age. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has stressed the inner meaning and spirituality of the Pillars of Islam, as reflected in the contemporary Ismaili Tariqah practices which emphasize spiritual purification of the human soul and the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of the Imam. In closing, we refer to a public statement of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah which states:

If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, **it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed.** It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain Ibnu'l-Waqt (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time.”

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Foreword, Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, *Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations*, 14)

As for the month of Ramadan, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has urged the Ismaili Muslim Jamat to pray more and strive to remember God at every moment during this special month:

Now I am going to tell you about *'ibadat*. Always worship God. This is the month of Ramadan. In this month do more *'ibadat*. Every hour, every minute remember God. Do not forget Him. If you have forgotten Him and have become lazy then take heed that I am reminding you to remember and worship Him.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Mumbai, April 27, 1891)

FURTHER READING

[Ramadan: From Physical Fasting to Spiritual Fasting](#)

Do Ismailis Have to Fast in Ramadan? Zahiri & Batini Fasting in Ismaili History

In contemporary Ismaili Muslim practice, **the obligatory religious duties (*wajibat*) for all Ismaili Muslims are *Du'a* (daily prayer), *Dasond* (*zakat*), and obeying the *farmans* of the Imam of the Time.** All mandatory and optional ritual practices for Ismaili Muslims are based on the guidance of the Imam:

“Who are [our] spiritual children? For this, there are two points: the first is submitting the *Mal-i Wajibat* (*Dasond*), the second is performing worship, that is, reciting the *Du'a*. These two matters are obligatory in our *Din*. If one does not keep these two things then one is not our *murid*.”

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Mumbai, January 25, 1926; translated by Khudabux Talib) [Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?](#)

“He whose *Du'a* and *Mal-i Wajibat* (*Dasond*) are proper can go to his Original Abode (*asal makan*).”

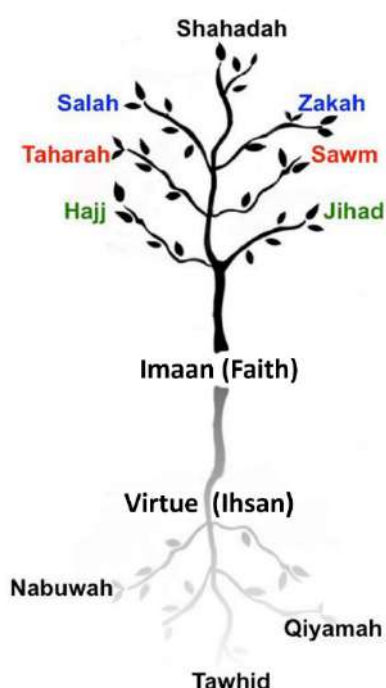
Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Karachi, February 9, 1950; translated by Khudabux Talib) [Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?](#)

According to the guidance of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah decreed in *farmans* delivered in the early 1900s, **the exoteric (*zahiri*) fasting from food and drink in the month of Ramadan is not an obligatory religious practice (*wajib, fard*) for Ismaili Muslims today.** Rather, the *zahiri* fasting of Ramadan is an optional or discretionary practice that Ismaili *murids* may or may not choose to practice based on their own discretion and spiritual disposition.

Contrary to modern popular notions, the historical and normative definition of a “Muslim” is not a person who practices the so-called “five pillars” of Islam (*Shahada*, Prayer, *Zakat*, Fasting, Pilgrimage). This notion that *Muslim* = *performer of five pillars* is a later Sunni Muslim construct created by Sunni jurists. In reality, the [Sunni hadith literature](#) is full of examples where a person need only affirm the *Shahada* to be counted as a Muslim. Throughout Muslim history, Sunni and Shi'i scholars have vehemently disagreed on what exactly are the [“necessities of religion”](#) (*al-*

[daruri min al-din](#) whose acceptance make one a Muslim and whose rejection take a person outside of Islam.

Most modern Twelver Shi'i scholars, including [Ayatullah Khomeini](#) and [Ayatullah Khamenei](#), hold that the minimum requirement for being a Muslim is to believe in the Unity of God (*tawhid*), the Prophethood of Muhammad (*nabuwwah*), and the Day of Judgment (*qiyamah*). Not believing in or not practicing a particular religious practice (such as five prayers or Ramadan fasting) is not sufficient to declare someone non-Muslim.



Mawlana Hazar Imam has [likewise stated](#) that affirming the *Shahada* (*la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadun Rasul Allah*) is sufficient for a person to be Muslim and that such a person's Islam [cannot be questioned](#). Believing in one God and the Prophethood of Muhammad and earlier Prophets are among the **essential "Roots of Religion (*usul al-din*) common to all Muslims**; whereas particular Muslim practices such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. are **subsidiary Branches of Religion (*furu' al-din*)** whose format and interpretation vastly differ across Muslim communities.

Islamic Rituals Have Changed Over Time

Islamic Rituals Have Changed Over Time

The Month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qurʾān – a guidance for mankind, and manifest proofs of the guidance and the criterion (between truth and falsehood). So whomever among you witnesses the Month, let him fast for it.

Holy Qurʾan 2:185

The word for fasting in Arabic, *sawm*, literally means “to abstain.” The historical record shows that various divinely-mandated practices including the forms of prayer and fasting were changing and evolving during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Before the Qurʾanic command to fast in the month of Ramadan was revealed, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) had guided his followers to fast on the tenth day of the month of Muharram as the Jews did, as well as on some other days. These early fasting practices were commanded in the Qurʾan before Ramadan fasting was even ordered:

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint, (fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will—it is better for him. And it is better for you that ye fast, if ye only knew.

Holy Qurʾan 2:183-184

These early fasting practices were later replaced by the Ramadan fasting mentioned in Qurʾan 2:185. However, the specific rules of the Ramadan fast were changed by the Prophet and the Qurʾan in response to the community’s needs and circumstances. Initially, the Qurʾan and the Prophet did not permit Muslims to fall asleep during a day of fasting and later wake up after sunset to break their fast; if they slept through the sunset, they were required to remain fasting for the night and the entire next day. Furthermore, sexual relations between spouses were initially not permitted in the nights of Ramadan. However, many in the early Muslim community were unable to follow these rules and kept breaking their fast

prematurely. Therefore, subsequent Qur'anic verses were revealed to abrogate the original fasting rules and modify them: Muslims who had slept in the daytime until it was time to eat were now allowed to break their fast at night; sexual relations, previously prohibited during the month of Ramadan, were then permitted after breaking the fast at night. This is evidenced in Qur'an 2:187, which says: *"Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you"* (see Francis E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, 215-216).

Similarly, the specifics of other rituals in the Prophet's lifetime evolved under the Prophet's guidance during specific situations and were reinforced with specific Qur'anic verses. These changes include two changes of the Direction of Prayer (*qiblah*): first, the *qiblah* was changed from Makkah to Jerusalem after the Prophet's emigration; second, the *qiblah* was changed back to Makkah from Jerusalem (see Qur'an 2:143).

Sunni Muslim sources agree that the Muslim religious practices of prayer and fasting evolved and were modified several times by the Prophet Muhammad during his mission:

Ibn Kathir relates a well-known account of the institutions of prayer and fasting attributed to **the famous learned companion of the Prophet, Mu'adh ibn Jabal who said, "The prayers were changed three times and the fast three times.** As for the changes in fasting, it was that the Apostle of God came from Medina and began to fast three days of every month as well as the day of 'Ashura. Then God ordained fasting for him by sending down, 'O you have faith, fasting is ordained for you.' Thus it was that whoever wished to fast did so and whoever wished to feed a poor person instead was absolved from the fast. Then God sent down, 'It is the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was sent down,' by which God made its fast obligatory for the person not on a journey and in sound health, thus exempting from it the sick and the traveler. God further affirmed in this [verse] the feeding of a poor person by the aged who are incapable of fasting. **These were two changes.** People then used to eat, drink, and come into their wives so as long as they had not gone to sleep, but after they retired to sleep [and again awoke in the night] they desisted."

Mu'adh then related the anecdotes of Abu Qays and 'Umar as occasion for **the third change:** "It is lawful for you on the night of the fast to go into

your wives” (Ibn Kathir, I, p. 377; see also Shawkani, I, p. 181). This view is accepted by most commentators and jurists, with minor differences.

Mahmoud M. Ayoub, ([The Qur'an and its Interpreters, 2012, 190](#))

When the Prophet was alive, [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) (it was not a scripture) nor was it used as a source of legal interpretations as it is today. The Prophet, as the divinely-inspired leader and vicegerent of God, guided the believers on every matter ([The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#))—whether it was rooted in a Qur'anic revelation or not. Even then, the Qur'an's commands are very much “goal-oriented” and rooted in ethics as opposed to a fixed body of law.

Sunni and Shi'a Views of Religious Authority after the Prophet

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, Shia and Sunni Muslims came to differ about the nature of religious authority and its legitimate possessors. The Prophet had announced that his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Talib was the [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) ([Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#)Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature). The Prophet also said:

“Verily, I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters (*al-thaqalayn*): the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*) is a rope extending from heaven to earth, and my descendants (*'itratī*), my Ahl al-Bayt. Verily, the Gracious (*al-laṭīf*), the Aware (*al-khabīr*) informed me that the two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool.”

Prophet Muhammad, *Hadith al-Thaqalayn*,

(Narrated in over [60 reported chains in Sunni Muslim texts](#) compiled in the first 300 years after the Prophet).

Imam 'Ali claimed to be the rightful temporal and religious leader after the Prophet despite the fact that political authority was assumed by Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and later Uthman. Even some of Imam 'Ali's early followers regarded him as “*an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet*” (Maria Masse Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57). The early followers of Imam 'Ali regarded his commands as “right guidance” deriving from Divine support. In other words, Imam 'Ali's

guidance is the foremost expression of God's will, the Qur'anic message, and the Sunna of the Prophet. This spiritual and absolute authority of 'Ali was known as *walayah* and it was [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#).

In the first century after the Prophet, the [term *sunnah*](#) was not specifically defined as "Sunnah of the Prophet" but was also used in connection to [Abu Bakr](#), ['Umar](#), Uthman, and some Umayyad Caliphs. **The first three Sunni Caliphs made numerous changes to the laws and ritual practices originally commanded by the Qur'an and the Prophet. For example:**

- Abu Bakr changed the practice of *zakat* and claimed that [it must be paid to the Sunni Caliphs](#); but the Qur'an (9:103) mandates that *zakat* is paid to the Prophet who accepts it, purifies the giver, gives blessings (see [Sunni hadith](#)), and determines how the *zakat* is spent;
- Abu Bakr spent a portion of the *zakat* on himself and his family (see [Sunni hadith](#));
- Abu Bakr and 'Umar compiled the Qur'an into a physical book—something that the Prophet Muhammad never did himself (see [Sunni hadith](#));
- 'Umar changed the call to prayer (*adhan*) by adding the words "prayer is better than sleep" ([Muwatta Malik](#));
- 'Umar [made numerous changes](#) to the Prophet's religious law: he established new *sunan* for the community, he prohibited Muslims from performing *'umrah* and *hajj* at the same time, despite the Qur'an allowing that, and prohibited Muslims from engaging in fixed-term marriages, even though the Qur'an and Prophet allowed them;
- 'Umar administered eighty lashes as a penalty for drinking in public while the Qur'an and Prophet mandated forty lashes ([Sunni hadith](#)).
- 'Umar established *tarawih* prayers in congregations within the *masjids* in Ramadan ([Sunni hadith](#)); the Prophet himself forbade the people from praying *tarawih* in congregation ([Sunni hadith](#));
- 'Umar [abrogated an entire class of *zakat* recipients](#)—non-Muslims who might convert to Islam—on the grounds that this verse did not apply to the post-prophetic situation.

- ‘Umar [suspended the Qur’anic *hudud* punishments](#) such as amputation of hands of thieves due to a famine.
- ‘Umar [allowed a man to divorce his wife permanently by uttering the divorce word three times](#) in one meeting; whereas the Prophet required three different meetings with three divorce declarations for there to be an irrevocable divorce between a man and his wife.
- ‘Uthman changed the number of *rak’ats* in the Mina prayer during *Hajj* from two to four; the Prophet only prayed two *rak’ats* for this prayer ([Sunni *hadith*](#))

Before [the consolidation of Sunni Islam in the eleventh century \(1000s\)](#), there were various “proto-Sunni” groups such as the Murji’a, ‘Uthmanis, Umayyads, Jama’is, Mu’tazilis, Hanafis, Malikis, and *Ahl al-Hadith*. Each of these groups held to a different concept of the Sunna. For [Malikis](#), the Sunna of the Prophet includes only mass-transmitted *hadith* and the established practice (*‘amal*) of the people of Medina. For [Hanafis](#), the Sunna of the Prophet is secondary to the Qur’an and only consists of mass-transmitted *hadith* and the practices that are well-known to the scholars called “the well-known Sunna” (*sunna ma’rufa*). For [Shafi’is](#), the Sunna is limited to the *hadith* of the Prophet including both mass-transmitted and solitary reports. For [Hanbalis](#), the Sunna includes *hadith* of the Prophet that are mass-reported, solitary, and even weak; it also includes the practices of *all* of the Prophet’s companions. (Read an academic study on the concept of Sunnah [here](#)). Furthermore, many of the Sunni schools of law resort to various man-made interpretative techniques called *ijtihad*. These include: communal consensus (*ijma’*) that is regarded as infallible; companion consensus; analogical reasoning (*qiyas*); custom (*‘urf*); juristic preference (*istihsan*); and many others.

Meanwhile, the Imami Shi’i Muslims hold that the correct interpretation of the Qur’an and the Prophet’s Sunna is the exclusive heritage of the hereditary Imams from the Prophet’s *Ahl al-Bayt*. Accordingly, the Ismaili Shi’a with a living Imam do not rely on fallible *ijtihad* techniques of interpretation.

The various descendants of the Prophet who received Shi’i devotion (the Imams) were asked questions about right conduct and proper compliance with the Shari’a. They gave answers with which their followers were ordered to comply. However, when an Imam was present there was no

need for an overarching jurisprudence. Since the Imam could answer all legal enquiries, there was no need to create a framework into which the Imams' rulings collectively might fit. The doctrine of the Imamate, then, reduced the need for legal theory... This lack of interest in legal theory eventually resulted in a lack of interest in the law generally, and the Ismaili Shi'i tradition after Qadi Numan produced few significant legal works.

Robert Gleave, (*Scripturalist Islam*, Preface)

Through the first 200 years after the Prophet's death, both Sunni and Shi'i Muslim communities came to regard Ramadan fasting as one of the foundational practices of Islam. For Sunni Muslims, fasting consists of one of the Five Pillars. For the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) of the Fatimid era and later periods, fasting was among the [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#)—the other Pillars being [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) (faith, allegiance and love for the Imam), [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a'sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#), *taharrah* (purification), [Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?](#), [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam](#) [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam](#), and *jihad* (struggle). Even in the Fatimid era, when Ismaili Muslims practiced fasting in Ramadan as an obligatory religious practice, they differed from the Sunnis in how to recognize the first day of Ramadan. Sunni tradition relied on physically sighting the new moon to mark the commencement of Ramadan while Ismailis used mathematical calculations. This often caused significant disagreement between Ismaili and Sunni scholars on when to begin the fast and when to break the fast on the day of *'Id al-Fitr*. The Ismaili Fatimid *hujjat*, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, wrote an entire treatise defending the Ismaili mathematical method of marking the start of Ramadan.

The Imam Updates Religious Law & Practice According to Changing Circumstances

According to Ismaili legal principles, the Imam of the Time determines the proper balance between the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions of religious practice. During his own lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad prescribed and interpreted the exact forms of prayer and fasting; the Prophet also had the authority to update and [abrogate Qur'anic](#)

[practices](#) through his own Sunnah. The Imams have inherited the Prophet's divine authority. Accordingly, just as the Prophet evolved and abrogated both Qur'anic and Sunnatic laws during his own lifetime (as explained above), the Imams succeeding the Prophet can update, adjust, and abrogate Qur'anic and Prophetic laws. In doing so, the Imams preserve the wise purposes or inner wisdoms (*hikma, hikam*) of the original Qur'anic/Prophetic rulings (*hukm, ahkam*) while changing their outward forms. This is because every time-period requires fresh and renewed manifestations of God's wisdoms (*hikam*) in the form of updated rules (*ahkam*). Mawlana Hazar Imam has spoken of these principles in a public interview (starts at 8:05):

"I am not entirely convinced that the faith itself has decreed any particular form rather than that people have interpreted it. And if my role is to interpret the faith in regard to modern society, I have to look at the basic issue, which is whether anything that we are doing is in conflict with the ethic of Islam; **if it is not in conflict with the ethic of Islam then I must interpret it as being possible...**

Well from the moment that I am not willing to say that the faith of Islam is of a particular time, then I have to search within Islam: what are the elements which allow me to interpret within the modern world; and my interpretation is that Allah's message and His power is not limited, and in fact that modern science simply allows us to discover more and more of the miracles that He has performed, perhaps continues to perform, and we are blessed with the faculty of intelligence. And I cannot understand why we would be blessed with that faculty unless we were mandated to use it."

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(In Conversation with Rajiv Mehrotra, February 1989)

One cannot validly maintain that all Islamic laws and rituals must remain absolutely unchanged after the death of Prophet Muhammad while also accepting that many Qur'anic and Prophetic laws underwent evolution through abrogation during the life of the Prophet (as all Sunni Muslims hold). One modern scholar has argued that if some Islamic laws changed while the Prophet was alive, it logically follows that some Islamic laws in the Qur'an and Sunna may change after the Prophet:

The standard definition of abrogation not only states that Jewish laws were replaced by Qur'anic rulings, but **it also stresses that divine laws given to Prophet Muhammad were changed by later divine laws he received... It is untrue, then, to suggest that specific laws are immutable; at least some of these laws can change.** Of course, the same is true of the **Sunna...** Those changes, as identified by Muslim jurists, included various ritual, family, civil, and criminal laws. They varied from changes to how one should fast, to the introduction of capital punishment for adultery, to changing the entitlements and duties of the widow. How, then, can the same jurists who believe in these changes claim that specific laws could not change after the Prophet, i.e. that such laws remain the same forever? **How can rulings change within a few years but stay the same for over fourteen centuries?** There is an intrinsic contradiction between the concept of abrogation as understood by Muslim jurists and their belief in the immutability of specific laws.

Louay Fatoohi, *Abrogation in the Qur'an and Islamic Law*, 2012, 223-224

Accordingly, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has explicitly declared that the Imams have the authority to “adjust” the forms of religious practices like prayer and fasting:

If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, **it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed.** It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain *Ibnu'l-Waqt* (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time.”

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Foreword, Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, *Muhammad: A Mercy to All the Nations*, 14)

The Esoteric Dimension of Fasting

According to the Holy Qur'an, fasting was prescribed for the believers so that they may learn *taqwah* (2:183)—a word which can mean piety, mindfulness, or God-consciousness. The great Islamic philosopher and scientist of Alamut, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, writes that fasting from food and

drink “restrains the soul from its base inclinations.” He explains that this form of fasting is practiced for thirty days in a year so that a new form or behavioural pattern will become imprinted on the human soul—to the point that all of one’s faculties and desires “become restrained from the pursuit of improper things” (Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. Badakhchani, 149).

Accordingly, the concept of fasting has a deeper meaning and significance than not eating or drinking. The Holy Qur’an in 19:26 uses the same Arabic word for fasting, *sawm*, to refer to the vow of silence taken by Mary, the mother of Jesus. In this spirit, the Ismaili Muslims, under the guidance of the Imams, have also emphasized the inner or [Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#). All Ismaili

Muslim *hujjats*, *da’is*, and thinkers, under the guidance of the Imams, maintained that the Seven Pillars of Islam have [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur’an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta’wil](#) and that sometime in the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#), the exoteric or *zahiri* forms of the Seven Pillars would no longer be mandatory whereas their *batini* or esoteric dimensions would instead be practiced openly. This came to fruition in certain periods of Ismaili history. In 1164, the 23rd Ismaili Imam, Hasan ‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam, declared the period of [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#). As maintained by several Fatimid Ismaili *hujjats* like Sijistani (d. after 971), Ja’far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1078), in the period of [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#), the exoteric or *zahiri* practices of the *shari’ah* including *namaz*, *Hajj*, and fasting are abolished and no longer mandatory while their *batini* and spiritual dimensions are practiced.

For example, during the *qiyamah* period, the Ismaili Imam’s guidance on fasting was as follows:

“As for fasting of this *jama’at*, whereas in the realm of the *shari’ah*, out of twelve months which make up the year, for one month, from dawn to dusk, one closes his mouth against eating and drinking, **the rule of this *jama’at* requires that during the whole of one’s life one is not permitted to abandon the true fast even for the twinkling of an eye.** They

keep not just one organ of the body closed, but rather all seven external and internal organs against that which God has prohibited, so that they may always preserve a state of fasting.”

Imam ‘Ala al-Din Muhammad of Alamut,

(Nasir al-Din Tusi, Representation No. 28 in *The Paradise of Submission*)

Subsequently, in later periods, Ismailis went back to observing the exoteric *shari‘ah* as a form of *taqiyyah* to avoid harsh [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#). This period of *taqiyyah*—which lasted for the next several hundred years after the fall of Alamut—included the general observance of *shari‘ah* rituals to ensure the survival of the Ismaili Jamats, although there may have been minor intervals of *qiyamah* occasionally during this period. **In either case, those believers who reached the spiritual rank of *hujjat* were permitted to dispense with observing the *shari‘ah* (see *The Epistle on the Recognition of the Imam*, ca. 16th century, tr. Ivanow; *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*).**

However, the Khoja Ismailis of the *Satpanth* tradition in South Asia never performed exoteric fasting for the month of Ramadan; they only fasted on *Beej* and on the 21st and 23rd days of Ramadan. During this period, the Ismaili Imams continued to dispense guidance to their murids concerning the esoteric dimensions and practices of faith.

Just as *zahiri* fasting consists in refraining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan, **the spiritual *haqiqi* fasting consists in abstaining from all impure thoughts, words, and deeds for every single day of one’s life.**

The thirty-fourth Ismaili Imam, Hazrat Mawlana Shah Gharib Mirza, as recorded in his “Counsels of Chivalry” (*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*), has said: The whole year you must fast, just as the Exoterists (*ẓāhiriyyān*) fast one month. The meaning of this fast is austerity. Control yourselves; keep yourselves away from bad qualities, evil and indecent actions and devilish acts, so that the mirror of your hearts may be gradually polished.

Here (we specify) the parts of the fast of the inner self:

The fasting of the head means to treat one's own head with the same humility as the feet of other people, casting out from one's head the lust for superiority, greatness and pride, because greatness and superiority are only suitable to the all-great substance of the Truth (Haqq), who is eternal, and the King of the Authority.

The fasting of the eye means that one must keep away coveting looks from

the women who are not lawful to one.

The fasting of the ear means that one should abstain from listening to slander. The fasting of the tongue means that one should keep one's tongue from uttering abuse or slander.

The fasting of the heart means to keep the heart free from doubt. The fasting of the foot is to hold one's foot back from a wrong step.

The fasting of the hand is to keep all one's limbs away from treachery so that they may not do evil. This especially applies to one's tongue which must be kept from uttering lies. And there is no greater lie than the denial of (the existence of) the Imam, saying that he has disappeared. God has cursed liars, who talk about such a disappearance (of the Imam), and make the ignorant people follow them in order to enjoy their short lived respect.

Imam al-Mustansir bi-llah III (Shah Gharib Mirza),

(*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, tr. Ivanow, 37-38)

Modern Ismaili Practice: The Imam Abrogates Shari'ah Rituals including Ramadan Fasting

In the modern period of Ismaili history, the 48th Ismaili Imam, **Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah, has re-emphasized the spiritual or *haqiqi* fasting as a spiritual discipline**, which consists of always being mindful and keeping away from sins and negative or impure thoughts.

At the same time, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah formally **abolished the requirement for Ismailis to practice the *shari'ah* worship rituals—namely the traditional *namaz*, *hajj* to Mecca, *zahiri* fasting in Ramadan, ritual ablutions (*wudu'*), etc.** These reforms of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah have been documented in modern scholarship by both Ismaili and non-Ismaili historians and the oral histories of the Syrian and Iranian Jamats.

In the case of the Khoja Ismailis, the Imam delivered oral *farmans* explaining that practices such as the Ramadan fasting are not obligatory in the Ismaili *Tariqah* whereas the fasting of a believer (*mu'min*) is of a higher spiritual nature :

“In my Ismaili Path (*dharam*) keeping the fast is not obligatory (*wajib*). Again, some people fast seven days and others throughout forty days—this is not obligatory... The manner of fasting for a *mu'min* is the fast of the eye, of the hand, of the mouth, of the foot, and then learning the essence... Observe a fast wherein besides me, besides Hazar Imam,

you do not have faith in anyone else and **you keep a clean heart** and do not tell lies.”

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah,

(Mumbai, March 16, 1902; translated by Khudabux Talib) [Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?](#)

In the early 1900s, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah appointed Hajji Akhund known as Fida'i Khurasani as his representative to deliver and implement his *farmans* to the Iranian Jamats. In his Harvard Ph.D. Dissertation, Ismaili historian [Rafique Keshavjee](#) reports that **the Imam's *farman* to the Iranian Ismailis abrogated the practice of fasting in Ramadan along with other the *shari'ah* worship rituals categorized as *furū' al-din* (Branches of Religion): five times *namaz*, *hajj* to Mecca, facing Mecca in prayer, and ritual ablutions (*wudu'*). The Imam's guidance also stressed the essential nature of the *usul al-din*—which do not change.** Below are selected quotes from Keshavjee's doctoral dissertation that summarize Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's *farmans* to the Persian Ismailis in the early 1900s:

“Aga Khan III told his followers to give up aspects of the *shari'ah* considered crucially important by the orthodox.” (Ch. I: p. 36)

“It is very clear that Aga Khan III in 1910 abolished the *furū'-i din* of the *shari'ah*—the so-called five pillars of orthodox Islam, in order to reinvigorate his legitimacy, close the ranks, and set in motion the dynamic elements in the doctrine of the *batin*.” (I:42-3)

“It was no longer meritorious for Ismailis to go to Mecca because God rather than his house was to be worshipped; they ceased praying in the orthodox manner and followed the prayers ordered by the Imam; they stopped performing the ritual ablution before prayers because true ablution was cleansing of the heart; they were not to observe the fast of Ramadan because the true fast was abstention, all year, from evil; the holy war was no longer to be fought literally because the greater war was within, against the *nafs* (lower self); and finally, all the recommendations, prescriptions and proscriptions to be followed were to be those issuing directly from the Imam. This is how they interpreted the *furū'-i dīn*—the auxiliaries of the faith. The *usul-i din*, the essentials of the faith, were unchanged—belief in the oneness of God, in the Prophet, in the Resurrection, in the Imamate, and in the justice of God.” (III:13)

“All those who followed the Aga Khan were to give up the *furū‘-i dīn*, and all those who gave up the *furū‘-i dīn* were thus followers of the Aga Khan. This *firman* from the Imam established the very criterion of identity for the Ismaili, and what is sociologically interesting is that the doctrine underpinning the abandonment of the *furū‘-i dīn* was one which belonged to a theory of historical progression and of spiritual transformation.” (III:17)

“The Ismailis of Iran today still think in the light of their last great challenge to literalism, which took place in 1914, when **they replaced the *furū‘-i dīn* with an interiorized ethic and introduced major changes in ritual and social structure.** They therefore view the Imam as one who, as Commander, maintains the truth by transforming the command to suit the age.” (III:71)

“It was also possible for missionaries, two young Iranian Ismailis and an Ismaili from India, to go around the villages saying that observing these orthodox rites was not the *firman* of the Imam... if the rights of the *furū‘-i dīn* were not being observed, it was abundantly clear that it was only by virtue of the Imam’s *firman*. (IV:12-13)

Rafique Keshavjee, “The Quest for Gnosis and the Call of History: Modernization and the Ismailis of Iran,” Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, May 1981)

Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah enacted the same changes in ritual practice for the Ismailis of Syria. These changes are documented by Dick Douwes in two articles titled [“The Trials of the Syrian Ismailis”](#) and [“Modern History of the Nizari Ismailis in Syria.”](#)

In 1890, the Syrian Ismailis were practicing the “five pillars” of Islam in their *shari‘ah* format (*shahadah*, *salat*, *zakat*, *hajj*, fasting). However, in 1895, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah appointed a new *Mukhi* and sent him with **a new *farman* to change the Syrian Ismaili rituals from *shari‘ah* to *tariqah* and thereby abrogate the requirement to fast in Ramadan.**

Malise Ruthven summarized Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah’s *farmans* to the Syrian and Iranian Jamats as follows:

Changes were introduced in the areas of ritual. In Syria a new *mukhi* appointed by Aga Khan III in 1895 was instructed in Khoja doctrines and rituals and told to introduce them into Syria. Similar changes

were introduced in Iran. *Hajj* and fasting were abandoned along with ritual ablutions before prayers: God, rather than his house, was to be worshipped; the true fast was year-round abstention from evil; true ablution was cleansing of the heart. Duties (*'ibadat*) regarded as essential by other Muslims, such as *Hajj* and fasting, were defined as *furu'-i-din*, auxiliaries of the faith. The *usul-i din*, the essentials of the faith were unchanged – belief in the oneness of God, in the Prophet, in the Resurrection, in the Imamate and in the justice of God.

Malise Ruthven, “Aga Khan III and Ismaili Renaissance”, (Peter B. Clarke, ed., *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*. London: Luzac Oriental, 1998, 371–95: 382)

What kind of fasting is obligatory for Ismaili Muslims?

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has explained in a well-known *farman* that the fasting of the *haqiqati mu'min* does not take place only in Ramadan but is performed on every day of the year:

“Life (*duniya*) is for two days; be mindful of becoming pure through performing *'ibadat*. **A *haqiqati mu'min* does not fast only in the month of Ramadan, he fasts continuously for 360 days [i.e. year-round].** To not commit any bad deeds for three hundred and sixty days—this is the fast; to not hurt anyone—this is the fast. The fast is not to seal one’s mouth and not eat, while committing other sins and misdeeds. **This is a fast of thought (*khayal*). Always be mindful of your thoughts. Be mindful so that no bad intention arises in your heart,** so that no thought of envying someone enters your heart.”

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Mombasa, November 2, 1905; translated by Khudabux Talib) [Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?](#)

gnificance of the Imam’s *farman* that *haqiqati mu'mins* must fast and abstain from impure thoughts (*khayal*) lies in the fact that according to *shari'ah* and *fiqh*-based interpretations of Islam, Muslims are [not held accountable](#) by God and not subject to divine punishment for having [evil thoughts](#), but only evil actions. However, Ismaili Muslims must practice the far more difficult discipline of keeping the heart away from evil and impure thoughts for which they are held accountable. Therefore, if one is striving to perform the *haqiqi* fasting from impure thoughts all-year round, then one has already fulfilled the purpose of fasting in Ramadan. While the *zahiri* fasting of Ramadan

restrains the animal soul from impure desires, the *haqiqi* fasting restrains the imaginal soul (*nafs-i khayali*) and the rational soul from impure thoughts and turns the human soul towards matters of the intellect.

The imaginal soul (*nafs-i khayali*) has an intermediary position between the animal soul and the human soul. It has one face [turned] towards sense perception and perceptibles (*mahsusat*), and another towards the intellect and intelligibles (*ma'qulat*). If it unites with the animal soul, it will imagine through a bodily organ, become dependent on that organ, and deteriorate with the deterioration of [that organ]. But if it unites with the human soul, it can retain ideas without a bodily organ and be independent and detached from that bodily organ, becoming coeternal with the eternity of soul, and sharing in both felicity and misery of the soul.

Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 34)

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah further explained that the Prophet had ordered the *zahiri* fasting to discipline the body, but **the spiritual or *haqiqi* fasting of the human soul is obligatory upon all Ismailis at all times:**

The Noble Messenger gave the order (*hukm*) to keep the fast. The fast is meant to work the body. It is obligatory (*wajib*) to exercise *taqiyyah* so that others don't speak ill behind your backs. For you *haqiqatis* it is necessary (*lazim*) to fast the whole year of three hundred and sixty days. *This* fast is:

1. To not speak lies
2. To not cheat anyone
3. To not speak ill behind anyone's back

In this manner the *haqiqi* fast of three hundred and sixty days is obligatory (*fard*) for Ismailis.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Mombasa, November 2, 1905; translated by Khudabux Talib. cf. Malise Ruthven, "Aga Khan III and the Isma'ili Renaissance," 390) [Are Ismailis](#)

[Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?](#) Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah that **Ramadan fasting is no longer obligatory (along with other *shari'ah* rituals)** was understood throughout the Ismaili world.

Writing in the 1950s, John Hollister reported that the Ismailis of Persia did not fast in Ramadan (*The Shi'a of India*, 1953, 390). Brian H. Jones (*Around Rakaposhi*, 2010) describes living among Ismailis in Northern Pakistan and

reports that most Ismailis in the region do not perform the fast in the month of Ramadan although they are careful to consume food and drink in secluded areas so as not to antagonize those who do observe this fast. Frank Bliss (*Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs*, 2006, 231) notes in his study of the Pamirs that the Pamiri Ismailis only physically fast for 3 days during the month of Ramadan and consider such fasting to serve no useful purpose while Sunnis fast exoterically for the entire month. Even in Syria, the Ismailis of Salamiyyah do not keep the exoteric fast of Ramadan. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was once asked by his own dentist, Dr. Hasan Nathoo, as to why his *murids* did not pray five times per day and why they did not keep *zahiri* fasts in the month of Ramadan. The Imam's reply was conveyed by Dr. Hasan Nathoo in his memoirs:

In the matter of the Ismā'īlīs praying only three times daily instead of five times and not keeping fasts (*roza*) generally in the month of Ramaḍān, [the Imam] told me two things: that in the Qur'an there was no specific mention of the number of daily *namaz*. It was only a tradition (*sunnah*); the other was that there was [a hadith](#) where the Holy Prophet had said that if during his lifetime the people of Arabia observed 90% of his injunctions, 10% would be forgiven. But after his death, if the followers observed even 10%, 90% would be forgiven. These *hadiths* are confirmed in [a book on the life of the Prophet by Martin Lings](#) which I read only recently. This *hadith* makes Islam the most liberal religion."

Dr. Hasan E. Nathoo, (*My Glorious Fortnight with Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, London, 1988)

Nizari Ismailis are far from the only Muslim group today that does not observe the Ramadan fasting as obligatory. The following Muslim groups, which include both Sunni and Shi'i esoteric communities, do not view Ramadan fasting as a mandatory practice, but rather as optional, and many among them do not observe it:

- **The Shi'i Bektashi Alevis (Twelver Shi'i):** "Unlike the Orthodox Muslims, the Bektashis, Kizilbash, and Shabak do not fast during the month of Ramadan... If a Bektashi desires to fast throughout the month of Ramadan, he may do so; such fasting is considered a commendable human practice rather than a religious duty, however." ([Matti Mossa, *Extremist Shiites*, 121-22](#))

- **The Nusayri-Alawis (Twelver Shi'i):** "The Nusayri Alawis take pride in celebrating the religious holidays of both Muslims and Christians. They do not fast during the month of Ramadan but they celebrate the feast at the end of the Ramadan." ([Jorgen Christensen-Ernst, *Antioch on the Orontes*, 147](#))
- **The Ni'matullahis (Twelver Shi'i):** "Not much else in the way of external observance of the *shari'a* is required for Ni'matullahi dervishes to practice; each dervish may or may not fast during Ramadan, depending on his or her own personal preference. This overriding *tariqa* emphasis is reflected by the fact that the term 'Canon Law' (*shari'a*) does not actually occur in Dr Nurbakhsh's published discourses. His conception of prayers and fasting exclusively stresses the significance of the inward requirements of these Islamic practices." ([Leonard Lewisohn, "Persian Sufism in the Contemporary West: Reflections on the Ni'matullahi diaspora," 53](#))
- **The Ahl-i Haqq (Twelver Shi'i):** "The *Ahl-i Haqq* neither observe Muslim religion such as daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan, nor share Islamic theology and sacred space, such as belief in the day of resurrection and sanctity of the mosque. Instead they have their own sacred universe and their own rituals, which center on the *jam'* (lit., assembly)." ([Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Inner Truth and Outer History: The Two Worlds of the Ahl-i Haqq of Kurdistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 \(May, 1994\): 267-8](#))
- **The Zikris (Sunni):** "Zikris have their own daily prayers and do not fast during Ramadan. By the Zikris' own self-estimation they are devout Muslims." ([Peter R. Blood, *Pakistan: A Country Study*, 115](#))
- **The Baye Fall subgroup of the Muridiyya Tariqah (Sunni):** "Since the Baye Fall see their main task as unconditional work for their Sheikh, especially during religious festivals and Ramadan, they observe neither the fast during Ramadan nor the five daily prayers." ([Gabriel Rosenthal et al., "Migrants from Senegal: Integrated in Religious, National and Multinational networks," 32](#))
- Multiple Sunni Sufi groups in Southeast Asia documented by ['Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani](#) in the eighteenth century.

In conclusion: the ritual practices of Islam including prayer and fasting evolved according to the divine guidance of the Prophet. The Ismaili Imams, as the successors of Muhammad, have continued to update Islamic law and practice in accordance with changing times and the preservation of divine wisdom. Accordingly, the Imams have distinguished between the exoteric (*zahiri*) fasting of the body and the spiritual or *haqiqi* fasting of the human soul. In the present era, the contemporary Imams require all Ismaili Muslims to practice the *haqiqi* fasting of the heart consisting of abstention from impure thoughts and deeds for the entire year. Meanwhile, the exoteric fasting from food and drink in Ramadan is not obligatory (*wajib*) for Ismailis but a purely discretionary practice that *murids* may choose to practice based on their spiritual dispositions.

As for the month of Ramadan, Ismailis commemorate the month as a time of heightened spiritual awareness in common with other Muslim communities. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has urged all Ismaili Muslims to pray more and strive hard to remember God at every moment during this special month:

Now, we will give you a Farman about '*ibadat*. Always be worshipping God. **This is Ramadan, so do lots of '*ibadat*. You should remember God every second, every hour—you should not forget Him.** If you have forgotten and become negligent, then we are reminding you of the way to do '*ibadat*.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Mumbai, April 27, 1891; translated by Khudabux Talib) [Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and](#)

[Drink During Ramadan?](#)

The Esoterics (Batin) of Prayer: From Salah to Du‘a’

This post will address the exoteric (*ẓāhir*), the esoteric (*bāṭin*), and the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of prayer (*ṣalāh*) and their relationship to the rituals of the *sharī‘ah*, the practices of the *ṭarīqah*, and the realities (*ḥaqā‘iq*) of universal spirituality. In specific, the esoteric relationship between the formal *Ṣalāh* and the Ismā‘īlī *Du‘ā’* will be addressed in great detail.

After [*The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah*](#), the most important [*The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah*](#) is prayer (*ṣalāh*). Prayer has been enjoined upon the believers for their own spiritual benefit. According to the Prophet Muḥammad, “The prayer is the *mi‘rāj* of the believer.”

The word *ṣalah* may be derived from the root *waṣalah* (“to connect, to arrive”). Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw explains that the word *ṣalāh* means “to follow”, since the word *muṣallī* refers to a horse that follows its leader (*sābiq*). Both these meanings become relevant in explaining the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) of *ṣalāh*.

The Qur’ān uses the term *ṣalāh* in a wide variety of contexts (the prayers of the believers, the prayer of the Prophet, the blessings of the Prophet, the blessings of God and His Angels, etc) and the word *ṣalāh* (plural: *ṣalawāt*) in the Qur’ān did yet not have the specific connotation of the daily ritual *Ṣalāh* (see below) which is practiced by Muslims today.

Ṣalāh: The Exoteric Prayer (*ẓāhirī ṣalāh*)

The exoteric dimension (*ẓāhir*) of prayer is called *Ṣalāh* (note the capitalized ṣ) or *Namāz* – and this is the daily ritual prayer practiced by most Muslims in present times. This *Ṣalāh* consists of the following stages:

- 1) *takbīr* (glorification)
- 2) *qiyām* (standing)
- 3) *qirā‘ah* (recitation of *Sūrah Fātiḥah* and another *surāh*)
- 4) *rukū‘* (genuflection)
- 5) *sujūd* (prostration)
- 6) *tashahhūd* (testification)
- 7) *salām* (salutation)

This exoteric prayer, *Salāh*, is prayed in the direction of the exoteric *qiblah* – the *Ka‘bah* in Makkah. The purpose of these bodily gestures is *‘ibadah* – the worship or servitude of God.

According to the *sharī‘ah* – as interpreted by the majority of Muslim schools of law (including the Fātimid Ismā‘īlī law codified in the *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*) – there are five daily times for the *Ṣalāh* or *Namāz*: *fajr* (just before dawn), *ẓuhr* (noon), *‘aṣr* (afternoon), *maghrib* (just after sunset) and *‘ishā’* (at

night). The major congregational *Ṣalāh* during the week is the Friday *Ṣalāh* in which the *ẓuhr* (noon) and *ʿaṣr* (afternoon) prayers are often combined.

In the *Ṣalāh*, the central emphasis is upon the performance of the above actions – in which there is complete uniformity amongst worshippers. The question of which Qurʾānic *surahs* are actually recited varies from person to person – there is no set programme of recitation (although there are recommended *sūrahs*). But there is no difference when it comes to the bodily actions performed in the *Ṣalāh* – this is because the *Ṣalāh*, as the exoteric prayer, is a worship primarily performed by the physical body.

The *Taʿwīl* (Esoteric Interpretation) of *Salāh*

In its earliest period, the Shīʿī Ismāʿīlī *Ṭarīqah* of Islam was simply known as the *Daʿwah* – a word meaning “calling”, “summons”, or “convocation”. The Ismāʿīlī path of Islam defined itself as a path which “summons” humanity to the recognition of *tawḥīd* – the absolute oneness of God – through the recognition of the *Imām*. It is the essential role of the *Imām* to summon human souls to *tawḥīd* as stated on a Fāṭimid coin:

The Imam Maʿad [al-Muizz] summons to the tawhid of God, the Absolute.

To recognize the *walāyah* of the *Imām* and give one’s *bayʿah* to him is to “respond” to the “Calling” (*Daʿwah*) and begin a spiritual journey towards the recognition of *tawḥīd*. The spiritual journey within the *Daʿwah* includes many levels of initiation, purification, and realization up to the recognition of *tawḥīd*. It is in such a context that we now turn toward the *taʿwīl* and *bāṭin* of the *Ṣalāh*.

The *bāṭinī taʿwīl* of the *Ṣalāh* is explained by Sayyidnā Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān in his *Asās al-Taʿwīl* as follows:

“The outward (*ẓāhir*) blessing of *salat* is in performing it outwardly, including all its genuflections and prostrations, compulsory and permissible [components]. Correspondingly, the hidden (*bāṭin*) blessing lies in establishing the Summons of Truth (*daʿwat al-haqq*) in every generation, day and night, as is done in performing the visible *salat*. In establishing the *Daʿwah* there is benefit for this world and the next and benefit for the worshipper. The Messenger of God – God’s prayer and peace be upon him – said: “I derive pleasure from prayer”, meaning in its *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*.”

Sayyedna Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, (*Taʿwīl al-Daʿāʾim*, Vol. 1, 176)

The ritual of *Ṣalāh* is thus an outer symbol (*mathāl*) for the *Daʿwah* which is its inner meaning (*bāṭin*). Thus, Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw writes that: **“The *taʿwīl* of the *Ṣalāh* is the *Daʿwah*.”** Dr. Farouk Topan expands on the relationship between the *Salāh* and the *Daʿwah* as follows:

“*Ṣalāh* has been made obligatory to all Muslims as it is one of the channels through which God showers His bounties on human beings. However, according to the Qurʾan (31:20), mankind receives God’s bounties both in the

realm of the 'seen' (*ẓāhir*) and the 'unseen' (*bāṭin*). *Ṣalāh* encompasses both. Its texts, gestures and even canons constitute the 'seen'. On the other hand, the bounties in the realm of the hidden, the esoteric and the 'unseen' relate to the principles of the Ismā'īlī *Ṭarīqah* (path) and its practices. The bounties in that realm are channelled through the institution of the *Da'wah*, an organization whose basic aim was to 'call' or 'invite' selected people to an understanding of the inner meaning of faith. Just as, on a wider level, all Muslims are called to prayer through the *Adhān*, so, in a more restricted way, the *Da'wah* calls on particular individuals and invites them to receive the esoteric knowledge of the *Ṭarīqah*."

Dr. Farouk Topan, (*Swahili and Ismaili Perceptions of Salat*, published in *Islamic Prayer across the Indian Ocean*, by David J. Parkin, Stephen C. Headly, 108)

This also means that each of the seven stages of the *Ṣalāh* symbolizes one of the stages of initiation in the *Da'wah*. This is proven by the etymology of the word *ṣalāh* which means "to follow". Therefore, the esoteric meaning of *ṣalāh* is to "follow" the *Da'wah* of the Prophets and the *Imāms*. Each stage of the *Ṣalāh* has *ta'wīlī* meaning which is the corresponding *bāṭinī* reality in the *Da'wah*:



1) The *ta'wīl* of *takbīr* is to take the *bay'ah* and enter into a covenant (*'ahd*, *mīthāq*) with the *Imām* of the time. During the *takbīr* the worshipper remains silent and raises his hands to his ears. This symbolizes the fact that when the *murīd* pledges the *bay'ah* to the *Imām*, he agrees to “hear and obey” the *Imām*. The late Shaykh Martin Lings has explained this from a Sufī perspective:

“In the *takbīr*, which opens the *Ṣalāh*, the hand placed on the ear is a ritual enactment of the words ‘we hear and obey’ which follow the Qur’anic credo (2:287). The hand here symbolizes the free will, which man alone of all earthly creatures possesses and which makes him alone capable of deliberate obedience, unlike animals which are bound to follow their instincts.”

Martin Lings, (*A Return to the Spirit*, 167)

2) The *ta'wīl* of *qiyām* (standing) is that the *murīd* stands by the promises of his covenant (*mīthāq*) with the *Imām*.

3) The *ta'wīl* of the *qirā'a* (recitation) is that the *murīd* listens to the wisdom-filled discourse of the *dā'ī*. The actual recitation of the Qur’ānic *sūrahs* is

the *tanzīl* (exoteric revelation) of the Qur'ān while the discourse of the *dā'ī* contains the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān.

4) The *ta'wīl* of *ruku'* (genuflection) is the *murīd's* recognition of the *Bāb* (the person who serves as the "proof" or "gate") of the *Imām* in the Minor Cycle and the *Bāb* of the Enunciating Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) in the Major Cycle.

5) The *ta'wīl* of *sujūd* (prostration) is the *murīd's* recognition of the *Imām* in the Minor Cycle and the Enunciating Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) in the Major Cycle.

6) The *ta'wīl* of *tashahhūd* is the recognition of the *dā'ī* who summons to the recognition of the *Imām*.

7) The *ta'wīl* of the *salām* (when the worshipper turns to his right and his left and salutes the persons next to him) is that the *murīd* has now attained to the knowledge and wisdom to speak and teach others in the *Da'wah*.

Each stage of the *Da'wah* forms a part of the gnostic or psychic worship (*'ibādah 'ilmīyyah wa nafsīyyah*) which gives life and meaning to the bodily or practical worship (*'ibādah 'amalīyyah*) of the *Ṣalāh*. The seven stages of the *Ṣalāh* collectively symbolize the Minor Cycle of Seven Imāms through whom the *Da'wah* is sustained in every age. Just as the *Ṣalāh* is performed in the direction of the exoteric *qiblah*, the *murīd* journeys through the stages of the *Da'wah* in the direction of the esoteric *qiblah* – as stated by Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw:

"The exterior meaning of ritual prayer is the worship of God with the body by advancing towards the *qiblah* of bodies, which is the *Ka'ba*, the house of God (the exalted) in Mecca. The esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl-i bāṭin*) of the ritual prayer is the worship of God with the rational soul by turning, in the quest for knowledge of the Book and the Law (*sharī'at*), towards the *qiblah* of spirits, which is God's House, which is a house in which God's knowledge resides – the *Imām* of Truth."

Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, 272)

The five times of *Ṣalāh* as mandated in the *sharī'ah* likewise have an esoteric meaning. Since *Ṣalāh* as such symbolizes the *Da'wah*, the five prayer times symbolize the five *Da'wahs* of five great Speaker-Prophets (*Nāṭiqs*) of God who preceded the Prophet Muḥammad: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The Prophet Muḥammad instituted the five daily times for *Ṣalāh* as an allusion or symbol for their respective *Da'wahs*. Whenever a Prophet or *Imām* is commanded to "establish the *Ṣalāh*" (*aqīmū'l-ṣalat*) in the Qur'ān, the inner meaning is "establish the *Da'wah* of the True Religion". Sayyidnā Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman explains that:

"The five [*Nāṭiqs*] institute the *Da'wah* for the Sixth *Nāṭiq* (Prophet Muḥammad), the seal of the Messengers, the last of the Prophets, because after him there will not arise a prophet or messenger, as he said to his *wasi*: *Ali is to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there shall be no prophet after me*. So they allude to him and spread the good news about him and therefore the

duty of prayer was prescribed five times every day and night. In its true reality, salat is the *Da'wah*."

Sayyednā Ja'far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, (*Ta'wīl al-Zakāt*, 69-70)

Du'ā': The Esoteric Prayer (*bāṭinī ṣalāh*)

The word *du'ā'* simply means "call" or "supplication" and can refer to any informal or personal prayer. However, in this context, the word *Du'ā'* refers to the daily ritual prayer of the Shī'ī Ismā'īlī *Ṭarīqah* of Islam. To understand the context and the nature of the Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* and why it differs from the exoteric *Ṣalāh*, it must be remembered that the gestures and actions of the *Salāh* symbolize the stages of initiation in the *Da'wah*.

The Ismā'īlī *Ṭarīqah* is an esoteric branch of Islam and therefore its ritual practices belong to the *bāṭinī* realm of the *tarīqah* in contrast to the *ẓāhirī* realm of the *sharī'ah*. This is most evident in the layout of the Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'*.

The Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* consists of six parts. Each part contains a Qur'ānic verse (or verses), a supplication (*du'ā'*), an affirmation (*ithbāt*) of the *Imām* of the Time, and prostration (*sujūd*). The overall meaning of the Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* can be seen by simply noting the themes and order of the Qur'ānic verses recited through the six parts:

Part 1: *Sūrah al-Fatiḥah* whose main theme is the **'ibādah (worship)** of God

Part 2: *Sūrah al-Nisa* (4:59 – "O you who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger and the holders of authority amongst you") and *Surah Yasīn* (36:12 – "And We have encompassed all things in the Manifest *Imām*") whose main themes are **obedience (tā'ah)** to God's representatives.

Part 3: *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (5:67 – "O Messenger, proclaim that which has been revealed to you by your Lord...") whose main theme is the **declaration (tablīgh)** of the Imam.

Part 4: *Sūrah al-Fath* (48:10 – "Verily, those who give their *bay'ah* unto you(Muhammad), they give their *bay'ah* unto God Himself...") whose main theme is **bay'ah/mithāq (covenant)**.

Part 5: *Sūrah al-Anfal* (8:27 – "O you who believe, do not betray God and His Messenger and do not betray your trusts (*amānāt*) while you know") whose main theme is **trust (amānah)**.

Part 6: *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* (112 – "Say: He is God, the Unique. God is Independent. He did not beget nor was He begotten. And there is none like unto him") whose main theme is the **recognition (ma'rifah)** of *tawḥīd*.

Based on the Qur'ānic verses evoked in each Part, the act of reciting the Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* is a symbolic journey through the stages of the Ismā'īlī *Da'wah*:



1. In the First Part, the worshipper recognizes the Attributes of God such as Mercy, Compassion, Lordship and Sovereignty and enters into the **worship** (*'ibādah*) of God.
2. In the Second Part, after affirming the need to worship God, the worshipper recognizes that God has established a manifest *Imām* as the possessor of authority (*ulu'l-amr*) and that worship can only take place by means of **obedience** (*ta'ah*) to God, the Prophet, and the *Imāms*.
3. In the Third Part, the worshipper recognizes the identity of the *Imām* by means of the **declaration** (*tabligh*) of *nass* – which was first revealed at Ghadīr al-Khum.
4. In the Fourth Part, after discovering the identity of the *Imām*, the worshipper pledges a **covenant** (*mīthāq*) with the *Imām* through the act of *bay'ah* and becomes a *murīd* and a spiritual child of the *Imām*.
5. In the Fifth Part, the *murīd* affirms to stand by his *bay'ah* and **fulfill the trusts** (*amānāt*) of the *Imām*. During the silent *dhikr* of *Yā 'Alī Yā Muḥammad* in the midst of the Fifth Part, the *murīd* contemplates and attains the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of the *Nāṭiq* and the *Asās*, and the *Imām* and his *Bāb*. The end of this *dhikr* – beginning with the exclamation of *Ya Imami'z-Zamān* (O' *Imām* of the Time) – represents the moment (*waqt*) of the **recognition** (*ma'rifah*) of the *Imām* followed by a declaration of the true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the *Imām*.
6. In the Sixth Part, after having recognized the *Imām* in his reality, the *murīd* attains the **recognition** (*ma'rifah*) of *tawḥīd* – the absolute oneness of God – represented by *Sūrah al-Ikhlās*.

The Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* encompasses the stages of the Ismā'īlī *Da'wah*. Indeed, the two words *du'ā'* and *da'wah* come from the same Arabic root (*dal-'ayn-waw*) which means to summon, to invite, to call, etc. This Ismā'īlī *Du'ā'* is a **practical or embodied form of the *Imām's* "Summons" (*Da'wah*) to his *murīds* and it summarizes the essence of the Ismā'īlī *Ṭarīqah* of Islam.** To recite this *Du'ā'* is to respond to this *Da'wah* and symbolically journey through all its stages.

When it is remembered that the *ta'wīl* of the *Ṣalāh* is the *Da'wah*, and that the *Ismā'īlī Du'ā'* actually embodies the *Da'wah*, then it becomes clear that **the *Ismā'īlī Du'ā'* is itself the *ta'wīl* of the *Ṣalāh*.** In the past, the *Da'wah* existed through the institution of the dignitaries of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*), while in the present day the *Da'wah* exists in a practical and embodied form through the rites and rituals of the *Ismā'īlī Ṭarīqah* and the *Ismā'īlī Du'ā'* in particular. **In summary, the *Ismā'īlī Du'ā'* of the *bāṭinī ṭarīqah* is the practical *ta'wīl* (i.e. the living and embodied *ta'wīl*) of the *Ṣalāh* of the *ẓāhirī sharī'ah*.**

The *Ṣalāh* and the *Du'ā'* are therefore complementary and not in opposition. The *Ṣalāh* is the external dimension of the *Du'ā'*, and the *Du'ā'* is the interiorization of the *Ṣalāh*. It is also true that the *Ṣalāh* is the exoteric prayer (*ẓāhirī ṣalāh*) and the *Du'ā'* is the esoteric prayer (*bāṭinī ṣalāh*). In accordance with the needs of the present [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) and the command (*farman*) of the *Imām* of the Time, the *Ismā'īlī* Muslims perform the obligatory prayer in its *ta'wīlī* or esoteric form of *Du'ā'* and thereby also fulfill the conditions and requirements of the exoteric *Ṣalāh*.

Dhikr: The Real Prayer (ḥaqīqī ṣalāh)

The purpose of formal prayer (*ṣalāh*) according to the Qur'an is to establish the Remembrance (*dhikr*) of God in the human soul:

“Then worship Me and establish the prayer (*al-ṣalāta*) for the sake of My Remembrance (*li-dhikrī*).”

Holy Qur'ān 20:1

In this sense, the Remembrance of God (*dhikru'llāh*) is a state of awareness or consciousness or illumination as opposed to a formal act of ritual worship. Indeed, *dhikru'llāh* in this sense underlies all states of formal worship – whether it be formal prayer (*Ṣalāh*), *Du'ā'*, glorification (*tasbiḥ*), etc. In this sense, the *ḥaqīqah* (reality) or *bāṭin al-bāṭin* of prayer is the Remembrance of God (*dhikru'llāh*). *Imām Ṣultān Muḥammad Shāh* refers to this reality of prayer as a communication, illumination and inspiration from the Universal Intellect (“Universal Flame”) and the particular intellect (“the spark”) as follows:

“Prayer is a daily necessity, a direct communication of the spark with the universal flame.... Everyone should strive his best to see that this spark be not extinguished but rather developed to that full “Companionship-on High” which was the vision expressed in the last words of the Prophet on his deathbed, the vision of that blessed state which he saw clearly awaiting him... it is my profound conviction that man must never ignore and leave untended and undeveloped that spark of the Divine which is in him.”

Imām Ṣultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(World Enough and Time: Memoirs of the Aga Khan)

Ontologically speaking, the spiritual state of awareness or consciousness that is *dhikru'llāh* is “greater” than the formal acts of ritual or formal prayer – as the Qur'an states:

“Verily, the prayer (*al-ṣalāta*) keeps one away from minor sins and major sins, but the remembrance of God (*al-dhikru Allāhi*) is greater (*akbar*).”

Holy Qur'ān 29:45

The most elevated and purified human souls – the Prophets, the *Imāms*, and the greatest saints (*awliyā'*) have attained the spiritual station of continuous *dhikru'llāh* – such that their souls never depart from remembering God even though they may live in the physical world. The Qur'ān refers to them collectively as the *Ahl al-Dhikr* (People of Remembrance – Qur'ān 16:43) and Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib explains the inner meaning of the *Ahl al-Dhikr* as those who always remain in the state of God's remembrance:

“There have always been slaves of God ... with whom He held intimate discourse through their thoughts and spoke with them through the essence of their intellects. They diffused illumination through the awakened light in their hearing and their seeing and their hearts, calling unto the remembrance of the days of God... Indeed, there is a special group (*ahl*) who belong to the Remembrance (*dhikr*); they have adopted it in place of the world, such that 'neither trade nor merchandise' distracts them from it. They spend the days of their life in it ... It is as though they had left this world for the Hereafter, and they are there, witnessing what is beyond this world.”

Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib,

(Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, 142)

To summarize, the *ẓāhirī* prayer performed by the physical body is the *Ṣalāh*. The *bāṭinī* prayer performed by the rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nātiqah*) is the *Dū'ā'* which embodies the *ta'wīl* of the *Ṣalāh*. The *ḥaqīqī* prayer – the *bāṭin al-bāṭin* – is the remembrance of God (*dhikru'llāh*) performed by the heart (*qalb*) in which human intellect (*'aql*) resides.



In accordance with these principles, the Shī'ī *Imāms* who are the possessors of the divinely-inspired intellect (*al-'aql al-mu'ayyad*) are always in a state of continuous and unceasing prayer. The entire mission, life, or existence of the *Imām* is itself a prayer and the *Imām* has no need or obligation to engage in any sort of formal or ritual prayer – although he may observe such rituals in accordance with the needs of the time and context (as

above). Otherwise, the soul of the *Imām* of the Time is always praying at every moment. Indeed, it is possible for all people to attain the spiritual station of continuous prayer or *dhikru'llāh* and such a feat is the goal of the esoteric *ṭarīqahs* in Islam.



“The Saint has himself become prayer, the meeting-place of earth and Heaven; and thus he contains the universe and the universe prays with him. He is everywhere where nature prays and he prays with and in her: in the peaks which touch the void and eternity, in a flower which scatters itself or in the abandoned song of a bird.”

Frithjof Schuon, (*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 231)

The Shia Imamat: A Timeline of Major Divisions and Developments

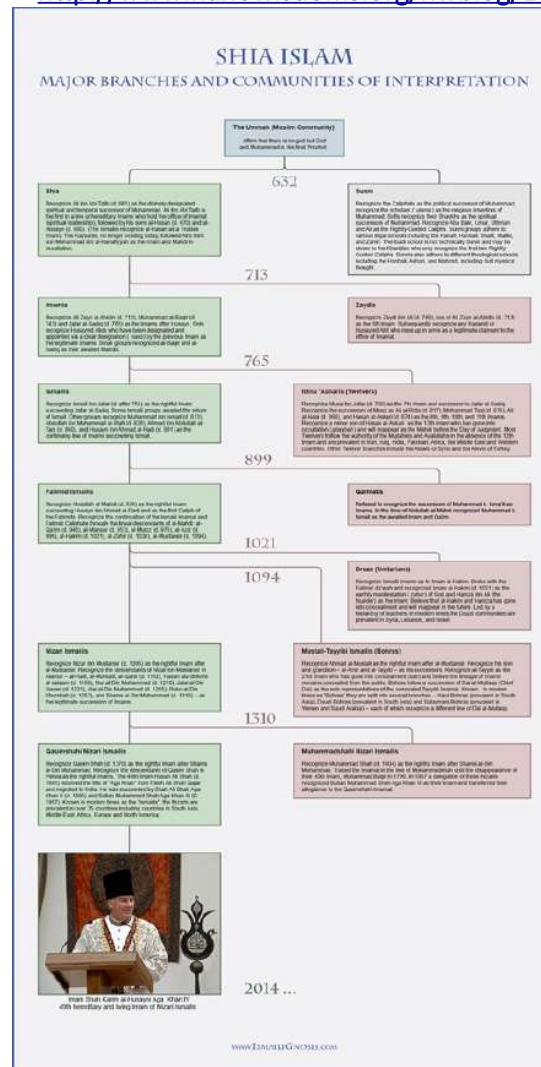
From that early division, a host of further distinctions grew up, but the question of rightful leadership remains central. In time, the Shia were also subdivided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Address to both Houses of the Canadian Parliament and Senate,

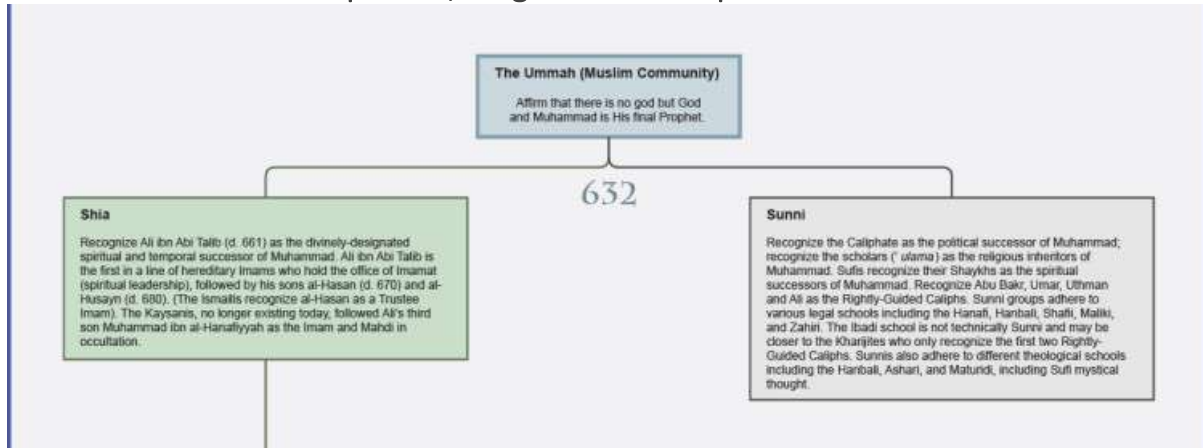
February 27, 2014

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10724/>



632 AD: Death of Prophet Muhammad.

The *Shi'at Ali* recognize 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the appointed successor of Muhammad in spiritual, religious and temporal matters.



As you know, the Shia divided from the Sunni after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, was, in Shia belief, named by the Prophet to be the Legitimate Authority for the interpretation of the faith. For the Shia today, all over the world, he is regarded as the first Imam.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Acceptance Address, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's 'Tolerance' Award, May 20, 2006

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7706/>

A number of companions, known as the *Shi'at 'Ali*, hold that Prophet Muhammad designated his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as his spiritual and temporal successor, Master (*mawla*, *wali*) and Imam of the believers. Others — a small number of Meccan and Medinese companions — on the contrary, selected and appointed, after much deliberation and disagreement, Abu Bakr as the temporal successor (*khalifah*) of Prophet Muhammad at the Banu Saqifa assembly hall while 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his kinsmen were performing the Prophet's burial rights. And so, although Abu Bakr became the first Caliph of Islam, a small number of Muhammad's community held 'Ali as the rightful successor and Imam of the community and support the succession rights of the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt*. The *Ahl al-Bayt* refer to the Prophet Muhammad's closest family members whom the Qur'an declares to be purified by Divine Command, including the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, his daughter Fatimah al-Zahra, and his grandsons al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and the Imams that followed 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

I swear by the Lord that I know fully well all the messages of God that the Holy Prophet has received, the ways of fulfilment of promises made by God and of all the knowledge that science or philosophy could disclose. We, the progeny of the Holy Prophet, are the doors through which real wisdom and true knowledge will reach mankind: we are the lights of religion.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, (*Naghul Balagha: Peak of Eloquence*, tr. Sayed Ali Reza, Sayed Mohamed Askari Jafery, Khutba 123, 91)

661 AD: Death of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali succeeds as the Imam of the Shi'a Muslims.

O people, whoever knows me, knows me, and whoever does not know me, I am al-Hasan, the son of Muhammad. I am the son of the bringer of good tidings, the son of the warner, the son of the summoner to God, powerful and exalted. With His permission, I am the Shining Lamp. I am of the family of the Prophet from whom God has removed filth and whom He has purified.

Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, (January 28, 661, Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 311)

670 AD: Death of Imam al-Hasan.

Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali succeeds as the Imam of the Shi'a Muslims.

God gave preference to Muḥammad before all His creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After he had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him for Himself. We are his family (*ahlihi*), those who possess his authority (*awliyā'*), those who have been made his trustees (*awṣiyā'*), and his inheritors (*wurathā'*); we are those who have more right to this position among the people than anyone else. People selfishly claimed our exclusive right to that. Yet we consented since we hated disunion and desired the well-being [of the community]. However, we know we have greater claim to that right, which was our entitlement, than those who have seized it.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 30)

680 AD: Death of Imam al-Husayn during the massacre at Karbala.

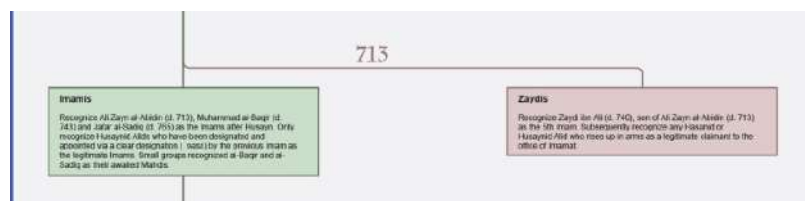
Some of the Shi 'a recognize his half-brother Muhammad ibn al-Hanafyya as the next Imam while others follow 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin as the next Imam.

This is he whose footprint is known to the valley of Mecca. He whom the Kaba knows and the most frequented sanctuary. This is the son of the best of all the servants of God. This is the pious, the elect, the pure, the eminent. This is Ali, whose father is the Prophet, and it was through the light of his guidance, that the darkened road changed into the straight path. This is the son of Fatima, if you are ignorant of him; and with his great-grandfather the Prophethood came to an end.

Farazdaq (d. 730), (Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *Ismailis Through History*)
<http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/history03/history364.html>

713 AD: Death of Imam 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin.

The Zaydi Shi'a recognize his son Zayd as the next Imam while the Imami Shia recognize his son Muhammad al-Baqir as the next Imam, followed by the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.



Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [A.S.] teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525

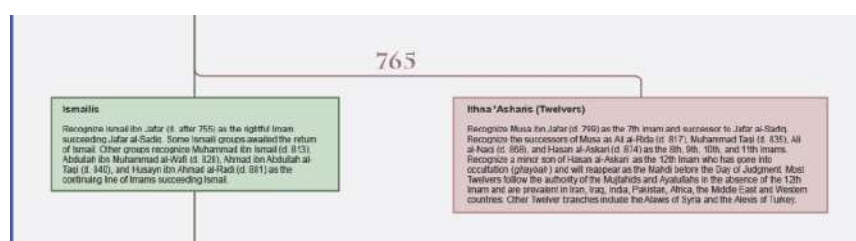
My words are the words of my father, and the words of my father are the words of my grandfather, and the words of my grandfather are the words of my great grandfathers, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn, and their words are the words of Imam Ali, and the words of Imam Ali are the words of Prophet Muhammad and the words of Prophet Muhammad are the words of God the Almighty, the Great.



Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, Book 2, Chapter 17, Hadith No. 14)

765 AD: Death of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, 5th Imam of the Shi'a.

The Isma'ili Shi'a recognize the Imam Ja'far's appointed successor Isma'il and his descendants as the rightful Imams while those who later become the Twelver Shi'a recognize Musa al-Kazim and his descendants as their Imams.



Portrait of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq embracing his student. Source British Library.

According to the majority of the available sources, he [Imām Ja'far] had designated his second son Ismā'il (the eponym of the Isma'iliyya) as his successor, by the rule of the naṣṣ. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the Ismā'īliyya and which should have settled the question of al Ṣādiq's

succession in due...However, the fact remains that Isma'il was not present at the time of the Imam al-Sadiq's death, when three other sons simultaneously claimed his succession, though none of them could convincingly prove to have been the beneficiary of a second nass. As a result, the Imam al-Sadiq's Shi'i partisans split into six groups, two of which constituted the nucleus of the nascent Isma'iliyya.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, 88)

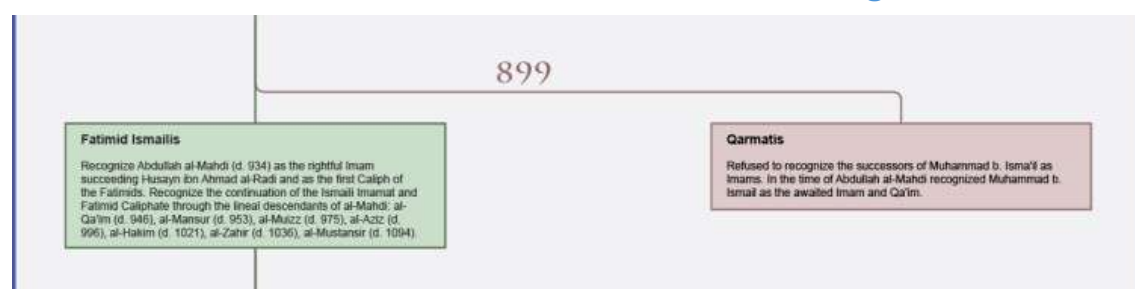
The line of Musawi Twelver Imams ends when the eleventh Imam, al-Hasan al-Askari, leaves no apparent successor; the Twelvers split into numerous groups, each with a different understanding of the succession of the Imam (Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*). The majority of the Twelver Shi'a hold that the Twelfth Imam disappeared as a young child and await his re-appearance on the Day of Judgment.

If an Imam dies without leaving a son as his successor, it can only mean that not only he personally, but the whole line of his ancestors were not the true Imams. Thus the discontinuation of the line of the Twelvers proved that at least the last several of them were not genuine.

Wladimir Ivanow, (*Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism*, Holland, 1952, 9)

813 AD: Death of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il, 7th Imam of the Isma'ili Shi'a.

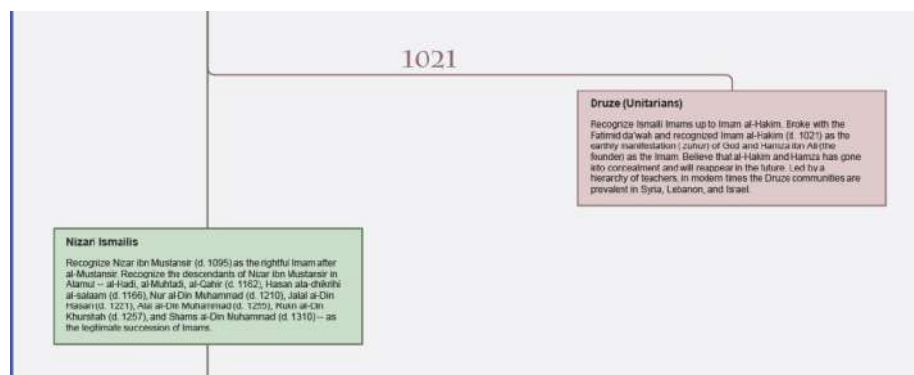
By 899 one group of his followers, later known as the Qarmatians, recognize him as the seventh and last Imam and the awaited Qa'im and reject the Imam of the Fatimids. Another group, later known as the Fatimid Isma'ilis, recognize the continuity of the Imam through the descendants of Muhammad b. Isma'il including the Fatimids.



On the death of Muhammad b. Isma'il, the Mubarakiiyya split into two groups. A majority, identified by the Imami heresiographers as the immediate predecessors of the dissident Qarmatis, refused to accept Muhammad b. Isma'il's death. They acknowledged him as their seventh and last Imam, awaiting his imminent return as the Mahdi or *qa'im* [...]. A second group, very small and extremely obscure, affirmed Muhammad b. Isma'il's death and now began to trace the Imamate in his progeny.

Farhad Daftary, (*A Short History of the Ismailis*, 36)

1021 AD: Death of Imam al-Hakim bi-amr'illah, 16th Imam of the Isma'ili Shi'a.

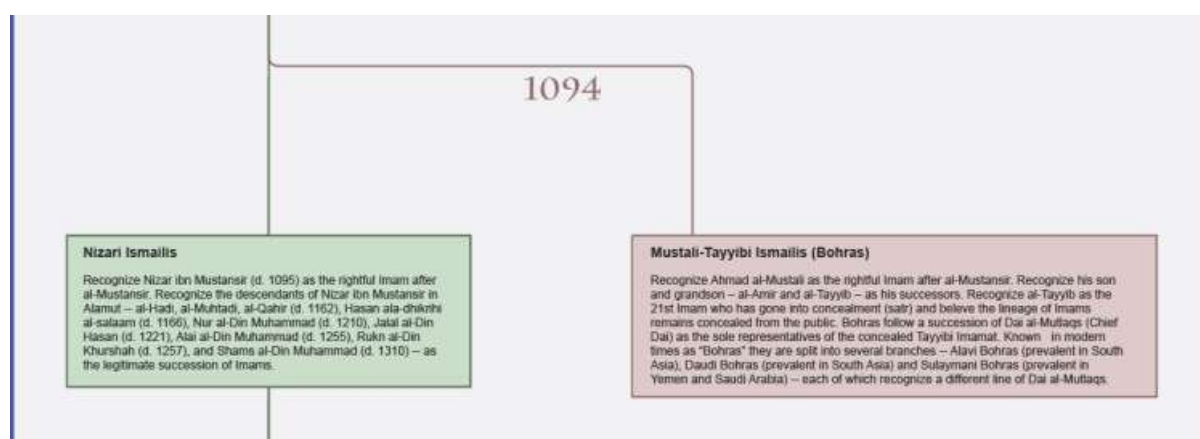


A group later known as the Druze, led by Hamzah ibn 'Ali, proclaim that al-Hakim is the manifestation (*zuhur*) of the transcendent God and has gone into occultation with Hamza [a dissident Fatimid *da'i*] becoming the Imam of the believers. The Druze await al-Hakim's return at the Day of Judgment while the Fatimid Ismailis continue to recognize the Imamatus of al-Hakim's son, al-Zahir, and his descendants.

In the mountainous regions of Syria, for example, are to be found the Druzes, in their fastness in the Jebel Druze. They are really Ismailis who did not originally follow my family in their migration out of Egypt but remained with the memory of my ancestor, Al-Hakim, the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt, but they established their doctrines on lines very similar to those of the Syrian Ismailis, who, in present times, are my followers.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
The Memoirs of Aga Khan III, Chapter 2, Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

1094 AD: Death of Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir bi-llah, 18th Imam of the Isma'ili Shi'a.



Every student of Ismailism knows the historical accounts of that fateful night when the aged al-Mustansir unexpectedly died after a short and apparently not very serious illness, and the princes and other dependents were urgently summoned to the palace only to find that the all-powerful commander-in-chief

had already placed his own son-in-law, the youngest prince Must'ali, upon the throne, and required them to take the oath of allegiance to him. There are different versions of what had really happened – quite naturally, indeed. But it is quite clear that the eldest prince, the original heir apparent, Nizar, under one pretext or other, escaped, and took refuge in Alexandria, claiming his rights. The events happened in the full light of history, and there is very little doubt as to their real trend.

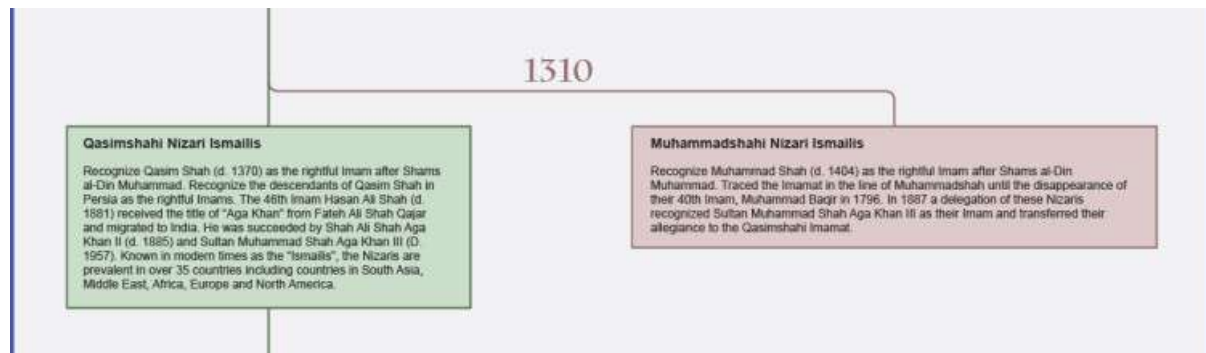
Wladimir Ivanow, (*Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 5)

The Nizari Ismailis recognize al-Mustansir's eldest son and heir-designate, Nizar, as the next Imam while the Must'alian Ismailis recognize his younger son al-Must'ali as the next Imam. The Fatimid vizier al-Afdal effects a palace coup and places al-Musta'li on the caliphal throne while Nizar and his family flee to Alexandria. The Nizaris recognize the continuity of the Imamatus through the descendants of Nizar who find refuge in the Nizari state in Persia led by Hasan-i Sabbah. The Must'alian line of Imams ends with al-Amir ibn Must'ali, who dies without an apparent successor. The Tayyibi Must'alian Ismailis, today known as the Bohras, hold that the line of Must'alian Imams has gone into concealment with their twenty-first Imam al-Tayyib, son of al-Amir, and that this line of Imams is thereafter represented by a succession of da'i mutlaqs (chief da'is) up to present times.

The Ismailis themselves are divided into two parties, a division which stems from the period when my ancestors held the Fatimid Khalifat of Egypt. One party accepts my ancestor, Nizar, as the rightful successor of the Caliph of Egypt, Mustansir; whereas the other claims as Imam his other son, the Khalif Musta'li... After the loss of the Fatimid Khalifat in Egypt, my ancestors moved first to the highlands of Syria and the Lebanon, thence they journeyed eastward to the mountains of Iran. They established a stronghold on the craggy peak of Alamut in the Elburz Mountains, the range which separates from the rest of Persia the provinces lying immediately to the south of the Caspian

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
The Memoirs of Aga Khan III, Chapter 2, Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

1310 AD: Death of Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad, 21st Imam of Nizari Ismailis; Nizari Ismailis split into two groups – the Qasimshahi Nizaris recognize the Imamate of Qasimshah while the Muhammadshahi Nizaris follow the Imamate of Muhammadshah.



After Shams al-Din Muhammad, there occurred once again a dispute over the succession to the Imamate, splitting the line of the Nizari imams and their followers into what became known as the Muhammad-Shahi (or Mu'mini) and Qasim-Shahi branches. The Muhammad-Shahi line of Imams, whose most famous figure was Shah Tahir Dakkani, was discontinued about two centuries ago, while the Qasim-Shahi line has endured to the present day. The Qasim-Shahi Imams, who in modern times have carried the title of Aga Khan, an honorific meaning chief master or lord, are now the sole Nizari Imams.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 413)

1885: Death of Imam 'Aga 'Ali Shah

His son Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah succeeds as the 48th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis.



Enthronement of
Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

O' Jamat! Do not consider us small! We are the descendant of the Prophet and Hazrat Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, was our great-grandfather. Hazrat Bibi Fatima Khatun-i Jannat was our great grandmother. We are the Light of both Ali and the Prophet. We are young in age but exalted. Mawla Murtada Ali was small in stature but in his youth he conquered the fort of Khaybar... In the physical world he used to eat bread made of barley but in reality he could reach the other end of the world in a fraction of a second and he could turn mountains in to pieces. Whoever yearned for the help from Mawla Murtaza Ali he used to fulfill their wishes and ease their difficulties. I am the great-grandson of Murtada 'Ali. Hazrat Imam Zayn al-Abidin was also a young Imam but he was like Murtada 'Ali in his knowledge and ability. My Light comes from them."

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Address made in Bombay, September 1, 1885 quoted in Michele Boivin, *Le Renovation du Shiisme Ismailien en Inde et au Pakistan*, 196)

1887: The bulk of Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris transfer their allegiance to Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Muhammad-Shahis had lost contact with their fortieth Imam, Amir Muhammad al-Baqir. Since 1210/1796 they had not heard from this Imam, who, like his predecessors, had been living in India. In 1304/1887, the Syrian Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris sent a delegation to India to locate the

descendants of Amir Muhammad al-Baqir, who was thought to have gone into concealment. The delegation failed in its search, and soon afterwards the majority of the Syrian Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris transferred their allegiance to the Qasim-Shahi line, then represented by Aga Khan III, who had earlier assumed the imamate in Bombay.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 489)

1957: Death of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

His grandson Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV succeeds as the 49th and present Imam of the Nizari Ismailis.



Ever since the time of my ancestor ‘Ali, the first Imam, that is to say over a period of thirteen hundred years, it has always been the tradition of our family that each Imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants whether they be sons or remoter male issue... And in these circumstances and in view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place including the discoveries of atomic science I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shi’a Muslim Ismailian Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of a new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam. For these reasons and although he is not now one of my heirs, I APPOINT my grandson KARIM, the son of my son, ALY SALOMONE KHAN to succeed to the title of AGA KHAN and to be the Imam and Pir of all my Shia Ismailian followers.

Will of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10233/>

Remarks by the present Aga Khan about the Shia and Ismaili Imamats

Interviewer: When did this turning-point as far as the Ismailis come and why was it necessary?

Aga Khan IV: It was the sixth generation after Ali where the Imam of the time, called Ja’far Sadiq, had four sons. Isma’il was the eldest, and the Sevener Shia – the Isma’ilis are Sevener Shia – followed the branch of the family led by Isma’il, and that’s why they are called Isma’ilis....

Interviewer: And your own descent as head of the Isma'ilis is from...?

Aga Khan IV: Is from *Isma'il*.

Interviewer: And where do you rank?

Aga Khan IV: I am the forty-ninth.

Interviewer: You are the forty-ninth Imam?

Aga Khan IV: Yes, Yes.

BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton, September 6, 1979
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1988/>

Interviewer: You are called the living Imam, what exactly does that mean?

Aga Khan IV: Well the Shia history has followed the same sort of historical developments all hereditary offices have followed, where there have been differences of opinion on who was the legitimate successor to the predecessor, whether it was a secular or religious office. In the case of the Shia Muslims, the Shia branch of Islam split and one branch of the Shia Muslims accepted the concept of the Imam in hiding, the invisible Imam, because the twelfth Imam disappeared as a very young child, and our branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed and that is why they are known as Ismailis. And that branch of the family has continued today hereditarily and that is why there is a living Imam for the Ismaili Muslims.

CBC Man Alive Interview, October 8, 1986
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/>

Interviewer: What makes the Ismailis different from the mainstream Shiite Islam?

Aga Khan IV: Probably that there is a living Imam who traces his family back to Hazrat Ali. The majority of the Shia today are known as the Twelver Shia and they believe in the hidden Imam.

Independent Television ITV Interview, June 4, 1985
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/>

The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali's descendants, and the Isma'ilis are the only Shi'a Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself. The other Shia — the Twelvers — revere a "hidden" Imam who will return on the Day of Judgement to take part in the final judgement. It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
"The Power of Wisdom", *Politique Internationale*, March 1, 2010
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/>

In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to both Houses of the Canadian Parliament and Senate, February 27,
2014
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10724/>

We conclude with the remarks of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni which emphasize the continuity of the Imamatus throughout history and his role as the Living Imam in fulfilling the mandate of the institution:

The Imam is a transitory being, who forms a link between the past and the future. For this reason, ensuring the continuity of the institution and its ability to fulfil its role is what my life is all about.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Translation]
“The Confessions Of The Aga Khan”, *Paris Match*, February 3, 2005
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7190/>

The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali’s descendants, and the Isma‘ilis are the only Shi’a Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself. The other Shia — the Twelvers — revere a “hidden” Imam who will return on the Day of Judgement to take part in the final judgement. It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
“The Power of Wisdom”, *Politique Internationale*, March 1, 2010
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/>

Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamatus of Imam Isma'il ibn Jafar

Our branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed and that is why they are known as Ismailis.

Forty-Ninth Hereditary Imam of the Shi'i Isma'ili Muslims

DEDICATION: This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Shaykh 'Abd al-Hakeem Seth Carney (1979-2007) whose hidden services and loving devotion to the Isma'ili Imamatus shall always be remembered. He will forever be a spiritual (*ruhani*) presence in the Isma'ili Muslim Jamat. Special credit goes to [Quranic Blueprints](#) and [John Andaluso of Third Shahada](#) for finding and expounding some of the new references in the updated version of this article.

The Isma'ili Muslims take their name from the fact that they affirm the Imamatus of Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far as the hereditary *Imām* after the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq – as opposed to the Twelvers who believe that Musa al-Kāẓim was the *Imām* after Imam al-Sadiq. The issue became complicated because most historical sources confirm that the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq publically designated his son Isma'il as his successor. But most sources also say that Isma'il died before his father. Therefore, at the death of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Shi'ah community split into a number of factions – each following a different Imam. Many who followed Isma'il and upheld his Imamatus did not believe that Isma'il had actually died, while others affirmed Isma'il's death and followed his son Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the Imam. The group of Shi'ah known as the Isma'ilis trace the line of Imamatus through the direct descendants of Isma'il ibn Ja'far and his son Muhammad ibn Isma'il and today recognize their lineal descendant, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, as the Present, Living and Manifest Imam of Shi'i Islam.



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni
Aga Khan IV visiting his Ismaili followers in Tajikistan, 2008

In the case of the Shia Muslims, the Shia branch of Islam split and one branch of the Shia Muslims accepted the concept of the Imam in hiding, the invisible Imam, because the twelfth Imam disappeared as a very young child, and our

branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed and that is why they are known as Ismailis. And that branch of the family has continued today hereditarily and that is why there is a living Imam for the Ismaili Muslims.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
CBC Man Alive Interview, October 8, 1986
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/>

The question of who was the rightful successor to the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is of extreme importance. This is because the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was the last Imam recognized by both Isma'ili and Twelver Shi'is. The Imam Ja'far is also revered by Sunni Muslims as one of the great scholars of hadith as he narrates at least 2000 traditions which are found in the nine major books of Sunni hadith, with 110 of these found within the six canonical collections (Sihah al-Sitta). He was the teacher of four founders of Islamic schools of thought: Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man (d. 767), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778), and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Awza'i (d. 774). In addition, the hadith scholars and jurists Ibn Jurayj (d. 767), Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna (d. 815) and Shu'ba ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 776) also studied under him. He was descended from Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib through his father and from Abu Bakr on his mother's side. The overwhelming majority of Sufi chains of lineage go through him. It was during his time that many central theological doctrines of Shi'ism began to crystallize. He has been designated "Shaykh al-'Ulama'" and "Imam al-Fuqaha'" for his noble rank as one of the most knowledgeable men that the Islamic world has ever seen. (Source: [Mohamad Ballan](#)).



Portrait of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq embracing his student. Source: British Library.

For Shi'i and Sufi Muslims, the true successor of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is the inheritor of his authority, knowledge, and spiritual legacy; and the true lineage of Imamatus continues the spiritual virtues, mystical teachings and authoritative knowledge of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

This article presents a series of Seven Proofs that the *Imamah* after Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq went to his son Isma'il and the Isma'ili Imams from his lineal descendants. To grasp the significance of this article and the importance of the Imamatus in Shi'i Islam, we highly recommend our readers review the following three articles, in order:

- ["He who is above all else": The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)
- [Proof of Prophethood: A Philosophical Argument for the Prophethood of Muhammad](#)
- [The Spiritual Authority of the Prophet Muhammad](#)
- [The Concept of Imamatus in the Quran](#)
- [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#)
- [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#)

Summary of the Seven Proofs

Below is a summary of the proofs. Please read beyond for the evidence for each, or click on the proof number to jump directly to a specific proof.

Taken individually or collectively, these Seven Proofs demonstrate that the legitimate successor and true Imam after the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far and that the Present and Living Imam of all Shi'i Muslims must be the direct lineal descendant of Isma'il ibn Ja'far.

Proof #1 Imam Ja'far designated Mawlana Isma'il as the next Imam by the rule of *nass* as per Twelver, Ismaili, Sunni and academic sources Imam Ja'far designated Mawlana Isma'il as the next Imam by the rule of *nass* as per Twelver, Ismaili, Sunni and academic sources.

Proof #2 The only way to deny the *nass* of Mawlana Isma'il is through contradictory *hadiths* about Bada' presented in Twelver *hadith* books The only way to deny the *nass* of Mawlana Isma'il is through contradictory *hadiths* presented in later Twelver *hadith* books.

Proof #3 Isma'il's death before Imam Ja'far is not confirmed and may have been staged — to protect him — as he was reportedly seen by eyewitnesses after his alleged death Isma'il's death before Imam Ja'far is not confirmed and may have been staged to protect him — as he was reportedly seen by eyewitnesses after his alleged death.

Proof #4 Even if Isma'il had died before his father, the *Nass* upon Imam Isma'il from Imam Ja'far means that the Imamatus continues ONLY in Muhammad, the son of Isma'il, whom the latter appointed as his own successor; the Sunna of God concerning prior Prophets and Imams affirms that Imamatus continues in hereditary

succession. Even if Isma'il had died before his father, the Imamatus continued in Isma'il's son, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, whom Isma'il had appointed as his own successor.

Proof #5 The Earliest Shi'i hadiths lack the mention of Twelve Imams but instead predict the Fatimid Ismaili lineage of Imams The Earliest Shi'i *hadiths* lack the mention of Twelve Imams but instead predict exactly the first eighteen Imams in the Isma'ili lineage of Imamatus.

Proof #6 With the exception of the Nizari Ismaili Imamatus, all other Shi'i Imamatus lineages have hidden Imams. This contradicts the Qur'anic definition of Imamatus which requires the Imam always be present and manifest (mubin) in the world With the exception of the Nizari Ismaili Imamatus, all other Shi'i Imamatus lineages have hidden Imams. This contradicts the Qur'anic definition of Imamatus which requires the Imam always be present and manifest (*mubin*) in the world.

Proof #7 Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of Shi'i Islam in direct, documented, lineal descent from Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. The Aga Khan's Lineage is Historically documented in this article. As the only present (hadir), manifest (mubin) and living (mawjud) hereditary Imam, with a documented and validated lineage, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's very existence is itself confirmation of his Imamatus and that of his ancestors Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of Shi'i Islam in direct, documented, lineal descent from Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. As the only present (*hadir*), manifest (*mubin*) and living (*mawjud*) hereditary Imam, with a documented and validated lineage, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's very existence is itself confirmation of his Imamatus and that of his ancestors.

HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT IMAM ISMA'IL B. JA'FAR

- Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far was one of the two eldest sons of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq; his mother was a descendant of Imam al-Hasan; Isma'il and 'Abdullah al-Aftah were full brothers with the same father (Imam al-Sadiq) and Fatimah bint al-Husayn — a fact attested in multiple Twelver sources (al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shi'a*, 68; al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*, Vol. 2, 209; Yusuf b. Hatim al-'Amili, *al-Dar al-Nazim fi Manaqib al-A'imma*, 643; al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 48. 241).
- **Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far referred to himself as Ahl al-Bayt.** A doctor once offered to treat his illness with wine, to which Imam Isma'il replied: "Wine is forbidden. ***We are the Ahl al-Bayt (ahlu baytin) who do not heal ourselves through what is forbidden.***" (al-Kulayni, al-Kāfi, Vol. 6, 414, Hadith No. 5; [Read the Arabic Text](#); in the Arabic text the word "ahlu baytin" appears in the indefinite form without 'al' because it is the subject of a relative clause, but the meaning is still "the Ahl al-Bayt"; other Twelver Hadith in al-Kafi use the indefinite form "ahlu baytin" to describe later Twelver Imams like Muhammad Jawad here: [Read Arabic Text](#); Imam al-Sadiq uses "ahlu baytin" for himself as recorded by al-Majlisi: [Read Arabic Text](#))

- Imam Isma'il used to give religious rulings to the Shi'ah community on his own authority (without referring to Imam Ja'far) and two of these rulings are recorded in the Twelver hadith compilation al-Kafi ([al-Kāfī, Vol. 7, 388, Hadith No. 2](#); and [Vol. 7, 32, Hadith No. 21](#); the — that a woman has reached maturity for marriage at age 10 — is consistent with premodern Twelver Fiqh; see [see Sayyid Ali Imran, Legal Age of Bulugh For Girls](#))
- Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far reported several hadiths from the prior Imams. One important example is that **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq entrusted Imam Isma'il to keep and preserve Imam Zayn al-'Abidin's al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya (the famous collection of supplications)**. This is mentioned in the transmission chain of the Sahifa as follows: *"Then he said to his son: Stand up, O Isma'il, and bring out the supplications which I commanded you to memorize and safeguard! So Isma'il stood up, and he brought out a Sahifa just like the Sahifa which Yahya ibn Zayd had handed over to me. Abu 'Abd Allah kissed it and placed it upon his eyes. He said: This is the handwriting of my father and the dictation of my grandfather (upon both of them be peace), while I was a witness."* (al-Sahifa al-Kamaliyya al-Sajjadiyya, [Read the Arabic Text](#))
- Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far also reported prayers and supplications from his grandfather Imam al-Baqir. In one such report, Imam al-Baqir affectionately referred to Imam Isma'il as "my son" (see Al-Sayyid al-Burujirdi (1875-1961), Jāmi' Ahādīth al-Shi'a, [Read the Arabic Text](#))
- **Imam Isma'il was deputized by his father Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq on several occasions** and travelled with the Imam on some journeys; this was similar to how Imam al-Sadiq accompanied his father Imam al-Baqir to visit the Abbasid court. On one occasion, the Abbasid governor's chief of police murdered Imam Ja'far's follower al-Mu'ala b. Khunays. In response, **Imam Ja'far asked Imam Isma'il to enact the Qur'anic law of retaliation (qisas) and execute the murderer: "O Isma'il, it is your matter to take care of."** Then Isma'il went out with his sword and killed him in his gathering. (Rijal al-Kashshi, [Read the Arabic Text](#))

Proof #1

Imam Ja'far designated Mawlana Isma'il as the next Imam by the rule of *nass* as per Twelver, Ismaili, Sunni and academic sources

Every Imam designates the succeeding Imam from among his descendants and this designation is called *naṣṣ*. The identity of the next Imam is determined by the Command of God and disclosed by the Imam of the Time.

[The Imam Muhammad] Al-Bāqir, as noted, categorically maintained that that, contrary to the belief of some groups, the Imām had to be divinely appointed and that his appointment had to be clear and precise, i.e. by *naṣṣ al-jalī* (explicit designation).

Arzina Lalani, (*Early Shi'i Thought*, 77)

الإمام يعرف الإمام الذي من بعده فيوصي إليه

The Imam knows the one who will be the Imam after him, and so he passes his inheritance on to him.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Al-Kulayni [d. 941], *Usūl al-Kāfi* Vol. 1, p. 277, [Read the Arabic Text](#))

1A

The earliest historical sources and the majority of sources — both Ismā'īli and Twelver — bear witness that Imam Ja'far designated his son Isma'il as the next Imām

TWELVER SOURCES (LATE 3RD/9TH CENTURY/EARLY 4TH/10TH CENTURY)

There are **seven distinct Twelver Shi'i reports that narrate Imām Ja'far's appointment of Ismā'il as his successor to the Imamāt**. These reports appear in multiple Twelver sources including heresiographies and hadith compilations. The Twelver reports are presented below according to the dates of the sources:

First Twelver Report: Hasan ibn Musa al-Nawbakhti (writing before 286/899), *Firaq al-Shi'a*, ed. Ritter (1931 Istanbul), p. 55 – quoted below:

...when Ja'far ibn Muhammad designated (*ashāra ila*) the Imamāt of his son Isma'il...

Hasan ibn Musa al-Nawbakhti (writing before 899), *Firaq al-Shi'a*, ed. Ritter, Istanbul 1931, p. 55; [Read the Online Arabic Text](#))

Second Twelver Report: Sa'd ibn 'Abdullah al-Qummi (writing before 286/899), *Kitab al-maqālat wa'l-firaq*, ed. Muhammad J. Mashkur. Tehran 1963, p. 78 – quoted below:

...when Ja'far ibn Muhammad designated (*ashāra ila*) the Imamāt of his son Isma'il ibn Ja'far.

Sa'd ibn 'Abdullah al-Qummi (writing before 286/899; d. 914), (*Kitab al-maqalat wa'l-firaq*, ed. Muhammad J. Mashkur, Tehran, 1963, 78)

Third Twelver Report: 'Ali b. Babawayh al-Qummi (d. ca. 328-329/939-941), *al-Imāma wa l-tabṣīra*, (Madrassa Imam al-Mahdi, Qum 1404/1984 | Mu'assasa Aal al-Bayt, Beirut 1407/1987), p. 73 / p. 210 [Hadith #63] and reports Imam Ja'far telling his son 'Abdullah that his full-brother Mawlana Isma'il possesses the Light (*al-nur*) of Imamāt in his face and that Isma'il is from his [the Imam's] own soul (*nafsi*). The latter is identical to how Prophet Muhammad said that "Ali is from my own soul (*nafsi*).":

Imam Ja'far [Abu 'Abdullah] was reprimanding and admonishing 'Abdullah [his son], saying: 'Why can't you be more like your brother?' [By God, I recognize the Light \(*al-nur*\) in his face.](#) 'Abdullah said: 'Aren't my father and his father the same? Aren't my mother and his mother the same?' Then [Imam Ja'far \[Abu 'Abdullah\] said: 'Verily, Isma'il is from my own soul \(*nafsi*\) while you are my son.'](#)

[٦٣] محمد بن يحيى ، عن محمد بن الحسين ، عن جعفر بن بشير ،
عن فضيل ، عن طاهر ، عن ابي عبدالله عليه السلام ، قال : كَانَ يُلَوِّمُ
عَبْدَ اللَّهِ وَيُعَاتِيهِ وَيَعِظُهُ وَيَقُولُ : مَا يَمْنَعُكَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مِثْلَ أَخِيكَ ؟ فَوَاللَّهِ إِنِّي
لَأَعْرِفُ النُّورَ مِنْ وَجْهِهِ ! فَقَالَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ : لَيْسَ أَبِي وَأَبُوهُ وَاحِدًا ؟ وَأُمِّي
وَأُمُّهُ وَاحِدَةٌ ؟ فَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ : إِنَّ إِسْمَاعِيلَ مِنْ نَفْسِي وَأَنْتَ
ابْنِي .

[٦٤] وعنه ، عن محمد بن الحسين ، عن وهيب بن حفص ، عن أبي
بصير ، قال : كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ جَالِسًا بَيْنِي ، فَسَأَلْتُهُ عَنْ
مَسْأَلَةٍ ، وَعَبْدُ اللَّهِ جَالِسٌ عِنْدَهُ ، فَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ : يَا

[٦٢] لم اجد له تخريجاً .

[٦٣] لم أعثر على تخريجه بطريق المؤلف .

لكن الكليني رواه في الكافي (ج ١ ص ٣١٠) عن (محمد بن يحيى) مثله . ورواه
المفيد في إرشاد العباد (ص ٣٢٥) عن (الفضيل) عن (طاهر) بن محمد .

[٦٤] لم أقف على موضع تخريجه .

Image Note: This image is from the 1987 published edition of *al-Imāma wa l-tabṣīra* edited by the Twelver scholar Sayyid Muhammad Rida al-Husayni al-Jalali published in Beirut, p. 210, where the Hadith correctly reads “Verily, Isma’il is from my own soul”. However, in the 1984 edition of *al-Imāma wa l-tabṣīra* published in Qum [[read the Arabic text online](#)], the Editor arbitrarily REMOVED the name of Isma’il from the published text, but he admits in Footnote #7 that the “Asl” (the 2 primary manuscripts) of this Hadith compilation DO say “Inna Isma’il” instead of “Innahu”;

Note: The Twelver Shi’i *hadith* compiler al-Kulayni (d. 941) quoted the above *hadith* with the same chain as Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi in his *Usul al-Kafi* (ed. ‘Ali Akbar al-Ghifari, 5th edition, 1984, Vol. 1, 310, Hadith No. 10). But Kulayni removed the name of Imam Isma’il b. Ja’far from the

original *hadith* and instead presented the **hadith** as evidence for Musa al-Kazim's Imamate. [Read the Arabic Text of al-Kulayni's doctored version of the narration.](#)

Reception History of Third Twelver Report: The Twelver *hadith* scholars including al-Kulayni have always quoted this same report (without the name of Isma'il) as clear evidence for the explicit appointment (*nass*) of Musa al-Kazim to the Imamate; see: al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujja*, Ch. 71, No. 10; Shaykh al-Mufid (338-413/948-1022), *Kitab al-Irshad, Vol. 2, 209*; Shaykh al-Tabarsi (d. 548/1153), *l'lam al-wara bi-A'lam al-huda, Vol. 2, 13*; Muhammad Salih al-Mazandarani (d. 1081/1671), *Sharh Usul al-Kafi, Vol. 7, 179-180*; 'Allamah al-Majlisi (1037-1110/1628-1699), *Mirat al-'Uqul, Vol. 3, 336*. Both al-Mazandarani and al-Majlisi argue that the specific words used by the Imam for his son – “he is from my soul (*min nafsi*)” – **are an explicit designation (*nass*) of the Imamate:**

[The Imam's] saying: “he is from my soul (*innahu min nafsi*) while you are my son” means “you are related to me by bodily lineage while he is related to me both bodily and spiritual lineage such that his soul is like my soul, his knowledge is like my knowledge, his character is like my character, his action is like my action” extending to the other attributes of perfection without any disparity... His saying “I see the Light within his face” and “he is from my soul” is a clear indication that he is the locus of the Imamate to the exclusion of others.

Muhammad Salih al-Mazandarani (d. 1081/1671), (*Sharh Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 6, 179-180)

“He is from my own soul” means “from my substance and within him is my character and my character is my inclination.” This expression unrestrictedly conveys the complete unification in perfections, virtues, and degrees of rank, and the apex of distinguishment just as the Prophet said: “‘Ali is from me and I am from ‘Ali.” The upshot is that “your relation is by bodily lineage and his relation is through bodily, spiritual and intellectual connection together. Since he was of this station from me, then he is more deserving of the Imamate than the rest of the children.” Thus, it is an explicit designation () for his Imamate.

'Allamah al-Majlisi (1037-1110/1628-1699), (*Mirat al-'Uqul*, Vol. 3, 336)

Fourth Twelver Report: 'Ali al-Rida [7th Twelver Imam], as quoted in Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. ca. 340/951) in his *Rijal al-Kashshi*, p. 772 ([Read the Arabic Text](#)) reports how after the death of Musa al-Kazim, his son 'Ali al-Rida debated with some people and explained to them that the Shi'i followers of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq differed over the question of his successor. In his response to some questions, **'Ali al-Rida admitted that Isma'il had been designated by Imam Ja'far as his successor and that Isma'il was the Imam during his lifetime:**

He [al-Rida] said: “They did not use to agree about him [Musa al-Kadim]. How could they agree about him when your leaders and elders used to say about Isma'il – even while they saw him drink so-and-so – they were still saying ‘this one more suitable’. They said: “He [Ja'far al-Sadiq] did not enter Isma'il in the

testament.” [He \[al-Rida\] said: “He \[Ja’far al-Sadiq\] had entered him in the Book of Sadaqa while he was an Imam.”](#)

Fifth Twelver Report: ‘Ali al-Hadi [10th Twelver Imam], as related by Sa’d ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qummi in Shaykh al-Tusi, Kitab al-Ghaybah, confirms the appointment of Isma’il. The tenth Imam of the Twelver Shi’ah, Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali al-Hadi, designated his eldest son Abu Ja’far Muhammad as his successor but Abu Ja’far Muhammad died within his lifetime. After his death, ‘Ali al-Hadi designated another son, Abu Muhammad Hasan al-‘Askari, and referred back to the Imam Ja’far’s designation of Isma’il ibn Ja’far to justify his decision – directly confirming that Imam Ja’far designated and appointed Isma’il as the next Imam. The hadith report in Tusi’s book meets the highest standards of Twelver rijal certification: al-Tusi quotes this report in two places on the authority of Sa’d ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qummi (one of the earliest and most reputable Imami scholars), who narrates the report from Abu Hashim Dawud al-Ja’fari – the most trusted companion of two Twelver Imams – al-Hadi and al-‘Askari – and who has a spotless reputation in Twelver sources. Tusi’s source for this report was a lost work of Sa’d ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qummi titled “al-Diya’ fi l-radd ‘ala al-Muhammadiyah wa al-Ja’fariyya” ([Read More](#)).

Sa’d ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qummi narrated from Abu Hashim Dawud al-Ja’fari narrated: I was with Abu l-Hasan (‘Ali al-Hadi) at the time of the death of his son Abu Ja’far (Muhammad b. ‘Ali) – whom he had appointed and designated (*wa-qad kana ashara ilayhi wa-dalla ‘alayhi*). So then I thought to myself saying: “This is the story of Abu Ibrahim (Musa al-Kazim) and Isma’il. Abu l-Hasan (‘Ali al-Hadi) came to me and said: “Yes O Abu Hashim, a new matter (*bada*) appeared to God concerning Abu Ja’far [Muhammad b. ‘Ali] and He replaced him with Abu Muhammad [Hasan al-‘Askari], just as a new matter appeared to God (*bada’a lillahi*) concerning Isma’il after Abu ‘Abdullah (Ja’far al-Sadiq) designated him (*dalla ‘alayhi*) and appointed him (*nasabahu*).

Shaykh al-Tusi, (*Kitab al-Ghaybah*, Part 1, 106, Hadith No. 84, [Read the Arabic Text](#); 22, Hadith No. 167; [Read the Arabic Text](#))

Narrated by Abu Hashim al-Ja’fari: I was with Abu l-Hasan after his son Abu Ja’far [Muhammad b. ‘Ali] passed away and I thought within myself to say: “These two, meaning Abu Ja’far and Abu Muhammad in this time are similar to Abu l-Hasan Musa and Isma’il son of Ja’far b. Muhammad. Verily, the two of those two is like the story of these two. Because Abu Muhammad came after Abu Ja’far.” Then Abu l-Hasan turned to me before I spoke and said: “Yes, O Abu Hashim. A new affair appeared to God (*bada’a lillahi*) regarding Abu Muhammad after Abu Ja’far which was not known to Him (*ma lam yakun yu’rafu lahu*) similar to what appeared to Him (*kama bada’a lahu*) in/regarding Musa after the passing of Isma’il by which his condition was unveiled. It is like what your soul narrated to you even though the falsifiers dislike it: Abu Muhammad will be my successor.”

(Narrated by Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari, in al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujja, Chapter 75, Hadith No. 10; [Read the Arabic Text](#))

The above *hadith* in Twelver books shows that even during the lifetime of the tenth Twelver Imam, the Twelver community – irrespective of the questionable idea of *badā'* [to be dealt with below] – had expected that Isma'il was going to be the Imam succeeding Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. The fact that the case of Isma'il was cited by the tenth Twelver Imam to justify his own second designation after the death of his first appointed successor, confirms the Twelver Imams knew Isma'il was the designated successor for the Imamatus. A contemporary Twelver scholar John Andaluso has closely analyzed the above reports about the so-called Bada' comparing the designations of Isma'il b. Ja'far and Muhammad b. 'Ali and likewise argues that they prove the historicity of the appointment of Isma'il [here](#).

Sixth Twelver Report: al-Khasibi (d. 346/957) in his famous work *al-Hidaya al-Kubra* [Read the Arabic Text](#) reports a narration from two of his teachers that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq made Isma'il his Inheritor (*wasi*) and proclaimed him as the Imam after him. Al-Khasibi's family was very close to the 11th Twelver imam Hasan al-'Askari and he was a contemporary of al-Kulayni (d. 941). Al-Khasibi's *Hidaya* is a revered text in the Nusayri-Alawi tradition and al-Majlisi quotes many *hadith* from him: "al-Khasibi appears in Shi'i literature as an important transmitter of traditions. Shi'i traditions on his authority were recorded in the voluminous canonical *Bihar al-anwar* composed by Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1267/1700)... Al-Khasibi's *Kitab al-Hidaya* (see Appendix 1) is mentioned in the list of books 'around which the millstones of the Shi'a turn' and "there is no Shi'i household from which they are absent" (Yaron Friedman, *The Nusayri-'Alawi*; Leiden: Brill, 2010, 28). Al-Khasibi reported Isma'il's appointment as Imam as follows:

al-Husayn b. Hamdan (al-Khasibi) narrates: I said to al-Husayn b. Thawaba and to Abu 'Abdullah al-Shaykh who descended upon him: "Both of you narrated to me this narration. If someone else narrates to me, then I leave your narration and accept that one, but I have an argument that I say." They both said: "Bring what you have. Then I said to them: "This is what al-Maymuna said: Abu 'Abdullah al-Sadiq made a testament of succession (*awsa*) to his son Isma'il and told about him and informed that he is the Imam after him."

Abu 'Abdullah al-Husayn b. Hamdan al-Khasibi (d. 346/957), *al-Hidaya al-Kubra*, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Balagh, 1991, 385)

Seventh Twelver Report: Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 573/1178) in his *al-Khara'ij wa l-jara'ih* ([Read the Arabic Text](#)) reports a narration where a companion of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq testifies before the Imam that God has commanded the Imam's followers to obey his son Isma'il just as they were required to obey the Imam's ancestors; in response, Imam Ja'far confirms his follower's statement as "sufficient". This report is also found in Yusuf b. Hatim al-'Amili's (d. 664/1265) *al-Dar al-Nazim fi Manaqib al-A'imma* and al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar* (see full citations/links below). Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi is an extremely honoured and

reputable scholar in Twelver Shi'i [scholarship](#): Allama Amini stated al-Rawandi is one of the heads of Shi'a scholars, chosen of the sect, one of the jurisprudence and hadith masters, and an intelligent man in knowledge and literature. No fault is seen in his plenty of works, his honors, his efforts and religious works, his good deeds, and great books. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Khwansari has praised al-Rawandi as a jurist, a prominent and reliable person having diverse works; 'Abd Allah b. 'Isa Afandi said al-Rawandi was a Shaykh, pioneer in jurisprudence, an honorable person, familiar with hadiths and poetry, muhaddith and theologian; Shaykh 'Abbas Qumi has written that al-Rawandi was a scholar, jurist, muhaddith and researcher. He absolutely is one of the great muhaddiths of Shi'a.

Mufaddal b. Marthad said: 'I said to Abu 'Abdullah (al-Sadiq): "God has ordained upon us ('*alayna*) obedience (*al-ta'a*) to your son Isma'il just as He ordained it to your ancestors." Isma'il was alive at that time. Then he said: "That is sufficient (*yakfi dhalika*).” Thus, I thought that he was ordering prudence (*taqiyya*) on me. Isma'il died not long after that.'

Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 573/1178), (*al-Khara'ij wa l-jara'ih*, Vol. 2. 637, No. 39; see also Yusuf b. Hatim al-'Amili (d. 664/1265), *al-Dar al-Nazim fi Manaqib al-A'imma*, 644, [Read Here](#); al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 47, p. 250, No. 21, [Read Here](#))

ISMAILI SOURCES (MID 10TH CENTURY)

The extant Ismaili reports for the appointment of Imam Isma'il by Imam Ja'far come from Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), who was the *Bab*(gate) of Imam al-Mu'izz, which means that he was the highest ranking Ismaili Da'i and second only to the Imam himself. Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman was trained by his father Ibn Hawshab (d. 914) known as Mansur al-Yaman. Ibn Hawshab was originally a follower of Hasan al-'Askari and left his circle after al-'Askari died childless. Ibn Hawshab was trained by the 10th Ismaili Imam, the predecessor of Imam al-Mahdi, whom he met in person on several occasions as recorded in his memoir *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*. The chain of transmission for Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman's reports about Imam Isma'il by Imam Ja'far goes back through his father Ibn Hawshab, who himself was informed by the 10th Ismaili Imam, whose knowledge is directly inherited from his ancestor Imam Isma'il. Additionally, Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman's works were approved and overseen by Imam al-Mu'izz.

And when the Command of God came to him [Imam Ja'far] to hand over [his high office], he summoned his dignitaries and specially deserving followers, just as it was done by other Imams and Prophets before him, and handed over his authority to his son Isma'il, by the Command of God and His inspiration of him, making them witnesses of this, his appointment. Thus, Isma'il became the Gate to God (*bab Allah*) and His prayer niche (*mihrab*), the repository of His Light, the link between Him and His creatures – both we and you admit this. And then his body was caused to disappear during the lifetime of his father, as

a mystery, intended to protect him from his enemies, and as a test for his followers.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa'*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 275-276)

It is necessary to mention now Isma'il's acceptance of the authority from his father. We shall only say what no one can deny, except the aggressive heretics who suppress the right belief in their hearts and advance impious theories in the hope of 'extinguishing the Light of God...But God shall make His Light triumph, even if the infidels shall be displeased.' This is why Imam Ja'far, when his health became impaired, summoned the most trusted amongst his followers, and those members of his family who were still alive, and did what his predecessors had done, i.e. handed over his authority to Isma'il. Thus, Isma'il became the Gate to God, His praying niche (*mihrab*), the Abode of His Light, and the link between Him and his creatures, the Lieutenant of God on earth."

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa'*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 290-291)

It is similarly narrated from Ja'far as-Sadiq that he said: 'Even if someone should come before you with the head of this, my son [Isma'il], do not doubt, nevertheless, that he is to be the Imam after me.' And on another occasion he said, while he, Isma'il ibn Ja'far, was present: 'He is the Imam after me, and what you learn from him is just the same as if you have learnt it from myself.'

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa'*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 292)

We narrate [the tradition] (*rawayna*) and you narrate [the tradition] (*rawaytum*) that when [Isma'il] the son of the Imam [Ja'far] completed seven years of age, the Master (*sahib*) of the Time (*waqt*) declared him (*'arafa-hu*) the Master of Religion (*sahib al-din*) and his heir apparent among sons. And he guarded him from his other of his sons, kept him away from the contact with the public, and his education went on under his own supervision.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa'*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 296)

The faction called Isma'iliyya say: "The Imam after Ja'far is Isma'il b. Ja'far." They claim that Ja'far designated him during his lifetime and directed the Shi'a towards him. [The Shi'a] collectively agreed that he is the Imam after his father and that Ja'far imposed that upon them during his lifetime and commanded them with it. Then they believe in the Imamate of Muhammad b. Isma'il after him. They deny the Imamate of the other sons of Ja'far. They also say that there is no Prophet or Messenger except that he has a Vicegerent (*khalifa*) during his lifetime and after his death and God commanded His Friends with that.... Similar to [previous Prophets and Imams], Ja'far b. Muhammad for twenty-five years did not have any sons except Isma'il and 'Abdullah and he indicated to Isma'il and designated him such that many people among the

companions of Ja'far within his lifetime believed in his Imamatus. He did not deny them when a group believed that Isma'il did not die during his lifetime and that Ja'far concealed him as a precaution. They say: 'How is this possible when he [Ja'far] imposed his command upon us and commanded us to obey him [Isma'il].' They contended that Ja'far did not marry women except the mother of [Isma'il and 'Abdullah] and did not take a concubine – just like the Messenger of God did not marry anyone except Khadija and did not take any [wife] until after she died. Likewise the action of God of not taking any [wife] over the mother of Isma'il – she was Fatima the daughter of his uncle – until her death makes known that there is a Proof (*hujja*) among her sons.

Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 322/934), *Kitab al-Zina*, ed. H. Hamdani, vol. 2, Cairo: 1956-57, 63-64)

SUNNI AND ZAYDI SOURCES

Ja'far designated his son Isma'il to the Imamate after him; when Isma'il died during the life of his father, we learned that he had designated his son merely to guide the people to choose as Imam his son Muhammad b. Isma'il".

'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi (d. 1037), (*al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, tr. Kate Chambers Seelye as "Moslem Schisms and Sects", 65)

These hold that Isma'il was the designated Imām after Ja'far, as the sons of Ja'far also agreed.

'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, (*Muslim Sects*, 144)

As far as Isma'il ibn Ja'far as-Sadiq, he was given the patronym of Abu Muhammad, and his mother was Fatimah bint al-Husayn al-Athram bin al-Hasan bin Ali ibn Abi Talib, and was known as Al-'Araj. He was the eldest son of his father, and the most beloved by him; his father loved him intensely.

Ibn 'Uṭbah – Sunni scholar, (quoted in *Ja'far al-Subhani Buhuth fi al-Milal*, 72)

ACADEMIC HISTORIANS

The vast majority of academics who specialize in Islamic studies and Shi'i studies have concluded that Imam Ja'far historically appointed his son Mawlana Isma'il as his successor to the Imamate. Several quotations in the field of academic Shi'i and Ismaili studies are presented below. All of the below quotes are from academic peer reviewed books and journal articles that have been vetted by the normal academic review process.

According to the overwhelming majority of the available sources, both sectarian and of their opponents, Imam Ja'far appointed as his successor his eldest son Isma'il, by his first wife, a highly aristocratic lady, great grand-daughter of Hasan.

W. Ivanow, (*Ismailis and Qarmatians*, 57)

Ja'far had named his second son, Ismā'īl, as his successor... In the light of the statements of Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh, there can be no doubt about the reality of this nomination, on which the Ismailis base their claim to the true imamate.... In fact, the Twelver Shiites, who hold Ja'far's rightful successor to be Mūsā al-Kāẓim, generally admit that Ja'far first decided on Ismā'īl as his successor.

Wilferd Madelung, "The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine", (*Shii Studies Review* 2 (2008) 62-155: 62-63; originally published as "Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre,". *Der Islam* 37 (1961): 43-135)

Our oldest and presumably most reliable authorities agree that Ja'far designated his second son Isma'il to succeed him as Imam.

Paul Walker, (*The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 1998, Vol 1. 121)

The trial case for the Shi'a in all periods that were to follow was that of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq who, by most reports, publicly designated his second son Isma'il as the person to succeed him. This fact was accepted as the formal act of *nass* required by Shiite theory and was therefore a designation by an infallible imam of the new Imam who would inherit the full powers of the imamate. Isma'il was thus not only Ja'far's choice but was God's choice as well. However, to the extreme chagrin of Ja'far's numerous, deeply committed followers, Isma'il died before his father. That Ja'far's choice of Isma'il had been a mistake could not be admitted by his Shi'a under any circumstances, although as long as the father lived there was hope of an explanation and a correction to this perception of error. Apparently, though, Ja'far did not appoint another in place of Isma'il and the theoretical argument by which he might have done so is, generally speaking, missing. Imami writers like al-Nawbakhti admitted as much even a hundred years after the fact... Those who formed the main party of what became the Ismailis refused either of these possibilities and claimed instead that the designation of Isma'il was not only sound, no matter the early death of Isma'il, but, because Ja'far's choice was correct, the succession necessarily moved thereafter beyond Isma'il to his own son Muhammad.

Paul Walker, ("Succession to Rule in Shiite Caliphate", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 32 [1995], 241)

According to the majority of the available sources, he [Imām Ja'far] had designated his second son Ismā'īl (the eponym of the Isma'īliyya) as his successor, by the rule of the *nass*. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the Ismā'īliyya and which should have settled the question of al Ṣādiq's succession in due.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 88; First Edition, 1990, 93)

There seems to be general agreement among the Shi'i sources that, at first, as-Sadiq had intended his eldest son Ismā'īl to succeed him.

Moojan Momen, (*An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 1985, 55)

In addition to the above specialized publications, numerous academics in related fields have accepted and repeated the conclusion that Imam Ja'far historically appointed his son Isma'il as his successor to the Imamate. These academics include: Abdulaziz Sachedina (*Islamic Messianism*, 1981, 153), Alexander Knysch (*Islamic in Historical Perspective*, 2016, 193), Amira K. Bennison (*The Wiley*

Blackwell History of Islam, 2018, Ch. 5), Vernon O. Egger (A History of the Muslim World to 1405, 76), John Renard (Seven Doors to Islam, 199, 15)

1B

Mawlana Isma'il was the most beloved son of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and most of the Shi'ah of Imām Ja'far believed that Mawlana Isma'il was his successor

“Abū ‘Abdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] had ten children... Isma'il was the eldest of them. Abū ‘Abdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] had intense love, affection, and devotion for him, and the people believed that he would be the rectifier [al-qā'im] after him, and that he would be his successor. This was because he was the eldest of the brothers, as well as his father's intense inclination towards him, and the great nobility which his father bestowed upon him.

(Shaykh al-Mufid [d. 1022], *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 431; Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar* 47:241; [Read the Arabic Text](#))

As reported in the early proto-Twelvev hadith book *Kitāb al-Mahasin* compiled by al-Barqi (d. ca. 888-894), **Imām Ja'far referred to his son Isma'il as the “my beloved” (*habibati*)** ([See the Arabic Text](#))

It appears that most of the followers of al-Ṣādiq were expecting the latter's eldest son, Ismā'īl, whose mother was a granddaughter of Zaynu'l-Ābidīn, the Fourth Imām, to succeed to the Imamate.

Moojan Momen, (*An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 39)

1C

The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq did not designate or appoint any other son as his successor to the Imamate and Twelver Shi'i authors conceded this

The earliest Imami Shi'i heresiographers – al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi writing before 286/899 – FAIL to affirm or offer any evidence that Imam Ja'far actually appointed Musa by nass. Instead, they admit that the mass of the Shi'a of Imam Ja'far including the most prominent leaders (mashayik) and scholars (fuqaha') of the Shi'a recognized the Imamate of 'Abdullah al-Aftah:

The fifth faction are those who said that the Imamate after Ja'far is in his son 'Abdullah b. Ja'far al-Aftah. This is [because] he was the eldest of his sons in age after the passing of Ja'far and sat in the majlis of his father and claimed the Imamate and testament (*wasiyya*) of his father. They argued through a hadith they narrated from Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far b. Muhammad that he said the Imamate is in the eldest son of the Imam. The majority among those who believed in the Imamate of his father Ja'far b. Muhammad inclined towards 'Abdullah and the belief in his Imamate – except for a small group who tested 'Abdullah with questions concerning the permissible and the forbidden among prayer, alms, and other matters and they did not find that he possessed knowledge. The faction who affirm the Imamate of 'Abdullah b. Ja'far is called the Fathiyya and they are called that because 'Abdullah was broad-headed and some of them say that he was flat footed and some of them narrated that they

were attributed to their leader among the people of Kufa called ‘Abdullah b. Fatih. The learned shaykhs of the Shi’a (*mashayikh al-shi’a*) and their jurists inclined towards this faction and they did not doubt that the Imamate is in ‘Abdullah b. Ja’far and in his descendants after him. He did not leave any successor of mention, so the mass of the Fathiyya withdrew from the belief in his Imamate to join the small group who were upon the belief in the Imamate of Musa b. Ja’far.

Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti, (*Firaq al-Shi’a*, Online edition: 77-78, [Read the Arabic Text](#))

Both al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi state that the ONLY reason why a small group eventually recognized Musa as their Imam is because a) ‘Abdullah al-Aftah failed to answer their questions to their satisfaction; and b) ‘Abdullah al-Aftah died 70 days after Imam Ja’far, after which most of his followers joined Musa’s party (see al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, 77-79, [Read the Arabic Text](#))

The most prominent followers of Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq, after his death, did not recognize or support the Imamate of Musa al-Kazim: Zurara b. A’yan, Abu Basir al-Muradi, Burayd, and Muhammad b. Muslim – described by Imam al-Sadiq as “tenth pins of the world” – did not recognize Musa as the successor of al-Sadiq. Zurara (see below) died without recognizing al-Sadiq’s successor; Abu Basir, who received special knowledge (‘ilm) from Imam al-Sadiq, criticized Musa al-Kazim for teaching things contradictory to Imam al-Sadiq, saying: “I think the knowledge of our companion (Musa) has not matured yet.” Burayd and Muhammad b. Muslim were known as the “Apostles” of Imam al-Sadiq and named by the Imam as the “Foremost” (al-sabiqun) and “Nearest” (al-muqarrabun) to God. Both men failed to recognize Musa al-Kazim as the successor of Imam al-Sadiq. Other prominent disciples of Imam al-Sadiq who did not follow Musa as the next Imam include: Abad b. ‘Uthman al-Bajali, ‘Abdullah b. Bukayr, and Yunus b. Zibyan. (see Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, “The Imam-Shi’i Movement in the Time of Musa al-Kazim and ‘Ali al-Rida,” PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1997, 104-105)

It is certain that Ja’far did not nominate another successor after Ismā‘īl’s death, for when Ja’far died, three brothers of Ismā‘īl claimed the succession at the same time. None of them could invoke nomination by his father. The great majority of Ja’far’s adherents, including the most important scholars, initially supported ‘Abd Allāh, not Mūsā, contrary to what is generally said.

Wilferd Madelung, “The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine”, (*Shii Studies Review*, Vol 2, 2008, 62-155: 63)

Apparently, though, Ja’far did not appoint another in place of Ismā‘īl and the theoretical argument by which he might have done so is, generally speaking, missing. Imami writers like al-Nawbakhti admitted as much even a hundred years after the fact.

Paul Walker, (“Succession to Rule in Shiite Caliphate”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 32 [1995], 241)

However, the fact remains that Isma‘il was not present at the time of the Imam al-Sadiq’s death, when three other sons simultaneously claimed his succession, though none of them could convincingly prove to have been the beneficiary of a second nass. As a result, the Imam al-Sadiq’s Shi‘i partisans split into six groups, two of which constituted the nucleus of the nascent Isma‘iliyya.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, 88)

Even the most prominent Twelver *ḥadīth* narrator, Zurarah, died without even knowing who was the Imam on the death of Imām Ja‘far – as reported by al-Kashshi, one of the earliest Twelver *rijāl* authors:

After Abu ‘Abdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] died, some of the people believed that the Imāmah had passed to ‘Abd Allāh the son of Ja‘far, and they disagreed. And others said that it had passed to Abū’l-Ḥasan [Mūsa al-Kāzīm], and so Zurarah called for his son ‘Ubayd, and said: “O my son, the people are disagreeing about this affair. Those who are supporting ‘Abd Allāh are basing themselves on the report that says that Imāmah goes to the eldest son of the Imam. Get your riding camel and go to Madinah until you can bring me the truth about this affair.” Zurarah eventually became very ill, and when death approached he asked about ‘Ubayd. It was said to him: ‘He has not come.’ And so Zurarah called for a Qur’ān, and said: ‘O Allāh, indeed I bear witness to what has come with Your prophet Muḥammad and what You have revealed to him and made clear to us through his tongue, and I bear witness to what You have sent down in this Book. Indeed, my covenant and my religion is what my son ‘Ubayd will bring, and what You have explained in Your Book. If you will end my life before he comes, then this is my testimony and confession upon my own self concerning what ‘Ubayd, my son, will say. And You are my witness for that.’ And so Zurarah died.

Muhammad b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kashshī [d. 978], (*Rijāl al-Kashshi* 154)

Proof #2

The only way to deny the **nass** of Mawlana Isma'il is through contradictory **hadiths** about Bada' presented in Twelver **hadith** books

2A

To negate Mawlana Isma'il's *nass* (shown in [Proof #1 Imam Ja'far designated Mawlana Isma'il as the next Imam by the rule of nass as per Twelver, Ismaili, Sunni and academic sources](#)) and Imamatus, several Twelver *hadiths* attributed to the Imam Ja'far, as reported by al-Kulayni (d. 941) and Shaykh al-Saduq [d. 991], state the death of Isma'il was a "bada" — a new event that "appeared to Allah" (*bada'a lillah*) which was previously not known to Him. This notion of Bada' in early Twelver theology was very problematic and entails that God was unaware that Isma'il would die and so "changed His Mind" and appointed another successor in Isma'il's place.

ما بدا لله بقاء كما بدا له في إسماعيل إبنه يقول ما ظهر لله أمر كما ظهر له في إسماعيل إبنه إذ
إخترمه قبلي ليعلم بذلك أنه ليس بإمام بعدي

Imam Ja'far (allegedly) said: "Nothing appeared to God (*ma badā'a li-llāhi*) like what appeared to Him (*ma badā'a lahu*) about my son Isma'il, meaning, nothing manifested to Allah greater like what manifested to Him about my son Isma'il. For he was taken away by death before me, in order that it would be known that he was not the Imam after me."

(Shaykh al-Saduq [d. 991], *Kitab al-Tawhid*, 336; Kamal al-Dīn, 1:69; Majlisi Bihar al-Anwār, 4:109)

ما بدا لله بقاء أعظم من بقاء بدا له في إسماعيل إبنه

Imam Ja'far (allegedly) said: "Nothing has appeared to God (*ma badā'a li-llāhi*) greater than the new affair that appeared to Him (*bada'un badā'a lahu*) about my son Isma'il."

(Majlisi Bihar 4:122, 47:269; al-Saduq, Kamal al-Dīn 1:69; *Kitab al-Tawhid* 336)

ما بدا لله كما بدا له في إسماعيل إبنه يقول ما يظهر لله أمر كما يظهر له في إسماعيل إبنه إذا اخترمه
قبلي ليعلم بذلك إنه ليس بإمام بعدي

Imam Ja'far (allegedly) said: "Nothing appeared to God (*ma badā'a li-llāhi*) like what appeared to Him (*badā'a lahu*) about my son Isma'il since he was slain before me, in order that it would be known that he was not the Imam after me.

(Al-Saduq, *Kitab al-Tawhid* 66)

The content of these *hadiths* is contradictory and suggest God *did not know* that Isma'il was going to die and that his death was a new event (*badā'*) that became known to God (*badā'a li-llāhi*) when it happened. God transcends space and time and His knowledge encompasses all things – so there can be no question of an event like the death of a person being a "newly known affair" (*badā'*) for God. The Twelver academic Sachedina points out the absurdity in this idea:

It [the *badā'* doctrine] implied God's change of mind because of a new consideration, caused by the death of Ismail. However, such connotations in the doctrine of *badā'* (change of mind) raised serious questions about the nature of God's knowledge, and indirectly, about the ability of the Imams to prophesy future occurrences... Ibn Babuya cites a tradition in which the sixth Imam, al-Sadiq, says: "He who asserts that God, the Mighty and Glorious, does something new which He did not know before, – from him I disassociate myself," and then he added, "He who asserts that God, after doing something, repents concerning it, – then he, in our opinion, is a denier of God, the Almighty." But the question of the change concerning the Imamatus from Isma'il to Musa al-Kazim, the sons of al-Sadiq, remained unsettled.

Abdul-Aziz Sachedina (*Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shiism*, 153-54)

In fact, the Imām Ja'far himself completely refutes the very notion that something new can appear to God and commands us to disassociate from anyone who holds such a belief:

If someone claims that something manifests itself to Allah one day which He did not know the previous day, then disassociate from that person.

Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, (Al-Saduq, *Kamal al-Dīn*, 69)

Interestingly, the Twelvers were faced with a similar situation when their tenth Imām, 'Alī al-Naqī, originally designated his eldest son Abū Ja'far Muḥammad as his successor. However, Muḥammad died before his father and instead his brother, Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan al-'Askari, succeeded him as the eleventh Imām of the Twelvers. In this case, the Twelvers tried to explain the "change in nass" through the same idea of *badā'*:

قال علي بن مهزيار: قلت لأبي الحسن أن كان كون و أعوذ بالله فإلى من قال عهدي إلى أكبر من ولدي
'Ali ibn Mahziyar says: 'I said to Abū Al-Ḥasan [the tenth Twelver Imām]: "If something should happen, and I take refuge in Allah from that, then who will it go to?" He said: "It will go to my eldest son."

(Al-Kulayni [d. 941], *Usul Al-Kafi* 1:326)

Narrated by Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari: I was with Abu l-Hasan after his son Abu Ja'far [Muhammad b. 'Ali] passed away and I thought within myself to say: "These two, meaning Abu Ja'far and Abu Muhammad in this time are similar to Abu l-Hasan Musa and Isma'il son of Ja'far b. Muhammad. Verily, the two of those two is like the story of these two. Because Abu Muhammad came after Abu Ja'far." Then Abu l-Hasan turned to me before I spoke and said: "Yes, O Abu Hashim. A new affair appeared to God (*bada'a lillahi*) regarding Abu Muhammad after Abu Ja'far which was not known to Him (*ma lam yakun yu'rafu lahu*) similar to what appeared to Him (*kama bada'a lahu*) regarding Musa after the passing of Isma'il by which his condition was unveiled. It is like what your soul narrated to you even though the falsifiers dislike it: Abu Muhammad will be my successor."

(Narrated by Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari, in al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujja, Chapter 75, Hadith No. 10; [Read the Arabic Text](#))

I used to relate from Abu l-Hasan al-'Askari [Ali al-Naqi] about his son Abu Ja'far (Muhammad) narrations (riwayat) indicating to him [as the succeeding Imam]. When Abu Ja'far passed away, I became anxious due to that and I remained bewildered neither going backward nor going forward. I was scared to write to him about that, as I did not know what it would be. Then I wrote to him asking him for supplication and that God the Exalted relieve us of the hardships imposed on us from the ruler with regard to our youth. The response returned with supplication and the hardships upon us abated, and he wrote in the end of the letter. You wanted to ask about the successor after the passing of Abu Ja'far and you were anxious about that. Do not worry, for God does not lead astray a people after He has guided them until He makes clear for them what they must be aware of. Your Master after me is Abu Muhammad my son. He has what is needed for him. God gives precedence to what He wills and delays what He wills: "Whatever We abrogate of our signs or cause to be forgotten, We bring something better or similar to it" (2:106).

(Narrated by Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari, in Shaykh al-Tusi, *Kitab al-Ghayba*, Ch. 33, Hadith No. 6 (168); [Read the Arabic Text](#))

Again, how can the death of any person be something newly known God (*badā'a li-Llāh*)? God, by definition, always has complete knowledge of all things. It is self-evident that *hadiths* which are theologically contradictory and question the omniscience of God cannot be genuine and thus can not be used to justify the Imamate of Mūsā and al-'Askarī.

2B

Another argument used to try and nullify Mawlana Isma'il's designation are contradictory *hadīths* where the Imam Ja'far pleads with God for Isma'il to be the Imam after him but God refuses his requests.

Imam al-Sadiq said: I have not ceased imploring Allah the Exalted about Isma'il, begging him to bring him back to life and make him the Rectifier (*qā'im*) after me, but my Lord has refused this. This is not something that a man places wherever he wants; rather it is a covenant from Allah the Exalted and Glorified. He will make this covenant with whomever he wills, and so Allah has willed that my son Mūsā would be the Rectifier after me, and has refused to make Isma'il the Imam after me.

(Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 47:270 quoted from the Usul of Zayd al-Narsi in the Sixteen Sources, [Read the Arabic Text of Majlisi](#) and [Read the Arabic Text of the Usul](#))

ما بدا لله بداء أعظم من بداء بدا له في إسماعيل إبنی

Imam as-Sadiq said: "Nothing has been manifested to Allah greater than what was manifested to him about my son, Isma'il.... I implored Allah that he make

Isma'il the Imam after me, but he refused to make anyone the Imam except my son Mūsā.

(Majlisi *Bihār al-Anwār* 47:269; [Read the Hadith in several Twelver collections.](#)))

إِنِّي سَأَلْتُ اللَّهَ فِي إِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنْ يُبْقِيَ بَعْدِي فَأَبَى، وَلَكِنَّهُ قَدْ أَعْطَانِي فِيهِ مَنَزَلَةً أُخْرَى، أَنَّهُ يَكُونُ أَوَّلَ مَنْشُورٍ فِي عَشْرَةِ مَنْ أَصْحَابِهِ.

Imam as-Sadiq said: "I asked Allah that he would preserve Isma'il after me, but He refused. But He has given me another noble station with him; indeed, he will be the first to be risen [at the End of Time] amongst his companions.

(Muhammad b. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Kashshī, *Rijal al-Kashshī*, 217)

The above ḥadīths attributed to Imām Ja'far suggest that the Imām had wishes and desires and prayers which were contrary or against the Will of God. They state that Imām Ja'far wanted or desired for his son Isma'il to be the next Imām but that God refused and instead chose Mūsā al-Kāẓim. Yet, the Imam Ja'far has said that his words are at the same level of authority as the Words of God:

My words are the words of my father, and the words of my father are the words of my grandfather, and the words of my grandfather are the words of my great grandfathers, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn, and their words are the words of Imam Ali, and the words of Imam Ali are the words of Prophet Muhammad and the words of Prophet Muhammad are the words of God the Almighty, the Great.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, Book 2, Chapter 17, Hadith No. 14)

So was Allah pleading with himself? The whole idea that the Imam would desire something other than what God desires, and implore God to grant him his desire, is absurd and contradicts the very definition of Imāmah because the Imām, by definition, is the *khalīfah* or representative of God on earth and is divinely inspired (*mu'ayyad*) by the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Quds*). Whatever the Imam desires on a religious or spiritual matter is a reflection of God's Will and can never go against the Will of God.

Therefore, given the contradictions with the very definition of Imamah in the above *hadiths*, it is self-evident that they — like others upon which the Twelvers rely on to refute the Imamah of Mawlana Isma'il, such as those that state God was ignorant of Isma'il's death until it happened, as discussed earlier — cannot be genuine.

2C

Another argument in Twelver texts relies on hadiths purportedly attributed to Imam Ja'far that contradict all of the historical evidence in Proof 1 — that Imam Ja'far appointed his son Isma'il as the Imam via nass — and, instead, claim that Imam Ja'far actually condemned his beloved son Mawlana Isma'il as a sinner!

The seminal Twelver Shaykh al-Saduq, considered to be one of the greatest of Twelver scholars — the same al-Saduq who cited "*hadith*" suggesting that God can

be ignorant and changes His mind, as discussed in 2A above, offers the following narration as “proof” that Imam Ja’far could have never given *nass* to Isma’il, and that Imam Ja’far had no affection for him whatsoever. He says:

و كيف نص الصادق على إسماعيل مع قوله فيه إنه عاص لا يشبهني و لا يشبه أحداً من آبائي
And how could Imam as-Sadiq have given the *nass* to Isma’il, when he said:
“Indeed, he was a sinner! He does not resemble me nor any of my fathers.”

(Al-Saduq, *Kamal al-Din*, 103)

He then provides two chains of narrations for this same *hadith*, with slightly different wording:

قال الحسن بن راشد: سألت أبا عبد الله عن إسماعيل فقال عاص لا يشبهني و لا يشبه أحداً من آبائي

Al-Hasan ibn Ar-Rashid says: “I asked Abu ‘Abdullah [Ja’far as-Sadiq] about Isma’il, and he said: “A sinner. He does not resemble me nor any of my fathers.”

قال عبید بن زرارة: ذكرت إسماعيل عند أبي عبد الله فقال عاص لا يشبهني و لا يشبه أحداً من آبائي
‘Ubayd ibn Zararah says: “I mentioned Isma’il to Abu ‘Abdillah [as-Sadiq] and he said: “A sinner. He does not resemble me nor any of my fathers.”

However, again, the above *hadiths* are problematic because, in another set of narrations, reported by as Saduq himself, and others, the Imam Ja’far Sadiq condemns and contradicts the very statements he allegedly made concerning his son Isma’il:

لا يقول أحد في ولده لا يشبهني و لا يشبه شيئاً من آبائي

“No one should say about their child: ‘He does not resemble me nor anything of my fathers.’”

(Al-Saduq *Faqih* 3:484; *‘Ilal al-Shara’i* 1:103)

Such reports about Isma’il’s dipsomania and his disavowal by his father, especially as related by the Twelver sources, probably represent later fabrications by those who did not accept the Isma’ili line of imams.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, 88)



Proof #3

Isma'il's death before Imam Ja'far is not confirmed and may have been staged — to protect him — as he was reportedly seen by eyewitnesses after his alleged death

3A

The year and cause of Isma'il's death remain unknown and unverified. Many sources which claim that Isma'il died in the lifetime of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq also report that eyewitnesses saw Isma'il three days later

The exact date and the circumstances of Isma'il's death also remain unknown. According to some Isma'ili authors, Isma'il survived the Imam al-Sadiq. However, the majority of sources report that he predeceased his father in Medina, and was buried in the Baqi cemetery... Many Isma'ili and non-Isma'ili sources repeat the story of how, before and during Isma'il's funeral procession, the Imam al-Sadiq made deliberate attempts to show the face of his dead son to witnesses, though some of the same sources also relate reports indicating that Isma'il was seen in Basra soon afterwards.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 91)

3B

Mid-10th century Isma'ili sources report that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq staged his son's Ismail's death before witnesses to protect him from 'Abbasid persecution, and that Isma'il was then seen in Basra a few days after his supposed death

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, renowned Twelver scholar, admits that the safety of the successor to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was a paramount issue as the Abbasids had threatened to kill whomever was designated as the next Imam:

The question of the successor to the Imam (Jafar al-Sadiq) having been made particularly difficult by the fact that the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur had decided to scourge to death whoever was to be chosen officially by the Imam as his successor thereby hoping to put an end to the Shiite movement.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (*Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 165-166)

The following extensive report, by Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), is among the earlier sources that cover Ismail's purported death and funeral. In this account, the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq takes unusual measures to have numerous people watch the funeral of Isma'il and testify that Isma'il has died. This is done in order to convince the 'Abbasid Caliph that the successor of Imam Ja'far has died and thus spare Isma'il from 'Abbasid persecution. A few days later, Isma'il was seen alive in Basra and this was reported to the 'Abbasid Caliph. However, the Imam Ja'far was able to produce witnesses that Isma'il has died and he was saved from harm.

And also among those things which prove the Imamatus of Isma'il b. Ja'far is the fact that when he died, Ja'far left his body remain covered in his house for

three days. His face was left uncovered, and the people who came in could recognize him – the Hashimites and the non-Hashimites, the residents of Madina, and the visitors from elsewhere. Imam Ja'far himself asked those who came to express their condolence to him: "Is not this my son Isma'il?" And those who saw him had no choice but to admit this without hesitation. Then he took the signature of the visitor, as to what he had seen. He did this until in Madina all the Hashimites, local people and visitors, had given their signatures. The body was then taken out to the Baqi cemetery on the fourth day, still with the face exposed. From time to time the Imam [Ja'far] caused it to be laid on the ground, kissed it, and said: "By God, the death of Isma'il does not hurt me so much as what I have promised him." He made the whole crowd which was with him to witness his burial, and even took signatures from those who were not present before the body was carried about. He did this three times, and on the fourth he had the body placed in the grave. He went through the ceremony in the usual way, and those present could give testimony of having seen him [Isma'il] buried in their presence.

[Twelver sources also report the above scene of Isma'il's funeral and Imam Ja'far asking numerous witnesses to confirm multiple times that it was the face of his son – see al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*, 431; Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 47:254.] The local spies wrote about all this to al-Mansur [the second 'Abbasid Caliph]. And Imam Ja'far also sent a letter to him, informing him of his bereavement. The 'Abbasids [had] sent spies to watch Imam Ja'far, in order to find out who was appointed as his successor, so that he might be murdered. When the news [about the appointment of Isma'il] came to him, he became worried. And they [the spies] were watching Isma'il, plotting to seize him. Then came the news of his death, and the Caliph was relieved from his anxiety.

But only a few days passed before he received a report that a man in Basra, a cripple of about sixty years, was sitting once at the door of his shop in the bazaars of the town, plaiting a basket of palm leaves, when a young man passed by, in appearance and dress looking like Isma'il b. Ja'far. A crowd of men surrounded him, all greeting him, and asking for protection. When the cripple, who was a Shi'ite, a follower of Imam Ja'far, saw him, he began to shout: 'O descendant of the Messenger of God, stretch thy hand to me so that God may stretch His to thee.' The young man returned, seized his hand, and brought him down from his shop. Then the cripple walked along with him a distance, leaving him later, and returned to his place healthy and straight in stature. People began to crowd around him, asking him who it was who healed him. And he replied: 'Isma'il b. Ja'far b. Muhammad.'

Thus the spies of the caliph wrote about Isma'il being dead, and also Ja'far al-Sadiq wrote about his bereavement. And when the caliph read the latest news, he said: 'Verily, the trickery of the sons Abu Kabsha will never cease until they perish to the last man.' Then he immediately summoned Imam Ja'far, who was

brought before him. When he appeared before the caliph, the latter produced his own letter, and the report of the spies, and, showing to Imam Ja'far his own note, asked him: 'Is not this in their own handwriting, the letter informing me about Isma'il's death?' The Imam replied: 'yes'. Then the caliph produced the report of his spies about the events which took place in Basra. The Imam also produced the testimony of those who witnessed the death and the burial of his son. When the caliph saw these documents, his anger subsided. He then summoned a number of the Hashimites who were with him, and they testified what they had seen, and acknowledged their signatures.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa'*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 275-276)

3C

The Twelver Shi'i hadith literature bears witness to the fact that people saw Mawlana Isma'il after his alleged death

When faced with reports that Isma'il was reportedly seen alive after his supposed funeral, the Twelver scholar Shaykh al-Saduq, who above was quoted saying that God changed His mind because He was unaware Isma'il would die, now produces *hadiths* where the Imam Ja'far allegedly says that a demon was appearing in the form of his son Isma'il:

قال الوليد بن صبيح : جاءني رجل فقال لي: تعال حتى اريك أين الرجل؟ قال: فذهبت معه قال: فجاءني إلى قوم يشربون فيهم إسماعيل بن جعفر فخرجت مغموما، فجئت إلى الحجر فإذا إسماعيل بن جعفر متعلق بالبيت يبكي، قد بل أستار الكعبة بدموعه، فرجعت أشتد فإذا إسماعيل جالس مع القوم، فرجعت فإذا هو أخذ بأستار الكعبة قدبلها بدموعه قال: فذكرت ذلك لأبي عبد الله فقال: لقد ابتلي ابني بشيطان يتمثل في صورته

Al-Walid ibn Sabih said: "A man came to me and said, 'Come, and I will show you where the man is.' And so I went with him, and he brought to a group of people who were drinking. Isma'il ibn Ja'far was amongst them! I fled away in anxiety, and came to the hijr [in the Holy Mosque of Mekkah], and there was Isma'il ibn Ja'far, clinging to the Sacred House and weeping, almost flooding the covering of the Ka'bah in tears. And so I went back, stronger this time, and saw Isma'il sitting with the people. And then I went back again, and there was Isma'il grabbing the cover of the Ka'bah, covering it with tears. I told Abu 'Abdullah [as-Sadiq] about this, to which he said: 'My son is being tormented by a demon which takes his form.'"

(Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* 47:270; Al-Mazandaran, *Al-Manaqib* 1:267; Al-Saduq, *Kamal al-Din* 1:70)

إن شيطانا قد ولع بابني إسماعيل يتصور في صورته ليفتن به الناس وإنه لا يتصور في صورة نبي ولا وصي نبي، فمن قال لك من الناس: إن إسماعيل ابني حي لم يمت، فإنما ذلك الشيطان تمثل له في صورة إسماعيل، مازلت ابتهل إلى الله في إسماعيل ابني أن يحييه لي ويكون القيم من بعدي فأبى ربي ذلك وإن هذا شيء ليس إلى الجرل منا يضعه حيث يشاء إنما ذلك عهد من الله عز وجل يعهده إلى من يشاء فشاء الله أن يكون إبنى موسى أبي أن يكون إسماعيل.

Indeed, Satan has become passionately fond of my son Isma'il, and has appeared in his image in order to create chaos amongst the people. But he cannot take the form of a prophet, nor the successor of a prophet. And so whenever the people say that my son Isma'il is alive and has not died, then this is nothing but Satan, manifesting himself in Isma'il's form.

(Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* 47:270; Al-Usul al-Sittat 'Ashar, 197, *Read Arabic Text*)

Of course, the existence of the above hadiths in Twelver books raised the question of why they are there in the first place. Two possibilities present themselves: a) either Imam Isma'il was seen after his alleged death — because he was actually alive — and his father Imam al-Sadiq actually made these statements; or b) these hadith are not genuine. If they are genuine, then it would be logical to conclude the Imam made such statements under practicing *taqiyya* — so as to continue to protect his son's life, after the meticulously staged death and funeral he arranged for that very purpose.

Proof #4

Even if Isma'il had died before his father, the Nass upon Imam Isma'il from Imam Ja'far means that the Imamatus continues ONLY in Muhammad, the son of Isma'il, whom the latter appointed as his own successor; the Sunna of God concerning prior Prophets and Imams affirms that Imamatus continues in hereditary succession.

4A

Mawlana Isma'il, as the designated successor, was the silent Imam during the lifetime of Imam Ja'far; even Twelver scholars agree that the early death of a designated Imam does not negate his Imamatus — as was the case with Aaron the designated successor of Moses

The historical *nass* or appointment Isma'il by Imam Ja'far means that Isma'il always possessed the rank of Imam during his father's lifetime. Isma'il was the "Silent Imam" (*imam samit*) and possesses all the perfections of the Imamatus; Imam Ja'far was the "Speaking Imam" who exercised the formal authority of the Imamatus. Both Twelver and Ismaili teachings affirm the existence of the Speaking Imam and the Silent Imam as the successor of the former. The following statements are from the Twelver *hadith* early hadith book *Basa'ir al-Darajat*:

Zurara asked Abu 'Abdullah al-Sadiq: "Can the earth be left without an Imam?" He said: "No." We asked: "Can there be two Imams in the earth?" He said: "No, unless one of the two Imams is silent (*samit*) and not speaking. The one before him is speaking and the Imam recognizes the Imam who is after him."

al-Saffar al-Qummi, (*Basa'ir al-Darajat*, p. 536, No. 44)

Abu 'Ala asked Abu 'Abdullah al-Sadiq: "Can the earth be left without an Imam?" He said: "No." We said: "Can there be two Imams in the earth?" He said: "No except there is a silent Imam (*imam samit*) who does not speak and the Imam before him speaks."

al-Saffar al-Qummi, (*Basa'ir al-Darajat*, p. 506, No. 11)

Abu 'Abdullah al-Sadiq said: "'Ali b. Abi Talib was the Knower (*'alim*) of this community and knowledge is inherited as a legacy. One of us does not pass away until he sees one of his offspring who comprehends his knowledge. The earth cannot subsist for a day without an Imam among us whom the community seeks for succor." I said: "Can there be two Imams?" He said: "No, unless one of them is silent and he does not speak until the passing of the first."

al-Saffar al-Qummi, (*Basa'ir al-Darajat*, p. 531, No. 20)

The death of Isma'il in the lifetime of Imam Ja'far does NOT NEGATE the Imamate of Isma'il – because Imamate is a spiritual rank that the Imam never loses. The Twelver scholar al-Sharif al-Murtada makes this EXACT SAME argument about the Imamate of Aaron (Harun), the brother of Moses – whom Moses had appointed as his Successor (*wasi*) and Imam during his lifetime. Aaron died before Moses just as Isma'il allegedly died before Imam Ja'far. But Al-Sharif al-Murtada argues that the rank of Imamate still belongs to Aaron regardless of his early death:

As for his claim that the report requires the negation of the Imamate [of Aaron] since Aaron was not an Imam after the death of Moses and his saying: 'He did not have quality of this status', it is far from correct because Aaron – even if he is not the Caliph of Moses after his death – we have already indicate that he, if he remained, would succeed him in his community and that this status (*manzila*) – even if it was delimited – it is correct that it is within his ranks.

Aaron possessed the position of the Caliphate during his life and was the most deserving of it after the death [of Moses]; he had the rank of precedence (*manzila al-taqaddum*) over the rest of the companions of Moses and he was the most excellent of them after him. This is the position that the Prophet intended to affirm for the Commander of the Faithful.

al-Sharif al-Murtada, (*al-Shafi fi l-Imama*, Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Sadiq, 1987, 34-36)

The Imamatus only continues in the lineal descendants of the designated Imam; therefore, the Imamatus of Isma'il only continues in his lineal descendants regardless of whether he died before his father or not; Twelver scholars agree that the Imamatus of Aaron continued in his lineal descendants, despite Aaron passing away before Moses; based on this same principle, the Imamatus of Isma'il continues in his progeny

Given that Isma'il was already an established silent Imam, whose rank of Imamatus was disclosed by Ja'far's historical appointment of him, it follows that EVEN IF Isma'il passed away during the lifetime of his father, the succession of Imamatus can only continue in Isma'il's own line of descendants. Even the Twelver hadith explicitly say that after Imam al-Husayn, the Imamatus ONLY continues in direct descendants – one after the other – and never from brother to brother ([Usul al-Kafi, Ch. 63](#)). The Twelver scholars al-Sharif al-Murtada believes that the Imamatus of Aaron continued in his descendants:

The Caliphate of Aaron to Moses is spoken about in the Qur'an and its affair is clear to all Muslims. The Caliphate of Joshua b. Nun to Moses is not established in the Qur'an and is not evident to everyone for whom the Caliphate of Aaron is clear. Thus, the Prophet intended to necessitate for him [Aaron], the Imamatus by the evidently obvious affair that the Qur'an attests to. There is no objection to the suspicion that Joshua b. Nun was not the Caliph of Moses after him with respect to what the Imamatus requires and after him our Prophet only indicated to his ruling and his Caliphate with respect to what is connected to the Imamatus which was in the progeny (wuld) of Aaron.

al-Sharif al-Murtada, (*al-Shafi fi l-Imama*, Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Sadiq, 1987, 36)

The renowned Twelver scholar al-Majlisi narrates many reports from Twelver hadith where the Imams teach that the Imamatus of Aaron was inherited by Aaron's descendants, even though Aaron died before Moses and Joshua became the Prophet after Moses:

Moses bequeathed the succession (*awsa*) to Joshua b. Nun; Joshua bequeathed bequeathed the succession (*awsa*) to the sons of Aaron. He did not bequeath the succession to his own descendants or to the descendants of Moses.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (al-Kulayni, [Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujja](#), Chapter on the Designation of the Commander of the Faithful, No. 3, p. 293)

Aaron died before Moses...The names of the sons of Aaron were Shabar and Shubayr and the translation of them in Arabic is al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (al-Majlisi, [Bihar al-Anwar](#), Vol. 13, No. 14, p. 11))

Verily, Moses and Aaron were both Prophetic Messengers and Moses was more excellent than Aaron. But God appointed the Prophethood and the Caliphate in the descendants (wuld) of Aaron to the exclusion of the progeny

of Moses; likewise, God appointed the Imamate in the descendants of al-Husayn to the exclusion of the descendants of al-Hasan.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Shaykh Saduq, 'Ilal al-Shara'i, in al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 25, No. 19, p. 259))

The authority (*wilaya*) of Moses exists in the sons of Aaron and the authority (*wilaya*) of Muhammad exists in the sons of 'Ali.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 39, p. 61))

Twelvers must agree that the established Sunna of God in the example of Aaron is that the Imamate continues in the lineal descendants of the designated Imam (*al-imam al-mansus*), regardless of when the designated Imam passes away. By this very principle explicitly taught by the Shi'i Imams and Twelver scholars, every Twelver must accept that the Imamate of Isma'il continues in his progeny and cannot be nullified by his death.

The Imamate and the Spiritual Legacy (*wasiyya*) is from God and God had granted Isma'il his position during his lifetime. When his eminence passed away, his son Muhammad b. Isma'il was more deserving of his heritage (*mirath*) than his uncles; he was the elder in age than his uncles except 'Abdullah. The affair [of Imamate] does not exist in two brothers after al-Hasan and al-Husayn according to the narrated reports about this.

Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 322/934), (*Kitab al-Zina*, ed. H. Hamdani, vol. 2, Cairo: 1956-57, 63-64)

The designation (*al-nass*) cannot be retracted and the informing benefit of the designation (*al-nass*) is the continuation of the Imamate in the progeny of the designated person to the exclusion of others (*baqa' al-Imama fi awlad al-mansus 'alayhi duna ghayrihi*). Therefore, the Imam after Isma'il is Muhammad b. Isma'il.

The designation (*al-nass*) upon him [Isma'il] only conveys the transmission of the Imamate from him to his specific descendants; this is similar to Moses' designation (*nass*) upon Aaron (Harun): then Aaron died in the lifetime of his brother [Moses] and only the designation (*nass*) informs the transmission of the Imamate from him to his descendants – since the designation cannot be retracted and the belief of *bada'* is absurd. The Imam does not designate one of his sons except after hearing from his own father and a designation based on doubt and ignorance is impossible.

Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), (*al-Milal wa-'l-Nihal*, 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmiyya, 1992, 170-71, 200)

4B

Mawlana Isma'il had, during his own lifetime, already appointed his eldest son Muhammad ibn Isma'il as his successor and the Imam after him

It is evident that Isma'il was not present in Medina when his father died, but that he had designated his successor... A second group of the Shi'i Imamis

affirmed Isma'il's death had occurred in the lifetime of his father and now recognized his eldest son Muhammad b. Isma'il as their Imam.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: An Illustrated History*, 64)

Muhammad was the eldest son of Isma'il who had at least one other son named 'Ali. He was also the eldest grandson of the Imam al-Sadiq and, according to Isma'ili tradition, was twenty-six years old at the time of the latter's death. Furthermore, all sources agree that he was older than his uncle Musa by about eight years... He was the imam of the Mubarakiyya and the eldest male member of the Imam al-Sadiq's family, after the death of his uncle 'Abd Allah al-Aftah. As such, he enjoyed a certain degree of esteem and seniority in this Fatimid branch of the 'Alid family... It was probably then, not long after al-Sadiq's death, that Muhammad left Medina for the east and went into hiding, henceforth acquiring the epithet al- Maktum, the Hidden. As a result, he was saved from persecution by the Abbasids, while continuing to maintain close contacts with the Mubarakiyya, who like most other radical Shi'i groups of the time were centred in Kufa. Different sources mention various localities and regions as Muhammad's final destination, but it is certain that he first went to southern Iraq and then to Persia.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, 95)

Isma'il never left this world without leaving in his stead his son, who was of mature age, and that the Imam had been handed over to him by the Command of God, and His inspiration of him. And that he, Isma'il b. Ja'far, when the desire of God became known to him, received an inspiration to hand over the authority to his son Muhammad. He then summoned the dignitaries, and those specially trusted amongst his followers, and handed it over to him in the presence of the chosen ones alone, in secret, in order not to expose him to danger...He, Muhammad b. Isma'il, was at that time a grown up, 14 years of age. At such age witness is acceptable from a man, according to law. He [Imam Isma'il] did this in anticipation of the calamities and the attack of the infidels which were to befall him.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition*

Concerning the Rise of the Fatmids, 296)

And just as the Imam of Isma'il was handed over to him by the Command of God and His inspiration of the one who preceded him, so also was it handed over to his son by the Command of God and His inspiration, as is already narrated concerning how it happened in the past ages, and how the past prophets and Imams acted. Both we and you admit the tradition that when Isma'il was about to die, he summoned his son [Muhammad b. Isma'il] and his followers, and handed over the Imam to him, in their presence, under the supervision of his father [Imam Ja'far]. He entrusted the testimony concerning the position of his son to one of his hujjats [high ranking *da'i*]... And Imam Ja'far presided over the assembly, as [the Prophet] Jacob presided over the

assembly of Joseph when the latter was on his deathbed. Then came Muhammad b. Isma'il by the command of God and His Inspiration of him. His da'is dispersed, travelling in different provinces (*jaza'ir*), and ordering the local people to carry on the da'wah in his favour. The world became alive with da'wah and his influence spread.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 297)

There are traces of Imam al-Sadiq's appointment of both Imam Isma'il and his son Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il in the extant Twelver Shi'i hadiths that are purportedly about Musa al-Kazim. Al-Kulayni reports a tradition where a companion of Musa named Yazid ibn Salit recalls an event where Imam al-Sadiq met Yazid and Yazid's father on the way to pilgrimage. Kulayni reports that on this occasion, Imam al-Sadiq pointed to Musa as his successor, referring to his successor as the "Gate among the Gates of God". Imam al-Sadiq also stated that the future Imam's son and successor would be the future savior of the Ummah. **When Yazid's father asked Imam al-Sadiq whether the successor-Imam's son, the promised savior, was already born, the Imam replied that he was born several years ago: "I asked him [the Imam]: 'Is he already born (*wa-hal wulida*)?' He said: 'Yes and several years have passed for him (*na'am wa-marat bihi sanun*).'"** (Usul al-Kafi, ed. 'Ali Akbar al-Ghifari, 5th edition, 1984, Vol. 2, 180, Hadith No. 14: [Read the Arabic Text](#)). In other words, Imam al-Sadiq indicated that one of his sons would be his successor/heir and the heir-designate son already had his own son who had been born several years earlier. This proves that Imam al-Sadiq could not have designated Musa as his successor because Musa's son and successor, 'Ali al-Ridha, was born in 766 after the death of Imam al-Sadiq in 765. On the other hand, Imam Isma'il's son and successor, Muhammad ibn Isma'il was born in 740 during the lifetime of Imam al-Sadiq. **Therefore, the narration of al-Kulayni purportedly referring to Musa actually shows that Imam al-Sadiq designated Isma'il as his successor and the Gate (bab) of God (which matches the Ismaili narrations quoted above) and also designated Isma'il's living son, Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the successor of Isma'il.**

4C

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, the Fatimid hujjat and da'i, offers three deductive arguments to prove that the Imamatus only continues in the progeny of Mawlana Isma'il

What follows is quoted from Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *Master of the Age*, 104-106:

Argument #1: "Subsequent to Ja'far b. Muhammad's designation of Isma'il, with respect to claims about his having designated another of his sons after the death of Isma'il, the situation had three possible outcomes:

Outcome #1: Either he designated *another* of his sons following the death of Isma'il, as has been reported, and Isma'il had a son; or

Outcome #2: he designated him and Isma'il did not have son; or

Outcome #3: he did not designate another after having issued his previous designation of Ismā‘īl.

Conclusion of Outcome #1: If the designation [of another son] was made and Ismā‘īl had a son, Ja‘far would have issued a decision contrary to what God revealed should he have thereby given the inheritance of Ismā‘īl, despite his having a son, to his brothers without a cause for depriving the son... But to imagine something like that of Ja‘far is inconceivable due to the validity of his imamate and his infallibility. If that is inconceivable, what is attributed to him concerning the designating of another of his sons, after having previously designated Ismā‘īl, is false.

Conclusion of Outcome #2: If he were to have designated him and Ismā‘īl had no son, and yet [he had done so] with the knowledge and empowerment of God, there would have been a truncation of genealogical descent. But God’s knowledge and power would not have permitted a designation in favour of a person whose line would end, given that the Imam is preserved in progeny. That requires that Ja‘far did not designate Ismā‘īl. However, since we have found that he did designate him [Isma‘īl], we know that he was not without progeny and lineal succession. And if he was not without progeny and lineal succession, that the Imam belonged to him and to his progeny is proven.

Conclusion of Outcome #3: If, however, Ja‘far did not designate anyone after having designated Ismā‘īl, the Imam belonged to Ismā‘īl. If the Imam of Ismā‘īl is established fact, that he had progeny is proven because the Imam is not merited by someone who has no lineal successor since it is preserved through lineal succession. If his progeny is proven, that the Imam belongs to his offspring is also proven. The situation was confined to these three possibilities and yet the three possibilities all require that the Imam belong to Ismā‘īl and to his descendants. Thus, the Imam is proven to have been Ismā‘īl’s and his son’s. Therefore, the Imam resided in Ismā‘īl and in his descendants.

Argument #2: We hold that since the Imam resided in the succession of Ja‘far, the imam would not have designated anyone he regarded as suitable other than a person he knew to be appropriate for it. The first thing to be considered fitting of an Imam in regard to his having the Imam is that the person not be infertile. Next, since a person without a successor does not merit the Imam, he should have a lineal successor and progeny. Because the imam Ja‘far designated Ismā‘īl, from that fact we determine that Ismā‘īl had a son and successor; otherwise he would not have designated him. Since he had a successor, his successor was more worthy of the imamate than his uncles. Therefore, the Imam belonged to Ismā‘īl, and to his successor, to the exclusion of the rest of them.

Argument #3: “Given that the Imam is infallible, never having made a mistake, and given that, if Ismā‘īl had not had a son nor successor nor descendants, it

would make Ja'far's designation of him a mistake, since he was designated, with respect to the infallibility of the Imam, that requires that Ismā'īl had a successor and descendants. If he had descendants and a successor, his successor is more deserving of the Imamatus than his uncles. Therefore, the Imamatus after Ismā'īl belonged to his son, and to his descendants, to the exclusion of everyone else.





Proof #5

The Earliest Shi'i *hadiths* lack the mention of Twelve Imams but instead predict the Fatimid Ismaili lineage of Imams

The main proof for the Twelver line of Imams has always been the large number of Sunni narrations prophesising the coming of twelve Imams (these *hadiths* where the Prophet purportedly says that twelve commanders or khalifs will come after him). In Shaykh al-Saduq's *Kamal ad-Din*, he continually argues against the Ismailis and Zaydis and other Shi'a sects on the basis of the "Twelve Imam" narrations. However, the pre-Occultation Twelver Shi'a *hadith* books have a striking lack of narrations about "Twelve Imams." The two main, surviving works of Twelver Shi'ism which *pre-date* the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam of the Twelvers are the *Basa'ir al-Darajat* of Al-Qummi and the *Kitab al-Mahasin* of al-Barqi. The former book is an extensive tract on the *fada'il* (noble attributes) of the Imams; yet nowhere in it do we find a *single* reference to there only being Twelve Imams [there is one narration that foretells a total of 13 Imams – [link](#)]. *Kitab al-Mahasin* is a text mainly dealing with issues of *akhlaq* (ethics), but does contain an extensive introductory discussion on Imamatus. Once again, one finds absolutely no reference to Twelve Imams in this text, even in the chapter on the significance of the number 12.

The only other books that were purportedly compiled before the Occultation are known as the “four hundred source books.” These source books are the basis for the Twelver Shi’a *hadith* literature; scholars who authored one of these books are usually held in the highest esteem by Twelver Shi’a scholars. In one of these texts, we find the most fascinating reference to the number of Imams. This quote is found in the *Asl* of Muhammad ibn al-Muthanna al-Hadrami in which we read:

ان منا بعد الرسول صم سبعة اوصياء ائمة مفترضة طاعتهم سابعهم القائم انشاء له ان الله عزيز حكيم يقدم ما يشاء ويؤخر ما يشاء وهو العزيز الحكيم ثم بعد القائم احد عشر مهديا من ولد الحسين فقلت من السابع جعلني الله فداك امرك قلت ثلث مرة قال ثم بعدي امامكم ثم قائمكم

Imam as-Sadiq said: Indeed, after the Prophet there will be seven inheritors, Imams, upon whom obedience has been made obligatory. The seventh of them is the *Qa'im*, if Allah the Mighty and Wise wills he will come soon, and if He wills he will come later, and He is the Mighty and Wise. Then, after the *Qa'im* there will be eleven Mahdis from the progeny of Husayn.” His companion said to him: “May my soul be your sacrifice! Tell me who this Seventh Imam will be? He said this three times. Finally, Imam as-Sadiq said “After me will be your Imam, and then your *Qa'im*.”

(*Al-'Usul as-Sitta 'Ashr*, *Asl* of Muhammad ibn al-Muthanna al-Hadrami, 90-91)

The fulfillment of the above *hadith* is the exact unfolding of the Isma'ili lineage of Imams:

The “**Seven Inheritors (awsiya) and the *Qa'im***” are the first seven Isma'ili Imams:

1. 1. Imam Mawlana 'Ali ibn Abi Talib
2. 2. Imam Mawlana al-Husayn
3. 3. Imam Mawlana 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin
4. 4. Imam Mawlana Muhammad al-Baqir
5. 5. Imam Mawlana Ja'far al-Sadiq
6. 6. Imam Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far
7. 7. Imam Mawlana Muhammad ibn Isma'il [the first *Qa'im* in the Cycle of Imamah]

The “**Eleven Mahdis from the Progeny of al-Husayn**” are the next eleven Isma'ili Imams – including the three concealed Imams and the eight Fatimid Imam-Caliphs:

1. 1. Imam Mawlana 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Wafi
2. 2. Imam Mawlana Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Taqi
3. 3. Imam Mawlana al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Radi
4. 4. Imam Mawlana 'Abdullah al-Mahdi bi-llah
5. 5. Imam Mawlana Abu'l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah
6. 6. Imam Mawlana Isma'il al-Mansur bi amr Allah
7. 7. Imam Mawlana Ma'add al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah
8. 8. Imam Mawlana Nizar al-Aziz i-llah
9. 9. Imam Mawlana Mansur al-Hakim bi-amr Allah
10. 10. Imam Mawlana 'Ali al-Zahir li-Din Allah
11. 11. Imam Mawlana Ma'add al-Mustansir bi-llah

Interestingly, the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs always referred to themselves and their ancestors as the *mahdis* and as the Mahdi-ist Imams:

The phrase *khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*, 'the rightly guided mahdī-ist caliphs', was a part of the very first Fatimid khutba. [The Fatimid Imam-Caliph] Al-Qā'im in 302 asked for God's blessings on *al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*. In [the Imam-Caliph] al-Manṣūr's first khuṭba he uses the words ibn al-mahdiyyīn 'son of the mahdīs' for his grandfather. Later in the same sermon he cites *al-hudāt al-mahdiyyīn*, 'the rightly guided guides'. In a subsequent *khuṭba* he speaks of [the Imam-Caliph] al-Mahdī as *wārith faḍl al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn min ābā'ihī al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn*, 'the inheritor of the excellence of the mahdī-ist imams from his forefathers, the rightly guided caliphs'.

Paul Walker, (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams*, 70)

Proof #6

With the exception of the Nizari Ismaili Imam, all other Shi'i Imam lineages have hidden Imams. This contradicts the Qur'anic definition of Imam which requires the Imam always be present and manifest (*mubin*) in the world

Mohib Ebrahim's article, *Towards Validating Manifest Imam From The Qur'an Alone*, established that one necessary attribute of Imam, as defined by the Qur'an, is that the Imam must always be *mubin* (manifest) and present in the world in physical form, not hidden, in each generation in order to fulfill his mandate. Regarding the meaning of *mubin* in the verse "And We have encompassed all things in the Manifest Imam (*imamin mubin*)" (36:12), Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai writes that:

In the sense of *mubīn*, the Imam is manifest and speaking in two forms: corporeal and luminous. That is, he is manifest both in human form and in the luminous form. Similarly, he speaks in both the physical *hudūd* as well as in the spiritual *hudūd*.

Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai, (*Recognition of the Imam*, Vol. 1, 31)

Thus, the true Imam is always *mubin* – meaning that he is present in physical form and physically speaking to and guiding his followers. Any Imam that is *ghayb* (occulted) or *mastur* (hidden) from all of his followers cannot, by definition, be the manifest Imam (*al-imam al-mubin*). With the unique exception of the Ismaili Imam, all other Shī'ī Imam lineages – including those of the Twelvers and the Tayyibi Bohras — have ceased. All these Shia hold their Imams have been occulted (*ghayb*) or concealed (*mastur*) for 900-1,200 years. On this note, the historian Wladimir Ivanow concludes that:

If an Imam dies without leaving a son as his successor, it can only mean that not only he personally, but the whole line of his ancestors were not the true

Imams. Thus the discontinuation of the line of the Twelvers proved that at least the last several of them were not genuine.

Wladimir Ivanow, (*Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism*, Holland, 1952, 9)

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani argues that if a lineage of Imams terminates, then that lineage never possessed the Imamate in the first place and, consequently, the true Imamate must belong in another, ongoing, lineage:

The nobility of the Imamate and the crown of designation and appointment require, if it were to have been in any one of them [non-Isma'ili lineages], that the authority of the Imamate continue in the lineal succession of the one who had a lineal successor. If that succession breaks off for them, while at the same time the existence of the Imamate in the lineal succession of Ja'far is well established, its authority rests with the lineal succession of Ismā'il, and it is thus correct that the Imamate belonged to Ismā'il and to his lineal succession. Therefore, the Imamate belongs to Ismā'il and to his lineal descendants to the exclusion of the rest of them.

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, (*Master of the Age*, 112)

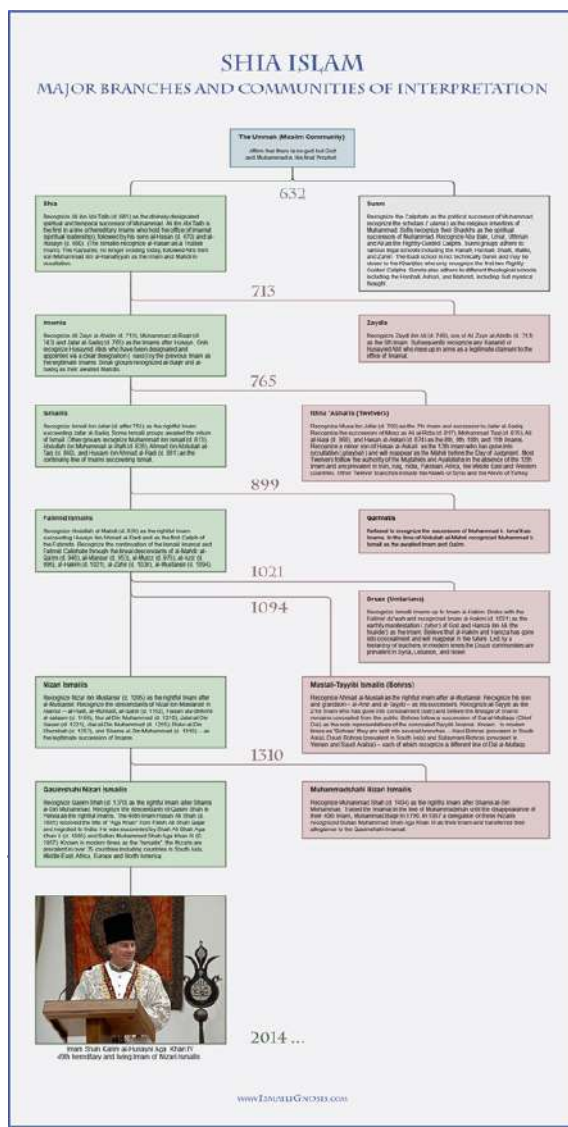
Proof #7

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of Shi'i Islam in direct, documented, lineal descent from Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. The Aga Khan's Direct Descent

from Prophet Muhammad:
Historical Proof As the only present (*hadir*), manifest (*mubin*) and living (*mawjud*) hereditary Imam, with a documented and validated lineage, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's very existence is itself confirmation of his Imamate and that of his ancestors

To learn more about the succession of Isma'ili Imams, from Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib to the present Imam, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni, please read our article, *Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams*.

The different historical lineages of the Shi'i Imams to the present day



Interviewer: When did this turning-point as far as the Ismailis come and why was it necessary?

Aga Khan IV: It was the sixth generation after Ali where the Imam of the time, called Ja'far Sadiq, had four sons. Isma'il was the eldest, and the Sevener Shia – the Isma'ilis are Sevener Shia – followed the branch of the family led by Isma'il, and that's why they are called Isma'ilis....

Interviewer: And your own descent as head of the Isma'ilis is from...?

Aga Khan IV: Is from *Isma'il*.

Interviewer: And where do you rank?

Aga Khan IV: I am the forty-ninth.

Interviewer: You are the forty-ninth Imam?

Aga Khan IV: Yes, Yes.

BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton, September 6, 1979

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1988/>

Interviewer: You are called the living Imam, what exactly does that mean?

Aga Khan IV: Well the Shia history has followed the same sort of historical developments all hereditary offices have followed, where there have been differences of opinion on who was the legitimate successor to the predecessor, whether it was a secular or religious office. In the case of the Shia



Muslims, the Shia branch of Islam split and one branch of the Shia Muslims accepted the concept of the Imam in hiding, the invisible Imam, because the twelfth Imam disappeared as a very young child, and our branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed and

that is why they are known as Ismailis. And that branch of the family has continued today hereditarily and that is why there is a living Imam for the Ismaili Muslims.

CBC Man Alive Interview, October 8, 1986

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3268/>

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV being interviewed by Independent Television (ITV) of the UK on June 4, 1985

Interviewer: What makes the Ismailis different from the mainstream Shiite

Islam?Aga Khan IV: Probably that there is a living Imam who traces his family back to Hazrat Ali. The majority of the Shia today are known as the Twelver

Shia and they believe in the hidden Imam.

Independent Television ITV Interview, June 4, 1985

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3134/>

The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali's descendants, and the Isma'ilis are the only Shi'a Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself. The other Shia — the Twelvers — revere a "hidden" Imam who will return on the Day of Judgement to take part in the final judgement. It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

"The Power of Wisdom", *Politique Internationale*, March 1, 2010

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/>

In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Address to both Houses of the Canadian Parliament and Senate, February 27,

2014

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10724/>

Contemporary scholarship on the present Aga Khan's ancestry

Contemporary historians and scholars have confirmed the present Aga Khan's claim to be the direct descendant of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib through Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. The Fatimid lineage of the Aga Khan is backed up by a full family tree attested to by third-party historical sources (as documented [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#)).

His Highness the Honourable Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, is held in the highest esteem by all sections of the Persian and the Indian communities. Through not a ruling prince he is a descendant of the ruling princes of Central Asia in the Middle Ages. He is, as it were, an uncrowned prince among the noblemen of India. His ancestry for forty-eight generations is traced, through the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt, to Isma'il, the son of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam and through him back to Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Apostle of God. He is thus an hereditary Imam by a long descent.

Naoroj Maneckji Dumasia, (*A Brief History of the Aga Khan: With An Account of His Predecessors, the Ismailian Princes or Benefatimite Caliphs of Egypt*, 1903,

10)

The Aga Khan comes from the stock of the Banu-Fatimid Caliphs, for he traces his descent through [Hasan]'ala-dhikrihi al-salaam, who was a direct lineal descendant from Isma'il, the seventh Imam, through Nizar, a son of Mustansir (one of the Fatimid-Caliphs of Egypt). The Aga's ancient and splendid pedigree was accepted by Shah Fateh Ali Shah, for otherwise he would not have given

the hand of his daughter and a government to Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah's grandfather, who was then a mere youth.

Naoroj Maneckji Dumasia, (*A Brief History of the Aga Khan: With An Account of His Predecessors, the Ismailian Princes or Benefatimite Caliphs of Egypt*, 1903, 56)

There are few persons throughout the wide world who do not know of the Aga Khan's historic nobility and pontific heritage. All the same, a short account of his family would interest millions of Muslims and non-Muslims. The Aga Khans are direct descendants of the great Arabian Prophet through his son-in-law and cousin, the chivalrous Ali; and his beloved daughter Fatima.

Syed M.H. Zaidi, (*A Short Biographical Sketch of Aga Khan III*)

We have traced the line of the Imams of the Shia Imami Ismailis, known also as the Nizari branch of Ismailis, from Ali to the present Agha Khan, and we have seen the sect establish itself in India as one of the important components of Islam in that country.

J.N. Hollister, (*The Shi'a of India*, 1953, 378)

Most recently, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni declared, at the 2005 Amman Conference, that he was the forty-ninth hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammad. His letter was read to the leadership and representatives of the Sunni, Twelver, Zaydi, and Ibadi madhahibs of Islam.

...the Shia Ismaili Muslims of whom I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat 'Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet's daughter... Our historic adherence is to the Jafari Madhhab and other Madhahib of close affinity, and it continues, under the leadership of the hereditary Ismaili Imam of the time."

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Message to The International Islamic Conference, July 4, 2005 <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7426/>

It is worth noting that the Amman Conference was attended by the representatives of the highest religious authorities of Sunni and Shi'i communities including the Shaykh al-Azhar, the Ayatullah Ali Sistani, the Ayatullah Khamenei, and the Grand Muftis of several nations, and not one person disputed or challenged the Aga Khan's direct lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, the Aga Khan's lineal descent is affirmed and acknowledged during his visits to several Muslim countries including Syria, Egypt, Dubai, Russia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and many others who collectively constitute the vast majority of the Muslim peoples in the world today.

We conclude with the remarks of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni which emphasize the continuity of the Imamatus throughout history and his role as the Living Imam in fulfilling the mandate of the institution:

The Imam is a transitory being, who forms a link between the past and the future. For this reason, ensuring the continuity of the institution and its ability to fulfil its role is what my life is all about.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Translation]
'The Confessions Of The Aga Khan', *Paris Match*, February 3, 2005
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7190/>

Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language

According to Muslim tradition

The Prophet Muḥammad received the first revelations of the Holy Qur'ān on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) which is vividly described in the *sūrah*s below:

Verily, We sent it down in the Night of Power
And how can we tell you what is the Night of Power?
The Night of Power is greater than a thousand months.
The Angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord for every affair.

Peace it is, until the rising of the dawn.

Surah al-Qadr – 97:1-5

Ha-Mim. By the Manifest Book

Verily, We sent it down in a Blessed Night. Verily, We are ever warning.
In it every wise affair is made clear.

A Command from our Presence. Verily, We are ever sending.

A Mercy from your Lord. Verily, He is the Hearer, the Knower.

al-Dukhan – 44:1-6

The traditional interpretation holds that on the Night of Power, the entirety of the Holy Qur'ān as a Scripture including all of its chapters and verses were 'sent down' to the lowest heaven and that the Angel Gabriel then began dictating this 'text' to the Prophet Muḥammad over twenty-three years. But this is merely the exoteric interpretation which is based on subjective assumptions and not actually supported by the Qur'ān itself.



Our [Iqrā' – 'Read' or 'Remember'?](#)

[Rethinking the First Revelation of the](#)

[Qur'ān](#) demonstrates

that on this Night, the Prophet was not merely told to "Read: In the Name of your Lord", but rather, he was already engaged in the spiritual

practice of invocation (*dhikru'llāh*) – alluded to in the first revelation of the Qur'ān which properly reads: "Recite the Name of your Lord" (*iqrā' bi-smi rabbika*).

On the Night of Power, the Prophet Muḥammad underwent a spiritual and mystical experience. The celestial power which granted him this experience is

called the Holy Spirit which – as *Sūrah al-Qadr* states – descended in the Night of Power:

Inna anzalnāhū fī laylati al-qadri

“Verily, We sent it/him down in the Night of Power.”

Holy Qur’ān 97:1

Tanazzalu’l-malāikatu wa’l-rūḥ fīhā bi-idhn rabbiḥim min kulli amrin

“The Angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord for every affair.”

Holy Qur’ān 97:4

The Qur’ān was not merely dictated to the Prophet in the form of Arabic sounds and letters. Rather, it was infused and inspired into the Prophet’s heart and soul as an immaterial and formless Holy Spirit which is itself beyond sounds, letters, and language. Sayyidnā Nasir-i Khusraw is very critical of those who presume that the Muḥammad merely heard the Qur’an in Arabic from the Angel Gabriel and then repeated it. For Nāsir and other Ismā’īlī Muslim theosophers, the Angel Gabriel is the imaginal rank (*ḥadd al-khayāl*) of the Holy Spirit that inspires the soul of the Prophet as opposed to his physical ears:

“His learning of the knowledge of the higher world was done through his luminous soul (*nafs-i rawshān*), and not through his physical ears in the manner in which we hear.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Six Chapters – Shish Fasl*, transl. W. Ivanow, Chapter 5, [Click Here to Read](#))

The Qur’ān even suggests that the Book (*kitāb*) revealed to the Prophet was a pure Spirit and Light as opposed to sound and letters:

Wakadhālika awḥaynā ilayka rūḥan mina amrinā mā kunta tadrī mā’l-kitāb walā’l-imānu wa lakin ja’lnahānu nūran nahdī bihi man nashāu min ‘ibādīnā wa-innaka latahdī ilā ṣiratin mustaqimin

“And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*kitāb*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.”

Holy Qur’ān 42:52

It should also be pointed out that the term ‘Book’ (*kitāb*) as used in the Qur’ān does not actually refer to ‘writing’ or ‘scripture’. Contemporary scholarship questions the very idea that the Qur’ān was meant to be a written Scripture:

“To understand *kitāb* on the level of Book or Scripture is to distort and seriously reduce its potential meaning as used in the Qur’ān. It is to impair the transparent quality of the word *kitāb*. According to the Qur’ān, neither Muḥammad nor any of the preceding prophets was preoccupied with Scripture, something that is written and read.”

J.W. Fiegenbaum, *Prophethood from the perspective of the Qur’ān*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 153, [Click Here to Read](#)

The term Book (*kitāb*) as used in the Qur'ān denotes a purely spiritual knowledge of God's will and guidance as opposed to the text of a Scripture. Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw says that the Qur'ān as it exists today reached us through a three-stage process:

First, the Holy Spirit inspires the Book (*kitāb*) in a spiritual form (without sounds or letters) into the heart and soul of the Prophet (and not his ears and tongue) which the Qur'ān bears witness to in the below verses:

Wa-innāhu latanzīl rabbi'l-'ālamina

Nazala bihi'l-rūḥu'l-amīnu

'ala qalbika litakūna mina al-mundhirīna

Bilisānin 'arabiyyin mubīnin

"And verily, it is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds

The Faithful Spirit descended with it

Upon your heart, so that you may be of the warners

In clear Arabic language."

Holy Qur'ān 26:192-195

Secondly, the Prophet's soul and imaginal faculty (which are divinely inspired) express the divine inspiration in the form of revealed discourse (*nuṭq, tanzīl, qur'ān*) consisting of parables and symbols that were drawn from the local traditions, cultures, and contexts of his life and times. The Prophet himself is an active agent in the process of revelation. The subtle distinction between the spiritual Book (*kitāb*) and it having been 'sent down' as a revealed discourse (*qur'ān*) is also described in the following Qur'ānic verses:

Tilka āyātu'l-kitābi'l-mubīni

Innā anzalnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan la'allakum ta'qilūna

"These are the Signs of the Manifest Book,

Verily, We sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān that you may intellect."

Holy Qur'ān 12:1-2

Finally, this revealed discourse or speech (*nuṭq, tanzīl, qur'ān*) is then recorded (in the Prophet's own lifetime) and then codified into a formal written Scripture – which happened during the time of Uthmān, the third Caliph of Sunnī Islām.

The very idea of a written Scripture is not essential to the Qur'ān and is never mentioned in the Qur'ān except in a critical way. For example, the below verse refers to the Book of Moses as essentially 'Light' and 'Guidance' and its being 'put on parchments' by his community as a subsequent event:

"Say: Who revealed the Book which Moses brought, a light and guidance for mankind, which ye have put on parchments..."

Holy Qur'ān 6: 91

The Night of Power is when the first stage occurred: the *entirety* of Qur'ān in the form Spirit and Light descended into the heart of the Prophet. This was the climax of the Prophet's spiritual practice and training which he had been performing leading up to the Night of Power:

“When it is said that the Qur’ān was revealed all at once it means that the Prophet’s personality became Qur’ānic on the Night of *Qadr*. The Night of *Qadr* was the night on which the Prophet attained his quest. The Prophet lived an abstemious life for about 40 years and, at the age of 38 – or 40 according to some accounts – he suddenly became enlightened, like the Buddha, on a single night. He received a revelation and the veils suddenly fell away from his eyes. The Prophet saw that night, which fell in the month of Ramaḍān, as the Night of *Qadr* and he later gave it this name. That night was in fact his own night of destiny, the night of union, the night on which he arrived at his destination and became a prophet. It was the night on which all his asceticism and effort bore fruit. On that night, the Prophet, in effect, became Qur’ānic. In this sense, the Qur’ān was revealed to him in its entirety. He became a personality from which the Qur’ān henceforth emanated. His personality became a wealth on which he could draw for the rest of his life. Hence, this Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet all at once.”

Abdulkarim Soroush, *Islam, Revelation and Prophethood*, Feb 2008, [Click Here to Read](#)

On the Night of Power, the Prophet did not merely *receive* the Qur’ān; the Prophet himself *became* the Qur’ān. His heart and soul were permanently illuminated and effaced by the Holy Spirit and the Light of the Qur’ān. Thus, the Prophet became the “speaking Qur’ān” on the Night of Power and for the next twenty-three years, he expressed, rendered and articulated the spiritual Light of the Qur’ān in the form of revealed discourse (*tanzīl*, *qur’ān*) over the next 23 years – the *revealed recitation* whose first verses were: “Recite the Name of your Lord who created” in reference to the spiritual ritual (see our previous post) that he had been performing during the Night of Power. This *revealed* Qur’ān did not become a formal text until long after the Prophet’s death, But, in his own lifetime, the Prophet Muḥammad was himself the “Speaking Book” of God who guided people to the Right Path:

“And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (*kitāb*) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (*nur*) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path.”

Holy Qur’ān 42:52

The Holy Spirit is the original spiritual reality of the revealed Qur’ān that exists today in the Arabic language. This Spirit or Light (*nur*) continues to inspire and descend upon the souls of the hereditary *Imāms* of the Prophet’s *Ahl al-Bayt* who succeeded him. This is precisely why the Prophet Muḥammad could say:

“I am leaving for you two weighty things and if you adhere to both of them, you will never go astray after me. They are the Book of God and my Progeny (*itrat*), that is my *Ahl al-Bayt*. The two shall never separate from each other until they return to me by the [Paradiscal] Pool.”

– Prophet Muhammad, (Saḥīḥ al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Volume 5, 662-663, No. 328)
“[Ali is with the Qur’ān and the Qur’ān is with ‘Alī](#). They will not separate from each other until they return to me at the [Paradisa] Pool.”

– Prophet Muhammad, (al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Saḥīḥayn*, 927, No. 4685)

These *ḥadīths* do not simply mean that Imām ‘Alī and the *Ahl al-Bayt* carried a copy of the Qur’ān everywhere they went. But rather, the Qur’ān always exists in the heart/soul of Imām ‘Alī and the *Ahl al-Bayt* by virtue of the Holy Spirit that continuously inspires them. Like the Prophet himself, the Imām is the Speaking Qur’ān and the Speaking Book of God – and this is irrespective of whether there exists a written Scripture or not. In this sense, Ḥaḍrāt Shams-i Tabrīzī – the spiriāal master of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī once said:

“The meaning of the Book of God is not the text, it is the man who guides. He is the Book of God; he is its verses; he is scripture.”

– Ḥaḍrāt Shams-i Tabrīzī, (Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 93)

The major difference between the Prophet and the *Imām* is that the former expresses the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the form of symbols and parables that comprise the revealed discourse (*tanzīl*, *qur’ān*), while the latter expresses the Holy Spirit in the form of instruction (*ta’līm*) and inspiration (*ta’yīd*). The Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq remarks that this Spirit is *always* present with the successors of the Prophet:

“Gabriel is the one who came down with revelation to the prophets, while [the Holy Spirit is with them and with the Successors \[Imāms\], never departing from them, strengthening them and guiding them on behalf of God.](#)”

– Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, (al-Qummi, *Basā’ir al-Dajarat*, 463, No. 1)

The Spirit is also the source of all spiritual enlightenment and insight. In principle, the Spirit can touch the souls of all human beings – as the forty-eighth *Imām*, Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, reminds us:

“...any of us, if the [Holy Spirit](#) ever present grants us that enlightenment, can, being thus blessed, have the power which Christ had.”

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, Chapter titled *Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, [Click Here to Read](#))

The Night of Power is not only a night or historical occasion on which the Prophet first received revelation. In its esoteric meaning, the real *Laylat al-Qadr* is the spiritual rank of the Prophets and the *Imāms* – a perfect soul “in which the Spirit and the Angels descend for every affair” and remain ever-present. This is why Imām ‘Alī has declared:

“I am the meaning of Ramadan; [I am Laylat al-Qadr](#) mentioned in the Mother of the Book. My utterance is decisive, for I am *Surah al-Hamd*. I am the purpose of prayer itself, whether at home or when travelling. I am the purpose of fasting, and the sacred anniversaries in the months of the year.”

– Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khuṭbah al-Iftikhār, [Click Here to Read](#))

In the universal sense, the Night of Power is the spiritual state of receptivity to the Holy Spirit – such that each seeker of gnosis can himself *become* the Night of Power:

“Inwardly, or esoterically, the ‘Night of Power’ is interpreted as an allusion to the very soul of the Prophet. Exoterically, the particular verses of the Qur’an are deemed to have descended ‘upon’ the heart of the Prophet (26:192-94); but esoterically the essence of the Qur’an is deemed to have descended *into* the heart of the Prophet. What this kind of interpretation alludes to is the spiritual power inherent in the absolute receptivity of the state of the Prophet’s soul... Applied analogically to the spiritual quest, it can be said that every soul must make itself into a kind of ‘Laylat al-Qadr’, by emptying itself of egotism and worldliness, in order to be ‘full’ of receptivity to the divine: one aims to become a vessel made empty for the influx of divine grace.”

– Reza Shah-Kazemi, (*Spiritual Quest: Reflections on Qur’ānic Prayer according to the Teachings of Imam ‘Alī*, 73-74, [Click Here to Read](#))

Reading Resources:

If you do not accept the existence of God or are not sure, then read a [“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#) for the existence of God here.

If you do believe in the existence of God but are unclear on the concept of God, then [The Concept of God in the Teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III](#) on the concept of God according to the 48th hereditary Imam of the Ismā‘īlī Muslims.

If you do accept the existence of God but are unsure as to the existence of the immaterial human soul, then read [Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics](#) for a series of philosophical arguments on the soul.

If you believe that the Prophet Muhammad was merely a deliverer of the Qur’an and nothing more, then [read this article](#) which uses the Qur’an to delineate the spiritual duties and powers of the Prophet Muhammad.

What is Ismā'īlī Gnosis?

Gnosis – Arabic: *ma'rifah*, Persian: *shinākht*, Sanskrit: *jnāna*,
Hebrew: *hokmah*

Gnosis is that 'supreme knowledge' 'which unifies and sanctifies' the human being. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 41)

Gnosis is not acquired by discursive learning, but it is innate to the human soul and intellect. Gnosis is 'the basis of the intellect ('*ʿaql*)' and is 'unwavering in man'. Gnosis is not merely a discursive or rational (*fikrī*) knowing, but rather, it is direct awareness or recognition. (Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, *Jamī' al-Hikmatayn*, Chapter 22)

The highest level of gnosis is the gnosis of the Ultimate Reality (God, Allah, Tao, Brahman, Ayn Soph, Nirvana, etc.) which is called **tawḥīd** in Islam:

"The gnosis (*ma'rifah*) of God, glory be to Him, is the highest of the knowable truths."

– Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(*The Scale of Wisdom*, ed. Rayshahri, 707)

Tawḥīd is both the root and the goal of all gnosis. It is the root because *tawḥīd* is expressed by all forms of gnosis and it is the goal because *tawḥīd* is realized only after one has ascended through the limits (*ḥudūd*) of gnosis.

Human beings have come into existence to attain the gnosis of God, as expressed in the **Qur'an** and the **Ḥadīth**:

Wa mā khalaqtu al-jinna wa al-insa illā li-ya'budūni'
"I have not created the *jinn* and man except that they might worship Me."

– Holy Quran 51:56

According to the commentary of Imām 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib transmitted through Ibn Abbas, the words 'except that they might worship Me' (*illā li-ya'budūni'*) actually mean 'except that they might recognize Me' (*illā li-ya'rifūni'*) which refers to the **gnosis (*ma'rifah*)** of God.

Kuntu kanzan makhfiyan, fa-aḥbibtu an u'rafa, fa-khalqtu al-khalaqa li-kay u'rafa

"I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the creation so that I would be known."

man 'arafa nafsa-hu fa-qad 'arafa rabba-hu

"He who knows his soul knows his Lord."

Indeed, the gnosis of *tawḥīd* is innate and lies deep within the human soul. The Qur'an indicates that all human souls, upon their initial creation in the World of Particles (*'alam al-dharr*), were endowed with the recognition or gnosis of God:

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants (*dhuriyyatahum*), and made them testify concerning their souls (*anfūsihim*), (saying): "Am I not your Lord?" – They said: "Yea! We do testify!"

(This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: “Of this we were never mindful.”

– Holy Qur’an 7:172

Gnosis is attained through self-knowledge, and the human soul is the mirror of the Cosmos. Thus, gnosis embraces both the self and the Universe – both the inner world and the outer world. Through gnosis of both the microcosm and the macrocosm, one attains the gnosis of the Ultimate Reality (Metacosm).

Gnosis is universal to all human beings, but it has been expressed through different forms stemming from various prophetic revelations, religions and spiritual traditions. Thus one can speak of a Greek gnosis, a Jewish gnosis, a Christian gnosis, an Islamic gnosis, etc. Gnosis is the inner dimension of religion and the core of spirituality.

This blog is dedicated to the study of **Ismā’īlī Gnosis** – the forms and manifestations of universal gnosis (*ma’rifah*, *shinākht*, *jnāna*, *hokmah*) found in the tradition of Shī’ī Ismā’īlī Islam – and its relationship to other forms of gnosis. Ismā’īlī Gnosis is expressed by a variety of religious and intellectual disciplines including metaphysics, philosophy, history, theology, cosmology, scriptural hermeneutics, spirituality, comparative religion, and eschatology – all of which will be featured in this blog. All the different forms of gnosis found in various religions and traditions are but branches of a single root – the *sophia perennis* which contains the eternal truths (*haqā’iq*) that underlie all revelations, religions, and spiritual paths.

In a spiritual path (*ṭarīqah*) of Shī’ī Islam, the gnosis (*ma’rifah*, recognition) of *tawḥīd* is attained through the gnosis (*ma’rifah*, recognition) of the *Imām*.

For Shī’ī Muslims, the *Imām* is divinely-ordained spiritual successor/legatee (*waṣī*) of the Prophet Muhammad, the inheritor of the prophetic knowledge (*‘ilm*) and authority (*amr*), and most importantly, the bearer of the gnosis (*ma’rifah*). The *Imām* is the direct lineal descendent of the Prophet Muhammad through his cousin and son-in-law Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Talib and Faṭimah al-Zahra, the Prophet’s daughter.

The institution of the *Imāmat* is present in the world in every age and epoch even to the present day. An uninterrupted lineage of *Imāms* has existed through all the periods of human history including the epochs of the Vedic, Greek, Persian, Asian, and Abrahamic traditions, safeguarding and transmitting *gnosis* to the seekers of enlightenment from age to age.

The Shī’ī Muslim disciple (*murīd*) seeks the gnosis (*ma’rifah*, recognition) of *tawḥīd* – the gnosis of God – through the gnosis (*ma’rifah*, recognition) of the *Imām*:

Imām al-Husayn called out to his companions: “God – may His Mention be glorified – did not create the servants except to know Him, and by knowing Him to worship him, and by worshipping Him to be satisfied only by His worship, and to never find satisfaction in worshipping other than Him.” And a man said to him: “O Son of the Prophet, may my father and mother be

sacrificed for you. What is this Gnosis (*ma'rifah*) of God? The Imam said: "The Gnosis (*ma'rifah*) every people have of the Imam of their Time..."

(Shaykh Saduq, *Ilal al-Sharā'ī*, Vol. 1, 19)

"Everyone must know God through knowing me, since a person becomes a knower (*'ārif*) through my knowledge and becomes a unifier (*muwahhid*) through my *tawhīd*. Then the reality of *ma'rifat*, union (*ittihād*), and unity (*wahdat*) comes completely into existence, and the reality of worship becomes evident."

– Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salām,
(Nasīr al-Din al-Tusi, *Contemplation and Action*, 44)

From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat

“God created my spirit and the spirit of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib two thousand years before He created humankind. He sent ‘Alī secretly with every prophet and openly with me.”

– Prophet Muḥammad

The *Imāmat* is the office of spiritual and religious leadership recognized in Shī‘ī Islam according to which the *Imām* is the spiritual and religious successor (*waṣī*) of the Prophet Muḥammad. While [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#) ended with the Prophet Muḥammad, [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#), spiritual authority, religious guidance, and mystical gnosis continued in the institution of *Imāmat*.

Today, the Shī‘ī Ismā‘īlī Muslims recognize 49 designated hereditary *Imāms* from the progeny and family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) of the Prophet Muḥammad in direct lineal descent from Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib who was designated by the Prophet. The present (*ḥaḍir*) and 49th hereditary *Imām* is [“We come from the Light of God”: Birthday of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni](#) – known to his disciples (*murīds*) as Mawlānā Ḥaḍir Imām. (For more details on the history of this succession, see the article [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#))

Ismā‘īlī gnosis, as articulated in the teachings of various Ismā‘īlī Muslim philosophers, sages, and *Imāms*, reveals [The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Alī](#) which integrates and unifies the histories, communities and theologies of many different religions. One of the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad often quoted by Shī‘ī sources states:

“I and ‘Alī are of one light. God created my spirit and the spirit of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib two thousand years before He created humankind. He sent ‘Alī secretly with every prophet and openly with me.”

– Prophet Muḥammad,

(Shigeru Kamada, ‘Fayd al-Kāshānī’s Walāyah’, Todd Lawson, *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, 463)

Henry Corbin notes this same *ḥadīth* and concludes that:

“This last is as precise a statement as could be wished for. The Muhammadan Imamate, as the esotericism of Islam, is *eo ipso* the esotericism of all previous prophetic religions.”

(Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 42)

The *Imāmat* of Shī‘ī Ismā‘īlī Islam is not *only* the spiritual legacy of the Prophet Muḥammad but it embodies the [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) of *all* the previous prophetic religions and spiritual traditions. The presence of ‘Alī ‘secretly with every Prophet’ also means that this lineage of *Imāms* has been in existence *even before* the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad:

“It is impossible to think that there could not have been an *Imām* before Muhammad al-Mustafa. In reality, for many thousand centuries before this world and people, he was, he is at present, and will (always) be. After recognition of the *Imām* one must also know that there always was an *Imām* from the time of the creation of the world to the creation of Adam, from Adam to the Last Prophet, from the Last Prophet to this moment; that he always is, and will be, to the end of the world.”

– Khayrkwāh-i Harātī, (*Kalām-i Pīr*, transl. Ivanow, 115-116)

The Pre-Muhammadan *Imāms*

Various statements of the Prophet Muḥammad and the early *Imāms* illustrate how the Light (*nūr*) and authority (*amr*) of the *Imāmat* were transmitted among their forefathers before manifesting in the persons of the Prophet and Imām ‘Alī. This Light was passed down, from generation to generation, until it reached the historical persons of Prophet and Imām ‘Alī who inherited this Light from their respective fathers. Subsequently, the Light continued to be transmitted through the line of Shī‘ī *Imāms* descended from the ‘Alī:

“We were silhouettes of light until God wanted to create our form; He transformed us into a Column of Light and hurled us into Adam’s loins; He made us be transmitted through the loins of the fathers and the wombs of mothers... and when He had us reach the loins of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, He divided the light in two and placed half in the loins of ‘Abdallāh and the other half in the loins of Abū Ṭālib. Amina received in her breast the half that was for me, and she brought me into the world; likewise, Fāṭima, the daughter of Asad received in her breast the half that was for ‘Alī, and brought him into the world. Then God had the column [of Light] come to me and I begot Fāṭima; likewise, He had it go to ‘Alī, and he begot al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn... Thus, this light will be transmitted from *Imām* to *Imām* until the Day of Resurrection.”

– Prophet Muḥammad,

(Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, 40)

In a similar statement, the Fatimid Caliph-Imām Ma‘add al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh wrote in one of his famous letters:

“We were transferred through the chaste loins and pure and approved wombs. Whenever a loin and a womb brought us together, power and knowledge were manifest from us. This continued until our last ancestor, the best father, the chief of the messengers, the leader of the prophets, Aḥmad and Muḥammad, blessings of God be upon him and his progeny in every circle and in every assembly.”

– Imam Ma‘add Abū Tamīm al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh,

(Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 169-170)

Ismā‘īlī gnosis understands the universal chain of the Prophets and the *Imāms* in a [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\)](#): [Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) – which views the history of humankind as comprised of different

periods or ‘cycles’ of history. The following verse of the Qur’ān served as the inspiration for this theory of Cyclical Time:

“It is God who created the heavens and the earth and everything between them in Six Days, then He established (Himself) upon the Throne.”

– Holy Qur’ān 32:4

Each “Day” of Creation is a Cycle of one of the six major Prophetic Messengers (*nātiqs*): Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad. A Cycle lasts for several hundred years (ranging between five hundred and fifteen hundred years) during which the Prophet’s community is guided by his Summons, Scripture and [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#):

“The Cycle of every prophet is his ‘day’. The time in which we are now – I mean, the time after the Emissary, the Chosen, was sent forth up to the time of the Resurrection – is the ‘day’ of our Emissary. The days of Moses, Jesus, and the other prophets are past... God the Exalted created the lifetime of this world during the span of the prophethood of six prophets, each of whom had his cycle (*dawr*) and his summons (*da’wat*) in his ‘day’ (*rūz*), and during his day the Emissary summoned people to God... If people were to examine this interpretation, each prophetic community would occupy the position which it indeed occupies: the Christians established on the fifth day, the Jews on the fourth day, the Mazdeans on the third day.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw,

(*Between Reason and Revelation*, transl. Eric Ormsby, 152-153)

The institution of *Imāmat* was present during these Prophetic Cycles and the pre-Muḥammadan *Imāms* (i.e. ‘Alī sent secretly) transmitted the gnosis and esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the Scripture and the Law to the spiritual initiates of the Prophet’s community. For example, each of the six Prophets was accompanied by an *Imām* who served as his *waṣī* (legatee): Seth (with Adam), Shem (with Noah), Ishmael (with Abraham), Aaron (with Moses), James (with Jesus) and ‘Alī (with Muhammad). The lineage of *Imāms* continued from Cycle to Cycle, safeguarding and uphold the esoteric meaning of the prophetic message. The [Iqrā’ – ‘Read’ or ‘Remember’? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur’ān](#) was the last of the prophetic revelations and was succeeded by the Muḥammadan *Imāmat* in the person of Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the *Imāms* of his progeny (who are also descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad) to the present day. The Qur’ān alludes to this inter-prophetic lineage of *Imāms* in the following verse:

“Verily God chose Adam and Noah and the progeny of Abraham and the progeny of ‘Imran above all the worlds. Direct descendents, one after the other, and God is the Hearing, the Knowing.”

– Holy Qur’ān 3:33-34

The esoteric meaning and the *gnosis* of all revelations and traditions has been preserved and transmitted through an uninterrupted chain of *Imāms* which stems from the Prophet Adam and continues with present [“We come from the Light of](#)

[God”: Birthday of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni](#). The present *Imām* is himself the direct lineal descendent of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Imran, and the Prophet Muhammad.

The Seventh Cycle is the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) in which the esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of all prophetic revelations is revealed. In this final Cycle, knowledge (*‘ilm*), gnosis and spiritual truths (*haqā‘iq*) become available to humanity at large and the people of the world become unified.

“The interpretation of ‘establishing Himself upon the Throne’ is the execution of the command of God by the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) (‘Master of the Resurrection’), which is the Throne of God and which will be manifest after his six days have passed... ‘Tomorrow’ is the cycle to come. That ‘tomorrow’ in which the wise take such delight is the day of True Resurrection, when the shadows of ignorance will be lifted from humanity by the light of His knowledge, just as God says, ‘*The earth will be illumined by the light of its Lord*’.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw,
(*Between Reason and Revelation*, transl. Eric Ormsby, 153)

The Pre-Adamic *Imāms*

The Seven Cycles (“The Seven Days”) all together form a Major Cycle (“The Week”) of seven thousand years which began with the Prophet Adam – the Adam of the Qur’ān and the Bible. However, Cyclical History as envisioned in Ismā‘īlī gnosis extends even before *this* Adam – who was but merely the first Prophet of the current Major Cycle and not the first human being in an absolute sense. The Prophet Adam himself was preceded by a countless number of Cycles during which the lineage of *Imāms* was also present (see Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*).

Various Ismā‘īlī texts document an entire lineage of pre-Adamic *Imāms* – the *Imāms* who lived on earth *before* the Prophet Adam of the Bible and Qur’an. Several of these pre-Adamic *Imāms* include figures from Indian and Vedic traditions such as Shri Rāma and [The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Alī](#) – whom the Ismā‘īlī traditions, particular those of South Asia, considered to be the *Imāms* of the ancient periods. These lists are found in the *Ghatpāt Du‘ā’* ([see here](#)) of Pir Ṣadr al-Dīn and the writings of Fidā‘ī Khurasāni ([see here](#)) as well as other sources.

How far back into history does the *Imāmat* extend? Ismā‘īlī gnosis describes the origins of the *Imāmat* with the first human being on earth – who is referred to as the “Universal Adam” (*al-Adam al-Kull*). This Adam, however, is different from the Prophet Adam described in Genesis and the Qur’ān. The Universal Adam was without sin or impurity and established primordial institution of the *Imāmat* on earth, inaugurating the “Cycle of Cycles”. He and his companions established the

first “Call” (*da’wah*) to gnosis – an esoteric and intellectual Call which has reverberated from Cycle to Cycle and continues into the present Cycle:

“The first Adam founded the ‘Noble Convocation’ (*al-da’wah al-sharifah*) in this world; he it was who established the hierarchy of the hierocosmos (*‘alam al-din*), which symbolizes both with that of the Pleroma and with that of the macrocosm... In short, he was the founder of the permanent esoteric hierarchy, uninterrupted from cycle to cycle, and from period to period in each cycle, up to and since Islam.”

(Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 87)

The Imām al-Mu’izz, in paying tribute and invoking blessings upon his ancestors, makes specific reference to the *Imāms* of the ‘bygone periods and ages’.

“The customs of the Speaking-Prophets (*nuṭuqā’*), the ways of the *Imāms* and Prophets, the paths of the Messengers and Legatees (*awṣiyā’*), those of us who have passed before and those who shall come, blessings of God be upon us and upon our ancestors, the possessors of authority and discernment, in the preceding epochs and eras, and bygone periods and ages, when they carried out the rules of God and stood up for the order of God.”

– Imam Ma’add Abū Tamīm al-Mu’izz li-Dīn Allāh,
(Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean Empire*, 168)

The below Chart (created by Ismā’īlī Gnosis) depicts the various Cycles while highlighting the Prophets, the *Imāms*, the Scriptures, and the community of each Cycle.

The Cycles of Universal Prophecy and Imamat				
Cycle	Prophets	Imams	Scriptures	Communities
Cycle of Cycles (Origin of Humanity)	Universal Adam (<i>al-Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Adam (<i>Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Gnosis	Humanity (One Community)
Pre-Adamic (Pre 4,050 BC)	Rishi Vashisht Rishi Viyas Gur Sohodeva	Shri Rama Shri Krishna Shri Budh	Laws of Manu Vedas	Humanity (One Community)
Adamic (4,050 BC)	Prophet Adam	Mawlana Shith (Seth)	Scrolls of Adam	Brahmans
Semitic (3,000 BC)	Prophet Nuh (Noah)	Mawlana Sam (Shem)	Noahide Laws	Sabians
Abrahamic (2,000 BC)	Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)	Mawlana Isma’il (Ishmael) Mawlana Ishaq (Isaac)	Scrolls of Abraham	Mazdeans
Mosaic (1,400 BC)	Prophet Musa (Moses)	Mawlana ‘Adnan Mawlana Harun (Aaron)	Torah	Jews
Christic (33 AD)	Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus)	Mawlana Khuzaymah Mawlana Yaqub (James)	Gospels	Christians
Muhammadan (610 AD)	Prophet Muhammad (Last Prophet)	Mawlana ‘Ali	Qur’an	Muslims
Resurrection	<i>Hadrat Qa’im al-Qiyamah</i> (Lord of Resurrection)	<i>Hujjatu’l-Qa’im</i> (Proof of Qa’im)	Universal <i>Ta’wil</i> of all Scriptures	Humanity (One Community)

[Click on Image to Enlarge](#)

The Universal *Imāmat*

The existence and influence of the *Imāms* upon a plurality of traditions, civilizations and communities displays the universality of the *Imāmat*. The *Imāmat* is not only

an institution of Muslim leadership, but its scope and mission extends to people *all* faiths.

Today the present living Imām – Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husayni Āgā Khān IV – is the inheritor and guardian of the **universal gnosis** which emanates from *all* religious and spiritual traditions – including the Adamic, Semitic, Abrahamic, Jewish, Christian and Islamic revelations.

“The first Imam, in a conversation with his disciple Kumayl, makes precise reference to **the succession of God’s Sages who, from century to century, remain largely unknown to the majority of men. This was later to be known as *silsilat al-’irfan*, the ‘succession of gnosis’; and it consists of all those who, from the time of Seth, the son of Adam, down to the Muhammadan Imams, and including all those who acknowledge them as Guides, have been transmitters of the esoteric aspect of eternal prophecy.**”

– Henry Corbin, (*History of Islamic Philosophy*, 72)

Notes to Chart

- The dates before Jesus are approximate and subject to debate and speculation. The events of Mahābharata War have been dated by Dr. Padmakar Vishnu Vartak ([see link](#)) to 5,561 BC which was before the biblical timeline of Genesis (which began around 4,000 BC) and the birth of Prophet Adam in India. Similarly, the genealogies found in Ismā’īlī sources place Shri Rāma and [The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Alī](#) before the Seth and the Imams of the Adamic Cycle. Shri Budh (see the *Ginān Budh Avatar*) was the last *Imām* of the pre-Adamic Cycle who initiated the Cycle of Adam and appointed Adam as the first Prophet. In the Persian and Arabic traditions, he is referred to as the Resurrector (*qā’im*) Imām Hunayd and should not be confused with the founder of Buddhism who lived much later.
- Each Cycle began with a major Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) who was accompanied by an *Imām* called the *Asās* or *Waṣī*. The Prophet of each Cycle revealed a Scripture and a religious Law and established a unique religious community. The *Asās-Imām* succeeded the Prophet as the interpreter of the revelation and the leader of the community. The *Imāms* succeeded one another in direct lineal descent except in the case where the Prophet emerged from their line (in the case of Adam, Noah, and Abraham) in which the permanent *Imāmat* was transmitted from grandfather to grandson (e.g. from Lamech, father of Noah, to Shem, son of Noah). The genealogy and timeline of the biblical figures is found in the Bible. From a strictly historical point of view, the names in the genealogy before the period of Moses may actually stand for entire tribes or generations, in which case these genealogies must be taken symbolically and not literally. Nevertheless, they serve to illustrate the underlying theme which is the presence of the *Imāmat* in every epoch and period.

- After Prophet Abraham, the institution of *Imāmat* continued in two parallel lineages – the Permanent *Imāms* descended from Ismā‘īl and the Entrusted *Imāms* descended from Isaac, with the latter including many of the well-known Isrā‘īlite Prophets and *Imāms* (including Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, Solomon, John, Jesus, James). The Entrusted *Imāms* of the Isrā‘īlite line continued until the Cycle of Prophet Muhammad. The lineage of Permanent *Imāms* continued in a hereditary succession through the line of Ismā‘īl (including Mawlānā ‘Adnān and Mawlānā Khuzaymah) to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and continues thereafter in the line of Imām ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib down to Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī.
- The Ismā‘īlī texts named Simon Peter (*Shamun al-Safa*) as the *Imām* succeeding Jesus. However, contemporary research shows that Jesus’ brother – James the Just (*Ya‘qūb al-Ṣādiq*) – was his actual successor (see Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus*).
- The Cycle before Adam (termed as “Pre-Adamic”) was a Cycle of Resurrection in which humankind enjoyed an exalted level of gnosis, spirituality and ethics. The Qur’ān refers to Pre-Adamic humanity as being “one community” in the verse: “*Mankind was one community and God raised Prophets as bearers of good news and as warners and revealed to them the Book with Truth that it may judge between mankind concerning that in which they differed*” (Holy Qur’ān 2:213). But humanity began to turn away from the primordial religion of *tawḥīd* and began to differ amongst themselves which prompts the beginning of the Cycle of Adam and the sending of the Prophets. With the coming of the Seventh Cycle – the Resurrection – humanity is judged and returns to the state of “one community”.
- The initiator of the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#) who does not bring any new prophetic message but reveals the esoteric meaning or universal *ta’wīl* of all the previous revelations. The *Imām* directly preceding the *Qā’im* is his Proof (*hujjah*) or Gate (*bāb*) and will be the most exalted *Imām* of the Six Cycles.

Iqrā' – 'Read' or 'Remember'? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur'ān

Abstract: According to traditional interpretations, the first verse of the Qur'ān (*iqrā bi-smi rabbika*) merely commands the [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) to read aloud the verses of the Qur'ān. But based on early Muslim tradition and the rules of Arabic grammar, the Qur'an's earliest verses actually show that [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) was engaged in a form of mystical meditation, consisting of repeating and reciting a special Name of God, when the Qur'an was revealed to him. This interpretation has profound implications on how Muslims should understand the spirituality of a [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#): every prophet undergoes a spiritual initiation which includes rigorous spiritual training, the performance of mystical practices like meditation using a special Name of God.

If you do not accept the existence of God or are not sure, then read a "[He who is above all else](#)": [The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#) for the existence of God here.

If you do accept the existence of God but are unsure as to the existence of the immaterial human soul, then read [Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics](#) for a series of philosophical arguments on the soul.

If you do not accept that Prophet Muhammad was a true divinely-inspired prophet, then [Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#)

If you believe that the Prophet Muhammad was merely a deliverer of the Qur'an and nothing more, then [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) which uses the Qur'an to delineate the spiritual duties and powers of the Prophet Muhammad.

If you believe in the spiritual authority of the Prophet Muhammad and accept the Qur'an as [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#), but do not accept that Muhammad had any spiritual successors, then read this [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) showing that Muhammad appointed his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Talib as his successor.

If you wish to see historical proof that Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali, then [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#)

"The command to recite the Name of the Lord seems to refer to a certain act of devotion... The interpretation...according to which *Ṣūrat al-'Alaq* urges the prophet to praise the Name of his Lord, was almost utterly forgotten."

Uri Rubin

Ramaḍān is the month in which the first revelations of the [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) to the [The Prophet Unveiled: What](#)

[the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#). It is widely reported that the first verses of the Holy Qur'an revealed to the Prophet as he meditated in the Cave of Hira were:

*Iqrā' bi-smi rabbika'lladhī khalaqa
Khalaqa al-insāna min 'alaqin
Iqrā' wa rabbuka al-Akramu
Alladhī 'allama bi'l-qalami
'Allama'l-insān ma lam ya'lam*

These verses are usually read and translated as follows:

Read: In the name of your Lord Who created
Created man from a clot
Read: And your Lord is most Generous
Who has taught by the Pen
Has taught man that which he knew not.

Holy Qur'an 96:1-5

According to most traditional accounts and interpretations, the [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) was being told by [The Concept of God in the Teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III](#) to *read* the verses of the Qur'an which the [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) was conveying to him. This interpretation implies that the Qur'an, even prior to being revealed in the physical world, was a static and fixed *text* which the Prophet merely conveyed or 'read' to his community. However, there is no basis for this interpretation which has its origins in a later period and is married to a particular theology that sees [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) as transcending human history. But there is *another way* of understanding these verses, based on early Muslim tradition and Arabic grammar, which yields a different interpretation altogether.

Remember the Name of your Lord

The words *bi-smi rabbika* must first be re-examined. In the traditional interpretation, these words mean 'in the name of your Lord' – where the word *bi* is translated as "in". Thus, the Prophet is being commanded to merely read the Qur'anic verses – 'in the name of' his Lord as they revealed to him. But it would be better to actually look at all the instances of the words *bi-smi rabbika* in other Qur'anic verses to see if this reading actually makes sense in the context of the Qur'an as a whole:

*Fasabbih **bi-smi rabbika** al-'azīmi*
"Then praise the Name of your Lord, the Supreme."

Holy Qur'an 56:74

*Fasabbih **bi-smi rabbika** al-'azīmi*
"Then praise the Name of your Lord, the Supreme."

Holy Qur'an 56:96

*Fasabbih **bi-smi rabbika** al-‘aẓīmi*

“Then praise the Name of your Lord, the Supreme.”

Holy Qur’ān 69:52

*Wa-udhkuri **isma rabbika** wa tabattal ilayhi tabtīlān*

“And remember the Name of your Lord and devote yourself to it/Him devotedly.”

Holy Qur’ān 73:8

*Wa-udhkuri **isma rabbika** bukratan wa aṣīlān*

“And remember the Name of your Lord morning and evening.”

Holy Qur’ān 76:25

In the first three verses (56:74, 56:96, 69:52), the expression *bi-smi rabbika* is used but the word *bi* is silent in meaning – it does not actually add anything to the meaning of the phrase which is read as “praise the Name of your Lord” instead of “praise in the Name of your Lord”. In the last two verses (73:8, 76:25), the *bi* is not present and the verb *dhakara* (to remember, to invoke) is used instead of the verb *sabbaḥa* (to praise, to glorify). But the meaning of all these verses is virtually the same in that they are instructing the Prophet (and/or the believers) to praise or remember the Name (*ism*) of their Lord.

This conclusion should be applied to the *lqrā’* verse and the words *bi-smi rabbika*. If we make the *bi* silent (as it is in the three verses above), and recall that the word *lqrā’* also means ‘recite’, then the first verse of the Qur’ān reads follows:

lqrā’ bi-smi rabbika’lladhi khalaqa

“Recite the name of your Lord Who created”

The meaning of the above reading is vastly different than the traditional reading. Instead of being told to read a pre-determined, static text, the first verse of *Ṣūrah al-Alaḥ* is instructing the Prophet Muḥammad to recite or invoke the Name of his Lord. This reading was also supported by the early Qur’ān commentator Abu ‘Ubayda (d. 825) who held that *lqrā’ bi-smi rabbika* actually means *iqra isma rabbika* (‘Recite the Name of your Lord’). The *ba* is added in speech but is silent in its meaning and does not add anything to the phrase.

It appears that this was the original meaning of the first verses of the Qur’ān based on the earliest sources. It seems that later traditions and commentaries eventually shifted the meaning of this verse to the way it is read today: “Read: In the name of your Lord” according to which the Prophet was being commanded to simply read the ‘text’ of the Qur’ān. In this sense, the scholar Uri Rubin concludes that:

“The command to recite the Name of the Lord seems to refer to a certain act of devotion which the prophet is prompted to perform in honour of his Lord... The view that in *Sūrat al-‘Alaḥ* Muḥammad is commanded to start spreading the divine message of the Qur’ān has thus become the most prevalent one. The interpretation preserved by Abū ‘Ubayda, according to which *Sūrat al-‘Alaḥ* urges the prophet to praise the Name of his Lord, was almost utterly forgotten.”

Therefore, we must ask the question: Why does it matter that the Qur’ān instructs the Prophet to “recite the Name of your Lord” as opposed to “Read: In the Name of your Lord”?

Firstly, this means that the Qur’ān is not necessarily a preset, static ‘text’ or ‘book’ which the Prophet Muḥammad was passively reading to his community. In fact, the very notion that the Prophet was literally reading or hearing Arabic words and sounds is itself questionable (this issue will be dealt with in a later post). Secondly – and more immediate for the present discussion – the verse shows that the Prophet was being told to perform a specific ritual – the recitation of a particular Name of [The Concept of God in the Teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III](#). The commentator al-Rāzī even adds that the meaning of *iqrā’* (recite) in *Ṣūrah al-‘Alaq* is equivalent to *udhkur* (invoke, remember). Thus, the words *iqrā bi-smi rabbika* mean “remember/invoke the Name of your Lord”. This means when the Prophet was in the Cave of Hira, the first revelation of the Qur’ān was actually telling him to engage in the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Name of God – and a very specific name as evidenced by the term *rabbika* (your Lord) which already suggests a particular and intimate connection between the Prophet and God.

The fact that the Prophet was instructed to recite or invoke or remember the Name of God shows that Muḥammad was, to some extent, familiar with this devotional practice of invocation. The Prophet, even prior to receiving revelation, knew of an actual Name of God to recite and the actual *method* of invocation. As he retreated regularly to the Cave of Hira, it appears that the Prophet *was already engaged* in certain spiritual practices and disciplines – which included the invocation and recitation of a specific Name of God – what is today known as *dhikr*. Interestingly, this practice of *dhikr* – the repeated remembrance and invocation of the Divine Name – is the bedrock of spiritual praxis throughout Shi’ism and Sufism.

It is even more remarkable that another early *ṣūrah* of the Qur’ān – which came to the Prophet a few years after the first revelation – repeats the instruction for the Prophet to perform a specific recitation (*qur’ān*) of a weighty Word (*qawl*) – the Name of God – in a meditation during the night:

Yā ayyuhā’l-muzzammilu

Qumi al-layla illā qalīlan

Niṣfahu awi unquṣ minhu qalīlan

Aw zid ‘alayhi wa-rattili al-qur’ān tartīlan

Innā sanulqī ‘alayka qawlan thaqīlan

Innā nāshi’ata al-layli hiya ashaddu waṭan wa-aqwamu qīlan

Innā laka fī’l-nahāri sabḥan tawīlan

Wa-udhkhuri isma rabbika wa-tabbattal ilayhi tabtīlan

O ye who wraps himself
 Rise up during the night except a little
 Half of it or less from it a little
 Or add to it and recite the recitation with measured rhythm
 Indeed, we will cast upon you a weighty Word
 Indeed, the rising of the night is very hard and most potent and more suitable
 for the Word
 Indeed for you in the day is prolonged occupation
 And invoke the Name of your Lord and devote yourself to it with devotion.

Holy Qur'ān 73:1-8

These verses of *Ṣūrah al-Muzzammil* – which are among the earliest revelations of the Qur'ān in Mecca – prescribe a very specific spiritual practice. The Prophet is told to rise for a special night meditation and recite a special Word (*qawl*); the recitation (*al-qur'ān*) of this Word (the term *al-qur'ān* here refers to this particular recitation and not the Qur'ānic Scripture which did not yet exist) is to be done in a rhythmic tone which probably involves a specific breathing pattern; the Word to be invoked in this meditation is the Name of God and depending on how the words *tabbattal ilayhi* are read (i.e. “devote yourself to Him” or “devote yourself to it”), it may be said that the Prophet is instructed to devote himself to this invoked Name.

To summarize – the earliest revelations of the Qur'ān instruct the Prophet Muḥammad to engage and continue in the practice of reciting and invoking the Name of God – a Name which was a special and sacred Word that the Prophet was specifically granted.

The Ascension of the Prophets through the Names of God

The theme of the invocation of the Divine Name (*ism ilahi*) or Word (*kalima; qawl*) is not only unique to the case of Prophet Muḥammad – it actually recurs in the story of several Prophets in the Qur'ān.

In the Qur'ānic story of the appointment of Prophet Adam, what gives Adam precedence over the angels is the fact that God taught him all the “Names”. These “Names” taught to Adam were none other than the Divine Names – the Most Beautiful Names of God – by which Adam attained spiritual superiority over the angels:

*Wa 'allama ādama'l-asmāa kullahā thumma 'araḍahum 'alā'l-malāikati
 faqāla anbiūnī bi-asmāi hāulāi in kuntum ṣadiqīna*

“And He taught Adam all the Names. Then he said to the angels: ‘Inform me of the Names of these if you are truthful.’”

Holy Qur'ān 2:31

In other verses (38:72-73 and others), the Qur'ān refers to the “Spirit” (*al-ruh*) that God breathed into Adam after which the angels prostrated before him. This means

that the Names of God and the Spirit are one – the Spirit comprises the inner reality of the Names. Henry Corbin remarks that:

“This is emphasized by a *hadith* (a tradition) illustrating the Qur’ānic verse, which declares that Adam remained there, flung like an inert body, until God breathed His spirit into him, that is, until He has breathed into him spiritual science, the science of the esoteric things, that “science of Names” (Qur’ān 2:29), by means of which beings are promoted to their true being.”

Henry Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 103-104, [Click Here to Read](#)



The identification of the Spirit and the Divine Name is also demonstrated by the meaning of the Arabic word *ruh*. The term *ruh* is derived from the word *riḥ* (breath) and the actual recitation of the Divine Name (*ism Allah*) is actually a form of ‘breathing’ – indeed, this is the noblest form of breathing. And therefore, the Divine Spirit (*ruh*) or Breath (*riḥ*) which was given to the Prophet Adam took the form of the invoked Divine Name. In other words, the Prophet Adam attained his spiritual rank above the angels due to his internalization of the Divine Spirit which takes place through the invocation (*dhikr*) of the Names of God.

In the story of Noah, the Ark of Noah which leads the believers to salvation in both worlds runs its course by means of the Name of God:

*Wa-qāla irkabū fīha **bi-smi’llahi** majrahā wa-mursāhā inna rabbī laghafūrun raḥīmūn*

“And he (Noah) said: ‘Embark in it (the Ark). The Name of God is its course and its anchorage. Verily, my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Merciful.’”

Holy Qur’ān 11:41

The Qur’ān also relates that God tested the Prophet Abraham by means of certain “Words” (*kalimāt*). These Words refer to the Divine Names by which Abraham ascended the ranks of spirituality until God appointed him as the *Imām* of of the time:

*Wa-idhi ibtalā ibrahīma rabbuhu **bi-kalimātin** fa amtammahunna qāla innī jā’iluka li’l-nāsi imāman qāla wa min dhurriyyatī qāla lā yanālu ‘ahdī al-ṣalimīna*

“And remember when [Abraham was tried by his Lord by certain Words](#) and he fulfilled them. He said: ‘Verily, I appoint you *Imām* of humankind.’ He (Abraham) said: ‘And of my descendents?’ He (God) answered: ‘My covenant is not with the unjust.’”

Holy Qur’ān 2:124

The Prophet Abraham’s spiritual legacy is also passed down amongst his descendents by means of a sacred Word (*kalimah*) which endures forever. In other words, Abraham taught these Words (*kalimāt*) and Names of God to his successors:

*Wa-ja’alahā **kalimatan bāqiyatan** fī ‘aqibihi la’allahum yarji’ūna*

“And he made it an Enduring Word amongst his descendants so that they may return (to God).”

Holy Qur’ān 43:28

In the story of Mary and Jesus, the Qur’ān describes how Mary received the [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#) – due to which she gave birth to the Prophet Jesus:

*Wa maryama ibnnata ‘imrāna allatī aḥsanat farjahā **fanafakhnā fīhi min rūḥinā** wa-ṣaddaqt bi **kalimāti rabbihā** wa-kutubihi mina’l-qānitīna*

“And Mary, daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her sexual organ and [We breathed into it from Our Spirit](#). And she testified to the truth through [the Words of her Lord](#) and His Books and she one of the devout servants.”

Holy Qur’ān 66:12

[What is the esoteric meaning \(ta'wil\) of Mary's \(Maryam\) virgin conception?](#) gives the esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the God breathing His Spirit into the sexual organ of Mary as follows:

“This means that Mary did not turn her ears to the devils (*iblis*) with their speeches. [This is because the sexual organ is like the ear, and ear symbolizes the sexual organ because through it comes the corporeal form \(*ṣurat-i jismāni*\), and through the ear the psychic form \(*ṣurat-i nafsāni*\).](#) ‘She guarded her sexual organ’ means that she did not turn her ear to those who only teach the *zahir*, the formal side of the religion, disregarding the esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*).”

– Sayyidna Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Shish Fasl or Six Chapters*, transl. W. Ivanow, Chapter 3, [Click Here to Read](#))

For Nāsir-i Khusraw, the Divine Spirit was breathed into the “ear” of Mary and not her sexual organ. This also shows that the actual form of the ‘breathing of Spirit’ was something audible – a Word (*kalimah*). The sexual organ in this verse is used as a symbol or metaphor for the ear. Just as the sperm – the source of the physical form – is deposited in the womb by means of the sexual organ, the Divine Word – the source of the spiritual form – is deposited in the soul through the ear.

Therefore, it is not surprising that even early Christian theology maintained that the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary with Jesus not through her sexual

organ but by means of her ear. Mary received the Spirit by ‘hearing’ the Word of God which was spoken to her.

“The bodily locus of the virginal conception was not portrayed in early Christian acts as the vagina, but the ear: ‘The conception was by hearing’, wrote John of Damascus. In early iconography the Holy Spirit is not portrayed as coming into Mary’s body physiologically by sexual transmission, but spiritually by attentive hearing...the conception was by right hearing of the Word of God.”

Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, 292, [Click Here to Read](#)



The end of the verse also mentions how Mary testified to the truth through the Words (*kalimāt*) of God – these being the same Words by which Abraham was tested. The Qur’ān also refers to Jesus as a Word (*kalimah*) from God which He breathed into Mary:

‘Isa ubnu maryama rasūlu’llahi wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā maryam wa-rūḥun minhu

“The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word (*kalimatuhu*) that He cast to Mary, and a Spirit from Him...”

Holy Qur’ān 4:171

The above verse states that Jesus was the God’s Spirit and Word (*kalimah*) which He “cast” (*alqā*) into the Virgin Mary. This is significant because in *Ṣūrah al-Muzzammal* (73:53), the exact same verb – *alqā* (to cast, to commit, to present) – is used when the verse says to the Prophet Muḥammad – “Indeed we will cast (*sanulqī*) upon you a Weighty Word”. Thus, the “casting” of the Word of God upon

the Virgin Mary is identical to the “casting” of the Word of God to the Prophet Muḥammad.

Even in the case of Prophet Jesus, the Qur’ān indicates that God inspired him with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is initially given to a Prophet in the form of a Word (*kalimah*) or Divine Name (*ism ilahi*) – as shown in the cases of Prophet Adam and the Virgin Mary.

It is indeed remarkable that the Qur’ān highlights the instrumental role of the Words, Spirit or Names of God in the spiritual ascendance of the major Prophets: Adam is exalted above the angels only through the Divine Names or Spirit; Noah’s Ark safeguards the believers by the power of the Name of God; Abraham passes God’s trials and attains to the rank of *Imām* of all humankind only after being tested by God’s Words and transmits this Word to endure amongst his descendants; Mary receives in her ear the Holy Spirit in the form of a audible Word to give birth to Prophet Jesus; Jesus performs his miracles by means of this Holy Spirit. The Prophet Muḥammad, both prior and after his initial revelations of the Qur’ān, is made to recite a weighty Word that is the Name of his Lord.

Spiritual Initiation into Prophethood

The above Qur’ānic analysis shows that the great Prophets of God (e.g. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Mary/Jesus, Muḥammad) attained their exalted status by means of the Name of God which was received by them in the form of a Word (*kalimah*; *qawl*) that embodies the Divine Spirit. This demonstrates that the Prophets had to undergo a process of spiritual training, initiation, and development by means of the Word or Name of God to *actualize* their souls’ perfection for the function of prophethood.

These notions are all expressed in “the early Ismā’īlī idea of the gradual formation of enunciator-prophethood or *nāṭiq*-ship in a future prophet” (Shin Nomoto). For Ismā’īlī gnosis, the person of the Prophet does not merely attain prophethood in a sudden way without any historical or spiritual context. The Prophet experiences a spiritual expansion and elevation of his own [Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics](#)– the culmination of which is receiving [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#) or the Holy Spirit and assuming the prophetic office (*al-nubūwwah*). While a Prophet possesses latent perfection and is pre-destined for his mission even before his physical birth, his spiritual training effects “the gradual development of the prophetic faculty in a future prophet” (Nomoto, 218). Many Ismā’īlī Muslim theosophers and gnostics such as Abū Hātim al-Rāzi, Qādi al-Nu’mān, and Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī have described this process of prophetic formation in their writings:

“On the issue of the gradual formation of prophethood, we must consider some passages by al-Sijistānī, who is more systematic in presenting his

thought. Al-Sijistāni holds that prophethood (*al-nubūwah*) does not suddenly come into conjunction with just any prophet; rather, the prophet must experience significant change (*al-istiḥālah*) in his spiritual status until he reaches the rank of enunciator-prophethood (*ḥadd al-nāṭiqīyah*)."

Shin Nomoto, *Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*
by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, 217, [Click Here to Read](#)

The Prophets' spiritual training does not occur in isolation; numerous Ismā'īlī esoteric texts relate how the Prophets were initiated and trained by a hierarchy of spiritual knowers – the dignitaries of the "Calling" (*al-Da'wah*). [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a'](#) is an ancient and perpetually present institution of spiritual knowers, sages, and initiates present in every time and age under the [Towards Validating Manifest Imamāt From The Qur'an Alone](#) each period ([From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) our Previous Post for details). It is the Calling (*al-Da'wah*) which transmits eternal *gnosis* from generation to generation across time and space. In certain historical periods, the Calling operates openly while in others it functions in secret (such as in the present age and time).

The earliest chapters of the Qur'ān indicate that both before receiving revelation and afterwards, the Prophet Muḥammad was already familiar with the spiritual practice of remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Divine Name. The fact that the Qur'ān instructed him to invoke the Name of *his Lord (rabbika)* indicates that a direct and intimate relationship already existed between the Prophet Muḥammad and God Himself. Thus, the Name which Muḥammad was reciting was a specific Divine Name (the Name of *his Lord*) that *already* had a special significance for the Prophet. This could only mean that Muḥammad was *taught the ritual* of invoking his Lord's Name by the members or dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) of the Calling through whom he received spiritual training:

"Prophethood and prophetic ascent are linked to the gradual perfection of the human being that takes place initially with the training the "Calling" (*da'wah*) provides in each prophetic cycle....The "Calling" of each epoch, like the "ranks of religion", thereby provides the necessary training (*tarbiyyah*) not least for individual practitioners but for the prophets as well... Even the prophets are not exempt from the necessary training that the "Calling" provides in each cycle of prophetic history...The apparent Calling is paired with the hidden Calling for the purpose of explanation and facilitation."

Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, "Prophetic Ascent and Initiatory Ascent in Qāḍi al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl*", Gruber, Colby, *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales*, 160-164, [Click Here to Read](#)

The Ismaili *ta'wīl* works by Qadi al-Nu 'man (*Asas al-Ta'wil*) and Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (*Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*) explain how the Prophet Muhammad, prior to beginning his prophetic mission, was trained and initiated by the Calling (*al-Da'wah*) of the Imam of his Time who was Mawlana Imran – more popularly known

as Hazrat Abu Talib ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the father of Imam ‘Ali. The Prophet first received this spiritual initiation and upbringing at the hands of his wife, Hazrat Khadijat al-Kubra, who was the *hujjat* (proof) of Mawlana Imam Abu Talib ([Click Here to Read](#) more on this). The marriage between the Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Khadijah was both physical and spiritual. It was Hazrat Khadijat, the *hujjat*, who first recognized and confirmed the prophethood of Muhammad after his revelatory experience at Mount Hira.

“By marrying her both exoterically and esoterically, Muhammad received from her both the ranks of prophet and messenger (*nubuwwa* and *risala*). As his *hujja*, Khadija is made responsible for his ‘educational training’ as Imam or ‘Master of the time’, for elevating his status and explaining his rank. Echoing traditional Muslim accounts of her seniority to Muhammad...she was ‘the high Mary’. Khadija is also presented as being the trustee of Muhammad’s appointment of ‘Ali as his *wasi*, the heir of his knowledge and he who gathers in himself all the ranks.”

– Delia Cortese, Simonetta Calderini (Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam, 11

The previous Prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Mary/Jesus, were all prepared and ‘raised’ (*ba‘atha*– Holy Qur’ān 2:213) for their missions in the same way. From the earliest revelations of the Qur’ān, one clearly sees that the actual method of the Prophet Muḥammad’s spiritual ascension to the rank of prophethood was the invocation (*dhikr*) of a special Word (*kalimah*; *qawl*) that is the Name of God (*ism Allāh*). It is of no small significance that almost all the *Ṣūrah*s of the Holy Qur’ān begin with the words *bi-smi’llāh* – bearing witness how each and every verse of the Qur’ān descended through the Prophet only by means of his invocation of the exalted Name (*ism al-‘azam*) of God. This truth is also made present in daily life when Muslims and people of other faiths invoke the Name of God (i.e. *bi-ismi’llah*) when beginning any task.

During this [Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#) and in all moments of life, the one who seeks to follow the Prophets’ example (*sunnah*) must engage in the intense remembrance (*dhikr*) of God’s Names. In doing so, the spiritual seeker responds to the Calling (*al-da‘wah*) – thereby perfecting his or her human soul to attain direct communion with the Holy Spirit – the Spirit which inspired the Prophet to “RECITE the Name of your Lord who created” (*iqrā’ bi-smi rabbika’lladhi khalaqa*).

Notes:

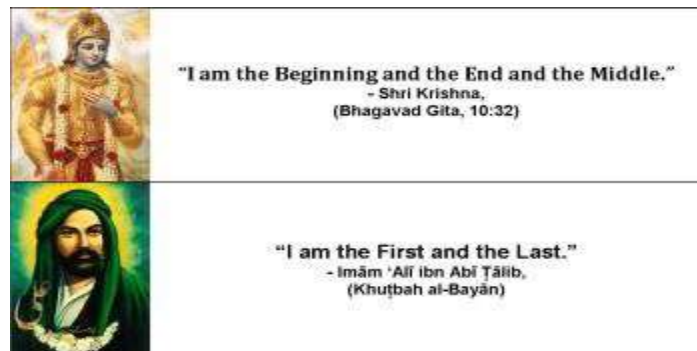
For the academic and scholarly background to this post, consult the following:

Uri Rubin, *Some Notes on the Interpretation of Sūrat al-‘Alaq*, [Click Here to Read](#)

Shin Nomoto, *Early Ismā‘īlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-İslāḥ* by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (Thesis), [Click Here to Read](#)

Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, “Prophetic Ascent and Initiatory Ascent in Qāḍi al-Nu‘mān’s *Asās al-Ta’wīl*”, Gruber, Colby, *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi’rāj Tales*, [Click Here to Read](#)
Rashida Nur-Muhammad Hunzai, *Hazrat Khadijat al-Kubrah*, [Click Here to Read](#)

The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Alī



Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib once proclaimed this soul-quaking utterance in his “Sermon of the Great Explanation”:

“I am the Sign of the All-Powerful. I am the Gnosis of the Mysteries. I am the Threshold of Thresholds. I am the companion of the radiance of the divine Majesty. I am the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. I am the Face of God. I am the mirror of God, the supreme Pen, the Tabula secreta.”

– Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(*Khuṭbah al-Bayān*, Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, 187)

How can such powerful statements of the *Imām* be explained? The eminent scholar Henry Corbin reminds us that:

“Here it is not this or that *Imām* that speaks in his own name, but an Eternal Imām.”

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 119)

Ismā‘īlī Muslim philosophy describes how an innumerable number of *Imāms* have been present on earth through a myriad of Cycles and Periods (see our [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) for details). But underlying the plurality and multiplicity of the historical *Imāms* is a single Light (*nūr*) or Reality (*ḥaqīqah*) – the “**Eternal Imām**”:

“In the Ismā‘īlī theosophy the seven *Imāms* of the seven periods of a cycle epiphanize the essence of a unique and Eternal Imām.”

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 119)

What is the **Eternal Imām**? God is the Absolute Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Essence (*al-dhāt*), the Originator (*al-Mubdi’*) of all existence – totally transcending all names, attributes, descriptions and qualities including even being and non-being. The **Eternal Imām** is the first origination and the first manifestation of God – known as the Divine Word (Arabic: *kalimah*; Greek: *Logos*), the Muhammadan Light (*nur Muḥammadī*) and the Universal Intellect (*al-‘aql al-kull*) in Sufism and Ismā‘īlī gnosis in accordance with the well-known *ḥadīths* of the Prophet:

“The first thing created by God was the Intellect (‘*Aql*); the first thing created by God was my Light (*Nur*).”

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 379, [Click Here to Read](#))

The **Eternal Imām** is the Supreme Name of God which comprises all the Divine Names and Attributes: the Living (*al-ḥayy*), the Self-Subsistent (*al-qayyūm*), the Knowing (*al-ʿālim*), the Perfect (*al-tamm*), the High (*al-ʿālī*), the All-Merciful (*al-raḥmān*), the Eternal (*al-qādim*), the Creator (*al-khāliq*), the Sustainer (*al-rabb*), the Light (*al-nūr*), the One (*al-wāhid*), the Witness (*al-shāhid*), the Face of God (*wajh Allāh*), etc. Thus, the **Eternal Imām** is the greatest manifestation and the eternal “personification” of the transcendent Absolute in the form of Names and Attributes – the ‘Lord’ who is directly worshipped and adored by the creatures. But the **Eternal Imām** is *not* God Himself: the Absolute Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Essence (*al-dhat*), the Originator (*al-Mubdiʿ*) remains forever transcendent and inaccessible, exalted above all attributes and relationships.

The **historical Imām** – the individual person of the *Imām* who lives in the material world (*dar al-dunyā*) and in the world of faith (*ʿalam al-dīn*) – is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the **Eternal Imām**. There is no *incarnation* or ‘taking on human flesh’. The **historical Imām** is only a locus of manifestation. The pure soul of the **historical Imām** serves as the mirror of the **Eternal Imām** – as evidenced in Imām ‘Alī’s words: “I am the *mirror* of God.”

The **historical Imām** is both the mirror and the reflection of the **Eternal Imām**. A mirror does not possess anything and is poor before the object it reflects. The **historical Imām** – as the mirror – is the most humble Servant of God (*ʿabdu’llāh*), the Friend of God (*walīyyu’llāh*), the Proof of God (*ḥujjatu’llāh*) and the Vicegerent of God (*khalifatu’llāh*) amongst humankind. This is why one finds the *Imāms* uttering some of the humblest supplications (*duʿāʿ*) before their Lord:

“I praise Thee, – and Thou art worthy of praise – for Thy benefaction toward me, the lavishness of Thy favours toward me, and Thy plentiful bestowal upon me, and for showing bounty toward me through Thy mercy and lavishing Thy favour upon me. Thou hast done well toward me, I am incapable of thanking Thee.”

– Imām Zayn al-Abidīn,

(*al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, Supplication 51, Verse 1)

The **historical Imām** – as the reflection of the **Eternal Imām** – is likewise the Hand of God (*yadu’llāh*), the Tongue of God (*lisānu’llāh*), the Eye of God (*ʿaynu’llāh*), the Side of God (*janbu’llāh*) and the Face of God (*wajhu’llāh*). In this respect, the **historical Imām** is the living Names and Organs of God and the channel of God’s blessings upon humankind. This is why Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the other *Imāms* have also made some very bold and ecstatic utterances. Their words and statements tend to oscillate between the differing points of view of the **Eternal Imām** and the **historical Imām**:

“I am the Sign of the All-Powerful. I am the Gnosis of the Mysteries. I am the Threshold of Thresholds. I am the companion of the radiance of the divine Majesty. I am the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. I am the Face of God. I am the mirror of God, the supreme Pen, the Tabula secreta.”

– Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(*Khuṭbah al-Bayān*)

“Indeed, Allah created us and formed us, and gave us the most perfect form. He made us His Eye over His Servants, and His Speaking Tongue, through which He speaks to His Servants. We are His Open Hand, extended with Mercy and Kindness to His Servants. We are His Face, through which He is reached, and the Gate which indicates upon Him. We are His reservoir in the heavens and Earth. Through us, the trees grow and the fruits are ripened. Through us the rivers flow, and through us the succour of the skies comes down. We plant the grasses of the Earth. Through our worship, Allah is worshipped. If it were not for us, Allah would not be worshipped.”

– Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq,
(*al-Kulayni, Usūl al-Kāfi, 1:144*)

Some readers may be shocked by such statements being uttered by the *Imāms*. What must be remembered is that the *pure human soul* of the **historical Imām** is utterly humble before God and aware of his own nothingness in the face of the Divine. The *Imām’s* pure soul is completely *effaced* in the light of the **Eternal Imām** because of his awareness of his own creature-hood. Like a perfectly polished mirror which is empty of all dust and rust, the soul of the *Imām* – empty of all sins, egotism, and individual pride – is the *mazhar* that perfectly *reflects the light* of the **Eternal Imām** (i.e. God’s Names and Attributes) through his own words and deeds. There is no question here of ‘incarnation’ (Arabic: *ḥulūl* – of God *entering into* the creature and ‘taking on flesh’): the **Eternal Imām** is not *inside* the body of the **historical Imām**; God does NOT become man. But the Divine Names/Attributes are truly *reflected in* the soul of the **historical Imām** who is but the *mazhar* – the locus of manifestation or epiphany.

“The ‘friends of God’, who know they are nothing in the face of the Absolute, are the ones who most faithfully reflect the Divine Names and Qualities, which belong not to them but to God... The reflections of these divine attributes shine through them most clearly precisely because the mirrors of their hearts have been polished by the remembrance of God; and the most persistent stains—those imprinted by egotism—have been removed.”

– Reza Shah Kazemi, (*Justice and Remembrance, 188-89*)

The **Eternal Imām** has always manifested in the form of the **historical Imāms** throughout the ages of humankind. Thus, one should not be surprised to know that the *Imām’s* spiritual sanctity and divine mission – known as *walāyah* – is universal and has been revealed and declared in *all* revelations, scriptures, and religious traditions. The Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (the fifth *Imām* of the Muḥammadan Cycle) has that:

“Our *walāyah* is the *walāyah* of God. Every prophet was only ever sent for it; the *walāyah* of ‘Alī is inscribed in the books of the prophets; a messenger was

only ever sent to proclaim the prophethood of Muḥammad and the *walāyah* of ‘Alī.”

– Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq,
(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam*, 258)

One of the ancient spiritual texts in which we find the *walāyah* of the **Eternal Imām** is the Bhagavad Gita – meaning the “Song of God”. In this text, the **Eternal Imām** appears as Shri Krishna – who is revered by Vaishnavite Hindus as the *avatara* of Shri Vishnu. This conclusion is confirmed by the spiritual hymns known as the *Gināns* – composed by a group of the *Bābs* (“Gates”) and *Hujjats* (“Proofs”) of the Ismā‘īlī *Imāms* known as the *Pīrs*. The *Gināns* proclaim that the Eternal ‘Alī (one of the names of the **Eternal Imām**) is Shri Vishnu and that Mawlānā Shri Krishnā was himself the *mazhar* or the *avatāra* of the **Eternal Imām**:

Ād Vishnu te Nar-Ali jaañ

“The pre-eternal Vishnu is the Lord ‘Alī.”

– Sayyidnā Pīr Saḍr al-Dīn,
(*Buddh Avatar*, Verse 456)

Āshāji Kānh rūp ka(n)i jiv ṭārya, ṭeno anṭ na pār ji

“In the form of Krishna the Lord saved many souls; there are no ends to Your limits.”

– Sayyidnā Pīr Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn,
(*Anant Akhāḍo*, Verse 428)

Some South Asian and Persian Ismā‘īlī texts locate Shri Rama and Shri Krishna in the hereditary lineage of **historical Imāms** (the earthly manifestations of Eternal Imam) which spans back before the biblical Adam (see our [From Ādam to Āgā Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#)– *From Ādam to Āgā Khān: The Universal Imāmat* for more details).

To demonstrate the reality of the **Eternal Imām**, we present below a side-by-side comparison of the ecstatic self-declarations found in the **Songs (*gīta*) of Mawlānā Shri Krishna** and the **Sermons (*balāgha*) of Mawlānā ‘Alī**. Most remarkably, the “I AM” declarations of these two exalted personalities are extremely similar. In the last analysis, it is the **Eternal Imām** – regardless of the form of His historical manifestations – who speaks and proclaims His Eternal Identity:

“Even if the sermon was not in reality pronounced by the First Imām...it was, at a given moment [pronounced] by an **Eternal Imām**, in the Shī‘ī consciousness, and it is this that matters from a phenomenological point of view.”

– Henry Corbin,
(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam*, 106)

Imām ‘Alī has said: “*I speak in every language of the world*”. In the language of yesterday, the Eternal Imām spoke as Mawlānā Shri Krishna; in the language of today, he speaks as Mawlānā Shāh Karīm.

HUMAN FORM – ETERNAL ESSENCE:

	"Many births of mine have passed." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 4:5)
	"I have existed throughout the past." - Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, (Khutbah al-Iftikhār)
	"Although I am unborn and my transcendental body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all those who are born, I appear in every age in My material form; In order to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to re-establish the principles of religion, I appear age after age." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 4:6-8)
	"I appear in appearances as God wills. He who has seen them has seen Me. He who has seen Me has seen them; In reality, We are the Light of God that changes not and His effulgence that is not extinguished; We appear and have Our Manifestation in every age." - Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, (Khutbah al-Ma‘rifat bi’n-Nūrāniyyah)
	"Unintelligent men, who know Me not, think that I have assumed this form and personality. Due to their small knowledge, they do not know My higher nature, which is changeless and supreme." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 7:24)
	"None of you can understand the bounty of our inner reality, the bounty God has instilled in us. No, not even a tenth of a tenth could be understood." - Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, (Bihār al-Anwār, 26:6-15)



"One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 4:9)**



"The faith of no believer will attain perfection until he recognizes Me through Light. If he attains this, then he has attained faith. In reality, the recognition of Me through Light is the recognition of God, and the recognition of God is indeed the recognition of Me."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Ma'rifah bi'n-Nūrāniyyah)**



"There is no end to My divine manifestations."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:40)**



"I shall appear again, even as I have done from the beginning that has no beginning or even unto the end that has no end; I am forever new and forever pre-existent."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Iftikhār)**

THE CREATOR AND THE FASHIONER:



"I am the Creator Brahma whose manifold faces turn everywhere."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:33)**



"I am the Creator."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)**



"I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:8)



"I am the maker and sustainer of all the regions of the world."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Tuṭunjiyyah)



"I am the generating seed of all existences. There is no being – moving or unmoving – that can exist without Me."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:39)



"I am the Creator of the stars and the substance of the heavens."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Nahj al-Asrār, 119-129)

THE CREATOR AND THE DESTROYER:



"I am all-devouring death, and I am the generator of all things yet to be."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:34)



"I am the builder of those civilisations and their destroyer; I cause their expiry and I cause them to be quickened."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Tuṭunjiyyah)



"The whole cosmic order is under Me. By My will it is manifested again and again, and by My will it is annihilated at the end."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 9:7-8)**



"I am the Word through which all things are consummated and through which the universes are brought into being."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib
(Khuṭbah al-Tuṭunjiyyah)**



"I am death: destroyer of the worlds."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 11:32)**



"I am the destroyer of all things."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Nahj al-Asrār)**

THE SUSTAINER AND THE PROVIDER:



**"Everything rests upon Me,
as pearls are strung on a thread."**

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 7:7)**



**"I am the one who holds the earths in place.
I am the holder of the heavens."**

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Nahj al-Asrār)**



"I control heat, the rain and the drought."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 9:19)



"I am He who makes the rain fall; I am He who enables the leaves to grow."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)



"I become the moon and thereby supply the juice of life to all vegetables; I am the fire of digestion in every living body, and I am the air of life."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 15:13-14)



"I am who who enables the leaves to grow; I am he who makes the colours burst forth and fruit ripen; I am the bestower of nourishment."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)



"I am the original fragrance of the earth, and I am the heat in fire. I am the life of all that lives, and I am the penances of all ascetics."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 7:9)



"I am the one who breaks open the wells, and plants the crops, and grows the fruits; I am the one who brings forth the trees."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Nahj al-Asrār)



"The splendor of the sun, which dissipates the darkness of this whole world, comes from Me. And the splendor of the moon and the splendor of fire are also from Me. I enter into each planet, and by My energy they stay in orbit."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 15:12-13)**



"I brighten the stars, and bring forth the moon. I fix the stars, and I am the ever expansive ocean, and I place the pegs of the Earth. I cast the orbits of the heavens. I illuminate the sun."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Al-Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭalib, 3:387)**



"Of the aquatics I am Varuna the controller of water."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:29)**



"I am He who makes the sources of water rise."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)**



"I am the goal, the sustainer, the master, the witness, the abode, the refuge and the most dear friend."

**- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 9:18)**



"I am sustainer of sustainers and the master of men; I am the supreme, the knower;

I am a knight of iron."

**- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(A Nusayri Catechism, 171)**

THE JUDGE AND THE RESURRECTOR:

	"I am Yama - the Lord of the Judgment." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:29)
	"I am the Lord of the Day of Judgement." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khutbah al-Bayān)
	"I am the punishment of the punishers." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:38)
	"I am the punishment of fire meted unto the damned." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khutbah al-Iftikhār)
	"I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 12:7)
	"I am the one who will bring the believers from their graves." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Nahj al-Asrār)

6

THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING AND THE OMNIPRESENT:

	"I am the Beginning and the End and the Middle." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:32)
	"I am the First and the Last." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khutbah al-Bayān)
	"By Me, in My unmanifested form, this entire universe is pervaded. All beings are in Me, but I am not in them. And yet everything that is created does not rest in Me." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 9:4-5)
	"I am the one who gazed at the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and did not see anything other than Me; I am the one who encompasses creation; I am the one who gazes upon the universes." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Nahj al-Asrār)
	"I am the Self seated in the hearts of all creatures." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:20)
	"I am the Lamp of hearts." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khutbah al-Bayān)

THE ALL-KNOWING AND THE OMNISCIENT:



**"Many births of mine have passed. Of you also;
I can remember all of them, but you cannot."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 4:5)



**"If I wished I could inform you of your forefathers
and all your predecessors as to where they were,
and from whom they were and where they are now
and how they came to be where they are!"**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib
(Khuṭbah al-Tuṭunjiyyah)



**"I know everything that has happened in the past,
all that is happening in the present, and all things
that are yet to come. I also know all living entities;
but Me no one knows."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 7:26)



**"To me hath been vouchsafed the knowledge of
past and future generations and their genealogies;
The knowledge of the destinies of all things hath
been granted unto me."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Iftikhār)



**"I shall now declare unto you in full this knowledge
both phenomenal and noumenal, by knowing which
there shall remain nothing further to be known."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 7:2)



**"People! Question me before you lose me!
For I am the Treasurer of Knowledge."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)



"I am the Knowledge of the Higher Self."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:20)



"I am the Gnosis of the Mysteries."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)

THE REVEALER OF SCRIPTURE AND THE TEACHER OF GNOSIS:



"I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvan, and Vivasvan instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣvaku."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 4:1-2)



"I bestowed the knowledge of the Prophets and the Friends of God and their decisive utterance unto them; I am Khidr who taught Moses; I taught David and Solomon."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Ma'rifat bi'n-Nūrāniyyah)



"The seven great Sages and before them the four other great Sages and the Lawgivers are born out of My mind."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:6)



"I am the light of the Prophets; I am the sanctity of the Saints of God; I am the certitude of those who know with certainty."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)



**"Among sages and demigods I am Narada;
Of the singers of the gods I am Citraratha; Among
perfected beings I am the sage Kapila."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:26)



**"I am the first Adam. I am the first Noah. I am
Ibrahim the Friend when he was cast in the fire."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Nahj al-Asrār)



**"Of the descendants of Vrsni I am Vasudeva;
Of the Pandavas I am Arjuna;
Of the sages I am Vyasa;
Among great thinkers I am Usana."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:37)



**"I am Adam and Seth; I am Moses and Joshua;
I am Jesus and Simon; I am Hanbatha of the Blacks;
I am Bashir of the Turks; I am Jirjis of the Franks."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)



**"I am the Rig Veda;
I am the Sama Veda;
I am the Yajur Veda;
Indeed I am the compiler of Vedanta;
I am the knower of the Vedas."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 9:17, 15:15)



**"I am the Master of Esoteric Interpretation;
I am the Commentator of the Gospels;
I am the Sage of the Torah;
I am the Mother of the Book."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khuṭbah al-Bayān)



"By all the Vedas I am to be known."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 15:15)



"There is not a letter revealed by God in any of His Books whose intention does not point towards me."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Iftikhār)



**"I am the ritual;
I am the sacrifice, the offering to the ancestors,
the healing herb, the transcendental chant;
I am the butter and the fire and the offering."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 9:16)



**"I am the meaning of Ramadan;
I am the Night of Power; I am the *Surah al-Hamd*;
I am the purpose of prayer itself, whether at home
or when travelling; I am the purpose of fasting."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Iftikhār)



**"Of vibrations I am the *Om*. Of sacrifices I
am the chanting of the Holy Names."**

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 4:5)



**"I am the Most Beautiful Names of God
which one Invokes."**

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)

THE MANIFEST AND THE IMMANENT:



"I will tell you of My splendid manifestations."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:19)



"I am the Manifest."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)



"Among men I am the king."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:27)



"I am the prince of every believer"

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Bihar al-Anwar, 26:5-16)



"I am the fire of the elements."

- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:23)



"I am fire itself."

- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Iftikhār)



"I am the Holy Fig Tree."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:26)



"I am the Tree of Lights"
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)



"I am the thunderbolt."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:28)



"I am the thunder."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)



"Among the beasts I am the lion."
- Shri Krishna,
(Bhagavad Gita, 10:30)



"I am the lion of the sons of Banu Ghalib."
- Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,
(Khutbah al-Bayān)

	"Of purifiers I am the wind." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:31)
	"I am the one who causes the winds." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khuṭbah al-Tuṭunjiyyah)
	"Of letters I am the letter A; Among compounds I am the dual word." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:33)
	"I am the secret of letters; I am the lord of the <i>Alif-Lam-Mim</i>." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khuṭbah al-Bayān)
HISTORICAL NAMES OF THE ETERNAL NAMED:	
	"I am Vasudeva of the descendants of Vrsni." - Shri Krishna, (Bhagavad Gita, 10:37)
	"I am 'Alī the son of Abu Talib." - Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (Khuṭbah al-Bayān)

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(Note: Some translations will slightly differ from the above)

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Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” (Part 1)

“The Qiyāmah is true and will happen, but a full explanation of it, either in theory or in common doctrine, is not easy.”

– Paul Walker, (*Abu Yaqub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary*, 73)

“We, the Imāms in descent from Imām Husayn, are present until today and we shall remain until the Qiyāmah and even after the Qiyāmah.”

– Imām Shāh Āgā Shāh ‘Alī Shāh

In Islamic thought, the ideas and themes relating to the “end of the world” fall under the doctrine of *qiyāmah* (“rising”, “resurrection”). The Qur’an contains hundreds of references to *qiyāmah* under various names including: the Day of Resurrection, 2:85; the Day of Mutual Disillusion, 64:9; the Day of Mutual Calling, 40:32; the Day of Decision, 37:21; the Day they are raised up, 7:14; the Day of Judgement, 1:4; the Day of Gathering together, 50:44; the Day they come forth [from the tombs], 70:43; the Day of Imminence, 40:18; the Day when the Hour comes, 30:12; the Day of Reckoning, 14:41.

For the people of the exoteric (*ahl al-zāhir*), *qiyāmah* is when physical world comes to an end and all things return to God for the final judgment. They expect *qiyāmah* to be preceded by a series of natural disasters and physical events including earthquakes, disasters, wars, the opening of the heavens, and other such things.

However, the esoteric (*bāṭin*) perspective views *qiyāmah* in an entirely different sense. In this sense, Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī writes that the real meaning of *qiyāmah* is hidden from the masses and only available to the People of the True Realities:

“Among the greatest of matters in which the People of Realities (*ahl al-ḥaqā’iq*) take pride is the recognition of *qiyāmah*, its causes, and the tokens and signs that follow these, about which the people of the exoteric (*ahl al-zāhir*) are in the dark.”

– Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, (*Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 181)

In the esoteric perspective, *qiyāmah* is not a physical event, but rather, it is a spiritual or soul-related event which has effects and manifestations in the physical world. This is because *qiyāmah* is related to creation (*khalq*). Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh explains that “the creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time, but a perpetual and constant event” (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*). Similarly, *qiyāmah* is an event that occurs in every moment and instant – although it is hidden and not perceived by most people.

Just as time is continuous, it can be felt, measured and aggregated in certain intervals – seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, decades, etc, in the same way, the *qiyāmah* which is ever-occurring can be experienced in intervals. When a being

fulfills and actualizes the limit (*ḥadd*) of its own existence, this is the “metamorphosis of being which esoteric parlance designates as *qiyāmah*, resurrection.” (Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*). Thus, *qiyāmah* is a direct culmination and the recompense (i.e. reward, punishment) of the previous actions and events in the life of a particular being. All human beings undergo *qiyāmah* as they ascend from one level of consciousness to the next – such as the progression through the mineral, vegetable, animal, and rational souls in earthly life.

Thus, we can speak of involuntary *qiyāmah* – when the human soul experiences the death of the physical body and is resurrected in the astral or imaginal body. There is also the voluntary *qiyāmah* – when the human soul undergoes the final death and attains union with God – such as the spiritual *mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad. A collective *qiyāmah* is something experienced by a group of human beings – such as a community, a nation, a civilization, or even humanity as a whole. When *qiyāmah* is understood as “the end of the world” – it is referring to a collective *qiyāmah*. This *qiyāmah* is foremost a spiritual event which has consequences and effects in the physical world – as manifested in human history. However, the term “world” in this expression “the end of the world” cannot be understood as the planet Earth or the physical universe as a whole. A “world” (*‘ālam*) refers to the entire way of life, sets of conventional beliefs, paradigms of understanding, and discourses of knowledge (*‘ilm*) that subsist amongst human beings in a particular period of human history – called a cycle (*dawr*). The “end of the world” refers to the conclusion (“death”) of one such historical cycle (*dawr*) and the beginning (“birth”) of a new cycle. This transition – from one historical cycle (*dawr*) to the next cycle – is the *qiyāmah* or the “end of the world”. The great Ismā‘īlī Muslim philosopher Sayyidnā Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī explains as follows:

“Amongst these [worlds] is the revolution that takes place when one cycle changes to another, when one prophetic tradition (*sunnat*) and custom changes to another, and one religion (*millat*) changes to another. Each one of these is a world, each of these is a separate world, and when each changes, one may say that such and such a cycle, a prophetic tradition and a religion, which did not exist and then came into existence, was a separate world which underwent non-existence and then existence... Thus, when one cycle, which is another world, begins, the founder (*wāḍi‘*) of the religion of that cycle is made manifest, and his appearance, form, language, dialect, speech, behavior, deeds and spiritual path, both in whole and part, are completely different [from the previous cycle].”

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 68-69)

Different historical periods or cycles are marked by the appearance of God’s Messengers and each cycle (or “world”) lasts anywhere between five hundred or fifteen hundred years. In the language of the Abrahamic scriptures, the cycles are referred to as the “Days of God” (Qur’ān 14:5) or the “Days of Creation” (Genesis):

“Lo! Your Lord is God Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days.
Then He established the Throne.”

– Holy Qur’ān 7:54

According to the esoteric meaning (*ta’wīl*) of this verse, the six days in which God creates the heavens and the earth are six historical cycles of prophecy and religion. The “world” created in during these six cycles is the “World of Faith” (*‘ālam al-dīn*).

“The Cycle of every prophet is his ‘day’. The time in which we are now – I mean, the time after the Emissary, al-Muṣṭafa, was sent forth up to the time of the Resurrection – is the ‘day’ of our Emissary. The days of Moses, Jesus, and the other prophets are past... God the Exalted created the lifetime of this world during the span of the prophethood of six prophets, each of whom had his cycle (*dawr*) and his summons (*da’wat*) in his ‘day’ (*rūz*), and during his day the Emissary summoned people to God... If people were to examine this interpretation, each prophetic community would occupy the position which it indeed occupies: the Christians established on the fifth day, the Jews on the fourth day, the Mazdeans on the third day.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby, 152-153)

In each cycle of prophecy, the Enunciating Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) reveals a Scripture and a religious Law (*sharī’ah*). Accompanying the *Nāṭiq* and later succeeding him is the person of the Foundation (*Asās*) – who is the first hereditary *Imām* of the cycle. The *Asās* is succeeded by a lineage of *Imāms* until a *qiyāmah* – when the prophetic cycle comes to an end and the next *Nāṭiq* appears. The institution of *Imāmah* continues throughout these prophetic cycles – serving as an arc of guidance, continuity and permanence ([From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) our previous post on the continuity of the eternal *Imāmat* in history). An overview of these six cycles is as follows:

Cycle	Prophets	Revelation	Scriptures	Communities
Cycle of Cycle (Origin of Humanity)	Universal Adam (a’Adām al-Adām)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Pre-Adamite (Pre-Adamite)	Pre-Adamite (Pre-Adamite)	Pre-Adamite (Pre-Adamite)	Pre-Adamite (Pre-Adamite)	Pre-Adamite (Pre-Adamite)
Adamite (4,000 BC)	Prophet Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Sethite (3,000 BC)	Prophet Seth (Seth al-Seth)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Abrahamic (2,000 BC)	Prophet Abraham (Abrahām al-Abrahām)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Mosaic (1,500 BC)	Prophet Moses (Mūsā al-Mūsā)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Christian (1,000 AD)	Prophet Jesus (Yūsuf al-Yūsuf)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Mahometan (600 AD)	Prophet Muhammad (Muḥammad al-Muḥammad)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)
Resurrection (2000 AD)	Prophet Jesus (Yūsuf al-Yūsuf)	Universal Adam (Adām al-Adām)	Universal Quran (Adām al-Adām)	Humanity (the Community)

When the Sixth Prophetic Cycle comes to an end, the Seventh Cycle begins. The Seventh Cycle, in the Qur’anic verse above, is referred to as the establishment of the Throne. This Seventh Cycle is the Cycle of the Great *Qiyāmah*. This is because a cycle of prophecy consists of the dominance of the religious Law (*sharī’ah*) in which spiritual truths (*ḥaqā’iq*) are concealed in symbols and only available to the initiates. The Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is when the spiritual truths are unveiled to the public. The meaning of *qiyāmah* is literally “rising” and the meaning of the word “apocalypse” is “revelation”. Therefore, the *qiyāmah* or apocalypse is not the end

of the physical world, but rather, the revelation, rising or unveiling of spiritual truths to humanity.

“In the cycle of every Prophet, the period of the manifestation of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) dimension of the religious law (*sharīʿat*) is called the cycle of concealment, and the cycle of every *Qāʾim*, when the manifestation of the esoteric realities of the religious laws (*haqāʾiq-i sharīʿat*) of the Prophets occur, is called the cycle of unveiling (*dawr-i kashf*).”

– Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 69)

The Seventh Cycle, which follows the previous Six Prophetic Cycles, is the Special Cycle of the Great *Qiyāmah* because it happens only once in every several thousand years. This Cycle of *Qiyāmah* lasts for one thousand years and is marked by special conditions and events which are the culmination, fulfillment and apex of the previous Six Prophetic Cycles. When the Sixth Cycle – the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad – reaches its climax and conclusion, it is then that the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins:

“In the current cycle of human history, however, it was still expected, as with the earliest Ismaʿilis, that full *qiyama*, or the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat-i qiyamat*), would occur at the end of the final millennial era after Adam; that is, at the end of the sixth era initiated by the sixth law-announcing prophet, Muhammad. The Great Resurrection, towards which all the partial consummation of the preceding cycles in history of mankind had been tending, would inaugurate the final, seventh era – the culmination of the ages in the history of mankind.”

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, II, p. 381)

The person who begins and initiates the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is not a Prophet – since Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets. Instead, the august personality who begins this *Qiyāmah* is called the *Qāʾim al-Qiyāmah* (Lord of the Resurrection) and he is the Seventh *Nāṭiq* after the previous Six Messengers. Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw (d. 1088) describes this as follows:

“The interpretation of ‘establishing Himself upon the Throne’ is the execution of the command of God by the *Qāʾim al-Qiyāmat* (‘Lord of the Resurrection’), which is the Throne of God and which will be manifest after his Six Days have passed... ‘Tomorrow’ is the cycle to come. That ‘tomorrow’ in which the wise take such delight is the day of True Resurrection, when the shadows of ignorance will be lifted from humanity by the light of His knowledge, just as God says, ‘*The earth will be illumined by the light of its Lord*’.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby, 153)

It is true that within a single prophetic cycle, i.e. the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad, there are minor *Qāʾims* as well – approximately every seventh *Imām* in the chain of *Imāmat* is the *Imām-Qāʾim* of the minor Cycle and brings a minor *qiyāmah* for the community of believers. Each minor *Qāʾim* reveals new esoteric teachings to

the community of believers relative to his own age. Some examples of the minor *Imām-Qā'ims* during the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad are Imām Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, Imām al-Mu'izz, Imām al-Ḥakim bi-amr Allāh, Imām Ḥasan 'alā dhirkihī al-salām, Imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, and others. All of these minor *Qā'ims* serve as previews or foretastes of the actual *Qā'im* – the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* who is the Seventh *Nāṭiq* – while the minor *qiyāmahs* are foreshadowings of the Great *Qiyāmah*. Henry Corbin explains that:

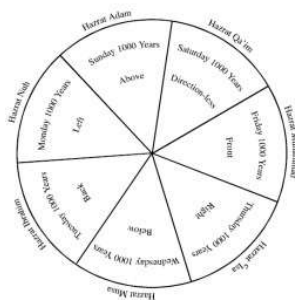
“The name of *Qā'im*, resurrector, is reserved *par excellence* for “he who will rise up”, the Lord of the Resurrection, at the close of the final Period of our Cycle. Yet each partial *Qā'im* at the end of each Period of the Septenary, as well as each *Imām* and each member of the Order, is also, potentially, Lord of the Resurrection, a limb of his mystical body, an oratory in his Temple of Light.”

– Henry Corbin, (*Temple and Contemplation*, 162)

Thus, the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* (Lord of the Resurrection) is not merely one of the seven *Imāms*, but rather, he is the *Qā'im* of the entirety cyclical history and his *qiyāmah* is the Great *Qiyāmah*. Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw explains the difference between the *Qā'im* (Seventh *Nāṭiq*) and the previous Prophets as follows:

“The Jews respect Saturday and do not work on it because of this, i.e. God has rested on this day. But they do not know that when the Messengers told people this, they meant that the people should know that, by the command of God, there will come to this world Six Messengers who will instruct the people (to work). When the Seventh will come, he will not instruct, rather, he will give them the reward of their work. And they called it Saturday and said to respect it and that day is the day of the Lord of Resurrection (*Qā'im-i Qiyāmat*), may peace be upon him.”

– Sayyedna Nasir-i Khusraw,
(*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter VII, tr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, *Ilm Magazine*, Vol. 11,
No. 4/3, December 1987 / March 1988, p. 36)



A visual depiction of the Seven Prophetic Cycles of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the *Qā'im*. Each Cycle spans approximately 1,000 years. Indeed, the very purpose of the previous Prophets, Messengers and *Imāms* and their missions was to prepare the way for the arrival of the *Qā'im* and the Cycle

of *Qiyāmah*. The function of the *Qā'im* is to be the “lord of reckoning” instead of a “lord of *sharī'ah*” like the Messengers of God before him.

“Through the *Qā'im*, God completes and fulfills his promise in the way of bestowing intellectual emanations upon all souls. The *Qā'im* is crucial to the completion of the cycle of revelation. He is intrinsically related to the cycle in its growth and harmony or its corruption and disunity. He negates all natural structures since the very event of the advent of the *Qā'im* symbolises the end of one order, the judgment, and the beginning of another order, different yet not discontinuous.”

– Boustān Hirjī, (*A Study of Risalah al-Bahira*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, Montreal, October 1994, 155)

Many religions have described the coming of the *Qā'im* under different terms and symbols such as the *Messiah*, the *Kalki Avatara*, *Matreyah*, the *Mahdi*, and others. According to the Ismā'īlī gnosis, the *Qā'im* is not some random person who appears out of nowhere, but he comes from the lineage of the *Imāms* from the progeny of the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib. In the Holy Qur'ān, all the various names of *qiyāmah* such as the “Hour”, the “Last Day”, etc. are references and allusions to the holy personality of the *Qā'im*. The Prophet Muḥammad once said: “*I and the Hour were sent like these two forefingers.*” That is to say, Muḥammad is the final Prophet to appear before the coming of the *Qā'im*. The Prophet's analogy of himself and “the Hour” as “two forefingers” means that they are both similar in the sense of being divinely-inspired human beings.

In Ismā'īlī gnosis, the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* is the most eminent human being in the entire Cosmos. His soul encompasses and integrates the virtues of all the Prophets, *Imāms*, sages, saints, and luminaries who preceded him. In this sense, Henry Corbin refers to the *Qā'im* as the “Perfect Child” because he is the most perfect soul to be created by the Universal Soul and it is through him that Universal Soul actualizes its own perfection.

“It is said, for example, that the *Qā'im*, the aim and goal of all the *hudūd*, the degrees or “horizons”, is the Grand Cycle of which the *Imāms* are the periods or partial cycles, just as each *Imām* is himself a cycle in relation to his *hudūd*. ... It is also said that the *Qā'im* is the “coalescence” (*majma*), the *corpus mysticum* of all the *hudūd*; each of the *Imāms* has his own *corpus mysticum*, his Temple of Light, and all are gathered together and integrated in the Sublime Temple of the Resurrector.

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 99)

Over one thousand years ago, several Ismā'īlī *pīrs*, *hujjats*, *dā'īs*, and philosophers offered prophecies, descriptions, and explanations of the how the Great *Qiyāmah* would occur and what its signs and effects would be. It must be remembered that since *Qiyāmah* is a spiritual event, then all the verses and

descriptions of it in the Qur'ān and other scriptures must be understood symbolically using the technique of *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation).

In a summary form, we now relate the major "Signs" of the *Qiyāmah* and the appearance of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* as outlined in the books of the *Ismā'īlī da'wah*:

1) The Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*)



And verily, We revealed him in the Night of Power
And how can We convey to you what is the Night of Power?
The Night of Power is greater than a thousand months
The Angels and the Spirit descend in it upon all decrees by the permission of
their Lord
Peace it is, until the rising of the Dawn.

– Holy Qur'ān 97:1-5

The beginning of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is the appearance of the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*). Exoterically and historically, the Night of Power was one of the last odd nights of the Month of Ramaḍān. But esoterically in light of the *qiyāmah*, the Night of Power, refers to an august personality in the World of Faith who begins the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

All *Nātiqs* were accompanied by their *Asās* – the first *Imām* of the new Cycle who served as the *Hujjat* (proof) and *Bāb* (gate) of the *Nāṭiq* – like *Imām 'Alī* was for the Prophet Muḥammad, or *Imām Shith* (Seth) was for Prophet Adam. Similarly, each *Imām* has a son who serves as his *Hujjat/Bāb* and later succeeds him – like *Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq* was for *Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir*.

On the same lines, the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* is also accompanied by his own *Hujjat* or *Bāb* – except that whereas the *Hujjat/Bāb/Asās* of every *Nāṭiq* or *Imām* came after him, the *Hujjat* or *Bāb* of the *Qā'im* comes before him. That is to say, the *Qā'im's* own father or the preceding *Imām* (instead of his son or the succeeding *Imām*) will serve as his *Hujjat* or *Bāb*.

"Before the advent of the seventh cycle, governed by the *Qā'im*, comes the *Lahiḳ* or *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im*. This is noteworthy, as the *hujjat* of an *Imām* is generally his contemporary. The *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im*, however, is the harbinger of the advent of the Sabbath."

– Shafique Virani, (*The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw*,
Institute of Ismaili Studies)

The *Qā'im*, in the symbolic language of the Qur'ān, is called the “Last Day” (*yawm al-ākhirah*) or the Seventh Day (in the Bible). And therefore, the “Last Day” is preceded by the greatest of all nights – in the language of the Qur'ān, this is called the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*). According to the science of *ta'wīl*, the Night of Power stands for the great *Imām* who functions as the *Hujjat* or *Bāb* of the *Qā'im* and the entirety of *Sūrat al-Qadr* is a metaphor for the exalted personality of this *Imām*.

“...the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* comes before him in the World of Faith and he is the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*).”

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Discourse 33)

“The Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) is a symbol (*mathal*) of his *Bāb* (gate) and *Hujjat* (proof) who is going to come before him. And thus the *Bāb* of the *Qā'im* is the lord of universal explanation (*sahib al-bayan al-kulli*) and the true unveiling (*kashf al-haqiqi*).”

– Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī, (*al-Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Volume II, 612)

The Night of Power is greater than a thousand months. The inner meaning of this is that the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* shall be greater than a thousand *Imāms*. This is because the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* will be “the lord of universal explanation and the true unveiling” – meaning, his teachings will reveal spiritual truths and insights in clear, succinct and unprecedented manner. Indeed, the *Qā'im*'s *Hujjat* will be the greatest *Imām* of all the Cycles of Prophecy going back to Adam:

“His saying, ‘*Laylat al-Qadr* is better than one thousand months’, alludes to the *Bāb* of the *Qā'im*, peace be on his mention, [who is] greater than all of what is established by the manifestation of the grades of the intellects, from the legatees of the possessors of the religious laws and their most radiant degree.”

– Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī, (*Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Volume III, 8)

“The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.” That is, the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* is superior in knowledge to a thousand Imams, although collectively their ranks are one.”

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Discourse 33)

The meaning of *al-Qadr* is the *Qā'im* of the Progeny of Muḥammad (*qā'im-i āl-i Muḥammad*) and the meaning of *Laylat al-Qadr* is the *Hujjat* or *Bāb* of the *Qā'im*. The Qur'ān explicitly states: “We revealed him in the Night of Power”, i.e. “We revealed the *Qā'im* in the personality of his *Hujjat*.” This means that the *Qā'im* will carry out his mission, reveal his knowledge and display his glory in the physical world through the person of his *Hujjat*.

This *Hujjah* or *Asās* of the *Qā'im* will be the most publicly known and renowned *Imām* in the entire world – the people of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* – just

as the Prophet Muḥammad was manifest to both groups of people. Sayyidnā Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw explain this as follows:

“...the *da’wah* is established in the name of the *Asās* in secret and will become manifest in public in the presence of the Last Completer [the *Qā’im*].”

– Sayyidnā Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, (Shin Nomoto, *Early Ismaili Thought on Prophecy*, PhD Thesis, 307)

“...the status of the *Asās* will be manifest at the time of the advent of the Seventh Rank (*hadd*), namely, the *Qā’im*, to the people of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*), as the rank of the *Nāṭiq* has become completely manifest to the people of the exoteric and the esoteric prior to the [advent of] the Seventh Rank (the *Qā’im*).”

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Dīn*, Chapter 19, Section 7)

The Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is thus inaugurated in by not one, but *two* figures – the *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im* and the *Qā’im al-Qiyāmah*. This idea of *two messianic figures* is also paralleled in the Abrahamic traditions. The Sunni and Twelver Shī’ī Muslims await the second coming of the Prophet Jesus and the *Mahdī* of the progeny of Prophet Muḥammad. The Jews await Messiah and the second coming of the Prophet Elijah – who functions as the “interpreter” of the Messiah. These are all symbolic designations for the manifestation of the *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im* and the *Qā’im al-Qiyāmah* at the beginning Seventh Cycle – the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

2) The Sun and the Moon are united



A visual depiction of a lunar eclipse. The lunar eclipse is a symbol of the union of the offices of *Imamah* and *Piratan* during the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“And when the Moon is eclipsed, and the Sun and Moon are united,”

– Holy Qur’ān 75:8-9

According to various Ismā’īlī texts (i.e. *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-Ghulām* – Ja’far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman; *Taṣawwurāt* – Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī), the Sun (*shams*) stands for the *Imām* and the Moon (*qamar*) stands for the *Pīr* or Supreme *Hujjat* (*Bāb*). The *Imām* is the spiritual father of the believers and the *Pīr* or Supreme *Hujjat* (*Bāb*) is their spiritual mother. Metaphysically, the *Imām* is the locus of manifestation of the Universal Intellect and the *Pīr* is the locus of manifestation of the Universal Soul.

The union of the Sun and the Moon at the time of *Qiyāmah* means that the institutions of *Imāmah* and *Piratan* will be united in the person of the *Imām* during the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

3) When the Stars darken



When the Sun is shining, the Moon and the Stars are present but not visible. This symbolizes the manifestation of the *Imām* and the concealment of the Ranks of Faith (*hudud al-din*) in the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“And when the stars darken”

– Holy Qur’ān 81:2

“And when the stars are obliterated.”

– Holy Qur’ān 77:8

In all the cycles of prophetic history, the *Imāms* delivered their *ta’līm* and *ta’wīl* through a hierarchy of representatives and teachers – the *bābs*, the *hujjats*, the *dā’īs*, and *ma’dhūns*. This hierarchy makes up the “World of Faith” (*‘ālam al-dīn*) and is known as the “Ranks of Faith” (*ḥudūd al-dīn*). In the World of Nature, the *Imām* is symbolized by the Sun, his *Bābs* by the Moon, and the rest of the *ḥudūd* by the Stars. This is related to the vision of the Prophet Joseph (Yusūf) when he saw “the Sun, the Moon, and eleven Stars” (see *Sūrat Yūsūf*) prostrating before him.

When the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins and the *Qā’im* appears in the physical world, the Ranks of Faith (i.e. “the Stars”) will cease their formal functions and the *Imām* himself will take over their roles. This is the meaning of the Qur’ānic verse:

“The Day We shall summon every people with their *Imām*.”

– Holy Qur’ān 17:71

This is because the *Imām*, as the Sun of Faith (*shams al-dīn*) will be manifest to the world and the Moon and the Stars of Faith will no longer be visible. When the Sun is shining in its full glory, the light of the Moon and the Stars cannot be observed, despite their continuous presence. It is also related in a prophetic *ḥadīth*:

“Goodness is knotted up in the forelocks of horses till the Day of *Qiyāmah*.”

– Prophet Muhammad,

(*Sunān Abū Dawūd*, Book 21, Number 21.19.44)

“Nasir Khusraw explains that the *ta’wīl* of this is that the *da’wat*, the summoning of humankind, will not be severed from the *hujjats*, symbolised by the horses, and the *da’īs*, symbolised by their forelocks, till the time of the *Qā’im*’s manifestation.”

– Shafique Virani, (*The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw*, [Click Here to Read](#))

The Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* – the formal and practical *daʿwah* that actively summons people to the recognition of the *Imām* – will be abolished along with the functions of the Ranks of Faith (also confirmed by Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī in his *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ*).

4) The Heavens are rolled up



A visual depiction of the heavens being rolled up into a scroll. The imagery of a scroll serves to symbolize the “scroll of the *sharīʿah*” which is abrogated in the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“The Day that We roll up the Heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed),- even as We produced the first creation, so shall We produce a new one: a promise We have undertaken: truly shall We fulfil it. Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the message (given to Moses): ‘My servants, the righteous, should inherit the Earth.’”

– Holy Qurʾān 21:104

The various terms in the Qurʾān – “heaven”, “earth”, “mountains”, “seas”, “rivers”, etc. all contain an esoteric or *taʿwīlī* meaning because they refer not to the physical world (*dunyā*) but to the World of Faith (*ʿālam al-dīn*). Therefore, the real meaning of “heavens” is the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the *sharīʿah*, and the inner meaning of “earth” is the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the *ṭarīqah*. Just as the physical heavens surround and protect the physical earth, the *ẓāhir* protects and envelopes the *bāṭin*. The “rolling up” of the “heavens” means that the *sharīʿah* will be abolished when the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins and the quaking of the “earth” means that the esoteric sciences will become revealed in a sudden way – in the manner of earthquakes – even though people may not be prepared for it.

“Al-Sijistānī explains that *taʿwīl* is necessary for two categories of Qurʾānic verses: one, verses with physical objects such as heaven, earth, and mountains, and two, the allegorical verses. In chapter 12 of *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* (“The Book of Pride”), al-Sijistānī gives some examples such as Q 21:105: “Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the message (given to Moses): ‘My servants, the righteous, should inherit the earth’.” This, he suggests, should not be interpreted in the literal sense since it is always the tyrants who take the land. The earth on which vegetation grows is a source of

nourishment for all creatures; therefore its inner meaning is the nourishment of the soul (i.e. spiritual knowledge). In another passage, Q 21:104, “The day that We roll up the heaven like a scroll rolled up with the writings,” the “heaven” signifies the *sharīʿa* which will be abrogated on the judgment day.”

– Diana Steigerwald, (“Ismāʿīlī Taʿwīl”, *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 391)

With respect to the abrogation of the *sharīʿah* at the time of *Qiyāmah*, Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw (as per *Khwān al-Ikhwān*) explains that the *sharīʿah* of Prophet Muḥammad has two dimensions – the specified (*waḍʿī*) *sharīʿah* and the intellectual (*ʿaqlī*) *sharīʿah*. The specified *sharīʿah* refers to specific formal or ritual practices as *Ṣalāh* (ritual prayer), *Ṣawm* (ritual fasting), *Wudū* (ablution), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), etc. in their exoteric form – without which mankind can still survive and function. The intellectual *sharīʿah* refers to moral and ethical laws such as the laws against murder, stealing, and unethical behavior – without which humanity would plunge into chaos.

“While Nāṣir emphasizes that in the physical world action is necessary for the development and perfection of the human soul, he makes a distinction in the two types of practices of *sharīʿa*. He divides the *sharīʿa* into intellectual (*ʿaqlī*) and positional or statutory (*waḍʿī*). The intellectual *sharīʿa* is always necessary to maintain the order and discipline of society. Meanwhile the statutory *sharīʿa* is a temporary measure that conceals certain realities (*haqāʾiq*) that cannot be openly revealed due to the unfavourable time. When the time becomes favourable, these devices are no longer necessary.”

– Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, (*Nasir-i Khusraw’s Ethical Philosophy*, 15)

It may be wondered as to why the abrogation of the *sharīʿah* must occur in the first place. This is because all *sharīʿahs* were compiled and composed by a *Nāṭiq* in accordance with the culture and needs of his time. Furthermore, each *sharīʿah* has an outer form and an inner meaning which is like a spirit that inhabits a body. Over time, it is natural that a *sharīʿah* becomes worn out and ineffective due to the progression of history and human life – as Sayyidnā Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī explains:

“After a long time, the *sharīʿah* becomes empty of the ‘spirit of the second age’, particularly, after the advancement of Man with the expansion of the knowledge, his intelligence and his mental faculties.”

– Sayyidnā Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, (*Ithbāt al-Nabuwwat*, 343)

When this happens – usually after more or less a thousand years – a new *sharīʿah* is established and a new prophetic cycle begins and the new *Nāṭiq* abrogates the old *sharīʿah* and compiles a new one. However, after the Prophet Muḥammad, there are no more Prophets. Therefore, the *Qāʾim* will abrogate the specified *sharīʿah* while revealing its inner meaning (*taʿwīl*) and simultaneously, spiritualize and transform the *sharīʿah* into a higher mode of ritual practice. The

intellectual *sharī'ah* – as a set of ethics and moral guidelines – always remains in force and becomes more prominent in the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

5) The Intellectual *Da'wah* and the Epoch of Knowledge (*Dawr al-'Ilm*)



An image depicting how knowledge comes to light. The Cycle of *Qiyamah* is the Epoch of Knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*) and the Qur'anic description of "being raised from the graves" refers to the manifestation of once hidden or concealed knowledge out in the open.

"Our *Qā'im* will begin a New Summons (*du'ā'an jadīdan*)."

– Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq,

(Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 119)

The *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* will inaugurate a new intellectual and gnostic *da'wah* (*da'wat al-jadīdah al-'ilmīyyah*). This is the difference between the Summons of the *Qā'im* and the Summons of the previous Six Prophetic Messengers. The Summons of the Prophets was an exoteric (*zāhirī*) and physical (*'amalī*) Summons whereas the Summons of the *Qā'im* is intellectual (*'aqlīyyah*) and gnostic (*'ilmīyyah*):

"Sijistānī specifies that the summons of [Prophet] Muhammad, when likened to the Hour, are ritualistic whereas the summons of the *Qā'im* is intellectual. The reason the *Qā'im* is absent at the time of the prophet is that his summons are different from that of the prophet... Since the *Qā'im's* call is intellectual (*da'wah* is *'ilmīyyah*) the *Qā'im's* knowledge is not visible; whereas the Prophet's (*ra'ūl*) call (*da'wah*) is *'amalīyyah*. Therefore, while hypocrites may enter the *dawah* of a prophet, only the sincere can enter the *dawah* of the *Qā'im*; and their souls will be recompensed according to that effort of sincerity. Sijistānī holds that God has ordained the *da'wah* of the *Qā'im* as intellectual, not ritualistic. It is intellectual because it cannot be operative through force since force would make its followers hypocrites, not true believers. Therefore, the believer must possess knowledge (*'ilm*), and the *ṣāhib al-'ilm* is he who deals with those who profess a belief without the use of force, i.e. without an externally motivating factor. Therefore, a believer is defined as the one who is intellectually convinced of the truth of revelation and accepts this as an intellectual conviction and not as a mere acceptance and observance of the law."

– Boustan Hirji, (*A Study of Risalah al-Bahira*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, Montreal, October 1994, 155)

The *Qā'im* begins a new phase of human history known as the Epoch of Knowledge (*dawr al 'ilm*). In the periods before the *Qā'im*, humanity lives in the Epoch of Practice – where both religion and worldly life are oriented around actions (*'amal*) and physical resources. After the coming of the *Qā'im* and the beginning of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*, humanity enters into the Epoch of Knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*) in which there is an abundance of knowledge (*'ilm*) available in a way that humankind has never seen before.

“The final epoch before the advent of the *Qā'im* is defined as the epoch of practice (*dawr al-'amāl*), and is one in which religious practices are obligatory on the part of the individual practitioner. With the establishment of the *Qā'im* and the commencement of the epoch of knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*), even the practice of obedience (*ta'ah*) to the *hudud al-din* is no longer required... Therein arises another set of distinctions: between the epoch of practice (*dawr al-'amal*) and the epoch of knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*). The *dawr al-'ilm* (Epoch of Knowledge) is the time of the *Qa'im*, and associated with this is *tayid*, purity, and more significantly, “pure knowledge” (*al-'ilm al-mahd*).... Because the *Qa'im* is established at the end of the *dawr al-'amāl*, the epoch of the *Qa'im* is the epoch of purity (*safa*), *tayid* and *'ilm*, without religious obligation in terms of practice (*taklif*).

– Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (*The Sphere of Walayah: Ismailii Ta'wīl in Practice according to al-Mu'ayyad*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, 2006, 322-334)

As a result of the beginning of the Epoch of Knowledge, the esoteric meaning – *ta'wīl* – of all previous religions and revelations is unveiled to humankind. The Qur'ān foretells this in the verse:

“Do they not wait (*hal yanzurūna*) for its *ta'wīl*? The Day when its *ta'wīl* arrives, those who had forgotten it from before will say: ‘Verily, the Messengers of our Lord came with the Truth.’”

– Holy Qur'ān 7:53

The *Qa'im* will unveil the *ta'wīl* (esoteric meaning) of all scriptures and revealed religions during the Epoch of Knowledge. It is through this *ta'wīl* that people will be able to recognize the truth (*haqq*) in the messages and revelations of the Prophets. This means that the esoteric, philosophical and theological materials of all religions – formerly concealed and guarded except from a select few – will be accessible in the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. In most periods of history, the believers could not freely share such material and had to maintain the veil of *taqiyya* and secrecy. However, the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* will allow such knowledge and wisdom to be shared freely and in abundance:

“In fact, other Shi'ite factions likewise maintain that, with the coming of the ‘messianic figure’, the obligation of *taqiyya* and *kitman* will be annulled and the believers will be permitted to divulge their secrets. In Isma'ili thought, the

secrets revealed at the end of time are the truths (*haqa'iq*) or the inner aspect of religion (*batin*) – in effect, the philosophical, theological and esoteric knowledge of every kind. Consequently, in Isma'ili tradition, acquiring this knowledge and transmitting it to others entails a messianic sentiment – for the disclosure of this knowledge is a clear sign of the end of time... These sciences are entrusted to the Imams, the descendents of 'Ali, and to their followers (such as Jabir); with the appearance of the 'messianic figure', the external aspect of religion (*zahir*) will lose its primacy and will be replaced by the inner aspect, namely, the philosophical and esoteric sciences... In this era, 'the tables will be turned': the hitherto concealed Isma'ili knowledge will be revealed to all, judgment day will commence and human history will reach its final end."

– Michael Ebstein, ("Secrecy in Isma'ili Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-'Arabi", *Journal Asiatique*, 298.2 (2010), 326-329)

In the Epoch of Knowledge, the the *Qā'im* will accept and affirm the right of each community to its own religious tradition. This is also because the spiritual and esoteric meaning of scriptures will also be unveiled during the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

"He [the *Qā'im*] will take the Torah and the other holy Books from the case and will judge the faithful of the Torah from the Torah, and the faithful of the Gospels from the Gospels, the faithful of the Psalms according to the Psalms, and the faithful of the Qur'an according to the Qur'an."

– Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, (Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 225)

During the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* which lasts for one thousand years, the *Qā'im* and his Deputies (*khulafā'*) – all of whom are from the progeny of Prophet Muḥammad – also work to rid the earth of injustice and suffering. This is in accordance with the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet:

"Even if there remains (in the life of the world) only a single day, God will prolong it until there comes a man, a descendant of mine, who will fill the earth with equity and justice even as it has been filled with oppression and injustice."

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunān Abū Dawūd, *Kitab al-Mahdi*, Hadith No. 4270)

6) The Hidden *Qiyāmah*



An image of the sunlight shining through the clouds. This depicts the coming of the *Qā'im* and his spiritual influence in the sense

that the *Qa'im* himself will not be recognized directly but his knowledge and inspiration – like sunlight – will permeate the entire world.

“Do they only wait for the Hour – that it should come on them all of a sudden, while they are unaware?”

– Holy Quran 43:66

“He is called “*mahdi*” because he guides (*yahdī*) to a hidden teaching.”

– Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir,

(Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 225)

Many people expect the advent of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* to be an event filled with fanfare such that all human beings will recognize it. However, the Qur’ān indicates exactly the opposite. The *Qiyāmah* is the most hidden and most secret of all affairs because it is a spiritual or soul-related event and is only perceived by the highest degrees of souls in the World of Faith. Many Qur’anic verses point to this fact:

“Do they only wait for the Hour – that it should come on them all of a sudden (*baghtatan*), while they are unaware?”

– Holy Quran 43:66

“Do they then feel secure from the coming against them of the covering veil of the wrath of Allah,- or of the coming against them of the Hour all of a sudden (*baghtatan*) while they are unaware?”

– Holy Quran 12:107

“Verily the Hour is coming – My design is to keep it hidden for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its effort.”

– Holy Quran 20:15

This means that when the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins, most of humankind will not be aware of it due to its hidden and concealed nature. Even the Bible describes how the *Qiyāmah* (“the Day of the Lord”) shall occur secretly without anyone noticing:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.”

– New Testament, Peter 3:10

“For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

– Thessalonians 5:2

As in the manner of of the *Qiyāmah*, the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* will likewise be veiled and hidden. This does *not* mean that the *Qā'im* will enter into an occultation (like the twelfth *imām* of the Twelver Shī'īs). The *Qā'im* will appear in the physical world as a human being but his rank and spiritual status will not be perceived or recognized by most people. With respect to the appearance of the *Qā'im* in the physical world, the following *ḥadīth* is relevant:

“Indeed, Islam began as a Stranger (*gharīban*) and it will return as a Stranger. Blessed are the strangers.”

– Prophet Muhammad,

(Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 225)

This *ḥadīth* describes the state of the *Qā'im* and how he will appear “strange” to the people of the world during his advent. The Qur'ān describes the veiled appearance of the *Qā'im* and the events of his time in the following verses:

“And your Lord shall come, with the angels, rank on rank.”

– Holy Qur'ān 89:22

“Do they not wait until God comes to them in shades of clouds, with the angels and the question is (thus) settled? but to God do all questions go back.”

– Holy Qur'ān 2:210

These verses describe the coming of the “Lord” (*rabb*). However, God Himself – transcending time and space – is above the process of “coming” or “going”. This verse refers to the coming of the *Qā'im* and the events of *Qiyāmah* – indicated by the words “do they not wait” (*hal yanẓurūna*).

The “Lord” refers to the *Qā'im* and the Angels who accompany him refer to the Deputies or Vicegerents (*khulafā'*) of the *Qā'im* who represent him and carry out his mission on earth. The description of “God comes to them in shades of clouds” means that the *Qā'im* comes to the World of Faith and the physical world while being “veiled” from people’s recognition – in the same way that the clouds may conceal the Sun from being looked upon directly.

This raises the question – if the *Qā'im* will be unrecognizable in the physical world, how does he influence human beings? Although the *Qā'im*’s status is hidden or veiled in the physical world, his real mission is carried out in the subtle world of human souls or the spiritual realm – because *Qiyāmah* is primarily a spiritual event. Thus, the *Qā'im* cannot be conceived as a political warrior, a world conqueror or ruler in the exoteric or physical sense. His role and function is primarily spiritual, hidden and intellectual. The *Qā'im* allows human souls to have access to the flow of spiritual illumination (*nūr*) inspiration (*ta'yīd*), and esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) in the spiritual world – in a form superior to the previous Six Prophetic Cycles. Nāsir-i Khusraw writes that the *Qā'im*, for this reason, is represented and symbolized by the *Īd al-Adha* and its *namāz*:

“The *Qā'im* is represented by the *Īd al-Ādha*, the festival of sacrifice as well as by the prayer recited on this occasion. He is the lord of the two worlds, as the inner meaning of the divine scripture is revealed through him and he delivers the believers from the torment of ignorance, extracting symbols from concealment and explaining them. The fact that the expression ‘God is Greater’ (*Allahu akbar*) is recited five times before the festival prayer indicates that during the cycle of the *Qā'im*, the believers receive benefit directly from the five spiritual *hadd*s: the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, *Jadd*, *Fath* and *Khayāl*.”

– Shafique Virani, (*The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir-i Khusraw*, [Click Here to Read](#))

All the Prophets of the past guided human beings through physical structures and symbols in Scripture and religious practices – thus only providing an indirect

experience of spiritual truth – in accordance with the limits of their times. Conversely, the *Qā'im* interacts with human souls directly – and offers a direct spiritual experience of metaphysical and spiritual truth (*haqq*). Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī explains that the *Qā'im* is called the “*Mahdī*” because he guides (*yahdī*) each soul to its own inner reality:

“The name of that person [i.e., *Mahdī*] is derived from [the root] *HDY* [“to guide”], which implies that there is no way for anyone to avoid him and his Call (*da'wat*), or to escape from his arguments and proofs, because he guides the humans to that which is in their own inner reality (*haqīqat-i īshān*) and shows the way to those sciences to which ‘the Horizons and the Souls’ bear witness and opens the way for the souls to know the spiritual dominion of God, so that the souls become one with the True Realities (*haqāyiq*) and the Spiritual Support [*ta'yīd*].”

– Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, (*Kashf al-Mahjūb*, tr. Landolt, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia Volume 2*, 119)

7) The Cycle of 49 *Imāms*



The ceiling of Glenview Jamatkhana features a pattern of seven concentric septagons. Each septagon stands for a Minor Cycle of Seven *Imams*. The Center of the Seven Heptagons represents the *Qā'im al-Qiyamah* who appears after the Cycle of 49 (7×7) *Imams*.

“And We have bestowed upon thee the Seven Repeated Ones and the Great Qur'an.”

– Holy Qur'ān 15:87

Several Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* of the Fatimid period had prophesized that the coming of the *Qā'im* and the beginning of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* would take place after the coming of forty-nine *Imāms* in the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad. This is based, in part, on the above verse. Exoterically, the Seven Repeated Ones refer to the seven verses of *Sūrah Fātiḥah*. Esoterically, the Seven Repeated Ones refer to a minor cycle of seven *Imāms* being repeated in seven heptads and the “Great Qur'ān” refers to the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah*.

“The Seven Oft-Repeated (*al-sab' al-mathānī*) are symbols of the *Imams* from Ḥaḍrat 'Alī. Whenever Seven *Imāms* pass away, another Seven *Imāms* come

like the Seven Days of the week, and this state remains until the Day of Judgement."

– Sayyidnā Abū'l-Qāsim al-Malījī, (*al-Majālis al-Mustansīriyyah*, Cairo, 1947, 29)

Based on this verse, Sayyidnā Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī prophesized that the *Qiyāmah* would take place after the appearance of forty-nine *Imāms*. This is summarized in an academic study as follows:

"Kirmānī firmly rejected Druze statements about the imminent advent of the *Qā'im* by reiterating that the *Qiyāma* was not near, but was to take place in the distant future when the long cycle of forty-nine *Imāms* was concluded. Only then would the *Qā'im* remove all the ranks of the world of *dīn* [*'ālam ad-dīn*], which would no longer be necessary as intermediaries for the knowledge of the divine knowledge would become pure, actual, and no longer mediated."

– Simonetta Calderini, ("‘Ālam al-dīn in Ismā‘īlism: World of Obedience or World of Immobility?", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 1993, 467)

Similarly, Sayyidnā Muḥammad b. al-Ṣūrī – the *dā'ī* of Syria – wrote that the seventh heptad (set of seven) of *Imāms* after the Prophet Muḥammad is the greatest of all because it leads to the coming of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah*:

"Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣūrī, a Fatimid *dā'ī* in Syria who died around 487/1094, enumerates the *imāms* of the era of Islam in a long poem. According to him, the seventh heptad of *imāms* in the era of Muhammad is the most eminent one, because it precedes the coming of the *Qā'im*."

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 208)

The advent of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* and the manifestation of the *Qā'im* are the climax of all human history since the time of Adam. One may wonder or even doubt the plausibility of such events occurring in actual history.

However, it must be known now that the Great *Qiyāmah* has already occurred. To read about how the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins and the manner in which the Signs of *Qiyāmah* come to pass in the light of actual history – [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 2\)](#) of this post.

Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” (Part 2)

“All of these changes suggest that we are moving into a new epoch of history, a new condition of human life.”

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV

“We, the Imāms in descent from Imām Husayn, are present until today and we shall remain until the Qiyāmah and even after the Qiyāmah.”

– Imam Āgā Shāh ‘Alī Shāh Āgā Khān II

This post continues from [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#). In Part 1, we explained and outlined the concept of *Qiyāmah* in Ismā‘ilī gnosis, and the various signs which would accompany the beginning of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* and the advent of the *Qā’im al-Qiyāmah*. (We advise all readers to go through Part 1 before reading this post).

Part 1 left off by showing how two prominent Ismā‘ilī *dā’īs* – Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and Muḥammad al-Ṣūrī – prophesized that the Seventh Cycle – the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* – would commence after the coming of 49 *Imāms* of the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad:



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“Kirmānī firmly rejected Druze statements about the imminent advent of the *Qā’im* by reiterating that the *Qiyāma* was not near, but was to take place in the distant future when the long cycle of forty-nine *Imāms* was concluded. Only then would the *Qā’im* remove all the ranks of the world of *dīn* [*‘ālam ad-dīn*], which would no longer be necessary as intermediaries for the knowledge of the divine knowledge would become pure, actual, and no longer mediated.”

– Simonetta Calderini, (“‘Ālam al-dīn in Ismā‘ilism: World of Obedience or World of Immobility?”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 1993, 467)

“Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣūrī, a Fatimid *dā’ī* in Syria who died around 487/1094, enumerates the *imāms* of the era of Islam in a long poem. According to him, the seventh heptad of *imāms* in the era of Muhammad is the most eminent one, because it precedes the coming of the *Qā’im*.”

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 208)

At this point it must be remembered that *Qiyāmah* is a spiritual event and recognizing *Qiyāmah* requires one to perceive the “spiritual history” of humanity. Spiritual history is the inner meaning (*ta’wīl*) of external or recorded history. Thus, one cannot expect the history books to “record” the event of *Qiyāmah* in the same way that they record external world events. Instead, one must contemplate the spiritual significance of such events. The late Henry Corbin explains this as follows:

“Now the succession of the epochs of a spiritual world does not consist of a history which one can perceive and demonstrate in the way in which documents permit us to speak of the campaigns of Julius Caesar or of Napoleon. The epochs of the spiritual world are totally different from the epochs of the exterior world of geology or of sociopolitical history. The epochs of the spiritual world make up a history *sui generis*, which is in its very essence imaginal history ... We have already said that this history is neither myth nor history as understood in current parlance, but that it does not involve any the less a history of real events, or a reality proper to these events, a reality situated at a level other than that of the exterior world, which esoteric hermeneutic considers as being the metaphor of true events.

– Henry Corbin, (*Celestial Body and Spiritual Earth*, Prelude)

When interpreting the prophecy about the 49 *Imāms*, it must be remembered that all Shī’ī groups including the Ismā’īlī *da’wah* of the Fatimid period considered Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the first *Imām*, his elder son Imām al-Hasan ibn ‘Alī as the second *Imām*, and his younger son Imām al-Husayn ibn ‘Alī as the third *Imām*. The Ismā’īlī thinkers do differentiate al-Hasan from the rest of the *Imāms* because he was an Entrusted *Imām* (*imām mustawda*) while Imām al-Husayn and the *Imāms* succeeding him in his lineage are Permanent *Imāms* (*imām mustaqarr*). For this reason, the Present *Imām* – Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āga Khān IV – is today reckoned as the forty-ninth *Imām* in the chain of Permanent *Imāms* when al-Hasan is not counted in the list.

However, when Imām al-Hasan is counted as the second *Imām* (as the Fatimid Ismā’īlī *dā’īs* had reckoned), then the forty-ninth *Imām* is Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āga Khan III. This is directly related to the *Qiyāmah* prophecies made one thousand years ago – because it means that the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins in the period of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh who is the forty-ninth *Imām* of the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad and the seventh *Imām* of the seventh heptad. According to the information provided by the Ismā’īlī chief *dā’ī* al-Malījī, the seventh *Imām* of the seventh heptad would also be the *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im*:

“Such tendencies are also distinctly embodied in *al-Majalis al-Mustansiriyya*, a collection of lectures by al-Maliji, one of the chief *qadis* in al-Mustansir’s imamate. According to this source, the heptads of *imāms* will succeed one another until the arrival of the *Qa’im* of the Resurrection, whose *Hujja* will be the seventh *imām* contiguous to his era.

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 218)

When one interprets all of the above in the light of recent history, it amounts to only one thing – the renowned *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im* is none other than Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III – the eminent grandfather and predecessor of the present Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV.

1. The Night of Power = The *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im*: The *Sultan* of the World



And verily, We revealed him in the Night of Power
And how can We convey to you what is the Night of Power?
The Night of Power is greater than a thousand months.
The Angels and the Spirit descend in it upon all decrees by the permission of
their Lord.

Peace it is, until the rising of the Dawn.

– Holy Qur’ān 97:1-5



“Name him Muḥammad
Sulṭān. He would be a *Sulṭān* in the world. His period would see wonderful
events, and would earn distinguished position in the world.

– Imām Āgā Shāh Hasan ‘Alī Shāh Āgā Khān I,
(Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *Ismailis through History*, 1995)

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh was named by his grandfather on the day of his birth on November 2, 1877 at the Honeymoon Lodge in Karachi. The very name *sultān* is of immense significance because this word means “proof”, “argument” or even a “miracle” by which God demonstrates the truth of His Messengers. In many ways, the word *sultān* is synonymous with the word *ḥujjat* (“proof”, “argument”, “evidence”). Throughout the Qur’ān, the miracles of the different Prophets are referred to as *sultān* by which they effectively “prove” their veracity and divine mandate.

The naming of this *Imām* as *Sultān* Muḥammad indicates that his holy and august personality serves as the *sultān* (proof) or *ḥujjat* (proof, argument) of the *Qā’im al-Qiyāmah* – in the same way that the miracles served as proofs for the previous Messengers of God.

An examination of Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh’s life shows that he was the most publicly renowned and prominent *Imām* in all of world history. An abbreviated timeline of some of his great accomplishments is given below:

1897 – Knight Commander of the Indian Empire by Queen Victoria

1899 – Star of Persia by the Shah of Persia

1907-1914 – Founding Member and President of the All-India Muslim League

1921 – Founding Member and Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University

1923 – Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order by King George

1924-25 – Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

1930 – Chairman of the British-Indian section to the Round Table Conference

1932 – Delegate of India to the League of Nations

1937-38 – President of the League of Nations

The worldly career of Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh culminated in his role as President of the League of Nations. This effectively meant that the *Imām*, the direct descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad, sat as the “leader of the nations of the world”.



The publicity of the *Imāmat* of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh is a direct fulfillment of the prophecies about the *Hujjat* or *Asās* of the *Qā'im* made by Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw over one thousand years ago when he wrote that:



“The status of the *Asās* will be manifest at the time of the advent of the Seventh Rank (*hadd*), namely, the *Qā'im*, to the people of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*), as the rank of the *Nāṭiq* has become completely manifest to the people of the exoteric and the esoteric prior to the [advent of] the Seventh Rank (the *Qā'im*).

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 19, Section 7)

Furthermore, both Sayyidnā al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī and Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw had foretold that the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* would be greater than all of the *Imāms* who came before him – in the same way that the Night of Power is greater than a thousand months:

“His saying, ‘*The Night of Power is better than one thousand months*’, alludes to the *Bāb* of the *Qā'im*, peace be on his mention, [who is] greater than all of what is established by the manifestation of the grades of the intellects, from the legatees of the possessors of the religious laws and their most radiant degree.

– Sayyidnā al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī, (*Majālis al-Mu'ayyadāyyah*, Volume III, 8)

“*The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.*” That is, the *Hujjat* of the *Qā'im* is superior in knowledge to a thousand Imams, although collectively their ranks are one.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 33)

These prophecies were also fulfilled by the august personality of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. Accordingly the present Imām, Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, made the below remarks after the death of his grandfather:



“You have lost the finest *Imām* we have had and I have lost a grandfather who was more devoted than any grandfather a man has ever had. I hope you do not think that because he is not physically with us, that he won’t watch over you.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV

Another distinguishing feature of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh was the way in which he elucidated the esoteric and spiritual meaning of Islam in an open and clear way. He gave spiritual guidance to both the Ismāʿīlī community through his *farmāns* and to the general public through his numerous speeches and interviews. In many ways, the wisdom of the previous Islamic philosophers and poets are summarized in his teachings. A few extracts of his practical spiritual guidance to the later public are as follows:

“A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people... it is surely strange that a believer in an omnipotent and ever-present Deity should fail to realize that how we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the universe. That is the fundamental question:- Are you in harmony with God? If you are – you are happy.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*My Personal Life*, London, November 2, 1931)

“I should, first of all, advise my heirs to learn to desire the thing that happens, and not try to mould events to their desires... I would advise my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves... Let them seek communion with that Eternal Reality which I call Allah and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence – to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*My Philosophy of Happiness*)

“A mind that is occupied, in health or in sickness, with things outside itself and its own concerns is, I believe, a perpetual source of true happiness. In ordinary prayer, as we in Islam conceive it, adoration of the beloved fills up every nook and cranny of the human consciousness; and in the rare, supreme moments of spiritual ecstasy, the light of Heaven blinds mind and spirit to all other lights and blots out every other, sense and perception.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*)

“Thus Islam’s basic principle can only be defined as mono-realism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: “Allah-o-Akbar”. What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*)

“Life in the ultimate analysis has taught me one enduring lesson. The subject should always disappear in the object. In our ordinary affections one for another, in our daily work with hand or brain, we most of us discover soon enough that any lasting satisfaction, any contentment that we can achieve, is the result of forgetting self, or merging subject with object in a harmony that is of body, mind and spirit.

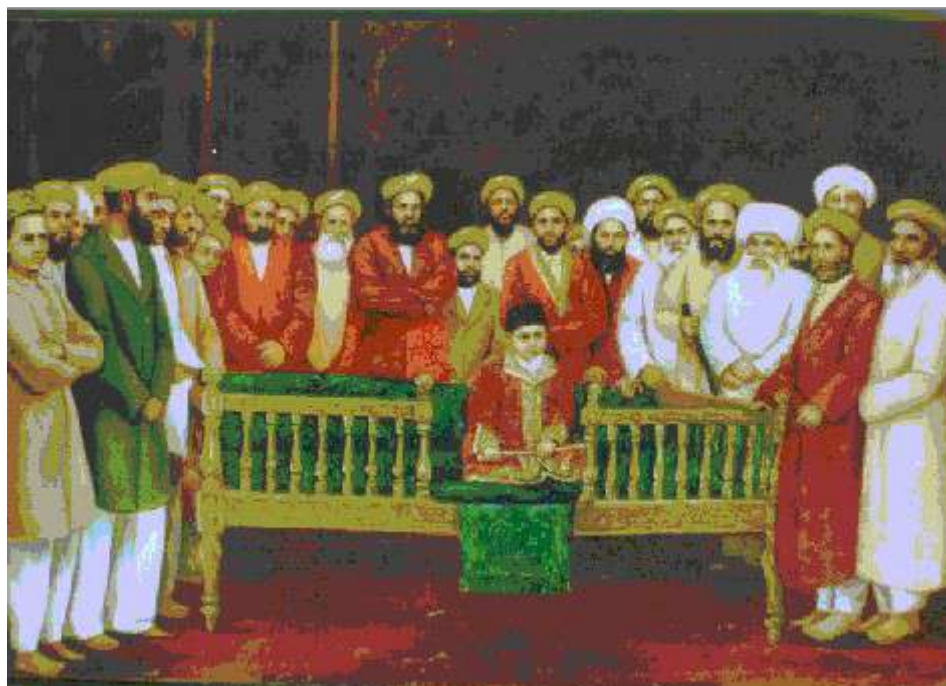
– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*)

Over one thousand years ago, Sayyidnā al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirāzī wrote that “*the Bāb of the Qā’im is the lord of universal explanation (ṣāhib al-bayān al-kull) and the true unveiling (kashf al-ḥaqīqī)*” and these qualities were fulfilled in Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. In reference to the clarity and lucidity of this *Imām’s* teachings, Allāmah Hunzā’ī wrote that:

“Hazrat Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, *salawātullāhi ‘alayhi wa-salāmuhu*, was the sovereign of the wonders and marvels of knowledge and recognition both externally and internally, as well as the exalted and august *Imām* of the age of spirituality and *ta’wīl*. There are very few people who are aware of how immensely useful, meaningful, revolutionary and resurrecting his teachings are. His unique spiritual and luminous characteristics were prophesied by Pīr Nāsir-i Khusraw around a thousand years ago and are preserved in his *Wajh-i Dīn*.

– Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Nāsir Hunzā’ī, (*A Thousand Wisdoms: An Encyclopedic of Ta’wīl*, 470)

2. The Dawn of *Qiyāmah* – The Beginning of the New Age



A portrait of

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah at the age of seven on the day of his ascension to the office of Imamat.

“And listen for the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quite near. The Day when they will hear a Blast in Truth: That will be the Day of Resurrection.”

– Holy Qur’ān 50:42

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, the glorious *Bāb* and *Hujjat* of the *Qā’im*, made numerous allusions and announcements that humanity was entering into the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. The first such indication was given in his first address on September 1, 1885 at the beginning of his *Imāmat*:

“The Light (*nūr*) of ‘Alī is always established in the world. These are the ‘End Times’ (*aakhar zamaano*) and whosoever has true faith will see the Imam’s powers (*qudrat*) and miraculous events (*karamāt*) in his time. But those who have half hearted faith they will witness the miraculous events but will not understand them.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III

The words “End Times” (Arabic: *akhir al-zamān*) are extremely significant and indicate the “Last Days” or period of *Qiyāmah* in Islamic terminology. The *Imām* went on to announce the coming of *Qiyāmah* in the language of his contemporaries throughout his lifetime. For example, in the speech called *Muslims Awake* on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee, the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh declared:

“The world of Islam today is at a turning point of its history. The middle-ages are over and either Islam must now go forward or be added to the other might-have-beens of History... Today we are in our middle-ages. We must get

out of it, and begin our new era with strength and with will power for the coming development of our people.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Muslims Awake*, London, March 14, 1934)

Ten years later, the *Imām* commemorated his Diamond Jubilee. On this occasion, Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh sent the following message to the Steering Committee:

“Sixty years have passed since the enthronement of the *Imāmat*, which is a unique occasion. It is an incomparable occasion in the world. No occasion ever occurred in the world history like it.”

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Message to Steering Committee, December 31, 1945)

The above words testify to the unprecedented period of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh’s *Imāmat*. In his public Diamond Jubilee message, the *Imām* described how this event constituted a “new age” among the epochs of Ismā’īlī history:

“The Ismā’īlīa History has passed through several stages of development. My Diamond Jubilee marks such a stage in the present times.... With Diamond Jubilee dawns a new era, full of hopes and opportunities for economic, educational, social and religious uplift of my beloved Spiritual Children all over the world. It is a time to go ahead and leave a mark on the world history like the glorious Ismailis of the past.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Diamond Jubilee Address, Nairobi, July 22, 1946)

Finally, at the approach of his Platinum Jubilee, Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, offered a most explicit affirmation of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* with special emphasis upon its impact on the Muslim world.

“Today the Muslim world is almost at the last stage, almost at the last hour between a final collapse and revival.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Platinum Jubilee Message, Karachi, February 3, 1954)

At the end of his long and illustrious *Imāmat* – the longest *Imāmat* in the history of the *Imāms* – Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh also described and detailed the unprecedented changes and revolutions which took place in the world. In his Platinum Jubilee message, the *Imām* went so far to say that his exceptionally long *Imamāt* had begun in “another world” and marked the transition to a new world:

“You referred to my seventy years Imamāt which, indeed, is unique in the history of 48 Ismā’īlī *Imāms* by its long duration, but also it began in another world, the world of horse carriages and candle lights, and today we are in the world of nuclear power, physics, jet air travel and serious discussion amongst the most learned as to how and when we can visit the stars and the moon.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Platinum Jubilee Address, Cairo, February 20, 1955)

The above words must be viewed in light of how the Ismāʿīlī philosophers such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī understood the term “world” (*ʿālam*). Every prophetic cycle (*dawr*) is a “world” and the transition from one “world” to another “world” refers to the movement from the Cycle of *Sharīʿah* or Concealment (*satr*) to the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* and Unveiling (*kashf*):

“Amongst these is the revolution that takes place when one cycle changes to another, when one prophetic tradition and custom changes to another, and one religion (*millat*) changes to another. Each one of these is a world, each of these is a separate world, and when each changes, one may say that such and such a cycle, a prophetic tradition and a religion, which did not exist and then came into existence, was a separate world which underwent non-existence and then existence.

– Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 68)

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh was not the only person to observe that the first half of the twentieth century marked the end of one “world” and the beginning of a new “world”. Such an observation was also shared by other commentators, among whom was Rene Guenon (d. 1951) – one of the founders of the Perennialist or Traditionalist School. In his famous work, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Guenon remarked that:

“As we have said, there are those who have a vague feeling that something is approaching its end, without being able to define exactly the nature or extent of the change they foresee...We really do seem to be approaching the end of a world, in other words, the end of an epoch or a historical cycle, which may also correspond to the end of a cosmic cycle, in accordance with the teaching of all traditional doctrines on the subject.

– Rene Guenon, (*The Crisis of the Modern World*, 5)

The period of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh thus marked the conclusion of the Sixth Prophetic Cycle of Muḥammad and the dawn of the Seventh Prophetic Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh is the *Bāb* or *Hujjat* of the *Qāʾim* and the living meaning of the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*). Accordingly, *Ḥaḍrat Qāʾim al-Qiyāmah* began his great work through the exalted personality and deeds of his *Hujjat*. As such Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh is the most glorious *Imām*, in both knowledge and virtue, of the entire Great Cycle of history that began with the Prophet Adam. His unique status is conveyed by Allāmah Nāṣir al-Dīn Hunzāʾī as follows:



“The unprecedented personality of Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Sulṭān, peace and salutation of God be upon him, possessed the spiritual kingdom. Although every Imām in his time is the spiritual king, but according to the great programme of God, all times are not alike. Thus the time of Ḥaḍrat Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shah was extremely important and very special, in fact, it was the greatest of all. For, in the language of the *ta’wīl* of the Qur’ān, his exalted personality was the ‘Night of Power’ (*shab-i qadr*), in which the angels, the supreme soul and other souls of the world of command descend [to the physical world]. Thus, in the time of this living ‘Night of Power’ that promise of God, which is mentioned in (97:1-5) has been fulfilled... All this is according to that great programme of God, which is mentioned in the Qur’ān time and time again, which is related to the Night of Power and Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah, the most excellence greeting and peace be upon him.”

– Allāmah Nasīr al-Dīn Nāsir Hunzā’ī, (*Du’a: Essence of Ibadat*, 90)

3. The Abolishment of the Ranks of Faith (*Ḥudūd al-Dīn*)



When the Sun is shining, the Moon and the Stars are present but not visible. This symbolizes the state of the Imam and the Ranks of Faith (*hudud al-din*) in the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“At the time of the Great Resurrection (*qiyāmat-i qiyāmat*), when everything will be revealed, there will be no hindrance, either belonging to the physical world, the *ẓāhir*, or to the spiritual sphere, the *bāṭin*, before the eyes of the people; then neither the *ḥujjat*, nor other dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) will be manifest.

– Khayrkwah-i Harāṭi, (*Kalām-i Pīr*, tr. Ivanow, 41)

The Sun (*shams*) stands for the *Imām* and the Moon (*qamar*) stands for the *Pīr* or Supreme *Hujjat* (*Bāb*). The union of the Sun and the Moon at the time of *Qiyāmah* means that the institution of *Imāmah* and *Piratan* will be united in the person of the *Imām* during the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.



A visual depiction of a lunar eclipse. The lunar eclipse is a symbol of the union of the offices of *Imamah* and *Piratan* during the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“And when the Moon is eclipsed, and the Sun and Moon are united,

– Holy Qur’ān 75:8-9

This came to pass during the *Imamāt* of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. He was the first *Imām* in many hundreds of years to exclusively hold both the offices of *Imām* and *Bāb* (*Pīr*). For this reason, this *Imām* would bless his *murīds* with “paternal maternal loving blessings”. In a letter dated January 11, 1953, *Imām* Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh confirmed that “at this time there is no independent *Pīr* – I am myself holding this position.” In another letter dated

October 16, 1954, the *Imām* explained the meaning of the Red and Green colours of the *Ismā'īlī* flag:

“...the colours of our family are, as you know, red and green, the reason being that we represent both (offices of) the *Shāh* and the *Pīr*.”

– *Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh*

In the World of Nature, the *Imām* is symbolized by the Sun, his *Bābs* by the Moon, and the rest of the *ḥudūd* by the Stars. The darkening of the stars at the time of *Qiyāmah* means that the formal functions of the *hujjats*, the *dā'īs*, and *ma'dhūns* are abolished when the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins.

“And when the stars darken”

– Holy Qur'ān 81:2

“And when the stars are obliterated.”

– Holy Qur'ān 77:8

Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw also explains the same concepts in relation to a saying of the Prophet:

“The Prophet, God's blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny, has said: ‘Goodness is knotted up in the forelocks of horses till the Day of Resurrection.’ The *ta'wīl* of this is that the *da'wat* will not be severed from the *hujjats* till the time of the manifestation of the Lord of Resurrection (*Qā'im-i Qiyāmat*), the best salutations and peace be upon him. That is, the horses signify the *hujjats* and their forelocks are the *dā'īs*.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 35)

The abolishing of the functions of these Ranks of Faith (*ḥudūd al-dīn*) actually took place at the beginning of Mawlānā Sultān Muḥammad Shāh's *Imāmat*. This is summarized as follows:

“Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, who assumed his responsibilities at a young age in 1885, decisively began to re-establish contact with his community living in the mountain areas of Iran, Afghanistan and elsewhere. He abolished the spiritual hierarchy of *hujjats*, which had a dramatic effect on the organization of the community.

– Rafiq Keshavjee, (*Mysticism and the Plurality of Meaning*, 6)

The fact that the *Imām* abolished the hierarchy of the *hujjats* serves as a clear and irrefutable sign for the onset of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

4. The Abrogation of the *Sharī'ah*

“Ye are in an age in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be redeemed.

Prophet Muḥammad

The *Ismā'īlīs* had foretold that the *sharī'ah* in its exoteric form would be abrogated and transformed at the arrival of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. This is allegorically described in the Qur'ān as the “rolling up” or the “splitting” of the Heavens:



A visual depiction of the heavens being rolled up into a scroll. The imagery of a scroll serves to symbolize the “scroll of the *sharī’ah*” which is abrogated in the Cycle of *Qiyamah*.

“The Day that We roll up the Heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed),- even as We produced the first creation, so shall We produce a new one: a promise We have undertaken: truly shall We fulfill it. Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the message (given to Moses): ‘My servants, the righteous, should inherit the Earth.

– Holy Qur’ān 21:104

The inner meaning of “heavens” is the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the *sharī’ah*, and the inner meaning of “earth” is the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the *ṭarīqah*. Just as the physical heavens surround and protect the physical earth, the *ẓāhir* protects and envelopes the *bāṭin*. The “rolling up” of the “heavens” means that the *sharī’ah* will be abolished when the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* begins and the quaking of the “earth” means that the esoteric sciences will become revealed in a sudden way – in the manner of earthquakes – even though people may not be prepared for it:

“The cycle of *sharī’at* is a time in which worship is ordained at specific times, when the practice of external, physical behaviour is dictated, and when all acts of worship are completely absorbed in their specific temporal moments... The cycle of *qiyāmat* is when specific times of worship are abrogated, when people are summoned unto God for His own sake, and when all the moments [of life] are completely absorbed in the practice of devotion. This age is called the Cycle of Unveiling (*dawr-i kashf*).

– Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 110)

The *sharī’ah* of Prophet Muḥammad has two dimensions – the specified (*waḍ’ī*) *sharī’ah* and the intellectual (*‘aqlī*) *sharī’ah*. The specified *sharī’ah* refers to specific formal or ritual practices as *Ṣalāh* (ritual prayer), *Ṣawm* (ritual fasting), *Wudū* (ablution), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), etc. in their exoteric forms – without which mankind can still survive and function. The intellectual *sharī’ah* refers to moral and ethical laws such as the laws against murder, stealing, and unethical behaviour – without which humanity would plunge into chaos. Only the specified *sharī’ah* is abrogated, while the intellectual *sharī’ah* always remains in existence for the survival of humanity.

These conditions were fulfilled when Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh made major changes in the ritual practices of the Ismā’īlī communities. He effectively modified and discontinued the exoteric or *sharī’ah* forms of worship and instituted the esoteric or *ṭarīqah* forms of worship. These changes are described as follows:

“It may be noted that Aga Khan III from around 1910 also introduced certain changes in the religious rituals and practices of his followers, emphasising their spirituality and esoteric significance. These changes also served to distinguish further the Nizari Ismailis from the Twelver Shi’is, especially in Persia and the subcontinent where the Ismailis had either dissimulated as Twelvers or had interfaced with them for extended periods. These measures also safeguarded the separate identity of the Nizari Ismailis who were at the same time experiencing modernisation.

– Farhad Daftary, (*A Short History of the Ismailis*, 201)

“Around 1910, in line with the directives issued to the Qāsim-Shāhī Nizārīs of other countries, Āghā Khan III began to introduce certain changes in the religious practices and rituals of his Persian followers. In particular, he changed or simplified some of those religious rituals that the Persian Shi’is, like other Muslims, had categorized as the *furū’-i dīn*, comprising the positive rules of the Islamic law, such as the rituals of praying, ablution, fasting, the hajj pilgrimage, and so forth. The Persian Nizaris had hitherto observed these rituals mainly in the fashion of the Twelver Shi’is, perhaps for the sake of *taqāyyah*. But now they were required to set themselves drastically apart from the Twelvers, asserting their own identity as a religious community... Indeed, they were now required to observe only those religious prescriptions that were directly endorsed or issued by their living imam.

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 537)

It must be remembered that the abrogation of the specified *sharī’ah* does not amount to the abrogation of worship (*‘ibādah*) altogether. The abrogation of the specified *sharī’ah* refers to its transformation and its evolution into a higher and more subtler form by means of *ta’wīl*. In this sense, the Ismā’īlī *Dū’ā’* and the other contemporary Ismā’īlī *ṭarīqah* practices are a practical *ta’wīl* of the classical *sharī’ah* practices including *Salāh*, *Wudū*, *Hajj*, *Ṣawm* and others. In reality, this constitutes the perfection and fulfillment of the *sharī’ah* – although outwardly it may appear like an abrogation. Nevertheless, even the Prophet Muḥammad had foretold about the future time when the rules of his *sharī’ah* would be relaxed or discontinued:

“Ye are in an age in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be redeemed.

– Prophet Muḥammad,

(Seyyed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 183)

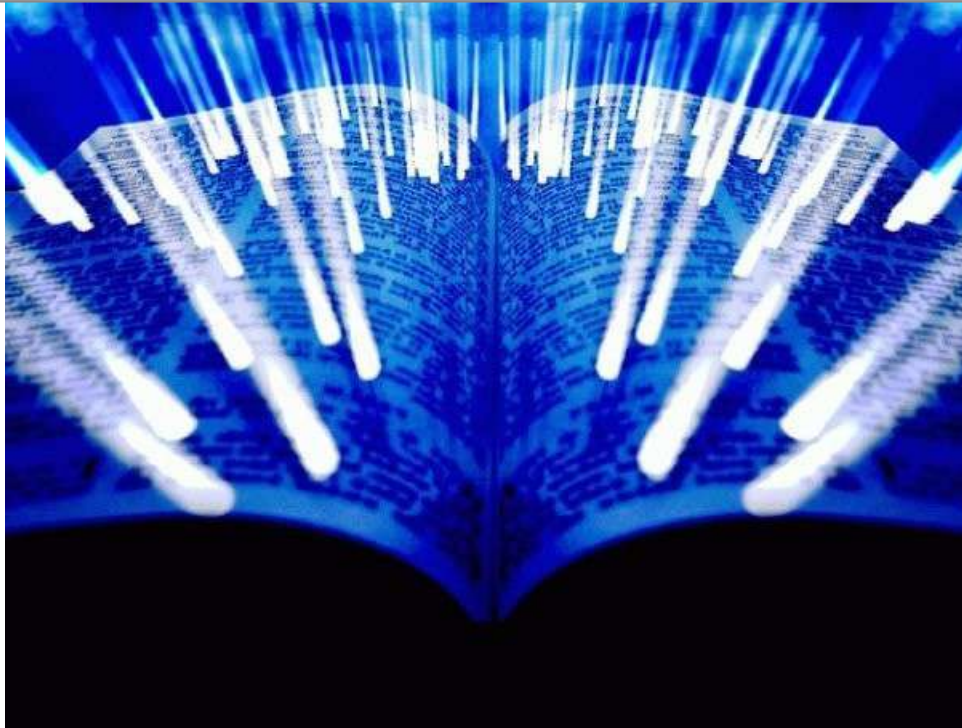
On the same lines, Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh asserted and affirmed his authority to modify and adjust the forms of rituals such as prayer and fasting in a public document:

“If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of

prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed.”

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Foreword to *Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations* by Al-Hajji Qassim
Jairazbhoy)

5. Intellectual *Da‘wah*: The Knowledge Society



“My life in many ways has been a bridge across vastly different epochs...The extent of the revolution which I have witnessed is not yet to be measured, but we can see manifestations of it at many levels of human experience... I have witnessed this rapid and all-developing process of change in every domain of human interest and experience.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1-2)

The Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is characterized by great physical, spiritual, and intellectual changes in the state of human life. The above quote of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh testifies to the unprecedented conditions that the world experienced during the course of his *Imāmat*. The *Imām* confirms that his very life constitutes “the bridge across vastly different epochs”, consisting of a revolution in “in every domain of human interest and experience”. These words are a testament to the conditions of *Qiyāmah* that began during the *Imāmat* of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. This was perhaps most evident in the *Imām’s* designation of his grandson Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī as his successor to the *Imāmat*. The Last Will of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh clearly attributes this form of succession to the great changes taking place in the world:

“And in these circumstances and in view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place including the discoveries of atomic science I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shia Moslem Ismailian Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of a new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam. For these reasons and although he is not now one of my heirs, I APPOINT my grandson KARIM, the son of my son, ALY SALOMONE KHAN to succeed to the title of AGA KHAN and to be the Imam and Pir of all my Shia Ismailian followers.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Last Will, Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 208)

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh was the *Bāb* and *Ḥujjat* of the *Qā'im* and the mission and Cycle of *Qiyāmah* began with him. Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī, as the successor and grandson of the *Ḥujjat* of the *Qā'im*, continues the work of *Qiyāmah* and is the first *Imām* of the Seventh Cycle. In terms of cosmic function, Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī and his successor are the *Khulafā'* (Vicegerents, Deputies) of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah*. The *Khulafā'* of the *Qā'im* are his exalted progeny and who represent the *Qā'im* in the physical world and carry out his mission.



The following is an explanation of the role of the *Khulafā'* of the *Qā'im*:

“...al-Nu'mān explains that the *Qā'im* essentially has three degrees (*ḥudūd*): the degree of the corporeal world, the degree of resurrection in the spiritual world, and finally, the degree of reckoning (the last judgment). More specifically, he mentions two corporeal degrees for the *Qā'im*, namely, the degree of speaker-prophet (*nātiq*) and that of the rightly guided deputies or lieutenants (*al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn*)... The *Qā'im*, according to [Imām] al-Mu'izz and al-Nu'mān, does not announce a new *sharia*, but merely reveals the inner meaning of the previous laws. Al-Mu'izz also speaks of the *khulafā'* who act righteously and represent the doctrine and deeds of the *Qā'im*. He further adds that there is no *Qā'im* and Lord of the Time (*ṣāhib*

al-zamān) besides the *Imām* of the time, who interprets the inner meaning of the laws.

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 164-165)

“It seems that Nāsir [Khusraw] considers the successors of the *Qā'im* to be his *khalīfas*, and he assigns a special rank to this function. Thus, he explains that the current cycle of Muḥammad is composed of two parts – that of the *awliyā'*, or the *imāms*, and that of the *khalīfas*.

– Shafique Virani, (*The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw*)

The earthly mission of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyamah*, undertaken by his Vicegerents (*khulafā'*), is to begin the “Intellectual Summons” (*da'wat 'ilmiyya*) and inaugurate the Epoch of Knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*).

“Since the *Qā'im's* call is intellectual (*da'wah is 'ilmīyyah*), the *Qā'im's* knowledge is not visible; whereas the Prophet's call (*da'wah*) is *'amalīyah*. Therefore, while hypocrites may enter the *da'wah* of a prophet, only the sincere can enter the *da'wah* of the *Qā'im*; and their souls will be recompensed according to that effort of sincerity. Sijistani holds that God has ordained the *da'wah* of the *Qā'im* as intellectual, not ritualistic. It is intellectual because it cannot be operative through force since force would make its followers hypocrites, not true believers. Therefore, the believer must possess knowledge (*'ilm*), and the *sāhib al-'ilm* is he who deals with those who profess a belief without the use of force, i.e. without an externally motivating factor. Therefore, a believer is defined as the one who is intellectually convinced of the truth of revelation and accepts this as an intellectual conviction and not as a mere acceptance and observance of the law.

– Boustān Hirji, (*A Study of Risalah al-Bahira*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, Montreal, October 1994, 155)

“The *dawr al-'ilm* (Epoch of Knowledge) is the time of the *Qā'im*, and associated with this is *tayid*, purity, and more significantly, “pure knowledge” (*al-'ilm al-mahd*).... Because the *Qā'im* is established at the end of the *dawr al-'amāl*, the epoch of the *Qā'im* is the epoch of purity (*safa*), *ta'yīd* and *'ilm*, without religious obligation in terms of practice (*taklīf*).

– Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (*The Sphere of Walayah: Ismaili Ta'wīl in Practice according to al-Mu'ayyad*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, 2006, 322-334)

In the Epoch of Knowledge, the esoteric knowledge of all religions is unveiled and made accessible to humanity at large. This process is evident throughout the contemporary world. The rise of modern technology, the information age, the internet, and the academic publishing sector has allowed esoteric material from multiple traditions to be published out in the open. Such a feat is unprecedented in world history and would have been inconceivable in the past. Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes how the unveiling of the inner meaning of various religions is an event of great cyclic importance:

“The full application of *scientia sacra* to the study of religions on a worldwide scale had to be preserved for modern times as both a compensation from

Heaven for the secularization of human life and a cyclic event of the greatest importance, which signified the unraveling and explaining of the inner meaning of not one but all the living traditions of mankind in the light of tradition itself before the present human cycle terminates.

– Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 245)

The beginning of this Epoch of Knowledge is confirmed by the present *Imām*, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī, in a recent speech made at the Aga Khan University. In the below quote, the *Imām* speaks of the onset of the Knowledge Society in very apocalyptic or *qiyamatī* terms:

“All of these changes suggest that we are moving into a new epoch of history, a new condition of human life. Many observers describe this new world as the “Knowledge Society — contrasting it with the Industrial Societies or the Agricultural Societies of the past. In this new era, the predominant source of influence will stem from information, intelligence and insight rather than physical power or natural resources. This Knowledge Society will confront people everywhere with new challenges — and new opportunities.”

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Aga Khan University Convocation Speech, 2006)

In the above quote, the *Imām* of the Time, refers to the Knowledge Society as “a new epoch of history”, “a new condition of human life”, a “new world”, and a “new era”. Such words must be weighed and assessed carefully in light of the descriptions of *Qiyāmah* given by the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wah* over one thousand years ago. The concept of the Knowledge Society explained by the present *Imām* directly tallies with the “Epoch of Knowledge” (*dawr al-‘ilm*) described by the Ismā‘īlī *hujjat* al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shirāzī. The fact that the *Imām* uses the terms “new epoch”, “new world”, “new era”, and “new condition of human life” confirm that the age of the Knowledge Society is none other than the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*.

The emphasis of the present *Imām*, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī, on the importance of knowledge and all of his work in establishing institutions of knowledge and research such as the Aga Khan University and the Institute of Ismaili Studies speak to his special role in the present Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. One thousand years ago, numerous Ismā‘īlī *hujjats* such as Sayyidnā Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, Sayyidnā Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, and Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, described the special function of the Vicegerents of the *Qā’im* (*khulafā’tu’l-qā’im al-qiyāmat*):

“The prayer of seeking rain symbolizes the *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) of the *Qā’im*, who delivers us from the famine of knowledge, just as rain delivers us from physical famine.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 19)



The special work of Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī in the present age is related to his role as the first *Khalīfāh* (Vicegerent) of the *Qā'im*. According to the *ḥadīths*, the *Qā'im* is supposed to judge each religious community by its own scriptures and tradition:

“He [the *Qā'im*] will take the Torah and the other holy Books from the case and will judge the faithful of the Torah from the Torah, and the faithful of the Gospels from the Gospels, the faithful of the Psalms according to the Psalms, and the faithful of the Qur’ān according to the Qur’ān.

– Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, (Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 225)

The above *ḥadīth* is fulfilled by Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī’s mission to promote pluralism, tolerance and religious diversity. Religious pluralism means affirming and upholding the right of all religious communities to practice their faith and embracing religious diversity as a gift from the Divine. In this sense, the *Imām* has remarked that:

“Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development. It is vital to our existence.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV,
(Speech at Humayun’s Tomb, New Dehli, April 15, 2003)

“The spirit of the Knowledge Society is the spirit of Pluralism—a readiness to accept the Other, indeed to learn from him, to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV,
(Aga Khan University Convocation Speech, 2006)

“Instead, seen not as a pallid religious compromise but as a sacred religious imperative, tolerance can become a powerful, positive force, one which allows all of us to expand our horizons — and enrich our lives.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV,
(Address at Tutzing Evangelical Academy, May 20, 2006)

The *ḥadīths* about the *Qā'im-i Āl-i Muḥammad* describe his purifying the world from injustice and oppression. The below *ḥadīth* is often cited in both Sunni and Shī'ī texts:

“Even if there remains (in the life of the world) only a single day, God will prolong it until there comes a man of my progeny who will fill the earth with equity and justice even as it has been filled with oppression and injustice.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunān Abū Dawūd, *Kitāb al-Mahdī*, Hadith No. 4270)

The reference to a “single day” remaining in the world refers to the Seventh Day of the Week of Religion, which is the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. The descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad who will “fill the earth with equity and justice” is the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* who accomplishes this mission through his *Khulafā'* (Vicegerents) that come from his progeny. This mission of restoring “equity and justice” to the world is currently being undertaken by Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī by means of the Aga Khan Development Network. The mission of the Aga Khan Development Network is to raise the “quality of life” of all human beings. In one of his speeches, the *Imām* reminded his audience that such work is part of his mission and should not be seen as simple philanthropy:

“I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world — especially the Western media — try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility — it flows from the mandate of the office of *Imām* to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV,
(Address at Tutzing Evangelical Academy, May 20, 2006)

The present work of Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī through the AKDN was, therefore, prophesied and foretold by the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Even the Imām al-Mu'izz, the fourth *khalīfah* of the Fatimid empire, had referred to the exalted mission of the *Qā'im* in one of his confidential prayers addressed to God over a thousand years ago:

“He [the *Qā'im*] is the one You (God) have elevated, honored, and glorified, through whom You have sealed the world of nature, and through whom You have abrogated the *ẓāhir* of Muḥammad's *sharī'ah* and through whom You are

filling the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with injustice and oppression.

– Imām al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh,
(Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 245)

6. Ḥaḍrat Qāʾim al-Qiyāmah: Lord of the Resurrection



“Indeed, Islam began as a Stranger (*gharībān*) and it will return as a Stranger. Blessed

the strangers.

– Prophet Muhammad

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The advent of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* and the appearance of the *Qāʾim* are indicated by a series of signs or portents including the appearance of the *Ḥujjat* of the *Qāʾim* who is the greatest of *Imāms*, the abolishment of the *daʿwah* and the *ḥudūd al-dīn* (Ranks of Faith), the abrogation and transformation of the *sharīʿah*, and the unprecedented changes in human life leading to beginning of the Epoch of Knowledge. As demonstrated in this study, all these signs have come to pass in the last one hundred years. The cause of the *Qiyāmah* and its signs in the physical world is the exalted person of *Ḥaḍrat Qāʾim al-Qiyamah*. Since all of the signs of *Qiyāmah* have occurred in both the physical world and the World of Faith, it suffices to say that *Ḥaḍrat Qāʾim* has already appeared in the physical world. The *Qiyāmah*, as a spiritual event in the soul-world, is hidden and concealed by definition as stated in the Qurʾān:

“Do they only wait for the Hour – that it should come on them all of a sudden, while they are unaware?

– Holy Qurʾan 43:66

“Verily the Hour is coming – My design is to keep it hidden for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its effort.

– Holy Qur’an 20:15

The above verses, speaking of “the Hour”, also describe how *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah* is likewise hidden and veiled. Many people expect *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* to be a famous personality whom the entire world will glorify and pay homage to. However, the truth is quite the opposite. This is indicated by the Prophet Muḥammad when he described the state of the *Qā’im* as follows:

“Indeed, Islam began as a Stranger (*gharībān*) and it will return as a Stranger. Blessed are the strangers.

– Prophet Muhammad,

(Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 225)

This *ḥadīth* describes how *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah* will appear as a “stranger” when he manifests in the physical world. It indicates that most people will not be able to fathom, understand, or rationalize his actions and behaviour. This is because *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* is the judge and reckoner of all actions and therefore his own acts and appearance defy all attempts of judgment, assessment or rationalization. On this point, William Quinn remarks that all great prophets, *avatars*, or bringers of Truth in the world have been perceived as “strange” and “unusual” – and this will specifically apply to the messianic figure.

“At this point it is necessary to digress for a moment to observe a remarkable feature of the major revelations of God’s Word to the world at large. That is, seldom did the bearer of the Word, typically an *Avatar*, or his harbinger arrive or operate in any conventional way in the contemporaneous culture. They were iconoclasts in contrast to those entrenched in the established and normative ways of the time and place in which they came. They were the least expected, and were often the source of dissension in their society. These great beings were, in that society’s view, rough, not part of the establishment, and so were the various harbingers of the coming....In the eyes of those witnessing, but not accepting, the advent of the sacred in their time and place, seldom do the revelation and its bearer or their harbinger appear proper or acceptable. They are strange, different, unacceptable, rough, if not entirely implausible as harbingers or bringers of Light. Yet they are such, even if but a few can see them for what they are.

– William W. Quinn Jr, (“Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Notes on the First Days after the End of the Kali Yuga”, *Sacred Web* Volume 3, 1999)

The real identity of *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* is “veiled” by his own spiritual intensity. The Qur’ān describes the veiled appearance of the *Qā’im* and the events of his time in the following verses:

“And your Lord shall come, with the angels, rank on rank.”

– Holy Qur’ān 89:22

“Do they wait until God comes to them in shades of clouds, with the angels and the question is (thus) settled? but to God do all questions go back.

These verses describe the coming of the “Lord” (*rabb*) or God (*Allāh*). However, God Himself – transcending time and space – is above the process of “coming” or “going”. This verse refers to the coming of *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* and the events of *Qiyāmah* – indicated by the words “do they wait” (*hal yanẓurūna*). The “Lord” refers to the *Qā’im* and the “Angels who accompany him” refer to the *Khulafā’* (Vicegerents) of the *Qā’im* who represent him and carry out his mission on earth. The description of “God comes to them in shades of clouds” means that *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* comes to the physical world in a way that is “veiled” from people’s recognition – just as clouds conceal the Sun. In a similar way Sayyidnā Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī explains that the rank and knowledge of the *Qā’im* is hidden from the people:

“Sijistānī writes that God states in the Qur’ān that ‘the Hour’ cannot be understood as temporal time (*Iftikhār*, p. 76); so also the traces of the *Qā’im* may not be physical. For the *Qā’im* is veiled because his *da’wah* is not of a practical (*‘amaliyah*) nature, but is a call to knowledge (*da’wah al-‘ilmiyyah*). Participation in this *da’wah* can be achieved only through effort in the search for it. Here Sijistānī identified ‘hiddenness’ as the mark of the *Qā’im*.

– Boustān Hirjī, (*A Study of al-Risalah al-Bahira*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, 1994, 122)

According to Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, when *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* appears, he will not actually engage in any *da’wah* or declare his real identity:

“The *Qā’im* prevents the community from the exoteric *da’wat* and at the time of his appearance he does not do the *da’wat*.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 18)

This raises the question of how one can ever recognize the person of the *Qā’im al-Qiyāmah*? Ultimately, *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im* will not be directly recognized by anyone in the physical world except the five highest ranks (*ḥudūd*) in World of Faith:

“The *Qā’im* cannot be recognised except through the five ranks (*ḥudūd*): the *Asās*, the *Imām*, the *Bāb*, the *Hujjat* and the *Dā’ī*.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Chapter 33)

The essential mission of *Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah* pertains to the spiritual world of human souls and not the physical world. All knowledge, blessings, and benefits of the physical world are rooted in the spiritual world. Accordingly, all of the special conditions of the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* in the physical world are caused by the *Qiyāmah* in the spiritual world. Thus, the *Qā’im*’s essential mission is actualized only after he dies and leaves the physical world and ascends to the spiritual world:

“Al-Nu’mān explains that the *Qā’im* essentially has three degrees (*ḥudūd*): the degree of the corporeal world, the degree of resurrection in the spiritual world, and finally, the degree of reckoning (the last judgment).

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 164-165)

“The proverb, ‘First is thought and last is action’, has bearing upon the Qā’im and the loftiness of his degree [rank] (*darajah*), in particular reference to when the Qā’im leaves the corporeal world (*al-‘ālam al-jismānī*) for the spiritual world (*al-‘ālam al-ruhānī*).

– Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (*The Sphere of Walayah: Ismāīlī Ta’wīl in Practice according to al-Mu’ayyad*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, 2006, 333)

Upon leaving the physical world, Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah ascends to the Universal Soul where he performs his greatest task – uniting the Universal Soul with the Universal Intellect at the highest level of the spiritual world. In Ismā’īlī philosophy, the Universal Intellect is the first and most perfect being in existence. The Universal Soul emanated from the Universal Intellect and created the Cosmos as a whole in order to achieve and actualize its perfection so it can return to the Universal Intellect. The Universal Soul accomplishes this task by means of creating perfect souls including the souls of the Prophets, Imāms, and the Ḥudūd al-Dīn (Ranks of Faith), up to the person of Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah who is the most perfect human soul that the Universal Soul has ever created. When Ḥaḍrat Qā’im leaves the physical world, he returns to the spiritual world of the Universal Soul and passes judgment over all human souls:

“The Qā’im, may his prayers be upon us – being the ultimate highest point (*ghayatu’l-ghayata*) of the Creation, for whose sake the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kull*) has produced this world, has the most perfect share in that [higher] world. It may even be said that the perfection (*tamāmi*) of the Universal Soul depends on him.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Shish Fasl or Six Chapters*, tr. Ivanow, 78-79)

“The Qā’im will depart from this [physical] world, and go to the higher world (*‘ālam-i uluwi*), where the Universal Soul through him will attain the position of the Universal Intellect, while every soul, those of the believers and the sinners, will receive from the Qā’im the reward or punishment which they deserve.

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Shish Fasl or Six Chapters*, tr. Ivanow, Chapter 6)

In uniting the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul, Ḥaḍrat Qā’im al-Qiyāmah unveils the *ta’wīl* of all religions and revelations. This act does not take place in the physical world – in the form of speech or writing – but can only occur in a subtle or spiritual form. In the physical world, the *ta’wīl* is taught in the form of verbal instruction (*ta’lim*). In the spiritual world, the *ta’wīl* is unveiled by the Qā’im in the form of spiritual inspiration (*ta’yīd*). Sayyidnā Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī explains how the Qā’im carries the *ta’wīl* in the physical world “*in potentia*” and then actualizes it as spiritual forms in “simple world”:

“Just as ether encircles the three elements, while being a grasper of them, likewise the Master of the Seventh Cycle encircles the six [prophets], namely, the masters of the three pairs of sacred laws, while he carries them in this world in *potentia*, his potentiality being in the esoteric interpretation (*al-ta’wīl*), in which there is found the basis of the sacred laws, and the final point

of esoteric interpretation (*nihayat al-ta'wīl*) belongs to him, and through him there will emerge their forms (*zuhūr suwārihim*) in the Simple World [spiritual world].

– Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, (*Kitāb al-Iṣlāh*, tr. Shin Nomoto, *Early Isma'ili Thought on Prophecy*, Ph.D. Dissertation, 118)

Ḥaḍrat Qā'im's actualization of the *ta'wīl* and the spiritual forms in the “simple world” had immediate consequences in the physical world. These effects began in the decade of the 1960s and saw several unprecedented developments in the political, social, and spiritual life of humanity. William Quinn describes this as follows:

“Lustrum is a Latin word meaning a period of five years. The five-year period of which we speak is 1965 to 1970, during which a window was opened long enough to complete, *inter alia*, a culture-wide or mass infusion of esoterism and first principles mainly into the West, but to some extent into the modern East as well as in the form of reaffirmation of Traditional principles... In this lies the true significant of the period from 1965 to 1970 – the illustrious lustrum. It was as if, within that brief period, the concentrated attention of some great being released a torrent of spiritual energy not unlike that of the similarly tumultuous times and milieus of the world's great *avatars*. It was not only unprecedented in recorded history; it was not only a grand marshaling of primordial esoteric truths; it was also a wholly new expression of those truths as found in the arts of the spiritual element of the lustrum.

– William W. Quinn Jr, (“Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Notes on the First Days after the End of the Kali Yuga”, *Sacred Web* Volume 3, 1999)

The spiritual resurrection (*qiyāmah*) accomplished by Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah results in the “spiritualization” of the world. This does not mean that the physical world is literally destroyed, but rather, the various phenomena of the physical world become more “transparent” and “immaterial” – less constrained by the perceived limits of physical matter. The recent technological breakthroughs, the availability of knowledge in the digital age, and the exponential increase and expansion of human knowledge in every moment are a testament to this process of “spiritualization”. Ultimately, all human technological advances and accomplishments are manifestations of the subtle powers of the human soul. All of mankind's creations are rooted in conceptions (*taṣawwur*) of the human intellect and soul – and all such conceptions and discoveries are due to the *ta'yīd* of Ḥaḍrat Qā'im. The Qā'im's act of *ta'wīl* unveils and unearths knowledge from matter – effectively abstracting and unearthing spiritual knowledge out of the physical form. In this act, the Qā'im's perfect soul and subtle body encompass and integrate the souls of all the Prophets, *Imāms* and the *ḥudūd al-Din* (Ranks of Faith) of all the previous cycles – as explained by Henry Corbin and Allāmah Hunzā'ī below:

“The Qā’im is the “coalescence” (*majma*), the *corpus mysticum* of all the *hudūd*; each of the *Imāms* has his own *corpus mysticum* (mystical body), his Temple of Light, and all are gathered together and integrated in the Sublime Temple of the Resurrector (Qā’im).

– Henry Corbin, (*Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 99)



“This Qā’im strings the persons of *Imāmat* before and behind him in the thread of the Divine light... And the Qā’im has comprised all that was with them and has encompassed everything in a number. That is, he has caused the subtle form of the whole world or the universal body to reach the higher world in a spiritual state, which is without matter. This is the meaning of the end or disappearance of this world. The point which demands enquiry here is that *mu’mins* cannot reach the higher world by themselves, but only by their being attached to the Imam or the *hudūd*. The Qā’im, due to the ascription of the acts of the Prophets and Imams of the entire cycle and due to the absence of the past and the future in the higher world, strings the chain or the persons of the *Imāmat*, prior to and after him, in the hearts of the Prophets with the thread of the Divine Light... From this *ta’wīlī* proof it is clear that the final act of the major cycle is called “*hasiya*” (encompassing), which is the act of *Hadrat Qā’im*, in which he encompasses all states events, the entire history of the universe and all sciences, arts and impressions and marks of the creatures of the earth and heaven and rarefies them from matter.

– Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Nāṣir Hunzā’ī, (*Chain of the Light of Imāmat*, 86-87)

Through *Ḥadrat Qā’im*’s Resurrection in the spiritual world and union of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, the channel of *ta’yīd* or the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) opens for all human souls – both in the spiritual world and the physical world. Furthermore, all human souls that have not yet attained salvation and await judgment in the imaginal world or *barzakh* are allowed to ascend to the level of Paradise of the Universal Soul through the intercession of the Qā’im. This is described in an academic study as follows:

“The Resurrection (*qiyāma/ba’th*) follows the consummation of cycles at the coming of the leader of the seventh and final cycle (*ṣāhib al-dawr al-sābi’*),

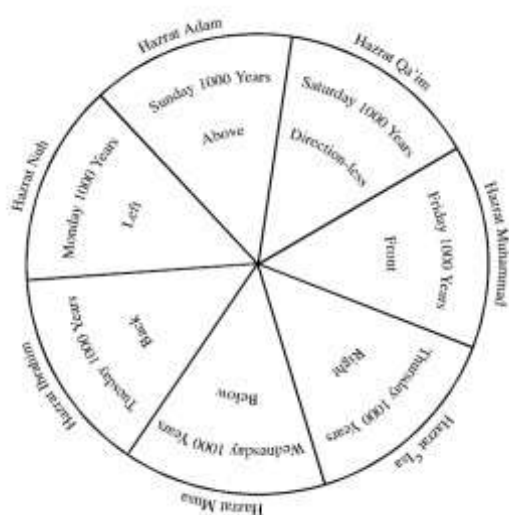
that is, the *Qā'im* or the Pure Soul (*al-nafs alzakiyya*), with whom all knowledge contained in the previous cycles will come into open both in its exoteric and esoteric form. Then as people will be illuminated by his knowledge, knowledge and happiness will prevail due to the great number of its possessors, while ignorance will nearly pass away completely...the souls dying before resurrection will have to wait for the completion of cycles in an “isthmus” (*barzakh*), knowing in their essence, however, whether they belong among the saved or lost ones...It is then that the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) will flow from the *Qā'im* to the souls enabling them to pass to the spiritual sphere, and all virtuous souls will share the same form as if together forming one single soul.

– Janne Mattila, (*Philosophy as a Path to Happiness*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2011, 84)

This post intended to demonstrate how the signs, conditions, and events of *Qiyāmah* and the advent of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* were fulfilled in human history over the last century. The major events and signs of *Qiyāmah*, in their esoteric meaning, are as follows:

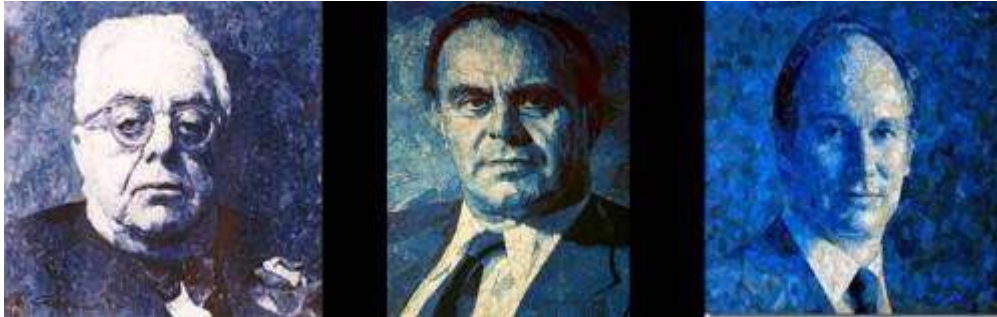
- The Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*): The *Ḥujjat* (proof) and *Bāb* (gate) of the *Qā'im*
- The union of the Sun and the Moon: The union of the *Imam* and the *Pir*
- The darkening of the Stars: The abolishment of the Ranks of Faith (*ḥudūd al-dīn*)
- The folding of the Heavens: The abrogation of the *sharī'ah*
- The Epoch of Knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*): The Knowledge Society

It must be remembered that the *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* (Day of Resurrection) – according to *Ismā'īlī ta'wīl* – is a a thousand year long cycle of human history and not literally a day in which the physical world comes to a literal end.



Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh was the *Ḥujjat* (proof) and *Bāb* (gate) of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* and the most glorious *Imām* in the history of the *Imāmat*. It is he who concluded the Cycle of Muḥammad and began the Cycle of *Qiyāmah*. His

illustrious grandson, the present *Imām*, Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī, is the *Khalīfah* of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* and first *Imām* of the Seventh Cycle. Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī and the *Imāms* following him are the *Khulafā'* of the *Qā'im* and carry out the special mission of *Qiyāmah* in the physical world.



The great Cycle of *Qiyāmah* has just begun and the conditions and events of *Qiyāmah* will continue to intensify as human history moves forward. As the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* progresses, human beings will be more receptive to spirituality and esoteric wisdom. The world's spiritual traditions will undergo a renewal. The *Imamat* will remain present throughout the Cycle of *Qiyāmah* to carry out the sacred mission of the *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* – to unveil knowledge, safeguard pluralism, restore justice to the world, and reveal *tawhid* – the absolute unity of God, the oneness of humanity and the spiritual integration of the human soul.

In the spiritual world of the Resurrection, the light (*nur*) and inspiration (*ta'yid*) of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* illumines all the seekers of enlightenment – uplifting every human soul in the journey towards its own *qiyāmah*. Sayyidnā al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī's depiction of the power of the *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* is summarized below:

“The *Qā'im* overflows over all of created beings (*al-khala'iq*), from state (*hal*) to state, and from degree to degree, whether concerning the uppermost ranks or those below him. The grace (*barakah*) of the *Qā'im* and his *maddah* (spiritual matter) overflow in such a manner that the *maddah* is connected to him. The grace of the *Qā'im's maddah* (spiritual matter) is synonymous with the knowledge of religious instruction (*'ilm al-talim*). This connection is possible, as the author explains further, only by means of the *walāyah* of the *Imāms*, for every true *Imām*, in every period, and more specifically, in his own time, is linked to the *Qā'im*.”

– Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (*The Sphere of Walayah: Ismaili Tawil in Practice According to al-Muayyad*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, April 2006, 334)

God continues to manifest His Signs to humankind in both the physical world and the spiritual world until all souls come to recognize the truth (*ḥaqq*) of *Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah* – as stated in the Qu'rān:

“Soon We shall show them our Signs on the horizons and within their own souls, until it is manifest to them that he (*Ḥaḍrat Qā'im al-Qiyāmah*) is the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*).

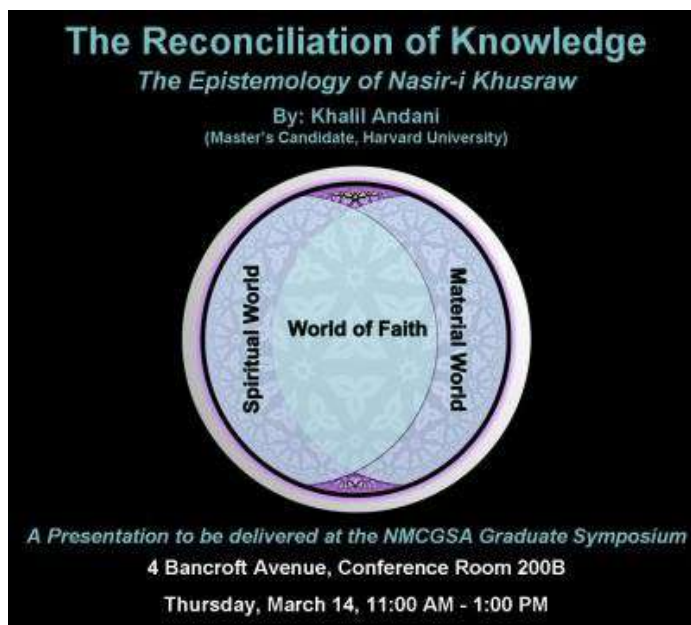
– Holy Qur’ān 41:53

“We, the Imāms in descent from Imām Husayn, are present until today and we shall remain until the Qiyāmah and even after the Qiyāmah.

– Imam Āgā ‘Alī Shāh, (Bombay, 1878)

The Concept of Knowledge ('ilm)

Nasir-i Khusraw's Philosophy



On Thursday, March 14, Khalil Andani (Master's Candidate, Harvard University) delivered a presentation on the concept of Knowledge ('ilm) according to Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw. This presentation took place during the 17th annual NMCGSA Graduate Symposium held at the University of Toronto.

Khalil's presentation explores the ideas of knowledge ('ilm), intellect ('aql), perception (*andar yāftan*; *idrāk*), recognition (*ma'rifah*) and inspiration (*ta'yīd*) in the philosophy of Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw and discusses two levels of knowledge – direct intellectual perception (*andar yāftan*) and conceptual knowledge (*taṣawwur*). His presentation ([click here for abstract](#)) consists of the following sections:

- a) Contextualizing Nasir-i Khusraw
- b) The Objects of Knowledge
- c) Knowledge as Intellectual Perception
- d) Knowledge as Conception
- e) *Ma'rifah* (Recognition)
- f) From Potential Intellect to Actual Intellect) Conclusion

Listen to the presentation and view the powerpoint slideshow video below (view on 720p quality):

View on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/67595385>

An Ismaili Muslim Reconciliation of Creation and Evolution

“It was this Islamic sense of unity in all forms of life which confirmed my father’s faith in a God-governed order. [Imam Sultān Muhammad Shāh] achieved a synthesis which enabled him to conciliate his faith in the Almighty as well as in Darwin’s theory of the origin of the species which swept across Europe in his youth and generated such heated debate.”

Prince Sadruddin Āgā Khān describing the beliefs of his father Imam Sultān Muhammad Shāh

The recent debate between the creationist museum and popular scientist raised the question of whether the monotheistic doctrine of creation is compatible with the scientific theory of evolution. This article reconciles the traditional doctrine of Creation found in monotheistic faiths with the theory of Evolution by refuting both creationism and naturalism (atheism) and integrating Ismā’īlī Muslim metaphysics with modern science.

Over one thousand years ago, the Ismā’īlī Muslim philosopher Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw undertook the daunting task of reconciling and synthesizing the religious doctrines and science and philosophical views of his time in a great work called *The Reconciliation of the Two Wisdoms (Jāmi’ al-ḥikmatayn)*. Following the spirit of Sayyidnā Nāṣir, this article presents a reconciliation of the classical theistic doctrine of Creation and theory of Evolution in light of contemporary discussions of both theology and science.

The recent debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham only serves to perpetuate the misunderstandings between atheists, agnostics, scientists and people of faith. On one side, Ken Ham’s “creationism” amounts to total departure from the classical concepts of God and Creation found in most monotheistic faiths. On the other hand, most people interpret (sometimes tacitly) the theory of evolution within a purely materialist or naturalist worldview – in which physical reality is *all* that exists and where all aspects of living organisms are fully explained by Darwinian evolution. The proper reconciliation between a theistic worldview based on the reality of God’s creation and the scientifically grounded theory of evolution involve a return to the classical understanding of God and Creation found in the scholastic and philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and an honest recognition of the limits of naturalism and the mechanistic concept of Nature.

The Pitfalls of Scriptural Literalism:

“...one would have to be rather simple to imagine that there could have been “days” before the creation of the sun, or that God literally planted an orchard with physical trees”

David Bentley Hart

Biblical literalism is a modern phenomenon that took hold among the Protestant Christians. Unlike the Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Protestants take the Bible alone as the sufficient authority in religious matters. In this context, certain groups of Protestants in the 18th century began to confine the interpretation of the Bible to its literal meaning. This happened because the interpretive mindsets of such people were conditioned and threatened by the scientific revolution – in which truth was recognized solely in terms of literal facts. However, Biblical literalism is inconsistent with both Christian tradition and human reason.

The Christian Church Fathers did not take the verses of Genesis literally. In fact, they emphasized that one must interpret the Bible with resource to philosophy in order to perceive the spiritual truths embedded within its allegories. As Hart explains:

“The greatest Church Fathers, for instance, took it for granted that the creation narratives of Genesis could not be treated literally, at least not in the sense we give to that word today, but must be read allegorically—which, incidentally, does not mean read as stories with codes to be decrypted but simply read as stories whose value lies in the spiritual truths to which they can be seen as pointing. Origen of Alexandria (185–254), in many ways the father of patristic exegesis, remarked that one would have to be rather simple to imagine that there could have been “days” before the creation of the sun, or that God literally planted an orchard with physical trees whose fruits conferred wisdom or eternal life, or that God liked to amble through his garden in the gloaming, or that Adam could have hidden from him behind a tree; no one could doubt, he said, that these are figural tales, communicating spiritual mysteries, and certainly not historical records.”

David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 25)

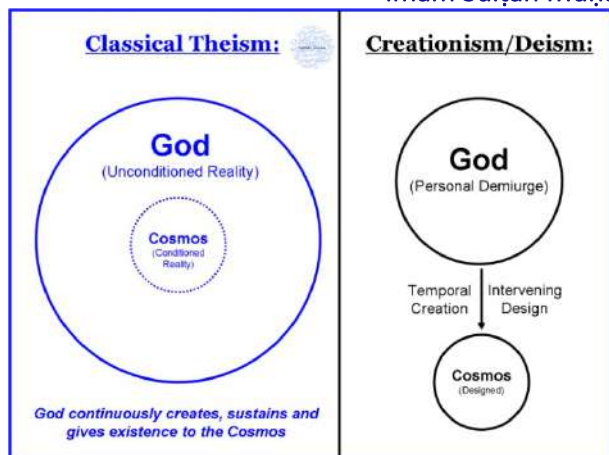
Secondly, the literal affirmation that God created the Universe in six days results in a contradiction. The simply reason being that if God is the creator of the universe, then He must also be the creator of time and space. Therefore, the divine creative act which originates time and space cannot itself be subject to time or take time to occur. St. Augustine recognized the contradiction in believing in a literal six day creation of the world when the word “day” means a twenty-four period. Augustine instead believed that God created time *with* the creation of the universe and that the mention of six days of creation is an allegorical expression for minds that are too weak to understand the concept of God’s instantaneous creation.

Biblical literalists such as Ken Ham are out of line with both science and Christian exegetical tradition. And yet, the view that God created the universe in six days continues to have a strong hold upon evangelical Christians all over the world. This belief is ultimately rooted in a theologically deficient concept of God. The only solution against scriptural literalism is a return to the concept of God found in Classical Theism.

Classical Creation vs. Modern Creationism:

“God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III



According to the classical theologians and philosophers of religions like Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is absolute, infinite, beyond space, time, and change. He is absolutely simple, and therefore transcends all duality or multiplicity. God is the uncaused and unconditioned reality that all things depend upon in order to exist. (*For those who are doubtful, a philosophical proof of the Existence of God is given [“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)*). The classical concept of God as described here is common to Hindu, Greek, Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians and thinkers such as Plotinus, Augustine, Ramanuja, Shankara, al-Farabi, Avicenna, the Ismaili Muslim thinkers, Aquinas, and Maimonides. In the Ismāʿīlī Muslim tradition, this concept of God is conveyed by Imām Sulṭān Mūhammad Shāh in his Memoirs as follows:

“It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur’an, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely... Thus Islam’s basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: “Allāhu-Akbar”. What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, extract from The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

In the above passage, the *Imām* speaks of God as the Absolute Reality (Mono-Reality) “which contains and gives existence” to everything that exists and could exist – such as the infinite, space, time, the Universe, all that is imaginable, and the soul itself. Even things that appear to be self-existent such as abstract objects (i.e.

mathematical truths) or the laws of physics, etc. depend upon God in order to exist. In this view – held by numerous world religions – God is not merely a “maximally great being”, a “supreme being”, a discrete thing, an object among others, or the “most perfect existent” among existents – since all of these notions contradict the infinite nature of God and restrict Him to finitude.

“God...is not something posed over against the universe, in addition to it, nor is He the universe itself. He is not a “being,” at least not in the way that a tree, a shoemaker, or a god is a being; he is not one more object in the inventory of things that are, or any sort of discrete object at all. Rather, all things that exist receive their being continuously from Him, who is the infinite wellspring of all that is, in Whom (to use the language of the Christian scriptures) all things live and move and have their being. In one sense He is “beyond being,” if by “being” one means the totality of discrete, finite things. In another sense He is “being itself,” in that He is the inexhaustible source of all reality, the Absolute upon which the contingent is always utterly dependent, the unity and simplicity that underlies and sustains the diversity of finite and composite things.”

David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of : Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 30)

The concept of creation that corresponds to this classical concept of God is not a temporal act of “designing” or “making” or “beginning” something – in the ordinary sense of these terms as with human acts of designing or making. God creates all existence from nothing and His creative act transcends time and space – since time comes into being with the physical Universe. Therefore, one cannot presume that God creates the Universe at such and such time. It is equally invalid to hold that God’s creative act took a period of time – such as six days. The Qur’an states that God creates simply by saying the word “Be” – an instantaneous order like the twinkle of an eye. This concept of creation is also explained by Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh in his Memoirs:

“The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allāh alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,

(Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, extract from The Memoirs of Aga Khan:

World Enough and Time), Read the Full Source

Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

Creation is not an event *in* time – it is the eternal, timeless and continuous relationship between God and created beings – in which created beings are originated by God, dependent upon God, and supported by God at every single moment in which they have existence. A good metaphor for the relationship

between the Creator and the act of Creation is that of a thinker and his thought, as opposed to a human being making an artefact. The appearance and continuation of a thought is directly dependent upon the thinker at all times:

“When you think, your thought becomes an idea. When God thinks, His thought becomes creation.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Count Paroo, Subjects Discussed by the Religious Study Group of Mombasa, 1960, 21)

Another attractive notion was that of God creating the Universe and then letting it exist on its own, i.e. Deism. This philosophy was attractive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But such a concept of God renders Him impotent and equates the mode of God’s existence with the mode of the existence of the Universe. If the Universe can exist without any involvement or relationship to the God who creates it, then such a Universe is also a god and one has effectively affirmed the existence of two gods. But in reality, the existence of the Universe is an existence that is entirely derivative and dependent upon God’s act of bestowing existence. This does not simply mean that God merely causes the Big Bang; it means that *every* temporal state of the Universe – in each moment of existence – is being granted its existence by God’s creative power. The *Imām* has articulated this very idea in a newspaper article published in the British newspapers:

“I have, anyhow, met many persons nominally Christian who seem to think that in the beginning God created the world and then left it to its own devices. They seem to regard Him as a Being infinitely removed from them and their affairs. Whereas my Faith is, as you say yours is, that God is ever present, ever creative, and that His Providence sustains us in the smallest detail of our daily life.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
 (“Is Religion something special?”, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, ed. K.K. Aziz., Vol. II, 1410), Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/>

A common belief today is the notion that God periodically intervenes with the Universe to tinker, adjust, or create new species or creatures. God is beyond space and time; there is no question of such Divine interventions occurring because created things already and always depend upon God to exist in the first place.

It was necessary to lay out the concept of God and Creation in the preceding section because the concept of God held by the Creationists, Deists, and many others in modern times is diametrically opposed to the God of classical theism. The god of Creationism is not theologically identical to the God of Classical Theism. Creationism’s deity is not the Unconditioned Reality, Necessary Being or Ultimate Reality which grounds the existence of all beings. Instead, the god of Creationism is an “object” among objects, a “person” among persons, a “designer” who constructs creatures out of material that exists alongside him, and a “supreme being” among other beings that is subject to time and space. This god’s creative activities take place within time and space. This is why Creationists have no

problem believing that creation occurs in six days and that the world is merely six thousand years old. The god of Creationism is not absolutely simple; he has personal and anthropomorphic attributes in the same manner as human beings – except without certain limitations. Ken Ham and those who share his views subscribe to a deficient and illogical concept of God. It is ironic that most contemporary atheists and scientists – including Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Hawking – have only engaged with the demiurgic deity of the creationists and not the God of Classical Theism. And yet, many religious people in modern times confuse this demiurge deity with the true God:

“Somehow, even in the minds of some Christians, God has come to be understood not as the truly transcendent source and end of all contingent reality, who creates through “donating” being to a natural order that is complete in itself, but only as a kind of supreme mechanical cause located somewhere within the continuum of nature. Which is only to say that, here at the far end of modernity, the concept of God is often just as obscure to those who want to believe as to those who want not to.”

David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 28)

Some may think the distinction between the Creationist concept of God and the classical monotheistic concept of God is irrelevant to the issues of creation, science, and evolution. But nothing could be further from the truth. For the reconciliation of evolution and creation hinges upon how one envisions the relationship between God and Nature.

The Fallacy of Darwinian Naturalism:

“The very notion of nature as a closed system entirely sufficient to itself is plainly one that cannot be verified, deductively or empirically, from within the system of nature.”

David Bentley Hart

“It is *prima facie* highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection... the usual view of evolution must be revised. It is not just a physical process.”

Thomas Nagel (A Prominent Atheist Philosopher)

What Creationists and many naturalists share in common today is a flawed conception of Nature. Beginning in the seventeenth century – accompanied by technological advancement – many scientists came to hold a mechanized view of Nature. This view entails that Nature merely consists of “matter in motion” subject to the laws of physics – bits of matter inert of meaning and purpose which can be dominated, used, and controlled by an external agent, i.e. human beings or God:

“A mechanical order of Nature is one purged of life and inherent forces or principles. In its place, the mechanistic conception offers a view of inert nature

composed of interchangeable parts and subject to externally imposed order and power.”

(Meyer, *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought*, 46)

“Western persons quickly acquired the habit of seeing the universe not simply as something that can be investigated according to a mechanistic paradigm, but as in fact a machine. They came to see nature not as a reality guided and unified from within by higher or more spiritual causes like formality and finality, but as something merely factitiously assembled and arranged from without by some combination of efficient forces, and perhaps by one supreme external efficient cause — a divine designer and maker, a demiurge, the god of the machine, whom even many pious Christians began to think of as God.”

David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God*, 57-58)

It is within the context of a mechanistic view of nature – where the natural world is understood merely as “matter in motion” – that the theory of evolution was first introduced. Such a worldview, although completely arbitrary and not based on any actual evidence, led to the idea of God as an external designer or agent whose creative act is merely one of “interference” or “tinkering” with the natural order from outside of it as opposed to being the continuous source for its existence as in the classical conception. This worldview is already one of “semi-naturalism” where God is only invoked to a) initiate the beginning of the Universe while remaining outside of it or b) interfere in the Universe to produce complex life. The Intelligent Design movement led by Paley is based on this notion of God as demiurgic designer as opposed to God as the Ground of Being. But Darwin’s theory of evolution showed that a demiurge that intervenes and designs life in the manner of human design is not actually required. The problem then comes down to interpretation – either one returns to a richer classical concept of God and Nature or one eliminates God entirely, adopts atheism, and holds to a mechanistic view of nature in which Darwinian evolution explains the existence of everything. As it will be seen, the second option leads to irrational absurdities.

The biggest problem with Darwinian evolution is not its scientific truth but the fact that the theory of evolution tends to be developed and interpreted within an atheistic worldview called “naturalism” or “materialism” – the idea that the natural or physical world is *all* that exists. When this worldview is combined with the theory of evolution, it results in an overarching claim – called “Darwinian Naturalism” – that all the features of life on earth can be explained by Darwinian physical processes alone.

But Darwinian naturalism remains flawed for two reasons. The first is that naturalism or materialism patently false. Naturalism – the belief that reality *only* consists of material or physical things lacks both empirical and rational proof. By definition, empirical methods can only affirm or deny the reality of empirical things – but cannot make claims about anything beyond the natural

world. One cannot use the physical world to explain the existence of the physical world. There are also no deductive or philosophical proofs for the reality of naturalism. The claim that things are only real if they can be observed by empirical testing methods is not demonstrable empirically. That is to say, one cannot *prove* that “things are only real if proven empirically” by resorting to empirical evidence. Therefore, naturalism’s claim is circular and lacks intellectual and empirical basis.

“The only fully consistent alternative to belief in God, properly understood, is some version of “materialism” or “physicalism” or (to use the term most widely preferred at present) “naturalism”; and naturalism— the doctrine that there is nothing apart from the physical order, and certainly nothing supernatural— is an incorrigibly incoherent concept, and one that is ultimately indistinguishable from pure magical thinking. The very notion of nature as a closed system entirely sufficient to itself is plainly one that cannot be verified, deductively or empirically, from within the system of nature. It is a metaphysical (which is to say “extra-natural”) conclusion regarding the whole of reality, which neither reason nor experience legitimately warrants.”

David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God, 17)

Finally, if naturalism were true, it would then follow that it could not be true. This is simply because, in a naturalist worldview, a person’s thoughts and thought-content are strictly determined by the laws of physics, brain chemistry and neural activity – as opposed to the truth or logic of the thought-content. Therefore, the very concept or idea of naturalism – under a naturalist worldview – must have been physically determined by material brain events caused by external stimuli responses and not its efficacy. But there is absolutely no proof that neural events can produce *true* ideas – especially when one denies that logic or truth has any other basis except the laws of physics and chemistry.

“If, moreover, naturalism is correct (however implausible that is), and if consciousness is then an essentially material phenomenon, then there is no reason to believe that our minds, having evolved purely through natural selection, could possibly be capable of knowing what is or is not true about reality as a whole. Our brains may necessarily have equipped us to recognize certain sorts of physical objects around us and enabled us to react to them; but, beyond that, we can assume only that nature will have selected just those behaviors in us most conducive to our survival, along with whatever structures of thought and belief might be essentially or accidentally associated with them, and there is no reason to suppose that such structures—even those that provide us with our notions of what constitutes a sound rational argument— have access to any abstract “truth” about the totality of things. This yields the delightful paradox that, if naturalism is true as a picture of reality, it is necessarily false as a philosophical precept; for no one’s belief in the truth of

naturalism could correspond to reality except through a shocking coincidence (or, better, a miracle)."

David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 18)

Having shown the inadequacy of naturalism, where does this leave the theory of evolution? There is no reason to deny that organisms undergo change due to random mutations in their genetic code resulting from environmental factors. There is also no reason to deny that these changes are filtered by natural selection. However, this evolutionary picture of the world remains incomplete for two major reasons. The first is that the probability of conscious and rational human beings evolving from nothing based simply on random chance mutations is virtually non-existent. Even the generation of the first form of life on earth remains a mystery to scientists to this day. As a further example, Barrow and Tipler in their book *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, list ten steps in the course of human evolution, each of which is so improbable that before it would have occurred the Sun would have burned up the earth. They estimate the probability of the evolution of the human genome to be on the order of 1 divided by 4^{-360} (110,000). This figure basically shows that the evolution of human beings by a purely *physical* Darwinian process is quite impossible. To date there are no mathematical probability models that verify the possibility of evolution propelled purely by natural selection and chance mutation. The following statements by Thomas Nagel – a well known atheist – also voice the sheer improbability that human life and other forms of life evolved due to purely physical processes.

"But for a long time I have found the materialist account of how we and our fellow organisms came to exist hard to believe, including the standard version of how the evolutionary process works. The more details we learn about the chemical basis of life and the intricacy of the genetic code, the more unbelievable the standard historical account becomes... But it seems to me that, as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense. It is prima facie highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection... What is lacking, to my knowledge, is a credible argument that the story has a nonnegligible probability of being true."

Thomas Nagel (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 12)

"As I have said, doubts about the reductionist account of life go against the dominant scientific consensus, but that consensus faces problems of probability that I believe are not taken seriously enough, both with respect to the evolution of life forms through accidental mutation and natural selection and with respect to the formation from dead matter of physical systems capable of such evolution. The more we learn about the intricacy of the

genetic code and its control of the chemical processes of life, the harder those problems seem.”

Thomas Nagel (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 12)

“No viable account, even a purely speculative one, seems to be available of how a system as staggeringly functionally complex and information-rich as a self-reproducing cell, controlled by DNA, RNA, or some predecessor, could have arisen by chemical evolution alone from a dead environment.

Recognition of the problem is not limited to the defenders of intelligent design. Although scientists continue to seek a purely chemical explanation of the origin of life, there are also card-carrying scientific naturalists like Francis Crick who say that it seems almost a miracle.”

Thomas Nagel (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 268)

The second problem with the Darwinian evolution theory is that it fails to account for the appearance of consciousness within all living things and particularly the reflective self-consciousness of human beings. Despite the weak arguments brought forth by materialists, conscious states simply cannot be reduced to brain activity. There are a number of reasons for this. One argument is that thoughts possess intentionality (i.e. thoughts are *about* something, i.e. an object, a person, etc) while brain activity, being purely material, is not. One cannot simply observe a scan of a person’s brain activity in terms of neurons and chemicals and then ascertain *what* they are thinking about. Secondly, the content of particular thoughts in areas like mathematics and logic is determined by the content of the preceding thoughts in the sequence (i.e. the logical sequence) and not brain states. If it were other than this – and thoughts were determined by physical states of the brain, then the mathematical truth of $2+2=4$ would not depend on the truth of $2+2$ but instead would depend on material brain activity alone in which case it could not be logically correct. Thirdly, we can only observe the physical world *through* conscious states such as sensation. We can only model and describe these physical observations through abstract models found in mathematics (which is not empirical). Therefore, from an epistemological point of view, what we know directly and immediately are our conscious states and not the matter as such. Therefore, to reduce our conscious states to material events is illogical – since those material entities have no existence for us except *through* consciousness. Darwinian evolutionary theory has no answer at all for the appearance of consciousness let alone its explanation. The following statements from the prominent atheist Thomas Nagel confirm these arguments:

“If evolutionary biology is a physical theory—as it is generally taken to be—then it cannot account for the appearance of consciousness and of other phenomena that are not physically reducible. So if mind is a product of biological evolution—if organisms with mental life are not miraculous

anomalies but an integral part of nature—then biology cannot be a purely physical science.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 16)

“If one doubts the reducibility of the mental to the physical, and likewise of all those other things that go with the mental, such as value and meaning, then there is some reason to doubt that a reductive materialism can apply even in biology, and therefore reason to doubt that materialism can give an adequate account even of the physical world.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 16)

“Since the conscious character of these organisms is one of their most important features, the explanation of the coming into existence of such creatures must include an explanation of the appearance of consciousness. That cannot be a separate question. An account of their biological evolution must explain the appearance of conscious organisms as such. Since a purely materialist explanation cannot do this, the materialist version of evolutionary theory cannot be the whole truth. Organisms such as ourselves do not just happen to be conscious; therefore no explanation even of the physical character of those organisms can be adequate which is not also an explanation of their mental character. In other words, materialism is incomplete even as a theory of the physical world, since the physical world includes conscious organisms among its most striking occupants.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 31-32)

If naturalist evolution *were* true, and thought contents are reducible to or caused solely by brain activity, then all human thought would be logically discontinuous. This is because our thoughts would be the result of purely physical evolutionary processes determined by the need to survive and not by the need to know things objectively or truthfully. There would be no reason to trust our cognitive faculties in providing an accurate picture of the world – since the Darwinian evolutionary process gives no guarantee of that. Instead, affirming that our thoughts are identical to our brain activity resulting from Darwinian evolution implies that our thought content is certainly false – since it is based on purely physical brain chemistry and not the truth or logic of that thought content. But if this is the case, then how could naturalist evolution be true in the first place – since people would only this worldview due to physio-chemical brain processes and not because it is true or logical. Thus Nagel reminds us that:

“Evolutionary naturalism provides an account of our capacities that undermines their reliability, and in doing so undermines itself... Evolutionary naturalism implies that we shouldn’t take any of our convictions seriously, including the scientific.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 22-23)

The conclusion that follows from the above arguments is that the purely materialist and naturalist theory of evolution is incomplete due to its materialist underpinnings. The solution is not to deny biological evolution, but to revise by interpreting it according to a worldview that is not naturalist or materialist in its scope. In other words, there must be a dimension to evolution that transcends the physical world. This is the same conclusion reached by Thomas Nagel who writes:

“I conclude that something is missing from Darwinism, and from the standard biological conception of ourselves.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 63)

“Biological evolution is responsible for the existence of conscious mental phenomena, but that since those phenomena are not physically explainable, the usual view of evolution must be revised. It is not just a physical process.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 32)

If theory of naturalist Darwinian evolution is inadequate in explaining the appearance of life and conscious creatures like human beings, then it must be adjusted and modified rather than denied outright. This adjustment is as follows: instead of seeing emergence of life through evolution as purely the result of random chance, accidents, and “blind” processes, the evolutionary process must be seen as “purpose-driven” or “teleological.” The very fact that conscious creatures evolved – despite its sheer improbability – must mean that there are universal laws that are “built-in” or immanent in Nature that encourage and inevitably lead to the existence of life in general and conscious creatures in particular. Evolution must therefore include a non-physical dimension in addition to the laws of physics and chemistry and chance events in order to be rationally plausible. Consciousness – rather than being an accidental feature of living beings – is an essential feature of life and latently present in all things.

“It is trivially true that if there are organisms capable of reason, the possibility of such organisms must have been there from the beginning. But if we believe in a natural order, then something about the world that eventually gave rise to rational beings must explain this possibility. Moreover, to explain not merely the possibility but the actuality of rational beings, the world must have properties that make their appearance not a complete accident: in some way the likelihood must have been latent in the nature of things.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 50)

This view of the Nature – where purpose, goals, and direction are inherent to the very substance of things in Nature – is actually a return to the pre-modern

Aristotelian philosophy of Nature (this is not to deny modern science, but only certain philosophical ideas it gets interpreted within). This is not an absolute negation of the theory of evolution, but rather, a re-interpretation of evolution within a worldview that is neither naturalist/materialist nor mechanistic. Accordingly, Nature is no longer bits of moving matter subject to deterministic laws of physics or chemistry that needs to be given meaning from the outside, but a holistic system that contains inherent purpose and goal-directedness. This is what Aristotelians call “teleology” and it amounts not to a denial of the theory of evolution, but rather, its completion.

“This is a revision of the Darwinian picture rather than an outright denial of it. A teleological hypothesis will acknowledge that the details of that historical development are explained largely through natural selection among the available possibilities on the basis of reproductive fitness in changing environments. But even though natural selection partly determines the details of the forms of life and consciousness that exist, and the relations among them, the existence of the genetic material and the possible forms it makes available for selection have to be explained in some other way. The teleological hypothesis is that these things may be determined not merely by value-free chemistry and physics but also by something else, namely a cosmic predisposition to the formation of life, consciousness, and the value that is inseparable from them... The tendency for life to form may be a basic feature of the natural order, not explained by the nonteleological laws of physics and chemistry.”

Thomas Nagel, (Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False, 68-69)

There are also prominent biologists and scientists who affirm teleological principles in Nature that have propelled the direction of evolution toward the appearance of human beings (or rational creatures like human beings). Stuart Kaufman has written about how reductionist natural selection alone is inadequate in explaining the order found in living things and that such order is due to “underlying ordering principles in biology.” Simon Conway Morris has stated about Darwinian evolution that *“it is after all only a mechanism, but if evolution is predictive, indeed possesses a logic, then evidently it is being governed by deeper principles.”* Thus, a good number of scientists have argued for purpose, direction and teleology within Nature on empirical grounds just as Nagel has argued for this position on philosophical grounds.

Having refuted the dubious thesis of naturalism, shown the inadequacy of naturalist Darwinian evolution, and concluded that a mechanistic conception of Nature must give way to a teleological conception, we can now proceed to how a worldview based on Creation (and not Creationism) is reconciled with the teleological vision of the natural world.

“If ever we are to attain a final theory in biology, we will surely, surely have to understand the commingling of self-organization and selection. We will have to see that we are the natural expressions of a deeper order. Ultimately, we will discover in our creation myth that we are expected after all.”

Stewart Kaufman, (At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity (1996), 112)

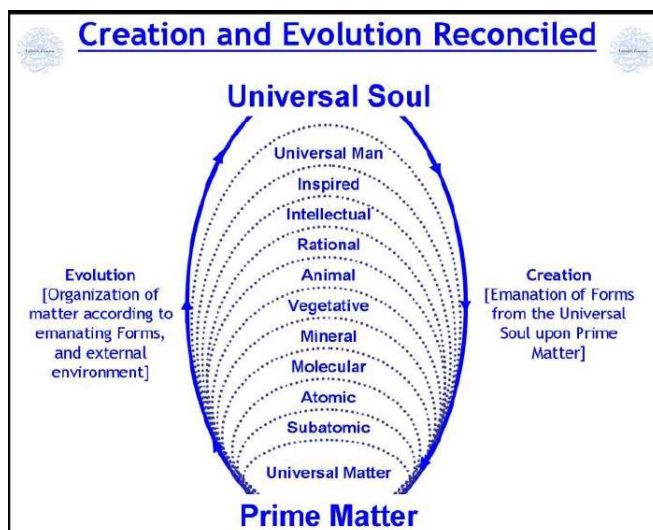
Nature as Divine Manifestation: The Confluence of Creation and Evolution

“Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion. Throughout the Qur’ān God’s signs (Ayats) are referred to as the natural phenomenon.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III

“Since the purpose of the natural kingdoms was the human species, the order of existence necessitated that first minerals, then plants, then animals and then human beings come into being.”

Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī



Having argued for a teleological view of Nature according to which the physical Universe is naturally predisposed towards the production of life, sentience and rational animals, i.e. human beings, we will now lay out the conception of Nature and evolution according to classical theism.

At the outset, let us clearly reject all attempts to infer that the purpose

and intelligence manifest in Nature should be construed as evidence of a “Divine Designer” who has intervened in order to construct the complexity in living organisms. There is a great difference between the “design arguments” of Paley and the “teleological arguments” of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Thomas Aquinas. The latter argument simply observes that things in the natural world move toward certain ends i.e. the production of life, order, consciousness, etc. and concludes that such intelligent activity within the natural world must be directed by the Divine Intellect. Meanwhile, the design argument infers that an external designer is required to construct complex organisms from bits of inert matter – in the manner that human beings design and construct machines. If the mechanistic picture of Nature is to be rejected, what would be the proper conception of Nature within a monotheistic framework?

At this point, it is perhaps best to illustrate in greater clarity the metaphysical relation between God and the Universe. Let us recall that the relationship between the Creator and the created reality is one of ontological dependence: all created reality is continuously receiving existence from God upon whom it always depends. God is the Ground of Being or the Unconditional Reality; He is neither “outside” the Universe nor is He dwelling or embodied “inside” it. But rather, God is at once transcendent and immanent. His Reality, being absolutely simple and unlimited, transcends all descriptions and likenesses. At the same time, God’s attributes are immanent in created reality – not by incarnation, but by the principle of reflection. That is to say, the Universe in its entirety is a limited reflection of God – insofar as He can be manifested. This principle is expressed by the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh in his Memoirs as below:

“Imam Hassan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the Sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain; there is certainly a reflection or image of the Sun, but with what poverty and with what little reality; how small and pale is the likeness between this impalpable image and the immense, blazing, white-hot glory of the celestial sphere itself. Allāh is the Sun; and the Universe, as we know it in all its magnitude, and time, with its power, are nothing more than the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the fountain.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, extract from The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time),
Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

The analogy of the Sun and its reflection in a pool of a fountain is much more appropriate in describing the relations between God and the natural Universe than the analogy of a designer and the designed artifact. There are two features of the Sun-reflection analogy that convey the ontological and spiritual relationship between God and the Universe. Firstly, the existence of the image of the Sun in the water is entirely dependent upon the Sun. Compared to the Sun, the image or likeness of the Sun is of “little reality” since its own existence derives from that of the Sun at all moments. This conveys how the existence of the Universe is metaphysically dependent upon the Reality of God. Secondly, the Sun-reflection analogy means that the qualities or attributes of the Sun – such as its luminosity – are partially reflected within its image. Similarly, certain qualities or attributes of God are reflected in the created things of the natural world. This point is confirmed by the Qur’ān which refers to all kinds of natural phenomena as the “signs” (*āyāt*) of God. The present *Imām* of the Ismā’īlī Muslims, Mawlana Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, once said that “*in Islam, the Divine is reflected in Nature’s creation*” ([see full speech](#)).

Nature must therefore be conceived as a living system with built-in or inherent teleology, i.e. purpose, meaning. The reasons for this were given in the previous section and due to the fact that the mechanistic view of Nature is entirely

outdated and no longer a tenable picture of physical reality. At the same time, this teleological Nature must also be understood as a reflection of God's Names and Attributes – in other words, as a Divine manifestation or theophany. This does *not* mean that God has entered inside Nature or “intervened” to design Nature from the outside. It means that God's qualities are ontologically and spiritual reflected in and as Nature – a reflection which comprises the very existence of Nature. On the same idea, Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh wrote that:

“Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion. Throughout the Qur’ān God’s signs (Ayats) are referred to as the natural phenomenon, the law and order of the universe, the exactitudes and consequences of the relations between natural phenomenon in cause and effect. Over and over, the stars, sun, moon, earthquakes, fruits of the earth and trees are mentioned as the signs of Divine power, Divine law and Divine order...Islam is a natural religion of which the Ayats are the Universe in which we live and move and have our being.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (“What have we forgotten in Islam”, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Edited by K.K. Aziz., Vol II, 1290), Read the Full Source
Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1253/>

The many features of Nature which human beings today take for granted are actually the signs of Divine Power and Divine Intelligence. What scientists today call the “laws of nature” and the laws of physics are patterns of regular behavior that natural things consistently observe. This regularity is logical and intelligible – this is the only reason why scientists can describe it in mathematical terms. Such regularity – on a purely naturalistic worldview – has no basis or reason to occur. If a person who has faith in naturalism simply answers that the regularities within nature exist merely due to chance, such a view is ultimately untenable due to its sheer improbability. It is one thing to win a lottery for which one had very slim chances a single time, and it is another thing to win the same lottery millions upon millions of times. The regularities within Nature are akin to the second case and therefore cannot be attributed to chance or randomness. Instead, the laws of Nature are manifestations of God's Power and Intelligence – not an “intervention” from outside, but a reflection of them within.

Even if one affirms this theistic point of view, one can continue to study Nature as a closed system and analyze the various patterns, interactions, processes within Nature – as the scientific method does. Nevertheless, the mechanistic view of Nature regards all natural phenomena as lifeless and soulless – being comprised of inert matter. But in the view of classical theism, all things in Nature possess “soul”. Thus, Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh writes that:

“Islamic doctrine goes further than the other great religions, for it proclaims the presence of the soul, perhaps minute but nevertheless existing in an embryonic state, in all existence — in matter, in animals, trees, and space

itself. Every individual, every molecule, every atom has its own spiritual relationship with the All-Powerful Soul of God.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, extract from The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Tim),
Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

The idea of *all things* – even atoms or molecules – having souls may conjure up ideas of “ghosts” being present “inside” each and every bit of matter. But to think this way is to mistakenly appeal to the mechanistic view of Nature and matter. At the human level, the soul is the subject of self-consciousness who is a free agent with respect to human intellectual powers and acts. At the animal level, the soul is the consciousness of a particular animal with respect to its actions and behaviours. At the vegetative level (and all living things), the soul refers to the “organic wholeness” of a living organism – the unity that holds together and directs the various interdependent parts of the organism and is responsible for the organism’s ability to adapt and react to its environment. At the level of ‘inanimate objects’ such as minerals, molecules, atoms, etc, the soul refers to the form or structure of the material components of that object. For example, the soul or form of a water molecule is the particular pattern or structure in which the two hydrogen and oxygen atoms are bonded. One must note that pattern, structure or even shape is NOT the same as the material or matter that is shaped. There is a qualitative difference between the formal structure of an object and its constituent material parts. The parts of any object always exist in a certain structure – without which the object would no longer be essentially what it is. In terms of matter, the human brain and a sandbox are essentially the same – made out of the same essential material components (i.e. atoms, molecules). But what makes the human brain a most complex entity is its *form* or *structure* in which its material components are arranged. Thus, soul is an integral *dimension* of all things in Nature – mineral, living, animal, and human – while being present and actualized at various levels that depend upon the entity in question. In the case of human beings, would be more accurate to say that the living human body is a reflection or shadow of the human soul – as opposed to saying that the human soul dwells *inside* the human body.

Having established the status of Nature in the worldview of classical theism, we now turn to the question of the “origin of species” and “evolution” in such a framework. Everything in Nature – including atoms, molecules, minerals, living organisms, animals, and human beings – is a particular reflection of one or more of God’s Names and Attributes. For example, God’s power is reflected, albeit partially, in the waves of the ocean, storms, or even lightening. God’s stability is partially reflected in the stability of a rock. God’s life is reflected in living organisms to various degrees – from single celled bacteria to lions. In the theistic worldview, the human being is the comprehensive reflection of God due to his potential to reflect *all* of God’s Names and Attributes. Nevertheless, each species is a reflection

of a particular combination of God's Attributes. In philosophical terminology, a particular configuration of these Divine attributes manifested in a certain species is called "form". The "form" is a spiritual blueprint or archetype of a species with respect to its defining or essential qualities. Every physical species on earth is a manifestation or reflection of a specific form. From the spiritual perspective, each species has its spiritual archetype or form that pre-exists in the spiritual realm and there are an infinite number of these forms. When the natural environment is suitable, these spiritual archetypes manifest as the physical species – in chronological order from less differentiated to more differentiated.

"In the celestial realm the species are never absent; their essential forms or archetypes reside there from an endless beginning. As earth ripens to receive them, each in its turn drops to the terrestrial plane and, donning the world's fabric, gives rise to a new life form. The origin of species is metaphysical. First a viable habitat must be devised, hence the inorganic universe is matured to the point where life can be sustained. And when living beings do arrive, they do so in a vaguely ascending order that passes from relatively undifferentiated organisms – though not simple ones; the electron microscope shows unicellular organisms to be astonishingly complicated to ones that are more complex. But there is no need to force the fossil record to show a univocal and continuous line. If the movement proceeds in jumps with whole categories of plants and animals bursting out at once without discernible predecessors, this presents no problem... If the tortoise turns up all at once in fossil remains or the spider appears simultaneously with its prey and with its faculty of weaving fully developed, such facts can be welcomed with smiles instead of puzzled brows. As for the variant forms which Darwinists must use to construct their largely hypothetical bridges between species, from the metaphysical perspective these appear as variations which the species in question allow. It is as if nature, always more prolific and life-loving than we had supposed, first staked out distinct species and then decided to ring changes on these by having each reflect the forms of the others insofar as it could do so without transgressing its own essential limits."

Huston Smith, (Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions, 139-140)

The classical theistic view of the origin of species is very much consistent with the findings of modern science with respect to evolution. But it must be kept in mind – as argued before – that the mechanistic understanding of Nature is outdated and the purely materialistic and naturalistic view of reality is hopelessly and logically flawed. The key difference between this Islamic theistic view of the origin of the species and the naturalistic Darwinian view is that the former asserts that the appearance of rational creatures in the world was built-in to Nature and is the end goal of the evolutionary process. About nine hundred years ago, the famous Ismā'īlī Muslim philosopher, astronomer and scientist, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī,

explained the origin of the species and the creation of humankind in accordance with the metaphysical principles explained above. Consider the below passages from Ṭūsī's most famous Ismā'īlī work known as *Taṣawwūrāt*:

"The natural kingdoms began with solidification [of minerals], then [there came] plants, then animals and then human beings. The final stage of minerals was joined to the first stage of the plant kingdom, the final stage of the plant kingdom to the first stage of the animal kingdom, the final stage of the animal kingdom to the first stage of man, and the final stage of man to the first stage of the angelic kingdom. Since the chain of existence (*silsila-yi wujūd*), [causing] the return of all things to the Command of the Almighty, reached its completion in the perfect status of man, and since the ability to acquire such perfection, [consisting of diverse] intellectual conveniences and physical tools, was particular to man, it is clear that, although the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms preceded him in [the temporal order of] existence, the ultimate aim of all of them was him. And it is said, 'the first in thought is the last in action.'"

Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 29)

"The action of Nature upon matter lay in bringing into the reality of concrete existence the forms bestowed upon it by the [Universal] Soul. The final purpose of all such emanations was that [the natural kingdoms], beginning with minerals, would combine with the vegetative [realm], and [the vegetative realm combine] with the animal realm, and [the animal realm] be terminated by humankind."

Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 106)

"The purpose of the movements of the spheres was mixing of the elements of the natural kingdoms, and since the purpose of the natural kingdoms was the human species, the order of existence necessitated that first minerals, then plants, then animals and then human beings come into being. if there had been no minerals, plants could never have come into being, and had minerals, plants and animals not existed, neither could man have existed."

Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 68)

Evolutionary theory will continue to undergo more changes and modifications as human knowledge progresses. In fact, some biologists such as Stuart Kauffman and Simon Conway hold that random mutation is insufficient to explain the complexity of life and that matter must have self-organizing properties which are themselves rooted in a deeper order of things. But none of this contradicts the metaphysical origins of creatures as previously explained. Even if one grants all the key features of Darwinian evolution, it is the integral interpretation of this theory that is most important. Such an interpretation would have to account for the fact that purpose appears to be built into Nature – as some biologists now hold:

"If ever we are to attain a final theory in biology, we will surely, surely have to understand the commingling of self-organization and selection. We will have

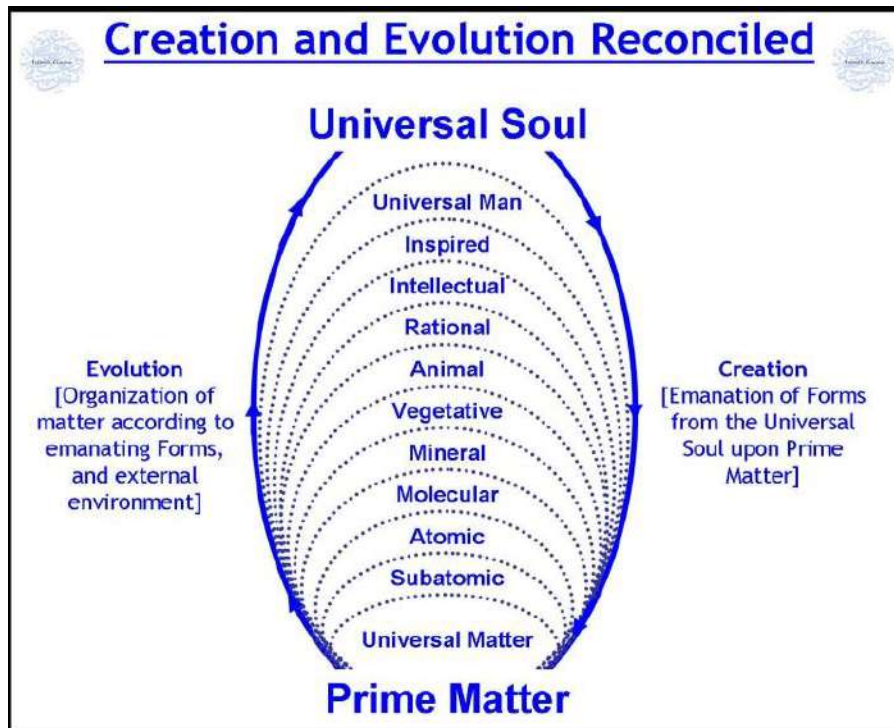
to see that we are the natural expressions of a deeper order. Ultimately, we will discover in our creation myth that we are expected after all.”

Stuart Kauffman, (At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity (1996), 112)

If the natural Universe is a reflective manifestation of God in fragmented multiplicity, and human beings are the reflective manifestation of God in comprehensive singularity, it follows that the human being is the manifestation of both God and the external Universe. Evolution by way of genetic mutations (either due to chance or due to self-organization potentials inhering in matter as Kauffman would argue) and their perpetuation via natural selection is the vehicle by which the Universe produces a creature who is best suited to survival in the natural environment. To use an analogy, the Universe or the external environment is like one mirror of God and the human form is another mirror of God. The evolutionary process of Darwinian natural selection is the mechanism by which these two mirrors are “brought into focus” such that the resulting creature – namely the human being – appears in the Universe. Once again, Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī helps summarize the metaphysics of this process as follows:

“When the effusive grace of the Divine Command fell upon the First Intellect, it did not halt there, but provoked the existence of another type of being, that is, the Universal Soul. Likewise, when it [the Command] fell from the First Intellect upon the Universal Soul, it did not halt there either, but it provoked another type of existence, that is, the spheres. And when it [the Command of God] fell from the spheres upon the elements, it did not halt there but provoked another type of existence, that is, the natural kingdoms. And [similarly], when it fell from the natural kingdoms upon the minerals, it did not halt there, but provoked another type of existence, that is, the plant kingdom. And when it fell upon the animal kingdom, it did not stop there, but provoked another type of existence, that is, humanity. But when it fell upon man, it stopped there, for the furthest reach and terminus of creation was sealed with him. Thus, man is a compendium (*majmūʿ*) of all these stages and perfections, bearing within himself a likeness of the entire Cosmos, which is expressed by the marvels of his physical constitution and the amazing composition of his soul.”

Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, (The Paradise of Submission, 169)



The above diagram helps illustrate the manner in which both Creation and Evolution are processes within Nature. God, as the Unconditioned Reality, bestows existence upon all other realities and

sustains them in being. The divine creative act of giving existence is called the Command of God, and the first conditioned reality with respect to metaphysical or essential causation is the Universal Intellect which contains the Forms of all things in oneness. Through the Universal Intellect, the Command of God manifests and emanates the Universal Soul – in which the celestial archetypes or Forms of all creatures are differentiated. The Universal Soul generates a shadow of itself – called Prime Matter – whose nature is simple receptivity, potency or passivity due to which that it cannot be observed empirically. Prime Matter receives the Forms which emanate and shine upon it from the Universal Soul. In this process of continuous emanation (see above) or involution, the Prime Matter “evolves” into the Universal Body or Universal Matter [what medievals called the ‘spheres’] – identical with the quantum field or “vacuum energy” that physicists register as the boundary of empirical observation from which subatomic virtual particles “pop in and out” of existence. These particles are the Heisenberg potentialities – that receive the “forms” imprinted upon them from the Universal Soul by means of measurement interventions – and become actualized as discrete particles. This evolutionary process continues while being empowered by continuous emanation or involution, i.e. the manifestation of the Forms from the Universal Soul. Thus, Simon Conway, has said that *“Darwinism not a total explanation? Why should it be? It is after all only a mechanism, but if evolution is predictive, indeed possesses a logic, then evidently it is being governed by deeper principles.”* If biologists like Stuart Kaufman speak of the “self-organization” of matter, this is because they are detecting the effects of the Forms. These Forms cause matter to organize into more differentiated structures that are suited to the external environment and these are perpetuated by the process natural selection. The holistic structure (or

“holon) of an organism is the “soul” (as explained above) and it is the soul that serves as the principle of the self-organization of matter into a complex “whole”. In the human being, this soul has reached the level of reflexive self-consciousness – or what is traditionally called “rational” (*nāṭiqah*) – that can in principle know and conceive the entirety of the Cosmos. Thus, the human being is the culmination and summation of both spiritual emanation and physical evolution. The human being continues to evolve with respect to consciousness until higher stages – the intellectual (*‘aqlī*), the inspired (*ta’yīdī*), and the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) or Universal Man (*al-insān al-kull*) – are actualized. The Universal Man is the most perfect manifestation of the Command of God, the Universal Intellect, and Universal Soul, through which everything in the Universe returns to its origin. Perhaps, it is no surprise that Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, the forty-eight hereditary *Imām* of the Shī‘ī Ismā‘īlī Muslims, had already achieved a synthesis that reconciled his understanding of God’s creation with Darwin’s theory of the origin of the species:

“It was this Islamic sense of unity in all forms of life which confirmed my father’s faith in a God-governed order. He achieved a synthesis which enabled him to conciliate his faith in the Almighty as well as in Darwin’s theory of the origin of the species which swept across Europe in his youth and generated such heated debate. It was difficult for him to separate what he called proto-religion and proto-science: they made their journey like two streams, sometimes mingling, sometimes separating but running side by side... I have not forgotten his heated conversations with Professor Leakey in Nairobi when the first discoveries of the earliest remains of man were made in the Rift Valley.”

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan on his father Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, (The Times, November 5, 1977)

For Further Reading:

Simon Conway Morris on the Limits of Darwinism

<http://www.theguardian.com/global/2009/feb/12/simon-conway-morris-darwin>

Seyyed Hossein Nasr on Evolution and Islam

<http://toorumer.blogspot.com/2010/08/evolution-and-islam-talk-with-dr-seyyed.html?m=1>

Rodney Blackhirst on *Evolutionism and Traditional Cosmology*

<http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/blacks/evolutionism.pdf>

James Cutsinger on “Emanationist Evolution”

http://www.cutsinger.net/pdf/earth_as_it_is_in_heaven.pdf

“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God

I think that monotheistic religions, having a common reference to a single God, should and must dialogue. The three religions which Abraham inspired have many more common facets than those which divide them. Religion must be the means by which to affirm the ethical significance of existence, regardless of one's profession of faith.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Interview with Correre della Sera, Massimo Nava, October 22, 2001)

The concept of one God who transcends space, time, multiplicity, and contingency, and gives existence to all things is the foundation of the shared worldview of the monotheistic traditions including Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam. It is also the pivot around which people of all faiths should rally in order to oppose the atheistic, materialist, relativist and naturalist ideologies appealing to many people today. This article offers a strong deductive and philosophical argument for the existence of God. [If you think philosophy is unimportant or incapable of providing sound knowledge, then please read here first.]

1. Proof of at least one Unconditioned in all of existence:

2. Proof that Unconditioned Reality is the Simplest Reality in all of existence

Contrary to what many modern people believe, the existence of God can be rationally and logically demonstrated: faith in God is not a matter of ‘blind faith’ or taqlid. According to Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, logic underlines the very foundation of Islamic belief:

You must have in every walk of your life a logical concept. This does not mean to wipe away faith, but the real principle of Islam is that faith is logical. Islam would not be what it is if it were not logical and this is something you must keep in mind. Because the very heart of Islam is logical. There is no hocus-pocus. There is no nonsense. It is clear and it is lucid and it is understandable.

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Speech to Students, Karachi, September 27, 1960; quoted in Mohib Ebrahim, Truth, Reality and Religion)

Two major reasons for the growing popularity of atheism and agnosticism among people today are that a) most people are not exposed to the classical concept of God within their own religious tradition and instead are made to believe in an anthropomorphic image of God and b) the positive arguments for God's existence are poorly understood and misrepresented by both atheists and people of faith.

On the Meaning of “God”:

Somehow, even in the minds of some Christians, God has come to be understood not as the truly transcendent source and end of all contingent reality, who creates through “donating” being to a natural order that is complete in itself, but only as a kind of supreme mechanical cause located

somewhere within the continuum of nature. Which is only to say that, here at the far end of modernity, the concept of God is often just as obscure to those who want to believe as to those who want not to.

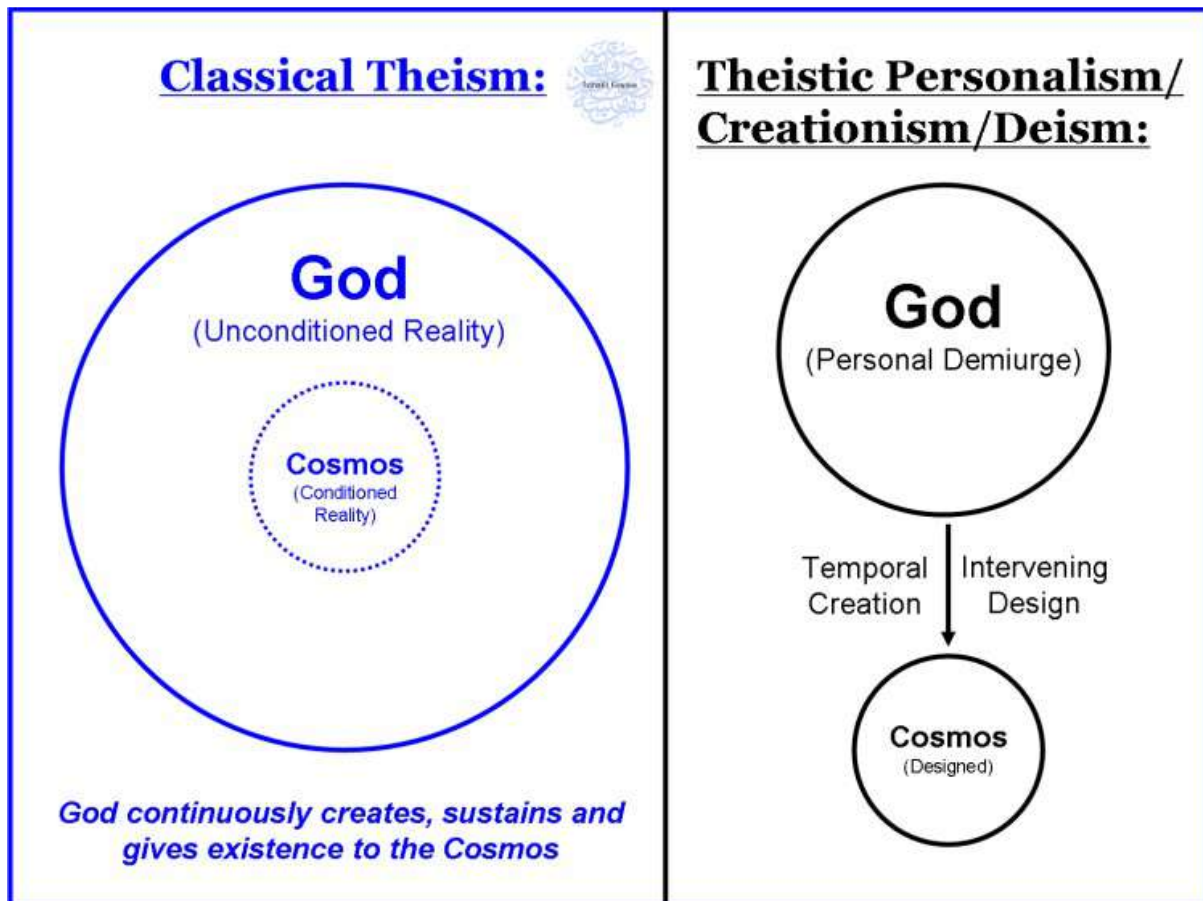
– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 28)

Many theists and atheists of the modern age have utterly misunderstood the classical and traditional concept of God found in the intellectual and philosophical traditions of the world's monotheistic religions. They instead tend to think of "God" as a "supreme being", an "immaterial person", an "intelligent designer", "all-powerful agent", or a "disembodied self" who exists either wholly outside of the Universe as an observer or within the Universe as its most exalted component, and does what He pleases at any given time. This sort of God is but an intellectual idol who resembles a human person except without human limitations. Belief in this sort of god is merely a form of "mono-polytheism", "creationism" or "theistic personalism." Both classical theists and atheists have rightly argued and rejected this sort of God:

The most pervasive error one encounters in contemporary arguments about belief in God—especially, but not exclusively, on the atheist side – is the habit of conceiving of God simply as some very large object or agency within the universe, or perhaps alongside the universe, a being among other beings, who differs from all other beings in magnitude, power, and duration, but not ontologically, and who is related to the world more or less as a craftsman is related to an artifact.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 32)

In classical theism, God is not a member or instance of the general category of "existence" – such that He is the "supreme being among beings." But rather, God is the "Ground of Being" and the "Unconditioned Reality" that continuously creates, sustains and grounds the existence of everything that exists. The below diagram illustrates the difference between the concept of God in Classical Theism and the ideas found in more modern notions of creationism, deism, poly-monotheism, and the like:



It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur'an, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely...Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: "*Allāhu-Akbar*". What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul... God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

This is the concept of God common to the classical tradition of Plato, Aristotle and, Plotinus, the medieval Islamic philosophical traditions of the Peripatetics and the Ismā'īlīs, the Islamic mystical tradition of Ibn al-'Arabī and the Akbarī school, the school of Mulla Sadra, the medieval Christian scholastic and mystical traditions of St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, the modern Christian theological tradition of Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, and Elizabeth Johnson, and the contemporary Sufi, Twelver, and Ismā'īlī *Tariqahs* of Islam.

This argument will demonstrate that there is one, single Absolute Reality upon which all existing things depend in all moments in which they exist; this Reality does not depend on anything else for its existence. It is therefore called “Unconditioned Reality” or “God”. The argument will further demonstrate that God or Unconditional Reality is absolutely simple, absolutely one or single, unrestricted and unbounded, and transcending time, space, and matter. Readers can find this argument presented in the works of Robert Spitzer and David Bentley Hart – whose books are referenced and quoted in the body of this post. The argument is a logical deductive argument – consisting of premises and conclusions that logically follow and not merely a series of rhetorical pronouncements or sound bites meant to affect and convince an audience.

The argument provided here is not new – different versions of it have been advanced by classical religious thinkers cited above. Its most famous proponent in the Islamic tradition was Ibn Sīnā; Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī in the Ismāʿīlī tradition; Thomas Aquinas in the Christian scholastic tradition; Moses Maimonides in Judaism. Nevertheless, it is necessary to re-examine one’s religious beliefs in the light of intellect, logic, reason and experience. This has been emphasized in the guidance of recent Ismāʿīlī *Imāms* – Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III and Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV:

These religious principles of Ismailism are well known to you for you have heard them from me and through your fathers and grandfathers and from my father and grandfather until I fear that by long familiarity with these teachings some of you forget the necessity of re-examination of your heart and religious experience.

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Material Intelligence and Spiritual Enlightenment, Platinum Jubilee Message, 1955)

For readers who refuse to accept the validity of logical and philosophical deduction, and only recognize empirical evidence and inductive methods as a valid method of attaining knowledge, we ask you to skip to Section 8 and read our comments on empirical verification.

A medieval version of this argument based on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī is presented by *al-Mabahathat* here: [From the Contingency of Essences to the Existence of the Necessary.](#)

The Argument for the Existence of God:

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT:

1. *Recognizing the Function of Science and the Importance of Philosophy:*

a. Science is the study of the natural world for the purpose of modelling the *behavior* or *movement* of natural objects for the purposes of manipulation and prediction. However, science does not deal with the questions about the source of *existence* of natural objects, issues of morality, mathematical truths, the rules of

logic, aesthetics (the study of beauty), or the source and experience of consciousness.

b. The enterprise of modern science is interested in *discovering the rules or laws of nature by which the natural world behaves* but it does not reveal anything about the *origins or ultimate causes* of the existence of the natural world and the causes of the laws of nature. To use an analogy, **science is about observing the moving pieces of a checkers board and documenting the rules of the movement of pieces, but science cannot tell you where the checkers board, the pieces, and the rules of the game come from or why they exist in the first place.** This second question can only be determined by philosophy and metaphysics.

2. *There Can Only Be Two Types of Existing Realities:*

a. Conditioned Reality: Any reality (human, plant, animal, wood, etc.) that depends on something else for its existence. For example, a cat depends on its organs, the organs depend on cells, the cells depend on molecules, which depend on atoms, etc. This dependence is *simultaneous* at any moment the conditioned reality exists.

b. Unconditioned Reality: Any reality that is self-sufficient, i.e. does not depend on anything else for its existence. This is what is called “God”.

3. *Logical Proof that at least one Unconditioned Reality exists:*

a. Some conditioned reality exists (i.e. cats, animals, trees, humans, wind, water, etc. as shown by science)

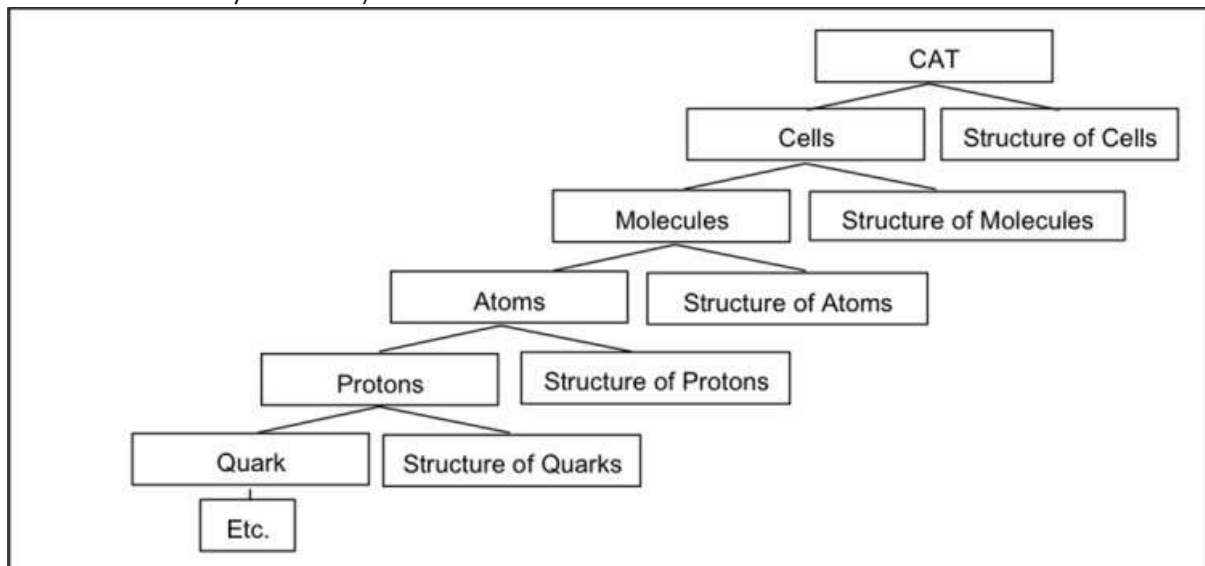


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b. Any conditioned reality (R1) always depends upon another reality (R2) in order to exist (per definition of conditioned reality)

c. Any conditioned reality, by definition, must either depend upon:

1. a finite number of conditioned realities only
2. or an infinite number of conditioned realities only
3. or a finite number of conditioned realities + at least one unconditioned reality

d1. **A conditioned reality cannot be caused by a finite series of conditioned realities.** If there is a linear series of conditioned realities, what would the first one depend on? Since it must depend on something, and there is nothing prior to it, the whole linear chain ceases to exist. Therefore a linear series of conditioned realities cannot exist. **Additionally, a circular finite series of conditioned realities could not exist either.** This would simply result in each conditioned reality fulfilling their own conditions, which violates the definition of a conditioned reality.

d2. **Conditioned realities cannot exist in an infinite chain either.** A very large series of one million conditioned realities cannot exist, neither can a series of one billion, and so on and so forth. As the number of conditioned realities in a series increases, the result continues to be non-existence. Continuously adding one (million, billion, trillion, etc.) to the end of the chain would never allow for the conditions of existence to be satisfied, **therefore the entire infinite chain of conditioned realities would never have its conditions fulfilled.**

To argue in another way, *if* an infinite series of conditioned realities could exist on its own, *then* the complete set of infinite conditioned realities would be an unconditioned reality. However, this is impossible because an unconditioned reality cannot depend upon an aggregate of conditioned realities — if this were the case, it would still be conditioned. Therefore, a set of infinite conditioned realities is itself a conditioned reality, and fails to exist on its own.

d3. Since any model made up entirely of conditioned realities can never have their conditions fulfilled, it therefore follows that **all conditioned realities must be caused by a series of realities that ends (or begins its ontological chain) with an unconditioned reality.**

e. Therefore, an unconditioned reality exists.

4. *Proof that any Unconditioned Reality is Absolutely Simple:*

a. Anything that is composed of parts is *caused* and *conditioned* by those parts.

b. Therefore, **any unconditioned reality is absolutely simple** by definition because it cannot be composed of any parts.

5. *Proof there is only one Unconditioned Reality:*

a. If there were two unconditioned realities (UR1 and UR2), then there must be a differential property that makes UR1 different from UR2 and vice versa and there must also be a common property that is common to both UR1 and UR2.

b. If there is no differential property between UR1 and UR2, then both UR1 and UR2 are actually the same UR.

c. If UR1 and UR2 exist, then UR1 and UR2 each contain a differential property and a common property, and both UR1 and UR2 are composed of two parts – the differential property and the common property. However, it is impossible for any unconditioned reality to be composed of any parts like this. Therefore, UR1 and UR2 are not really unconditioned reality.

d. Therefore, there is only one Unconditioned Reality.

6. Proof that Unconditioned Reality is the Sustainer and Continuous Creator of all Conditioned Realities:

- a. Because there is only one Unconditioned Reality, it is therefore the only self-sufficient reality.
- b. Therefore, every ontological chain of conditioned realities, if the chain actually exists, must ultimately depend upon the one Unconditioned Reality in order to exist at all.
- c. Therefore, all conditioned realities (each and every conditioned reality) ultimately depends on the one Unconditioned Reality for the fulfillment of their conditions.
- d. Therefore, Unconditioned Reality continuously creates and sustains the existence of every conditioned reality.

7. Proof that Unconditioned Reality Transcends Space, Time, and Material Existence:

- a. All spatio-temporal realities are composite – made of parts like atoms, molecules, spatial coordinates, and temporal coordinates.
- b. Therefore, by definition, Unconditioned Reality is beyond matter, space, and time.
- c. Sub: Therefore, Unconditioned Reality is transcendent, immaterial, eternal, changeless and immutable.

For a thorough and comprehensive version of this argument in all of its steps with accompanying diagrams, we encourage readers to continue scrolling down:

WE FIRST LAY OUT THE FOLLOWING TWO DEFINITIONS:

A. Conditioned Reality (Contingent Being) is any reality (i.e. animal, plant, particle, wave, etc.) that depends on at least one other reality in order to exist at any given moment of its existence. An everyday example of a conditioned reality is a cat whose existence depends on the existence of cells and the structure of cells. The cells depend on the existence of molecules and the structure of molecules. The molecules depend on the existence and structure of atoms. The atoms depend on the existence and structure of sub-atomic particles, etc. **Conditions** means any reality upon which a conditioned reality depends upon for its existence.

Some conditioned realities are known to exist – trees, plants, animals, tables, chairs, buildings, people, molecules – all of these are examples of **Conditioned Realities** because their own continual existence depends on the existence of other things.

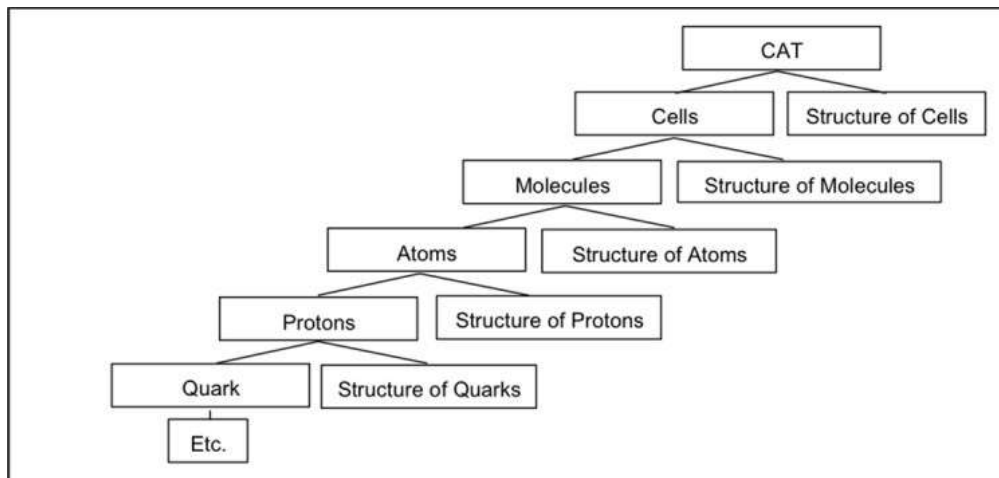


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Every **Conditioned Reality** is an *effect* of its cause(s) – the reality(s) it depends upon in order to exist. However, there are two types of causation – essential causation and accidental causation.

An accidental series of causes is like a series of fathers and sons – where the father begets the son. But the father, after begetting a son, may die the next day and the son can still continue to exist. The important thing to note is that in accidental causation, the continuous existence of a son at any time does not depend upon the existence of the father. The second type of causation is essential causation. In essential causation, the existence of the effect depends on the existence of the cause at all times, the effect is simultaneous with its cause, and the cause continues to produce the effect from moment to moment. Thus, every cause in an essential series derives its causal power from its own cause. Essential causation refers to the existence of any object in the here and now.

The cat example – where the cat’s existence always depends on the existence of its cells and the form or structure of the cells, etc. – is one of essential causation. If one alters the structure of the cat’s cells or molecules or atoms – or the larger web of conditions such as the air, the earth, gravity, etc – all of which ground the existence of the cat in the here and now – the cat will no longer exist as a cat, nor will it have the power to produce effects of its own.

If one considers the terms of one’s own existence, for instance, one sees that there is no sense in which one is ever self-existent; one is dependent on an incalculable number of ever greater and ever smaller finite conditions, some of which are temporal, and some of which definitely are not, and all of which are themselves dependent on yet further conditions. One is composed of parts, and those parts of smaller parts, and so on down to the subatomic level, which itself is a realm of contingently subsistent realities that flicker in and out of actuality, that have no ontological ground in themselves, and that are all embraced within a quantum field that contains no more of an essential rationale for its own existence than does any other physical reality. One also belongs to a wider world, upon all of whose physical systems one is also

dependent in every moment, while that world is itself dependent upon an immense range of greater physical realities, and upon abstract mathematical and logical laws, and upon the whole contingent history of our quite unnecessary universe... In short, all finite things are always, in the present, being sustained in existence by conditions that they cannot have supplied for themselves, and that together compose a universe that, as a physical reality, lacks the obviously supernatural power necessary to exist on its own.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 105)

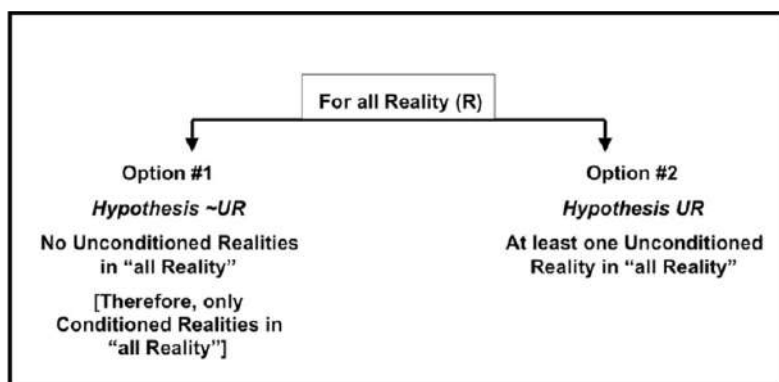
Both types of causation exist in the physical world, but this argument for the existence of Unconditioned Reality is based on essential causation of Conditioned Realities, not accidental causation that is related to the temporal origin of the physical Universe. For example, focusing on accidental causes will lead back in time to the Big Bang. But essential causation pertains to the causes of all things in the here and now at any given moment – regardless of whether the universe exists infinitely into the past or not. The networks of causes that ground the existence of the cat – such as its cells and cellular structure, molecules and molecular structures, atoms/atomic structures, sub-atomic particles, quantum particles, etc. – cause the cat to exist in the present moment and ground its existence; they are not temporal causes of the cat's temporal origin. This is the *grave error* made by the New Atheist movement – where Richard Dawkins and his minions have utterly misunderstood the classical arguments for God's existence because they failed to appreciate the concept of essential causation – which grounds the existence of something in the present and not in some distant past like the Big Bang. There are, of course, other logical reasons why the physical Universe *cannot* exist infinitely into the past and has a temporal beginning. But this argument is not concerned with that point and is independent of it. Even if the Universe was temporally infinite into the past – a chain of essential causes is still required to keep it in existence in every temporal instant.

B. Unconditioned Reality (Necessary Being or Uncaused First Cause) is any reality that does not depend on another reality to exist; Unconditioned Reality is independently self-existent and it has no cause. At this point in the argument, Unconditioned Reality *is not yet demonstrated* is being offered as a preliminary definition. The purpose of the first part of this argument is to *demonstrate* that at least one Unconditioned Reality exists *by logical necessity*.

1. Proof of at least one Unconditioned in all of existence:

Case #1: There are only Conditioned Realities in all reality (The Atheist Position: there is no god). There are two ways for this to occur – if there is a *finite* number of Conditioned Realities in all of existence OR if there is an *infinite* number of Conditioned Realities in existence.

Case #2: There is at least one Unconditioned Reality in reality (The Theist Position).

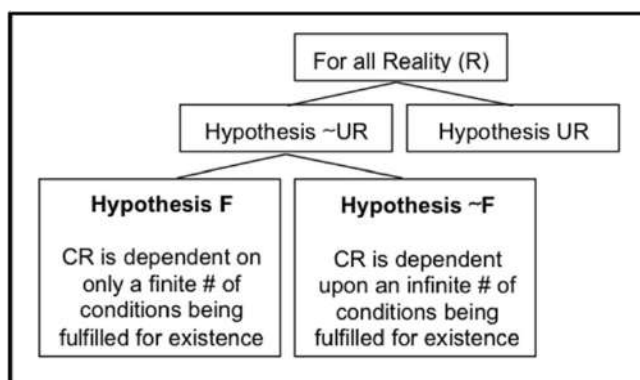


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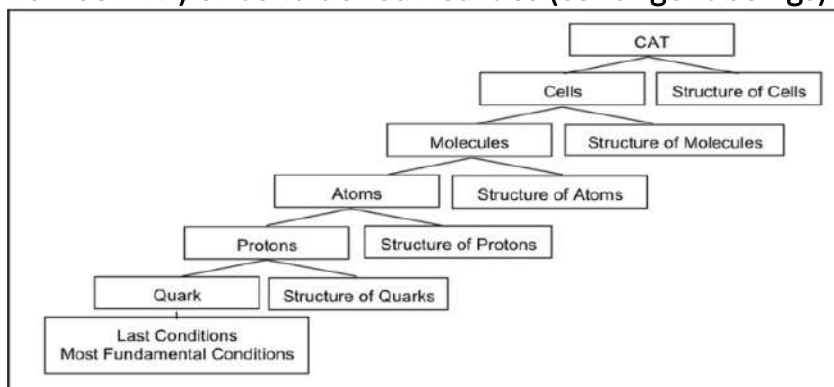
Please note that this is a **disjunctive syllogism**: either Case #1 is true or Case #2 is true, but they cannot both be true or both be false. And if one Claim is shown to be contradictory, then it is false and the other Claim is necessarily true.

We first consider Case #1 – that all reality is comprised of only Conditioned Realities. In this Case, there are two options – there is either a *finite* number of Conditioned Realities in existence or there is an *infinite* number of Conditioned



Realities.

1.1 The claim that reality *only* contains a finite number (let us call this finite number “X”) of Conditioned Realities (contingent beings) is false.



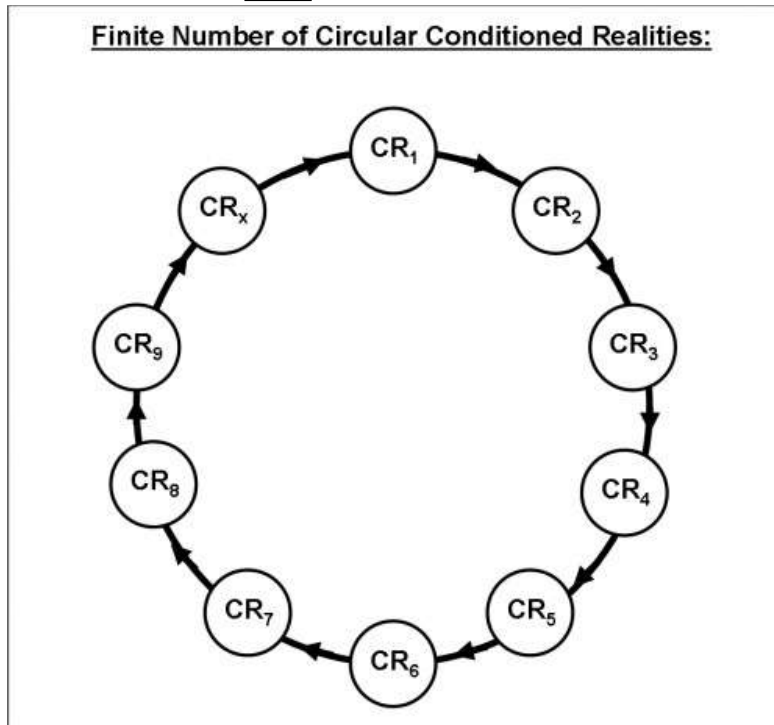
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Rationale: This is because the last or Xth Conditioned Reality in the network or chain of conditioned realities will require another reality for its conditions to be fulfilled. However, since there are no other realities in existence after Xth

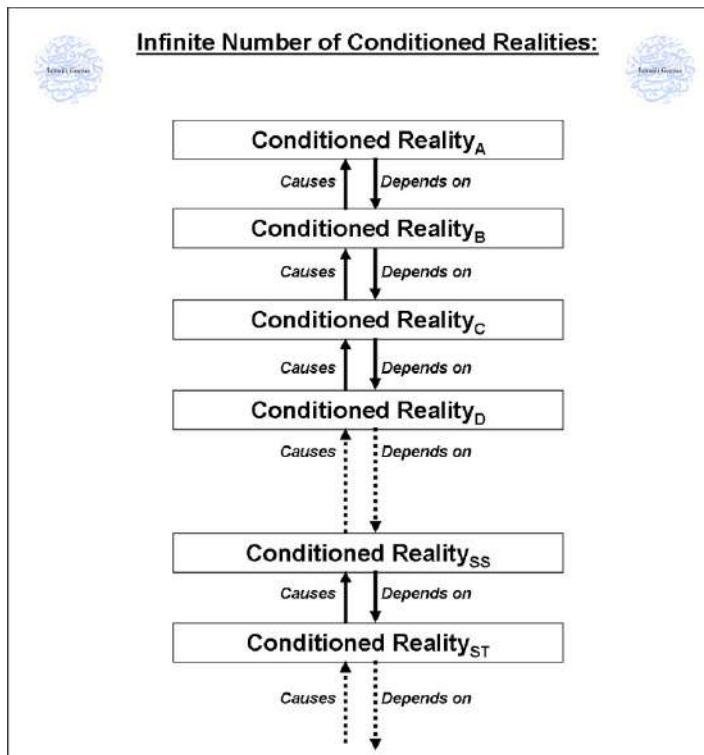
Conditioned Reality (the last or fundamental condition), the Xth or final Conditioned Reality will not exist since it has no more Conditioned Realities to ground its existence – and therefore, all X Conditioned Realities (and thus everything) will not exist. But things obviously *do* exist and so this option leads to an outright contradiction and must be rejected.

1.2 The claim that reality *only* contains a finite number of Conditioned Realities in a circular series is false.



Rationale: This is because all Conditioned Realities (CR) in the circle depend upon another reality in the Circle for their existence. So any reality CR1 in a circle of Conditioned Realities depends upon CR2, CR3, and so on until CRx where Cx is dependent upon C1. Thus, any reality CX in a circle is actually dependent upon and caused by itself and have to be its own cause – which is absurd. Secondly, a circle of Conditioned Realities cannot cause itself to exist since it only consists of X Conditioned Realities and the set of X Conditioned Realities is still conditioned reality. Therefore, none of the Conditioned Realities in the circle have their conditions fulfilled and they will never exist. This means that nothing will exist at all. However, things obviously *do* exist and so this option leads to an outright contradiction and must be similarly rejected.

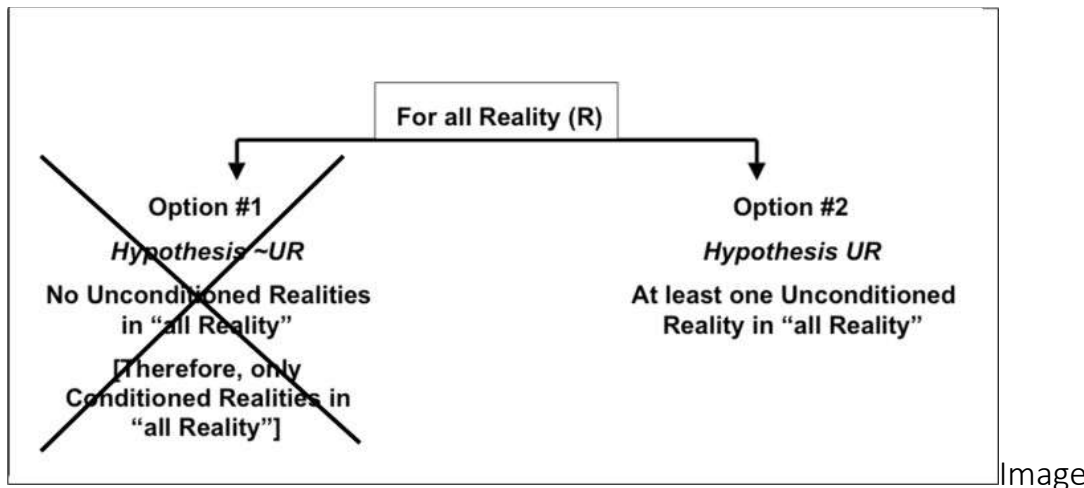
1.3 The claim that reality *only* contains an infinite number of Conditioned Realities in a linear series is false.



Rationale: This is because each conditioned reality in the infinite series depends upon another Conditioned Reality for its existence – which in turn depends upon another. Any Conditioned Reality in the infinite series can *only cause* or fulfill the conditions of the next Conditioned Reality that depends upon it if it has actual existence itself. But the Conditioned Reality does not have actual existence because the Conditioned Reality it depends upon is itself dependent upon another Conditioned Reality and so on. Since the series of Conditioned Realities continues *ad infinitum*, no Conditioned Reality in the infinite series of conditions ever has its conditions fulfilled in order to exist and therefore lacks the causal power to ground other Conditioned Realities. Furthermore, the total set of an infinite number of Conditioned Realities is still only equivalent to Conditioned Reality. This results in the existence of nothing at all – as Conditioned Realities cannot cause themselves to exist. **An essential causal series cannot continue for infinity** because this would result in the non-existence of all members in the causal series. (An infinite series of dark moons positioned to shine upon one another will always remain dark).

Please note, the impossibility of an infinite series of Conditioned Realities does not follow because infinite is impossible, but because an infinite number of Conditioned Realities still lacks the power to exist at all. For a more expanded discussion of why an infinite regress of Conditioned Realities cannot ground its own existence, see this post by *al-Mubahathat*: [On the Infinite Regress Assumption](#)

1.4 Therefore, Claim #1 – There are only Conditioned Realities (the Atheist Position) in existence is false. This has been clearly established as per the above arguments.



Source: <http://magisgodwiki.org/index.php?title=File:Metaphysics8.png>

1.5 Conclusion: There is at least one Unconditioned Reality (Necessary Being) in all of reality. This is because Claim #1 in all of its forms is shown to be false due to inherent contradictions. This leaves only the conclusion of Claim #2 – there must be at least one Unconditioned Reality in all of existence.

In short, all finite things are always, in the present, being sustained in existence by conditions that they cannot have supplied for themselves, and that together compose a universe that, as a physical reality, lacks the obviously supernatural power necessary to exist on its own. Nowhere in any of that is a source of existence as such. It is this entire order of ubiquitous conditionality — this entire ensemble of dependent realities— that the classical arguments say cannot be reducible either to an infinite regress of contingent causes or to a first contingent cause. There must then be some truly unconditioned reality (which, by definition, cannot be temporal or spatial or in any sense finite) upon which all else depends; otherwise nothing could exist at all.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 105)

Note: *In the past, it was common for atheists to claim that the Universe as a whole is Unconditioned Reality. However, it should be noted that all of physical reality, i.e. the entire spatio-temporal Universe, is a Conditioned Reality and this can be demonstrated deductively (as below) due to the composite nature of the material Universe, i.e. anything which can be divided into parts or components is caused by those parts and therefore cannot truly be uncaused or unconditioned. In modern times, the conditioned nature of the Universe is obvious because contemporary cosmology has shown that the Universe has a beginning or is finite in the past (see the work of Alexander Vilenkin, Alan Guth). Anything that has a finite past is conditioned or contingent in its existence and cannot be necessary or Unconditioned due to being finite. That being said, even if one does not admit the past finitude of the Universe, this argument remains valid.*

At this point, the existence of one God has not been established; only the existence of at least one Unconditioned Reality is established. The argument now

continues in order to demonstrate that there necessarily is *only one* Unconditioned Reality.

2. Proof that Unconditioned Reality is the Simplest Reality in all of existence

2.1 Unconditioned Reality cannot have any parts or components. This is because any reality which is composed of parts – whether they are material or non-material – would then be caused by those parts. But Unconditioned Reality, by definition, has no cause and cannot be composed of any parts whatsoever.

The First is not divisible in thought into things which would constitute its substance. For it is impossible that each part of the explanation of the meaning of the First should denote of the parts by which the First's substance is constituted. If this were the case, the parts which constitute its substance would be causes of its existence.

– Abu Nasr al-Farabi, (On the Perfect State, 67)

Every composite thing is posterior to its components and dependent on them. But, as was shown above, God is the first being [and hence not dependent on anything].

– St. Thomas Aquinas, (Summa Theologica, 1.3.7)

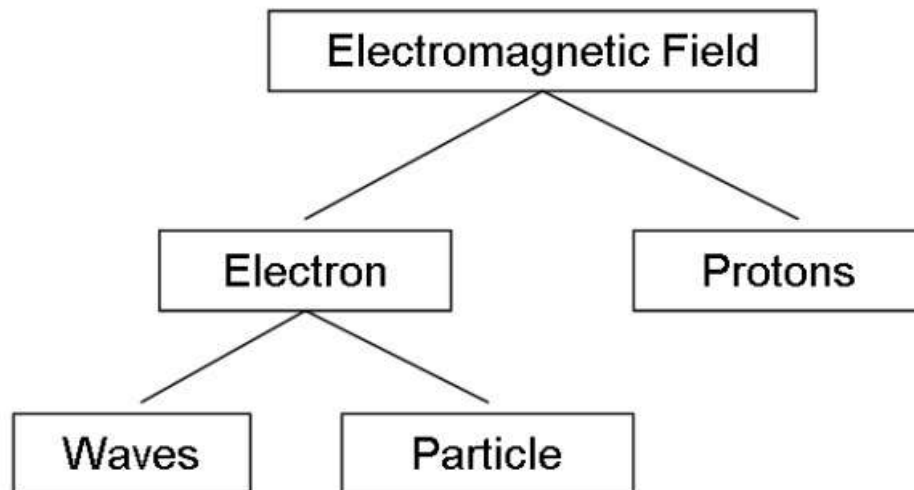
2.2 Therefore, Unconditioned Reality is absolutely simple because it lacks parts, components, dimensions, etc. and therefore any kind of extrinsic boundaries (i.e. circles vs. squares; particles vs. waves; electrons vs. protons) or intrinsic boundaries (i.e. particular thoughts).

If God is to be understood as the unconditioned source of all things, rather than merely some very powerful but still ontologically dependent being, then any denial of divine simplicity is equivalent to a denial of God's reality. This is obvious if one remembers what the argument from creaturely contingency to divine necessity implies. To be the first cause of the whole universal chain of per se causality, God must be wholly unconditioned in every sense. He cannot be composed of and so dependent upon severable constituents, physical or metaphysical, as then He would himself be conditional.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 134)

2.3 Expanded Explanation of Simplicity: Simplicity means to be lacking composition, components, parts or multiplicity of any kind. Simplicity utterly devoid of multiplicity entails the total *absence* of extrinsic (external) and intrinsic (internal) boundaries or limitations. All material objects have extrinsic boundaries or form – without which they would not be what they are. An example of extrinsic boundaries is the fact that a square is a square and therefore cannot be a circle – because a square and a circle each have external boundaries which define their existence. Another example in the material world is that of electrons vs. protons. Electrons (which repel other electrons) are mutually exclusive with protons (which attract electrons) – something cannot be an electron *and* a proton at the same time and place. A *simpler* reality is one that has *less* extrinsic/intrinsic boundaries than a given reality. For example, particles and waves are mutually exclusive –

waves exclude particles and vice versa. However, a photon can behave as a particle or as a wave in different situations. This means that a photon is *simpler* reality than both particles and waves – because it does not have the *formal* boundaries of particles or waves and can take on the boundaries of either one. The photon can take on the properties of a particle or a wave and revert between the two without ceasing to be what it essentially is – a photon. In further examples, an electromagnetic field is *simpler* than electrons and protons (whose boundaries are mutually exclusive) because it allows for the interaction of protons and electrons.



The above example shows how a *simpler* reality can ground/condition the existence of *less simple* realities and also interact with *less simple* realities. In other words, a *simpler* reality is *compatible with* (i.e. does not exclude the existence of) *less simple* realities. Another example is the *act of thinking* vs. the *content of thoughts*. A thought possesses particular boundaries due to its content. But a single act of thinking can hold and ground the existence of several different thoughts – without being limited or reduced to any particular thought. This shows that the act of thinking is a *simpler* reality than a particular thought. An example of the absence of *intrinsic* boundaries would be self-transparency – such as the human act of self-consciousness where such consciousness is aware of itself as being conscious.

3. Proof that there is only one, single, unique Unconditioned Reality:

3.1 If there are multiple Unconditioned Realities, they would each have to be absolutely simple (the simplest realities in all of existence) – as per the previous proof.

3.2 If there are multiple Unconditioned Realities, then there must be some *difference* or *differentiating factor* between each Unconditioned Reality. The existence of multiple Unconditioned Realities implies at least one factor that differentiates each Unconditioned Reality from the other. If one denies the presence of the said differentiating factor, then all of these Unconditioned Realities are one and the same.

3.3 Any Unconditioned Reality that includes a differentiating factor cannot be a pure Unconditioned Reality. This is because an Unconditioned Reality that includes a differentiating factor is *less simple* than pure Unconditioned Reality because it would be composed of parts: Unconditioned Reality + differentiating factor.

3.4 There cannot be multiple Unconditioned Realities. If this were the case, each of these Unconditioned Realities would be composed of parts (Unconditioned Reality + differentiating factor). But anything composed of parts is caused by those parts and therefore cannot be Unconditional Reality since Unconditioned Reality is uncaused. For example, if we suppose that there are two Unconditioned Realities – then each of them would possess a common property shared between them and a unique property specific to each one. But this entails that each Unconditioned Reality is composed of two parts – unique property and shared property – and they would each be caused by those parts and therefore cannot be Unconditioned Reality.

Each one of them (i.e. the two gods) would have two parts – one of them common and the other specific – by which their essences would exist. So this would necessitate One who precedes both of them and who would be the One who gives to each of them what is specific to it.

– Sayyidnā Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, (Rāḥat al-‘Aql, 142)

3.6 Conclusion: There is only one unique Unconditioned Reality in all of existence – since the existence of multiple Unconditioned Realities is impossible or contradictory – to the notion (in the previous proof) that Unconditioned Reality is the simplest reality in all of existence and has no parts.

4. Proof that the Unconditioned Reality is the continuous “Creator” and “Sustainer” of all realities in existence:

4.1 There is only one, single, and unique Unconditioned Reality in all of reality – as per the previous proof. This entails that:

4.2 All other realities in reality besides Unconditioned Reality are Conditioned Realities. Therefore:

4.3 Any Conditioned Reality in existence depends on Unconditioned Reality for the fulfillment of the conditions of its existence. The fulfillment of the conditions of an existent by the Unconditioned Reality can be variously called “creation”, “sustenance” or “actualization” – these being names of the same thing.

4.4 Conclusion: Unconditioned Reality is the continuous Creator and Sustainer of all realities in existence at any given moment – or nothing would exist at all. This Unconditioned Reality is what we call “God”.

The Creator (the unique, absolutely simple, unrestricted, unconditioned Reality itself) must be a continuous Creator (source of the ultimate fulfillment of conditions) of all else that is real at every moment it could cease to be real (i.e. at every moment of reality). Analogously speaking, if the Creator stopped “thinking” about us, we would literally lapse into nothingness.

– Robert Spitzer, (New Proofs for the Existence of God, 143)

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

5. The Transcendence of Unconditioned Reality:

5.1 Unconditioned Reality is beyond matter, space, and time and is therefore changeless and immutable – this follows from the fact that it is absolutely simple and non-composite. All spatio-temporal realities are composite in their structure.

The principle of divine simplicity, moreover, carries with it certain inevitable metaphysical implications. One is that God is eternal, not in the sense of possessing limitless duration but in the sense of transcending time altogether. Time is the measure of finitude, of change, of the passage from potentiality to actuality. God, however, being infinite actual being, is necessarily what Sikhism calls the Akhal Purukh , the One beyond time, comprehending all times within His eternal “now”; all things are present to Him eternally in a simple act of perfect and immediate knowledge. Another implication is that God is in some sense impassible: that is, being beyond change, He also cannot be affected— or, to be more precise, modified— by anything outside Himself. For one thing, as He is the infinite sustaining source of all things, nothing could be “outside” of Him in that sense to begin with.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 136)

5.2 Unconditioned Reality is unrestricted and without limit— since it is not subject to any external or internal boundaries due to its absolute simplicity.

God cannot change over time, moreover, as He would then be dependent upon the relation between some unrealized potentiality within Himself and some fuller actuality somehow “beyond” Himself into which He may yet evolve; again, He would then be a conditional being. He also must possess no limitations of any kind, intrinsic or extrinsic, that would exclude anything real from Him. Nothing that exists can be incompatible with the power of being that He is, as all comes from Him, and this means that He must transcend all those limits that alienate and exclude finite realities from one another, but in such a manner that He can embrace those finite realities in a more eminent way without contradiction... The infinite power of being— the power to be, without any reliance upon some other cause of being, as well as the power to impart being to creatures— must be of infinite capacity, which means infinite simplicity.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 135)

5.3 Unconditioned Reality is beyond all ontological duality such as body-soul, substance-attribute, essence-existence, form-matter, subject-object, etc. – since it is absolutely simple and beyond any kind of composition – both material and formal. In this respect, the *Imām* of the Time refers to Unconditional Reality as “He Who is above all else” – the meaning of which Dr. Aziz Esmail explains:

This Ultimate Reality is often conceived as ‘transcendent’, or described as ‘He who is above all else’ — not because it is a reality spatially above the human habitat, but because it is above, i.e. goes beyond or transcends, all human categories. Being free from and prior to the dichotomy between subject and object, it is therefore also outside the frame of human discourse.

– Aziz Esmail, (‘Reason and Religion: The Old Argument Revisited’, *Ilm*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Dec. 1981-Feb. 1982, pp. 32-40)

5.4 Unconditioned Reality is the ground or source of all universal qualities – life, knowledge, power, will, intelligence, beauty, justice, compassion etc. found in existence – since every creative principle contains and encompasses its effects (formally, eminently, or virtually). The meaning of saying that “God is compassionate”, “God is knowing” or “God is just” is that compassion, knowledge, justice, power, etc. exist in the conditioned realities only through God and their existence comes from Him and depend on Him. It does not mean that God literally possesses knowledge or justice as distinct attributes. The Thomist philosopher Edward Feser explains this as follows:

Recall the Aristotelian principle that a cause cannot give what it does not have, so that the cause of a feature must have that feature either “formally” or “eminently”; that is, if it does not have the feature itself (as a cigarette lighter, which causes fire, is not itself on fire), it must have the feature that is higher up in the hierarchy of attributes (as the cigarette lighter has the power to generate fire). But the Unmoved Mover, as the source of all change, is the source of things coming to have the attributes they have. Hence, He has these attributes eminently if not formally. That includes every power, so that He is all-powerful. It also includes the intellect and will that human beings possess, so that He must be said to have intellect and will, and thus personality, in an analogical sense.

– Edward Feser (The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism, 98)

6. Answers to Common Atheist Objections:

“If everything has a cause, then God must have a cause.”

Response: The above argument *never* took “everything has a cause” as its first premise. Instead, it distinguished between Conditioned Reality and Unconditioned Reality and proceeded to show, by disjunctive syllogism, that there must be at least one Unconditioned Reality in existence. It further used the very definition of Unconditioned Reality to deduce that there is but one unique Unconditioned Reality in all of existence. Even then, God as Unconditioned Reality is not a discrete “thing”, and so logically falls outside the domain of “everything has a cause.”

If the concept of God were the concept simply of some demiurge— some conditioned being among other conditioned beings—then it would indeed be a concept requiring the supplement of some further causal explanation. But none of the enduring theistic faiths conceives of God in that way. The God they proclaim is not just some especially resplendent object among all the objects illuminated by the light of being, or any kind of object at all, but is himself the light of being. It makes perfect sense to ask what illuminates an object, but none to ask what illuminates light. It makes perfect sense to wonder why a contingent being exists, but none to wonder why Absolute Being “exists.” In any event, the “Who made God?” riposte to theism has never been favored by the more reflective kind of skeptic. It is the resort of the intellectually lazy. For one thing, it is an approach that already concedes the power of the argument against an infinite explanatory regress, which is definitely not a good first move for the committed unbeliever

— David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 143)

“God is not empirically observable and therefore does not exist.”

Response: This object is assumes the truth of the principle of empirical verification: “A fact is only true if verified by empirical observation.” The new atheists make this the sole criterion for assessing all knowledge and all truth claims. However, there are four major problems with this line of thinking. Firstly, the principle of verification itself cannot be verified empirically. That is to say, the statement that “A fact is only true if verified by empirical observation” cannot be verified by empirical observation. There is no empirical observation that tells us that something is only true is verified empirically. So the entire principle of empiricism is based on faulty circular logic and must be dismissed. Secondly, empirical observation – even with the most sophisticated instrumentation – can only observe material things that undergo change. The only reason that physicists can observe anything at all is because change is taking place at all levels of the material world. For this reason, the scope of empirical observation is limited and will eventually reach a boundary. God is changeless and immutable. Therefore, He cannot be empirically observed by definition. This does not entail the non-existence of God, it entails the limited scope of empiricism as a method of knowing. Thirdly, the actual practice of science is not strictly empirical. Science includes an interplay of theory, mathematical modeling, empirical observation and trust. Certain branches of physics such as cosmology, quantum physics, astronomy rely heavily on mathematical modelling in order to produce theorems. Many scientific theories such as relativity, the Big Bang theory, etc., are the result of mathematical modelling and not pure empirical observation. Einstein himself never needed to set foot in a laboratory. Fourthly, many truths are deduced using axiomatic logic and not empirical testing. The Pythagorean theorem can only be proven mathematically and not empirically. No amount of empirical observations of triangles would ever constitute a proof of the theorem. Compared to logical and

deductive proofs, empirical based proofs are at best probabilistic since the sample size can never include the entire set of testable samples.

“God cannot be proven by the scientific method”

Science is the study of the natural world for the purpose of modelling the *behavior* or *movement* of natural objects for the purposes of manipulation and prediction. However, science does not deal with the questions about the source of *existence* of natural objects, issues of morality, mathematical truths, the rules of logic, aesthetics (the study of beauty), or the source and experience of consciousness. The enterprise of modern science is interested in *discovering the rules or laws of nature by which the natural world behaves* but it does not reveal anything about the *origins or ultimate causes* of the existence of the natural world and the causes of the laws of nature. To use an analogy, **science is about observing the moving pieces of a checkers board and documenting the rules of the movement of pieces, but science cannot tell you where the checkers board, the pieces, and the rules of the game come from or why they exist in the first place.** This second question can only be determined by philosophy and metaphysics.

Think of it this way: you can't find out why checkers boards exist by looking at the rules of checkers themselves, which concern only what goes on within the game. The rules tell you how each piece moves, how the game is won, and so forth. But why are the pieces governed by these rules, specifically, rather than others? Why do any checkers boards exist at all in the first place? No scrutiny of the rules can answer those questions. It is impossible to answer them, or indeed even to understand the questions, unless you take a vantage point from outside the game and its rules. Similarly, what science uncovers are, in effect, the “rules” that govern the “game” that is the natural world. Its domain of study is what is internal to the natural order of things. It presupposes that there is such an order just as the rules of checkers presuppose that there are such things as checkers boards and game piece... **Thus, science cannot answer the question why there is any world at all, or any laws at all. To answer those questions, or even to understand them properly, you must take an intellectual vantage point from outside the world and its laws, and thus outside of science. You need to look to philosophical argument, which goes deeper than anything mere physics can uncover.**

– Edward Feser, ([Scientists Should Tell Lawrence Krauss to Shut Up Already](#))

“Causation is not universally true – it is invalidated by quantum physics”

Response: There are no exceptions to the rule of causality. Modern science has not detected or observed any cases where material things have no cause. Certain physicists such as Lawrence Krauss and Stephen Hawking have inappropriately and deceptively referred to empty space or the quantum vacuum energy as “nothing”; but this is simply no the case since the vacuum is not nothing, even empirically

speaking. The quantum vacuum contains unstable energy subject to the laws of physics.

Even the most fervent materialist must at least grant that quantum particles and functions are not causally independent in an ultimate sense; they do not literally emerge from nonexistence. Radioactive decay, for instance, still has to occur within radioactive material, and within a physical realm governed by mathematically describable laws. And whatever occurs within a quantum field or vacuum is dependent upon that field or vacuum (and that vacuum is not, as it happens, nothing). And all physical reality is contingent upon some cause of being as such, since existence is not an intrinsic physical property, and since no physical reality is logically necessary. Today's more ingenious skeptics, however, do not attempt to search out some sort of specific exception to the universal rule of causality, because they understand that what might count as an exception will always be determined in advance by certain metaphysical prejudices.

– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 145)

“But causes are not simultaneous with their effects; causes must always precede the effect in time”

Response: A number of classical thinkers (Aristotle, Ibn Sina, Aquinas) and contemporary western philosophers have argued and demonstrated that causes are in fact simultaneous with their effects. While common people tend to see cause and effect as two temporal events, this is not actually the case when causation is examined in depth. Even Immanuel Kant admitted that causes are simultaneous with their effects – such as the case where a stove is causing an area to be heated or when a ball impresses a groove when it sits on a cushion. In fact, all types of causation – even those that appear to be temporal – are in reducible to simultaneous causation. This is established by Mumford and Anjum in *Getting Causes from Powers* (see pp. 106-129). These authors look at several examples from everyday experience, biology, physics and agent causation and conclude that they are all cases of simultaneous causation. This is because an object is not truly a cause until the very instant that it is producing its effect. Before or after that time, the object is not a cause in any meaningful sense.

We argued against Hume's temporal priority condition in which the cause occurs before the effect. Causation, we insisted, involved simultaneity. The effect occurs at the same time as its cause.

(Mumford, Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers*, 230)

Man has every reason to believe in the reality of causation: indeed, to take it as one of the most fundamental realities in the whole of existence... Causation is as real as anything we know. It is fundamental: an actual feature of this one true world.

(Mumford, Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers*, 237)

“Atheism is for more rational persons while theism is blind faith”

Response: The only logical alternative to theism is naturalism or physicalism – the belief that physical reality is all there is. However, there is much stronger support for theism than naturalism – for three reasons. Firstly, there are no deductive or empirical arguments for naturalism. Naturalism, as already mentioned, relies on empiricism which is unprovable and circular in its own logic. Furthermore, there is no way to actually prove or argue, from observations within the natural world, that the natural world is all that exists. Indeed, it is the atheist – not the theist – who holds his naturalist position out of ‘blind faith’ in the absence of good reasons or evidence. Naturalism, far from being a reasoned position, is merely a prejudice or assumption that one arbitrarily adopts. Secondly, naturalism is self-refuting because under the assumption of naturalism, the human mind is reducible to the brain which has evolved through natural selection for the sole purpose of survival and not to discover objective truth. This means that all thoughts, ideas, and intellectual worldviews are the result of brain neurobiological events that occur as the brain’s responses to stimuli and genes. As such, all ideas held by a person – under naturalism – are not held because of their truth or rationality but simply because of brain chemistry. This casts great doubt as to the accuracy of human scientific conclusions and knowledge in general – since it could only correspond to objective reality by some improbable miraculous coincidence. Under naturalism, it is the atheist who has “blind faith” that his own mental and intellectual convictions should be trusted in the first place.

Finally, naturalism ultimately amounts to saying that ‘things are just there’ as a brute fact without any final explanation because of its refusal to admit of anything beyond the natural world. Atheism at the end of the day is simply not provable and this should cast doubt on the very rationality of atheist belief which truly amounts to blind faith. Dr. James Cutsinger summarizes this point when he says:

On the contrary, atheism is self-contradictory. Think about it. The atheist says, “There is no God.” Now anyone who says, “There is no _____,” is giving voice to what a logician would call a universal negative proposition, whatever might be placed in that blank. It’s negative because it says “no” and denies something, and it’s universal because the field it encompasses is unlimited. If I said, “There is no platypus in this chapel,” I would also be uttering a negative statement, but it wouldn’t be universal because the context would be restricted to this building, and we could verify, or disconfirm, the truth of my statement by arming everyone in the room with a flashlight, fanning out throughout the building, and engaging in a systematic platypus-hunting exercise. Notice, however, that when atheists say, “There is no God,” they’re not saying, “There’s no God in this chapel,” or “There’s no God in Greenville,” or “There’s no God in our galaxy.” They’re saying, “There is no God anywhere in the entire universe, no God at all wherever one might look throughout the full extent of reality.” But in doing so they’re implying that they’ve done the looking. They’ve carefully inspected all the nooks and crannies of existence,

even as we'd need to inspect all the nooks and crannies of this building to know there's no platypus in it. If however they've truly looked everywhere there is to look—if they can honestly say they're personally acquainted with the full extent of reality—it follows that they must be omniscient. But omniscience is an attribute of God. Therefore, in saying "There is no God," atheists are implicitly claiming to be God, and thus inevitably contradicting themselves.

– James Cutsinger, (The Sound of a Lecture Undelivered, Furman University, April 30, 2007)

7. The worldview of the First Cause/Unconditional Reality Argument is rationally superior to any naturalist worldview:

While there are no positive arguments *for* naturalism or atheism, there *are* good arguments for theism. The argument presented in this article is based on the concept of causality – which no one really disputes.

All physical reality is logically contingent, and the existence of the contingent requires the Absolute as its source. Why the Absolute produces the contingent may be inconceivable for us; but that the contingent can exist only derivatively, receiving its existence from the Absolute, is a simple deduction of reason. Alternatively, reality is essentially absurd: absolute contingency, unconditional conditionality, an uncaused effect. And the antithesis between the two positions can never be made any less stark than that... The general argument from the contingent to the absolute, or from the conditioned to the unconditioned, is a powerful and cogent one. No attempt, philosophical or otherwise, to show that it is a confused argument, or logically insufficient, or susceptible of some purely physical answer has ever been impressively successful. Even if one does not accept its conclusions one still has absolutely no rational warrant for believing that materialism has any sort of logical superiority over theism; the classical argument is strong enough to show that naturalism is far and away a weaker, more incomplete, and more wilfully doctrinaire position than classical theism is. Naturalism, as I have said repeatedly, is a philosophy of the absurd, of the just-there-ness of what is certainly by its nature a contingent reality; it is, simply enough, an absurd philosophy.

– David Bentley Hart, (The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 147-150)

8. Conclusion: Be in Harmony with God

The arguments presented in this article lead to the conclusion that there is one, single, unique, infinite Unconditioned Reality that continuously creates and sustains the existence of all things – space, time, matter, the Universe, consciousness, etc. As such, every reality in existence is a Conditioned Reality whose existence is ultimately dependent upon the absolute, and infinite

Unconditioned Reality – what people of faith call “God”. Having accepted this metaphysical truth, one must realize that one’s own existence is contingent and ultimately dependent upon God. The next logical step is to live one’s life in total conformity with the realization of one’s utter dependence before the Divine. That is to say, one’s entire being – physical, mental, and spiritual – must be oriented towards God as the source of all existence by realizing one’s contingency or conditioned state before Him: for this is the essence of *faith*. Such an orientation brings one *in harmony* with God. And he who is in harmony with God, who is absolutely poor and humble before the unceasing existence that flows forth from the Unconditioned Reality – is “at one” with God and will be truly and deeply *happy*.

A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people. A few may think that they do not believe in God, and some others that it matters little to the individual in his daily life how he stand with regard to Him. Ruling out the atheist, with whom a believer can no more argue than he can discuss color with a blind man, it is surely strange that a believer in an omnipotent and ever-present Deity should fail to realise that how we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the Universe. This is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are – you are happy.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (“My Personal Life”, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. K.K. Aziz, 866)

What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities

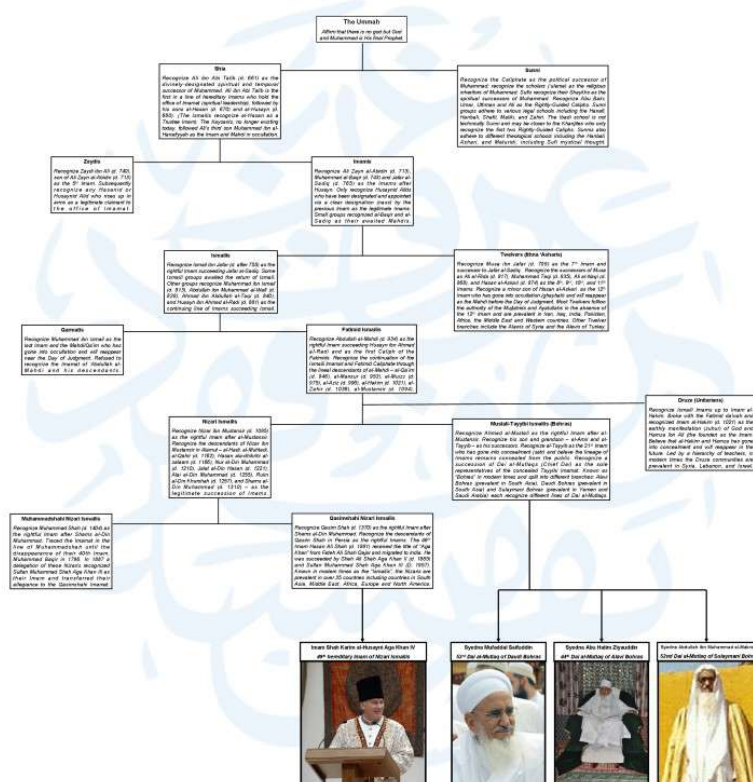
It is important, therefore, for non-Muslims who are dealing with the Ummah to communicate with both Sunni and Shia voices. To be oblivious to this reality would be like ignoring over many centuries that there were differences between Catholics and Protestants, or trying to resolve the civil war in Northern Ireland without engaging both Christian communities.

Imam Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV

This short article features a visual chart outlining the major differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims and further depicting the major divisions and branches within Shia Islam pertaining to the succession of the Shia [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#)||

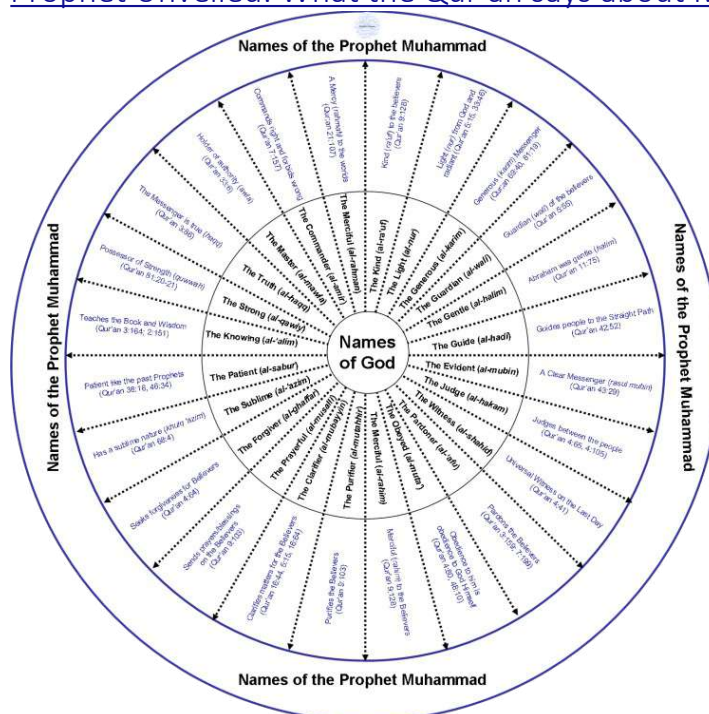
Shia Islam: Major Branches and Communities of Interpretation

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Muslims affirm the absolute oneness of God and the role of Muhammad as His final prophet, Shia and Sunni Muslims differ on the question of legitimate spiritual and religious authority after the Prophet Muhammad. It must be kept in mind that [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#), he was both the political and spiritual leader of the believers. All questions concerning religious interpretations, law, ethics, theology, etc. were deferred to and decided by the Prophet; his ruling was, for all intents and purposes, the direct representation of God's Will and Command to the believers. Far from being just a mouthpiece for the Qur'an, [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#), esoteric knowledge, moral leadership and the channel of God's continual guidance

and blessings for the believers. To obey the Prophet in his lifetime was the practical way of obeying God. God's blessings, guidance and forgiveness had to be sought through Muhammad's intercession, blessings and prayers. All devotional offerings (*ṣadaqah*) and acts of repentance by the believers were offered to God via Muhammad. Thus, in addition to being the vehicle through which the Qur'an is revealed in human language, the Prophet Muhammad was the bearer of a spiritual authority or charisma, called *The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah*, which was the source of the spiritual sanctity and purity by which he performed the aforementioned spiritual duties. The relationship between God and the Prophet Muhammad is depicted in the below diagram and can be read about [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#):



Sunni Muslims recognize no direct succession of spiritual and charismatic authority (*The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah*) of Muhammad; the community exercises authority and religious interpretation through the Caliphate (holding political authority, the scholars (*ulamā*) and Sufi *shaykhs* holding religious and mystical authority. Meanwhile, Shia Muslims stress that the Prophet Muhammad – whom Qur'an 33:6 speaks of as possessing more authority (*awlā*) over the believers than their own souls – had actually designated his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib as the master (*mawlā*) of the believers. [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) for various statements by the Prophet in favour of 'Alī's role as his successor. This last took place during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage when Muhammad halted the pilgrims at Ghadīr Khum, quoted Qur'an 33:6 by saying "Do I not have more authority (*awlā*) over you than your own souls" and then proceeded to declare "He whose *mawlā* I am, 'Alī is his *mawlā*". This event at Ghadīr Khum is attested to by Sunni and Shia sources and narrated by 184 companions. Therefore, the Shia

Muslims hold that the spiritual and charismatic authority of the Prophet Muhammad and all of his [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) (with the exception of scriptural revelation) continue through the institution of hereditary spiritual leadership called the Imamate, with Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the first *Imām*. This Imamate is subsequently handed down by each Imam to his appointed successor from among his male progeny. The Imams are of the Prophet's [Towards Validating Manifest Imamate From The Qur'an Alone](#) whom the Qur'an declares as thoroughly purified by God as per Qur'an 33:33. The Imam for Shia Muslims is the inheritor of the Prophet Muhammad's authority and the sole source for the legitimate interpretation of Islam.

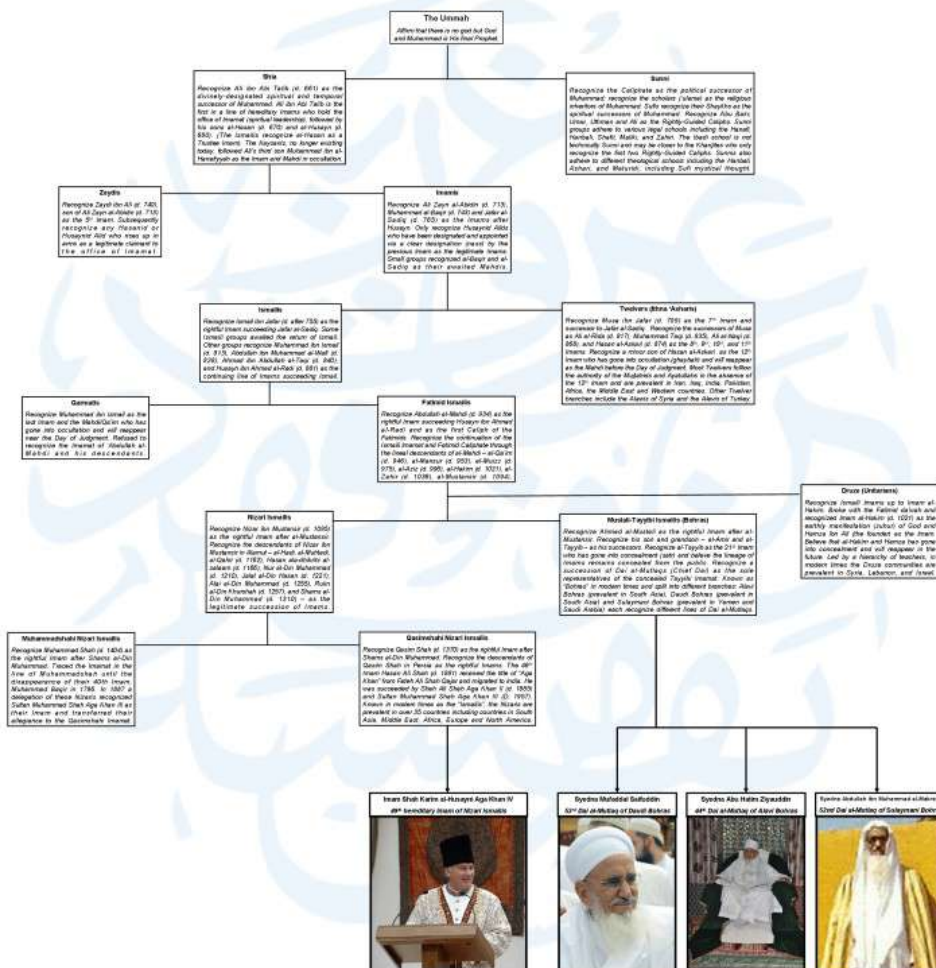
Even some of Imam 'Ali's early followers regarded him as "an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet" (Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57). For example, one of Ali's supporters who also was devoted to the Prophet said to him: "our opinion is your opinion and we are in the palm of your right hand" (Dakake 58). The early followers of 'Ali seem to have taken his guidance as "right guidance" deriving from Divine support. In other words, 'Ali's guidance was seen to be the expression of God's will and the Qur'anic message. This spiritual and absolute authority of 'Ali was known as *walayah* and it was inherited by his successors, the Imams. In the first century after the Prophet, the term *sunnah* was not specifically defined as "Sunnah of the Prophet" but was used in connection to Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman, and some Umayyad Caliphs. The idea of "Hadith" or traditions ascribed to the Prophet was not mainstream nor was Hadith criticism. Even the earliest legal texts by Malik b. Anas and Abu Hanifa employ many methods including analogical reasoning and opinion and do not rely exclusively on hadith. Only in the 2nd century does the Sunni jurist al-Shafi'i first argue that only the Sunnah of the Prophet should be a source of law and that this Sunnah is embodied in Hadiths. It would take another one hundred years after al-Shafi'i for Sunni Muslim jurists to fully base their methodologies on prophetic Hadiths (See Adis Duderija, "Evolution in the Concept of Sunnah During the First Four Generations of Muslims", [Read Here](#)). Meanwhile, Imami Shia Muslims followed the Imams' interpretations of Islam as normative without any need for Hadiths and other sources of Sunni law like analogy and opinion.

Sunni Muslims came to recognize the Qur'an, the Sunnah (custom) of Muhammad as recorded in the Ḥadīth literature, and legal interpretative techniques such as scholarly consensus (*ijmā*), analogy (*qiyās*), and interpretation (*ijtihād*) as the sources (*uṣūl*) for religious and legal interpretations. Meanwhile, Shia Muslims regard the institution of the Imamate and its living and continual interpretation of the Qur'ān as the sole authoritative and legitimate source of religious interpretation and spiritual guidance.

Over the last 1,400 years, the Shia Muslims experienced a number of splits and divisions due to disagreement over the rightful succession of the Imams. Different

The chart is followed by important extracts from the Address of His Highness Aga Khan IV, the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of the Nizari Ismaili branch of Shia Islam in an inaugural [Speech made to the Parliament and Senate of Canada in 2014](#).

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dealing with the Ummah to communicate with both Sunni and Shia voices. To be oblivious to this reality would be like ignoring over many centuries that there were differences between Catholics and Protestants, or trying to resolve the civil war in Northern Ireland without engaging both Christian communities. What would have been the consequences if the Protestant-Catholic struggle in Ireland had spread throughout the Christian world, as is happening today between Shia and Sunni Muslims in more than nine countries? It is of the highest priority that these dangerous trends be well understood and resisted, and that the fundamental legitimacy of pluralistic outlooks be honoured in all aspects of our lives together, including matters of faith....

I have the great privilege of representing the Ismaili Imam — this institution which has stretched beyond borders for more than 1400 years and which defines itself and is recognised by an increasingly large number of states, as the succession of Shia Imami Ismaili Imam. [Translation] ...

The Ismaili Imam is a supra-national entity, representing the succession of Imams since the time of the Prophet. But let me clarify something more about the history of that role, in both the Sunni and Shia interpretations of the Muslim faith. The Sunni position is that the Prophet nominated no successor, and that spiritual-moral authority belongs to those who are learned in matters of religious law. As a result, there are many Sunni imams in a given time and place. But others believed that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. From that early division, a host of further distinctions grew up, but the question of rightful leadership remains central. In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons
Chamber (Ottawa, Canada), 27 February 2014
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10724/>

Reading Resources

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- Read [“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#) *He who is above all else: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God a logical argument for the existence of God* .
 - Read [Beyond Personalist Theism and Modern Atheism](#) *pt of Tawhid (Oneness of God on the concept of God according to Ismā‘īlī Muslim theology.*
 - Read [Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics](#) *st? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics* for a series of philosophical arguments on the soul.

- Read [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#)^{led}: *What the Qur'an says about Muhammad* to learn about the spiritual duties and powers of the Prophet Muhammad per the Qur'an.
- Read [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) revelation for more on how divine revelation works per Ismaili thought. Read [Towards Validating Manifest Imamat From The Qur'an Alone](#) for arguments, based solely on Qur'anic evidence, for a manifest Imam, or spiritual leader, to succeed Muhammad. [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) for various statements by the Prophet in favour of 'Alī's role as his successor.

Towards Validating Manifest Imamate From The Qur'an Alone

MOHIB EBRAHIM

INTRODUCTION

Upon the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) a fundamental debate arose as to who was his rightful successor as leader of the nascent Muslim community. The debate is so fundamental that it is at the root of the Shia/Sunni difference of Islam and it has simmered continuously in the subsequent 1,400 years, at times boiling over with rage.

Over the centuries much has been written by both Shia and Sunni to "prove" their respective positions correct. On the one hand Shia theologians, philosophers, scholars, clergy and lay people have all sought to validate the Shia Imamate while on the other, their Sunni counterparts attempt to make the converse case. What is particularly perplexing and vexing to outside observers is both parties make their case from the same evidence -- marshalling quotes from the Qur'an and Hadith (anecdotes about, and sayings of, the Prophet), key historical records as well as relying on rational or "common sense" arguments.

The paradox arises because there is no unanimous agreement over which historical records are accurate, which Hadith are authentic, and then even when there is agreement, disagreement arises over their interpretation. The dilemma is not improved, but rather compounded, when evidence from the Qur'an is relied upon simply because the Qur'an itself admits, in verse 3:7, to its own partial ambiguity thereby rendering those parts open to individual interpretation.

DISAGREEMENT OVER THE HISTORICAL RECORD

To appreciate the depth of the quagmire over historical records, it would be instructive to review one particularly important example relevant to the Shia/Sunni disagreement over the Shia Imamate.

Consider the official position of the Ismailis -- who are also the only branch of Islam, Shia or Sunni, which have "a living Imam who traces his family back to Hazrat Ali" (1). They state, as do all Shia, that:

[The Shia's] espousal of the right of Ali and that of his descendants, through Fatima, to the leadership of the community was rooted, above all, in their understanding of the Qur'an and its concept of qualified and rightly guided leadership, as reinforced by Prophetic traditions. The most prominent among the latter were part of the Prophet's sermon at a place called Ghadir Khumm, following his farewell pilgrimage, designating Ali as his successor, and his testament that he was leaving behind him 'the two weighty things', namely the Qur'an and his progeny, for the future guidance of his community. (2)

In addition, all Shia maintain that the Prophet also said at Ghadir Khumm, as quoted by Mir Ahmed Ali:

To whomsoever I am the Maula (the Lord - the Master), Ali is his Maula (the Lord - the Master). O God! Be Thou a friend to him who is a friend to him (Ali). (Be Thou) an enemy to him who is enemy to him (i.e. Ali). Help one who helps him (i.e. Ali). Forsake one who forsakes him (i.e. Ali). (3)

Finally, Mir Ahmed Ali also notes:

[Upon] descending from the pulpit [after appointing Ali as Maula], the Holy Prophet commanded everyone of the huge gathering to pay his "Baiyat" or homage or allegiance to Ali. The first one to pay the baiyat was Omar ibne Khuttab (who later became the 2nd Khalif) Hearing the words with which Omar felicitated Ali, the Holy Prophet commanded Omar not to address Ali as son of Abu Taleb, but as 'Amirul-Momineen', i.e. the Lord Commander of the Faithful.... Like his other titles the title of

'Amirul-Momineen' was also bestowed upon Ali exclusively for him by the Prophet himself for none else held any of the titles during his lifetime of the Holy Prophet, particularly 'Amirul-Momineen'. (3)

The question is then of course: what is the Sunni position over Ghadir Khumm? Mir Ahmed Ali lists some 80 of the most respected Sunni authorities and books which have "reported this event in all its details." (3) He also adds that the number of authorities who have "relayed this event with its true significance" (3) is such that there is "not a single event of the Islamic history nor any other Qur'anic Verses which has earned so much unanimous, universal, unquestionable and doubtless attention from such great authorities in such a huge number" (3).

Nevertheless, despite such an agreed upon record of what took place at Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet's words were still parsed and dissected by, what appear to the uninitiated, hair-splitting arguments over Arabic and its grammar, that in all likelihood the matter will never be settled. For example, the word *Maula* is taken to mean "friend" and not "Lord" or "Master." Such is the state of affairs, that, in concluding his lengthy commentary about the event, Mir Ahmed Ali wrote out of frustration:

[I]n spite of so much of the doubtless and the unchallengeable acknowledgement of the facts [over Ghadir Khumm] it is only a wonder how man could ever insist upon his own fanciful notions and hold himself fast to them, unless his conscience and reasoning cease to work or he does not want to be corrected. (3)

DISAGREEMENT OVER QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATIONS

Given the disagreement about a historical event despite overwhelming agreement on its record by both sides, one can only imagine the disagreement over arguments relying on the Qur'an, given its admitted ambiguity.

Perusing, for example, Chapter 4, "*Al-Baqir's Views on the Imamate*," of Arzina Lalani's "*Early Shi'i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir*" offers a flavour of this, vis a vis the Imamate. In it, she discusses some of the Qur'anic verses -- including 5:55, 5:67, 5:3, 4:59, 4:83, 4:51, 4:53, 4:54, 4:58, 9:119, 9:105, 2:143, 3:5 [sic, 3:7], 35:32, 42:22 [sic, 42:23], 64:8, 57:28, 6:122, 33:6, 43:28, 33:33, 17:71 -- cited and interpreted by the 4th/5th Imam (i) revered by all Shia, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, in his defence of the Imamate. Needless to say, the Sunni have their own interpretations for each of these verses.

While some of the Sunni interpretations appear strained to Shia ears, the Shia interpretation of others can only be understood as referring to the Imamate when explained by the Imams themselves, giving rise to suggestions of self-serving interpretations. Other verses, like the historical record, have been subjected to similar hair-splitting debates over the Arabic and its grammar, perhaps none more so than 3:7 where the debate quite literally rages over the placement of a full stop.

IF THE ISSUE IS UNRESOLVABLE, IS THAT ITSELF A REASONABLE STATE OF AFFAIRS?

So does this Gordian Knot have a solution or are we of modern and later times hamstrung with the vexing task of trying to tease out the truth from an incomplete historical record 1,400 years after the fact? And, must those of us not versed in Arabic relegate our faith, and thus perhaps our salvation, to guessing which of several duelling Arabic linguists' arguments seem most credible to us, even though we have neither the knowledge nor the qualifications to assess the merits of their arguments? In other words, is religion for us reduced to blind faith in an arbitrary choice? And if Prophet Muhammad was indeed the last Prophet, then did Allah really leave us in such an unsettled, ambiguous, final state (at least until End Times), a state which cannot but breed more and more doubt, while simultaneously Hazrat Ali, first Shia Imam, informs us that, on the contrary, "sleeping with certainty is better than praying with doubt" (4).

Or, alternatively can we divine the truth from the Qur'an with a new approach, assuming good faith in translations? For is not truth blind to specific languages or the fallibility of man to record history and instead able to shine its essential light regardless, just as scientific discoveries are not limited to the language or writings of the discoverer, but have an essential light to them? After all Imam Jafar al-Sadiq informs us that "intellect is that by which Allah is worshipped and a place in Paradise earned" (5) and so relegating my faith to blindly following an arbitrarily chosen opinion of another person -- a linguist or historian -- is not only irredeemably unsatisfying both spiritually and intellectually, but in complete contradiction to both my

understanding of what Imam al-Sadiq advises as well as my firm conviction that faith must and should be verifiable, for all the reasons explained in my article *Truth, Reality and Religion*. (6) And thus, for me, finding a way to untie this Gordian Knot around the Shia Imam was an intellectual and spiritual necessity irrespective of, but also especially because of, my being Ismaili.

SETTING THE GROUND RULES FOR A NEW APPROACH

Leaving aside those ambiguous verses that require the Imam to explain they refer to the Imam, past attempts to validate the Imam from the Qur'an were, in general, based on arguing a specific interpretation of what were, hopefully, "smoking gun" verses that one could then point to and proclaim, "Here, clear verses where Allah ordained the Imam." However, the fact is that such "smoking gun" verses are few and far between -- if they are to be found at all, given the disagreements over interpretation, as explained above.

Furthermore, even if they are very clear when read in a certain light, it is precisely because they need to be read in that certain light and then argued in isolation, that they do not, in my opinion, provide substantive, let alone conclusive, evidence.

Consequently, inspired by the Ismaili position mentioned above, it began to dawn on me that perhaps there was an alternative approach -- at least for me -- to resolve the dual quagmires of contradictory historical records and Qur'anic interpretations. However, several severe constraints were first needed. The "Ground Rules" as it were.

Firstly, the position of the Ismailis is that validation of the Imam comes first and foremost from the Qur'an and then secondly, only as reinforcement, from Prophetic traditions. To me that meant, theoretically at least, one should be able to validate the Imam from the Qur'an alone and dispense with the historical record with their inevitable conflicts. For as His Highness the Aga Khan, the present, 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismailis, also said with respect to the historical record:

... nothing was written at the time, the Qur'an itself was memorised -- but at the time of the death of the Prophet, what was [sic] the ingredients of the division between the Shia and the Sunni is not really entirely clear, because all we have today is literature which is based on repetition of what was said, the Hadith in a sense. (7)

However, when one enlists the Qur'an, disagreement over interpretations, translations and the Arabic language promptly log-jam the discussion, perhaps even more obstinately than disagreements over the historical record. Nevertheless, I find it hard to accept that Allah has left the truth of this matter hostage either to the irreconcilable differences of expert Arabic linguists or personal interpretations of the Qur'an's ambiguous verses. And so, for these reasons the second, third and fourth constraints dictate answers must not be dependent on:

- i) knowing Arabic,
- ii) parsing the Arabic text or
- iii) ambiguous verses of the Qur'an, but rather only from those that are plain and understood by all so they are able to be translated without issue.

Surely it is self-evident that answers must be found in the "plain verses," and not the ambiguous ones, for otherwise we would have an unresolvable paradox where the instructions on how we are to acquire the correct meaning of the Qur'an's ambiguous verses, were themselves cloaked in ambiguity.

QUR'ANIC THREADS: TAKING UP THE INVITATION OF VERSE 4:82

The problem, however, is that the unambiguous verses do not come specially identified. And, since merely quoting a verse from the Qur'an implies interpretation, the first question which arises about a verse is whether or not it is one of the ambiguous verses. If the verse is not sufficiently clear by itself to be excluded from the ambiguous verses, then -- rather than trying to justify the interpretation semantically, parsing words or Arabic,

or resorting to the historical context of the verse -- perhaps other verses can be brought to bear and corroborate the interpretation offered and thereby settle issue with evidence. In fact the verse:

Will they not then ponder on the Qur'an? If it had been from other than Allah they would have found therein much incongruity. (Qur'an 4:82)

invites us to validate our interpretations by reconciling them with other parts of the Qur'an to and iron out any "apparent" inconsistencies our (mis)understandings create. Therefore, rather than trying to find and interpret a single "smoking gun" verse, argued and relied on in isolation, to justify Imamatus, I use what I call Qur'anic Threads.

Qur'anic Threads propose a conclusion that arises from a set of mutually supportive, interlocking Observations related to a single concept with each Observation substantiated from a set of verses. It seems self-evident that if the Qur'an has no discrepancies, per 4:82 above, then surely it must neither have discrepancies at the micro (verse) level nor at macro (conceptual or "thread") level. Therefore, if the thesis behind a thread is valid, threads will give interpretations credence, objectivity, coherence, resilience and stability because well formed threads are internally consistent from several perspectives and thus threads provide robust, perhaps even conclusive, lines of evidence and argument which are able to better withstand challenge as compared to individual, "smoking gun" verses argued in isolation.

INSPIRATION FOR A FRESH PERSPECTIVE AND A CORRESPONDING NEW APPROACH

Although the aforementioned constraints prevents the demonstration from getting mired once again in the quicksands of parsing Arabic, personal interpretations of allegorical verses and conflicting historical records, they appear, superficially, to be unreasonably severe rendering it all but impossible to accomplish anything. Hope, however, lies in precise notions articulated in the Ismaili explanation of the Shia position, highlighted below:

[T]he Shia's espousal of the right of Ali and that of his descendants, through Fatima, to the leadership of the community was rooted, above all, in their understanding of the **Qur'an and its concept of qualified and rightly guided leadership**, as reinforced by Prophetic traditions. [Emphasis added] (2)

Namely, that the Qur'an sets out two criteria for valid leadership: qualified and rightly guided. Here now were precise, specific criteria that could be tested objectively -- as opposed to the subjective duels of linguists and historians -- exactly as verse 4:82 proposes in the same spirit of scientific inquiry. Perhaps this is why Imam Jafar al-Sadiq said "Intellect ('*aqal*) is that by which Allah is worshipped and a place in Paradise earned" (5) and the Holy Prophet said:

To listen to the words of the learned and to instil into others the lessons of science is better than religious exercises. (8)

The Ismaili explanation of the Shia position and these two criteria beg the question: Does the Qur'an indeed declare a notion of "qualified and rightly guided leadership?" And if it does, then it prompts several fundamental questions:

- i) What qualifications make one "qualified and rightly guided" to lead?
- ii) Who are the "qualified" to lead and who are "the rightly guided?"
- iii) And most importantly, can they be identified?

Individually, each answer would be of immense value. Collectively, however, the conclusion they offer may well be unassailable. Surprisingly the answers are neither as obscure nor as surprising as one might imagine.

To investigate the Qur'anic position on the previous questions, three Threads (corresponding roughly to each question) were developed. Each thread is depicted in single page chart, which can be read independently of the commentary which follows each.

NOTES TO THE THREADS/CHARTS

Granted, short of Allah Himself confirming an interpretation of the Qur'an as correct, any interpretation or conclusion, by definition, relies on the circumstantial evidence of "logical" deductions or argument which some may find more compelling than others. Nevertheless, I am reminded of this old story about Henry David Thoreau and circumstantial evidence:

During the mid 1800s, milk distributors in Boston were notorious for heavily diluting their milk with water from Cochituate River, but there was no proof. Thoreau commented, "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find trout in the milk." (9)

However, in the final analysis, both the quality of the deductions or arguments, such as those presented, and the ability for another to appreciate the same is dependent on one's knowledge and, in particular, one's insight into that knowledge. I think what is presented will be, at the very least, for some, "trout in the milk," but if not, perhaps the approach will inspire others to develop threads for this or other debates over interpretation.

Unless otherwise noted, all verses cited use the Pickthall translation but it has to be admitted that working from translations of the Qur'an is not ideal, and so several translations were consulted to ensure all the translations convey the same essence -- in the same vein, as mentioned earlier, that scientific truths are independent of language -- and also to ensure what is said is both clear and similar, if not the same, in all the translations, as would be expected from unambiguous verses. Consequently, apart for three instances, little or no difference was found between Sunni and Shia translations or interpretations of the verses cited. In those three instances, the Shia translation or interpretation is used because, as explained for each, the Sunni version results in a contradiction or inconsistency with other verses within the thread, thus violating verse 4:82.

In the charts, the relevant portions of verses which substantiate each observation are highlighted, as a result some verses are cited more than once, each time drawing attention to a different part of the verses. The verses cited are not be exhaustive, but merely establish each observation and additional verses would only make the observations, and hence the threads and their conclusions, firmer. Observations are numbered sequentially, irrespective of thread, for ease of reference.

THREAD I

THE QUR'AN ON THOSE VESTED WITH AUTHORITY TO LEAD

1 LEADERS OF MANKIND ARE APPOINTED BY ALLAH AND GUIDED BY ALLAH. THAT IS, ALLAH DID NOT LEAVE MANKIND TO CHOOSE ITS OWN LEADERS.

... He said: Lo! I have appointed thee [Abraham] a leader for mankind.....(2:124)
And We made them chiefs who guide by Our command. (21:73; see also 32:24)
... We bestowed on them [the house of Abraham] a mighty kingdom. (4:54)

2 THE PROPHETS OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK ARE ALL DESCENDED FROM ONE FAMILY, PREFERRED ABOVE ALL OTHERS AND APPOINTED LEADERS FOR MANKIND.

Lo! Allah preferred Adam and Noah and the Family of Abraham and the Family of 'Imran above (all His) creatures. They were descendants one of another.....(3:33-34)
... O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above (all) the women of creation (3:42)
.....I am only a messenger of thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a faultless [pure] son. (19:19)
... He said: Lo! I have appointed thee [Abraham] a leader for mankind. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring (will there be leaders)? He said: My covenant includeth not wrong-doers. (2:124)
And We verily sent Noah and Abraham and placed the Prophethood and the Scripture among their seed.....(57:26)
We gave unto Moses the Scripture, and We appointed it a guidance for the Children of Israel.....(They were) the seed of those whom We carried (in the ship) along with Noah.....(17:2-3)
These [Zachariah, his son John, Jesus (son of Mary -- sister of Aaron), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Ishmael, Idris] areof the seed of Adam and of those whom We carried (in the ship) with Noah, and of the seed of Abraham and Israel, and from among those whom We guided and chose.....(19:58)
[Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elias, Lot, Ishmael, Elisha, Iohah] ...With some of their forefathers and their offspring and their brethren;Those are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood.....(6:84-90)

3 ONLY THE PURE ARE ALLOWED TO LEAD; THE IMPURE ARE NOT GRANTED THE AUTHORITY. EVEN THE HOLY PROPHET IS NOT TO OBEY A SINNER AND WE, NOT TO OBEY DISBELIEVERS.

... He said: Lo! I have appointed thee [Abraham] a leader for mankind. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring (will there be leaders)? He said: *My covenant includeth not wrong-doers.* (2.124)

... But if these [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elias, Lot, Ishmael, Elisha, Johah and some of their forefathers, offspring and brethren] disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it [scripture and *command* and prophethood] to a people *who will not be disbelievers* therein. (6:89)

... and [Mohammad] obey *not from among them (man) a sinner* or an ungrateful one. (76:24; see also 33:1, 33:48) So *obey not the disbelievers.....* (25:52; see also 18:28)

O ye who believe! *Obey Allah*, and *obey the messenger* and those of you who are in authority;..... (4:59)

[If "those who are in authority" were also not pure, like Allah and the Messenger, then, to ensure they were not being misled, the believers would need to have more knowledge than "those in authority" and thus render them redundant.]

CONCLUSION

Allah appointed purified leaders for mankind and instructed us to not follow those who sin.

COMMENTARY TO THREAD I

Note firstly that, Allah informs us that He does not change His practices:

Such is the way of God concerning those who passed away before, *and never shall you find in the way of God any change.* (Qur'an 33:62, S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali translation)

As set out from the verses cited, prior to Prophet Mohammad, Allah limited "command" or "leadership for mankind" exclusively to those who were either purified, faultless, righteous, not among the wrong-doers or disbelievers, and so forth. Then, consistent with this historical practice, Allah, in his last and final revelation (i.e. the Qur'an), instructs mankind not to obey those who have sinned or who are disbelievers. More particularly, in verse 4:59, Allah instructs those who believe to follow Him, the Prophet and "those of you who are in authority."

Exactly who are "those in authority" has been the subject of much debate, with the Sunni insisting they may be any ruler while the Shia insisting they may only be someone pure and faultless since it makes little sense for Allah to command mankind to follow Allah and the Prophet, both of whom are pure and faultless, as well as any other ruler irrespective of their character or virtue or faith or knowledge. For, it is self-evident that if "those who are in authority" were also not pure, like Allah and the Messenger, they will make mistakes and, thus by definition, cannot be rightly guided. Consequently, to avoid being misled by such leaders, others with more knowledge would have to double-check them rendering such leaders redundant and undermining the legitimacy of their claim as rightly guided leadership.

Nevertheless, leaving aside the rational arguments as to who "those in authority" may or may not be, our methodology, when faced with conflicting interpretations, is to invoke 4:82 and see if other verses bring clarity to what is intended. If the Sunni position is correct, and "those in authority" neither have to be pure and faultless nor be of the same family from which those with "command" and "leadership for mankind" were previously appointed, then this would be, as per the verses cited:

- i) inconsistent with Allah's final command in the Qur'an not to obey those have sinned or who were disbelievers and render it impossible to follow,
- ii) inconsistent with Allah's steadfast, unyielding practice -- going as far back as the Qur'an speaks to -- to appoint mankind's leadership for him,
- iii) inconsistent with Allah's steadfast, unyielding practice -- going as far back as the Qur'an speaks to -- to vest leadership only in the pure and the faultless, and
- iv) inconsistent with Allah's steadfast, unyielding practice -- going as far back as the Qur'an speaks to -- to vest leadership with the righteous of the same family.

Furthermore and notwithstanding the above, the Sunni position -- that "those in authority" do not need to be pure and faultless -- is just *an interpretation* since there aren't, to my knowledge, any verses in the Qur'an stating that Allah left mankind free to choose their own leaders and/or that mankind's kind leadership do not have to be pure and faultless (and breaking with His historical practices of ii, iii and iv above and in contradiction to verse 33:62). On the other hand, the verses of the Thread speak directly to and establish the contrary. It is self-evident what is explained, understandable and corroborated by several verses takes precedence over an interpretation, with no corresponding verses to substantiate the interpretation.

Since the interpretation allowing "those in authority" to be impure, generates all these (and other) inconsistencies while the contrary interpretation clears them all, then by verse 4:82 -- that the Qur'an is free of any inconsistencies -- the acceptable interpretation is that "those in authority" must be the pure.

Since we are unable to judge -- perfectly and without error -- who are the pure, Thread III will address the apparently impossible command not to follow disbelievers or those who have sinned. Indeed, Allah has said He will judge wherein we differ (42:10, 22:67-69, 5:48, 39:46, 6:164, etc.) thus precluding us from even making such assessments.

THREAD II

THE QUR'AN ON INTERPRETING IT AND

ON THOSE VESTED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE TO DO SO

4 THE EXPLANATION OF THE QUR'AN WILL COME FROM ALLAH AND WE ARE TO FOLLOW IT.

Lo! upon Us (resteth) the putting together thereof and the reading thereof. And when We read it, follow thou the reading; Then lo! upon Us (resteth) the explanation thereof. (75:17-19)

ALTHOUGH, EVERYONE CAN UNDERSTAND PARTS OF THE QUR'AN,

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - they are the substance of the Book ... (3:7)

5 THE QUR'AN IS, NEVERTHELESS, "FULLY EXPLAINED".

... He it is Who hath revealed unto you (this) Scripture, fully explained? ... (6:114)

A scripture whereof the verses are expounded, ... for people who have knowledge. (41:3; see also 29:49, 6:98, 6:105)

6 BUT ONLY THE (A) KNOWLEDGEABLE AND (B) PURIFIED ARE RIGHTLY GUIDED TO EXPLAIN IT.

(a) ... clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge, ... (29:49; see also 41:3, 6:98, 6:105)

(a) ... and others (which are) allegorical.....None knoweth its explanation save Allah and those who are of sound instruction.....(3:7 Mir Ahmed Ali)

(b) Nay, I swear by the places of the stars.....That (this) is indeed a noble Qur'an In a Book kept hidden Which none toucheth save the purified. (56:75-80)

(b) Those who believe and obscure not their belief by wrong doing,.....they are rightly guided. (6:82)

JUST AS AFORETIME, ONLY THE PURE AND RIGHTEOUS WERE THE RIGHTLY GUIDED.

... and never shall you find in the way of God any change. (33:62 Mir Ahmed Ali)

(And it was said unto his [Zachariah's] son): O John! Hold fast the Scripture. And We gave him wisdom when a child ... and purity.....(19:12-13)

... that I may bestow on thee [Mary] a faultless son (19:19) ... And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom.....(3:48)

... We bestowed upon the house of Abraham (of old) the Scripture and wisdom.....(4:54)

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and We established the Prophethood and the Scripture among his seed, ... and lo! in the Hereafter he verily is among the righteous. (29:27)

And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good. And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elias. Each one (of them) was of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot With some of their forefathers and their offspring and their brethren; and We chose them and guided them

unto a straight path.....Those [see 6:84-90 in Thread I] are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood....But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein. Those are they whom Allah guideth, so follow their guidance. (6:84-90)

CONCLUSION

The Qur'an is "fully explained" but only the purified are rightly guided and have that full explanation.

COMMENTARY TO THREAD II

Since this thread is concerned with the question of how we are to acquire the correct meaning of the Qur'an, as explained previously, it is self-evident that the verses which will provide the answer must themselves not be among the ambiguous verses for otherwise we have an intractable paradox: the Qur'an's instructions on how to obtain the correct meaning of itself cannot be understood because the instructions themselves are ambiguous. Therefore, out of necessity, we have no option but to take all verses relevant to answering this question at their face value, at least as far as their interpretation is relevant for this issue.

When it comes to acquiring the correct meaning of the Qur'an there are three key questions:

- a) Is the Qur'an fully understandable by all?
- b) If not, then are the parts which are not understandable by everyone understood by anyone, other than Allah?
- c) If they are, how can we identify them?

With respect to question (a), verse 3:7 explicitly states that some verses of the Qur'an are plain to understand, while others are allegorical, therefore questions (b) and (c) become pertinent.

With respect to question (b) several verses cited clearly indicate that some do indeed understand the whole Qur'an. In particular verses 29:49, 56:75-80 and 75:17-19, which are discussed below.

VERSES 3:7 (FIRST HALF) AND 29:49

Firstly, from the first part of 3:7 we know parts of the Qur'an are plain for everyone to understand and therefore confirm there is a common base of knowledge everyone has in order to understand those clear parts, yet 29:49 (and 41:3, 6:98, 6:105) speaks of a special group who have been granted additional knowledge to make the Qur'an "clear". Since this additional knowledge is not needed to understand the plain parts (because everyone can already understand them) it is reasonable to assume the knowledge is for understanding the ambiguous parts mentioned in 3:7, which not everyone can understand. Having such knowledge to understand those parts, would make the Qur'an, for them, fully explained just as 6:114 says the Qur'an is.

VERSES 56:75-80

Similarly verses 56:75-80 speak of the Qur'an being hidden which none can touch except the purified. It is self-evident that this cannot refer "touching" the physical Qur'an simply because many have defiled the physical Qur'an and such people are not considered "pure" by any definition. Nevertheless, Allah has said the Qur'an has been hidden from everyone except the pure which means, therefore, some other attribute of the Qur'an and not the physical Qur'an is hidden. The question is what attribute is not hidden for the purified?

Thread I set out that, prior to Prophet Mohammad, Allah reserved leadership only for the pure. Similarly, Allah informs us in the verses cited in this thread, that, in the past, scripture and guidance (i.e. knowledge) was also only vested with the pure. Consistent with this, in this, His final revelation, Allah confirms, once and for all, in 6:82, only the pure are rightly guided (i.e. have knowledge of scripture). In other words, only the pure have ever had, or ever will have, that special knowledge of scripture -- over and above what everyone already has -- that makes them rightly guided.

Summarising the above we have:

- i) In the past, only the pure were ever vested with knowledge of scripture and rightly guided.
- ii) Only the pure will ever be rightly guided (and thus have the knowledge of scripture to be rightly guided).
- iii) The Qur'an is fully explained and also, per 29:49 (and other verses listed), a special group of people is vested with additional knowledge that makes the Qur'an "clear" to them. In other words, they are vested knowledge of scripture and would thus be rightly guided.
- iv) The Qur'an is not "hidden" for the pure. In other words, the pure (who are rightly guided by definition) are vested with knowledge of scripture.

It is self-evident then that those with the knowledge of scripture which makes the Qur'an clear to them, are the pure. Or, in the converse, what is hidden about the Qur'an (per 56:75-80) for all except the pure, is knowledge of scripture.

Finally, verses 75:17-19 inform us we are to only follow His explanation of the Qur'an. Clearly, the plain verses mentioned in 3:7 above do not require Allah's explanation, and so the explanations spoken of in 75:17-19 must refer to the explanations of allegorical verses. Therefore it is self-evident if none are vested with that knowledge, we can not get His explanation that He has asked us follow. As we know, and also set out above, Allah speaks to us by vesting knowledge of scripture with the pure and so when the pure -- who have been granted that knowledge which makes the Qur'an clear to them -- explain the Qur'an to us, they are explaining it to us the way Allah wishes it to be explained, providing us with His explanation that we are to follow, exactly as described in 75:17-19.

VERSE 3:7 (SECOND HALF)

Finally, we come to the second half of verse 3:7, a verse which like 4:59 of Thread I has been the subject of much debate between the Sunni and Shia. The disagreement arises, quite literally, over the placement of a full stop. The Sunni version of the verse is:

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - they are the substance of the Book - and others (which are) allegorical.....None knoweth its [the allegorical verses'] explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord;

but only men of understanding really heed. (Qur'an 3:7, Pickthall)

While the Shia version of the ending is:

... None knoweth its [the allegorical verses'] explanation save Allah and those who are of sound instruction. They say: 'We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord' but only men of understanding really heed. (Qur'an 3:7, Pickthall, modified according to Shia belief)

The difference (underlined) being whether Allah alone knows the meaning of the allegorical verses, or Allah and "those of sound instruction" -- or "those firmly rooted in knowledge" as given in other translations -- both know the meanings.

As before, when faced with such conflicts our methodology is to invoke 4:82 and see if other verses bring clarity to what is intended, rather than resorting to parsing the Arabic or examining the historical record.

If the Sunni position is correct -- that everyone has the knowledge to understand the plain verses of the Qur'an but only Allah knows the meaning of the allegorical verses -- then this would be:

- i) Inconsistent with 6:114 which informs us that the Qur'an is fully explained.
- ii) Inconsistent with verses 29:49 (and other verses listed) and 56:75-80 which, as explained above, inform us that some -- the pure -- have been granted special knowledge to understand the whole Qur'an.
- iii) Inconsistent with verses 75:17-19 which direct us to only follow Allah's explanation of the Qur'an. However this command is impossible to follow since He has not vested anyone with the knowledge to provide us with His explanation.

On the other hand, if the Shia version is correct -- that there are some vested with knowledge to understand the allegorical -- this would corroborate and be consistent with:

- i) verse 6:114 that the Qur'an is fully explained,
- ii) verses 29:49 (and the other verses listed) and 56:75-80 which, as explained above, inform us that some -- the pure -- have been granted special knowledge to understand the whole Qur'an,
- iii) verse 75:17-19 which, as explained above, directs us to only follow Allah's explanation of the Qur'an, which is only possible if some are vested with His knowledge to pass on to us.

Furthermore and notwithstanding all of the above, the Sunni position -- that only Allah knows the meaning of the allegorical verses -- is just an *interpretation* of 3:7 since there aren't, to my knowledge, any verses in the Qur'an stating only Allah knows the meaning of the allegorical verses. On the other hand, the verses of the Thread speak directly to and establish the contrary. And so, as with Thread I, what is explained, understandable and corroborated by several verses takes precedence over an interpretation, with no corresponding verses to substantiate the interpretation.

Since the Sunni interpretation of 3:7, generates all these inconsistencies while the Shia interpretation clears them all then by verse 4:82 -- that the Qur'an is free of any inconsistencies -- the acceptable interpretation is that Allah and others know the meaning of the allegorical verses.

From the above, we now also have the answer to question (c), posed at the start of the commentary for this thread, and the identifying characteristic of those who have the knowledge to understand the whole Qur'an is they are the purified. As was pointed out with leadership, in Thread I, it is self-evident that if who interpret the Qur'an were also not pure, like the Messenger, they will make mistakes and, thus by definition, cannot be rightly guided. Consequently, to avoid being misled by such interpreters, others with more knowledge would have to double-check them would not only render such interpreters redundant but also undermine the legitimacy of their claim to interpret as the rightly guided.

However, as with Thread I, we are again left with an seemingly impossible situation of knowing who are the pure.

THREAD III

THE QUR'AN ON THE PURIFIED

7 ONLY ALLAH PURIFIES.

Hast thou not seen those who praise themselves for purity? Nay, Allah purifieth whom He will ... (4:49; see also 24:21)

8 FROM THREADS I & II WE LEARN THAT ALLAH HAS VESTED TWO AUTHORITIES, IN PERPETUITY, ONLY WITH THE PURIFIED:

A) LEADERSHIP: *We are to only obey the pure and only the pure from one family have been given the authority to lead.*

B) KNOWLEDGE: *The Qur'an is fully explained but only the purified have the knowledge and are rightly guided.*

9 SINCE WE CANNOT JUDGE WHO ARE THE PURIFIED AMONG US, ALLAH MUST IDENTIFY THEM. THE QUR'AN DOES SO, ONCE, NAMING ONLY THE FAMILY OF THE PROPHET.

Allah's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.

(33:33)

JUST AS AFORETIME, THE QUR'AN ONLY IDENTIFIES THE DESCENDANTS OF THE PROPHETS AS PURIFIED.

... and never shall you find in the way of God any change. (33:62 Mir Ahmed Ali)

And remember Our servants, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, men of power and insight. Surely we purified them by a pure quality ...

(38:45-46 Shakir)

(And it was said unto his [Zachariah's] son): O John! Hold the Scripture. And We gave him wisdom when a child ... and purity ... (19:12-13)

And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above (all) the women of creation. (3:42) ... that I may bestow on thee [Mary] a faultless son (19:19)

10 LOVE OF THE PROPHET'S NEAR RELATIVES WAS THE ONLY REQUEST MADE OF US.

... Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near relatives; ... (42:23 Shakir)

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you) and be not divided ... (3:103 Yusuf Ali)

11 FINALLY, ALLAH PROMISES HE WILL GUARD HIS MESSAGE.

THAT IS, BOTH THE TEXT ITSELF AND THE "ROPE" OF INTERPRETERS MUST BE GUARDED.

Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian. (15:9 Shakir)

CONCLUSION

Since we require the purified to both lead us *and* interpret the Qur'an for us (because *only* the pure are rightly guided and vested with these two authorities)

and since *only* The Family of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) are *identified as purified* in the Qur'an, a member of his family must be *present and manifest* to us, in perpetuity, to execute these authorities.

Or as the Qur'an says:

And We have vested everything in a manifest Imam. (36:12 Ismaili)

COMMENTARY TO THREAD III

There is no disagreement among all Muslims -- Sunni and Shia -- that:

- i) Only Allah purifies.
- ii) The Prophets, being purified by Allah and having knowledge of scripture, are rightly guided.
- iii) That the Prophets mentioned in the Qur'an -- including Prophet Muhammad -- are from the same "seed," i.e. family line.
- iv) That Allah promised Abraham leadership among the righteous of his "seed."
- v) As per verse 33:33, the *Ahl al-bayt*, i.e. the People of the Prophet's Household, are purified by Allah.

What is contested is whether or not all of the Prophet's wives and/or the progeny of the Prophet are included as members of the *Ahl al-bayt* and thus purified.

According to the Shia, citing the historical record, when 33:33 was revealed the Prophet indicated that along with himself, only Hazrat Ali and his wife -- the Prophet's daughter, Fatima -- and their two sons, Hussan and Hussein, were his *Ahl al-bayt*. Prophetic tradition -- such as those from Ghadir Khumm discussed earlier -- extend the *Ahl al-bayt* to include the Shia of Imams arising from Hussein's progeny. The Sunni disagree. They include some or all of the Prophet's wives and exclude any further progeny from the *Ahl al-bayt*. Whether or not the Prophet's wives are included as part of the *Ahl al-bayt* is not relevant to the issue of Imamatus, but the Prophet's progeny is of course fundamental, for if they are, then according to 33:33 they are purified and have automatic right to leadership and are vested with the knowledge to interpret the Qur'an.

As was done with Threads I and II, when faced with conflicting interpretations, our methodology is to invoke 4:82 and see if

other verses can resolve the conflict.

Observation 9 summarises the conclusions of Threads I and II, that (a) on the matter of leadership we are instructed to obey the pure and (b) on the matter of interpretation of the Qur'an, it is fully explained and that explanation lies with the purified. Leaving aside the issue of the Prophet's progeny, the fact that the Sunni position doesn't even insist that the purified are required to fulfil these two conditions is itself inconsistent with the Qur'an. The question, therefore, is not if the purified must be present among each generation, but rather, who are they?

It is self-evident that, during the Prophet's lifetime, these two conditions were met by the Prophet himself. Similarly it is also self-evident that:

- i) if each generation after the Prophet are to obey Allah's instructions to only follow purified leaders, and
- ii) if the Qur'an is to be fully explained, in perpetuity, as Allah promises,

then a purified person must live with each generation after the Prophet. That two conditions require the purified to satisfy them doubly confirms the necessity of a purified among each generation.

As Observation 10 notes, we must be informed by Allah who are purified since we are not able to make that judgement by ourselves since our knowledge is limited and not perfect. At the Prophet's time, Allah only identified the *Ahl al-bayt* -- i.e. the People of [Mohammad's] House -- as purified. If the purified, who are to fulfil the above two conditions in each generation, do not come from the *Ahl al-bayt*, then we have no way of identifying them -- since Allah doesn't inform us that any other family will be purified after the Prophet -- and thus it becomes impossible to fulfil or meet the above two conditions. This would be a significant inconsistency in the Qur'an.

On the other hand, Threads I and II expound -- in consistency with the Shia position that purified in each generation are part of the *Ahl al-bayt* -- that, historically (going as far back as the Qur'an speaks to) all the purified have descended from, or are members of, one "house," i.e. family, and furthermore, Allah promised that He would continue to appoint the righteous from the same "house" (the House of Abraham) as leaders

for Mankind, i.e. they will be the purified, per Thread I. And consistent with this and verse 33:62 -- where Allah informs us that He does not change His practices -- there aren't, to my knowledge, any verses in which Allah indicates He has terminated this practice or rescinded his promise to Abraham and therefore we have no reason whatsoever to assume the purified will not continue to be appointed from one family -- indeed the same family they were appointed from prior to the Prophet. Failure, therefore, to find such a continuous lineage of the purified after the Prophet, descended from the Prophet, would again result in a serious failing in the order the Qur'an lays down for mankind.

On the other hand that there is such a lineage, and critically only one such claimed lineage of "qualified rightly guided leadership", i.e. leadership appointed by Allah, at the very least corroborates or at best confirms the Qur'an (depending on one's insight into the evidence). That lineage is the lineage of the Shia Ismaili Imams, of whom His Highness the Aga Khan is the 49th hereditary Imam. As his predecessor, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, said:

If those who believe that Hazrat Ali was the rightful successor of the Prophet to be the *Ulu'l-amr* Menkom [then they] must accept the principle of that succession for the same reasons they accept in the case of Hazrat Ali and his rightful Imam descendants. [T]he Spiritual Imamat remained with Hazrat Ali and remains with his direct descendants always alive till the Day of Judgement. That a spiritual succession to the Imam makes the Imam the *Ulu'l-amr* Menkom always according to the Qur'an and though he has his moral claim to the Khalifat as well, always he can, like Hazrat Ali himself owing to the conditions of the world, accept and support such worldly authorities as the Imam believes help the cause of Islam. (12)

Observations 11 and 12, and verse 36:12 quoted in the conclusion of the thread are not critical to the argument but offered merely to illustrate how allegorical verses -- when viewed through the prism of the foregoing -- assume a corroborative air or quality, consistent with the necessity of a lineage of purified, descended from the Prophet, living among each generation.

CONCLUSION AND GHADIR KHUMM REVISITED

The point of departure for this exploration was the Ismaili position that the Shia's espousal to the right of the Imam was first and foremost rooted in the Qur'an and that Prophetic traditions only reinforced, or corroborated, that understanding of the Qur'an. Threads I, II and III set out and establish, from the Qur'an alone, that understanding, employing verse 4:82 -- that the Qur'an is free of inconsistency -- as the arbiter to resolve differences in interpretation, as opposed to the never ending debates of experts over the Arabic or historical record. Specifically, the threads establish that:

- i) Allah appointed purified leaders for mankind and instructed us to not follow those who sin.
- ii) The Qur'an is "fully explained" but only the purified are rightly guided and have that full explanation.
- iii) Since we require the purified to both lead us *and* interpret the Qur'an for us (because *only* the pure are rightly guided and vested with these two authorities) and since *only* The Family of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) are *identified as purified* in the Qur'an, a member of his family must be *present and manifest* to us, in perpetuity, to execute these authorities.

It would now be instructive, however, to revisit the Ismaili position quoted earlier, this time with a view to seeing if, and how, Prophetic traditions do indeed reinforce or corroborate the Qur'anic position set out in the Threads. It is self-evident that the traditions of Ghadir Khumm stated earlier corroborate and reinforce perfectly the position of the Qur'an put forth in the threads:

- i) The continuity of Allah's heretofore existing practice of appointing leadership for mankind.
- ii) The continuity of Allah's heretofore existing practice of vesting that leadership only among the chosen from one family.
- iii) The continuity of Allah's heretofore existing practice of vesting knowledge of scripture and rightly guiding only among the chosen of that same family.
- iv) The appointment of a continuous purified lineage so that every generation has a pure leader among them to follow, as ordered by Allah, and also access to the explanation of the Qur'an in full.

Notwithstanding the internal consistency of the Qur'anic position presented, the position makes a testable demand: the insistence of an uninterrupted, hereditary lineage not only going back to and initiated by the Prophet, but also claiming, without exception, to be the lineage necessary to meet the dual conditions of the Qur'an: (a) we are to only follow the purified from the family given authority to lead and (b) the promise that the Qur'an is fully explained.

And so it is, of course, the *continuity* of this purified lineage, present and manifest among mankind, that is the final validation of not only the Qur'anic position set out in Threads I, II, and III but also of the Prophetic traditions. That for 1,400 years such a lineage is claimed and that only one such lineage makes the claim -- namely the Ismaili Imam -- is therefore the final validation. Perhaps understanding this indispensability, this pre-eminence, this axiomatic necessity of the lineage's *uninterrupted continuity*, allows us better understand the Aga Khan's 2005 remark that:

The Imam is a transitory being, who forms a link between the past and the future. For this reason, ensuring the *continuity of the institution* and its ability to fulfil its role is what my life is all about. [Emphasis added] (10)

In conclusion, allow me to quote and repeat myself:

Granted, short of Allah Himself confirming an interpretation of the Qur'an as correct, any interpretation by definition relies on the circumstantial evidence of "logical" deductions or argument which some may find compelling, or perhaps even conclusive, but others not so. However, as Henry David Thoreau stated about the circumstantial evidence that milk distributors in the 1800s were diluting their milk from the Cochituate River: "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find trout in the milk" (9).

Nevertheless, both the quality of a deduction, argument or even a proof, such as those presented, and ability for another to confirm the same is dependent on one's knowledge and, in particular, one's insight into that knowledge.

NOTES

(i) "All Shi'i groups including the Isma'ili da'wah of the Fatimid period considered Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib [Hazrat Ali] as the first Imam, his elder son Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali as the second Imam, and his younger son Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali as the third Imam. The Isma'ili thinkers do differentiate al-Hasan from the rest of the Imams because he was an Entrusted Imam (imam mustawda) while Imam al-Husayn and the Imams succeeding him in his lineage are Permanent Imams (imam mustaqarr). For this reason, the

Present Imam – Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV -- is today reckoned as the forty-ninth Imam in the chain of Permanent Imams when al-Hasan is not counted in the list." (11)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An honours graduate of Simon Fraser University in Computer Science and Mathematics, Mohib has been involved in software development and the IT industry since the 1980s. His current project, MasterFile, is a state-of-the-art evidence system for academic researchers, investigators, and litigators. Mohib has also been a keen amateur astronomer for almost 40 years and his religious interests lie in the reconciliation of faith and reason.

OTHER ARTICLES BY THE AUTHOR

Truth, Reality and Religion: On the use of Knowledge and Intellect in Deen and Dunia: <http://bit.ly/1yGcCz5>

The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof

I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat 'Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet's daughter.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Letter to International Islamic Conference, Amman, July 2005, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The purpose of this article is to present the independent historical documentation that proves (as far as the historical method can show) that Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni is the direct lineal descendant of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib in an unbroken line of descent.

Today there are many Muslims known as Sayyids and Shariffs who claim direct descent from Prophet Muhammad. The "proof" that a Sayyid or Shariff family provides for their lineage usually consists of just a family tree. Sometimes, a small village or community or scholar(s) also testify to the Sayyid's or Shariff's lineage. But beyond the family tree, the Sayyids and Shariffs do not offer any more evidence. In comparison, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni has a full family tree of his ancestry (the 49 Imams) – which appears in numerous centuries-old Ismaili texts from Persia, Central Asia, and India. Secondly, in addition to the family tree, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni and each of his ancestors have had an Ismaili community in every generation that testifies to and recognizes their Fatimid 'Alid lineage. Thirdly, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's lineage can be independently historically corroborated through third-party historical documentation (centuries-old texts, documents, tombstones, genealogy trees, treatises, histories, etc.), much of which has been produced by non-Ismailis. **Much of this independent historical documentation for each generation of the lineage of 49 Ismaili Imams is presented and summarized in this article. The article provides a historical summary of the life of each of the 49 Imams and lists the major primary historical sources that mention the existence of each Imam in the lineage up to the present day, followed by citing the academic secondary studies that document these primary sources.** This is the first article that presents a historical documentation of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's lineage and we reference major academic publications on Ismaili history throughout. Before going into the historical documentation of the Imam's lineage, we will first present a theological "proof" of Shah Karim al-Husayni's Imamate that does not require independent historical documentation for the Imam's entire lineage.

A. The Theological Proof of the Imamate

The Muslims are divided into two main branches: the Shia Muslims and the Sunni Muslims. I suppose one could compare it to the division in the Christian Church between Protestants and Catholics. The main difference is that the

Shi'a accept the members of the Prophet's family as the rightful successors to the Prophet in his religious heritage...My family and myself trace our family line back to the Prophet and are accepted therefore by the community as the Imams.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Pacemakers – A Man of the World: The Aga Khan 1967, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shi'i Ismaili Muslims. By defining himself as the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni claims the following roles and status:

- **the holder of a divinely-ordained leadership office**, called the Imamate, which succeeds to the spiritual and moral authority of the Prophet Muhammad
- **responsible for providing an infallible interpretation of Islam** with respect to any time/context of human history and with respect to the esoteric meaning of the Revelation to Muhammad.
- **the spiritual intercessor/intermediary between humanity and God** with respect to divine guidance, authority, blessings and purification (the Prophet himself performed this function)
- **the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad through an unbroken line of descent** going back to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (the paternal cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) and the Prophet's daughter Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra.

A pivotal issue discussed today among both Ismailis and non-Ismailis is the question of "proof" for the Imamate of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. In general, there are several ways or methods of establishing evidence to prove that the Aga Khan's claim to Imamate is true and legitimate. Ismaili Gnosis' contemporary reconstruction of the traditional "Proof of Imamate" is as follows:

A. Establishing the Existence of God and the Revelation to Prophet Muhammad:

Step 1: There is one absolutely transcendent and eternal God who originates and continuously sustains all realities ([Towards Validating Manifest Imamate From The Qur'an Alone](#) God's Existence).

Step 2: God continually bestows divine guidance upon all created beings; there is always at least one divinely-inspired human being in every generation who, by this divine inspiration, comprehends ALL of God's guidance for human wellbeing and communicates this guidance to humanity; Prophet Muhammad was the possessor and transmitter of divine guidance during his lifetime and the Qur'an, which is inimitable and miraculous speech, is the outward public sign of his divine inspiration ([Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#)). For evidence that Prophet Muhammad was a real historical figure and that the Qur'an as it exists today contains his utterances, **10 Surprising Facts to Know Before Reading the Qur'an**.

Step 3: Prophet Muhammad's spiritual functions and duties, as laid out in the Qur'an, include being: the holder of divine authority on God's behalf, the mediator and intercessor between God and humanity, the channel of God's blessings,

favours, and purification, and the locus of manifestation of God's names and attributes; by logical necessity, there must be a divinely-inspired successor to the Prophet's religious authority and spiritual functions that he performed over his 23 year mission ([The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad's Special Theological Status per the Qur'an](#)).

B. Establishing Hereditary Imamate in the progeny of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali:

Step 4: Prophet Muhammad's successors must be divinely-appointed from his family and line of descendants, just as God appointed the successors of past Prophets and Messengers discussed in the Qur'an, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Imran, Zakariyyah, etc. from among their family members and descendants

Step 5: Prophet Muhammad appointed his paternal cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib to be his successor as the master of all the believers after him (**Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature**).

C. Establishing the Imamate of the lineage of Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir:

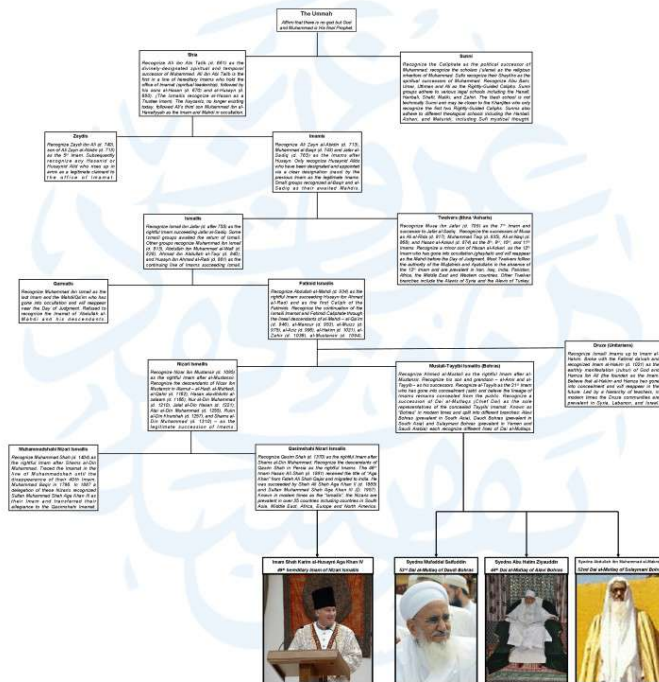
Step 6: Among the descendants of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the succession to the Prophet or the Imamate, continues in the line of Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq ([Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#) for the Succession of Imam Isma'il).

Step 7: Among the descendants of Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Imamate continues through Nizar ibn al-Mustansir because Nizar was officially designated as the Imam by his father Imam Mustansir bi'llah (as attested to in multiple historical sources including Nuwayri, Ibn Athir, Maqrizi, etc. and academic studies, viz. Daftary, Walker, Wiley, Fyzee, etc.).

D. Establishing the Imamate of Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan:

Step 8: *If* the hereditary Imamate in the progeny of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali is true, and *if* this hereditary Imamate was designated to the line of Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir, **then, the true Imam in any given period of human history must claim and trace his descent and Imamate from both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir**. Consequently, any Imamate claimant who does not trace his Imamate to both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir is not the true Imam.

Step 9: In the present day and time, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is [The Shia Imammat: A Timeline of Major Divisions and Developments](#) who traces and claims his Imamate from both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir. Meanwhile the hidden Imam of the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'a descended from Musa Kazim instead Isma'il, and the concealed Imam of the Bohras descended from Must'ali instead of Nizar. Neither the Ithna 'Ashari nor the Bohra Imams claimed their respective Imamates through both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir.



Step 10: Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the only claimant to the Imamate who traces his lineage through both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir, is the true and legitimate Imam in direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Related Questions about Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV and Ismaili Doctrine:

- To learn about the personal life and daily schedule of the Aga Khan, including the many sacrifices he has made in performing the duties of the Imamate, read [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#).
- To see how Ismaili Muslims understand Tawhid (the Oneness of God), read [Beyond Personalist Theism and Modern Atheism](#).
- To understand the concept and basis of Ismaili Muslim interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'an, read [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#).
- To understand why Ismaili Muslim prayers seek the help and blessings of the Imams, read [Ya Ali Madad: The Rationale for Praying to God and Calling upon the Imams in Prayer](#).
- To get an idea of the 1,400 year history of persecution faced by the Ismaili Imams and the Ismaili communities, read [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#).

Please note that the above proof does not require you to independently historically corroborate the Aga Khan's claim to direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad. Once it is established theologically that there must always be a hereditary Imamate in the world from the direct lineal descent of Prophet Muhammad (whose descendants only come through Imam 'Ali), it is simply a

matter of confirming who the legitimate holder of this Imamatus actually is – since it is not possible for the line of Imamatus to just cease to exist. The above proof only requires you to historically corroborate and substantiate the specific Imamatus designation of Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir by their own fathers. Once these two designations are historically substantiated (which they are as per all the historical evidence), then the true Imam at any time (and this Imam always physically exists in the world) will always be a descendant of both Isma‘il and Nizar. **Because there is only one person claiming Imamatus from the line of both Isma‘il and Nizar and no other person in the world makes a counter-claim to the same Imamatus lineage, it logically follows that this one claimant – Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV – is the true Imam by logical necessity.** (If there were two or more claimants to the Ismaili-Nizari Imamatus, then the matter would be more complicated – but this is not the case). From this proof, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni’s Imamatus becomes established without the need to independently corroborate and confirm every single generation in his unbroken lineage back to Prophet Muhammad.

Nevertheless, for those who do not like “theological demonstration” and prefer a **purely historical approach to the Ismaili Imam’s lineage**, the historical documentation for the unbroken Fatimid ‘Alid lineage of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan is presented below.

B. The Historical Proof for Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni’s Unbroken Fatimid Lineage

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni consistently makes the public claim that he comes from an unbroken lineage of hereditary Imams going back to Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. For example, the following quotes from the Imam’s speeches and interviews (and those of his grandfather) present this claim:

Our family claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his beloved son-in-law Ali: and we are also descended from the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt.

(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, 7)

This Imamatus, which was Hazrat ‘Ali’s, descended through him in the sixth generation to Isma‘il from whom I myself claim my descent and my Imamatus.

(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I have been the bearer of the “Nur” a word which means “The Light”. The Nur has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet.

(1965: The Sunday Times Interview, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

My family and myself trace our family line back to the Prophet and are accepted therefore by the community as the Imams.

(1967: Documentary – Pacemakers: A Man of the World, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Ismailis are Shi‘ite Muslims and my family descends from Ali. I am the forty-ninth Imam after him.

(1975: L’Expansion Interview, Roger Priouret, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

There is a living Imam who traces his family back to Hazrat Ali.

(1985: Independent Television (ITV) Interview, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Ismailis are united by a common allegiance to the living hereditary Imam of the time in the progeny of Islam's last and final Prophet Muhammad.

(2005: The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam Foundation Stone Ceremony, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet's daughter."

(2005: Message to The International Islamic Conference, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I was born into a Muslim family, linked by heredity to Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him and his family).

(2007: Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po), Graduation Ceremony, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali's descendants, and the Ismailis are the only Shi'a Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself...It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.

(2010: Interview – The Power of Wisdom, Read at [Simerg](#))

Today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

(2014: Speech to Canadian Parliament & Senate, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The Ismailis are the only Muslim community that has been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from Prophet Muhammad.

(2015: Harvard University Jodidi Lecture, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

For each Imam, this article offers some information about their life and then lists the major primary historical sources and sometimes archaeological sources that document the existence of that Imam. **In general, this article summarizes historical documentation that confirms the historical existence of each of the 49 Imams in Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's unbroken lineage to Prophet Muhammad.** We have divided the history of the 49 Ismaili Imams into the below **ten periods**. Readers can *click* on each period or skip to a specific Imam, or they may scroll and skim through each Imam in historical order.

1. The Period of the Early Shi'i Imams:

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (632-661); Imam al-Husayn (661-680); Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (680-713); Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (713-743); Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (743-765); Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far (765-ca. 775); Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il (775-ca.806)

2. The Pre-Fatimid (First) Period of Concealment (Dawr al-Satr)

Imam 'Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Wafi (ca. 806-828); Imam Ahmad b. 'Abdullah al-Ta'qi (828-ca. 870); Imam al-Husayn b. 'Ahmad al-Radi (ca. 870-ca. 880-81)

3. The Fatimid Period of the Imam-Caliphs:

Imam al-Mahdi bi'llah (881-934); Imam al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah (934-946); Imam al-Mansur bi'llah (946-953); Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (953-975); Imam al-'Aziz

bi'llah (975-996); Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah (996-1021); Imam al-Zahir li-'izaz Din Allah (1021-1036); Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah (1036-1094); Imam Nizar al-Mustafa Din Allah (1094-1095)

4. The Post-Fatimid (Second) Period of Concealment (Dawr al-Satr):

Imam al-Hadi (1095 – ca. 1132); Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (ca. 1132-ca. 1161-62); Imam al-Qahir (ca. 1161–ca. 1164)

5. The Alamut Period in Persia

Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam (1164-1166); Imam 'Ala Muhammad (1166-1210); Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (1210-1221); Imam 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad (1221-1255); Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah (1255-1257)

6. The Post-Alamut (Third) Period of Concealment (Dawr al-Satr):

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (1257-1310);
Imam Qasimshah (1310-1368); Imam Islamshah (1368-1424); Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (1424-1464)

7. The Anjudan Period of Revival:

Imam Mustansir bi'llah II (1464-1480); Imam 'Abd al-Salam Shah (1480-1494);
Imam Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi'llah III (1494-1498)

8. The Safavid (Fourth) Period of Concealment

Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali (1498 – ca. 1509); Imam Murad Mirza (ca. 1509-1574); Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali Khalil Allah I (1574-1634); Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali (1634-1671); Imam Khalil Allah II (1671-1680); Imam Shah Nizar II (1680-1722); Imam Sayyid 'Ali (1722-1754)

9. The Post-Safavid Period of Re-Emergence:

Imam Hasan 'Ali (ca. 1736-ca. 1747); Imam Qasim 'Ali (ca. 1747-ca. 1756); Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali (ca. 1756-1792); Imam Khalil Allah III (1792-1817)

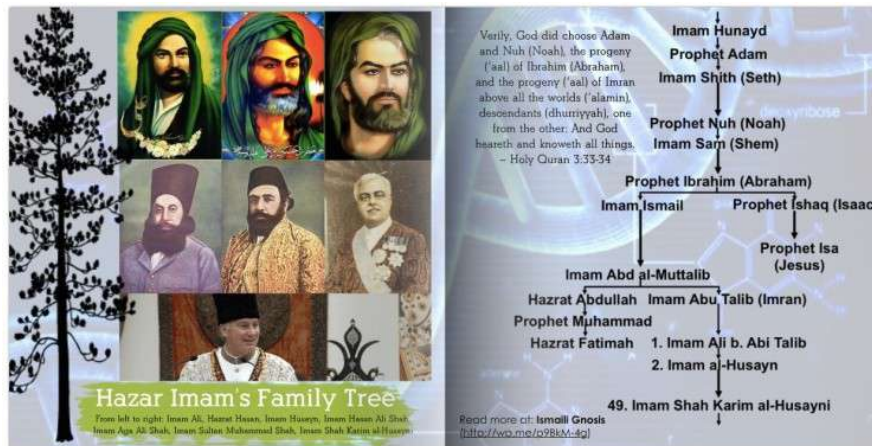
10. The Modern Period: The Age of the Aga Khans

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I (1817-1881); Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885); Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1885-1957); Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (1957-present)

Please note that out of the 49 Ismaili Imams, **at least 11 Imams were killed or murdered [along with many family members]** (Imam 'Ali, Imam al-Husayn, Imam al-Hakim, Imam Nizar, Imam Hasan ala-dhikrihi al-salam, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, Imam Rukn al-Din Kurshah, Imam Qasimshah, Imam Murad Mirza, Imam Khalil Allah III), **3 Imams are suspected to have been murdered** (Imam Zayn al-Abidin, Imam al-Baqir, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq), **1 Imam survived an assassination attempt** (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah), and **8 Imams faced the prospect of being killed** (i.e. in combat, execution), and 18 Imams lived under persecution. **This means a total of at least 44 out of 49 Imams, that is 88% of the Ismaili Imams, lived through considerable danger and only about 5 Imams have lived in total safety.** Inevitably, this means that many of the Imams had to conceal themselves from the public for their own safety and continuation of the Imamatus lineage. Thus, some Imams' lives are better documented than others and for many

Imams there is little available on their life events. However, as you will see, there are historical sources testifying to the specific existence of the more clandestine Imams as well.

1. THE PERIOD OF THE EARLY SHI'Ī IMAMS:



Shi'ites believe that the religious authority of the Muslims goes back to Ali, who was the nephew of Muhammad and also his son-in-law. This authority has descended through Ali's descendants on the male side. Among the Shi'ite Muslims there have been controversies over the genealogy and the true succession over the centuries. Ismailis are Shi'ite Muslims and my family descends from Ali. I am the forty-ninth Imam after him.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(L'Expansion Interview March 1975, Read at NanoWisdoms)

1. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (632-661):



I swear by the Lord that I know fully well all the messages of God that the Holy Prophet (may the peace of God be upon him and his descendants) has received, the ways of fulfilment of promises made by God and of all the knowledge that science or philosophy could disclose. We, the progeny of the Holy Prophet (may the peace of God be upon him and his descendants), are the doors through which real wisdom and true knowledge will reach mankind: we are lights of religion.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib,
(Nahjul Balagha: Sermons, letters and saying of Hazrat Ali, tr. Jafery, Syed Mohammed Askari, Khutba 123, 91)

Both Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali, according to Arabian traditions and genealogy, are the direct descendants of Prophet Abraham through his son Mawlana Isma'il (see above image). Abraham himself is the direct descendant of Prophet Adam and Prophet Noah according to Islamic and Biblical sources. Imam

‘Ali b. Abi Talib was the first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad – their fathers were brothers and they had the same grandfather. **Imam ‘Ali later married Hazrat Fatimah, the Prophet’s daughter, and their children Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn were the only surviving male descendants of Muhammad.** Today, all living descendants of Prophet Muhammad trace their ancestry back to al-Hasan or al-Husayn. For example, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan traces its lineage back to Imam al-Hasan. **Today, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is called *al-Husayni* because his ancestry and lineage goes back to Imam al-Husayn.**

Imam ‘Ali rendered a number of unique and matchless services during the Prophet’s mission and he was first appointed by Muhammad as his successor before the Banu Hashim clan when ‘Ali was about ten years old. The Prophet designated Imam ‘Ali as his successor and the legitimate authority over the community after him on several occasions (reported by numerous Sunni sources as shown [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#)), the last of which was at Ghadeer Khum when the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed:

The Messenger of God, may God’s peace and benedictions be upon him and his progeny, said: **“O people! Verily, I am leaving behind two matters (*amrayn*) among you – if you follow them (the two) you will never go astray. These two are: the Book of God and my Ahlul Bayt, my ‘itrah.”**

Then he said thrice: “Do you know that I have more right over the believers (inni awla bi al-mu’minin) than they over themselves?”

The people said, “Yes.”

Then the Messenger of God, may God’s peace and benedictions be upon him and his progeny said, **“He whose *mawla* (master) I am, ‘Ali also is his *mawla* (master).”**

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn [Dar al-Ma’rifah li al-Tiba’ah wa al-Nashr: Beirut), vol. iii, pp. 109-110; For Sunni sources reporting this, see [here](#))

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, Shi’i and Sunni Muslims came to differ about the nature of religious authority and its legitimate possessors. Imam ‘Ali claimed to be the rightful temporal and religious leader after the Prophet despite the political authority being assumed by Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and later Uthman. **Even some of Imam ‘Ali’s early followers regarded him as “an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet”** (Maria Masse Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57). For example, one of Ali’s supporters who was also devoted to the Prophet said to him: “our opinion is your opinion and we are in the palm of your right hand” (Dakake 58). The early followers of ‘Ali saw his guidance as “right guidance” deriving from Divine support. In other words, ‘Ali’s guidance was seen as the expression of God’s will and the Qur’anic message. The expression Din ‘Ali (the religion of ‘Ali) was also used during his own lifetime by his followers. **This spiritual**

and religious authority of 'Ali was known as *walayah* and it was inherited by his successors, the Imams. Imam 'Ali eventually became the fourth Caliph during which he faced great opposition from the A'isha, the Prophet's wife and the Umayyad family led by Mu'awiyah, which led to the first civil wars. Imam 'Ali was murdered by a Kharijite while he prayed in the mosque of Kufa.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Ishaq (704-770), *Sirat Rasul Allah*, original copy lost but extracts preserved in Ibn Hisham (d. 833), *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyyah*, and al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*
- Kumayt (d. 743), *al-Hashimiyyat*
- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870), *Sahih Bukhari*
- Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Sahih Muslim*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 533; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 132-134)

2. Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (661-680)



This painting commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and the third imam, or leader, of the Shia Muslims. Source brooklynmuseum.org.

God gave preference to Muḥammad before all His creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After he had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him for Himself. **We are his family (*ahlihi*), those who possess his authority (*awliya'*), those who have been made his trustees (*awsiya'*), and his inheritors (*wuratha*); we are those who have more right to this position among the people than anyone else.**

Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali,
(al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, in Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 30)

Mu'awiya openly opposed and fought against the Caliphate of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. After the death of Imam 'Ali, his son Pir Imam al-Hasan succeeded to the Caliphate but – due to the weakness of his support and resources – had to abdicate the Caliphate to Mu'awiya on the condition that Yazid would not succeed to the Caliphate after him. However, Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan ensured that his son Yazīd succeeded him as Caliph – an event which directly contradicted the agreement that Pir Imam al-Hasan had made with Mu'awiya earlier. Unlike Mu'awiya, who was unrighteous but tried to keep the appearance of dignity to the Caliphate, Yazid was an open sinner and disgraced the position by his drinking of wine and many other sinful activities. **When Yazid succeeded as Caliph, he sought to gain the allegiance of Imam al-Husayn to legitimize his succession but the Imam refused to do so.** Meanwhile, the people of Kufa invited Imam al-Husayn to lead them.



Imam al-Husayn's family and companions surrounded by an Umayyad army numbering over 40,000 troops.

The Imam and his close family and companions were journeying from Makkah to Kufa and were intercepted by the Umayyad armies sent by Yazid and surrounded at the plains of Karbala. After cutting off their water supply for several days, the Umayyad armies engaged the Imam and his supporters in battle. **Outnumbered by an army of over twenty thousand men, Imam al-Husayn, his family, and supporters were inhumanly massacred and martyred in what became known as the Battle of Karbala.** The dead included the sons of Imām al-Husayn – among them a six month old infant 'Ali Asghar, the sons of Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, and the children of Imam al-Hasan. The only surviving male member of the Imam's family was his son Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin – who was sick during the battle and saved from execution due

to the intervention of [The Esoteric Feminine: Women in Ismaili History and Thought](#) – the sister of Imam al-Husayn.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Ishaq (704-770), *Sirat Rasul Allah*, original copy lost but extracts preserved in Ibn Hisham (d. 833), *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyyah*, and al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*
- Abu Miknaf (d. 774), *Kitab Maqatal al-Husayn*
- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870), *Sahih Bukhari*
- Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Sahih Muslim*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 533; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 132-136)

3. Imam 'Ali b. al-Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin (680-713)

It is because of us, the initiated Guides
That the sky does not come crashing down to earth,
That the beneficent rain falls from the sky
That mercy is spread...
The earth will engulf its inhabitants
If one of us is not upon it.

Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin,
(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Sh'ism*, 61)

Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin was the only surviving male member of Imam al-Husayn's family at Karbala. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin lived a low-key life and stayed out of politics. He was exempt from giving allegiance to Yazid and stayed with his family in Madinah. On one occasion, this Imam went to Makkah for pilgrimage. The Umayyad prince Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik was also present and he was unable to perform the circumambulation of the Ka'bah due to the large crowd. However, when the crowd saw Imam Zayn al-'Abidin approach, they saw his face – recognizing the light and aura of the Prophet and Mawlana 'Ali – and respectfully moved out of the way so the Imam could walk toward the Ka'bah. On seeing this, one of Hisham's companions exclaimed, "who is this man?" Hisham denied knowing who the Imam was, and on that occasion the poet al-Farazdaq approached and recited the following poem on the spot:

This is the son of Husayn and the grandson of Fatimah the daughter of the
Apostle through whom the darkness dispersed.
This is he whose ability the valley (of Mecca) recognizes, He is known by the

(Sacred) House and the Holy sanctuary and the lands outside the sanctuary.
This is the son of the best of God's servants.

– Al-Farazdaq, (*Diwan al-Farazdaq*, Read the Entire Poem at [Ballandalus](#))/p>

Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin was also known for being in continuous prayer and he composed a series of spiritual prayers called *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*. The prayers in this text also speak to the concept of Imamatus, such as the supplication below:

O God, surely Thou hast confirmed Thy religion in all times with an Imam whom Thou hast set up as a guidepost to Thy servants and lighthouse in Thy lands, after his cord has been joined to Thy cord! Thou hast appointed him the means to Thy good pleasure, made obeying him obligatory, cautioned against disobeying him, and commanded following his commands, abandoning his prohibitions, and that no forward-goer go ahead of him or back-keeper keep back from him!

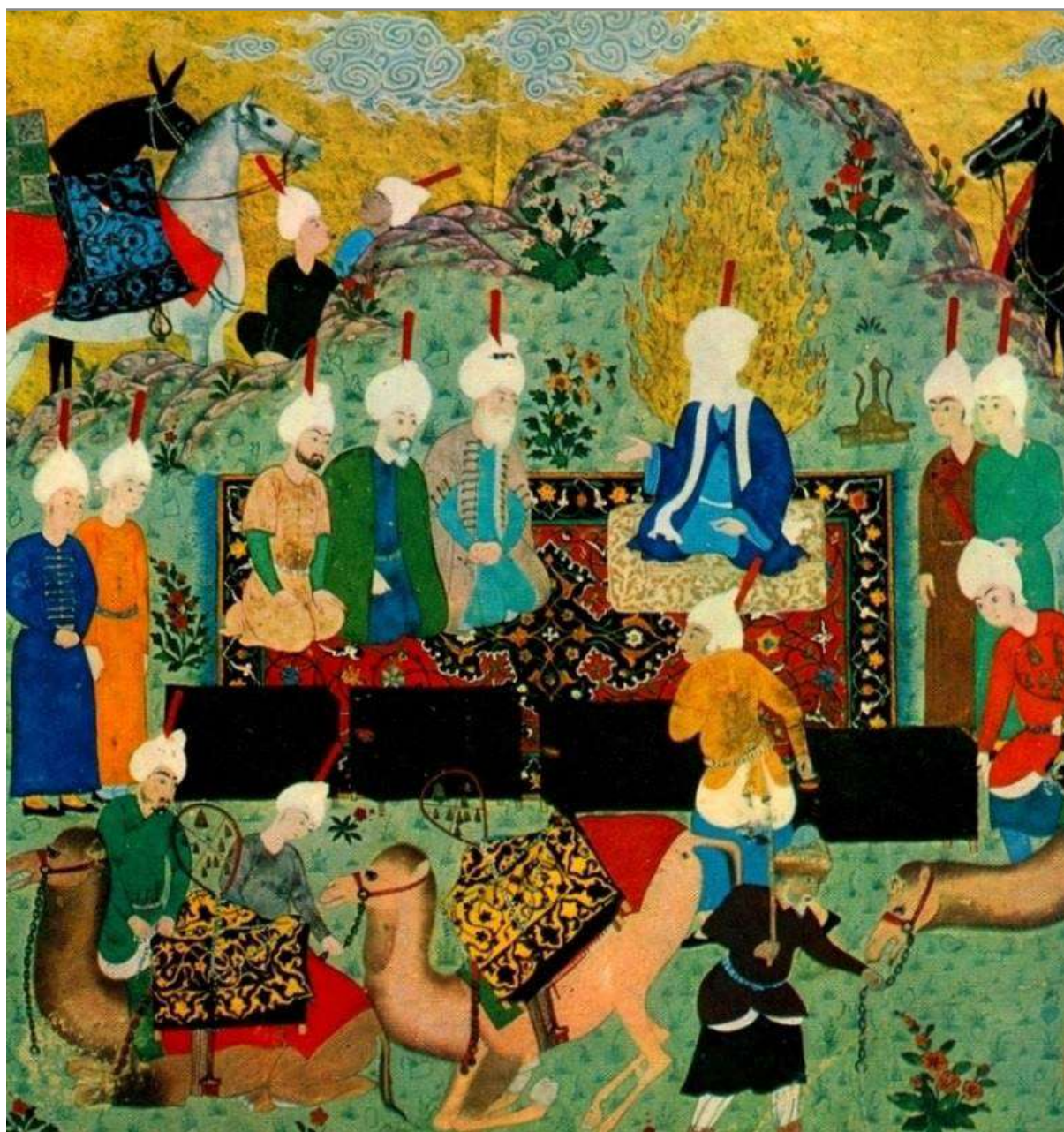
Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, (*al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, [Read Here](#))

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 713), *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah al-Kamilah*
- Al-Farazdaq (d. 730), *Diwan al-Farazdaq*
- Abu Miknaf (d. 774), *Kitab Maqtal al-Husayn*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Rijal 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Ya'qub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Al-Mubarrad (826-898), *Kitab al-Kamil*
- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*
- Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 540; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 132-136)

4. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (713-743)



(Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [A.S.] teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525)

We are the *hujjah* (proof) of God and His Gate. We are the tongue as well as the Face of God; we are the Eyes of God [guarding] His creation and we are the Guardians of the Divine Command (*wulat al-amr*) on earth.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir,
(Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 83)

On the death of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, he was succeeded by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir. Imam al-Baqir was known as "*Baqir al-'Ilm*" – the one who splits open knowledge – because of his deep spiritual and religious knowledge. In al-Baqir's time, there were many other claimants to the Imamate from other Shi'i groups – including the Hasanid line, the 'Abbasid line, and the descendants of Muhammad

b. al-Hanafiyyah (a third, non-Fatimid son of Imam 'Ali). In the midst of these counter-claimants to authority, Imam al-Baqir taught the key concepts of the formalized doctrine of Imamah: **the concept of *nass* (designation of one Imam by the prior Imam), which Imam al-Baqir used to prove his own Imamah against the counter-claimants; the concept of *'ilm* (spiritual knowledge) that each Imam must possess to be the Imam; the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*) which is the spiritual inspiration by which God guides and supports the intellect and soul of the Imam; the concept of *nur* (light), which is the original form of the Imams' existence before the creation of the world and which is spiritually manifest in the soul of every Imam; and the concept of *'ismah* (protection) which means the true Imam is protected by God from committing sins and errors.** Imam al-Baqir was also highly respected in Sunni Muslim scholarly circles and many Sunni hadith narrators transmitted hadiths from al-Baqir: ***"The evidence suggests that al-Baqir's position among his contemporaries was such that many scholars felt inferior to him; even the most eminent regarded him with awe and reverence on account of his outstanding knowledge"*** (Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 96). Imam al-Baqir provided commentaries on the verses of the Holy Qur'an about various subjects including *tawhid* and Imamah, through which he showed how the Qur'an in numerous places testifies to the authority of the hereditary Imams. Imam al-Baqir also gave many esoteric and spiritual teachings on metaphysics and cosmology. Imam al-Baqir would often travel in scholarly circles with his son, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 741), in Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf al-Mizzi (d. 743), *Tahdib al-Kamal*
- Kumayt (680-745), *Hashimiyyat*
- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub Al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*
- Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*

- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Ibn Hajar (d. 1449), *Tahdib al-Tahdib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 536-39 Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 136-166)

5. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (743-765)



Portrait of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq embracing his student. Source British Library.

He who knows us knows God, and he who does not know us does not know God. It is because of us that God is known and because of us that He is worshipped. Without God, we would not be known, and without us, God would not be known.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,
(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 46)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq succeeded his father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir to the Imamate. The first twenty-years of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's Imamate saw a number of key events including the revolt of his

uncle Zayd and the 'Abbasid overthrow of the 'Umayyads. Even when the new 'Abbasid revolution had succeeded, the 'Abbasids offered the caliphate to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and he rejected it, as he did not want to be a mere puppet. However, in due time, the 'Abbasid Caliphs became hostile to the Imam and his family and saw the Shi'i Imams as their rivals. **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq devoted much of his time to teaching and acquired a following of some of the best minds of his time. The Imam continued to systematize and consolidate the Imamate doctrine taught by Imam al-Baqir – including the concepts of *taqiyyah*, *zahir* and *batin*, *nass*, *'ismah*, *nur*, etc.** Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq gained more prominence in the last ten years of his life because many of the 'Alid counter-claimants had been killed and their movements wiped out. Most of the Shi'ah began to rally around Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, including a diverse group of thinkers such as the famous alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan. **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was also revered in Sunni circles – he was in fact the teacher of Abu Hanifa and Malik**

ibn Anas – the two scholars whom the Hanafi and Maliki schools of Sunni law are named after. The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq also stressed how the Imam's knowledge and role was spiritual and not political, due to the 'ilm and the Holy Spirit that inspired the Imam's thoughts and deeds. He also stressed the importance of taqiyyah – of concealing one's faith and beliefs when in danger and of the importance of keeping the batin hidden from the unworthy. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#) to the Imamate and died in 765 – according to some reports, the Imam was poisoned on the 'Abbasid Caliph's orders.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqah al-Shi'ah*
- 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqah al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Ibn Hajar (d. 1449), *Tahdib al-Tahdib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 543-545)

6. Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far (765-ca. 775)



Inside Maqam al-Imam, Salamiyyah, Syria. It is believed to contain the tomb of Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far

We narrate [the tradition] and you narrate [the tradition] that **when Isma'il**

the son of the Imam Ja'far completed seven years of age, the Master (*sahib*) of the Time (*waqt*) declared him the Master of Religion (*sahib al-din*) and his heir apparent among sons. And he guarded him from his other of his sons, kept him away from the contact with the public, and his education went on under his own supervision.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 296)

Imam Isma'il was one of the two elder sons of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq born of his first wife Fatimah, the granddaughter of Imam al-Hasan. Isma'il was born between 699-702 and his full-brother was 'Abdullah. On several occasions, Isma'il acted as the head of the family in the absence of his father Imam al-Sadiq to protest the killing of one of the Imam's followers. Some sources, mainly Twelver texts, report that Isma'il passed away during the lifetime of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq – but those same sources also report that Isma'il was seen several days later in Basra, suggesting that he did not really die but was sent away out of Madinah. **But the majority of sources – Sunni, Twelver, and Ismaili – agree that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq appointed and designated Isma'il as the next Imam (as documented [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#))** to the majority of the available sources, he [Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq] had designated his second son Isma'il (the eponym of the *Isma'iliyya*) as his successor, by the rule of the *nass*. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the Isma'iliyya and which should have settled the question of al-Sadiq's succession in due course.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, 88)

However, because Isma'il was absent from Madinah when Imam Ja'far passed away, the Shi'a split into numerous groups, with the majority first following his brother 'Abdullah, and then later following his half-brother Musa al-Kazim. Meanwhile, the minority continued to follow the Imamate of Isma'il and his descendants. This latter group became known as the Ismailis.

Our branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed and that is why they are known as Ismailis. And that branch of the family has continued today hereditarily and that is why there is a living Imam for the Ismaili Muslims.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(CBC Man Alive Interview, October 8, 1986, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismailis of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur

al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*

- Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyin*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Abu Ya'qub al-Sijstani (d. after 971), *Sullam Najat; Ithbat al-Nabuwwat*
- Ibn Babawayh (d. 991), *Kitab al-Tawhid; Kamal al-Din*
- Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *al-Masabih fi Ithbat al-Imamah*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Najashi (d. 1058), *Kitab al-Rijal*
- Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 546-548)

7. Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il (775-ca.806)



This is believed to be the secret underground tunnel in Maqam al-Imam used by the Isma'ili Imams and their da'is to escape 'Abbasid persecution

Then came Muhammad b. Isma'il by the command of God and His Inspiration of him.

His *da'is* dispersed, travelling in different provinces (*jaza'ir*), and ordering the local people to carry

on the *da'wah* in his favour. The world became alive with his *da'wah* and his influence spread.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 297)

Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il was the eldest son of Imam Isma'il and also the eldest grandson of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. After the death of 'Abdullah, Muhammad was the senior most member of this Fatimid branch of al-Husayn's descendants.

However, due to the rival group that recognized Musa al-Kazim and the 'Abbasid persecution of all Fatimids, Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il fled Madinah with his sons for the east. For this reason, Muhammad b. Isma'il was known as al-Maktum (the veiled one). Different sources report that Imam Muhammad and his sons first went to Iraq and then to Khuzistan in southwestern Persia. Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il had two sons when living in Madinah and then four more sons after his emigration, among whom was his successor Imam 'Abdullah al-Wafi.

Thenceforward the story of the Ismailis, of my ancestors and their followers, moves through all the complexities, the ebb and flow, of Islamic history through many centuries...**there is, however, endless fascination in the study of the web of characters and of events, woven across the ages, which unites us in this present time with all these far-distant glories, tragedies and mysteries. Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed;** at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqah al-Shi'ah*
 - Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*
 - Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqah al-Shi'ah*
 - Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
 - 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*
 - Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*
 - Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
 - Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
 - Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
 - Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
 - Abu Ya'qub al-Sijstani (d. after 971), *Sullam Najat; Ithbat al-Nabuwat*
 - Hamid al-Din al-Kirmanji, *al-Masabih fi Ithbat al-Imamah*
 - Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
 - Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Najashi (d. 1058), *Kitab al-Rijal*
 - Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
 - 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
 - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
 - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
 - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 550-551)



2. THE PRE-FATIMID (FIRST) PERIOD OF CONCEALMENT (DAWR AL-SATR)

Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili

Imams who succeeded him : Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din ‘Abdullah].

Those people (the concealed Ismaili Imams) were constantly on the move because of the suspicions various governments had concerning them. They were kept under observation by the tyrants, because their partisans were numerous and their propaganda had spread far and wide. Time after time they had to leave the places where they had settled. Their men, therefore, took refuge in hiding, and their (identity) was hardly known, as (the poet) says: *If you would ask the days what my name is, they would not know, And where I am, they would not know where I am.*

Ibn Khaldun, (Sunni Historian, *Muqaddimah*, tr. Frank Rosenthal, [Read Here](#))

8. Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Wafi (ca. 806-828)



Sign outside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma’il and the three Isma’ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din ‘Abdullah].

The first line of the sign reads: ‘God, the Exalted said: “We made them Imams guiding by Our Command” [Qur’an: 21:73 and 32:24], God speaks the truth.’ The second line is translated below it. The lives of the next three Imams are generally shrouded in mystery because they were constantly fleeing persecution by the ‘Abbasid Caliphs and their agents. Imam ‘Abdullah succeeded his father Imam Muhammad and traveled throughout Persia and the Middle East. He did not reveal his true identity publicly and only a few high ranking Ismaili *hujjats* and *da’is* were aware of his whereabouts. Imam ‘Abdullah was known by the surnames al-Radi and al-Wafi, along with several other names. During this period, the Imam guided the Ismailis through a vast underground *da’wah* network and the *da’is* simply referred to the Imam of the time by the name “Muhammad b. Isma’il” to trick their enemies into searching for the seventh Imam who had already died and to conceal the true Imam’s identity. Imam ‘Abdullah’s life story is reported mainly in the book *Istitar al-Imam* by Ahmad al-Naysaburi and later by Idris Imad al-Din. However, many non-Ismaili authors like Ibn Rizam, Akhu Muhsin, and Tabari also report his activities. According to these various sources, Imam ‘Abdullah first went to Askar Mukram in Khuzistan where he posed as a Hashimite ‘Aqilid merchant. Later he fled to Basra

and then settled in Salamiyya where he set up the headquarters of the Imamatus and the *da'wah*. Imam 'Abdullah designated his son Ahmad (known also as Taqi Muhammad) as his successor and died around 828. For more on Salamiyyah as the headquarters of the Ismaili Imams, see the article by Nimira Dewji, [here](#).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqat al-Shi'ah*
 - Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*
 - Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqat al-Shi'ah*
 - Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
 - Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Far'id wa Hudud al-Din*
 - Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi, (d. 934), Letters preserved in Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
 - Ibn Rizam (first-half of 10th century), *Kitab Radd 'ala'l-Isma'iliyyah*, preserved in later sources
 - Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtara; Majalis al-Musarat*
 - Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
 - Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (late tenth century), *Istitar al-Imam*
 - Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1021), *al-Risalat al-Wa'za*
 - Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
 - 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
 - Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
 - Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (Biographical Dictionary)
 - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
 - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
 - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
 - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - I-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

9. Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Taqi (828-ca. 870)



Inside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi

Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din ‘Abdullah]. Imam Ahmad (Taqi Muhammad) lived mainly in Salamiyya and oversaw a resurgence in the Ismaili *da‘wah* during his Imamate. While not much is known about his life activities, various Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources mention him as the leader of the Ismaili movement after Imam ‘Abdullah.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914), *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*, fragments survive in later Fatimid literature.
 - Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914), *Kitab al-Kashf*, compiled by Ja‘far ibn Mansur (d. 960)
 - Ja‘far al-Hajib (Imam al-Mahdi’s servant in late-ninth century – early tenth century), *Sirat Ja‘far (Memoirs)*
 - Ibn Rizam (first-half of 10th century), *Kitab Radd ‘ala’l-Isma‘iliyyah*, preserved in later sources
 - Imam ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen, in Ja‘far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara‘id wa Hudud al-Din*
 - Imam ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi, (d. 934), Letters preserved in Abu Ja‘far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
 - Anonymous Fatimid author, *Sirat Imam al-Mahdi*, written in mid-tenth century
 - Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtara; Majalis al-Musarat*
 - Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 142)
 - Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (late tenth century), *Istitar al-Imam*
 - Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1021), *al-Risalat al-Wa‘zah*
 - Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa’l-Ahkam*
 - Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
 - Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ az-zamān (Biographical Dictionary)*
 - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
 - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami‘ al-Tarawikh*
 - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
 - Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti‘az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a‘imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma‘ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

10. Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Radi (ca. 870-ca. 880-81)



Inside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam

Radi al-Din 'Abdullah]. Imam al-Husayn b. Ahmad, known as Radi al-Din 'Abdullah, led the Ismaili *da'wah* for a very short period in which it started achieving success in various parts of 'Abbasid territory. Before he passed away, the Imam entrusted the care of his son and successor, 'Abdullah 'Ali al-Mahdi who was then around 7 years old to his full brother, Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Shalagha. While Imam al-Mahdi was growing up, Muhammad b. Ahmad served as his Trustee (*mustawda*) and directed the Ismaili *da'wah* for some years.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914), *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*, fragments survive in later Fatimid literature.
- Ja'far al-Hajib (Imam al-Mahdi's servant in late-ninth century – early tenth century), *Sirat Ja'far (Memoirs)*
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- Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi, (d. 934), Letters preserved in Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
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- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtara; Majalis al-Musarat*
- Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
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 - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
 - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
 - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
 - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

3. THE FATIMID PERIOD OF THE IMAM-CALIPHS:

Source: Columbia University

I have found that this endeavour has provided for me, personally, **a profound sense of connection with my own ancestors, the Fatimid Caliphs, who founded Cairo and who laid its physical and cultural foundations 1,000 years ago.** To reach back across 35 generations and to be able to engage in the restoration and renewal of their legacy is a rare and stirring privilege. How could I not be affected seeing the remains of the original Fatimid walls and towers that protected this city when they founded it? And this experience has special meaning for me as I mark my own 50th year as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Restored Monuments in Darb al-Ahmar Address, October 26, 2007, Read
at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The Fatimid period is one of the best documented periods in Islamic history. As noted, almost the entire corpus of the histories of the Fatimid dynasty and Fatimid Egypt, written in the time of the Fatimids themselves, did not survive directly. This material was, however, at least partially preserved by later authorities, especially by the Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1442), who produced the most extensive account of the Fatimids in several of his works. Indeed, many medieval Muslim historians and chroniclers wrote about the Fatimids, who are also discussed in the universal histories of Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and Ibn al-Athir (d. 630/1233), amongst many others, as well as in a variety of regional histories of Egypt and Syria. (Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 139)

Before the rise of the Fatimids with Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi, the Ismaili Imams lived in concealment from the public. This allowed pro-'Abbasid Sunni Muslim polemicists such as Ibn Rizam, Akhu Muhsin, and the 'Abbasids themselves to pen numerous lies and slanders about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs. **However, a large number of Egyptian, North African, Persian, and Arab Muslim scholars in history recognized the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as genuine and legitimate descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam 'Ali, and Hazrat Fatimah through the lineage of Imam**

Ja'far al-Sadiq. For example, the prominent Twelver Shi'i scholar and genealogist, Shariff al-Radi (d. 1015), who was himself a descendant of Imam 'Ali, declared in a poem before the 'Abbasid Court that Imam al-Hakim bi Amr Allah was the legitimate descendant of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali. To quote al-Radi's own poem from his Diwan:

Why am I treated with contempt when I have
 A sharp tongue and a fierce disposition?
 Am I subjected to injustice in the land of the enemy
While in Egypt is the 'Alid Caliph?
His ancestors are also mine and his master is mine but
 The great distance treats me with injustice;
My roots are intertwined with his: the lords of
All people, [Prophet] Muhammad and [Imam] 'Ali.

– Sharif al-Radi (Twelver Shi'i scholar and 'Alid genealogist)
 (*Diwan*, Beirut, 1309 A.H., 972; tr. Idris El-Hareir, Ravene MBaye, *The Spread of Islam throughout the World*, 252)

The following non-Ismaili Muslim scholars, historians and theologians recognize the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as direct legitimate descendants of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib through Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq:

- 'Adud al-Dawla (Buyid Amir) (944-983), Letter to Imam al-'Aziz in which the Bu'yid Amir addresses the Fatimid Caliphs as "al-Hazrat al-Sharifah," preserved in Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Sharifs of Egypt and Hijaz (late 10th century), as reported in several historical chronicles including al-Maqrizi
- Sharif al-Radi, *Diwan* (Poetry, quoted above) (d. 1015), also reported by Ibn Athir.
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Miskawayh, (d. 1030), *Tajarib al-Umam*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*: "He himself and his partisans who declare his Imamate hold that his lineage is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) according to what we mentioned. Many among the 'Alid scholars of genealogy are also in agreement with them. This statement that al-Sharīf al-Raḍī uttered bears witness to its authenticity" (al-Kamil, vol. 6, 446)
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn al-Tuwayr (d. 1220), reported in Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa* and Ibn al-Zayyat (15th century), *Al-Kawakib al-Sayyarah fi Tartib al-Ziyarah*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Muhyi al-Din b. 'Abd al-Zahir (d. 1292), *al-Rawdah al-Zahirah fi Khitat al-Mu'izziyyah al-Qahirah*

- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*

(See Abu Izzedin, *History of Druzes*; Walker, *al-Maqrizi and the Fatimids*; Shainool Jiwa, "Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy during the reign of al-Aziz bi'llah"; Maqrizi, tr. Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire*; Prince P. H. Mamour, *Polemics on the Origins of the Fatimi Caliphs*)

11. Imam 'Ali b. al-Husayni Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Mahdi bi'llah (881-934)

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. We seek His Help. From the Servant of God, Abu Muhammad al-Imam al-Mahdi bi-illah, Commander of the Faithful, to his followers among the faithful and all the Muslims. Peace be with you. The Commander of the Faithful praises God before you. There is no god except Him... Therefore praise God who has let you attain the time of the Commander of the Faithful, and distinguished you with the blessing of his reign and good fortune of his dominion. May your hopes be high and your optimism grow with confidence in his justice.

Imam 'Abdullah Muhammad al-Mahdi,
(Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man, *Iftah al-Da'wah*, tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State*, 207-208)

Imam Abu Muhammad 'Ali b. al-Husayn 'Abdullah al-Mahdi was born in 873 in Askar-i Mukram. His father, the previous Imam, died when he was 7 years old and the affairs of the Ismaili *da'wah* were entrusted to al-Mahdi's paternal uncle, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Shalagha, for about 20 years. Al-Mahdi then married the daughter of his paternal uncle, who gave birth to his son and successor, Imam Abu'l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah. According to the *Sirat Ja'far*, the memoirs of al-Mahdi's chamberlain, al-Mahdi lived in Salamiyyah and was known as a wealthy noble person. There was a secret underground passage under the Imam's residence through which Ismaili *da'is* came and went safely.

When the Abbasid began their manhunt for the Ismaili Imams, Imam al-Mahdi and his partisans were forced to move out of Salamiyyah. One Ismaili *da'i*, al-Husayn b. Zikrawayh, who was captured by the 'Abbasids and "interrogated under torture," revealed Imam al-Mahdi's identity and whereabouts. This allowed the Abbasids to intensify and expand their chase for the Imam. In 904, starting in Syria, Imam al-Mahdi traveled to Palestine and then, after the 'Abbasids executed his *dais*, to Egypt. However, when the Abbasid army once again advanced on Imam al-Mahdi's location, he was forced to relocate again. While many of the Imam's companions expected him to move to Yemen, Imam al-Mahdi instead traveled deeper into North Africa to avoid potential military conflicts with the 'Abbasids. Not surprisingly, North Africa was also not safe for the Imams, after the Sunni Aghlabids ruling North Africa, were instructed by their 'Abbasid overlords to search for the Ismaili Imam and his companions. Still under the disguise of merchants,

Imam al-Mahdi, his brother Ja'far, and son, the future Imam al-Qa'im, took refuge on the far west coast of Africa in Morocco. One of the head *da'is* of the Isma'ili *da'wah* in North Africa during this time was Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i. Still in contact with Imam al-Mahdi, it was Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i who was largely responsible for establishing the base of the Fatimid Caliphate. This Ismaili *da'i* had targeted his instruction towards the warlike Berber clans of North Africa, slowly getting them to pledge allegiance to the Imam. Using these new forces, the Ismaili *da'is* overthrew various *amirs* in North Africa, including the Aghlabid Amir, clearing the way for the Imam to establish the *dawlat al-haqq* or the "the kingdom of the truth." After years of warfare, al-Shi'i minted new coins heralding the arrival of the *hujjat Allah* or "proof of God", and escorted the Ismaili Imam and his family from Morocco to Raqqada with the Berber army. Raqqada became the new capital of the young Fatimid State. Upon meeting and seeing the Imam, his *Mawla*, al-Shi'i was "bathed in tears" and reaffirmed his bay'ah. The following day, in his tent, the Imam granted an audience to each and every individual troop member who also pledged their bay'ah. Then on Friday January 5th, 910 CE, Imam al-Mahdi was declared the "Commander of the Faithful" and the first Caliph of the newly found Fatimid Caliphate and his opening message (quoted above) was sent to all the local towns. An Ismaili eyewitness, the *da'i* Ibn al-Haytham, recounts the arrival of the Imam to his new North-African kingdom meeting with the two *da'is* Abu 'Abdullah and Abu'l-'Abbas:

It was he whose excellence could not be hidden and '*the truth has now arrived and falsehood has perished*' [Qur'an 17.81]. The stars declined and the *Alive and Self-subsistent* appeared. Abu-'l-'Abbas went out and we went out with him and met the lord on the mountain pass of Sabiba. **I cannot forget his auspicious appearance, the splendor of his light, the brightness of his face, the elevation of his rank, the perfection of his build, and the resplendent beauty in his dawn. If I were to say that the lights that shine were created from the surplus of his light, I would have voiced the truth and the manifest reality.** Abu'l-'Abbas dismounted before him, may the blessings of God be upon him, and kissed the earth. He lay on the ground in front of him, and his brother Abu 'Abdallah dismounted for him, as did all of the friends from the Kutama and the others of their followers. **No one was left riding except the Commander of the Faithful, may the blessings of God be upon him, the sun most radiant, and [his son] the shining moon and glittering light, Abu'l-Qasim [Imam al-Qa'im]. These two, may the blessings of God be on them both, were the light of the world...** The earth began to shine with his light and the world was illuminated by his advent, and the Maghrib excelled because of his presence in it and his having taken possession of it.

Ibn al-Haytham, (*Kitab al-Munazarat*, tr. Wilfred Madelung & Paul Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids – A Contemporary Shi'i Witness*, 167)

For more information on Imam al-Mahdi and the Fatimids, see [this article](#) by Nimira Dewji.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914), *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*, fragments survive in later Fatimid literature.
- Ja'far al-Hajib (Imam al-Mahdi's servant in late-ninth century – early tenth century), *Sirat Ja'far (Memoirs)*
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- Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*
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- Ibn al-Haytham (d. mid. 10th century), *Kitab al-Munazrat* – an eyewitness memoir of al-Mahdi and his son al-Qa'im.
- Anonymous Fatimid author, *Sirat Imam al-Mahdi*, written in mid-tenth century
- Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu 'Ali Mansur al-'Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da'wah; Sharh al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da'a'im al-Islam*
- Al-Khushani (d. 981), *Kitab Tabaqat 'ulama Ifriqiyyah*
- Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Miskawayh, (d. 1030), *Tajarib al-Umam*
- Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A'imma*
- Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (late tenth century), *Istitar al-Imam*
- Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1021), *al-Risalat al-Wa'zah*
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- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
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- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
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- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
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- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma’ani* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

12. Imam Abu’l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa’im bi-amr Allah (934-946)

O people, I reach out to this community of yours just as the Messenger of God, may God bless and keep him, reached out to the Jews and the Christians, who had with them the Torah and the Gospels, churches and synagogues. He, may God bless and keep him, summoned them to the fulfilment of the knowledge that was in the Torah and the Gospels but they would not believe it... In the same way I reach out to this community of yours which has taken your Qur’an in vain.

Imam al-Qa’im bi-amr Allah,
(‘Id Sermon, April 19, 915, tr. Paul Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, 87)

Imam Abu’l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa’im bi-amr Allah was born in 893 in Salamiyya. He became the Imam in 934 upon the death of his father Imam al-Mahdi. Imam al-Qa’im also travelled with Imam al-Mahdi and received the nass and the title of wali ‘ahd from his father early on. After the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate, Imam al-Qa’im commanded the Fatimid armies and the naval forces. The coastal city of al-Mahdiyya became the main point of operations of the Fatimid navy led by Imam al-Qa’im. The reign of the Imam al-Qa’im was threatened by Abu Yazid’s Khariji revolt in 944-945. With the Berbers swarming quickly to his side, Abu Yazid launched his revolt against the Fatimids in 943–944. He swiftly conquered almost all of southern Ifriqiya, seizing Qayrawan in Safar 333/October 944. Subsequently in Jumada I 333/January 945, the rebels began their siege of Mahdiyya, where al-Qa’im was now staying. But Mahdiyya put up a vigorous resistance for almost a year, repelling Abu Yazid’s repeated attempts to storm the capital and mounting its own counter-offensive, aided by the new reinforcements sent by Ziri b. Manad, the *amir* of the Sanhaja (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 146). The Imam al-Qa’im died in 946 while the Fatimid armies, led by his son and successor Imam al-Mansur bi’llah (946-953), were fighting the Khariji rebellion. It was as the head of the Fatimid army in the midst of a military victory over the rebels that the Imam al-Mansur disclosed his father’s death and assumed the role of the Imam as the new Imam of the time.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914), *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*, fragments survive in later Fatimid literature.
- Ja’far al-Hajib (Imam al-Mahdi’s servant in late-ninth century – early tenth century), *Sirat Ja’far (Memoirs)*
- Ibn Rizam (first-half of 10th century), *Kitab Radd ‘ala’l-Isma’iliyyah*, preserved in later sources

- Imam ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen, in Ja‘far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara‘id wa Hudud al-Din*
 - Anonymous Fatimid author, *Sirat Imam al-Mahdi*, written in mid-tenth century
 - Ibn al-Haytham (d. mid. 10th century), *Kitab al-Munazrat* – an eyewitness memoir of al-Mahdi and his son al-Qa‘im.
 - Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A‘immah*
 - Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu ‘Ali Mansur al-‘Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
 - Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da‘wah; Sharh al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da‘a‘im al-Islam*
 - Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
 - Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
 - Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa’l-Maghrib*
 - Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
 - Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati‘a*
 - Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani ‘Ubayd wa siratuhum*
 - Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta’rikh Misr*
 - Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
 - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
 - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami‘ al-Tarawikh*
 - Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam‘i al-Ghurar*
 - Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
 - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
 - Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti‘az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a‘imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma‘ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)
13. Imam Isma‘il Abu’l-Tahir al-Mansur bi’llah (946-953)

O God, most certainly I am Your servant and Your friend. On me You have bestowed such favours that I am by You made mighty; You made me superior and thus You made me most generous. You have raised me and made me honoured by what You had me attain of the deputyship (*khilāfa*) from esteemed forefathers, the imams of right guidance, and You appointed me the flag of religion. You raised me to the imamate of the believers.

Imam al-Mansur bi’llah,
(‘Id Sermon, April 25, 947, tr. Paul Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, 105)

Imam Isma'il Abu'l-Tahir al-Mansur was born in 914 in North Africa (Qayrawan). His first name was Isma'il – recalling Isma'il son of Prophet Abraham who is the ancestor of Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'i Imams and also recalling Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq, the progenitor of the Ismaili Imams. He was designated as the next Imam by his father Imam al-Qa'im on several occasions. He assumed the position of Imam in 946 while he led the Fatimid armies in resisting the rebellion of Abu Yazid during the siege of al-Mahdiyya. Imam al-Mansur built a new Fatimid capital called Mansuriyyah. He also authored a book called *Tathbit al-Imamah* ("The Proof of Imamah") in which the Imam lays out several arguments from the Qur'an and logic to argue the necessity of a living Imam from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad. Below is a quotation from Imam al-Mansur's book:

[Quoting the Qur'an:] *"If they had referred it to the Messenger and the possessors of authority (ulu'l-amr) among them, those of them whose task it is to investigate would have known the matter"* (Holy Qur'an 4:83). **[Imam al-Mansur said]: this leads us to say: the possessors of authority (ulu'l-amr) among us are the knowledgeable among us. They are our Imams and the Prophet's vicegerents over us. They are the Ark of Noah. He who boards it is saved.** God has ordered us to follow them and to acquire knowledge from them... Our Prophet Muhammad (God's blessing be in him) told us that they would not depart from his Book until they come to him together at the Paradiscal Pool and that as long as we cling to them we will never go astray.

Imam al-Mansur bi'llah,

(*Tathbit al-Imamah*, tr. Sami Makarem, *The Shi'i Imamate*, 65)

Imam al-Mansur died in 953 "after having reasserted the Fatimid domination in North Africa and Sicily" (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 147) and was succeeded by Imam al-Mu'izz who had been designated as his successor on several occasions.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A'imma*
- Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu 'Ali Mansur al-'Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da'wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da'a'im al-Islam*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*

- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'ī al-Ghurar*
 - Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
 - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
 - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
 - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
 - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

14. Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (953-975)



Imam al-Mu'izz Street in Cairo

We are the everlasting words of God and His perfect names, His radiant lights, His luminous signs, His evident lamps, His created wonders, His dazzling signs and His effective decrees. No matter passes us by and no age is devoid of us.

Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah,

(Letter to the Qaramita, tr. S. Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire*, 172)

Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (Fortifier of the Religion of God) was born in 931 and was the 14th Ismaili Imam and the 4th Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Empire. Through the help of Jawhar as-Siqilli, he extended the Fatimid domains from Ifriqiya (northern Egypt) to Egypt, ushering a Golden Age for the Ismaili community (read more about the establishment of Cairo [here](#)). He was known as one of the greatest political leaders of his time; under his reign, Cairo – originally named al-Qahirah al-Mu'izziyyah, the Fatimid capital, began to surpass the Abbasid capital, Baghdad. Moreover, during this time, Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Twelver Shi'is, and Ismailis all lived together peacefully and Imam al-Mu'izz sent a Guarantee (*Amaan*) allowing all faiths and traditions to be practiced in security. He expanded the Ismaili *da'wah* and commissioned Qadi al-Nu'man, the chief jurist and *da'i*, to establish an official Ismaili law which led to the development of the "Seven Pillars of Ismaili Islam." The Imam is also credited with resolving a bitter dispute between the two noble Hashimid families in Makkah: **"His successful resolution of a feud between two of the leading Hashimid clans in the Hijaz, the Banu Hasan (descendants of al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib) and the Banu Ja'far (descendants of Ja'far b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib), highlights al-Mu'izz recognized status as a leading member of the Prophet's family"** (Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean*

Empire, 13). Lastly, the Imam is credited for the invention of the first fountain pen that avoids stains on the writer's hands and clothes.

In the below quote, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni declared at the opening of Al-Azhar Park in Cairo – before Muslim leaders and the Egyptian government – that he was the direct descendant of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and of Imam al-Mu'izz in the 35th generation and had finally returned to Cairo to build on the Fatimid legacy.

In our excavations and our historical investigations, I constantly have been reminded that we were touching the very foundations of my ancestors, the Fatimids, and the pluralistic history and intellectual profile of this city and this country to which they contributed so profoundly. I am very humbled by the opportunity to return to Cairo, founded over a thousand years ago by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz, to build on that history. Thirty-five generations later, through the work done here by my institutions, it is my prayer that this park will be a continuing contribution to the people of this great city.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Al-Azhar Park Opening Ceremony, March 25, 2005, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A'imma*
- Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu 'Ali Mansur al-'Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da'wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da'a'im al-Islam*
- Ibn Zulaq (d. 996), *Akhbar Sibawayh al-Misri*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*

- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

15. Imam Nizar Abu'l-Mansur al-'Aziz bi'llah (975-996)

From the slave and Friend (*wali*) of God, Nizar Abi'l-Mansur al-Imam al-'Aziz bi'llah, Commander of the Faithful to 'Adud al-Dawla, al-imam the protector of the community of Islam, 'Abi Shuja b. Abi 'Ali, greetings to you. The Commander of the Faithful praises God – there is no god but He – to you and asks Him to bless his [own] forefather Muhammad, the Messenger of the Lord of both worlds and the proof of God for all creation, continuous, increasing and everlasting prayers through his right guiding, pious and pure progeny.

Imam al-'Aziz bi'llah,
(Letter to Buyid Amir 'Adud al-Dawla, 979, preserved in Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*, tr. Shainool Jiwa, "[Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy in the Reign of al-'Aziz](#)")

Imam Nizar al-'Aziz bi'llah was born in 944 in North Africa and succeeded his father, al-Mu'izz. Imam al-'Aziz introduced financial and social reforms within the Fatimid Empire. He expanded the Fatimid Empire to Palestine and Syria and often appointed Jews and Christians into important administrative posts. During his reign and through the help of his grand Vizir Ya'qub ibn Killis, al-'Aziz founded the al-Azhar University (988), generally known as the oldest university in the world. Imam al-'Aziz also exchanged letters with the Buyid Amir al-Umara 'Adud al-Dawlah – who had control of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in this period – and **the Buyid Amir addressed Imam al-'Aziz as the *Ahl al-Bayt* and as "thy noble presence" (*al-hadrat al-sharifah*). These names and titles used by the Buyid Amir clearly acknowledge the Fatimid 'Alid lineage of Imam al-'Aziz and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs (see S. Jiwa, "[Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy during the Reign of al-'Aziz](#)").**

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A'immah*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da'wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da'a'im al-Islam*
- Ibn Zulaq (d. 996), *Akhbar Sibawayh al-Misri*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Al-Rudhbari (d. early eleventh century), *Balashkar al-'udaba'*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Al-Musabbihi (d. 1029), *al-Juz' al-arba'un min Akhbar Misr*
- Ibn Qalinisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*

- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

16. Imam Abu 'Ali Mansur al-Hakim bi-amr Allah (996-1021)



The al-Hakim Mosque in Cairo
O people, surely God has made us superior by the Word of Imamate. He has eternalized it in us so that it may last until the Day of Doom. The one of us receives it from the other and the son inherits it from the father. This is the bounty of God, He gives it to whomever He

wishes, 'and God is of bounty abounding.

Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah,
(Sermon in Cairo Mosque, al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa*, 133-143, tr. Sami Makarem, *The Doctrine of the Ismailis*, 32)

Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah was born in 985 and he was the first Imam to be born in Cairo, the official capital of the Fatimid Empire. Ascending to the role of the Imam at the age of seven, he was known for his generosity, bravery, and kindness. Despite his unique charisma, al-Hakim was feared by his enemies who circulated false rumours about him. However, these alleged claims are based on Christian and Sunni polemics which hardly have any basis in history or reality. In fact, al-Hakim was known for his reputation for incorruptible justice and went further than any other Imam to establish a rapprochement between the Christians, the Twelver Shi'is, the Sunnis, and the Ismailis. A strong advocate for education and intellectual search, he built the Dar al-'Ilm, "House of Knowledge", which further developed

fields of mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. Imam al-Hakim used to take long solitary walks and donkey rides and in 1021 he was murdered during one of his excursions.

Read more on Imam al-Hakim [here](#).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam al-Hakim, *Sijilat (Letters, Decrees)*
- Al-Rudhbari (d. early eleventh century), *Balashkar al-'udaba'*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1021), *al-Masabih fi ithbat al-imamah (and several other works)*
- Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (d. 1021), *Kitab Ithbat al-Imamah; Risalah al-Mujazah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Al-Musabbihi (d. 1029), *al-Juz' al-arba'un min Akhbar Misr*
- Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066), *Tarikh*
- Ibn Qalinisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān (Biographical Dictionary)*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

17. Imam 'Ali al-Zahir li-'izaz Din Allah (1021-1036)

Let all-our friends, governors, financial and taxation officials and all the other servants and employees of the empire according to their different states and several ranks who read this, or to whom this is read, take cognizance of this order and command of the Commander of the Faithful and act accordingly and in conformity with it, if God wills. Written in Muharram, the year Four hundred and Fifteen. **May God bless our ancestor Muhammad, the seal of the prophets**

and lord of the messengers, and his pure family, the right-guided Imams, and give them peace. God is sufficient for us; how excellent a Keeper is He.

Imam al-Zahir li-'izaz Din Allah,

(Letter to Monks and Karaite Jews of Cairo, Muharram 415/March-April 1024, tr. S.M. Stern in *Fatimid Decrees*, London, 1964, 15-20)

Imam 'Ali al-Zahir assumed the Imamate in 1021 after the murder of his father, Imam al-Hakim. At first, al-Zahir was under the guardianship of al-Hakim's sister, Sit al-Mulk. Under this reign, the Fatimid Empire fell into a state of crisis: famine and plague in Egypt lead to years of anarchy and the Bedouin revolt in Palestine and Syria led to enormous political strife. Despite these challenges, the Imam assured the citizens were fed and protected. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after a devastating earthquake and restored the Aqsa Mosque along with its mosaics. Stricken by an illness, al-Zahir died on 15th of Shaban, June 13th, 1036.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam al-Zahir, *Sijilat (Letters and Decrees)*
- Ibn al-Raiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Al-Musabbihi (d. 1029), *al-Juz' al-arba'un min Akhbar Misr*
- 'Ali b. Khalaf (d. after 1045), *Mawadd al-Bayan*
- Al-Quda'i (d. 1062), *al-Mukhtar fi dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-Athar*
- Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066), *Tarikh*
- Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1077), *Sirat; Diwan al-Mu'ayyad*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān*

(Biographical Dictionary)

- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jami' al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

18. Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah (1036-1094)



Marble panel

bearing the name of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah, in Kufic script, dated 1084–5, Egypt. Image: British Museum

Follow the clearest path—may God grant you success in bringing together what we recite to you from the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*)—and whenever you face difficulties, return to the one whom God chose as the best guardian for your guidance. As the exoteric and the esoteric are like body and soul, when they come together benefits are accrued, goals are realized and, by means of the senses the soul comprehends the marvels of the world and deduces gnosis of the Creator from the existence of the creation.

Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah,

(Majalis al-Mustansiriyyah, comp. al-Maliji, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 177)

Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah succeeded his father at the age of seven and administered the Fatimid Empire with the help of his mother Sayyida Rasad. His Caliphate lasted for 60 years, the longest reign of all the Imams. **During the 1050s, al-Mu'ayyad Shirazi's cowboy diplomacy led to the general al-Basasiri taking over 'Abbasid Baghdad and for one year the Khutbah in the 'Abbasid capital was read in the name of Fatimid Imam-Caliph.** This one year marked the zenith of Fatimid rule, but this was short lived and soon famine and political dissatisfaction degraded conditions in the Fatimid state. In the midst of this chaos, the Imam had little choice but to invite the Armenian general Badr al-Jamali to deal with the internal state affairs. With swift and decisive actions, Badr al-Jamali restored order to Egypt. Ultimately, however, Badr al-Jamali became the Fatimid vizier and his military seized control of the Fatimid empire. When Imam al-Mustansir passed away after a brief illness in 1094, Badr's son al-Afdal (the new vizier) bypassed the Imam's official heir-designate, Imam Nizar, and installed a younger brother of Imam Nizar on the Fatimid throne.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Al-Mustansir bi'llah (d. 1094), *Sijilat (Letters)*
- 'Ali b. Khalaf (d. after 1045), *Mawadd al-Bayan*
- Al-Quda' (d. 1062), *al-Mukhtar fi dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-Athar*
- Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066), *Tarikh*

- Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1077), *Sirat; Diwan al-Mu'ayyad*
- Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), *Shish Fasl; Gushayish va Rahayish; Wajh-i Din; Khwan al-Ikhwan*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

19. Imam Nizar al-Mustafa Din Allah (1094-1095)



Nizari Coin: The Coin refers to Imam Nizar by his caliphal title "Al-Mustafa li-Din Allah" and invokes God's blessings upon the ancestors and progeny of Imam Nizar.

Imam Nizar was the designated successor-Imam to his father Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah, as mentioned in numerous historical sources –

including Sunni, Nizari Ismaili, and even Tayyibi Ismaili sources. For this reason, nearly all historians of the Fatimids accept that Nizar was the heir-designate of **Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah**. The Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah passed away in 1094. Upon his death, Imam Nizar was opposed by the all-powerful Fatimid vizier al-Afdal, who put another son of Imam al-Mustansir, Ahmad al-Musta'li on the Fatimid throne in a coup d'etat. Imam Nizar and those who followed him – the Nizari Ismailis – refused to acknowledge Musta'li as the Imam-Caliph and maintained the original designation made by Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah. Imam Nizar initially received military support from Alexandria but was eventually defeated by

the more powerful Fatimid armies in 1095. Al-Afdal imprisoned the Imam Nizar and had him executed. **However, the sons and grandsons of Nizar survived and fled Cairo and several sources report that the next two Nizari Imams – the son and the grandson of Imam al-Nizar – led revolts against the Fatimid forces.** The Imams after Imam Nizar had to operate in strict secrecy and therefore few details are recorded about their lives.

Al-Maqrizi notes in his comments on the death of Nizar that the Ismailis of both Persia and Syria accepted his imamate and claimed that al-Mustansir had, in fact, made the designation in his favor. **Al-Mustansir had, after all, told Hasan b. al-Sabbah that Nizar would be his successor...** Several members of the caliphal family, however, fled to the far West, among them specifically three of Nizar's brothers, Muhammad, Isma'il, and Tahir, and a son of his named al-Husayn... Thus a small coterie of dissidents and Nizari supporters gathered somewhere in the West (the Maghrib) waiting for an opportunity to reassert their claim(s) to the imamate.

Paul E. Walker,
 ("Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 255)

Historical Sources that mention this Imam:

- al-Musta'li (d. 1101) and his mother in *Sijilat al-Mustansiriyyah*
- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh ad-Daw'ah al-Ismai'liyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975) pp. 255-256.
- Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- *Irshad al-Talibin*, comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)

- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 600; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Willey, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

4. THE POST-FATIMID (SECOND) PERIOD OF CONCEALMENT (DAWR AL-SATR):

The Valley of Alamut, Source: Simerg Photos



After the loss of the Fatimite Khalifat in Egypt, my ancestors moved first to the highlands of Syria and the Lebanon; thence they journeyed eastward to the mountains of Iran. They established a stronghold on the craggy peak of Alamut in the Elburz Mountains, the range which separates from

the rest of Persia the provinces lying immediately to the south of the Caspian.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

20. Imam 'Ali al-Husayn b. Nizar al-Hadi (1095 – ca. 1132)

Imam Nizar was survived by male progeny in the form of sons and grandsons. His successor was al-Husayn (some sources give his name as al-Hasan) and known by the title 'Ali al-Hadi in Persian sources (the concealed Imams generally went by several aliases). According to some sources, al-Husayn and other members of Nizar's family fled to North Africa (Maghrib) following Nizar's failed revolt. Hasan-i Sabbah continued to send *fida'is* and provide support from Persia and successfully assassinated al-Afdal, the Fatimid vizier who opposed Imam Nizar. Some historical sources including al-Maqrizi and Hamid Allah al-Mustawfi report that this Imam launched an unsuccessful revolt against the Musta'lian Fatimid caliphs.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975) pp. 255-256.
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*

- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Willey, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

21. Imam Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Muhtadi (ca. 1132 – ca. 1161-62)

I am your Master Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Nizar. The Truth has arrived, and falsehood is destroyed. We have sent down to you our Mercy, and encompassed you with the eye of concern.

Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi,
(Letter recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*, 1975, 255-256)

The next Imam, the grandson of Imam Nizar, is known in various sources as Muhammad and had the title of al-Muhtadi. Mustafa Ghalib shows a letter (quoted above) from this Imam that was preserved in Syrian sources in which Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi declares his lineal descent from Imam Nizar four times. In this same letter, the Imam specifies that a later Imam from his descendants will publicly reveal himself to the community in 40 years and that the total period of concealment from Imam Nizar's death will be 70 years (these predictions came true with the 23rd Imam). Persian Nizari traditions report that the Nizari Da'i Abu'l-Hasan Sa'idi helped escort this Imam from Egypt to Alamut. Some Egyptian sources also record that this Imam organized an unsuccessful revolt against the Musta'lian Fatimid caliphate in around 1161-62.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975), pp. 255-256.
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)

- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

22. Imam Hasan b. Muhammad al-Qahir (ca. 1161 – ca. 1164)

Imam al-Qahir executed the affairs of *da'wah* and state together with great deal of intelligence and skill, whom he dealt by his own excellent hands. He issued official orders in all the Ismaili territories, informing Muhammad bin Kiya Buzurg as his *hujjat* and the supervisor in political and martial affairs as well.

Mustafa Ghalib, (*A'lam al-Ismailiyya*, Beirut, 1964, 244)

Imam al-Qahir is said to be the first Imam to be established at Alamut but he did not announce his presence openly nor was he known publicly. It is reported that Imam al-Qahir settled in Alamut around 1160/61 and received *bay'ah* from his *hujjat*, Muhammad b. Kiya Buzurg Ummid and Nizari leaders in a private ceremony. Dr. Mustafa Ghalib writes in *A'lam al-Ismailiyya* (Beirut, 1964, p. 244) that Imam al-Qahir also announced that, "Muhammad b. Kiya Buzurg is my *da'i*, *hujjat* and special representative. Those who adhere to our doctrines should obey him unitedly in the worldly matters, and comply with his orders, and consider his instructions as if the divine revelation. None should disobey his orders, and remain steadfast therewith, and enforce it as if they are acting for me."

Various non-Ismaili sources allude, in different forms, to the existence of an unnamed Imam at that time in Alamut: see, for instance, Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 180–181, 231–237; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 663, 691–695; Rashid al-Din, pp. 79, 166–168; Kashani, pp. 115, 202–204; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl*, pp. 127–129, with a quotation on the subject from al-Fariqi, a historian writing shortly after the capture of Alamut, and Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar*, p. 102. Al-Ghazali, in his *al-Munqidh*, ed. and tr. Jabre, text p. 33, translation pp. 93–94, ed. Saliba, p. 127, tr. Watt, pp. 52–53, speaks of the Imamas being hidden and yet accessible to his followers.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 621)

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274), genealogy chart of the Imams prepared at Alamut
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*

- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wilely, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

5. THE ALAMUT PERIOD IN PERSIA

23. Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam (1164-1166)



In this Nizari Coin, the inscriptions state the Shahadah and also add that: Aliyyun Wali Allah (Ali is the Friend of God) and Nizar Mustafa li-Din Allah (Nizar is the Chosen One of the Religion of God)

Know that this Imamate is a reality which will never cease, change or be altered. It will continue forever to be transmitted through the progeny of our Lords (*Mawalina*). It will never leave them, whether in form, meaning or reality...The Imams, both outwardly and inwardly, both exoterically and esoterically, issue from the pure line and loins of the Imam, one after another. The Imam is perfect when still in the form of sperm in the loins of his father and the pure womb of his mother. An Imam is always an Imam and always perfect.

Imam Hasan *ala-dhikrihi al-salam*,
(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. Sayyid Jalal Badakhchani, 122-125)/p>

Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam was the first Imam in the Alamut period to openly and publicly declare his Imamate to the community. In 1164, Imam Hasan declared the *qiyamah* – which is a special period of history in which the exoteric religious practices of the *shari'ah* are abrogated and their esoteric meanings are

unveiled and practiced. **Numerous Fatimid Ismaili authors including Sijistani, Kirmani, and Nasir-i Khusraw had written about and foretold the arrival of the *qiyamah* period.** For the *qiyamah* declaration, Imam Hasan gathered representatives of the Ismaili Jamats from various regions at the valley of Alamut. A great pulpit was erected with four pillars attached to four banners – white, red, yellow and green. The murids from Rudbar and Daylan stood to the front of the pulpit, the murids from Khurasan and Quhistan were stationed on the right side, and the murids from central and west Persia were positioned on the left. At midday, Mawlana Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam*, adorned in a white garment and wearing a white turban, descended from the castle and ascended the pulpit. The Imam greeted the dignitaries and sat down for a moment. Suddenly, he rose and drew his sword and made one of the most important declarations in Isma‘ili history. The Imam first read out Arabic letters from his father, the previous Imam, declaring him as the successor (*khalifah, qa‘im maqam*) of his father (the prior Imam). He then declared the *qiyamah*:

“The Imam of the Time has sent you his blessings and compassion. He has called you his specially selected servants. He has relieved you of the duties and burdens of the shari‘ah and has brought you to the qiyamah (the resurrection).”

Following this declaration, the Imam invited everyone to feast and to break their fast – at midday during the month of Ramadan. Thereafter, this day was celebrated as *‘Id al-Qiyamah* (The Festival of Resurrection) or the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al-qubra*). The *qiyamah* had freed the *murids* from the burdens of the religious law (*shari‘ah*) and summoned them to the spiritual reality (*haqiqah*) of the

Imam. **During this time, the focus of practice was shifted toward the esoteric dimensions of the religious law (*shari‘ah*) – for example, instead of praying five times per day, the Ismailis aspired to remain in a state of continuous prayer; instead of fasting from food and drink for one month, the Ismailis aspired to perform the spiritual fast from all evil throughout their whole lives; instead of pilgrimage to the inanimate Ka‘bah in Makkah, the Ismailis sought to make the esoteric pilgrimage to the presence of the Imam.** They were invited to experience the spiritual Paradise on earth and be blessed with the Imam’s luminous vision (*nurani didar*). Because of this declaration, Imam Hasan is known as the *Qa‘im* or *Imam-Qa‘im*, which is a special rank and function in the chain of Imamatus. Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam*’s esoteric teachings disclosed the spiritual reality of the Imamatus in a quite unprecedented manner and he emphasized the believer’s quest to recognize the spiritual reality or Light (*nur*) of the Imamatus.

Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam* was murdered by his brother-in-law, a member of a Buyid family, in 1166 and was succeeded by his sixteen year-old son Imam ‘Ala Nur al-Din Muhammad.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa'imiyah*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu'minin*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

24. Imam Muhammad b. Hasan 'Ala Nur al-Din Muhammad (1166-1210)

Today the Mosque of Mosques, the Sun of Suns is that divinity which is the Mosque of God for the Souls, the noblest of holy Mosques, the Qa'im from the family of Muhammad, Mawlana, the Qa'im by the command of God, the Commander of the Faithful, son of Qahir, son of Muhtadi... Today for the truthful Ismaili community, that person of the knowledge of God, that manifestation of the Light of unity is the Qa'im from the family of the Prophet and I, Muhammad b. Hasan ('*ala-dhikrihi al-salam*), I am the Caliph of the Caliph of God, the *hujjah* of the *hujjah* of God and of the person of the knowledge of God. I make the call through the *hujjah*...because I am the vicegerent (*niyabat*) of the Qa'im from the family of Muhammad.

Imam 'Ala Muhammad b. al-Hasan '*ala-dhikrihi al-salam*,
(Persian Manuscript No. 32, Institute of Ismaili Studies, in Delia Cortese, PhD
Dissertation, "Eschatology and Power in Medieval Persian Ismailism", SOAS –
University of London, 1993, 142)

Imam 'Ala Muhammad, also known as Nur al-Din, was born sometime in the 1150s. He had a long Imamatus during which he expanded and implemented the *qiyamah* teachings of his father. This Imam was greatly engaged in philosophy and esoteric doctrines. In the above statement, this Imam describes himself as the successor of his father, Imam Hasan '*ala-dhikrihi al-salam* who was known as the Qa'im of his period.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa'imiyah*

- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk*; *Rawda-yi Taslim*; *Matlub-i Mu'minin*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

25. Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan b. Muhammad (1210-1221)



Nizari Coin minted in Alamut. The coin refers to Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan as the "Great Sultan" (sultan al-mu'azzam) and as "the Majesty of the world and the faith" (Jalal al-dunya wa'l-din).

Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was born in 1187 and received the designation (*nass*) of the Imamate from his father as a child. The Syrian scholar, Arif Tamir, cites a letter of the Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, in which he declares his Imamate and traces his descent from al-Nizar through Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam, see his *Sinan Rashid al-Din aw Shaikh al-Jabal* (al-Adib, 23rd vol., May, 1953, 45). According to John Malcolm in *History of Persia* (London, 1815, 1st vol., p. 405), "He is celebrated in

Persian history for the kindness and generosity of his disposition; and we are informed that this prince of the Ismailis was the handsomest man for his age.” (See Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis through History*, 1995)

The proclamation of *qiyamah* meant that the exoteric ritual practices of the *shari’ah* were no longer mandatory for Nizari Ismailis. However, this doctrine was quite misunderstood amongst many including the Sunni majority and their territories surrounding the Ismaili state. As a measure of prudence and *taqiyyah*, Imam Jalal al-Din reinstated the practice of the *shari’ah* according to the Sunni form in Ismaili territories, including Alamut. Dr. Nasseh Ahmed Mirza writes that: “*This misunderstanding of the spiritual aims of the qiyama, which very likely were only understood by the most learned dais, may together with political consideration have been the factor which prompted the grandson of Hasan ‘ala dhikrihi al-Salam to reinstate the observance of the ordinary rituals of the Shariah*” (*Syrian Ismailism*, 158-9). As a result of this, the Imam invited Sunni scholars to inspect Alamut and red flag any books they found problematic. During this time, as the Mongol incursions into Muslim territory had begun, many Muslim scholars found refuge in Alamut including Nasir al-Din Tusi, who became Ismaili. As a result of re-adopting the *shari’ah*, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was accorded full recognition and autonomy by the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir and the Nizaris entered into a formal alliance with the ‘Abbasid Caliphate. Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan sent his envoys to the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir, Muhammad Khwarazmshah, the rulers of Iraq and Adharbayjan to notify them of his religious policy, making them aware that the Ismailis were the true Muslims. Very rapidly, the Ismailis restored the lost prestige and began to spread in the Muslim cities. The Abbasid caliph al-Nasir also a decree in Baghdad in Rabi I, 608/August, 1211, proclaiming his close ties with Alamut. The Sunni rulers of Gilan also married some of their daughters to Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan. According to *The Cambridge History of Iran* (London, 1968, 5th vol., p. 470) that, “*From an Imamate point of view, he (Jalal al-Din Hasan) was undeniably the Imam: he had received the irrevocable designation by the preceding Imam and whatever he ordered was to be received in faith.*”

The Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, after his great efforts to make peace with the surrounding Sunni territories, died after being poisoned by one of his Sunni Muslim wives.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Hasan-i Mahmud (c. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa’imiyyah*
- Letter of Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (d. 1221) cited in Arif Tamir, *Sinan Rashid al-Din aw Shaykh al-Jabal*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu’minin;*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami’ al-Tarawikh*

- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

26. Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad b. Hasan (1221-1255)



The highest station [of gnosis] is that one knows God through God: 'God bears witness that there is no God but He' (3: 18). This station can only be that of the man of God, who is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Divine Command (*amr*) and the Word (*kalimah*) of God and the mediator (*mutawwasit*) between God and creation – such that, with the aspect that he has towards God, he can recognise God, and with the aspect that he has towards people, he can cause people to reach God, so that through his gnosis they become cognisant of God.

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad,
(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi taslim*, tr. Sayyid Jalal Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, 176)

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad was born in 1213 and succeeded to the Imamate upon his father's death at the tender age of 9 years old. For about six years (618/1221 to 624/1227), the administration of the state affairs had been governed by his gifted

mother, which was the first time a woman administered at Alamut. During this time, the Imam's mother seems to have deposed many incapable governors in Rudhbar and Kohistan. It seems that some governors and officers had misused their powers in that period. In 624/1227, Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad assumed governance of Nizari Ismaili territories at the age of 15-16 years upon the death of his mother. The writings of Nasir al-Din Tusi record a number of answers (example quoted above) given by Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad to certain theological and spiritual questions submitted by certain murids. These questions and answers are about how Ismailis observe esoteric forms of prayer and fasting, the meaning of attaining spiritual union with the Imam, and the hierarchies of the spiritual world and the *da'wah*. Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad died after being stabbed by one of his servants, Hasan Mazandarani, in his tent.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa'imiyyah*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Shams al-Din b. Ahmad al-Tayyibi (d. 1254), *Risalat al-dustur wa da'wat al-mu'minin li'l-hudur*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu'minin*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

27. Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah (1255-1257)



May it not remain hidden from all the servants that as Mawlana 'Ali and Mawlana Husayn (on whose mentions be peace) have said, '*We will have to pass through Jabalistan (i.e., Gilan) and Daylam, which will be the final Karbala. The palace of Caesar and the fortress of Alamut [will be reduced to such straits] that were they given to even a poor old woman, she would not accept them.*' All of this came to pass and was seen by the people of the world.

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad,
(tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 54)

Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah was the final Imam to rule at Alamut, which fell to the Mongol emperor Hulegu Khan in 1256. In the year's final months, this 26 year-old Imam assembled and consulted with his senior *da'is* and advisors at the fortress of Maymundez, to decide whether or not to surrender or continue resisting the Mongol invasions. Earlier that year, the Mongols executed every adult male in Tun and also murdered every Ismaili envoy the Imam had sent to meet with Hulegu Khan. While deliberating, the fighting continued unabated. The Mongols relentlessly battered down the Ismaili defenses, vowing to continue massacring Ismailis if the Imam did not surrender. Ultimately, a group of *da'is* and advisers, led by the pre-eminent scholar and *da'i* Nasir al-Din Tusi, prevailed and the Imam agreed to surrender. As Ismailis dismantled their defences, the Imam appeared before Khan, defenceless, in the name of peace, and surrendered himself to prevent further slaughter of his followers. Escorting the Imam from one Ismaili

fortress to another, Khan demanded each Ismaili stronghold surrender at the order of their Imam he held hostage. And so, one by one, Ismaili castles and fortresses were taken and destroyed. Ismailis were massacred and others sold as slaves. Finally, the Mongol horde set fire to Alamut, forever destroying nearly all of the Ismaili literary and intellectual treasures in its renowned library. Once the surrender was complete, Khan had no further use for the Imam and sent him to Mongolia.

After the Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah had left for Mongolia, the Mongols massacred thousands upon thousands of Nizari Isma'ilis in Persia: the Imam's family and dependents (including infants) were summarily executed in violation of the peace treaty the Mongols had committed to with the Imam; the Mongol commander summoned the Nizaris of Quhistan – in the guise of a social gathering – and massacred them (akin to the “red wedding” in the Game of Thrones). All of this took place under the general order of Genghis Khan to destroy all of the Ismailis. Some estimates place the total number of Nizari Ismailis killed in these massacres at 100,000. Finally, while the Imam's group rested for the night in the Khangay mountains of north-western Mongolia, Mawlana Rukn al-Din and his companions were led away, one by one, off the main road and brutally murdered and drowned by their Mongol guards. In the words of Juwayni himself: *'He and his followers were kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword, and of him and his stock no trace was left, and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world.'* (Ata Malik Juwayni, History of the World Conquerer).

Although the Mongol propagandist Juwayni loudly proclaimed that the Ismaili Imam and all Ismailis had been destroyed in perhaps the most painful and horrific period of Ismaili history, it was not so. Before the Imam was murdered, even before the surrender of the fortresses, **Imam Rukhn al-Din Khurshah's young son and successor, Mawlana Shams al-Din Muhammad (“the Sun of the Faith”) had, on the orders of his father, been concealed and secreted away to Azarbayjan by a small cadre of Ismaili *da'is* led by his uncle Shahanshah.** So while the situation was dire, it was not hopeless. The Imam had ensured the Imam's continuity knowing that, though hidden for the present, his successor would rise again. (see Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*)

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- *The Epistle of the Right Path* (15th century)
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*

- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

6. THE POST-ALAMUT (THIRD) PERIOD OF CONCEALMENT (DAWR AL-SATR):

Know that from [the time of the Imam] Rukn al-Din Muhammad onwards, the annals of this illustrious family do not appear in a single history that the eyes of this pauper have perused. This is because the family no longer possessed a worldly kingdom as in bygone times...**Hence it must be known that the Master of the House knows better than outsiders what goes on in his own household.**

Fida'i Khurasani, (*Guidance for the Seeking Believers*, tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 19)

Clearly, one of the reasons that we know so little of the Imams of this period is precisely because they didn't want their existence to be commonly known. **Attracting unwanted attention in such a hostile environment would have been exceedingly dangerous, even fatal, and success in concealing the identity of the Imams contributed to the survival of the lineage.** Faithful members of the community in areas in which the threat was most acutely felt would have been loath to reveal the names and whereabouts of their Imams, or indeed their own identity.

Shafique Virani, (*The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 56)

28. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (1257-1310)

Now I have left the land of Iran for Turan and traveled through its cities to see them. I passed through Samarqand, Bukhara, Cathay, Scythia, Balkh, China and the land beyond China (Chin wa-Machin), Tibet and Kashmir. I also passed through the land of the Franks. In short, I actually beheld the world from one end to the other. I clearly manifested myself in the cities of Uch and Multan and fulfilled the promise that I had made to the loving devotees. [After experiencing] the kindness of the loving devotees and friends of Hindustan, I returned to Iran. In all these lands through which I traveled, in every place I practiced taqiyya for taqiyya is my religion and the religion of my ancestors. That is to say, "*dissimulation (taqiyyah) is my religion and the religion of my ancestors.*" In every place we portrayed ourselves in a manner and form that we deemed prudent for the task of the people.

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad,
(tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 54)/p>

The Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad was born in the fortress of Maymundaz in the presence of his father, Imam Rukn al-Din. Contrary to Sunni and Mongol

propaganda, the line of Nizari Ismaili Imams survived the Mongol invasion of Alamut as Imam Shams al-Din was escorted by his uncle Shahanshah to Adharbayjan. It is worth noting that Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, many decades earlier, used to visit Adharbayjan for long periods of time and cultivated relations with its rulers. Hodgson also writes in *The Order of Assassins* (1955, 270-275) that, *“Juwayni assures himself that every Ismaili was killed; yet even if all the members of garrison were in fact killed, a great many other will have escaped.”* He further adds, *“but their spirit was more nearly indomitable; as it is from among them that the great future of Nizari Ismailism sprouted again. It is said the child Imam was carried to Adharbayjan, where the Imams lived for some time.”* According to W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society* (London, 1961, 77), *“In 1256, Alamut was surrounded, and was destroyed and in the following year the Imam met his death and there was a widespread massacre of the Nizaris. It may be further mentioned that, despite this catastrophe and the fact that it has never since had a territory of its own, the community was not exterminated and the line of Imams was maintained unbroken.”* Farhad Daftary (*The Ismailis*, 435) writes that ***“while Rukn al-Din Khurshah was spending the last few months of his life amongst the Mongols, the Nizari leadership evidently managed to hide his son and designated successor, Shams al-Din Muhammad, who became the progenitor of the Nizari Imams of post-Alamut period. The Nizari Imamate was thus preserved.”***

The Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad is reported to have traveled widely and visited a number of Nizari Ismaili centres across Persia, the Middle East and even India. A fragment of one of his writings is quoted above where the Imam outlines his travels. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad lived secretly and clandestinely and only the highest ranking members of the Nizari Ismaili leadership were aware of his whereabouts.

The Ismaili *da'i* and poet Nizari Quhistani was one of the lucky few who was able to find the Imam. He lovingly describes his *didar* in beautiful, mystical poetry that suggests the location or identity of the Imam without disclosing either. He describes a “handsome young man of exceptional spiritual authority with a large following in the city.” Nizari then discovered that the Imam was to visit a “house of healing” – a common Sufi and Ismaili term for a place of worship. Feigning an illness, Nizari met the Imam whom he calls “the intoxicated one”, a common Sufi and Ismaili metaphor for the Imam. The Imam *“reprimand[ed] Nizari for coming all the way from Khurasan to meet him. He told the poet that the lover and the beloved are in reality never apart: ‘When was Qays ever without the face of Layla?’ he asked.”* (Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, 132).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (d. 1310), *Alfaz-i Guharbar (The Pearl Scattering Words)*, preserved in 4 manuscripts at the Institute of Ismaili Studies
- Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (d. 1310), Untitled Passage, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript, copied in Ishkashim in 1895.

- Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320), *Diwan-i Hakim Nizari Quhistani*; *Safarnamah* (describing his meeting with Imam Shams al-Din in 1280-81 in Adharbayjan)
 - Pseudo-Abu Firas (fl. 14th century), *Qasidah al-Shafiyyah* (mentions the Imam living in the village of Qusur)
 - Pir Shams al-Din (fl. 13th-14th centuries), various *Ginans* mention the Imam arriving in Multan: “E sabhaga har puchh nind [sic] niravan pan~jetan”; “Jiv tum java de”; “Shahani sarevae tame jagajo”; “Evi: garabi: sampuran: sar”; “Tiyam thi ame avea un~chamam”
 - *The Epistle of the Right Path* (ca. 14th-15th century)
 - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
 - Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb ‘Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
 - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel* (*Offspring of the Tales of the Truth*)
 - Muhammad Qasim Firishta (ca. 1606), *Ta’rikh-i Firishta* (*Gulshan-i Ibrahimi*)
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and ‘Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - *Lama’at al-Tahirin* (comp. 1697)
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 217-226)
29. Imam Qasimshah (1310-1368)

O Careless Ones! Believe in the Light (*nur*) of Qasim Shah!
He is the legitimate heir, the true progeny of the Imam (*ala imam*) in this age
of Kalyug.

Pir Shams al-Din,
(*satagura shamasa ema kahere gāfalo kema utaraso pāra*, tr. Tazim R.
Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 345)

The Imam succeeding Shams al-Din Muhammad was Imam Qasimshah (1310 – 1368). Nizari Quhistani, the Nizari poet, alludes to meeting Qasimshah and his father Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad in Azarbayjan.

Several *Ginans* and *Garbis* attributed to Pir Shams name Imam Qasimshah as the Imam of the time – also referring to this Imam by the name “Shah Nizar.”

According to the few available sources that shed light on this obscure period, the Imam Qasimshah’s life was constantly in danger and he was ultimately murdered by a member of his family – likely Muhammad Shah – who also claimed the Imamate for himself. This resulted in a schism between the Qasimshahi Nizari Ismailis and the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis. By the time of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, almost all of the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis transferred their allegiance to the Qasimshahi Nizari Ismaili Imams.

That the Imams in this period were in real danger is confirmed in an ode (*qasida*) of a certain Da'i Anjudani, who informs us that the Imam Qasimshah (and here his reference is to the first Qasimshah) was murdered. It appears from these verses that there were numerous attempts to have him poisoned, one of which finally succeeded. Unfortunately, this poet provides us no further details regarding the perpetrators of the crime, nor any information about their identities, referring to them simply as "his enviers, worthy of hellfire" and "the accursed." The murder of Qasimshah is also alluded to in the work *Seven Aphorisms (Haft Nukta)*, which is associated with one of the Imams by the name Islamshah, perhaps the first. While not explicit, this work is highly suggestive that the murderer was from the Muhammadshahi line, which, however, is never mentioned. Nevertheless, it is very clear that a family member was involved.

Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 57)

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320), *Diwan-i Hakim Nizari Quhistani*; *Safarnamah* (describing his meeting with Imam Shams al-Din in 1280-81 in Adharbayjan and alluding to his successor)
 - Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Haft Nukta*, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts
 - Pir Shams al-Din (fl. 13th-14th centuries), various Garbis mention Mawlana Qasimshah as the Imam of the time: "Bhula: ma: bhule: bhamajore: hinduo"; "Ke: tame: amiras: pijo: din: ne: rat"; "Nar: kasham na: pharaman thi,"; "Satagur: samash: em: kahere: gaphalo: kem: utaraso: par,"; "Gur: avata: sarave: rat,"; "Avomara munivar bhaida hoji"
 - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
 - Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
 - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 228-223)

30. Imam Islamshah (1368-1424)

Brother, build a raft of truth, believer, steady your heart, for in the land of Daylam the great king, my lord has descended.
O king, the earth's nine continents are your vassalry. You are our lord, the Mahdi.

O lord Islamshah, the granter of boons! Be pleased, O great Mahdi.
O king, bestow on the faithful salvation, deliverance and your beatific vision.
How blessed is the region of Alamut where you have established your physical residence!

Pir Shihab al-Din,
(tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 41)

The Imam Qasimshah was succeeded by his son, Imam Islamshah (1368 -1426). According to Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin (*The Ismailis through History*, 1995), Imam Islamshah “visited Daylam several times in disguise, where he had erected a temporary mission centre for different regions...it appears that Islamshah was a man of middle height, radiant face having piercing eyes. He was a gifted man of sweet disposition and engaging manner. His mole on right cheek was an eye-catching mark. He was generous, fond of hunting and passed sometimes a few months in woods on hunting excursion.” While little is known about this Imam’s life due to the fact that he was living in precaution and secrecy, there is a work called Seven Aphorisms (*Haft Nukta*) that is attributed to him and quotations from him appear in other Nizari texts. Some sources relate that Imam Islamshah left Adarbayjan and migrated to Iran. Numerous *Ginans* of Pir Sadr al-Din name the Imam of the Time as Islamshah and Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din describes going to have the didar of the Imam in his *Ginans*, especially *Anant Akhado*. According to various specimens of evidence including the *Ginans*, Imam Islamshah transferred the residence of the Ismaili Imams to Kahek in central Persia – near Qumm and Mahallat – and enjoyed a long Imamatus of nearly 55 years

In Qazwin, the prominent Khushayji family faced opposition from ‘Ali Kiya for their adherence to the Nizari Isma‘ili Imamatus and had to defend themselves. In the course of these battles, the Nizari Imam known as Khudawand Muhammad – who was likely the Imam Islamshah – rallied the Nizaris of the area and opened up a second front against ‘Ali Kiya. The Nizari Imam and his forces even retook Alamut for short periods. However, ‘Ali Kiya joined up with Timur (Tamerlane) and his superior armies defeated the Nizari forces. The Nizari losses were massive due to Tamerlane’s massacres. In 1416, there was a mass execution of Nizari Isma‘ili leaders such that “the waters of the White River turned red with the blood of those killed.”

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Haft Nukta*, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts
- Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Risalat al-Huzn*, quoted in contemporary Nizari literature
- Tombstone of Imam Islamshah (as per local Ismaili tradition) in Shahr-i Babak witnessed by Iranian scholar Maryam Mu‘izzi
- *The Epistle of the Right Path* (ca. 14th-15th century)
- Pir Shihab al-Din (fl. 14th century), *Ginan* mentioning the Imam in Alamut: “Ao

gatiure bhandhe”

- Pir Sadr al-Din (fl. 14th century), various *Ginans* mention the Imam of the time as Islamshah: “Aj sahi mahadin bujo bhev”; “Ashaji sachu tum alakh nirijan agam agochar”; “Des delamame shaha hari avatareo”; “Dhan dhan ajano dadalore ame harivar payaji”; “Juga jug shaha avataraj dharea [a.k.a. Sen Akhado]”; “Payalore nam sahebajo vado lije”; “Sansar sagar madhe van apana satagure noriyamre”; “Shahake hek man amhi sirevo”; “Thar thar moman bhai koi koi raheseji”; “Yara anat kirodie vadhaium.”
 - Pir Sadr al-Din (fl. 14th century), describes meeting the Imam of the Time in two *Ginans*: “Sirie salamashaha amane maliya”; “Alamot gadh patan delam des bhaire”.
 - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
 - Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Zahir al-Din (d. 1498), *Ta’rikh-i Gilan wa Daylamistan*
 - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and ‘Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 234-240)
31. Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (1424-1464)

O Careless Ones! The Divine Light shines in Sri Islam Shah!
Recognize the Lord (*nāra*) when you see him!

Pir Shams al-Din,
(*satagura shamasa ema kahere gāfalo kema utaraso pāra*, tr. Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 345)

Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah was a child when he and his father migrated to Kahek and established a new residence of the Nizari Ismaili Imam in that town. Both Imam Islamshah and Muhammad b. Islamshah shared the same first name “Muhammad, Ahmad.” This was also the period in which Tamerlane and his son Shahrukh massacred thousands of Ismailis. While not much is known about this Imam’s life and activities, there is an area in Shahr-i Babak which the local Ismaili tradition named after this Imam – it is called “Muhammad Imamzada” meaning “Muhammad, the son of the Imam.”

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone of Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (as per local Ismaili tradition) in Shahr-i Babak witnessed by Iranian scholar Maryam Mu’izzi
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Zahir al-Din (d. 1498), *Ta’rikh-i Gilan wa Daylamistan*

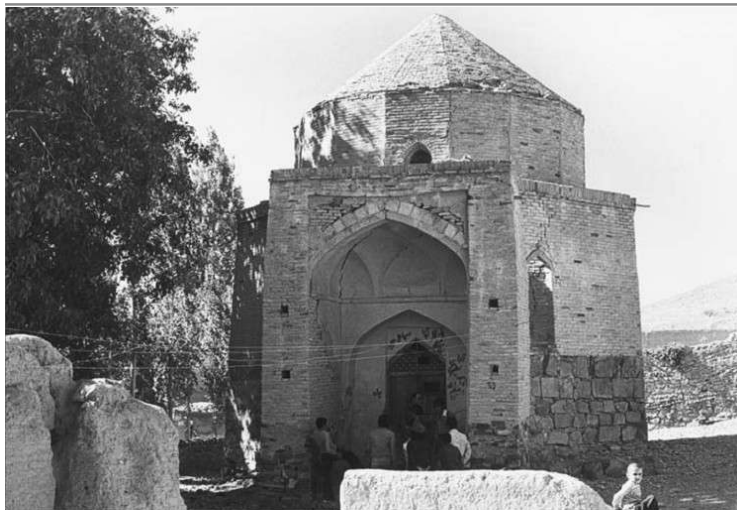
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 234-240)

7. THE ANJUDAN PERIOD OF REVIVAL:

In the early Anjudan period, the Nizaris adopted a new communal organisation, which played a key role in reasserting and re-articulating (at least secretly) their religious identity...But the Nizaris still found it necessary, in predominantly Sunni Persia, to practise *taqiyya* in the guise of Sufism. In addition, the Nizari imams often added, similarly to Sufi masters, terms such as Shah and 'Ali to their names. For all practical purposes, the Persian Nizaris now appeared as a Sufi *tariqa*, and they continued to use the master-disciple (*murshid-murid*) terminology of the Sufis. **To the outsiders, the Nizari imam living in Anjudan appeared as a Sufi *murshid*, *pir* or *shaykh*. They were also regarded as pious 'Alid Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet.**

Farhad Daftary, (*A Short History of the Ismailis*, 172)/p>

32. Imam 'Ali Shah Qalandar Mustansir bi'llah II (1464-1480)



The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah II (Shah Qalandar), Anjudan
(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 424)

“This is the purified, hallowed and luminous grave of the noble Shah Mustansir bi'llah, [erected] by the command and direction of the noble Shah 'Abd al-Salam.”

(Inscription of the Gravestone of Imam Mustansir bi'llah) Imam Mustansir bi'llah was the first Nizari Ismaili Imam to settle and live in the village of Anjudan. This Imam (or his mausoleum) was also known as Shah Qalandar,

which is a common Sufi epithet since the name “Qalandar” evokes the wandering spiritual guide who has no need for any spiritual guide himself. Some of the later Satpanth compositions by Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), the *Sat Veni Moti* and the *Sacho Tun Moro Sanhian*, mention Imam Mustansir bi'llah as the Imam of the time. This period began what scholars call the “Anjudan revival” in which the Nizari Ismaili Imamatus was able to reestablish more direct ties with many

Nizari communities. The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah still exists in Anjudan and it was visited and documented by the historian Wladimir Ivanow, who provides a description of the Imam's gravestone.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone of Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah with full inscription documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

33. Imam 'Abd al-Salam Shah (1480-1494)

Harken ye who quest for union, who boasts that he seeks. Heed my words, for I am the Book of God that speaks! If you desire that I open for you the door of mysteries, then enroll in the school of submission and attend to my teachings with all your heart. If you desire the Commander in this world of divinity, then gird yourself with my command and harken to my words. Now I am 'Abd al-Salam, but if with this company I am grieved, to this assembly I'll bid adieu, once again to return to it.

Imam 'Abd al-Salam,
(Ode to the Seekers of Union, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 177)

Imam 'Abd al-Salam, also known as Salamshah, resided in Anjudan like his predecessor. **Several compositions of this Imam have survived including the *Panj Sukhan* and three *farmans* bearing his signature sent in 1490 to the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis, calling for them to recognize the rightful Imams from Qasimshah's progeny.** This Imam is also mentioned by name in the *farmans* recorded in *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* composed by his son Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (also known as Mustansir bi'llah). Several Nizari Ismaili poets of this period including Da'i Anjudani, 'Abd Allah Ansari, Zamani, Darvish, and Husayn refer to Imam 'Abd al-Salam and his successor Shah Gharib. There is a unique *qasidah*, known as "The Ode to the Seekers of Union" composed by Imam 'Abd al-Salam where he reveals the spiritual reality of the Imams in rhythmic and rhyming poetry.

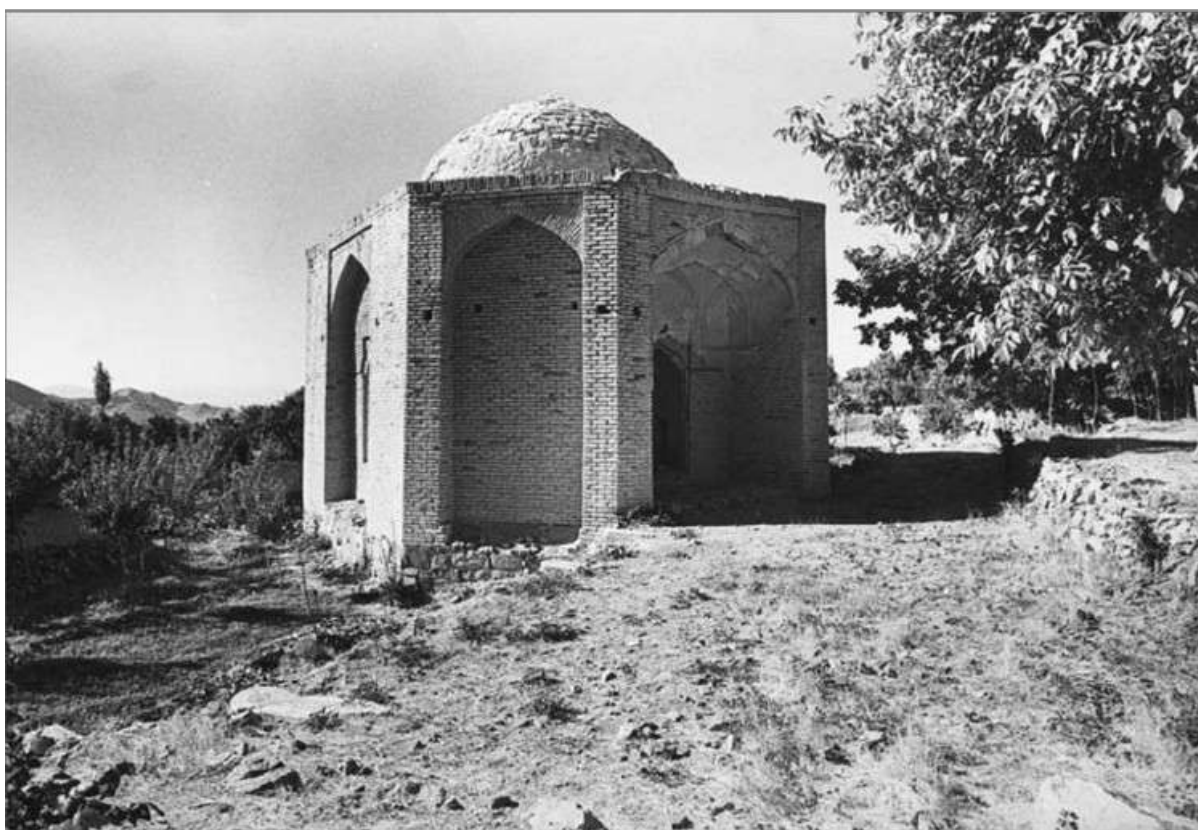
Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Panj Sukhan (Five Discourses)*
- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Farman-i Shah 'Abd al-Salam* (Farman addressed

to the Ismailis of Badakhshan and Kabul) bearing the Imam's signature (dated 1490) documented by W. Ivanow

- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Ode to the Seekers of Union (Ala ay Talib-i Wahdat)*
 - Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Bandi az Shah 'Abd al-Salam b. Shah Mustansir bi'llah*
 - Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* in which 'Abd al-Salam is named as the Imam of the time
 - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
 - Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Khwaja 'Abd Allah Ansari (fl. late 15th century), poem titled "Har kih az 'ilm-i laduni shammai agah shud", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts and quoted in Haft Bab Abu Ishaq and Kalam-i Pir refers to Imam Salamshah and Imam Mustansir.
 - Husayn (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Amad Zaman", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Zamani (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Ay dar miyan-i jan", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Darwish (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Dila az manil-i in tirah khakdan bar khiz", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Nizari Ismaili pilgrim (ca. 15th century), *Greetings O Emperor of the realm of faith and world*, refers to Shah Salam and Shah Gharib as successive Imams, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

34. Imam ‘Abbas Shah Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi’llah III (1494-1498)



The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi’llah III (Shah Gharib), Anjudan

(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 424)

O, truly-faithful believers, Mawlana Shah Mustansir bi’llah says: do not mention myself and the name of your Imam, Shah ‘Abd al-Salam Shah, in the presence of the ignorant and unbelieving people who have an innate hatred of the prophethood and Imamat. You must, however, appeal to him in your heart and with your tongues. Conceal my whereabouts from the irreligious people of to-day so that you may for this attain the perfect reward and a righteous life.

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi’llah III,
(*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, tr. Wladimir Ivanow, 21)

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (also known as Mustansir bi’llah III), whose personal name was ‘Abbas Shah, became known as “the Exiled Prince” (Shah Gharib) because he had to leave his homeland for a while due to persecution. There are several writings of this Imam that are extant today: these include the farman book *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, whose sermons were given by Imam Shah Gharib Mirza during the lifetime of his father, Imam ‘Abd al-Salam. This is why the *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* states that its author is Imam Mustansir bi’llah while the reigning Imam was ‘Abd al-Salam. There is also another set of *farmans* known as *Kalam* that record the guidance of this Imam. Several Nizari Ismaili poets at the time mention the name of “Shah Gharib” and suggest that he assumed the office of Imamat when he was already quite old. Abu Ishaq Quhistani wrote his

famous *Haft Bab* during this Imam's lifetime. The tomb of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, shown above, was visited and documented by the historians Ivanow and Ibrahim Dihgan. The casket of his grave states:

This is the wooden box (*sandug*) of Shah Mustansir billah, the son of Shah Abd al-Salam. Written on the 10th of Muharram, 904/August 29, 1498.

O King, certainly, in the way of the path

The threshold of your court became the qibla of the world

(Inscriptions on the Casket of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, documented by Ibrahim Dihgan, tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*)

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*
 - Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Min Kalam-i Shah Gharib Mirza*
 - Casket and grave of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza documented by Ibrahim Dihgan (d. 1948)
 - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
 - Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Khwaja 'Abd Allah Ansari (fl. late 15th century), poem titled "Har kih az 'ilm-i laduni shammai agah shud", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts and quoted in *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq* and *Kalam-i Pir* refers to Imam Salamshah and Imam Mustansir.
 - Husayn (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Amad Zaman", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Zamani (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Ay dar miyan-i jan", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Darwish (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Dila az manil-i in tirah khakdan bar khiz", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Nizari Ismaili pilgrim (ca. 15th century), *Greetings O Emperor of the realm of faith and world*, refers to Shah Salam and Shah Gharib as successive Imams, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
 - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

8. THE SAFAVID (FOURTH) PERIOD OF CONCEALMENT

It seems that the true religious identity of the Nizari imams and their followers had become somewhat better known after the establishment of Safawid rule, despite their continued use of the Sufi guise. The increased and more overt

activities of the Nizari Isma'ilis soon came to the attention of the earliest Safawid monarchs and their Twelver '*ulama*' who reacted by subjecting them to renewed persecution. We have records of two particular instances of such persecution taking place during the first Safawid century.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 436)

35. Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali (Nur Shah) (1498 – ca. 1509)

Glorify Nur Shah as the Imam.

O brothers! Nur Shah is the manifestation of the Imam

And resides in the land of Kahak.

Sayyid Imamshah (d. 1513), (*Ginan: Jirebhaire amar fal che gurajine hath*, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Voice of Truth: The Life and Teachings of Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah*, MA Thesis, 21)

Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali was known as Nur Shah. Sayyid Imamshah, the leader of the Nizari Ismaili *da'wah* in India was summoned by the Imam and visited him in Anjudan. This Imam invested Sayyid Imamshah with a mission to guide the Jamat in South Asia, after several of Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din's children apostatized and became Sunnis. Sayyid Imamshah mentions visiting Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali, called Nur Shah, in several of his Ginans. Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali is the one who sent the *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* as guidance to the South Asian Ismailis, giving this *farman* book the status of Pir. It is also reported that Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali had to go into hiding for several years due to persecution. The Persian *hujjat* Khayrkhwah-i Harati also describes visiting this Imam in Anjudan while the poet Amir Shirazi eulogized Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali and his successor in his poetry. There is also evidence that Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali later cultivated good relations with the Safavid Shah Isma'il I and possibly married a Safavid princess. According to Muhammad Taqi, "*Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali had been invested the honorific title of Amir al-Umra, whose description is still preserved on the marble slab of Imam's grave.*" (*Athar-i Muhammadi*, 65-66).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali in Anjudan witnessed in 1842 by Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893)
- Sayyid Imam Shah (d. 1513), mentions visiting Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali (called Nur 'Ali) in several Ginans: "*Jirebhaire sirabadh shahane kaje laviya*"; "*Jirebhaire amar fal che gurajine hath*"; "*Jirehbhai viracha sheheramen shaha more takhat e rachaeaji*";
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Khayrkhwah-i Harati (d. 1553), *Risalah*, in which he describes visiting the Imam of his time in Anjudan
- Amir Shirazi (d. 1591), *Diwan*; this poet was executed by the Safawids for eulogizing the Nizari Imams
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl.

17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*

- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 652-653)

36. Imam Murad Mirza (ca. 1509-1574)

Farhad Daftary (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 437) writes regarding Imam Murad Mirza that: Shah Tahmasp persecuted the Qasim-Shahi Nizaris in the time of their thirty-sixth imam, Murad Mirza, the son and successor of Abu Dharr 'Ali. The *Tarikh-i Alfi*, an extensive history of the Muslim world from the death of the Prophet to around the year 1000/1591–1592, which was compiled in India by several authors at the request of the emperor Akbar, refers under the same year 981/1573–1574 to the persecution of the Nizaris of Anjudan in the time of a certain Murad who claimed their imamate. Sources relate that Murad also had numerous followers in India, who sent him large sums of money from Sind and elsewhere. Murad Mirza and his predecessor evidently did not reside permanently at Anjudan, where the headquarters of the Qasim-Shahi Nizari *da'wah* had been located. Murad Mirza was engaged in political activity outside Anjudan, possibly in collaboration with Nuqtawis, and he had acquired supporters in Kashan and elsewhere in central Persia. Being alarmed by the activities of Murad Mirza, early in 981/1573 Shah Tahmasp ordered Amir Khan Musilu, the governor of Hamadan, to proceed to the Anjudan area to capture Murad and deal with his followers (*muridan*). Amir Khan killed a large number of the Nizaris of Anjudan and its surroundings and took much booty from them, but Murad Mirza himself, who was then staying at a fortress in the district of Kamara around Anjudan, managed to escape. Soon afterwards, he was captured and imprisoned near the royal quarters. In Jumada II 981/October 1573, Murad Mirza escaped from prison with the assistance of Muhammad Muqim, a high Safawid official who had come under the influence of the Nizari Imam. Murad proceeded to the vicinity of Qandahar, receiving help on the way from his followers in Fars, Makran and Sind. A few months later, he was recaptured in Afghanistan by a contingent of Safawid guards commanded by Didar Beg. Murad was brought before Shah Tahmasp, who had him executed along with Muhammad Muqim. It is interesting to note that Khayrkhwah, a contemporary of Tahmasp I as well as Murad Mirza and the latter's predecessor, states that one of the Nizari Imams of his time went into hiding (*satr*) for seven years, probably making reference to Murad Mirza. There is also a famous poet, Amir Shirazi, who mentioned Imam Murad Mirza in his poetry and was executed by the Safavids.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Khayrkhwah-i Harati (d. 1553), *Risalah*, in which he describes visiting the Imam of his time in Anjudan
 - Amir Shirazi (d. 1591), *Diwan*; this poet was executed by the Safawids for eulogizing the Nizari Imams
 - Qadi Ahmad al-Qummi (d. after 1606), *Khulasat al-Tawarikh*
 - Qadi Ahmad Tatawi and Jafar Beg Asaf Khan (d. 1612), *Tarikh-i Alfi*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 652-653)

37. Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali Khalil Allah I (1574-1634)



“According to this edict, originally installed in the main mosque of Anjudan and addressed to Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani, the current Qasim-Shahi Imam, the Shi'is of Anjudan, named as a dependency of the dar al-mu'minin of Qumm, were exempted, like other Shi'is around Qumm, from paying certain taxes.” (Daftary)

You must know that the knowledge of the Imam is one of the principles which should be accepted. As the Imam is permanent and an ever existing truth, the world could not be vacant of him for a single hour. And he, who does not know the Imam of his time, he would die a pre-Islamic death. The Imams are ever existing and permanent. They are continuous dynasty coming out the one from the other. The Imam is known from his original nucleus. If he has nominated and

appointed for the post of Imamate, any one of his sons, he should be considered the right Imam.

Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali Khalil Allah I,
(Letter to Syrian Ismailis, tr. Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis in History*, 1995)

After the Safavids started persecuting the Nizari Ismailis of Persia and executed Imam Murad Mirza, his successor Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali, known as Khalil Allah, lived quietly in Anjudan. The Imam and the Nizaris of this time seem to have practiced taqiyyah in the guise of Twelvers. The Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali formed close relations with the Safavid monarch Shah 'Abbas I and possibly married one of his sisters. There is an epigraph (shown above) from Shah 'Abbas dated 1627 which recognizes Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali as the Amir of Anjudan and exempts the Shi'is of Anjudan from certain taxes. This Imam's tombstone dated 1634 is in Anjudan and it names the Imam as Khalil Allah. Several Nizari poets including Khaki Khurasani and Azizullah Qummi eulogized the Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali in their poetry, such as the following verses of Azizullah Qummi:

There will have been not a single sign of the creature on earth, had the world remained without the existence of an Imam.

He, the Imam is apparent and hidden, and shall remain so all the times, and will be perpetual for ever. The compass of the universe is revolving under his command.

None can recognize God in person and even cannot perceive God with his physical eyes, be he talented like Ibn Sina in knowledge and excellence.

Acquire the recognition of God through the *hujjat* and *mu'allim* for they are the seekers of the path of the *tariqah*.

If you recognized the Imam, it means you have recognized God (through his channel), otherwise you will be caught in hell-fire.

Seek the recognition of Shah Dhu'l-Faqar, the Imam of the Age for he is the depository of glories.

He is like a man among the people, and sends the seekers of the path of religion towards God.

May I disclose you the interpretation of the "Mahdi in the cave?"

(It means that) the reality of the Imam is concealed in the cave of his heart from the hypocrites.

He is manifest by rule of *nass* (investiture), which is like a point, and all the affairs are in motion on the way to that point.

Sometimes, he appears as a father, or a son. Sometimes he is seen engaged in the polemics of knowledge like the orthodox people.

Sometimes, he sits on the throne, governing as a sovereign. Sometimes, he is like a darwish, an emperor or as a Lord of the lords.

No changes takes place in his essence (*dhat*), therefore, you ponder over the world of reality from the physical world.

Azizullah Qummi, (tr. Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin Saddik Ali, The Ismailis through History 1995, [Read Here](#))/p>

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- *Epigraph*, dated 1627, of a royal edict of Shah Abbas I addressed to Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali (Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani)

- Letter of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali sent to Syria, quoted in Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis through History* (1995)
 - Tombstone and grave of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali, stating his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
 - Azizullah Qummi (contemporary with the Imam), poetry quoted in Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646), *Diwan*, contains eulogies of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653)

38. Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali (1634-1671)

Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali, known also as Nur al-Dahr, lived in Anjudan but also travelled to see the Nizari Ismailis in different parts of Persia. There is a famous event in which the Imam met Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani when the latter was just a young boy. The poetry of Khaki Khurasani also eulogizes Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali. While not much is known about the Imam's life, his tombstone is in Anjudan and was documented by the historian Ivanow.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali, stating his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646), *Diwan*, contains eulogies of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653-654)

39. Imam Khalil Allah II (1671-1680)

Imam Khalil Allah II was the successor of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali. According to Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali (*The Ismailis through History*), this Imam examined the economic conditions of the poor Ismailis residing in Iran, India, Syria, Badakhshan and Central Asia, and sent necessary aid through his family members. He also reviewed the system of the Ismaili *da'wah* of different regions, and made vital changes specifically in the religious practices in India. The Imam Khalil Allah

also held a conference of the *da'is* and missionaries of different regions in Anjudan to review the mission activities. He made few key changes in the *da'wah* system in Syria and India, and issued necessary orders abreast of time in various regions. The tombstone and grave of Imam Khalil Allah is located in Anjudan as documented by Ivanow.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Khalil Allah, giving his name and deathdate, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653-654)

40. Imam Shah Nizar II (1680-1722)



Portrait of Imam Shah Nizar from his Mausoleum. Image Courtesy of The Essential Ismaili

In the eyes of the people I am only a person by the name of Nizar, but in reality I am the one who sees everything in the world of reality. While I am present, the people with wisdom and intellect do not take advantage of my presence, and once I leave this world they make my tomb a sanctuary for the fulfillment of their wishes.

Imam Shah Nizar II,
(*Qasidah: Har Chand Ke Man*,
[Listen on Youtube](#))

Imam Shah Nizar (d. 1722) was the fortieth Imam and moved his headquarters to the

town of Kahak where his mausoleum can still be found today. This mausoleum also contains several tombstones with inscriptions of Khojki Sindhi characters – which attests to the fact that Khojah pilgrims regularly visited this Imam. Satpanth manuscripts and sources among the Imamshahis, including the prayers recited by the Imamshahi group, contain a genealogy of the Nizari Imams up to this Imam Shah Nizar. The Persian historian Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876) in his *Tarikh-i Kirman* also refers to certain personal followers of Shah Nizar known as Ata'ullahis, who revered this Imam because they **“maintained complete faith and sincerity in**

the Sayyids of the line of Isma'il, son of Hadrat-i Imam, to speak correctly, Ja'far Sadiq." This quotation shows how the Nizari Ismaili Imams of this period were regarded, even by non-Isma'ilis, as "Sayyids" or direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Some of the ginans of South Asia actually mention this Shah Nizar as the Imam of the time residing in Kahak:

The ever-living Lord (*swami*) and Master (*shah*) has his seat in Kahak, manifest in the form (*avatara*) of 'Ali.

He is the seventy-seventh vessel (*patra*) and fortieth Imam, made manifest as Shah Nizar.

Those who have met Shah Nizar became everlasting in form.

The sins of all their existences disappear, and then their bodies are purified.

The Master (*sahib*) has fulfilled all the hopes of His imperfect handmaiden, for it is the age of the Lord Shah Nizār.

Sayyid Abdu'l-Nabi, (*Ginan*, tr. Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*, 98-101)

Imam Shah Nizar is also known for a famous ode (*qasidah*) that he composed, which has been preserved by the Iranian Ismailis. A line from this *qasidah* is quoted above.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Portrait of Imam Shah Nizar from his mausoleum
 - Imam Shah Nizar, *Qasidah*, still recited by contemporary Nizari Ismailis
 - Tombstone and mausoleum of Imam Shah Nizar in Kahak, giving his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
 - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
 - Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*, describes Shah Nizar as a sayyid and direct descendant of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq.
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

41. Imam Sayyid 'Ali (1722-d. ca. 1736)

Shah Nizar was succeeded by his son Imam Sayyid 'Ali (d. ca. 1736). While not much is known about this Imam's life, his tombstone is located in the mausoleum of his father Imam Shah Nizar. Imam Sayyid 'Ali is also mentioned in the *Silk-Guhar-Riz* as the father of Imam Hasan 'Ali in an account of a Central Asian Ismaili pir's meeting with the Imam (see below).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Sayyid Ali in the mausoleum of Imam Shah Nizar, giving his name, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Eyewitness account of Central Asian Ismaili Pir, Muhammad Salih, meeting this

Imam's son in *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)

- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

9. THE POST-SAFAVID PERIOD OF RE-EMERGENCE:

With the improved flow of the tithes of the Khojas, Imam Hasan Ali soon acquired extensive properties in Shahr-i Babak, also establishing a winter residence in the city of Kirman itself. **He was, indeed, the first Imam of his line to emerge from concealment and obscurity.**

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 459)

42. Imam Sayyid Hasan 'Ali Beg (ca. 1736-ca. 1747)

As the wine of divine unity (*wahdat-i ilahi*) was handed to Khwaja Muhammad Salih, he began to look for the sun-face of Mawlana. After some quests, he finally reached the Sun [Imam] and drank a cup of wine of divine unity in his session (*majlis*), whose pure name was Mawlana Shah-i Din Hasan b. Mawlana Sayyid 'Ali.

Silk-Guhar-Riz, (comp. ca. 1830 in Central Asia, tr. Abdulmamad Iloliev, *The Ismaili-Sufi Sage of Pamir*, 38)

The Persian historian Vaziri introduces Imam Hasan 'Ali, known as Sayyid Hasan Keheki, as being "from the lineage of Nizar who was, by several degrees removed, among the ancestors of Isma'il b. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq." This quotation also shows how the Ismaili Imams of this period were recognized by their contemporaries as direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through the line of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs through Nizar b. al-Mustansir. More importantly, as summarized by Daftary, Imam Hasan 'Ali moved his headquarters to Shahr-i Babak because he was concerned for the safety of "the Khojas who regularly travelled to the Anjudan and Mahallat areas to visit their imam and remit to him their religious dues were often plundered and killed between Na'in and Yazd by the Bakhtiyari tribesmen" (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 459). **Many sources suggest that Imam Hasan 'Ali also had warm relations with Nadir Shah (1688-1747), who actually recognized him as the Nizari Ismaili Imam and direct descendant of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs through Nizar b. al-Mustansir.** The *Athar-i Muhammad* (a chronicle written by a non-Ismaili servant of the Imams) reports that Nadir Shah appointed the Imam as the governor of Kiyab near Mahallat and that the Imam later helped Nadir Shah in the conquest of Isfahan. The Central Asian Ismaili pir Muhammad Salih, as recorded in the *Silk-Guhar-Riz* actually visited Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah in Kabul (as quoted above).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Muhammad Kazim Marvi (comp. after 1747), *'Alamara-yi Nadiri*
- Eyewitness account of Central Asian Ismaili Pir, Muhammad Salih, meeting this

Imam's son in *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)

- Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
- Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), who introduces this Imam as the direct descendant of Imam Nizar and Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq, *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

43. Imam Qasim 'Ali (ca. 1747-ca. 1756)

Imam Qasim 'Ali, also known as Sayyid Ja'far in some sources, was the son and successor of Imam Hasan 'Ali. Imam Qasim 'Ali did not have a long period of Imamate and little is known about his life. According to Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali (*The Ismailis through History*, 1995), Imam Qasim 'Ali was active in politics like his father and was also the governor of Kirman.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Pamiri Ismaili authors descended from Sayyid Suhrab Wali (d. after 1452), *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

44. Imam Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali (ca. 1756-1792)

Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali was also known as Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan Kahaki and became the governor of Kirman during the Zand period (1750-1794). John R. Perry writes in *Karim Khan Zand* (Chicago, 1979, 135-6) that, "*Abu'l-Hasan enjoyed the respect of all the leading citizens and even the provincial warlords and would seem the perfect choice for beglerbegi (governor-general) now that Kirman was relatively settled.*" This Imam played an active role in politics during the turbulent rule of the Zands. Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali passed away in 1792 and was succeeded by his son Imam Khalil Allah III. The tombstone and grave of Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali exists in Persia and was documented by the historian Ivanow.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali, stating his name and deathdate, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Musawi Isfahani (d. 1789), *Tarikh-i Gitigushay*
- Several letters of Imam Khalil Allah III in 1792 and 1794, presented as evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866
- Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*

- Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*
 - Numerous Persian chronicles document events of this Imam's life
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - 'Ali Rida 'Abd al-Karim Shirazi (ca. 1888), *Tarikh-i Zandiyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

45. Imam Shah Khalil Allah III (1792-1817)

There were still many Ismailis in the country who owed allegiance to an Imam of the line of Ismail. His name was Shah Khalil Allah, and he resided in a village called Kehek near Qumm, half-way between Tehran and Isfahan.

Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), (French consul-general in Aleppo, *Memoire sur les Ismaelites et les Nosairis de Syrie*, Vol. XIV, 1811, Paris, 279-80)

Imam Shah Khalil Allah moved from Kirman to Yazd – also in order to be closer to the Khoja Ismaili pilgrims who made dangerous journeys to see the Nizari Isma'ili Imams. E.I. Howard presented a few letters of written by this Imam in *The Shia School of Islam and its Branches* (Bombay, 1906, p. 85). On May 23, 1792, when Imam Shah Khalil Allah assumed the Imamatus, he wrote a letter addressed to the community of Bhavnagar, stating that he had been so fortunate as to have assumed his seat on the throne of the Imamatus, and directed them to remit the religious dues. Another letter dated July 1794 also addressed the Jamats of Sind, Kutchh, Surat, Bombay, Mahim, Bhavnagar, etc. Both of these letters were presented as evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866 to show how the Khojah Ismailis recognized the Nizari Ismaili Imams as the spiritual masters for a long time. Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), French consul-general in Aleppo (1809-1816), directly learned about Imam Khalil Allah from his visit to the Persian Qajar court of Fath 'Ali Shah and published his account as "Memoire sur l'adynastie des Assassins, et sur l'etymologie de leur Nom."

I have collected some fairly exact notions about the Batinis or Ismailis commonly called Melahedehs, a sect which still survives and is widespread and tolerated, like many others, in the provinces of Persia and in the Sind...

Meanwhile, it may be useful to tell you that the Melahedehs even today have their Imam or pontiff, descending, as they claim, from Ja'far Sadiq, the chief of their sect, and residing at Kehek, a village in the district of Qom. He is called Sheikh Khalil Allah...The Persian government does not bother him. On the contrary, he receives annual revenues from it. This person, whom his people grace with the pompous title of caliph, enjoys a great reputation and is considered to have the gift of performing miracles. They assure me that the Muslim Indians regularly come from the banks of the Indus to receive his

blessings in exchange for the rich and pious offerings they bring him. He is more specifically known to the Persians by the name of Seid Keheki.

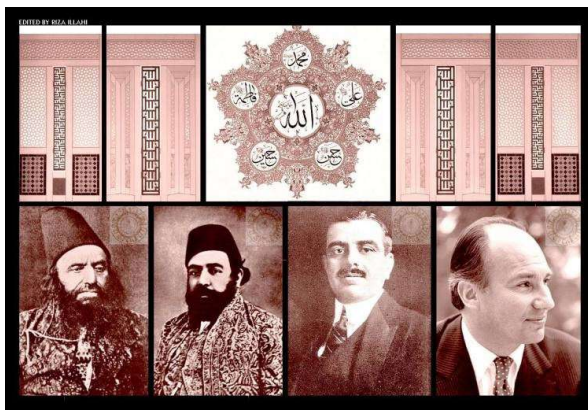
Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), (French consul-general in Aleppo, "Memoire sur la dynastie des Assassins," *Memoirs de l'Institut Royal de France* 4 (1818), tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 10)

The local Twelver Shi'i 'ulama' were extremely jealous of the Imam because of his popularity and the reverence shown by his Nizari Ismaili followers. In 1817, a mob led by a Twelver Shi'i mullah stormed the Imam's home – they murdered the Imam and several Nizari Ismailis.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Several letters of Imam Khalil Allah III in 1792 and 1794, presented as evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866
 - Two *Ginans* of Sayyid Fateh Ali Shah (1733-1798), including the famous Nawruz Ginan
 - Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), "Memoire sur la dynastie des Assassin" (1818)
 - Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
 - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
 - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
 - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
 - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

10. THE MODERN PERIOD: THE AGE OF THE AGA KHANS



Left to Right: Aga Khan I, Aga Khan II, Aga Khan III, & Aga Khan IV

My grandfather was as I am and have been for close on seventy years, the hereditary Imam or Spiritual Chief of the Ismaili sect of the Shia Muslims. He was a Persian nobleman, closely related to the then reigning dynasty in Persia, but

also in his own right the most princely blood in the Islamic world, for our family claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his beloved son-in-law Ali: and we are also descended from the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Aga Khan III, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1954, 7)

The life and activities of the four Imams who held the title of "Aga Khan" – Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Hazar Imam are well documented in a plethora of historical sources. Therefore, for these 4 Imams, our article will simply summarize certain

events and happenings in their lives, as there is zero historical doubt that these four Aga Khans actually existed.

46. Imam Shah Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I (1817-1881)



Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I

And it is known that my ancestors were from the Family of the Prophet, peace be upon him and upon his Family. Yet despite all this, I am not attached in the slightest detail to this world and what is in it. Indeed, efforts have been exerted to the utmost extent to spread the faith and the sacred law of the final Prophet in imitation of my pure ancestors. Likewise, is it evident that in Egypt several generations of my ancestors held kingship and the caliphate...I am a descendant of that

family.

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I,
(*Tarikh-i 'Ibrat-afza*, tr. Daniel Beben, Bombay, 19)

Imam Khalil Allah was succeeded by his thirteen year-old son, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah. After Imam Khalil Allah was murdered, the family was left unprovided for and nearly destitute. The late Imam's wife, Bibi Pir Sarkar Mata Salamat went to the Qajar court, demanding justice for the new Imam and his family. The pleas were successful: Fateh 'Ali Shah Qajar brought the murderers to justice, bestowed the title of "Aga Khan" on Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, gave one of his daughters in marriage to the Imam, granted the Imam land and appointed him as the governor of Qumm in 1835.

After the death of Fateh Ali Shah and the accession of Muhammad Shah Qajar, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was made governor of Kirman. He returned to Kirman and restored law and order to the area using his personal military, fighting off Baluchi and Afghan rebels and raiders on behalf of the Qajars. He was expecting to receive compensation for his services from the new Shah, Muhammad Shah

Qajar, but this was never granted. This mistreatment of the Imam was due to Qajar Court politics instigated by one Hajji Mirza Aqasi. This Qajar minister held a grudge against the Imam because Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah refused to marry his daughter (of royal blood) to a lowborn son of Aqasi's friend – a request that was a grave insult to the Imam. Mirza Aqasi's anger resulted in the Imam being deposed as governor of Kirman in 1837 and never compensated for his services. After an unsuccessful rebellion against the more powerful Qajar forces, for which Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah was held captive in Kirman and Tehran, the Imam was eventually pardoned and allowed to retire in Mahallat.

After again opposing the Qajars and fighting several minor battles, the Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, his brother and their party found themselves greatly outnumbered and escaped to Qandahar in Afghanistan. Here the Imam formed an alliance with the British, with whom he likely had prior contact. In 1842, when the British decided to retreat from Afghanistan, their entire British-Indian garrison was killed by Muhammad Akbar Khan's forces. The Imam's forces then assisted in the evacuation of the British forces from Qandahar. The Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party then went to Sind where they helped defend the British from night attacks. The Imam also intervened diplomatically with the Baluchi chiefs to avoid further fighting with the British. The Imam and his family also survived a Baluchi raid where their possessions were plundered. Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party eventually settled in Bombay, to the great joy of the Khoja Isma'ili Muslims, where he was joined by family members and attendants who migrated from Persia. The Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah wrote a personal memoir called *'Ibrat-Afza*, which is quoted above.

However, in 1848 Muhammad Shah's reign came to an end, and my grandfather settled peaceably in Bombay and there established his *durkhana* or headquarters. **Not only was this a wise and happy personal decision, but it had an admirable effect on the religious and communal life of the whole Ismaili world. It was as if the heavy load of persecution and fanatical hostility, which they had had to bear for so long, was lifted.** Deputations came to Bombay from places as remote as Kashgar, Bokhara, all parts of Iran, Syria, the Yemen, the African coast and the then narrowly settled hinterland behind it.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1954, Read on [NanoWisdoms](#))

47. Imam Aqa Shah 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885)



Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I next to Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II.

We, the Imams in descent from Imam Husayn, are present until today and we shall remain until the Qiyamah and even after the Qiyamah.

Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II,
(Address made in Bombay, 1878)

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was succeeded by his son Imam 'Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885), who also served as the *Pir* during his father's Imamat. Beginning with the Imamat of 'Aqa Ali Shah, the Nizari Ismaili Imams – no longer persecuted for their faith – were able to render immense services to Muslims of all persuasions and interpretations, beginning with the Muslims of India. "The growing prosperity of the Nizari Khoja community and his own policies earned Agha Khan II prestige among the Muslim population of India. He was elected

president of a body called the Muhammadan National Association. In that position, which he held until his death, Agha Khan II promoted educational and philanthropic projects for the benefit of all Indian Muslims." (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 477)

48. Imam Shah Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1885-1957)



Enthronement of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

O Jamats, do not consider me small. I am the descendant of the Prophet and my grandfather is Hazrat 'Amir al-Mu'minin (Hazrat 'Ali) and my grandmother is *Khatun-i-Jannat* (Lady of Paradise) Hazrat Bibi Fatima. I am the Light (*nur*) of both Hazrat 'Ali and the Holy Prophet (Muhammad). Though young in age, I am exalted.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Bombay, September 1, 1899, Jonah Steinberg, *Ismaili Modern*, 211)

Imam Aga 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II was succeeded by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, who became the new Imam at the tender age of 7 years. Upon his installation, many of the members of the Community were distraught and concerned about the Imam being a small boy. To comfort his murids and remind them of his spiritual authority, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah told the Jamat in his first address (quoted above): "do not consider me small."

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah lived an illustrious life and his countless accomplishments exceed all enumeration. An examination of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's life shows that he was the most publicly renowned and prominent Imam in all of world history. His great and unprecedented role in world history was foretold by his grandfather, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I, who said: *"Name him Muhammad Sultan, for he will be a sultan in the world and his period will see wonderful events."* **Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah worked and advocated in the interest of all Muslims worldwide: in the 1910s, he successfully worked to get Indian Muslims separate electorates; in the 1920s, he fought the British using all media and diplomatic channels to get Turkey a good deal after World War 1 and even endeavored to preserve the Sunni Ottoman Caliphate.** In the 1930s, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah led the Indian Muslim Independence movement at the Round Table Conferences. [Read more at [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#)]

An abbreviated timeline of some of his great accomplishments is given below:

- 1897 – Knight Commander of the Indian Empire by Queen Victoria
- 1899 – Star of Persia by the Shah of Persia
- 1907-1914 – Founding Member and President of the All-India Muslim League
- 1921 – Founding Member and Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University
- 1923 – Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order by King George
- 1924-25 – Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize
- 1930 – Chairman of the British-Indian section to the Round Table Conference
- 1932 – Delegate of India to the League of Nations
- 1937-38 – President of the League of Nations



The worldly career of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah culminated in his role as President of the League of Nations. This effectively meant that the Imām, the direct descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad, sat as the “leader of the nations of the world.” Even from an esoteric and spiritual perspective, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was, in the words of his grandson the present Imam, “the finest Imam we have had,” (July 26, 1957) and his holy personality is the living “Night of Power” (layat al-qadr) as foretold one thousand years ago by Fatimid thinkers – including Qadi al-Nu‘man, al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shirazi, and Nasir-i Khusraw (read more about that [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#))

hah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (1957-present)



Historically, Ismailis are united by a common allegiance to the living hereditary Imam of the time in the progeny of Islam’s last and final Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) through his daughter Fatimah and her husband, Hazrat Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and the first Shia Imam.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Ceremony, Ottawa, June 6, 2005, [NanoWisdoms](#))

His Highness Imam Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (b. 1936) is the present and 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and succeeded his grandfather to the office of Imamat in 1957. Born in Geneva and educated at Harvard, **the present Imam is the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad in an unbroken hereditary lineage going back to Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib in the line of Imam Isma‘il b. Ja‘far al-Sadiq and Imam Nizar b. al-Mustansir bi’llah. Today, Hazar Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the only living claimant to the Shi’i Imamat and he embodies the entire succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams going back thousands of years.** The present Imam has declared this in his own words that:

I have the great privilege of representing the Ismaili Imamatus — this institution which has stretched beyond borders for more than 1400 years and which defines itself and is recognised by an increasingly large number of states, as the succession of Shia Imami Ismaili Imams... The Ismaili Imamatus is a supra-national entity, representing the succession of Imams since the time of the Prophet. But let me clarify something more about the history of that role, in both the Sunni and Shia interpretations of the Muslim faith. The Sunni position is that the Prophet nominated no successor, and that spiritual-moral authority belongs to those who are learned in matters of religious law. As a result, there are many Sunni imams in a given time and place. But others believed that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. From that early division, a host of further distinctions grew up, but the question of rightful leadership remains central. **In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Address to Joint Session of Canadian Parliament, February 27, 2014, Read
at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Today, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spends 95% of his time and life leading the 15 million strong Ismaili Muslim Community spread through 35 countries in the interpretation of Islam and working to improve the quality of life of all human beings (read about his daily life [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#)). [Read about the Aga Khan's views and interpretations of Islam at [NanoWisdoms](#)]

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni is the Founder and Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) – a collection of development agencies which seek to improve quality of life and provide relief in the areas of poverty, health, architecture, media, governance, education, finance, economic development, building, environment, etc. [Read more on the AKDN [Aga Khan Development Network: The “Mahdi-ist” Mission of the Ismaili Imamatus](#)]



The Ismaili Imam has been widely recognized for his efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material assistance to the Ismaili Muslims, who are today spread over 25 countries, and for his vast contributions to quality of life in various communities worldwide. These include (courtesy of [Ismailmail](#)):

- 28 Title and State Decorations;
- 21 honorary degrees, from universities representing the US Ivy League, Canadian Group of 13, UK's Russell Group, and others;
- 16 civic honours, representing 9 investitures as Foreign Member to several state academies (for the creation of new knowledge – promoting research and stimulating the enhancement of thought, literature, language and other forms of national culture) and 3 Leadership posts at influential European Institutions to promote diplomacy, culture and development;
- 30 awards spanning domains such as architecture and the built environment, restoration and the revival of culture, education, health, diplomacy and peace, philanthropy, sports, corporate enterprise
- 70+ high profile keynote addresses delivered.

Most recently, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni established the [first Global Seat of the Ismaili Imamat in Portugal](#). According to this landmark Agreement, the Ismaili Imamat is also “a legal entity, [which] means the institution or office of the Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims [is] established in accordance with the applicable customary law.” Furthermore, the agreement states that the “Portuguese Republic acknowledges the legal personality and capacity of the Ismaili Imamat to act in international relations.”

In terms of Ismaili history and theology, this means that the spiritual-religious office of the Ismaili Imamat now has a “legal manifestation” in the exoteric (*zahir*)

realm of socio-international affairs – this manifestation being the “legal entity of the Ismaili Imam” now recognized by Portugal. Just as in past eras, the Ismaili Imams publicly presented themselves and acted as Fatimid Caliphs (the Fatimid Caliphate), Sufi Shaykhs, or Persian governors in the public-exoteric (*zahir*) and socio-public realm, today, the Ismaili Imams are engaging in the public realm today through a formal legal-institutional structure with the formal name “Ismaili Imam.” **Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the spiritual-religious office of the Imam truly belongs to the esoteric realm, the World of Faith (*din*) – regardless of whether there is a legal institution of the Imam in the public exoteric realm (*dunya*).** In the highest spiritual realm, there always remains the spiritual Light (*nur*) of Imam that transcends time and space and which manifests in the person of each individual Ismaili Imam who occupies the spiritual-religious office of Imam in the World of Faith (*din*).

Just as the lineage of Ismaili Imams has continued in an unbroken lineage from Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni today, it shall continue in the progeny of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni evermore until the end of time:



**“You know, my role is only transitory.
And from one Imam to the next, our
first concern is the Ismaili community.”**

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Jeune Afrique Interview, 19 September 2005

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When you inherit an office, which is a life office, you are simply a link in the chain. And, yes, you therefore look at life somewhat differently than if you were, I suppose, a professional who moves around and is free to do what he

wishes. In my case, my concern is, I inherited an office, I would like the next Imam to have a structure and a system which enables him to be effective in the ethical and the human terminology of this institution. And that is the nature of what I seek. Now some things are impossible to achieve, I well know that. And if that is the case, I simply have to try and move the issues forward as much as I can. **The next Imam will then decide how he wishes to handle the issues. But, it is the continuum which is at the back of my mind, which in a sense, affects the way I look at things. And that's why perhaps my time dimension appears different than it might for other people.** If I have to wait 12, 15, 20 years to achieve goals which I think are important, I will wait 12, 15, or 20 years. That simply is the nature of the issues that we have to address.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Pranay Gupte Interview 1999, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams

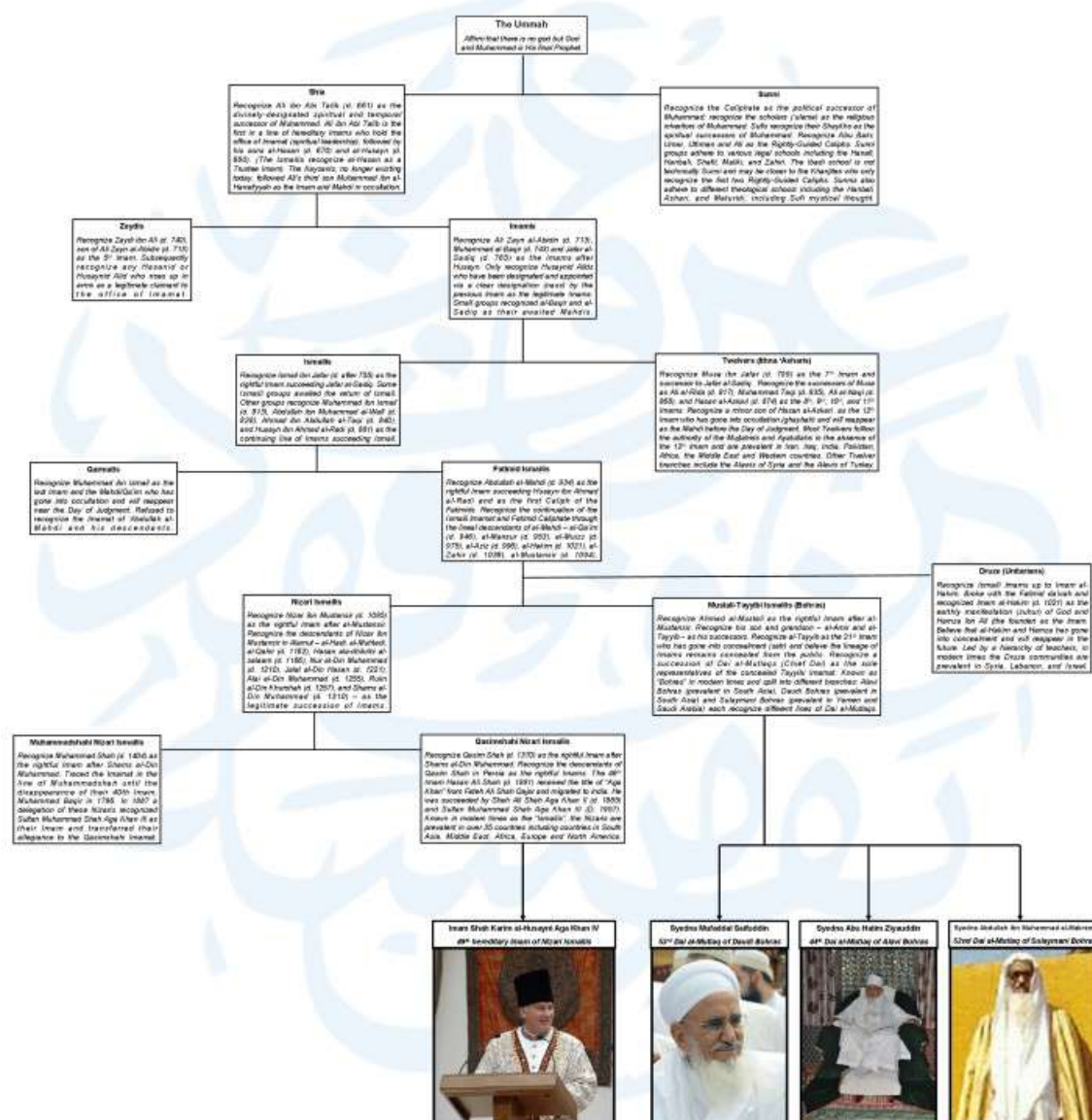
“In the early hours of July 11, the Aga’s heart-beat weakened. Aly and Sadruddin were summoned to the Barakat but their dying father could no longer speak. Karim came and the Begum was still keeping up her vigil. Four doctors were in attendance and nurses left the sick-room only to change their clothes or take a bite. At midday, the Aga Khan was sleeping peacefully. Forty minutes later his life slipped quietly away... The curtains were drawn and darkness fell over a great figure of the age.”

Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 1970, p. 206)

The above narrative describes one of the most difficult moments faced by every generation of Isma‘ili Muslim communities: the death of the Imam. This moment is immediately followed by another of equal intensity: the succession of the next Imam.

Ultimately, these events amount to a period of trial for the Isma‘ili community as it is a time when they must say goodbye to the Imam whom they have respected, venerated and loved for nearly a lifetime and subsequently transfer all these sentiments to their new Imam. At the same time, the community must come to understand the true nature of this change: in reality, nothing has really changed at all. Despite the death of the Imam, the Imam remains ever-more, albeit in a different guise. In Shi‘a Isma‘ili Islam, the succession of the Imamate – including the demise of the predecessor and the enthronement of his successor – is an event which combines both clarity as well as ambiguity. The face of the succession is clear – *this* Imam has succeeded *that* Imam. But the underlying matters are nebulous and in modern times are often subject to speculation: How is the next Imam chosen? Does the Imam-to-be know of his own status beforehand? Was he prepared for his function? Why does the Imamate continue in a single line of male descent? This article will explore these questions pertaining to the Isma‘ili Imamate and the matter of succession in light of some of the historical sources from the intellectual heritage of Shi‘a Isma‘ili Islam.

Shia Islam: Major Branches and Communities of Interpretation

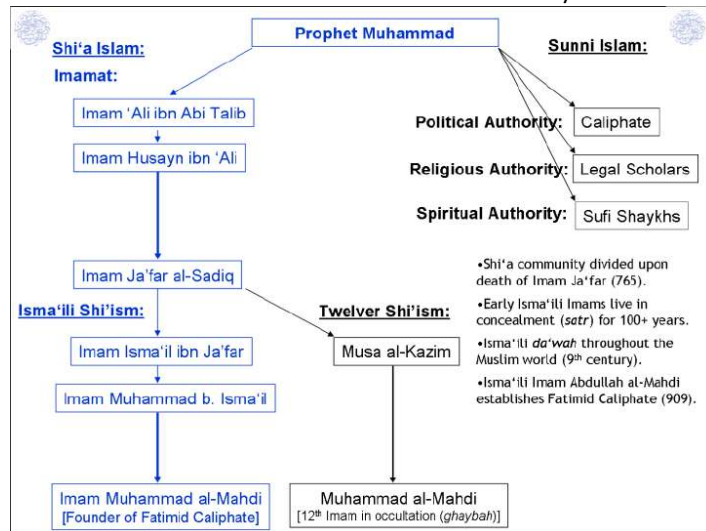


“In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.”

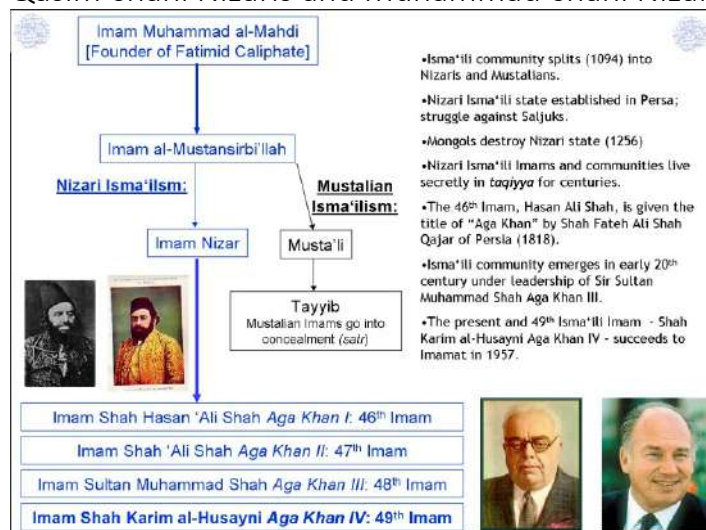
– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

The [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#) are a branch of [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#) which traces the religious and spiritual authority of the Prophet Muhammad through his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali, the first *Imam* (spiritual leader) and thereafter by heredity through the Imam's descendants. The Isma'ilis are so called because following the death of the fifth Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, they accepted his elder son Isma'il as his legitimate successor to the Imamate and traced the Imamate among the lineal descendants of Isma'il. Meanwhile, the majority of the Shi'a, later known as the

Ithna 'Ashari (Twelvers) traced the Imamate through Imam Ja'far's younger son Musa al-Kadhim and through a few more generations until the disappearance of their twelfth Imam in the ninth century.



The Isma'ili branch was itself subdivided upon the death of their nineteenth Imam, al-Mustansir-bi'llah, with the Nizari Isma'ilis accepting his son and heir-designate Abu Mansur Nizar as the next Imam while the other branch known as the Must'alian Isma'ilis followed another son Ahmad Must'ali. The Must'alian Imams were believed to have gone into concealment a few generations later and are now represented by *da'is* who lead the communities. The Nizari Isma'ilis were further subdivided over the succession to their twenty-first Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad. One group followed his younger son Qasim Shah as their Imam while the other followed Muhammad Shah – these groups being known as the Qasim-shahi Nizaris and Muhammad-shahi Nizaris.



Today, the Imam of the Nizari Qasimshahi Isma'ilis is His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV known to his *murids* as 'Mawlana Hazar Imam' (our lord the present Imam). The Muhammad-shahi community lost contact with its last known Imam, Muhammad Baqir, in the nineteenth century and the bulk of this community transferred its allegiance to the Qasim-shahi Imamate during the Imamate of The

Concept of God in the Teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, the predecessor and grandfather of the present Imam. Technically the term “Isma‘ili” embraces all those Shi‘a groups which affirm the Imamate of Isma‘il ibn Jafar. In the present time, the term ‘Isma‘ili Muslims’ is most often used to designate to the Nizari Qasim-shahi branch lead by the Aga Khan. Through all the various schisms that have occurred within the Shi‘a community, the matter of succession to the Imamate was of paramount importance and became the determining factor of these events.

‘Direct Descendants, one from the other..’



“Ever since the time of my ancestor ‘Ali, the first Imam, that is to say over a period of thirteen hundred years, it has always been the tradition of our family that each Imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants whether they be sons or remoter male issue...”

— Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

The matter of succession in the Isma‘ili Imamate is based upon two key factors. The Imam possesses two marks of authenticity which, in effect, support and prove his claims to the Imamate. The first of these is the Imam’s physical descent from the preceding Imams; the second is the explicit appointment or designation, known as *nass*, which the predecessor Imam has made for the succeeding Imam. These two elements, lineage and designation (*nass*), signify two kinds of relationships – a physical connection and the spiritual connection – by which people of any age can attain the recognition of the Imam. Thus, the physical genealogy of the Imam effectively narrows down and restricts the possible

candidates to the Imamate at any given time to the direct descendants of the previous Imams. The designation of the Imam by his predecessor further specifies the legitimate holder of the office of Imamate to its rightful claimant. Therefore, it must be noted that both the lineage of the Imams and the designation exist for the sake of humankind recognizing the true Imam at any given period of history.

The fact that the Imamate remains among one particular line of descent has been subject to questioning and debate, particularly in the modern age. Inaccurate viewpoints have compared the Imamate to a political dynasty of kingship and others have sought to delegitimize the notion of familial and hereditary authority in the name of equal opportunity and democracy. What is often neglected in such debates is that the Imamate is primarily an Islamic institution and model of leadership and as such it is a faithful reflection of principles which are laid out in the Holy Qur'an – the sacred scripture of Islam. Historically, the Imamate is an institution which succeeds to and continues [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) – who is viewed by Muslims as the last in a long line of Prophets whom God has sent to humanity over the ages. As such, the Imamate possesses certain traits in common with the model of Prophetic authority that the Holy Qur'an describes in many of its verses.

Firstly, the Isma'ili Imamate is connected to the Prophet Muhammad through blood relations and heredity. The first Imam, Hazrat 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is the progenitor of all the Shi'a Imams, was the first cousin of the Prophet sharing with him a common grandfather, Hazrat 'Abd al-Muttalib. The Imamate is also linked to the Prophet through his sole surviving child, Hazrat Bibi Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, who was given in marriage to Hazrat 'Ali. As the Prophet left no male progeny, his lineage survives through his daughter who, as the wife of the first Imam, is like the matriarch of all the Imams in their progeny.

The idea that the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad must be from his family and progeny is not merely based on dynastic ambitions, politics or Arabian tribalism. Rather, the concept of Prophetic succession through family is made evident in the Holy Qur'an in its own narrative regarding the stories of the past Prophets. Prophet Muhammad was himself the last in a long line of Prophets and his succession should be consistent with that of his predecessors who were also succeeded by their family members and descendants. The sanctity and prominence of the families of the Prophets is one of the key principles established in the Holy Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an speaks about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) being succeeded by his two sons Hazrat Isma'il and Hazrat Ishaq (Isaac), and Ishaq in turn being succeeded by his son Yaqub (Jacob). Hazrat Yaqub was in turn succeeded by his son Hazrat Yusuf (Joseph). Hazrat Musa (Moses) was helped and succeeded by his brother Harun (Aaron). Hazrat Dawud (David) who was both a king and prophet was inherited by his son Hazrat Sulayman (Solomon). The Prophet Zakariyyah (Zechariah) prayed to his Lord for a son to succeed him and this prayer was answered in the form of Hazrat Yahya (John). In fact, according to

S.M. Jafri, the verses which speak about the special status of the families and progeny of various Prophets number to over a hundred in the Holy Qur'an.

In this respect, there must be noted the Quranic concept of the exalted and virtuous family, whose favour in the eyes of God derives from their righteous deeds and services in the cause of God. In all ages the prophets have been particularly concerned with ensuring that the special favour of God bestowed upon them for the guidance of man be maintained in their families and pass to their progeny. The Quran repeatedly speaks of the prophets praying to God for their progeny and asking Him to continue His guidance in their lineages. In the answer to these prayers, the verses of the Qur'an bear direct testimony to the special favour of God being granted to the direct descendants of the prophets to keep their fathers' covenants intact, to become true examples of their fathers' righteousness, and to keep fast to the path of righteousness set by these prophets. Four terms are repeatedly used in the Qur'an to express God's special favour for the descendants of the prophets: *Dhurriya*, '*Aal*, *Ahl*, and *Qurba*. The total number of verses that mention special favour requested for and granted to the families of the various prophets by God runs to over a hundred in the Quran.

S. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Development of Shia Islam*, Chapter 1, Beirut, 1976

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) occupies a central place for the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. He is acknowledged as the 'father of monotheism' and these faiths and their members trace their spiritual ancestry back to him. In the Qur'anic narrative, a special status is particularly given to Prophet Ibrahim and his descendants. Prophet Ibrahim is said to have completed God's trials, and is thereafter Divinely appointed as an *Imam* (leader) of mankind. He prays to his Lord that this status is bestowed upon his descendants as well:

And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will make thee an Imam of mankind." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers."

— Holy Quran 2:124

God accepts Ibrahim's prayer on the condition that only the righteous and just among his progeny will be appointed as Imams. This Qur'anic verse is significant because it establishes two principles about the Shi'a Imamate as a model of Islamic leadership. Firstly, the Imams who bear the Imamate are not appointed by the whims of common people; rather, like the Messengers themselves, the Imams – who sustain, preserve and interpret the Divine Message – are Divinely appointed. Secondly, all the Imams are to be from the descendants of Ibrahim. It is significant to note that the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin 'Ali, the first hereditary Imam of Shi'a Islam, are acknowledged in Arabian and Islamic traditions as descending from Ibrahim through his elder son Isma'il. This also means that the Isma'ili Imams, through the lineage that goes back to their forefather Imam 'Ali, are also

the direct descendants of Ibrahim. There are also numerous other verses which speak about the unique status and rights which God has bestowed upon the descendants of Prophet Ibrahim¹. The verse shown below seems to confirm this:

Or are they jealous of mankind because of that which Allah of His bounty hath bestowed upon them? For We bestowed upon the House of Abraham (*'aala ibrahima*) the Book (*al-kitaba*) and the Wisdom (*al-hikmata*), and We bestowed on them a Mighty Kingdom.

– Holy Quran 4:54

The Holy Bible also affirms the special place of Ibrahim and his descendants, such as in the following verse from the Book of Genesis where God speaks to Abraham:

As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

– Holy Bible, Genesis 17:7

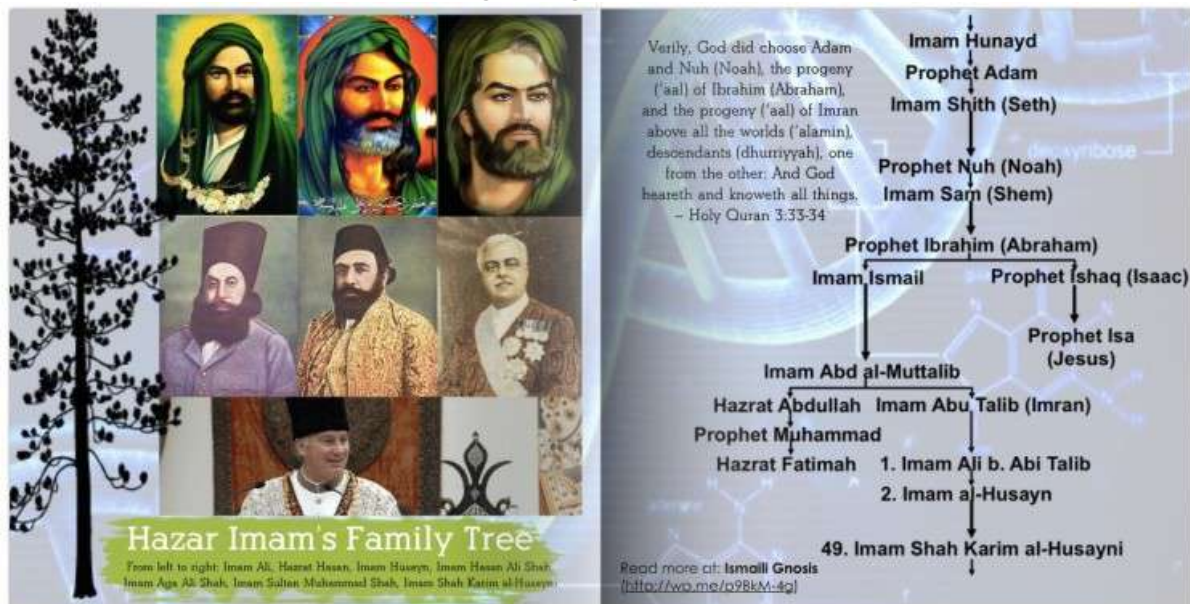
Using biblical data, one can also trace back the lineage of Ibrahim to Nuh (Noah) and Adam – great Prophets and patriarchs for Jews, Christians and Muslims. The following verse of the Holy Qur'an affirms [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) in the line of the hereditary Shi'a Isma'ili Imams.

Verily, God did choose Adam and Nuh (Noah), the progeny (*'aal*) of Ibrahim (Abraham), and the progeny (*'aal*) of Imran above all the worlds (*'alamin*), descendants (*dhurriyyah*), one from the other: And God heareth and knoweth all things.

– Holy Quran 3:33-34

The historical identity of Imran – last name in the above verse – is ambiguous and has been subject to different interpretations – the most common being that Imran refers to the father of Musa or the father of Maryam (Virgin Mary) as both are mentioned within the Qur'an. The Shi'a and particularly Isma'ili interpretations state that the name Imran in the above verse refers to the father of Imam 'Ali, whose popular name or *kunya* was Abu Talib whereas his proper name was, in fact, Imran.² In this sense, the Shi'a understand the words *'aal Imran* (Progeny of Imran) in the verse to be the hereditary Shi'a Imams who are the children (*'aal*) of Abu Talib (Imran). The logic of this interpretation is clear from the very structure of the verse. Adam, Nuh and Ibrahim are direct descendants of one another (which can be ascertained from the Book of Genesis) and all three names occur in chronological order. Therefore, in keeping with the structure of the verse, Imran and the Progeny of Imran must come chronologically after Abraham and the Progeny of Ibrahim. For all Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad as the greatest Prophet is undoubtedly included as part of the Progeny of Ibrahim. The Prophet

Ibrahim had two sons – Isma'il and Ishaq – and the Israelite Prophets including Musa, Dawud and Isa descend from Ishaq while the Prophet Muhammad descends from Isma'il. Therefore, Imran and the Progeny of Imran *cannot* refer to people who came *before* the Prophet Muhammad – otherwise, the chronological structure of the verse is broken. This eliminates the possibility of Imran referring to the father of Musa or the father of Maryam because both personalities lived before the Prophet Muhammad (who is a member of Abraham's Progeny). Furthermore, both the father of Musa and the father of Maryam would already be included among the Progeny of Ibrahim via Ishaq. The only consistent interpretation of the verse would chronologically place Imran at most contemporary to the Prophet Muhammad and place the Progeny of Imran after the Prophet Muhammad. The only reading which is faithful to this structure is when Imran is understood as Abu Talib and the Progeny of Imran is understood as Abu Talib's lineal descendants beginning with 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shi'a Imam.



While the Imamate continues in a male³nt, this should not be understood as a deprecation of the feminine. It is often forgotten that the Shi'a Imams' claim to be the direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad is not through male but female descent – as embodied in Fatima the daughter of the Prophet. This is the reason why the Isma'ili Imams chose the name *al-fatimiyyah* (the Fatimids) when they established Islam's only Shi'i Caliphate in the 10th century, the only Muslim dynasty to be named after a woman. In addition to the Prophet and Fatima, the key figures from whom the lineage of Imamate stems are Imam 'Ali and Imam Husayn. 'Ali, as the first Imam in the series, is considered to be the prototype and the forefather of all the Imams. Imam 'Ali was succeeded as Imam by both of his sons – Imam al-Hasan who was an Entrusted Imam (*al-imam al-mustawda*) and Imam al-Husayn who was the Permanent Imam (*al-imam al-mustaqarr*) in whose blessed line the Imamate dwells and continues.⁵ds, the Isma'ili Imams are 'Alid, Husaynid, and Fatimid – by virtue of which they are Muhammadan.

While the matter of the Imams' lineage is important, it should not be overestimated. Being a descendant of Imam 'Ali or other Imams does not automatically make one an Imam as well. It should not be forgotten that the both *nass* (designation) and lineage are required. The concept of *nass* does not translate to mere appointment. This designation is itself understood as an expression of the Divine Will. In the Qur'an, it is God who appoints the family members and descendants of the Prophets to their blessed position. The *nass* which each Imam makes for his successor indicates to his community the identity of the one whom the Divine Will has selected as their next Imam. The twenty-third Nizari Isma'ili Imam, Hasan *ala-dhikrihi al-salaam*, explains that the *nass* does not 'make' the Imam into an Imam, it merely 'reveals' the identity of the next Imam such that the community may recognize him as such:

The designation which is made is not in order to make him an Imam; it is only made so that people should recognize him as such – otherwise, from his standpoint and perspective, all such different states are one and the same.

– Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salaam,
(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim* transl. S.J. Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, p. 123)

The first such *nass* in the Islamic community goes back to the time of the Prophet when he designated Hazrat 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor on numerous occasions. The final and most well known occasion of designation of 'Ali as the supreme leader of the Muslim community took place at *Ghadeer Khum* where the Prophet declared: "I leave amongst you two weighty things – the Book of God and my Progeny (*itrat*). If you hold fast to both of them you shall never go astray. These two shall not separate until they return to me at the paradiscal pool."⁵ He further stated: "For whomsoever I am his master (*mawla*), this 'Ali is also his master (*mawla*)."⁶ Since that time, each Imam has designated his successor, with some of these designations taking place privately and others publicly.⁷ It is the belief of the Isma'ili Muslims that the Imamate will continue to be handed down in a continuous lineage through the designated individuals until the Day of Judgment. This is boldly proclaimed by the Imam Hasan *ala-dhikrihi al-salaam*:

Know that this Imamate is a reality [which] will never cease, change or be altered. It will continue forever to be transmitted through the progeny of our lords (*mawalina*). It will never leave them, whether in form, meaning or reality.

– Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salaam, (Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim* transl. S.J. Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, p. 122)

The Bearers of the Light



“Since my grandfather, the last Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the Nur – a word which means ‘The Light’.”

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

While their lineage and *nass* constitute the physical characteristics of the Imam, the foundation of the Imamate of the Imams lies in that which is esoteric, hidden and not perceptible to the external senses. What really qualifies the Imam for his role does not belong to his physical body, but to his subtle soul. The Imam is in possession of a sacred knowledge or *‘ilm*¹ by virtue of which he is the Imam in the first place. This knowledge is not an empirical or rational knowledge, but a knowledge pertaining to the spirit and the soul. Ultimately, the position of the Imam is due to his superior knowledge and enlightened intellect as opposed to just an illustrious pedigree.

The *‘ilm* of the Shi’a Imam includes full knowledge of the exoteric and esoteric meanings of the Holy Qur’an and the knowledge required to interpret the faith of Islam, particularly its esoteric sciences. But the essence of this *‘ilm* transcends the individuality of the Imam because it is essentially a mystical gnosis (*ma’rifah*) of the Ultimate Reality (*haqiqah*).² Nasir al-Din Tusi refers to this essential knowledge as the formula of the divine unity (*kalima-yi tawhid*).³ Due to its sacred and luminous nature, this mystical gnosis has been described by the imagery of ‘Light’ (*nur*)⁴ and the Imam himself has been often described as the ‘bearer of the Light’.⁵ This is indeed how the present Imam describes himself in a public interview given in 1965 when he was asked whether he was a symbol of the Isma’ilis’ Faith:

Yes. Since my grandfather, the last Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the Nur – a word which means ‘The Light’. The Nur has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet. But my work and responsibilities overflow into the practical side of life.

**– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Sunday Times Weekly Review – Interview, Dec 12, 1965)**

This 'Light' (*nur*) was manifest in the Prophet Muhammad and also the first Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The Light does not dwell inside their physical bodies, but resides within their subtle souls.⁶ By virtue of this Light, the individual souls of the Prophets and the Imams possess spiritual sanctity⁷ and divine proximity – referred to as *walayah* in Sufism and Shi'ism. This Light, transcending their existence as individual persons, is the foundation of the spiritual identity of the Prophet and the Imams by virtue of which the Prophet is reported to have said to 'Ali: "I am from you and you are from me." Isma'ili and Sufi theosophers have referred to this Light as the Muhammadan Reality (*haqiqah al-muhammadiyah*) and the Light of Imamate (*nur al-imamah*) because it is the metaphysical reality behind the person of the Prophet (and the Imams). It is this Reality which both Sunni and Shi'i traditions describe as the luminous being which God created first, before all things:

"The first thing created by God was the Intellect; The first thing created by God was my Light."

– Prophet Muhammad, (William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, State University of New York Press, New York 1983, p. 66)

The universal concept of the Muhammadan Reality and the Light of Imamate has its equivalents in various spiritual and philosophical traditions. The Isma'ili theosophers refer to it as the Universal Intellect (*al-'aql al-kull*) while the Islamic philosophers spoke of it as the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-'awwal*). According to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, this Intellect is the primordial Light before God which was manifest in the Prophet Muhammad and the first Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib:

"Two thousand years before creation, Muhammad and 'Ali were one Light (*nur*) before God."

– Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p. 31)

In another *hadith*, the same Imam describes the Intellect (*'aql*) as the first spiritual entity to be created from God's Light:

"God – may He be glorified and exalted – created the Intellect (*al-'Aql*) first among the spiritual entities. He drew it from the right side of His throne, making it proceed from his own Light."

– Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p. 8)

In classical Isma'ili philosophy, God Himself transcends all attributes, descriptions, and names including the categories of space and time, being and non-being, unity and multiplicity, and even existence and non-existence. God Himself or the Ultimate Reality is referred to simply as 'He who is above all else' because He transcends and is prior to the distinction between subject and object and thus outside the range of human knowledge. In the Isma'ili metaphysical worldview, all of the attributes and qualities of greatness, majesty and perfection, particularly those of an anthropomorphic nature, pertain to the Universal Intellect or Light of Imamate while keeping in mind that 'He who is above all else' is beyond all such qualities. The Universal Intellect includes all divine attributes and is, technically

speaking, the 'First Cause' and the 'Necessary Being' (*wajib al-wujud*) of the onto-cosmological hierarchy which gives rise to the physical world. The Universal Intellect encompasses all things and all being within itself for it is the first and most perfect entity originated by God. Explaining the Isma'ili concept of the Universal Intellect as described by Sayyedna Nasir Khusraw, Dr. Alice Hunsberger states that:

The [Universal] Intellect is complete and perfect. It knows all things, and knows them all at once; there is nothing for it to know later or better. There is no motion or time within the Intellect or within which the Intellect functions, for time and motion have not yet come into existence in the realm of the Intellect. Not only does the Intellect know all things; it encompasses all beings, material and spiritual. In fact, following the Command 'Be!', the Intellect *is* all being; there is nothing outside of itself. The Intellect also lacks nothing and needs nothing, because there is nothing other than its actual perfection.

(Alice Hunsberger, *The Ruby of Badakhshan*, p. 159)

The Isma'ili Imam is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of this Universal Intellect or Light of Imamate. The term *mazhar* suggests the idea of a mirror which reflects or manifests an object without actually incarnating it physically or causing any change or alternation to the object. Accordingly, it is the pure human soul of the Imam which serves as this mirror or *mazhar* of the Universal Intellect which is *reflected* in the Imam's soul without actually or materially descending into the person of the Imam. It is only in this sense that the Imam is called the 'bearer of the Light' – in that the Light of Imamate is reflected in the Imam's human soul while not being physically contained or constrained within this mirror. Thus, the Universal Intellect remains transcendent in the higher spiritual realm and manifest in the created world while never materially descending into it. It is important to note the distinctions – between the Imam and the Light of Imamate on one hand, and that between the Light of Imamate and God Himself on the other – so as to keep all things in their proper place.

While all the Imams are the bearers of the Muhammadan Reality or Light of Imamate, they still possess a unique individuality which renders each Imam as being different from the others. The sequence of the Imams should not be perceived as 'reincarnations' of one and the same individual soul, but rather an epiphanic succession where the individual soul of each Imam serves as a unique mirror or locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the same one Light – in the manner of a single light being reflected in multiple mirrors, each with different forms, curvatures and dimensions, with one mirror appearing after another in succession. Each Imam also integrates the virtues and qualities of his predecessors – *each* reflects the *all*. But at the same time, each Imam manifests these virtues and qualities in a unique fashion due to his individuality.⁸ These principles are, for example, reflected in the architecture of the Delegation of the Isma'ili Imamate in Ottawa. Its maple floor consists of 49 large squares – standing for the 49 Isma'ili Imams – and each of these 49 squares contains 49 smaller squares. This visually

depicts how each Imam amongst the 49 Isma'ili Imams reflects and integrates the virtues and qualities of all 49 Imams within himself.



It is often assumed that the Light of Imamate is mystically transferred from one Imam to the next when the Imam passes away. But in reality, what passes from one Imam to the next upon the predecessor's death are only the functions and authority of the Imamate; the Light of Imamate is something that all the Imams possesses at birth¹, although at such time their formal status as Imams is not known or declared.² It must be remembered that the reality which is described as the Light of Imamate is not a material entity which must be restricted to a single individual, but rather, it can be manifest in several generations at the same time. From a spiritual standpoint, the Imams are born as Imams and are always Imams; all are the bearers of the Light since birth and even before that. ⁴ The twenty-third Nizari Isma'ili Imam Hasan *ala-dhikrihi al-salaam* makes this clearly evident in his Blessed Epistles (*fusul-i mubarak*):

The Imam is perfect when still in the form of sperm in the loins of his father and the pure womb of his mother. An Imam is always an Imam and always perfect. Otherwise, why should he say, 'The Imam knows from which drop of sperm the Imam after him will come?'

– Imam Hasan '*ala dhikrihi al-salaam*, (Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim* transl. S.J. Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, p. 125)

As long as the present Imam is alive, he alone carries out the functions and holds the authority of the Imamate. The successor Imam will only assume the formal role of Imamate and be officially recognized as Imam when the previous Imam has passed away.⁴ In other words, the present Imam at any given time is the 'speaking Imam' (*al-imam al-natiq*), while the Imam-in-waiting is the 'silent Imam' (*al-imam al-samit*). This is indicated in Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's reply to a person who asked:

“Can there be two Imams at once?” To which the Imam replied: “No, unless one of them is silent.”⁵

This also implies the possibility of several generations of Imams being present at once but with only one of them being the speaking and functioning Imam of the Time. This was actually a reality during the early days of the Fatimid period. The Must‘alian Isma‘ili historian Idris Imad al-Din describes a moment from Fatimid history where the Qadi al-Numan was conversing with the Imam Abdu’llah al-Mahdi. In this period, Imam al-Mahdi had made it publically known that his son Abu’l-Qasim Muhammad – the future Imam al-Qa’im – was to succeed him. Al-Qa’im already had a son of his own, Isma’il, who would become the future Imam al-Mansur and Imam al-Mahdi had confided this fact to al-Numan:

Al-Qadi al-Nu‘man was among those who had precedence in serving the Imam al-Mahdi bi’llah during the later part of his caliphate. He was also the beneficiary of the favours of al-Qa’im bi-Amr Allah as were others. Then Imam al-Mahdi bi’llah disclosed to him the distinction of his grandson Imam al-Mansur bi’llah who was the third of the Imams of the [period of] manifestation. He (al-Nu‘man) said: ‘O Commander of the Faithful, three Imams in one age?’ the [number] astounded him. Then Imam al-Mahdi bi’llah showed him al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah who was a babe in his cradle and said, ‘And this is the fourth of us, O Nu‘man!’

(Idris Imad al-Din, *Tarikh al-Khulafa al-Fatimiyyin bi’l-Maghrib*, transl. Shainool Jiwa, *Anthology of Isma‘ili Literature*, p. 60)

In another moving account narrated by the Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi, the Imam al-Mahdi convened a special gathering (*majlis*) where he brought his son, al-Qa’im, his grandson, al-Mansur, and his great grandson al-Mu’izz into the same room and covered all of them with a cloak:

One day [Imam] al-Qa’im bi-Amr Allah, upon him be peace, was in his father [Imam] al-Mahdi’s *majlis* (gathering), seated in front of him. His son, [Imam] al-Mansur, was standing in front of his grandfather, when al-Mahdi said to him, ‘Bring me your son’, that is [Imam] al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah. So his nursemaid brought him. He was one year old or a little older. Al-Mahdi took him on his lap and kissed him. Then he said to his son al-Qa’im bi-Amr Allah, ‘O Abu’l-Qasim, there is not a *majlis* more illustrious on earth than this one, as four Imams are gathered here,’ that is, al-Mahdi himself, his son al-Qa’im, his grandson al-Mansur, and his great-grandson al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah. Additionally, the parasol bearer, Abu’l-Fadl Raydan, told me that al-Mahdi gathered them in a cloak and said, ‘The Prophet of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, gathered in his garment three Imams, in addition to himself, but in this cloak there are four Imams.

(Al-Maqrizi, *Lessons for the Seekers of Truth in the History of the Fatimid Imams and Caliphs*, quoted in Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 29)

The above examples show the existence of four generations of Imams in a single age, but Imam al-Mahdi was the speaking Imam, executing the authority of the Imamate, while his son (al-Qa'im), grandson (al-Mansur) and great-grandson (al-Mu'izz) were the silent Imams. But the above examples describe the more private and intimate moments of the Isma'ili Imamate as generally the identity of the next Imam was not always a matter of public knowledge.

This also raises the question of the exact relationship amongst the Imam and his future successor(s). The available literature indicates that there is indeed a special closeness and intimacy between the Imam of the time and the Imam-in-waiting. In certain periods, this special relationship was made known publicly, particularly in cases where the succession was declared openly. This is perhaps most evident in the case of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The close relationship between them is testified by 'Ali himself in the following statement recorded in the *Nahjul Balagha*:

When I was but a child he took me under his wing ... I would follow him [the Prophet] as a baby camel follows the footsteps of his mother. Every day he would raise up for me a sign of his noble character, commanding me to follow it. He would go each year into seclusion at [Mount] Hira. I saw him and nobody else saw him. At that time no household was brought together for the religion of Islam, except the Messenger of God, Khadija, and myself as the third. I saw the light of the revelation and the message, and I smelt the fragrance of prophecy.

– Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib,
(Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, p. 13)

The current Imam and the future Imam share a spiritual relationship which only the two of them can truly understand. The Qadi al-Nu'man narrates a beautiful story⁶ which the Imam al-Mansur confided to him. In his own words, the Imam al-Mansur describes his relationship with his own father, Imam al-Qa'im. The Imam stated:

Nobody could have been closer to the Imam than myself. I was his son, and yet my heart was filled with awe of his glory. One day, when I was just a little boy, I was walking behind him. I rejoiced at looking at him and receiving his *didar*. Then I would look at the heavens and the skies and rejoice at looking at them. Then I would look at him once again until my heart was satisfied. I thought to myself, the master of all creation is God in the heavens, and the Imam is his representative. The more this began to sink in, the more glorious my father appeared in my eyes, the more awe-inspired was my heart. Then Imam al-Qa'im turned around to face me. He held me and hugged me close. He said, 'My dear little son, may Allah not place in your heart what he has placed in the heart of your *mawla*.' I knew, at that moment, that he was referring to all of the worries that he had.

– Imam al-Mansur bi'llah,
(al-Qadi al-Nu'man, *Majalis wa'l-Musayarat*)

The Imam, responsible for the physical and spiritual welfare of his millions of followers, bears a great burden. No one can really estimate or imagine the intensity of the burden borne by the Imam of the Time except his successor. Other anecdotes in the Isma'ili literature relate how the Imams and their future successors were able to confide in one another. Although the Imams are all born with the spiritual Light of Imamate, there are forms of preparation and initiation by which current Imam initiates the future Imam into the formal functions of the Imamate which he will one day have to undertake. In this sense, the Qadi al-Numan narrates how Imam al-Mansur would spend time alone with his grandfather Imam al-Mahdi where the two would discuss secrets in confidence and the latter would prepare the former for the Imamate:

He (Imam al-Mahdi) used to confide secrets in him (Imam al-Mansur) and no one knew what transpired between them. One of the people who used to enter the presence of al-Mahdi frequently, as it was imperative for him to do so, said to me that there was never a time when he (al-Mahdi) was alone without al-Mansur being present and al-Mahdi would be speaking in confidence to him.

(Idris Imad al-Din, *Tarikh al-Khulafa al-Fatimiyyin bi'l-Maghrib*, transl. Shainool Jiwa, *Anthology of Isma'ili Literature*, p. 61)

Having discussed the principles by which the succession in the Isma'ili Imamate takes place, we can now examine the circumstances of the succession of the present Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV.

Prince 'Ali Salman Khan: Son of the Imams and Father of the Imams



“We are sending you our beloved son. Consider his coming as equivalent to our own coming. We are sending our Prince as our Wali ‘Ahd.”

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, the 48th hereditary Imam, was perhaps the most glorious Imam in Isma‘ili history. He succeeded his father Aga ‘Ali Shah at the tender age of eight and set forward in revolutionizing his community both materially and spiritually during one of the most exciting epochs of human history. He was the first Imam to settle in the Western world, making his permanent home in Geneva. He had the longest Imamate in the history of the all Imams through which he brought the Isma‘ili community into modernity and also championed many causes related to the overall welfare of the entire Muslim *Ummah*. He was the first Imam to make himself publicly known at the global level since the Fatimid period and his recognition extended from East to West. Also of importance was this Imam’s role in explaining the esoteric and universal meaning of Islam – which is evident in both his private *farmans* to the Isma‘ili Muslim community and in his public speeches and writings addressed to the world at large. The Imam explained many principles of Islamic esoterism and mysticism openly and in a clear language – these being concepts which were otherwise taught in private to initiates of esoteric orders. During his long and eventful Imamate of 72 years, there was much speculation and anticipation regarding the identity of the Imam’s successor.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's popularity in the world was perhaps equaled by that of his illustrious son Prince 'Ali Salman Khan, the father of the present Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni. Prince 'Ali Khan was very popular and dearly loved by the Isma'ili community and many had expected him to succeed as the Imam. He was also well known and prominent in the social circles of the Western world, as evidenced for example by his marriage to the famous actress Rita Hayworth. At the same time, there were some who questioned his eligibility for the Imamate based on the reports of his risky lifestyle and social life. In light of these circumstances, some have speculated that Prince 'Ali Khan was originally designated by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah to succeed him but that later the Imam changed his mind due to Prince 'Ali Khan's lifestyle and nominated his own son Prince Karim instead. But a closer examination of the facts belonging to this period proves such speculations to be quite untrue.

Prince 'Ali was born on June 13, 1911 and was the eldest son of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. He spent his life in both the East and the West. Due to his prominence in the social circles of England, his love for speed, horses and excitement, and his two marriages, the Western media sensationalized him and unfairly portrayed him as a playboy – a clearly distorted image. One of his biographers, Gordon Young, even concluded at the end of his book, *The Golden Prince*, that the Prince was not really the playboy which the outside world thought him to be. As reported in the same book, Prince 'Ali Khan himself questioned many of the things that had been written about him as being the product of inaccurate journalism. It is perhaps due to the Western media's mistreatment of Prince 'Ali Khan's image that his own son, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni, the present Imam, tends to avoid publicity:

Young Karim winced whenever the headlines brought the tittle-tattle about his father home to him. It was in these days that he first formed his aversion to publicity and resolved to give the press as little cause for comment about his personal affairs as humanly possible. That he would grow up to hate, not his father, of whom he was fond and proud, but his father's playboy image was a foregone conclusion.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 186

In light of these factors, to the undiscerning person Prince 'Ali Salman Khan appears as a sort of paradox. On the one hand, he performed religious and spiritual functions on behalf of his father, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, and as the son of the Imam was the object of great reverence and devotion. At the same time, Prince 'Ali Khan was one of the most popular figures in the Western imagination, and was the centre for social and aristocratic life:

But increasingly in recent years, Aly has gone about his father's business and those who have seen him in his Eastern robes earnestly carrying out the rituals of his sect find it hard to believe that this can possibly be the same slick socialite who in London, Paris and New York jokes with his friends in a faultless

Oxford accent and leads western café society in all the arts of high living and smart thinking.

Gordon Young, *Golden Prince*, p. 22

In a manner quite opposite from the newspapers, Prince 'Ali Khan was viewed and understood quite differently by those within the Isma'ili community. For example, the late Al-Wa'z Abualy Aziz who was contemporary with the Prince gives the following description of him in his book:

He was undoubtedly the beloved of his family as well as the *Jamats*... He was extremely popular in the *Jamats* all over the world and was loved by young and old alike. Very often he was sent by the Holy Imam to represent him for religious duties. He was a great sportsman and a statesman... His Serene Highness Prince Aly was a great champion of Islam and never missed an opportunity to serve and defend it. He had all his life contributed financially, as well as physically, to the cause of Islam. A warm-hearted friend, an ardent servant of Islam, a shrewd horse-breeder, an energetic sportsman, a lover of speed and motion, a great public speaker, a cautious statesman, generous and benevolent, he was indeed a great man.

Al-Wa'z Abualy Aziz, *Brief History of Isma'ilism*, Dar as-Salaam, 1974



From an early age, the Prince became involved in the affairs of the Isma'ili Imamate when he accompanied his father on a visit to India in 1923 where the Imam gave *didar* to his Indian *murids*. In August 1930, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah sent Prince 'Ali Khan to Syria along with the following message (*taliqah*):

"We are sending you our beloved son. Consider his coming as our own coming. We are sending our Prince as our *Wali 'Ahd*."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Message to the Syrian Isma'ilis, 1930)

In the above message, the Imam refers to his son Prince 'Ali Khan as his *wali 'ahd*. This term was interpreted by some as indicating that Prince 'Ali was designated as the next Imam, but this was not necessarily true. The actual term *wali 'ahd* means 'master of the pledge (or covenant).' The term has been used numerous times in

Muslim history, particularly in a political sense where it referred to the heir or crown prince of a political dynasty. *Wali 'ahd* was also used by the Isma'ili Imams when they reigned as the Fatimid caliphs during the 10th and 11th century. It is true that in many instances, the designated successor of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph was called the *wali 'ahd*, but this was not always the case. For example, the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Hakim *bi-amri'llah* bestowed the title of *wali 'ahd* upon two of his cousins – neither of whom actually inherited the Imamate. Therefore, the word *wali 'ahd* cannot be understood as a synonym for the future Imam but rather it indicates 'a kind of shadow caliph, or rather, a symbolic stand-in who could assume the ceremonial function of the true Imam but not the actual, i.e. veritable, position that is implied by sacred designation.'¹ This means that while Prince 'Ali Khan was not the Imam or the future Imam, as *wali 'ahd* he held a unique position² as the deputy of the Imam and possessed the rights to carry out secular and religious duties on the Imam's behalf – something which he did on several occasions.



Since the age of eleven, too, Aly Khan has flown East to visit groups of the Ismailis in the place of his father. Wearing faultless tropical suitings and a black Astrakhan cap, Prince Aly would give readings from the Koran and accept tributes on behalf of his father ranging from anything between 10,000 and 30,000 a time.

(Gordon Young, *Golden Prince*, p. 22)

During the Prince's Syrian visit, an open *Darbar* took place where thousands of Arab Isma'ilis, French Officers and the Governor of Syria gave a rising welcome to Prince 'Ali Khan and four hundred Arab horsemen gave a salute. The above *taliqah* was read out during this *Darbar* and the Syrian *murids* prostrated themselves before the Prince and kissed his hands in devotion. Prince 'Ali Khan possessed a unique and charismatic personality which always inspired and cultivated admiration from those who saw him. This was evident during his tour of the Isma'ili localities where many members of the community instantly fell in love with his magnetic persona.

His was an astonishing feat of personality: 'Aly's appearance always sent the marriage rate soaring,' wrote Leonard Slater. 'Young men would speed their courting; young women would overcome their shyness.' Sex appeal may have had something to do with it but much of Aly's success was spontaneous popular reaction to a warm-hearted, handsome young man with a genuine affection for people. From Syria he went on to Bombay and Karachi where he visited *jamatkhanas*, led the prayers and performed religious ceremonies with a touch as sure as that of an experienced *mukhi*. The tour was a great success.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 107

During the course of his life, Prince 'Ali Khan continued to perform important functions on behalf of the Imam, including a visit to India where the Prince was able to deal with issues caused by a dissident group known as the Khoja Reformers. In the 1950s, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah suffered a stroke while touring India and Pakistan and Prince 'Ali Khan as the *Wali 'Ahd* assumed his role and carried out religious functions on his behalf. The reality of Prince 'Ali Khans life is clearly quite different from the distorted and exaggerated stories reported in the Western newspapers. The Isma'ili community understood and appreciated the Prince in an entirely different manner. For example, an Isma'ili magazine praised Prince 'Ali Khan in the following way on the occasion of his forty-third birthday:

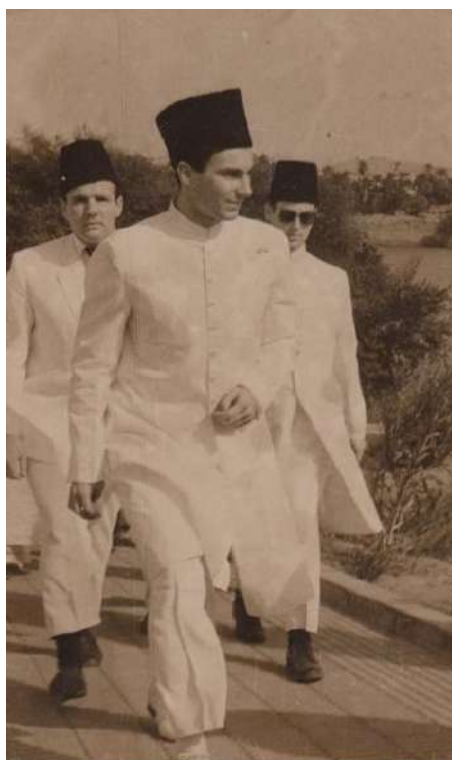
Our beloved Prince 'Aly Khan has completed forty-three years of age. We join Ismaili *Jamats* from all over the world in offering felicitations to His Serene Highness Prince Aly Khan on this happy occasion. His Serene Highness has inherited the qualities of his illustrious father, Mawlana Hazar Imam.

The *Jamats* have been appreciative of the keen interest His Serene Highness takes in all the varied activities of the community in all parts of the world, and of his great contribution to their welfare.

The Ismaili, quoted in Gordon Young, *Golden Prince*, p. 148

On July 11, 1957, at midday, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III passed away. His Last Will was read on the morning of July 12.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni: Imam of the Atomic Age



“...I am convinced that it is in the best interests of the Shi’a Muslim Isma’ilian Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of the new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam. For these reasons, although he is not now one of my heirs, I appoint my grandson Karim, the son of my son Aly Salomone Khan to succeed to the title of Aga Khan and to be the Imam and Pir all my Shi’a Isma’ilian followers...”

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

The Imam’s Last Will shocked the world when it announced that he had appointed his grandson Prince Karim to succeed him as the 49th Imam of the Shi’a Isma’ili Muslims. However, a closer look at this period reveals that this succession was consistent with Isma’ili history and one observes many elements which resemble the successions of the Fatimid Imams as cited earlier in this article. When looking at the early life of Imam Shah Karim, one observes that he was being prepared to undertake the Imamate from a very young age:



From the moment Karim was born, it was taken for granted that he would one day become Imam, and, unlike Aly, he was educated for the job from the beginning. When he was only seven years old, living in Nairobi, he was dressed in a tiny uniform and taken to the *jamat-khana* to chant: “We are the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace of God be on him.”

Leonard Slater, *Aly*, Random House, New York, 1965, p. 269

As a young boy, Imam Shah Karim soon developed a very unique and intimate relationship with his grandfather Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. These occasions were most likely not in the public view – in which Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah refused to discuss his succession. But the more private moments were observed by the close family members including Imam Shah Karim’s mother, Princess Joan:

When the old Aga returned from Africa and was staying in Lausanne, the boys were taken to see him: ‘An extraordinary relationship developed between my father-in-law and my elder son,’ Princess Joan recalls, ‘K always talked to his grandfather as if they were contemporaries. There was a powerful bond between them.’ It was probably due to his grandfather’s influence that Karim was mature beyond his age without forgoing the pleasures of a typical teenager’s life.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 152

The above account is reminiscent of the earlier mentioned anecdotes about the Isma’ili Imams of the Fatimid period. It seems that when several generations of Imams were contemporary – such as in the case of Imams al-Mahdi, al-Qa’im, al-Mansur and al-Mu’izz – the grandfather and the grandson Imams shared a special relationship where former would prepare the latter for the formal role of Imamate:

From a young age, [Imam] al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah had a special status with his grandfather [Imam] al-Qa’im. He used to keep him in his company, be close to

him and confide in him in preference to his father. Whenever he (al'-Qa'im) was alone, he (al-Mu'izz) was with him and whenever he was absent, he (al-Qa'im) would send for him. Similarly, Imam al-Mansur had the same status with his grandfather al-Mahdi, who was inseparable from him... One day al-Mu'izz mentioned a similar instance to his situation, saying that al-Mahdi bi'llah used to nurture him (al-Mansur) with wisdom and prepare him for the Imamate, just as al-Qa'im did so with him.

Idris Imad al-Din, *Tarikh al-Khulafa al-Fatimiyyin bi'l-Maghrib*, transl. Shainool Jiwa, *Anthology of Isma'ili Literature*, pp. 60-62

The situation at the time of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, Prince 'Ali Khan and Imam Shah Karim resembles the above. Just as the Imam al-Mansur and Imam al-Mu'izz were initiated for the Imamate by their grandfathers, the Imam Shah Karim was initiated by his grandfather Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. One observes here a remarkable sense of continuity from the Fatimid period in which Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Imam Shah Karim were keeping with the traditions and customs of their ancestors the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs. Accordingly, the historical reports mention how Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah would spend much time discussing the deeper meaning of the Isma'ili faith with his grandson Imam Shah Karim.

The old Aga seemed to think highly of the boy. Whenever he was at Villa Barakat in Geneva he sent for Karim and talked to him at great length, subtly introducing him into the deeper meaning of the Ismaili faith and instilling him with the sense of mission which became apparent to all not many years later. Prince Karim himself remembers his grandfather asking questions about his religious instruction, testing his knowledge: 'He could extract more from a human being in short conversation than anybody else in a lifetime,' he mused.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 182-3

In the early 1950s, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah sent both Imam Shah Karim and his brother Prince Aryn to East Africa to counter a campaign of anti-Ismaili rhetoric aimed against the Isma'ili Imam and his *Wali 'Ahd* Prince 'Ali Khan. During this visit, Imam Shah Karim addressed a large crowd – Isma'ilis and others – and reminded them of all that his grandfather had done for them. Later, in 1955, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah sent Imam Shah Karim to East Africa to introduce the new prayers, known as the *Holy Du'a*, to Isma'ili communities. During these years, it is reported that Imam Shah Karim spent much time with Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and the latter's secretaries to familiarize himself with the affairs of the Imamate:

Karim spent most of his time with grandfather or one of his secretaries, Mademoiselle Gaetane Beguel, research and acquainting himself with the Imam's affairs, both personal and religious.

Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 182-3

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah finalized his Last Will and Testament in May 1955. He passed away peacefully on July 11, 1957. The Imam's Will was read out before members of his family, including Prince 'Ali Khan and Imam Shah Karim, on the morning of July 12, 1957. The text of the Will announcing the Imam's successor is as follows:

"And in these circumstances and in view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place including the discoveries of atomic science I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shi'a Moslem Ismailian Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of a new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam. For these reasons and although he is not now one of my heirs, I APPOINT my grandson KARIM, the son of my son, ALY SALOMONE KHAN to succeed to the title of AGA KHAN and to be the Imam and Pir of all my Shia Ismailian followers."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Last Will, Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, p. 208)

As stated earlier, although Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah appointed his son Prince 'Ali Khan as his *Wali 'Ahd*, this was not a designation for the succession of the Imamate. Prince 'Ali Khan did not inherit the institution of Imamate and was not an Imam, but still holds an exalted status as the son of an Imam and the father of an Imam.¹ Prince 'Ali Khan was the first to give *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) to his son, now known as Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni the 49th Imam. Shortly after, the new Imam was met by Isma'ili leaders and representatives and it was reported that the first words he spoke to them were:

"According to the Will of my Beloved Grandfather, I am your Hazar Imam. I am your 49th *Mawla Mushkil Kusha*."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (To *Jamati* Leaders, Geneva, July 12, 1957)

As the 49th hereditary Imam, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni holds a special place within the lineage of Isma'ili Imams. The 49th Imam is the seventh Imam of the seventh heptad or series of seven Imams. The occurrence of seven Imams in Isma'ili thought has often been linked to the commencement of a new era and therefore, the appearance of forty-nine (seven x seven) Imams suggests the inauguration of a new epoch of major cycle in the history of the Imamate. Several Isma'ili theosophers of the Fatimid period wrote that the appearance of forty-nine Imams after Prophet Muhammad would mark the commencement of the Seventh Major Cycle (symbolized by the Seventh Day of Creation) called the Esoteric Apocalypse (Qiyamah): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" (Part 1) which brings great spiritual and material changes to both the World of Faith (*'alam al-din*) and the material world (*'alam al-dunya*).³ In this sense, Sayyedna Hamid al-Din Kirmani quoted the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

“And We have bestowed upon thee the Seven Repeated and the Great Qur’an.”

– Holy Quran 15:87

The ‘Seven Repeated’ refer to the seven cycles of seven Imams who appear in the after the Prophet Muhammad. Kirmani wrote that the appearance of these forty-nine Imams would mark the commencement of the Cycle of Resurrection when the Ranks of Faith (*hudud al-din*) would be removed and the knowledge of the divine knowledge would become unmediated.⁴ These signs have now come to pass as the functions of the *hudud al-din*, especially the *hujjahs* and *da’is*, were abolished during the Imamatus of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III.⁵ At the same time, the *murids* began to have more direct access to the Imam – something which was not the case in previous periods of history.

The Cycle of Resurrection is referred to in the Qur’anic verse of the Days of Creation as the period when God ascends the Throne.⁶ The Isma’ili *da’is* wrote that in the Cycle of Resurrection, justice and equity would be restored to the world and spiritual truths and knowledge would be available to humanity at large. The period of forty-ninth Imam is the beginning of the Cycle of Resurrection. The mentions of a ‘new age’ and ‘fundamentally altered conditions’ in the Last Will of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah appear to speak to the present Cycle of Resurrection. In this regard, some contemporary Isma’ili thinkers such as Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai have written the following about the status of the forty-ninth Imam:

Nur Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni Hadrir Imam: Nur means the intellectual, spiritual and moral light; *Mawlana* means our lord; *Shah Karim al-Husayni* means the generous king from the progeny of Husayn; *Hadrir Imam* means the Imam whose recognition and obedience is incumbent upon the people of the time and without this the *walayat* of the previous Imams does not avail anything. This most noble and the greatest Imam who, in the holy chain of *Imamat* is the seventh seven, is the Imam of the atomic age. A great resurrection has taken place in the background of his *Imamat*, which the people of the world saw only in the world of particles. They did not see it in the external world.

Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai, *Du’a: Essence of Ibadat*, p. 90

Link in the Chain



“The Imam is a transitory being, who forms a link between the past and the future. For this reason, ensuring the continuity of the institution and its ability to fulfill its role is what my life is all about.”

**– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (Paris Match Interview
No. 2907, 3-9 February 2005)**

The Isma‘ili Imamate, represented in every age by the Imam of the Time, is a trans-historical institution. To engage the Isma‘ili Imam is to engage with the history which he represents and, in a sense, connect to the ‘past’ that he embodies in the ‘present’. In this sense, one can experience the Imams of the past in the present Imam, but also experience the Isma‘ili communities of the past which were linked to these Imams:

In Ismailism, the fact that the Imam embodies a tradition extending considerably backwards in time creates the setting for just such an experience. By encapsulating the past within himself, the Imam serves as history incarnate, so to speak. In this sense, history is not only “learned”; it is also “experienced”, with a heightening of one’s intellectual and moral imagination.

– Aziz Esmail, (*Why History*, Institute of Isma‘ili Studies: Lifelong Learning Articles)

The figure of the Imam combines both transience and permanence. As a single part of a series of Imams, each Imam is a transitory being, serving as but a link in the chain. But the Imamate, the institution which each Imam bears and undertakes in his lifetime, is a permanent institution which has been present since humanity’s origins and which will continue to remain on earth until the Day of Judgment. Thus, the Imam is ‘a link in the chain’ – both historically and metaphysically. Historically, the Imam is the link in the chain of Imams and a bridge between the past and the future. Metaphysically, the Imam is a link in the great chain of being – guiding his *murids* from the limited realm of corporeality to the infinite realm of divinity – and serving as the mediator between the relative and the Absolute.

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining

star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. God guideth unto His light whom He will. And God speaketh to mankind in allegories, for God is Knower of all things.

— Holy Quran 24:35

The purpose of religion, in its essential sense, is 'to bind' the relative, the illusionary, and the transient to the Absolute, the Real, and the Permanent. In Shi'a Islam, it is the Imam – the bearer of the Light – who combines both transience and permanence within himself and guides the seeker to transcend his transitory and impermanent material life and bring his soul into communion with the Light of the Absolute and Infinite Reality – of which the Universe around us is but one of the infinite manifestations.

In our interpretation of this famous Qur'anic *ayat*, known as the *ayat al-nur* (Verse of Light), the 'niche' symbolizes the Imam's physical body and the 'lamp' with its 'glass' symbolizes his pure soul. The 'blessed tree' is Imam's pure lineage which extends back through the previous Imams, the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Ibrahim and Adam himself; a lineage both physical and spiritual from which many great Prophets, saints and sages have come forth. The light inside the lamp which shines and illuminates the darkness like a 'shining star' is the Light of Imamate which is the source of the Imam's virtues, knowledge and guidance. It is a universal spiritual Light, 'neither of the East nor the West', which shines upon the 'heavens and the earth' illuminating all the seekers of enlightenment. When the Imam departs this world and hands over the Imamate to the next Imam, one bearer of Light is succeeded by another bearer of Light; but their Light is one and the same and in reality there is no change, only 'Light upon Light'.



“When you inherit an office, which is a life office, you are simply a link in the chain. And you therefore look at life somewhat differently than if you were, I suppose, a professional who moves around and is free to do what he wishes. Now some things are impossible to achieve. I well know that. And if that is the case, I simply have to try and move the issues forward as much as I can. The next Imam will then decide how he wishes to handle the issues. But, it is the continuum which is at the back of my mind. And that’s why perhaps my time dimension appears different than it might for other people.”

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (Forbes Global, Cover Story, May 31, 1999)

1

See verse 4:54 where the Qur’an states that God has bestowed the Book (*kitab*), Wisdom (*hikmah*) and Kingdom (*mulk*) upon the progeny of Ibrahim and the related commentary of Imam al-Baqir recorded in Kulayni’s *Usul al-Kafi* and Qadi al-Nu’man’s *Da’aim al-Islam*; Verses 2:127-128 where Ibrahim and Isma’il pray for God to raise up from their progeny a submitting community (*ummatan muslimeen*) and verse 22:78 where the Qur’an addresses the Imams as *muslims* promised to their father Ibrahim along with Imam Ja’far’s commentary as recorded in Kulayni’s *Usul al-Kafi* and al-Nu’man’s *Da’aim al-Islam*; Verses 6:83-88 where several prophets of Ibrahim’s line are mentioned by name and the fact that God chose and guided their forefathers, descendants and brethren. See also the Book of Genesis 18:17-19 about the descendants of Abraham keeping the way of justice and judgment.

2

See Abu Firas, *al-Qasida ash-Shafiya*, transl. Sami Nassib Makarem, The University of Michigan, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1963, p. 126 where Abu Talib is referred to as Imran. See also Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary*, p. 278.

3

It is often asked why the Imamate must dwell in a male line and always be carried by a man. The exoteric reasons may be related to genetics in that one unique y-chromosome is passed down and preserved in a male lineage while the uniqueness of the x-chromosome is not preserved in a female lineage. In keeping with what Nasir al-Din Tusi writes, the physical genealogy of the Imams serves as a biological sign, demonstration, or marker of the present Imam's relationship and continuity with the previous Imams. If, for example, the Imam passed to a woman, then that woman would neither possess a unique y-chromosome nor a unique x-chromosome from any of her ancestor Imams and any future female or male Imam would not possess any unique x or y chromosome from the previous Imams. Thus, if the Imam was in a female lineage, there would be no clear biological marker or sign of the Imam's relationship to the previous Imams and this would make it much more difficult for the people of any given time to recognize the Imam of their time. This is merely a hypothesis based on the contemporary knowledge of genetics and the Imams theoretically have full authority to abrogate the norms of succession. The following excerpts from articles on genetics suffice to stress the importance of y-chromosomes passed by males in genetic continuity over the x-chromosomes.

"The X chromosome a woman inherits from her mother is, like any other chromosome, a random mix of genes from both of her mother's Xs, and so does not correspond as a whole with either of her mother's X chromosomes... By contrast, the X a woman inherits from her father is his one and only X chromosome, complete and undiluted. This means that a father is twice as closely related to his daughter via his X chromosome genes as is her mother."

Source: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201109/the-incredible-expanding-adventures-the-x-chromosome>

"The y-chromosome is inherited more or less unchanged from father to son to grandson, indefinitely. Chromosomes contain the DNA that determines our inherited characteristics, and the y-chromosome is one of the 46-chromosomes in the nucleus of each of the cells of all human males. Most chromosomes, including the two x-chromosomes possessed by females, get recombined or shuffled each generation before being passed down to offspring. But the y-chromosome is unique in remaining more or less unchanged when passed from father to son. Thus while

most chromosomes will contain a random mixture of genetic codes from one's grandparents and great-grandparents, a male's y-chromosome will be identical or nearly identical to that of his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and beyond for countless generations."

Source: <http://web.stanford.edu/~philr/Bachman/DNABachman3.html>

The esoteric reasons may be related to traditional and esoteric symbolism of the male and female. In the traditional worldview, gender is not viewed as a simple product of biology, sociology or anthropology. Gender is understood to be rooted in spiritual principles and celestial archetypes. Although a full discussion of this subject remains outside our scope, a few remarks will suffice. In traditional symbolism and metaphysics, the masculine principle is the active, manifest, and majestic pole of being while the feminine is the passive, hidden, and merciful pole. For example, in certain forms of traditional symbolism, the individual human soul is 'feminine' while the celestial Spirit is 'masculine' and proper spiritual equilibrium is achieved when the feminine soul submits to the masculine Spirit. This does not suggest that the female is lower than the male – since both poles are necessary for wholeness and equilibrium. Similarly, the Imam in relation to his disciples is active or male and the disciple in relation to the Imam is passive or female. This symbolism carries through in all levels of being – from the 'World of Command' with the masculine Universal Intellect and the feminine Universal Soul down to the 'World of Religion' – where the Imam must be a man since his spiritual function, in relation to his disciples, is masculine. Ultimately, the male-female principles have their metaphysical roots in the Divine Reality which is both absolute (corresponding to the male principle) and infinite (corresponding to the female principle). For details see M. Ali Lakhani, *Towards a Traditional Understanding of Sexuality*, Editorial published in *Sacred Web*, Volume 12, available at <http://www.sacredweb.org>.

4

The Nizari Isma'ilis do not include the name of al-Hasan ibn 'Ali in their list of Imams which has led some people to conclude that al-Hasan is not accepted as an Imam in Nizari theology. In reality, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali is regarded as an Imam by the Nizaris but with a minor difference: al-Hasan is understood to be an Entrusted Imam or Trustee Imam (*al-imam al-mustawda*) as opposed to a Permanent Imam (*al-imam al-mustaqarr*), the latter position belonging to his brother al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. The Nizari list of Imams only includes the names of the Permanent Imams and not the Entrusted Imams. The difference between the Entrusted Imam and the Permanent Imam is that the Entrusted Imam is a brother or cousin of the main genealogical line of the Imams who holds the rank and authority of Imam for a temporary period and the Imamate does not permanently dwell among the Entrusted Imam's descendants. The Permanent Imam is the hereditary Imam who inherits the Imamate from his forefathers and transmits it to his descendants. The

Entrusted Imam is only appointed in special circumstances and is usually the brother or cousin of the Permanent Imam. When there is an Entrusted Imam, the Permanent Imam remains silent (*samit*) although he is the source of authority (*amr*) of the Entrusted Imam who acts on his behalf. Thus, Imam al-Hasan was an Entrusted Imam as he held the authority and rank of Imamate after Hazrat 'Ali and then bequeathed it to his brother Imam a-Husayn who then transmitted the Imamate in his progeny. On a similar note, the Prophet Muhammad was the Entrusted Imam in his time while Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his forefathers were the Permanent Imams. For further details, see Shafique Virani, *The Isma'ilis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 83-85. In Nizari Isma'ilism, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali also holds the rank of *pir* or supreme *hujja* which is the rank in the Isma'ili hierarchy (*hudud*) second only to the Imam himself. This has led some to confuse the positions of Entrusted Imam and *pir* or simply deny that al-Hasan was an Imam altogether. In reality, al-Hasan was both an Entrusted Imam and a *pir* (supreme *hujja*) and this is perhaps why the Nizari Isma'ili *Ginans*, the *Asal Du'a* (Old *Du'a*) and the *farmans* of Imam Sultan Muhammad refer to al-Hasan as 'Pir Imam Hasan'.

5

Sahih al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Volume 5, pp. 662-663, No. 328

6

This tradition of Ghadeer Khum has been narrated by at least 110 Companions, 84 tabi'un, 355 ulema, 25 historians, 27 traditionalists, 11 exegesists, 18 theologians and 5 philosophers. (Dr. S.H.M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, London 1979, p. 20)

7

For example, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir appointed his son Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in the presence of his followers, referring to him as the best of mankind and the *Qa'im 'al Muhammad* (the one in charge of Muhammad's family). When al-Baqir was approaching his death, he asked for witnesses to be brought to him and referred to the succession of Prophet Yusuf from Prophet Ya'qub and then made a *nass* in respect of his son Ja'far al-Sadiq. See Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, p. 77.

8

See Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir*, Institute of Ismaili Studies and IB Taurus, London, 2000, pp. 78-79

9

Imam 'Ali states in a sermon known as *Khutba al-Bayan*: "I am the Gnosis of Mysteries". That is to say, the Imam identifies his inner reality with the knowledge of gnosis of God. The Imams are also able to communicate this gnosis to their

disciples – see Imam ‘Ali’s statements about the nature of Reality (*haqiqah*) in Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Ali*, Chapter 3.

10

See Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim*, translated by S.J. Badakchani as *The Paradise of Submission*, Institute of Ismaili Studies and IB Taurus, London, 2006, p. 121:

“The formula of the profession of Divine Unity (*kalima-yi tawhid*) is the [exclusive] heritage to be transmitted and inherited through his sacred progeny and holy descendants, in one line of descent and essence – ‘*offspring, one after the other*’ (3:34) – a [lineage] which will never be ruptured, even unto the end of time.”

11

See Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi’i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir*, Institute of Ismaili Studies and IB Taurus, London, 2000, pp. 79-82

12

To refer to the Imam as the ‘bearer of the Light’ must not be confused with the Christian concept of Divine Incarnation. In Isma’ilism, the Imam has never been understood as an incarnation (*hulul*) of God – a perspective which has always been rejected. A more precise definition of the relationship between the Imam and God was given at the Ismailia Paris Conference of 1975 where it was resolved:

“*The Imam to be explained as ‘mazhar’ of God, and the relationship between God and the Imam to be related to varying levels of inspiration and communication from God to man.*”

The term *mazhar* must be given careful consideration. The word *mazhar* does NOT mean ‘copy’ or ‘incarnation’ as the polemicist Akbarally Meherally ignorantly stated. *Mazhar* is an Arabic noun of place, and is translated as ‘locus of manifestation’. In this sense, when the Imam is called the *mazhar* (locus of manifestation) of God, it means that the soul of the Imam is like the surface of a mirror upon which the Names and Qualities of God shine and are reflected, producing an image which constitutes the Imam’s pure humanity. Therefore, the Divine Light is only ‘in’ the Imam insofar as the image of an object is ‘in’ a mirror. The Divine Light remains immutable and unchanging in itself and does not materially enter the created world. There is a further distinction made in Islamic theology and mysticism between God’s Essence and God’s Names, and it is only the latter aspect which is reflected in the Imam while God’s Essence remains unknowable and transcendent. Therefore, there is no question of *shirk* being committed since God does not actually or materially enter into the body of the Imam. This relationship between God and the Imam in these terms

of *mazhariyyah* (manifestation) can be extended to everything in the Cosmos: All creatures, all created phenomena are the loci of manifestation (*mazahir*) of God's Names and Qualities. Reza Shah-Kazemi explains this as follows:

"This is a point which is made emphatically by the Sufis in order to avoid the accusation of *shirk*: the presence of God really is 'in' the creature, but only in the sense that an image is really 'in' the mirror. There is no question of the glass of the mirror undergoing any material change as a result of the image that is present on its surface, nor is there any question of a material change or descent of the object into the mirror. Thus God remains absolutely transcendent, just as the object remains totally other than the mirror."

Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge 2006, pp. 110-111)

13

Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim* transl. by S.J. Badakchani as *The Paradise of Submission*, p. 109:

"...human souls are therefore varied and differ with respect to their receptivity to the resplendent lights of the Divine Command (*anwar-i ishraq-i amr-i ilahi*), just as material objects are variously receptive to the physical light of the sun. [Consider] stones, for example: one [kind] is pitch black, while others are progressively less dark, and their essences are more receptive to illumination, up to translucent glass which receives light from one side and emits from the other. In so far as human beings are unable to be receptive to His Almighty Command without mediation, it was necessary that there should be intermediaries vis-à-vis the Divine Command. Those people whose consciousness (*khatir*) behaved as does a [translucent] glass held up to the sun were the Prophets."

In accordance with Tusi's explanation as given above, the souls of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'a Imams are like the translucent glass or gemstones which capture and reflect the Divine Light to the highest degree possible for a created being. This concept is embodied in the architecture of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam in Ottawa and the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre in Toronto.

14

The spiritual purity of the Imams is declared in the Qur'anic verse known as the Verse of Purity (33:33): "And God wishes to remove from you all impurity, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to purify you with a thorough purification." According to both Sunni and Shi'ite *hadith*, this verse was revealed when the Prophet Muhammad embraced Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Imam al-Hasan, Imam al-Husayn, and Bib Fatima under his cloak, indicating that God had purified their souls from all impurities. For Shi'a Muslims, all the succeeding Imams possess the same spiritual purity. These notions are reflected in contemporary Isma'ili Muslim Prayer (*Du 'a*) in Part I (*wa*

'*ala'l-a'immati'l-athar* = "and upon the Pure Imams") and Part IV (*wa a'immatika'l-mutahareen* = "and Your Pure Imams").

15

Nasir al-Din Tusi states with regards to the differences among the various Imams:

"The principle of relative and real existence (*hukm-i idafa wa haqiqat*) must be kept in mind...as there are diverse degrees of truth and each Imam manifests a different degree [of truth], a different mystery, a different benefit (*maslahat*) which they detail and elucidate [for people]...But insofar as the Divine Truth has a unity wherein all these stages are one, and the Imams are all one in reality (*haqiqat*), so that their persons (*shakhs*) are not separate from each other nor their spirits."

Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi Taslim* transl. S.J. Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, p. 127)

16

Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 1, p. 179. This reference was provided and translated by the late Shaykh Seth 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, may his soul rest in eternal peace.

17

This point can be a matter of debate – as some of the early Shi'i traditions indicate that the Light is transferred only when the previous Imam passes away, while other traditions in the same corpus state that the Light is possessed by the Imams even at birth, and since the very creation of their souls in the spiritual World of Particles (*alam al-dharr*). See Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, pp. 80-82. But later Nizari Isma'ili Imams state quite clearly that the Imams possess the Light at birth.

18

Imam Hasan *ala-dhikrihi al-salaam* states, as recorded in Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Rawda-yi Taslim*, (p. 123, Badakhchani translation) that: "The designation (*nass*) which is made is not in order *to make* him an Imam; it is only made so that people should recognize him as such – otherwise, from his standpoint and perspective, all such different states are one and the same."

19

The Shi'i *hadith* literature describes how the luminous souls of the Imams were created by God before the creation of the physical world and the souls of others. For details, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, Chapter 1.

20

There can be exceptions to this rule. For example, Nasir-i Khusraw cites the cases of Imam 'Ali Zayn al-Abideen and Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far each of whom assumed

the functions of Imamate while his father was still alive. In the case of the former, Imam al-Husayn consigned the Imamate to Imam 'Ali Zayn al-Abideen on the battlefield of Karbala shortly before he went out to make a final stand against the armies of Yazid. In the case of Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far, his father Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is reported to have said about him: "He is the Imam after me, and what you learn from him is just the same as if you have learned it from myself." (Jafar ibn Mansur al-Yemen, *Asrar an-Nutuqa*, p. 256) Nasir-i Khusaw and other Isma'ili *da'is* refer to the *ta'wil* of the Qur'anic story of the Sun, Moon, and Stars prostrating before Hazrat Yusuf according to which the Imam, the supreme *hujja*, and the other *hujjas* submitted to Yusuf as their new Imam while the previous Imam, Yusuf's father Hazrat Yaqub, was still alive.

21

From Qadi al-Nu'man, *Majalis al-Musayrat*, tr. Shafique Virani in email correspondence.

22

See Paul E. Walker, *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine*, 2008, p. 17.

23

The Isma'ilis of the Fatimid period also invoked blessings (*salwaat*) upon the *wali 'ahd*. For example, the *da'i* al-Naysaburi invokes *salwaat* upon the *wali 'ahd* at the beginning of his *Ithbat al-Imamah*, see Paul Walker, *In Praise of al-Hakim*, published in *Fatimid History and Isma'ili Doctrine*, p. 379.

24

It is reported that before the final burial ceremony of Prince 'Ali Khan in Salamiyya, Imam Shah Karim told Isma'ili delegates: "Remember he was a son to an Imam and a father to an Imam." The statements of the Prophet and the early Imams indicate that the lineage and forefathers of the Imams were spiritually pure and served as vessels for the *Nur* of Imamate. This concept is also supported in the Qur'anic verses (3:33-34) already cited in this article whereby God exalted the lineage from Adam to Imran (Abu Talib, father of Imam 'Ali) above all creatures. In connection to this theme, Imam al-Mu'izz has stated: "We pass in the pure backbones and the sanctified and chaste wombs; whenever we are confined in a backbone and a womb, God shows us in power and knowledge..." (Makarem, *The Doctrine of the Isma'ilis*, Beirut 1972, p. 32) and Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salaam said: "The Imams, both outwardly and inwardly, both exoterically and esoterically, issue from the pure line and loins of the Imam, one after another." (Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Paradise of Submission*, p. 125) All these principles must be applied in understanding the rank of Prince 'Ali Khan. Prince 'Ali Khan was both the son of a pure Imam and the father of a pure Imam and thus he must also have shared in this state of spiritual

purity. Imam Hasan '*ala-dhikrihi as-salaam* also states that the *Nur* of Imamatus exists even in the state of 'intellectual sperm', and in this sense Prince 'Ali Khan would serve as the transition vessel by which the Light of Imamatus was inherited by his son Imam Shah Karim from his father Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. In summary, while Prince 'Ali Khan was never the formal and functioning Imam, his spirituality and purity would be at the same level as the Imams since he is both the descendant of the past Imams and the progenitor of all the Imams to come. It is worth noting that during the time when Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, Prince 'Ali Khan and Prince Karim were contemporary, the Imam ordered the Isma'ili community to hold a joint *saligrah* celebration commemorating the birth of all three persons on the date of June 13 – which was the birth date of Prince 'Ali Khan.

25

Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, p. 218 (Second Edition) where he refers to the prediction made by the Syrian *da'i* Muhammad b. al-Suri and the Fatimid *qadi* al-Maliji.

26

Simonetta Calderini, '*Alam al-din in Isma'ilism: World of Obedience or World of Immobility*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 467: "Kirmani firmly rejected Druze statements about the imminent advent of the *Qa'im* by reiterating that the *Qiyama* was not near, but was to take place in the distant future when the long cycle of 49 imams was concluded."

27

Rafiq Keshavjee, *Mysticism and the Plurality of Meaning: The Case of the Ismailis of Rural Iran*, IIS Occasional Papers, p. 6.

28

Qur'an 7:54 – "It is He who created the Heavens and the Earth in Six Days and then He ascended the Throne". According to the *ta'wil* of this verse as related in numerous Isma'ili texts, the world created in Six Days refers to the World of Faith ('*alam al-din*); the Heavens stand for the *shari'ah* or exoteric laws; the Earth stands for the *tariqah* or esoteric paths; the Six Days stand for the Six Cycles of the Six *Natiqs* – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad with each Cycle lasting approximately a thousand years; the Seventh Day (Sabbath) or Throne stands for the Cycle of Hazrat *Qa'im al-Qiyamah* which is the Cycle of Resurrection. For details see Shafique Virani, *The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir-i Khusraw*, published under Academic Articles of the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Why Philosophy is Important

[Education] must also stimulate students to consider a variety of perspectives on some of the fundamental questions posed by the human condition: “What is truth?” “What is reality?” and “What are my duties to my fellow man, to my country and to God?”

*Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
Aga Khan Academies Vision Statement, 2003
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6525/>*

Most people, when hearing the word **philosophy**, think of a highly abstract and purely theoretical body of ideas that have little or no impact upon their everyday lives. This may be true of the **academic** study of philosophy in some universities, but philosophy itself is embedded in **all** human activity — most people are simply unaware of it. Philosophy is ultimately about what is **true**, what is **real**, and what is **good**. It is philosophy that offers one an overarching framework to interpret and manage the other realms of human endeavor. Every person actually has a philosophy which is tacit and implicit in their entire way of living.

Some may think that philosophy is not based on “hard evidence” such as modern science. But they fail to notice that modern science — with its insistence that all **truth** be verified by empirical observations — is basing itself upon a purely **philosophical** claim (a claim that cannot be supported by empirical observation). The famous Cartesian slogan “I think therefore I am” is another statement about the nature of truth and reality. It implies, as a Cartesian may argue, that the realm of the mind is entirely separate from the external world. Some philosophers use this position to support materialism — the idea that only the external world is objectively real. But, if one’s philosophy exclusively affirms the reality of the physical world — made of matter, atoms, sub-atomic particles, etc., then everything beyond that — such as emotions, thoughts, intentions, values, and even consciousness — is unreal by implication. Thus, what is **true** logically points toward what is **real**. If someone were to claim that there is simply no such thing as universal truth — then they would have just declared a universal truth and contradicted themselves.

At first glance, it may seem of little importance to us whether Plato is correct in his view that justice, compassion, beauty, or goodness are universal truths that exist independently of our physical world. On the other hand, if these are just conventions or constructs made up by human beings — then how could they possess any intrinsic “good” at all? Why should we care about doing “good” or being ethical — if ethics is just a matter of cultural norms, profit, nationalistic agenda, individual preference or moral relativism?

To speak of end purposes, in turn, is to enter the realm of ethics. What are our ultimate goals? Whose interests do we seek to serve? How, in an increasingly cynical time, can we inspire people to a new set of aspirations — reaching

beyond rampant materialism, the new relativism, self-serving individualism, and resurgent tribalism.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
(Remarks at Evora University Symposium, February 12, 2006)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/>

In the realm of religion and theology, philosophy must be used to understand statements such as “God exists” since this phrase already assumes a concept of “existence”, and a concept of “God”. But what does it mean “to exist”? And what is the nature of “God”? And how can one rationally support the “existence” of “God”? Philosophical theology may speak of God as the ultimate cause of all things that exist. In this case, the argument will focus on demonstrating why a series of causes and effects require a single first cause to keep them in existence at all times. Once again, such an argument will be philosophical — and employ concepts of cause, effect, and logical reasoning to make its case. The philosophical argument does not **ignore** empirical scientific evidence, but it can build upon it or generalize from it. For example, the fact that the spatial existence of certain quantum particles depend upon the observation of a conscious observer can be used to argue that mind or consciousness is more fundamental than matter (which, upon deeper analysis, is hardly “solid” at all).

Ultimately, philosophy is required to shed light on the key questions of **truth**, **reality**, and **goodness**. The question of truth concerns the very nature of knowledge (epistemology). Knowledge leads to the question of what is **real** (ontology). What is **real** leads to the question of what has **value** or **goodness** (ethics). What is **good** ultimately leads to the formation of one’s character. One’s character determines one’s actions, and therefore, one’s entire life. Philosophy, far from being a purely theoretical discipline, is actually a way of life.

The Isma‘ili Gnosis blog is dedicated to the explanation of Isma‘ili Muslim Philosophy — the philosophical insights of the Isma‘ili **Imams**, theologians and thinkers throughout history — in a modern intellectual context. Seyyed Hossein Nasr best summarizes the imperatives of Isma‘ili philosophy as follows:

For the Ismā‘īlīs philosophy possesses essentially an esoteric, gnostic, and soteriological character and is not simply meant to be mental learning. It is related to the *ḥaqīqah* or truth at the heart of the Qur’ānic revelation, and therefore can be attained only after proper training of not solely the mind but also the whole of one’s being, which then makes one worthy of receiving knowledge from the representative of true gnosis, who is none other than the *Imām* or his representatives. The role of the *Imām* and the hierarchy of those who know at whose head he stands is, therefore, essential in the disciple’s gaining of authentic knowledge.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr,
(*An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia Volume 2: Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age*, 2)

Stories: Youth Find Answers to Questions, Strength of Faith through Ismaili Gnosis

Ismaili Gnosis shares two testimonials from two Ismaili Muslims youth who are regular readers of the blog. Like many young people in the modern world, both readers had many questions about their faith and found answers to such questions through Ismaili Gnosis.

"I finally came upon a website called Ismaili Gnosis and I began to read the various articles about topics I previously had questions about. I also joined the Ismaili Gnosis discussion group on Facebook, and I realized that I had finally found what I was looking for."

"Ismaili Gnosis has unceasingly provided nourishment for my soul. The content on their website, when followed in its logical progression, rebuilds one's faith and religious convictions."

"If one's **faith** is to be part of one's life then it has to come under **questioning**. The essential is that it should be **understood**, that's what would justify questioning. This way it is an integral part of one; there is no choice between leading a normal life or a faithful life."

- **Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni**,
(Sunday Times, December 12, 1965)



WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM

Ismaili Gnosis: Securing the Fort of Ismailism for Future Generations – *Navid Amiri*

"I finally came upon a website called Ismaili Gnosis and I began to read the various articles about topics I previously had questions about. I also joined the Ismaili Gnosis discussion group on Facebook, and I realized that I had finally found what I was looking for. I realized that the sort of questions that used to be met with fear and trepidation in REC were perfectly normal in the discussion group and one could actually have these addressed in a way that left people feeling that they were learning and growing."

When I think back to childhood going to REC and being in Jamatkhanna, the thing I remember best is a sense, a feeling, that we were under siege. Ismailism felt like a cloister, a fortress which we occupied kind of like the old fort of Alamut and the rest of the world represented the Mongols, invaders knocking on our door and trying to get us to come out. As society was entering the 21st century, the pressure

began to build as the Jamat began to open up to Western society and find themselves confronted by non Ismaili Muslims and those outside Islam. The youth of the Jamat began to feel challenged by their experiences and peers in high school and in college and found themselves vastly ill equipped to face it all. It began to seem to us youth that the walls of the fort of Ismailism were insecure and flimsy and people were lost and unsure why they were in the fort at all while second-guessing their trust in the Master of the fort, the Imam of the time. They began to see the fort not as a fort, but as a possible prison, as something designed not to keep the Mongols out, but to keep us locked in. My personal faith was held together by the unwavering confidence I had in certain key adults in my life and also the experience I had gazing upon our beloved Imam's face in 2002.

I knew however that more was needed and that even if I could be sustained by these forces, it would not be enough for many of those around me and certainly not for my future kids. I knew I had to gain more knowledge for their sake if not my own because simple emotion and experience are not a substitute for holistic knowledge and intellectual engagement. Beyond perhaps a single solid teacher in 10th grade REC, I had nothing to draw on besides having discussions with my friends, parents and various uncles and aunts in my family. REC sorely lacked the answers people were looking for as did the many articles read in Jamatkhana and the many Ismaili religious education programs and camps. **Students in REC especially in 12th grade were presenting questions and findings that, to my surprise, put the teacher and students on the defensive and rendered them helpless.** The situation seemed dire and I was concerned for the future of the Ismaili Jamat.

On February 14, 2015 I finally came upon a website called Ismaili Gnosis and I began to read the various articles about topics I previously had questions on. I also joined the [Ismaili Gnosis Facebook Discussion Forum](#), and I realized that I had finally found what I was looking for. I realized that the sort of questions that used to be met with fear and trepidation in REC were perfectly normal in the discussion group and one could actually have these addressed in a way that left people feeling that they were learning and growing. The Ismaili Gnosis website brings together the various writings of our Ismaili Imams, members of the Ismaili Dawah officially recognized by the institutions such as Nasir Khusraw and Nasir al-Din Tusi, and many IIS publications, presenting them in simple, lucid and easy to read articles about various topics such as ["He who is above all else": The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#) and the purpose of human life on Earth, understanding [Khushali Readings: Validating and Understanding the Ismaili Imam](#), and the meaning of [Ismaili rituals](#). It also provides a route for Ismailis to do their own personal search and interpretation of our faith and history.

I am convinced that reviving these teachings and presenting them the way Ismaili Gnosis has done so is the key to securing the fort of Ismailism for generations to come and I am very grateful for the efforts taken by its administrators. I was

severely uneducated in my faith but because of the constant prayer and seeking I had done trying to find signs and ayats in the world around me, when I came upon Ismaili Gnosis, my soul recognized what it was and I knew this was what I was seeking. I hope many more will stand up to support causes like this and also conduct their own independent efforts to strengthen our cause so that future generations can benefit from the intellectual richness of Ismailism and its Master, Imam-e-Zaman.

Ismaili Gnosis: Rebuilding Fortresses of Faith – *Ali Badruddin*

“Only through reading the articles that Ismaili Gnosis offers and through discussing with other Ismailis in the Ismaili Gnosis forum did I come to realize that there were so many things that I never learned after 12 years of REC, so many concepts that were never properly explained... Ismaili Gnosis has unceasingly provided nourishment for my soul. The content on their website, when followed in its logical progression, rebuilds one’s faith and religious convictions from a creaky shack, which can crumble at the slightest prod, to an impregnable fortress.”

It’s difficult to express my deep gratitude and affection for Ismaili Gnosis because it has done for me what cannot be easily described in words, and when I stumbled upon it on social media almost two years ago, I had no idea how much closer it would bring me to a clearer understanding of my faith. A hundred testimonials would not be enough to do full justice to my experience with Ismaili Gnosis. At first I wondered why an outfit such as Ismaili Gnosis was necessary in the first place because most Ismaili youth in the West complete 12 years of REC/BUI curriculum so they should have a thorough understanding of their faith. Only through reading the articles that Ismaili Gnosis offers and through discussing with other Ismailis in the [Ismaili Gnosis Facebook Forum](#) did I come to realize that there were so many things that I never learned after 12 years of REC, so many concepts that were never properly explained, and so many questions and concerns that I didn’t even realize I had. Unbeknownst to me was that Mawlana Hazar Imam had said that you must have a logical concept in all aspects of life, and that according to Islam faith is logical:

[You must have in every walk of your life a logical concept. This does not mean to wipe away faith, but the real principle of Islam is that faith is logical... Because the very heart of Islam is logical.](#) There is no hocus-pocus. There is no nonsense. It is clear and it is lucid and it is understandable.

Imam Shah Karim al-Ḥusayni Aga Khan IV,
(Speech to Students, Karachi, September 27, 1960)

My intention is not to place blame on the teachers because I am extremely grateful to all of them for their dedicated voluntary time and effort in service to the youth of the Jamat. They each did the best they could within their capabilities and with the tools they had, and I do not mean to imply that I never learned anything from them at all. Such an assessment would not be truthful because REC was beneficial

in many ways. However, I can honestly say that a firm foundation for a clear understanding of Ismailism was never laid, and I believe this is what was and continues to be extremely necessary.

My story with REC came full circle when I became a voluntary teacher for 10th grade after moving to another city. I realized that although there was some decent content sparsely sprinkled throughout the curriculum, the material that was needed to lay a solid foundation was notably missing. Naturally, the knowledge I began to gain from Ismaili Gnosis started to seep into my lessons and I found that my students were drawn much more to the Ismaili Gnosis material than the material from their actual curriculum.

In the year after, when I became Principal as well as a teacher, a student stopped attending class in part because she did not find the actual REC curriculum to be satisfying. From that moment onwards, I began to integrate Ismaili Gnosis material more and more into my lessons so as to not lose any more students, and I found this change to be very well received by them. **One day I combined my classes with another grade and included Ismaili Gnosis content in the lesson. The student from the other grade was so captured and satisfied by the content that his mother came to me in Jamatkhana and asked me to be his teacher next year.** I was left wondering why this type of content was not part of the actual curriculum in the first place. This was an absolute tragedy because the students were clearly missing out on some very beneficial material. I thank Ismaili Gnosis for being attuned to the issues that today's Ismaili youth face with regard to their faith and for stepping up to the plate to perform this extremely vital role that the community truly requires.

[Islam enjoins upon an individual the maintaining of a balance between spiritual life and material well-being, and to ensure that his or her material endeavors are underpinned by the ethical principles of Islam. This balance between din and dunya entails not only the fulfillment of the individual's spiritual obligation but also of the obligation to acquire knowledge and to use it for the benefit of others.](#)

Imam Shah Karim al-Ḥusayni Aga Khan IV,
(Public Address, Al-Khawabi, Syria, 9 November 2001)

The great Ismaili thinker Nasir Khusraw has said that knowledge is the food of the soul, and in keeping with this notion, Ismaili Gnosis has unceasingly provided nourishment for my soul. The content on their website, when followed in its logical progression, rebuilds one's faith and religious convictions from a creaky shack, which can crumble at the slightest prod, to an impregnable fortress. Naturally, the shack creaks because it lies on top of a shaky foundation so both unlearning and new learning must first take place in order for a stronger foundation to be laid. One example of this is to be found in their article, **[“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)**. This article first explains how many of us today think about God along the wrong lines and actually hold to an erroneous concept of God.

The most pervasive error one encounters in contemporary arguments about belief in God – especially, but not exclusively, on the atheist side – is the habit of conceiving of God simply as some very large object or agency within the universe, or perhaps alongside the universe, a being among other beings, who differs from all other beings in magnitude, power, and duration, but not ontologically, and who is related to the world more or less as a craftsman is related to an artifact.

David Bentley Hart,
(The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, 32)

This article changed my conception of God by providing a comprehensive and lucid argument for God as ultimate, unconditioned reality, which is “the Source or Ground for all of the powers or qualities found in conditioned realities such as existence, power, life, will, knowledge, beauty, compassion etc. This Unconditioned Reality – the Creator and Sustainer of all existing things at all times – is what we call ‘God’ or ‘He who is above all else’.” I was amazed at how the concept of God which this Ismaili Gnosis article explained and established using logic and philosophy matched exactly with what our Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah taught in his Memoirs:

It is said that we live, move and have our being in God... God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

Another article which has helped me immensely is **The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur’an says about Muhammad**. It outlines all of the spiritual functions and roles of Prophet Muhammad as they are found in the Qur’an. Some of them are:

- The Prophet Muḥammad forgives the Believers (5:13; 3:159; 7:199)
- The Prophet Muḥammad guides the Believers to the Straight Path (45:25)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the judge of the believers (4:65; 4:105; 24:51; 33:36)
- The Prophet Muḥammad makes things clear to the Believers (5:15; 5:19; 16:44; 16:64; 14:4)
- The Prophet Muḥammad purifies and sanctifies the believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad holds authority (awla) over the Believers (33:6)
- The Prophet Muḥammad recites the Signs of God (2:151)
- The Prophet Muḥammad sends ṣalawāt (blessings, prayers) upon the Believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad receives offerings (ṣadaqa) from the Believers (9:103; 58:12)

A reading of this entire piece changed my perception of the Holy Prophet Muhammad from simply being a “revealer of a message” to the central and august

person around which Islam revolved. The existence of these roles and functions also explain why a [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) was absolutely necessary, which in turn led me to understand how these roles and functions continue to be fulfilled and performed today by our Imam of the Time, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni.

These are just two examples of many, through which Ismaili Gnosis has helped me to achieve a clearer understanding of Ismailism. It also helps that there is an [**Ismaili Gnosis Facebook Forum**](#) for Ismailis where certain individuals make themselves available night and day to answer any questions and discuss topics relevant to various aspects of faith. Ismaili Gnosis even operates on [**Twitter**](#), [**Instagram**](#) and [**Snapchat**](#) through which it shares snippets of informational Ismaili content throughout the day. This is especially wonderful because now we are reminded of our faith at various moments throughout our busy daily lives. I truly believe that this growing pillar of our community is providing a great service to the Jamat and especially to the youth, and it is my hope and prayer that many creaky shacks of childhood belief will continue to be rebuilt into unshakable fortresses of faith through Ismaili Gnosis.

The Concept of God in the Teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

Ismā'īlī Gnosis presents Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh's teachings on the concept of God as found in his public speeches, interviews and writings.

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III (1877-1957) was the forty-eighth [*"We come from the Light of God": Birthday of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni*](#) of the Shī'ī Ismā'īlī Muslims and the predecessor of the present Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husayni Āgā Khān IV. Within the [*From Ādam to Āgā Khān: The Universal Imāmat*](#) in the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad, the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh occupies an exalted degree as the [*Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" \(Part 1\)*](#) (Proof of the *Qā'im*) and the living *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Power). According to [*Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" \(Part 1\)*](#) made by al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzi and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the *Hujjat al-Qā'im* would be the "master of universal explanation and true unveiling" (*ṣāhib al-bayān al-kull wa'l-kashf al-ḥaqīqī*) and greater than a thousand *Imāms* in knowledge. With respect to his pre-eminent position over all the *Imāms*, Mawlānā Hazar Imām has referred to Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh as "the finest *Imām* we have had". [*Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'īlī Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" \(Part 1\)*](#) about the exalted spiritual status of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah]



Since Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh was the *Hujjat al-Qā'im* (Proof of the *Qā'im*), it is no surprise that his public teachings and writings contain some of the most lucid and accessible explanations of gnosis and spirituality.

In the below selections, Ismā'īlī Gnosis presents the teachings of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III on the concept of God as found in his public speeches, interviews and writings. These teachings are extremely important in an age where believers, agnostics and atheists harbour misunderstandings concerning the nature of God and His relationship to the Cosmos. These errors include things like “deism” (that God simply creates the Universe and leaves it to its own existence without any involvement), “theistic personalism” (that God is merely an immaterial disembodied “person” that watches over human beings), “pantheism” (that the physical Universe *is* God), “abstract monotheism” (that God’s personality is entirely separate and disjoint from the Cosmos), atheism (that there is no God whatsoever), etc. The below statements of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah present a conception of God that harmonizes both “classical theism” (upheld by Christian and Islamic philosophers including Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, etc) and “mono-realism” (upheld by Christian and Muslim mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Ibn al-Arabi, Mulla Sadra, etc): the concept of God as the Absolute, Infinite and Sole Reality – the continuous Creator and Sustainer of all existence at every waking moment, the Absolute Being whose intrinsic and infinite qualities of Knowledge, Power, Justice, and Mercy are revealed throughout vastness of the Cosmos and in the souls of human beings, and the Eternal Reality through whom human beings may attain spiritual vision and mystical union. (In a subsequent post, we will contextualize the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh’s teachings on the concept of God with the classical Ismā'īlī doctrines of God).

God is the Absolute Infinite Reality embracing all realities



“Take the central principle of “Allāhu Akbar”. Here we find on one side divinity, on the other side infinity. For what is the greater – time, space, the starry heavens, intelligence, knowledge? – wherever existence goes, there His greatness extends. Greatness here, to anyone who understands the implications of the Arabic language, does not mean “greaterness” as literally translated into English. It means that everything else is within the womb of

the greater – everything else is maintained and sustained by Divine Power, including the furthest spaces of imagination. Muhammad told mankind first that the Infinite Sustainer and Container of all existence had justice, mercy, and love as well; secondly, that man through these qualities and through gentleness and kindness, prayer, awe or wonder could get – howsoever infinitesimal proportion – direct communion with the All-Embracing Power in which he lived and moved and had his being. I submit that this doctrine will have a universality that can be accepted as long as man is man and as long as intelligence as we understand it survives on earth.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Foreword, Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazbhoy, *Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations*, 12-13), Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.monoreality.org/isw/msms/onululamr.pdf>

“It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur’an, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely... Thus Islam’s basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: “Allāhu-Akbar”. What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*), Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

God is the continuous creator/sustainer of all things and His creative act is perpetual



“The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allāh alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*),

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

“Now Islam holds that religion should be an affair of everyday minute — like breathing. “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Allāh is the Sustainer. He sustains us always and everywhere. The Faithful son of Islam is ever conscious of that fact, and in the ordinary course of business will pause or go aside to get into direct touch with the Almighty, the Sustainer...I have, anyhow, met many persons nominally Christian who seem to think that in the beginning God created the world and then left it to its own devices. They seem to regard Him as a Being infinitely removed from them and their affairs. Whereas my Faith is, as you say yours is, that God is ever present, ever

creative, and that His Providence sustains us in the smallest detail of our daily life. And He watches while we sleep.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(“Is Religion something special?”, *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, Edited by K.K. Aziz., Vol II, 1410)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10121/>

The Cosmos contains the reflections/manifestations (signs) of God



“Imam Hasan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the Sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain; there is certainly a reflection or image of the Sun, but with what poverty and with what little reality; how small and pale is the likeness between this impalpable image and the immense, blazing, white-hot glory of the celestial sphere itself. Allāh is the Sun; and the Universe, as we know it in all its magnitude, and time, with its power, are nothing more than the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the fountain.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

“Islamic doctrine goes further than the other great religions, for it proclaims the presence of the soul, perhaps minute but nevertheless existing in an embryonic state, in all existence — in matter, in animals, trees, and space

itself. Every individual, every molecule, every atom has its own spiritual relationship with the All-Powerful Soul of God.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan:
World Enough and Time*)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

“Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion. Throughout the Qur’ān God’s signs (Ayats) are referred to as the natural phenomenon, the law and order of the universe, the exactitudes and consequences of the relations between natural phenomenon in cause and effect. Over and over, the stars, sun, moon, earthquakes, fruits of the earth and trees are mentioned as the signs of Divine power, Divine law and Divine order. Even in the Ayah of Nūr, [the] Divine is referred to as the natural phenomenon of light and even references are made to the fruit of the earth... Islam is a natural religion of which the Ayats are the universe in which we live and move and have our being.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
 (“What have we forgotten in Islam”, *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and
Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, Edited by K.K. Aziz., Vol II, 1290)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1253/>

“First of all as regards to the idea of divinity of God: a great deal of the Qur’ān is taken up with God’s intimate presence in the world, with the importance of each human being’s relations with the Creator; but only in one chapter-the chapter on Light – is the nature of the divinity referred to in a very clear form. Although, of course, we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Reincarnation or Companionship on High? Africa Ismaili Kisumu Supplement*,
March 28, 1969)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.amaana.org/sultweb/companion.htm>

Human beings carry the Divine Spark



“The healthy human body is the temple in which the flame of the Holy Spirit burns, and thus it deserves the respect of scrupulous cleanliness and personal hygiene. Prayer is a daily necessity, a direct communication of the spark with the universal flame... All are the sons of Adam in the flesh and all carry in them a spark of the Divine Light. Everyone should strive his best to see that this spark be not extinguished but rather developed to that full “Companionship-on-High” which was the vision expressed in the last words of the Prophet on his deathbed, the vision of that blessed state which he saw clearly awaiting him.”

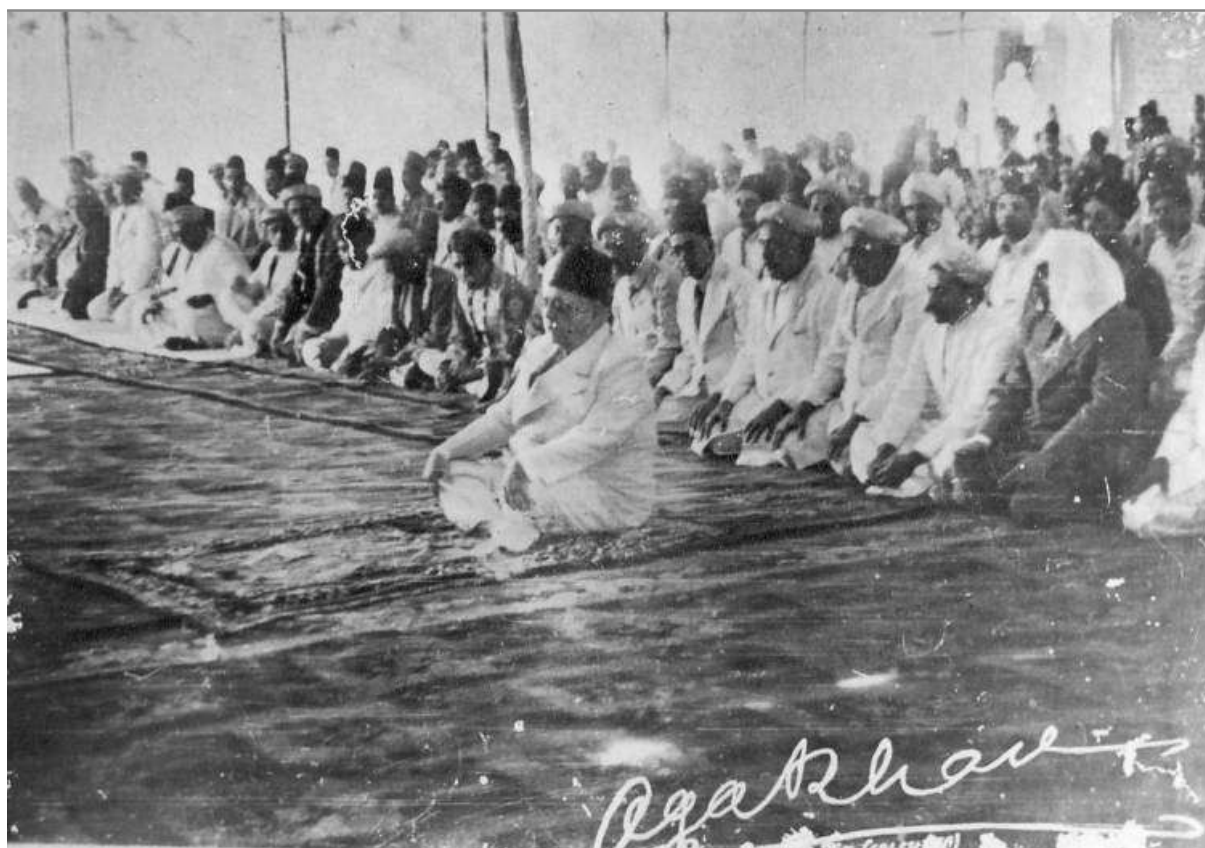
Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

“I can only say to everyone who reads this book that it is my profound conviction that man must never ignore and leave untended and undeveloped that spark of the Divine which is in him.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, Concluding Paragraphs)

Human beings may attain spiritual vision/communion with God



“It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur’ān, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely. But when we realise the meaning of this saying, we are already preparing ourselves for the gift of the power of direct experience. Rūmī and Hāfiz, the great Persian poets, have told us, each in his different way, that some men are born with such natural spiritual capacities and possibilities of development that they have direct experience of that great love, that all-embracing, all-consuming love, which direct contact with Reality gives to the human soul. Hafiz indeed has said that men like Jesus Christ and Muslim mystics like Mansūr and Bayezid and others have possessed that spiritual power of the greater love; that any of us, if the Holy Spirit ever present grants us that enlightenment, can, being thus blessed, have the power which Christ had, but that to the overwhelming majority of men this greater love is not a practical possibility... But as the joys of human love surpass all that riches and power may bring a man, so does that greater spiritual love and enlightenment, the fruit of that sublime experience of the direct vision of Reality which is God’s gift and grace, surpass all that the finest, truest human love can offer. For that gift we must ever pray. Now I am convinced that through Islam, through the idea of Allāh, as presented by Muslims, man can attain this direct experience which no words can explain but which for him are absolute certainties. I have not discussed experience of this order with non-

Muslims, but I have been told that Buddhists, Brahmins, Zoroastrians and Christians — I have not often heard it of Jews, except perhaps Spinoza — have also attained this direct, mystical vision. I am certain that many Muslims, and I am convinced that I myself, have had moments of enlightenment and of knowledge of a kind which we cannot communicate because it is something given and not something acquired.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors*, extract from *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

“Muhammad told mankind first that the Infinite Sustainer and Container of all existence had justice, mercy, and love as well; secondly, that man through these qualities and through gentleness and kindness, prayer, awe or wonder could get – howsoever infinitesimal proportion – direct communion with the All-Embracing Power in which he lived and moved and had his being. I submit that this doctrine will have a universality that can be accepted as long as man is man and as long as intelligence as we understand it survives on earth.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(Foreword, Al-Hajj Qassim Ali, *Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations*, 12-13)
Read the Full Source

Here: <http://www.monoreality.org/isw/msms/onululamr.pdf>

“It is a Muslim’s highest duty, by intensive prayer and spiritual abandonment of self to the great Universal Soul of the Universe, to get the supreme blessing of direct communion with Absolute Reality.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(“Reincarnation or Companionship on High?”, *Africa Ismaili Kisumu Supplement*, March 28, 1969)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.amaana.org/sultweb/companion.htm>

“A man must be at one with God. This may sound old-fashioned to some people. A few may think that they do not believe in God, and some others that it matters little to the individual in his daily life how he stands with regard to Him. Ruling out the atheist, with whom a believer can no more argue than he can discuss colour with a blind man, it is surely strange that a believer in an omnipotent and ever-present Deity should fail to realise that how we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the universe. That is the fundamental question: Are you in harmony with God? If you are — you are happy.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(“My Personal Life”, *Aga Khan III, Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*, Edited by K.K. Aziz, 866)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10471/>

“I would counsel my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves; I would have them resolute, self-controlled, independent, but not rebellious. Let them seek communion with that Eternal

Reality which I call Allāh and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*My Philosophy of Happiness – Interview with Mr. W. R. Titterton*)

Read the Full Source Here: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10494/>

“The way to personal fulfillment, to individual reconciliation with the Universe that is about us, is comparatively easy for anyone who firmly and sincerely believes, as I do, that Divine Grace has given man in his own heart the possibilities of illumination and of union with Reality. It is, however, far more important to attempt to offer some hope of spiritual sustenance to those many who, in this age in which the capacity of faith is nonexistent in the majority, long for something beyond themselves, even if it seems second-best. For them there is the possibility of finding strength of the spirit, comfort and happiness in contemplation of the infinite variety and beauty of the Universe.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time, Concluding Paragraphs*)

“Life in the ultimate analysis has taught me one enduring lesson. The subject should always disappear in the object. In our ordinary affections one for another, in our daily work with hand or brain, most of us discover soon enough that any lasting satisfaction, any contentment that we can achieve, is the result of forgetting self, of merging subject with object in a harmony that is of body, mind and spirit. And in the highest realms of consciousness all who believe in a Higher Being are liberated from all the clogging and hampering bonds of the subjective self in prayer, in rapt meditation upon and in the face of the glorious radiance of eternity, in which all temporal and earthly consciousness is swallowed up and itself becomes the eternal.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III,
(*The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time, Concluding Paragraphs*)

The Ismaili Imamat's Guidance against Drinking Alcohol

The Imam's word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan

The greatest danger to every Muslim citizen – I have not the least hesitation in saying it – is alcohol.

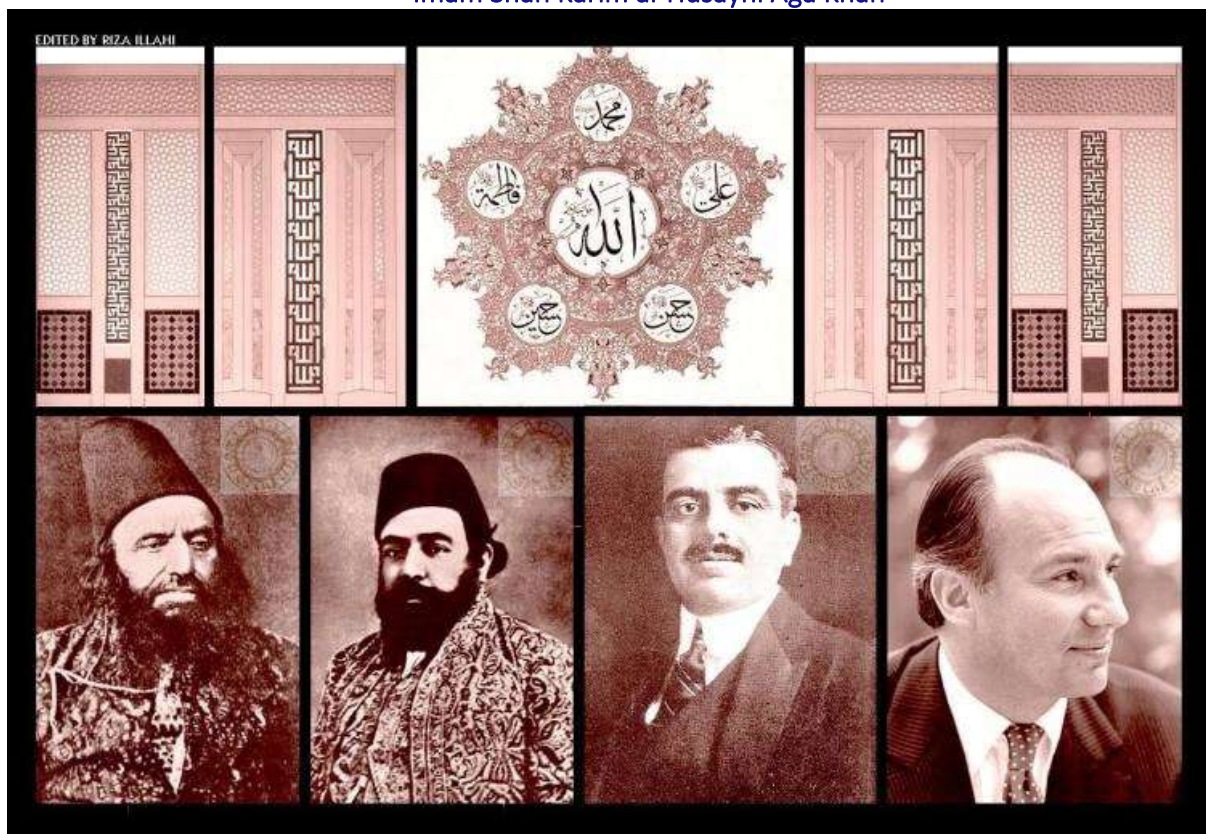
Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan

Our belief is that the thing which separates man from the animals is his power of thought. Anything that impedes this process is wrong. Therefore alcohol is forbidden. I have never touched alcohol.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan

Indeed our value systems are massively important for the future.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan



In the speech below, from the 1976 Seerat Conference, the Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams – Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV – depicted the dramatic shift in moral attitudes that have taken place in the Western world over the last forty years.

I have observed in the Western world a deeply changing pattern of human relations. The anchors of moral behaviour appear to have dragged to such depths that they no longer hold firm the ship of life: what was once wrong is now simply unconventional, and for the sake of individual freedom must be tolerated. What is tolerated soon becomes accepted. Contrarily, what was

once right is now viewed as outdated, old fashioned and is often the target of ridicule.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
Presidential Address, International Seerat Conference, 12 March 1976
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1804/>

The Ismaili Imams have consistently instructed their *murids* to abide by the values and ethical principles of Islam – which includes abstaining from drinking, smoking, drugs and other spiritually and physically debilitating social habits. Since the inception of Islam, **the Shia Ismaili Imam has condemned the act of drinking alcohol as the “greatest of all sins.”** In the past fifty years, the Ismaili Imams have equally condemned smoking and the use of drugs.

[NOTE: In the below referenced statements, the Imams condemn **the act of drinking alcohol** as “evil”, “sinful” or “wrong”; **they do not condemn the persons** who may engage in such acts. The purpose of conveying this information is for the sake of informing people’s decision making process and not to judge people for what they may or may not do or have done. Every person, under the guidance of the Imam, must make their own value judgments.]

For the [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#), the hereditary Imam from the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib holds absolute authority in religious and spiritual matters, as the [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur’an says about Muhammad](#). **Following the Imam’s guidance is essential to the salvation of all those who have given [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) to the Imam and have become his *murids* and spiritual children. The *bay’ah* between the Imam and the *murids* is a spiritual contract that enjoins a number of religious, ethical and moral imperatives upon the Imam’s *murids* – including striving to obey the guidance of the Imam on all religious and spiritual matters.** In this regard, in a Public Interview with *Sunday Times Weekly Review* on December 12, 1965, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained that:

[The Imam’s word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it.](#) The Community always follows very closely the personal way of thinking of the Imam. It’s one of the particularities of Ismailis.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
The Sunday Times, 12 December 1965
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>

Like all other schools of Islam, the Ismaili Imams have forbidden alcohol in any amount for their spiritual children and the following is a summary of the Imam’s guidance on this issue. Throughout the last century, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni have spoken out against drinking alcohol, both publicly and in their guidance to the Ismaili Jamat. For example, in an Address in Johannesburg, August 7, 1945, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said:

[The greatest danger to every Muslim citizen – I have not the least hesitation in saying it – is alcohol.](#) Time has shown that it is an injury to you; an injury to

your person; an injury to your health. It is forbidden because it carries greater evil than good. Believe me, in a community like yours, alcohol is a very grave danger. Once you got into the alcohol habit, I do not know where it would lead you. A handful, here and there, of the weak, or of the unhappy, find their way to this terrible poison. Avoid it at all costs. Avoid it, I say, for in this country you cannot afford to lose one man.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III
Guidelines for the Muslims of Transvaal, 1954, Johannesburg, South Africa
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10699/>

There are certain people who claim that drinking alcohol is permissible as long as one makes an honest personal judgment to do so using one's own intellect and judgement. However, this position is self-defeating because, firstly, drinking alcohol damages and impedes the operation of the Esoteric Thought in Physical Form: The Aga Khan Campus in Toronto and the power of thought. Therefore, it is absolutely nonsensical to justify consuming alcohol in the name of one's individual intellect when doing so actually reduces the powers of that intellect. Secondly, the central premise in Ismaili thought is the insufficiency of the individual human intellect and **the need to receive guidance from a perfect intellect**. This is, in fact, the reason why every Ismaili *murid* has pledged obedience to the Imam and such a pledge is an admission of the imperfection of one's individual intellect and the superiority of the Imam's divinely-inspired intellect. In a Public Interview with *Sunday Times Weekly Review*, on December 12, 1965, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained the Ismaili Muslim position regarding alcohol:

It is not allowed. You are severely reprimanded. There is a very clear set of rules by which you can live... Our belief is that the thing which separates man from the animals is his power of thought. Anything that impedes this process is wrong. Therefore alcohol is forbidden. I have never touched alcohol. But this, to me, is not a puritan prohibition. I don't want to drink. I've never wanted to drink. There's no pressure being placed on me by my religion.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
The Sunday Times, 12 December 1965
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's guidance against drinking alcohol

In Mumbai (April 3, 1893), **Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah referred to alcohol as abominable and "the greatest of all sins" – even more sinful than idol worshiping or killing a believer**. He commanded his entire Jamat to keep away from alcohol. He concluded by saying that whoever hears this order must repent and promise that they will "never" drink alcohol.

On April 24, 1891, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that those who drink alcohol shall be punished on the Day of Judgment.

In Ahmabawa (February 16, 1896), the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that the true believer does not drink alcohol. In Zanzibar (February 20, 1925), the Imam

proclaimed that a believer does not drink alcohol and those who drink alcohol will suffer a great deal in this world and the hereafter.

In a Message to Africa (April 7, 1953), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that alcohol is the most dangerous of man's enemies because **it approaches as a friend** but is actually the most dangerous pitfall. He explained that alcohol is a poison for the body and that not only will it will the body, but that alcohol will "kill your soul".

In London (June 11, 1951), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah described alcohol as a "sleep" that makes one forget reality and run away from life.

In a 1953 Message, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah warned that those who drink alcohol will **"gradually lose faith"** in their religion and "lose faith in my guidance" because **the Imam "always tells you not to drink alcohol."**

In Karachi (February 2, 1951), the Imam said that the Devil exploits you when you drink alcohol and use tobacco.

In Nairobi (July 5, 1946), the Imam explained that he "feels sorry" for his murids who drink alcohol and that the Imam himself is **"filled with tears"** and "overtaken by grief" when he sees his *murids* drinking alcohol.

In 1953 (Venezia), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah expressed his happiness that "all possible means" were being taken to educate the jamat about the dangers of alcohol and tobacco. The Imam was also happy about "the action taken" by the Ismaili Councils "against the use of tobacco and alcohol" and that many spiritual children should take an oath to stay away from these substances.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's guidance against drinking alcohol

In London (June 18, 1964), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni commanded his murids to abandon drinking alcohol and called it the **"most ugly habit"**. He explained that drinking alcohol is something which he **"condemns"** and that it brings nothing but spiritual sorrow.

In Eldoret (Oct – Nov 1966) and later in Uganda (December 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said to "stay away" from smoking and drinking. In no uncertain terms, the Imam said he wanted his murids to stop engaging in drinking because it is unpleasant, wastes money, makes one lose their honor and **creates a "very poor" impression on the Jamat**. The Imam concluded by explaining that he gave this order because he loves his Jamat. In the same address the Imam refuted the idea that drinking brings one social status or distinction and remarked that whoever believes that drinking gives social distinction has a mistaken view of what social distinction really is.

In Tanzania (November 8, 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking alcohol as a horrible habit and exclaimed that to be drunk is "a sin against Islam."

In Dar es Salaam (November 11, 1970), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni exclaimed that drinking and smoking and drugs are nothing but a "waste" of the younger

generation and that such habits are “not for the Jamat”. He ended by saying that **engaging in drinking and smoking is “the way to destroy the Jamat.”**

In Paris (June 30, 1972) Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said to leave aside such habits as drinking and smoking and to stay away from them. He remarked that he considered drinking alcohol as stupid as cutting off one’s hand. In the same farman, the Imam reminded his Jamat that they will not be judged any less kindly on the Day of Judgment just because they live in the Western World and they will not be allowed to say “I did not practice my faith because I as living in London”.

The Imam emphasized that his murids will be asked the same questions on the Day of Judgment as all other Muslims, and not to indulge in “passing habits” such as drinking and smoking that exist in the Western World.

In Mwanza (November 10, 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said that alcohol is not for his murids and that it creates a “very unpleasant impression” on the Jamat and wastes massive amounts of money.

In London (September 23, 1973), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni referred to alcohol, smoking and drugs as “social evils” which will reduce one’s “ability to perform” in worldly and spiritual affairs. **He concluded by telling his murids to “remain clear” from such matters.**

In Vancouver (November 15, 1978), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of alcohol and smoking as nothing but “facile bad habits” that prepare young men and women to “be crippled men and crippled women”. **The Imam warned that such habits are a “limitation” on the mind and the body.**

In Toronto (November 23, 1978), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni warned his murids to stay away from the “facile social habits” of the Western world, explaining that they contribute “nothing” physically or intellectually.

In London (September 1, 1979), the Imam urged the Jamat to leave “the facile bad habits” of drinking, smoking and drugs – stating that they “destroy you”.

In Toronto (April 27, 1983), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking and smoking as social habits which are “evil at time”s and instructed the Jamat not to “compromise” by engaging in them.

In London (July 6, 1983), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni referred to drinking and smoking as “habits of the Western World” which cause disharmony and which “reduce” the Jamat’s capacity to look after its own destiny. **He reminded the Jamat not to compromise on “the fundamental principles” of faith by engaging in these activities.**

In Chicago (November 5, 1986), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking and smoking as habits that are “evil and unhealthy” that are “damaging” to each person and his family. And in Houston (November 8), the Imam again described drinking and smoking as “evil in moral terms”.

In Lisbon (April 9, 1987), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni asked the Jamat to have the “discipline, rigour, integrity, courage” to “stand up” and reject the social habits of drinking and smoking and **not to “deviate” from the Straight Path.**

In Toronto (June 5, 2005), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained that **the Jamat “has choices to make” – either to “keep” the integrity of the value system of Shia Ismaili Islam or let the Ismaili value system be “replaced” with values that are not rooted in the Shia Ismaili Tariqah.** He instructed the Jamat to “make careful value judgments” for the future of the Jamat. On the same day, the Imam told the Jamat to leave aside the “undesirable” social activities that are “useless, costly, and damaging” because life is too short and health is too fragile.

In Toronto (November 22, 2008), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni remarked that some social habits are “frivolous” and others are “evil” and **ordered his Jamat to “give up both.”**

Finally, on December 13, 2008, the Imam in a worldwide message proclaimed that he will not “allow compromises” to come into the Ismaili Muslim value systems. Similarly, in a 2008 Interview, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said:

... progress does not mean occidentalisation. Progress in the Ummah means moving forwards in quality of life, but not giving up your identity, not giving up your value systems. Indeed our value systems are massively important for the future. [Emphasis original]

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
Syrian TV, 29 August 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9004/>

A true story about a *murid* who gave up alcohol as per the Imam’s guidance



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
visiting his Ismaili followers in Tajikistan, 2008

It is never too late for a *murid* of the Imam to give up alcohol, smoking and other facile social habits. The Imam’s blessings are always showering upon the souls of his *murids*, and it is only the vices and sins of the soul that may impede the spiritual purify of the soul and block its reception of these blessings. However, giving up drinking, sincerely repenting and seeking the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness of the Imam can bring about a spiritual transformation in the life and soul of the *murid*. In this respect, the Ismaili philosopher Nasir al-Din Tusi has written:

The devotees, devoid of all scruples or doubt, but with total confidence and sincere trust, must believe that a single merciful (*rahmat*) glance (*nazar*) or

sign of acceptance given by the Imam to the supplication and imploration of the creatures from first to last can remit their sins and pardon their faults, transmuting their iniquities into deeds of merit.

Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, Nasir al-Din Tusi, tr. S.J. Badakchani, 94)

It will be interesting to cite a real life example that **during his auspicious visit of East Africa between October 18, 1966 and December 11, 1966, Hazar Imam [Shah Karim al-Husayni] made many *farmans* against the degrading habits of drinking and smoking. [Missionary] Varas Kassim Ali was on his duty in East Africa, and when he returned, he explained the gist of the farmans in Aden and Karachi Jamatkhanas.** He also emphasized upon those who were smokers and addicts of alcohol. His delivery struck the hearts of the listeners, and most of them abandoned the diabolic habits. **Among them was an individual, an addict of drinking and smoking for 16 years.** It was not so easy to give up old habit in an instant, but he was determined to give it up in view of Imam's orders. **On fourth day following his abandonment, he suffered with a fatal heart trouble and expired.** Varas Kassim Ali prepared a report of his tour of East Africa, Aden and Karachi and sent to the Imam on January 20, 1967, including the incident of the above person in particular. The Imam sent following message on January 24, 1967:

My dear Missionary Kassimali,
I have received your two letters dated 20th January, and have read the contents with great interest.
I am very happy indeed with your good work, and I give you my most affectionate paternal maternal loving blessings for your devoted services.
I am happy to hear that you were able to stop in Aden on your way to Karachi and that my Jamat in Aden was able to listen to your *wa'z*.
I give my most affectionate paternal maternal loving blessings to the deceased spiritual child mentioned in your report, and I pray that his soul may rest in eternal peace. I send him my special loving blessings for having given up his 16 years' old habit of drinking and smoking.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

(Quoted from Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali *101 Ismaili Heroes*)

<http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Missionary-Kassim-Ali-Muhammad-Jaffer/775471#.VAoJ5vldUuc>

The decision to totally abstain from drinking alcohol, smoking, and other damaging social habits comes down to the individual choice to listen to the Imam's judgement, care for one's eternal human soul, and conquer the animal impulses within it in. It is only by applying his guidance at the individual level that the collective spiritual health of a community can be brought toward the greater good:

If it is possible to bring happiness to one individual, in that individual at least, the dark and evil impulses may be conquered. And may not the power of good in the individual in the end prevail against the power of evil in the many?

Appendix: Guidance from the early Imams

Imam as-Sadiq

No Prophet was raised at all except that Allah taught him that, once he has perfected his faith, that alcohol is forbidden. Alcohol has never, ever ceased to be forbidden.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:296)

Whoever drinks a thimble full of wine Allah curses him and the angels and the prophets and the believers. If he drinks until he is drunk, the spirit of faith is torn away from him.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:297)

Three will never enter paradise. The one who sheds blood, the one who drinks alcohol, and the talebearer.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:305)

Nobody disobeys Allah more than the one who drinks alcohol.

A man asked Imam as-Sadiq: Which is worse, drinking alcohol or abandoning the prayer?

The Imam said: "Drinking. Do you know why?" The man said no. The Imam said: "Because he will enter a state in which he cannot know his Lord.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:313-314)

Indeed, Allah has made a house for disobedience, and has made for this house a door, and has made for this door a lock, and has made for this door a key. And the key to the house of disobedience is drinking alcohol.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:313-314)

Alcohol is the lord of all sin.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25: 315)

Drinking alcohol is the key to every sin.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:315)

"Alcohol is the key that opens every evil.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:316)

An atheist said to Imam as-Sadiq: Why does Allah forbid alcohol?

The Imam said: Because alcohol is the mother of everything evil.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:317)

Imam Ali

It was said to Imam Ali: "You claim that drinking is worse than adultery and theft."

The Imam said: Yes, because a person who commits adultery will probably not do anything but that, but the person who drinks will commit adultery and will steal and will kill a soul that Allah has made sacred, and will abandon the prayer.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:316)

The Prophet

Whoever drinks alcohol until he is drunk, his prayers will not be accepted for forty days.

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:298)

Imam al-Baqir

Imam al-Baqir said: "The drinker of alcohol will appear on the Day of Judgment with his face blackened, his tongue hanging out, screaming 'The thirst, the thirst!'

(*Al-Hurr Al-'Amili. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a* 25:297)

Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) was the first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad with whom he shared the same paternal grandfather, the son-in-law of the Prophet as the husband of his only surviving daughter, and the most important personality in early Islam after the Prophet himself. As noted in Sunni Muslim historical chronicles, when Imam 'Ali was just ten years old, the Prophet Muhammad invited his close family to Islam and asked them:

Which of you, then, will help me in this, and be my brother, mine executor and my successor amongst you?' All remained silent, except for the youthful 'Alī who spoke up: 'O Prophet of God, I will be thy helper in this.' The Prophet then placed his hand on 'Alī's neck and said, 'This is my brother, mine executor and my successor amongst you. Hearken unto him and obey him.'

(Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah* [Earliest Biography of the Prophet], tr. A Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 118)

Ahmad al-Nasa'i, *Sunan al-Kubra* [one of the six canonical Sunni Hadith books], 126; [Read the Arabic Text](#))

Shi'a Muslims recognize Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the temporal, religious and spiritual successor, inheritor, and legatee (*wasi*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims recognize Imam 'Ali as the Fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph. Sufi Muslims from both Shi'a and Sunni traditions recognize Imam 'Ali as the first spiritual guardian (*wali*) and pole (*qutb*) of Islamic spirituality after the Prophet Muhammad. As the husband of the Prophet's only surviving daughter, Imam 'Ali is the father and progenitor of all the lineal descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, including Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn and their descendants.

Although prophetic revelation (*tanzil*) ends with the Prophet Muhammad, the authority of spiritual guardianship (*walayah*), teaching (*ta'lim*) and esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) continue in the person of Imam 'Ali and his designated lineal descendants until the end of time. Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#) and the present bearer of the 'Alid Imamate and (*walayah*). The Imam explained importance of Imam 'Ali to an audience of Evangelical Christians as follows:

As you know, the Shia divided from the Sunni after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, was, in Shia belief, named by the Prophet to be the Legitimate Authority for the interpretation of the faith. For the Shia today, all over the world, he is regarded as the first Imam.

Mawlana Hazar Imam, [Acceptance Address – Tutzing Evangelical Academy's 'Tolerance' Award](#), May 20th, 2016

During the reign of Umayyad dynasty the family and descendants of Imam 'Ali were heavily oppressed and the Imam 'Ali was cursed from the pulpits of the mosques. Nevertheless, the *hadith* literature of the Sunni tradition of Islam has preserved numerous statements of the Prophet Muhammad where he praises the virtues, excellence and spiritual pre-eminence of Imam 'Ali. **These *hadiths*, either taken individually or collectively, make it abundantly clear that the Prophet had indeed appointed Imam 'Ali as his spiritual and religious successor and as the legitimate authority for the interpretation of Islam after him.** It is highly unlikely that Sunni *hadiths* and transmitters would have forged such statements especially given the fact of the widespread opposition to Shi'ism. Indeed, the presence of such statements about the Imam 'Ali's exalted status even in Sunni literature lends support to the notion that 'Ali was the true and legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad.

Before turning to the Sunni hadith, one must note that the Qur'an does refer to Imam 'Ali in numerous verses: he is one of the *Ahl al-Bayt* whom God has purified from all impurity and sins (33:33) and the near-kin (*qurba*) of the Prophet whose love is obligatory for Muslims (42:23). Imam 'Ali is called the Guardian (*wali*) of the Believers after God and the Messenger (5:55), the Witness (*shahid*) from the Holy Prophet who verified him (11:17), and the Guide (*hadi*) of the community (13:7) after the Prophet. Imam 'Ali is part of the holy progeny of Abraham from whom God appoints the Imams (2:124) and upon whom He has bestowed His guidance, wisdom and kingdom (4:54). Imam 'Ali is mentioned in the verse of *mubahala* (3:61) as the self (*nafs*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Verse 5:67 of the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in right before the Prophet's final announcement at Ghadeer Khum where he announced that 'Ali is the *mawla* of the believers.

The hadith statements presented below appear in Reza-Shah

Kazemi, Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam 'Ali, p. 18-20, and are accompanied here by their original references from recognized Sunni Muslim hadith books: 'ala'l-Mustakrak al-Sahihayn by al-Hakim al-Naysaburi whose hadith isnads meet the criterion of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, and the Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib compiled by Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i who also authored one of the six Sunni canonical hadith collections. Later Sunni Muslim exegetes like Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti have also quoted these hadiths extensively in their works.

Truly, 'Ali is from me and I am from him (*inna 'Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and he is the *walī* (patron/spiritual master) of every believer after me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala'l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 19, No. 4636;
Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran
1998, 129)

‘Ali is with the Qur’ān and the Qur’ān is with ‘Ali. They will not separate from each other until they return to me at the [paradisaal pool] (*al-ḥawḍ*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4685)

[To ‘Ali]: Are you not happy that you should have in relation to me the rank of Aaron in relation to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasa’i, *Khasa’is Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 76)

Three things were revealed to me regarding ‘Alī: he is the leader of the Muslims, the guide of the pious and chief of the radiantly devout (*sayyidu’l-muslimīn, imāmu’l-muttaqīn, wa qā’idu’l-ghurra’lmuḥajjalīn*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 936, No. 4723)

Gazing upon ‘Alī is an act of worship (*al-naẓar ilā ‘Alī ‘ibāda*).)

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 938, No. 4736)

May God have mercy on ‘Alī. O God, make the truth revolve around ‘Alī wherever he turns (*adiri’l-ḥaqq ma‘ahu ḥaythu dāra*)

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4686)

‘Ali is as my own soul (*ka-nafsī*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasa’i, *Khasa’is Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 104)

You [‘Ali] are from me and I am from you (*anta minnī wa anā minka*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 924, No. 4672)

Whoever obeys ‘Ali obeys me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 925, No. 4678)

[To ‘Ali]: You will clarify for my community that over which they will differ after me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 926, No. 4678)

There is one amongst you who will fight for the *ta’wīl* [spiritual interpretation] of the Qur’ān as I have fought for its *tanzīl* [literal revelation].’ Abū Bakr asked, ‘Is it I?’. The Prophet said, ‘No’. ‘Umar asked, ‘Is it I?’. The Prophet said, ‘No, it

is the one who is mending the sandal.’ The Prophet had given ‘Alī his sandal to mend.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 926, No. 4679)

O ‘Ali, whoever separates himself from me separates himself from God, and whoever separates himself from you, O ‘Ali, separates himself from me.

Prophet Muhammad,
(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala’l-Sahihayn*, Beirut 2002, 927, No. 4682)

‘Ali is from me and I am from him (‘*Alī minnī wa anā minhu*), and nobody can fulfill my duty but myself and ‘Ali.

Prophet Muhammad,
(Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasa’i, *Khasa’is Amir al-Mu‘minin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib*, Tehran 1998, 106)

He whose *mawlā* [master] I am, this ‘Alī is his *mawla* (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu*).

Prophet Muhammad,
(Cited in numerous Sunni Muslim Hadith sources listed [here](#))

We conclude with the words of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, the 48th hereditary Imam of the Shi‘a Ismaili Muslims:

The Khalif or successor of the Prophet was to succeed him in both these capacities; he was to be both Amir al-Mu‘minin or “Commander of the true believers” and Imam-al-Muslimin or “spiritual chief of the devout.” Perhaps an analogy from the Latin, Western world will make this clearer: he would be Supreme Pontiff as well as Imperator or temporal ruler. ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, the husband of his beloved and only surviving child, Fatimah, his first convert, his bold champion in many a war, who the Prophet in his lifetime said would be to him as Aaron was to Moses, his brother and right-hand man, in the veins of whose descendants the Prophet’s own blood would flow, appeared destined to be that true successor; and such had been the general expectation of Islam. The Shi‘as have therefore always held that after the Prophet’s death, Divine power, guidance and leadership manifested themselves in Hazrat ‘Ali as the first Imam or spiritual chief of the devout.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Memoirs of the Aga Khan)

The Secret Life of the Aga Khan

Through his words, through his actions, and through the results obtained by the institutions that he has founded and encouraged and nourished, he has become a light in much of the world's conflicting darkness.

The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson

Watch: Five Minute Video by Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson (Former Governor General of Canada) on the Aga Khan's Life and Work:

His Highness Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#). This article looks at the Aga Khan's life and mission, in which the Imam has worked quietly and tirelessly to serve and bring hope to millions of people worldwide, in the name of Islam. The Aga Khan has been widely recognized for his efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material assistance to the Ismaili Muslims, who are today spread over 25 countries, and for his vast contributions to quality of life in various communities worldwide. These include ([courtesy of Ismailmail](#)):

- 28 Title and State Decorations including being made an honorary Companion to the Order of Canada (2005) and Honourary Canadian Citizenship (2009);
- 21 honorary degrees, from universities representing the US Ivy League, Canadian Group of 13, UK's Russell Group, and others;
- 16 civic honours, representing 9 investitures as Foreign Member to several state academies (for the creation of new knowledge – promoting research and stimulating the enhancement of thought, literature, language and other forms of national culture) and 3 Leadership posts at influential European Institutions to promote diplomacy, culture and development;
- 30 awards spanning domains such as architecture and the built environment, restoration and the revival of culture, education, health, diplomacy and peace, philanthropy, sports, corporate enterprise
- delivered over 70 high profile keynote addresses.

Overnight my whole life changed completely. I woke up with serious responsibilities toward millions of other human beings.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

([Sports Illustrated Interview, August 10, 1964, NanoWisdoms](#)

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10341/>)



On July 11, 1957, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan succeeded his grandfather, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III as the hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims at the age of 20 while still a sophomore at Harvard College. [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) are a branch of [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#) who recognize the continuation of the spiritual authority of the Prophet Muhammad through a [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#) descended from the Prophets cousin and son-in-law, [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#). Today, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni, known publicly as His Highness Prince Aga Khan IV, is the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of the Ismaili Muslims.

Historically, Ismailis are united by a common allegiance to [the living hereditary Imam of the time](#) in the progeny of Islam's last and final Prophet Muhammad

(may peace be upon him) through his daughter Fatima and her husband, Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's cousin and the first Shia Imam.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam Foundation Stone Ceremony, Ottawa, June 6, 2005, NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7314/>)

Unlike the Augustinian and Protestant traditions of Christianity, the Ismaili Imam's role and mandate requires him to lead the Ismaili Muslims in both the spiritual interpretation of Islam as well as the improvement of the quality of life of the Ismailis and those among whom they live. The Aga Khan describes his mission as follows:

I, as Imam of the Ismailis, have responsibility for and supreme authority over the community. This means taking the lead in the practice of the religion but also engaging in ongoing activities to improve the Ismailis' quality of life and to help "every Ismaili in the world who is in difficulties". It is true that today the role of the Aga Khan, 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, is to interpret Islam.

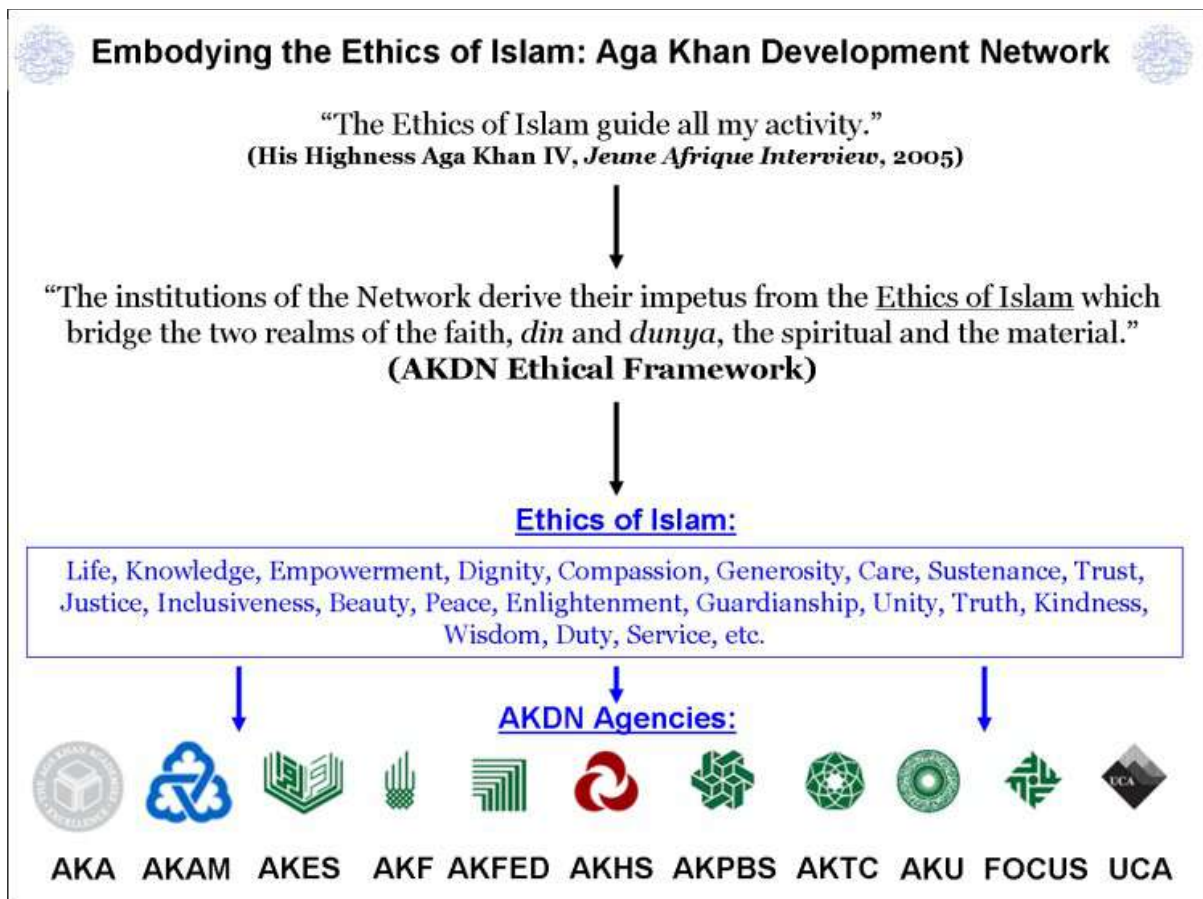
– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
([Paris Match Interview, Caroline Pigozzi, 'The Confessions of the Aga Khan', NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7190/>)

Over the past fifty years, the Ismaili Imam has been interpreting Islam and [teaching the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an](#). At the same time, the Ismaili Imam's mission to uplift quality of life for all human beings requires him to be deeply involved in all spheres of human activity. Many people, especially in the Western world, have difficulty understanding this because they expect religious leaders to devote themselves entirely to spiritual matters. But the division between spiritual life and physical life does not exist in Islam and the Aga Khan, as the Ismaili Imam of the time, exemplifies the union of faith and world in all of his activities:

An Imam is not expected to withdraw from everyday life. On the contrary, he's expected to protect his community and contribute to their quality of life. Therefore, the notion of the divide between faith and world is foreign to Islam. The Imam does not divide world and faith. That's very little understood outside Islam. In the West, your financial systems are all built around that divide.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([Vanity Fair Interview, James Reginato, 'The Aga Khan's Earthly Kingdom', NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10388/>)

The Ismaili Imam is the Founder and Chairman of the **Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** – a collection of development agencies who seek to improve quality of life and provide relief in the areas of poverty, health, architecture, media, governance, education, finance, economic development, building, environment, etc. [Read more at [AKDN website](#)]

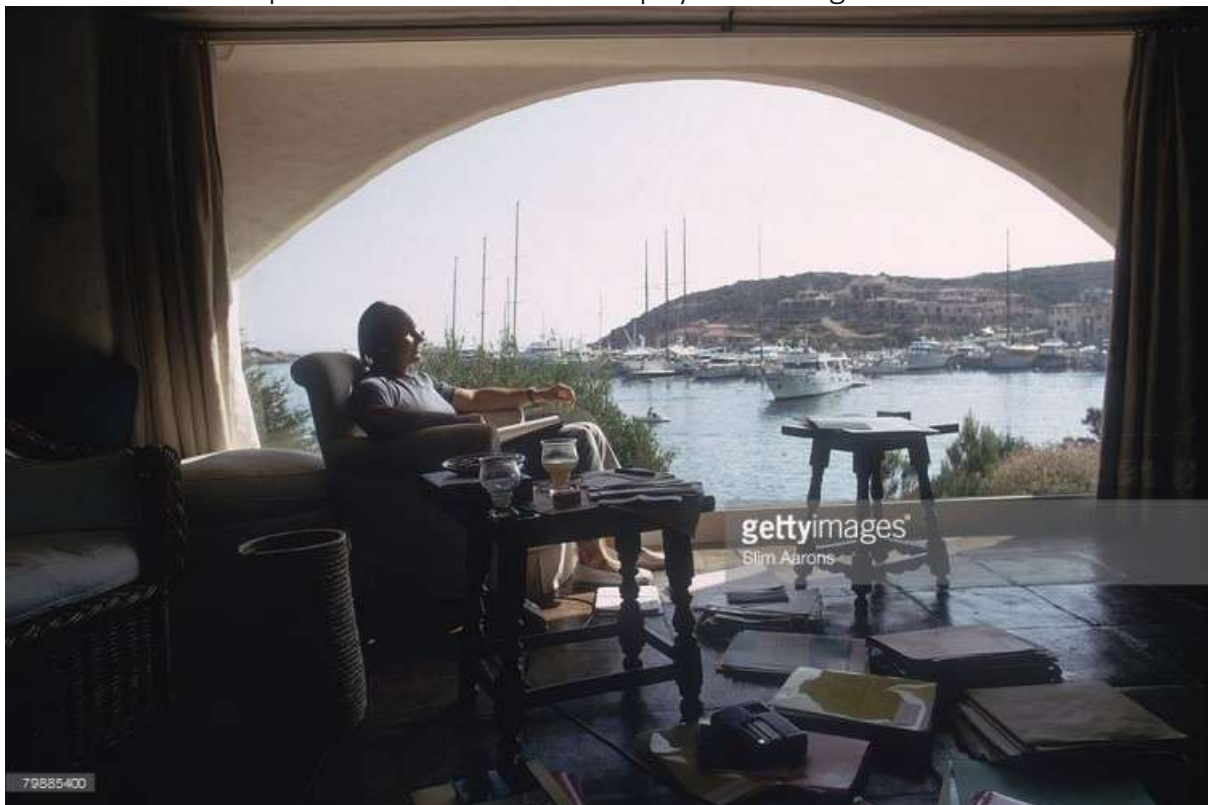


The work of the AKDN is not charity in the Western sense of handouts, but rather, its mission is to restore human dignity by empowering people to become self-sustaining. The work of the AKDN agencies is based on translating the Ethics of Islam into institutional endeavors. [Read more at the [AKDN Ethical Framework](#)]

- AKDN has been improving the quality of life of millions of human beings for **over 100 years**;
- AKDN operates in over **35 countries**, employs **80,000 people** and mobilizes over **100,000 volunteers** worldwide;
- AKDN’s annual budget is over **\$625 million** and funded in large part by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV;
- AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development) generates **\$3.5 billion in annual revenue** and **all profits are reinvested** for development;
AKDN raised \$1 billion from its own resources and partners for social, economic and cultural development in Afghanistan;
- AKDN through the Aga Khan Trust For Culture (AKTC) has executed **8 projects to restore or create parks, historic sites and gardens** – which attract **5 million people every year** and **43 million visitors** since opening;
- AKDN has created **5 power plants** providing electric power to **10 million people** in Asia and Africa;
- AKDN runs over **200 health centres, hospitals, clinics and community health programs**, allowing over **5 million people** to obtain healthcare every year;

- AKDN has helped **8 million people achieve greater food security** and high income through agricultural and disaster preparedness projects;
- AKDN has plants over **1 million trees every year**; **134 million** trees have been planted in Asia and Africa;
- AKDN provides **17 million people** in Asia and Africa access to financial services through various financial initiatives including micro-finance;
- AKDN has established and runs **200 schools (including IB schools) and 2 universities (AKU, UCA)** with campuses in 9 countries – helping educate 2 million students per year;
- AKDN supports **40,000 civil society organizations** with a membership of over **1.3 million people**;
- AKA (Aga Khan Award for Architecture) gives **\$1 million in prize money** for every award cycle and has a database of 9,000 architectural projects;
- AKDN provides **1.3 million people with safe drinking water**, sanitation and sewage facilities;

In accordance with his mandate, the Aga Khan performs the functions of Imamat throughout his entire life. The Aga Khan's Imam duties are the highest priority in his life and encompass all of his mental and physical energies:



The Aga Khan working at Sardinia

[For me, the notion of holidays does not exist. I must fulfill my function of Imam without cessation until my death.](#) A minister can go [on vacation]: someone assures his interim during the months when he goes on leave. This is not the case for me. The function of the Imam is attached to my person: I have to give

myself entirely to the activity which it symbolizes; to try apprehending everything which the human intellect can remember.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
([Elle Magazine Interview \[translation from French\], August 20, 1969,](#)

[NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/>)

A Day in the Life of the Aga Khan

Since the 11th of July, 1957 my aims and ambitions have been devoted to help and guide my spiritual children in spiritual and worldly matters.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Karachi, December 13, 1964; Source: [Simerg](#))

The Ismaili Imam describes his daily and annual schedules in several interviews between 1965 and 1994. The Imam's daily life is exhausting and filled with work and responsibilities which stem from his duties toward the Ismailis and from his position as the Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network. Contrary to the life of glamour and extravagance falsely attributed to him by the press, the Aga Khan is a workaholic. For several months of the year, the Ismaili Imam is visiting different countries to carry out his vast development work and practically lives on his airplane.



The Ismaili Imam at work on his airplane

Since I have left Harvard I've traveled every single year amongst the community. One journey or two journeys, three journeys, four journeys a year to the communities depending on what the problems are and whether it is

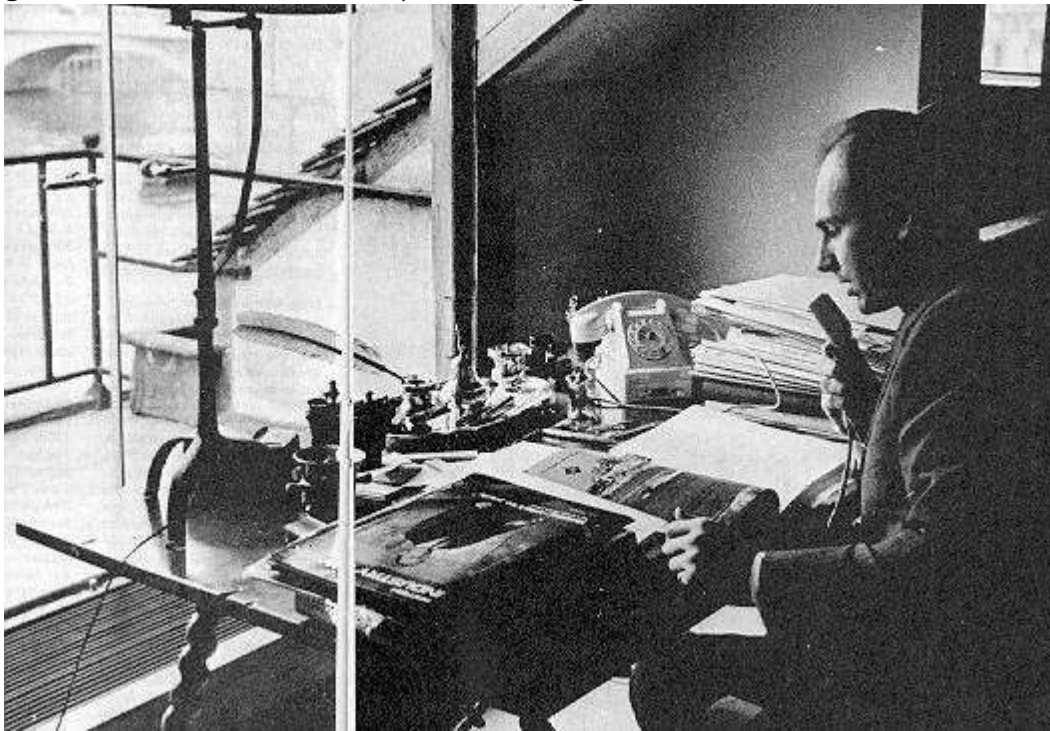
urgent that I should be there or not. Generally it would be visits to the schools or the hospitals or the sports centres or a mosque in the morning, appointments with leaders pending, planning development of the community in the future and I must say that if I am on to it, it's just a series of appointments, discussions, visits and it's very, very rough on everyone including the members of the community who follow these tours.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Pacemakers: A Man of the World – The Aga Khan, 1967, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10214/>)

I allocate 90% of my time at Geneva and Aiglemont to institutional tasks. Our offices are open seven days out of seven, because with us Muslims, Sunday corresponds with Friday. I must be available on the weekend to receive institutional directors who pass through. My life is highlighted by official visits to the twenty or so countries where members of the community live, which keep me moving from one end of the year to the next. This takes approximately six-hundred flight hours per year! To gain time, I always make sure I'm accompanied in my private plane by some assistants.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Paris Match Interview, December 15, 1994, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/850/>)

Even when the Imam is not travelling and residing in Paris or Sardinia, most of his day is spent working. The Aga Khan rises early at around six in the morning, hardly goes out, and works steadily into the night.



I'm usually up around six in the morning and I try to work from around seven onwards until around ten o'clock in the morning, independently of the secretaries. Then the secretary will come in at ten and we will work until

around eleven-thirty, twelve. Then I will have appointments which will cover an enormous field of problems and then lunch, usually at home I don't go out much. I do not like going out very much indeed. I would have more appointments in the afternoon, usually work in the evening, with the secretary again, and then in the evenings it depends entirely...either I stay at home or I will go out with friends. But generally speaking, in the last two or three years I've hardly been out at all because if you start early in the morning you really can't keep going till four the next morning.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Paris Match Interview, December 15, 1994, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/850/>)

Unlike other public figures, the Imam does most of his work away from the public eye and is usually only seen in public settings when he is taking a rare break. The interviewer, Nicholas Tomalin of the Sunday Times, notes this in his below conversation with the Imam about his work schedule:

Interviewer: I think another reason why your role is underrated in the West is that our important public figures are rather expected to be extremely sombre and dutiful in public and enjoy themselves in private. Whereas you seem to enjoy yourself in public and do your serious work in private.

Aga Khan: It is fatuous to think that if I am on the racecourse in the afternoon I have to abandon everything else to get there. That just isn't the case.

Interviewer: You have explained how it is not inconsistent for you to perform the roles of Pope, Head of State, racehorse owner and real estate developer all at the same time. But how do you manage it, physically? If I were in your position I would feel I couldn't do any single job adequately.

Aga Khan: Of course the horse-racing and the Sardinia venture are incidental; if I felt for one moment they were making my religious and community work suffer I would abandon them. But I have a working day that allows me to do all these things. I get up at six each morning. I have a quick breakfast, then dictate letters and memoranda for a couple of hours. During the rest of the morning I meet people who may be from any of my activities.

Interviewer: Don't you feel bewildered, sometimes, seeing a jockey, then a distinguished Muslim, then a Sardinian businessman, then a politician — isn't the contrast sometimes too abrupt?

Aga Khan: Yes sometimes I do get dizzy. It is difficult to switch. But then I have an early lunch and afterwards, Perhaps, go racing for a couple of hours or if I am in Sardinia go on the beach. In the afternoon I work again, seeing people or dealing with reports and suchlike that I may not have to answer but still must read. I work till nine each evening because I must have as long a working day as possible, racing or no racing. And after that I have dinner, about nine thirty. After that I go to bed.

Interviewer: Do you go out in the evenings?

Aga Khan: Don't be ridiculous. I can't. I am too tired. I think in the past year, for instance, I've seen no plays and only one film.

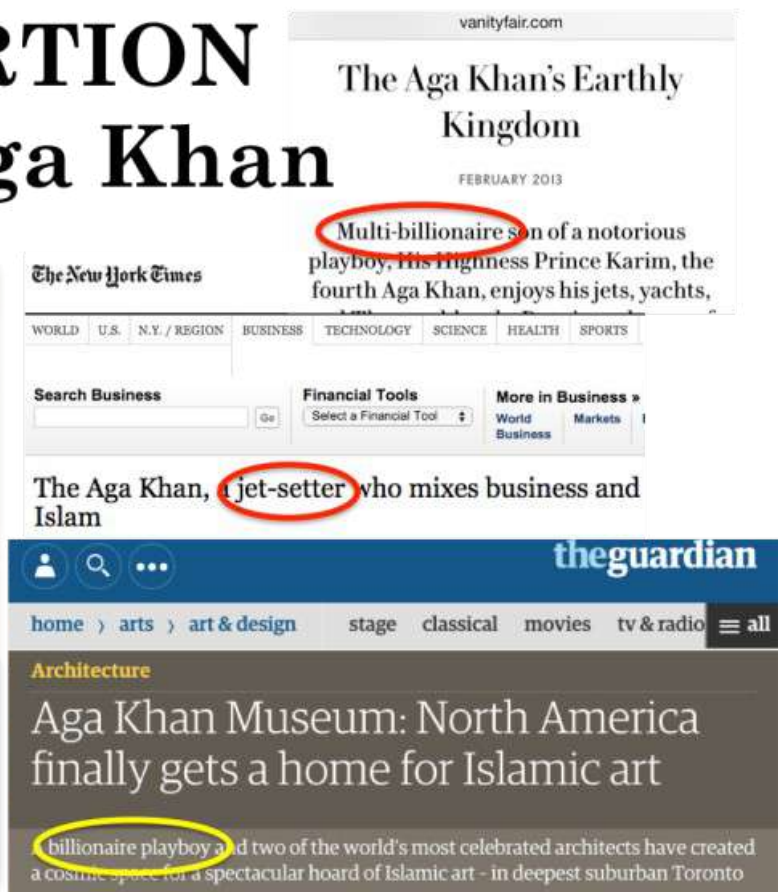
(The Sunday Times Interview, 'The Ruler Without A Kingdom', NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>)

Often Smeared and Misrepresented by the Press

I am not affected by suggestions in print that I live a luxurious Western life, while most Ismailis live in underdeveloped Eastern countries. These are just smears by cheap magazines. Serious publications are aware of the work we do and of our achievements in many countries.

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Media DISTORTION of the Aga Khan



Examples of headlines from Vanity Fair, The Guardian, and The New York Times misrepresenting the Aga Khan

Despite the fact that the Ismaili Imam's daily life mostly consists of working for and serving his community, the Western press continues to provide unfair and inaccurate coverage about the Aga Khan. Several examples of this inaccurate reporting of the Ismaili Imam are related by his biographer Willi Frischauer:

As the new Aga Khan, the twenty-year-old prince and religious leader became public property, a prime target for insidious commentaries. An early report

claimed to reveal a second secret Will of the Aga Khan and talked of frantic attempts to compose a violent quarrel between Prince Karim and the Begum involving millions, before it came before the courts. There was no truth in the story. With as much gusto Prince Karim's private life was examined in an Arabian Nights aura which turned him overnight from a boyish, sports-loving Harvard man into an Eastern Romeo. Presenting him as a worthy son of the amorous Aly reports described a veritable world war in which young ladies of every nationality seemed to fight for the heart and the hand of the young Aga Khan. The frivolities which occupied the daily Press could not have been more remote from the young Aga Khan's preoccupations on the eve of his trip to Pakistan, the first big test of his career as Imam.

"Such is the power of the popular Press," Karim said in an address to the Royal Commonwealth Society at Oxford, a little later, "that few people know very much about the Ismailis today, except that the Aga Khan is their leader, is weighed in diamonds from time to time, owns a number of race-horses, and (so far as I am concerned at any rate) appears to be perpetually on the brink of matrimony."

When, on one of his rare excursions to a night-club, he was seen dancing with a pretty girl, the paparazzi were convinced they had discovered a new 'girl-friend'. The young lady was his half-sister Yasmin whom he was giving a night out in Paris.

– Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 216-217; 239, 261)

Today the most repeated descriptions used by various news and media outlets term the Aga Khan as a "billionaire playboy", "billionaire philanthropist", "son of a playboy", "lavish", or "extravagant". Meanwhile, the Imam's daily toil and hard work continues to be ignored for the most part in the Western media as noted by his biographer Willi Frischauer:

Little of all this percolated to Europe, where the Aga Khan continued to be regarded simply as a rich young man, less of a playboy than his father, less of a character than his grandfather but as a handsome, pleasant young aristocrat eminently eligible for a place in the gossip columns.

– Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 272)

Due to the intrusions and constant interference of the Western press, the Ismaili Imam had to adjust his daily activities and take numerous precautions.

Consequently, the Aga Khan no longer lives a normal private and social life that most people are entitled to. In his own words, the Imam describes to Sports Illustrated the measures he has had take in order to avoid the intrusive media:

I take all sorts of precautions when I go out with friends. I have taught myself not to show any emotion in public places. I never sit next to a woman with whom the press is trying to link me. Here in Gstaad I go often to a bistro outside the village for a fondue because the proprietor will not let anyone take pictures in his establishment. I stopped going to certain Paris theatres because

I discovered they were tipping off the press to my presence. I realise that I may seem extreme on the subject, but do not forget that my mail has been stolen and my servants bribed. Close personal friends have taken private snapshots of me in my home and then sold them to magazines. I have been blackmailed on the telephone. All I desire is to have my private life respected. Is that unreasonable?

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([Sports Illustrated Interview, August 10, 1964, NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10341/>)

As for the slanderous reports about him in tabloids, the Ismaili Imam pays no attention to such “smears” and instead focuses on his work and mission:

I have always refused to talk about my private life. Any public man must have the right to have a private life and keep it private. In the West, intrusion into personal and private affairs is widely tolerated; this is not so in the East. Articles such as I have in mind do nothing for a public enlightenment; they are just a way of selling a magazine to a certain type of reader interested in such things.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, ‘The Quiet Prince of Islam’, May 27, 1979, NanoWisdoms](#),
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/>)

The Myth of the Aga Khan’s Affluence

I do not seek to do things, in fact I have stayed away from things which did not seem to me to be good sense, where it was affluence for the sake of affluence.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

As for the Western media’s relentless charge that the Aga Khan lives an ‘lavish’ or ‘affluent life’, the Ismaili Imam has answered and dismissed the veracity of these claims on multiple occasions.

I am not affected by suggestions in print that I live a luxurious Western life, while most Ismailis live in underdeveloped Eastern countries (he went on). These are just smears by cheap magazines. Serious publications are aware of the work we do and of our achievements in many countries. Such smear stories never appear in Asian publications.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, ‘The Quiet Prince of Islam’, May 27, 1979, NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/>)

GB: It is often suggested that your affluent lifestyle is very different from that of most Ismailis who live mostly in the poverty of the Third World. Do you think that is a fair comment?

Aga Khan: I think that affluence is perhaps the wrong terminology. I do not seek to do things, in fact I have stayed away from things which did not seem to me to be good sense, where it was affluence for the sake of affluence. I’ll give you an example. I have a private aircraft, but that aircraft today is flying

between 450 and 600 hours a year. You take 600 hours of time — that translates into approximately two months of working days. I cannot afford, nor can people who work in my organisation, to eliminate two months of working time...if you have to run an organisation in as diverse areas as I do there are certain things you've got to do to be efficient. When you talk about extremely poor people, of course there are poor people throughout the developing world and there will be poor people for years and years. I think they would ask whether the Imam as an institution was helping them as best as it could and I think it would be true to say that the Imam is assisting them.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(The Age Interview, 'Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West', July 14, 1979,
NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/>)

The Aga Khan only has a secretariat and a private plane because these assets are essential to his ability to carry out his duties as the Ismaili Imam of a community spread out over 35 countries. The Imam's biographer, Willi Frischauer, captured what went through the Imam's mind when he undertook the purchase of his first aircraft:

Each decision involved big issues. Symbolising the expansion of his interests, he [the Aga Khan] took delivery of the new Gruman Gulfstream jet, twice the size and cost of the old Mystere: "It will enable me to visit my community more frequently," he told me.

– Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 281)

At the personal level, the Aga Khan does not live affluently at all. During his final year at Harvard, when the Imam completed the last 1.5 years of study in just 2 semesters, the Aga Khan owned no car and took public transit despite having access to the funds of the Imamat. Even his Harvard roommate Stevenson noticed how the Imam owned very little in personal assets:



“K. Khan,” Stevenson said, “was a charming fellow with a cracking wit.’ According to his roommate, he did not go in much for clothes and became known as “that guy who had only one pair of shoes”. “During the time I knew him,” said Stevenson, “he owned two suits but I never saw either of them pressed. He had about two dozen neckties but they were all the same colour.”

– Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 1991)

Decades later in 1970, the Imam’s mother continues to note how it is impossible to convince the Aga Khan to even buy a new suit and the Imam’s friends have noticed how there are holes in his shoes:

When the Aga Khan enters, it is with a burst of youthful but well-controlled energy. He wears a sober dark suit, white shirt and an unobtrusive tie. He looks elegant whatever he wears, rather like an English squire who sports his shabbiest jacket during weekends on his estate. His mother says that it is a job to get him to buy a new suit, and friends have noticed holes in the soles of his

shoes. One of them says: “The Aga Khan wears a French smile and English socks—not a bad combination.”

– Willi Frischauer, (The Aga Khans, 14)

While many people charge the Imam with “extravagance” for owning property in Sardinia and developing its tourism industry, they would be surprised to learn the actual reason why the Ismaili Imam even spends some of his time there. The Aga Khan was overburdened with work and frustrated with the Western media’s misunderstanding of his role as Imam so he sought to find a place where he could find some calm and privacy:

But after my grandfather died I found the work so onerous, and there was so much misunderstanding here about the Imam and the Ismailis, that I felt I had to find a place where I could go and not be disturbed. So I joined a small group that had interests in Sardinia and found myself caught in a development that just grew. We found the place so beautiful, and we were so happy, that we decided we had to be very careful, because if not the place would simply become another ugly, over-crowded tourist centre.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

(The Sunday Times Interview, ‘The Ruler Without A Kingdom’, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>)

The Aga Khan’s development projects in Sardinia have proven to be an immense asset to the country and the growth of tourism,, as he himself explained:

It has transformed the country. Tourism is the one way you can bring prosperity to a place that has nothing except undeveloped beauty. I’ve been amazed how many political leaders in Africa and the Middle East have said, “Come and do the same thing to us.”

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

(The Sunday Times Interview, ‘The Ruler Without A Kingdom’, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>)

Sacrifices: The Aga Khan's Personal and Family Life



Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, Aga Khan looks on during the inauguration ceremony of The Aga Khan Academy in Hyderabad on September 20, 2013. The Academy is the second in a global network of day and residential schools being established across South and Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and aims to develop home-grown leaders with a strong sense of ethics and civic responsibility. AFP PHOTO/ Noah SEELAM

I hope to reorganise my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community.

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Fulfilling the mandate of the Imamate, being responsible for the spiritual and material well-being of millions of souls, and working tirelessly to raise quality of life is an impossible task for any normal human being. Nevertheless, the Ismaili Imam has taken on this mission despite the immense sacrifice and toll on his personal and family life:

Anyone facing a difficult situation has a certain solitude. But my days are occupied. I have no time to think about myself. I have moments of fatigue, of worry, but without having the feeling of abandonment. I am engaged. I have to weigh, reflect, seek to make a wise decision. But with my advisors, I escape isolation. Responsibility is a burden which we love. I received from my grandfather heavy responsibilities, but they are not weighty. It is not a burden. It is a pleasure to devote oneself to such a community, to work for people. Responsibilities are a burden we love to bear.

My social life is practically nonexistent. As an owner of racehorses, I can be in the galleries of the day Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, is all. In the summer I can be

on the beach in Sardinia but practically all my time is devoted to the Ismailis in Sardinia. In Muslim life, you have to live life everyday. It was therefore impossible to stay cloistered, away from even mundane events.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
([Elle Magazine Interview \[translation from French\], August 20, 1969,](#)

[NanoWisdoms](#)
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/>)

The demands of the Imam's mission and extensive work have also taken a toll on his family life. The Imam even makes his decisions on whom and when to get married based on the well being of the Ismaili Muslim community. The Aga Khan even gives the Ismaili community greater priority in his life than his own wife and children. The Aga Khan's biographer Willi Frischauer records the Imam saying the following when he married his first wife Begum Salima in 1969:



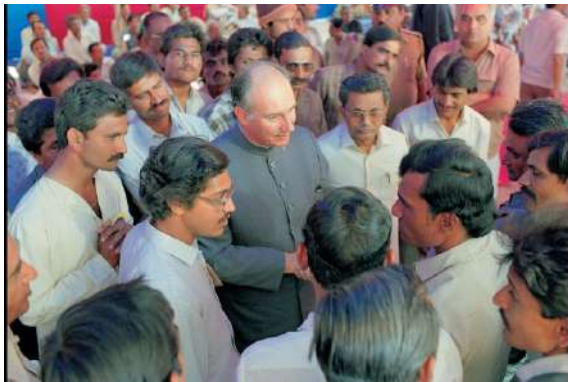
I would not marry a woman who I did not believe could help me. I hope to reorganise my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 283)

In an interview given ten years after his first marriage, the Imam described how his spiritual and material responsibilities keep him away from seeing his wife and children:

AM: You have told me very little about your family?

Aga Khan: The burden of work and travel is very severe. So although I am extremely fortunate to have a wonderful wife and children, I can't spend as much time with them as I wish. But I hope to have more time for my family later on. (Interviewer: He said exactly the same on the eve of his wedding ten years ago).



<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/>

The Aga Khan's Financial Sacrifices: Hundreds of Millions of Dollars over 50 Years

The Imamat revenue is given by the community to the Imam. He has a responsibility to manage the Imamat revenue.... I would say easily 98% of those funds, and in fact at times much more than 98%, in fact probably of the order of 150%, goes back to the community...and in fact, as I said, the Imamat is spending on many occasions more than it actually has.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

(BBC Radio 4 Interview, 6 September 1979, NanoWisdoms

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1988/>)

Since he became the Imam of the Ismaili Muslims in 1957, the Aga Khan has received religious dues from his followers called zakat or dasond. These religious dues are given to the Imam by his murids as a key practice of Shia Islam and the Imam manages and spends the religious dues on the community and institutional development that benefits all people. However, the religious dues given by the Ismaili Muslims are never sufficient to cover these needs and the Aga Khan has consistently drawn upon his own personal funds to support the institutional needs of the Ismaili Muslims and other communities.

From 1960 to the present day, there are a number of documented examples of the Imam spending his own money to sustain the institutions of the Ismaili Muslim Community and the Aga Khan Development Network. Just a few of these instances are listed below courtesy of [The Essential Ismaili](#):

THE AGA KHAN (1960-1969): OVER £10,000,000 IN VARIOUS PROJECTS

- 1960: The Aga Khan personally injects £300,000 into Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust when it suffered a shortage of liquidity. ¹⁰
- 1960: The Aga Khan goes on a “spending spree”, remarking that **“I want to use as much as possible of my money for the benefit of the community.”** He provides £200,000 for two textile factories, 50 auto-

rickshaws, equipment for a canvas factory whose profit supported the Girls Academy. He donated funds to create the Prince Aly Khan Library at Karachi University and approved plans for a huge new jamatkhana in Garden district of Karachi. ¹¹

- 1960: The Aga Khan starts discussions to launch an East African newspaper for which he was prepared to invest £1,000,000. ¹²
- 1963: The Aga Khan starts planning to launch I.P.S. “The amount needed to launch three East African I.P.S. companies — in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika — was £1 million but when, even at this late stage, doubts were raised, the Aga Khan simply said: ‘I will finance it!’ and — proof of his confidence in ultimate success — put up nearly the whole amount.” ¹³ When a project under consideration by I.P.S. was not financially viable and local officials said “There is no market, Your Highness, it will not pay. You will never get your money back.” The Aga Khan replied, **“Never mind, my spiritual children expect me to help them — whatever the cost, help them I shall!”** ¹⁴
- Late 1960s: The Aga Khan committed to fund the £4.5 million to £5 million required for the Aga Khan Hospital and Medical College in Karachi, but agreed to let others have the opportunity to participate. ¹⁵
- 1965: The Aga Khan was considering “investments of two or three million pounds in individual African countries” because, he said, “I would put money in if I also felt it would help the community that’s living there. But this would be my own investment, a personal thing.” ¹⁶
- 1969: The Aga Khan marries, remarking that the community would still come first: “I hope to re-organise my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community.” ¹⁷

THE AGA KHAN (2007-2012): \$140 MILLION OF PERSONAL FUNDS POURED INTO JUST THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY OVER JUST 4 YEARS

- 2007: The Aga Khan covers \$25.8 million of the Aga Khan University’s \$26.2 million operating deficit for 2007. ¹⁸
- 2008: The Aga Khan covers the Aga Khan University’s \$27.1 million operating deficit for 2008 plus an extra \$5 million. ¹⁸
- 2008: The Aga Khan covers the \$46.2 million cost, entirely, of the Heart & Cancer Centre, Nairobi. ¹⁹
- 2011: The Aga Khan covers \$17.0 million of Aga Khan University’s \$20.0 million operating deficit for 2011. ²⁰
- 2012: The Aga Khan covers \$17.0 million of Aga Khan University’s \$19.0 million operating deficit for 2012. ²⁰

The Secret of the Aga Khan: A Selfless Life of Service



The Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, is applauded as he arrives to deliver an address in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Thursday, February 27, 2014. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick ORG XMIT: POS2014022714475975

We are honouring an exceptional man. We are honouring a great friend of humanity, a courageous visionary, a builder of bridges between religions and society.”

(His Excellency Dr. Frank Walter Steinmeier, German Foreign Minister, on presenting the 2006 Tolerance Award of the Evangelical Academy of Tutzing, Germany – May 20, 2006)

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV has been widely recognized for his efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material assistance to the Ismaili Muslims, who are today spread over 25 countries, and for his vast contributions to quality of life in various communities worldwide. These include ([courtesy of Ismailimail](#)):

- 28 Title and State Decorations;
- 21 honorary degrees, from universities representing the US Ivy League, Canadian Group of 13, UK's Russell Group, and others;
- 16 civic honours, representing 9 investitures as Foreign Member to several state academies (for the creation of new knowledge – promoting research and stimulating the enhancement of thought, literature, language and other forms of national culture) and 3 Leadership posts at influential European Institutions to promote diplomacy, culture and development;

- 30 awards spanning domains such as architecture and the built environment, restoration and the revival of culture, education, health, diplomacy and peace, philanthropy, sports, corporate enterprise
- delivered over 70 high profile keynote addresses.



Graphic timeline of awards and honours accorded to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. Click on image to download high resolution PDF from NanoWisdoms. Amidst the worldwide recognition of his services and despite the media's inaccurate aspersions about his private life, the Ismaili Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV continues to maintain that serving the Ismaili Muslim Community remains the only thing of real significance in his entire life.



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni gives didar to his murids in Tajikistan (1998).

As you know I am ambitious for my Jamat, I'm ambitious for my Jamat worldwide. Wherever a murid is living, he or she is of immediate concern to the Imam of the time. And this has been my life since 1957 and it will continue to be my life.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan,
(Institutional Dinner, Nairobi, Kenya, July 15, 2011, NanoWisdoms
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9952>)

FOOTNOTES

1. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p58)
2. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p59)
3. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p122)
4. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p130)
5. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p155)
6. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p158)
7. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p180)
8. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p193)
9. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p195)
10. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p236)
11. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p241)
12. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p243)
13. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p253)
14. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p255)
15. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p258)
16. [The Sunday Times Interview, Part II, Nicholas Tomalin \(London, United Kingdom\), 19 December 1965](#)
17. Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, (The Bodley Head, 1970, p268)
18. 2008 Aga Khan University Annual Report, p72
19. 2008 Aga Khan University Annual Report, p73
20. 2012 Aga Khan University Progress Report, p83

Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community

Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed; at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III



In 1975, the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan (uncle of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV) urged the Ismaili Muslims of Canada to be “Ambassadors” of the Ismaili Muslim community (read a primer on [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#)). Being an ambassador, in the Prince’s words, means explaining Ismaili traditions, history, and religion to every person that one interacts with.

I would like to see every Ismaili and particularly every young Ismaili become an Ambassador, a real ambassador of the community. And I mean active ambassadors, Ambassadors who really work hard. I want you to be active ambassadors. I want you to explain to your Canadian friends, to your neighbors, to the people that you work with, that you live with, the people that entertain you, or that you will be entertaining, what you are, where you come from, about your traditions, about your culture, about your religion, about the way in which the community functions... Explain the role of the Imam, not only his religious functions but also the economic and social advice that you receive from the Imam and what has happened to the community as a result of its unity in other parts of the world.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan,
(Vancouver, Canada, January 22, 1975)

Being a true and active “ambassador” of the Ismaili Muslim Community requires one to be intimately familiar with the 1,400 year history of the Ismaili Imamat and the Ismaili Community. The Imam of the time, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni, recently shared how important it is to him that the Community learn about its own history and have a “sense of pride” and “understanding of our past”:



I wanted to just share with my Jamat leaders in Canada something which has been very important to me since many years back. And that is that the Jamat should learn about its remarkable history, should learn about the pluralism of its history, should learn about the great names, so that there is a sense of pride and an understanding of our past – of the greatness of the past of the Shia Ismaili Muslim Tariqah.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Speech in Vancouver, November 2009)

The 1,400 year history of the Ismaili Imams and Community has not always been comfortable. The Ismaili Imams are today very much respected on the world stage and live in security. Likewise, most of the Ismaili Muslims enjoy security and the freedom to practice their faith. Thanks to the Imam’s guidance and blessings, the Ismailis have become culturally diverse, intellectually vibrant, practically progressive and ethically pluralistic Community today. However, until quite recently, the Ismaili Imamat and Community had to regularly endure oppression, violent persecution, massacres and genocides at the hands of oppressive Muslim dynasties and rules.

This article tells the inspiring story of some of the most tragic moments in 1,400 year Ismaili history, with a focus on the grave persecutions endured by the Imams and the Ismaili Community from the death of the Prophet to the cessation of most

of the persecution in time of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. Most striking is how the recent Ismaili Imams, out of their sheer mercy and love for the unity and welfare of Islam, selflessly served the needs and interests of all Muslims – despite the historical fact that the Ismaili Imams were severely persecuted by the Umayyad, ‘Abbasid, Saljuq, Ayyubid, Mongol, Timurid, Safawid and Ottoman dynasties. It is indeed miraculous that the Ismaili Imams and Community even survived these persecutions, massacres and genocides in the first place. Indeed, the very existence and endurance of the Imamatus through such dangerous conditions over several centuries constitutes a proof of the Imamatus’s legitimacy and divine inspiration. The scholar of Ismaili studies, Wladimir Ivanow, once wrote that:

[My learned friends in Europe plainly disbelieved me when I wrote about the \[Ismaili\] community to them. It appeared to them quite unbelievable that the most brutal persecution, wholesale slaughter, age-long hostility and suppression were unable to annihilate the community.](#)

– Wladimir Ivanow,
("My First Meeting with the Ismailis in Persia," *Ilm* 3, no. 3 (December 1977):
16–17)

This article, although lengthy, hopes to provide the reader with a very moving experience of Ismaili Muslim history. It conveys the struggles and the hardships that the Ismaili Imams had to constantly face; the dangers and threats endured by the Ismaili Muslims who followed them; the persecutions and genocides that threatened to wipe the Ismailis out; the miraculous survival of the Ismaili Imamatus and the emergence of the Community in recent times; and finally, the manner in which the contemporary Ismaili Imams, having practically forgiven the past atrocities, now tirelessly work for the well-being of all Muslims and humanity at large.

This article, therefore, is dedicated to the memory of all the Ismaili Imams and murids, past and present, who risked or lost their lives enduring persecution, oppression, attacks and hardship for the sake of their faith. An Ismaili Muslim living in the 21st century must connect to the depths of his or her religious identity through remembering and understanding this past. Reading through the stories, accounts, and experiences documented in this history will hopefully allow the reader to "feel" this past, to transcend the present fleeting moment and bring the departed ones back to life in one's remembrance of them. Most importantly, reading through this article's recollection of Ismaili history can facilitate a deeper understanding of the Imam of the time whose spiritual essence encompasses the history and memory of all his predecessor-Imams and their murids.

[History fosters a partnership with the dead, and the dead come to life through history. It also serves as a therapy for undue obsession with the present, and this may help to liberate one from being bound excessively by time. In Ismailism, the fact that the Imam embodies a tradition extending considerably](#)

backwards in time creates the setting for such an experience. By encapsulating the past within himself, the Imam serves as history incarnate, so to speak. In this sense, history is not only ‘learned’; it is also ‘experienced’, with a heightening sense of one’s intellectual and moral imagination.

– Dr. Aziz Esmail, (“Why History”, Africa Ismaili (1970): 20-27)



The Present Imam embodies the history and memory of the previous Imams and the murids of their times.

LINKS TO PERIODS OF ISMA'ILI HISTORY

As this lengthy article covers several periods of Ismaili history, we recommend reading it in segments, which are linked below for the reader’s convenience.

[Seventh Century: Umayyad Oppression of the Ahl al-Bayt](#)

[Eight Century: The ‘Abbasid Persecution of the Shi’i Imams](#)

[Ninth Century – ‘Abbasid Persecution of the Concealed Ismaili Imams](#)

[Tenth Century: Struggles of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and Executions of Persian Isma’ili Philosophers](#)

[Eleventh Century: Massacres of Isma’ilis in Multan, North Africa and Persia](#)

[Twelfth Century: The Murder of Imam Nizar and the Saljuq Slaughter of the Persian Nizari Isma’ilis](#)

[Twelfth-Thirteenth Centuries: Murders of the Nizari Imams and Saljuq Massacres of the Nizari Isma’ilis](#)

[Thirteenth Century: The Mongol Genocide of the Nizari Isma’ilis](#)

[Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries: Surviving the Mongols under Taqiyyah](#)

[Fourteenth-Fifteenth Centuries: Timurid Massacres amidst the Cover of Sufism](#)

[Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries: The Safawid Persecutions of the Persian Nizari Isma'ilis](#)

[Eighteenth Century: Nizari Isma'ili Imams' Emergence from Obscurity](#)

[Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Aga Khans](#)

[Twentieth Century: "The Unity of Islam" – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III's Services to the Muslim World](#)

[Twentieth Century – Present – "From a Single Soul" – The Pluralist Vision of Imam Aga Khan IV](#)

Seventh Century: Umayyad Oppression of the Ahl al-Bayt



Imam al-Husayn's family and companions surrounded by an Umayyad army numbering over 40,000 troops.

"Mu'awiya and his successors were particularly hostile toward these supporters of 'Ali and his sons. It was routine for the Umayyads to condemn or persecute the family of 'Ali, and they were even cursed from the pulpit."

(Vincent Cornell)

Immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (632-661) and his family were denied their rightful succession. The office of leadership of the community, which was bequeathed by the Prophet to 'Ali by divine right, was instead assumed by Abu Bakr, 'Umar and Uthman, while the shi'ah of 'Ali continued to recognize him as their spiritual Guide (*wali*). Meanwhile, Abu Bakr disinherited Hazrat Fatimah of the property of Fadak which she inherited from the Prophet Muhammad.

Numerous Sunni and Shi'i sources agree that Abu Bakr and 'Umar went to the house of Imam 'Ali and 'Umar threatened to set the house on fire if the family did not give allegiance to Abu Bakr. Some reports even say that 'Umar broke down the door of the house, causing Hazrat Fatimah to miscarriage and die as a result.

'Umar threatened to set the house on fire unless they came out and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Al-Zubayr came out with his sword drawn, but stumbled and lost it, whereupon Umar's men jumped upon him and carried him off. There is some evidence that the house of Fatima was searched (futtisha). Ali is reported to have later repeatedly said that had there been forty men with him he would have resisted. To what extent force was used in other cases must remain uncertain. In general the threat of it was probably sufficient to induce the reluctant to conform...The Banu Hashim thus found themselves in a situation strangely reminiscent of the boycott that the pagan Makkans organized against them in order to force them to withdraw their protection from Muhammad.

(Madelung, The Succession to Muhammad, 43-44)

When Imam 'Ali was finally acclaimed the fourth Caliph, he was immediately opposed by 'Aisha, the widow of the Prophet and her cousin Mu'awiyah. This led to the First Civil War and the well-known Battle of the Camel and Battle of Siffin. Imam 'Ali was then assassinated by a Kharijite who struck him with a poisoned sword.

670-680 – MURDER OF IMAM AL-HASAN AND IMAM AL-HUSAYN

In the aftermath, Imam al-Hasan (661-670) was Caliph for a short time. However, his own officers and army betrayed him and al-Hasan was forced to abdicate the Caliphate to Mu'awiyah. In the following years, the family of the Prophet, including both Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (661-680) were severely oppressed under Mu'awiyah's rule.

During this period, 'Ali's descendants, especially his sons Hasan and Husayn, were increasingly perceived by opposition groups as the ideal rivals of the Umayyad Caliphs because of their piety and their relationship to the Prophet. For this reason, Mu'awiya and his successors were particularly hostile toward these supporters of 'Ali and his sons. It was routine for the Umayyads to condemn or persecute the family of 'Ali, and they were even cursed from the pulpit.

(Vincent Cornell, Voices of Islam, 115)

The Imam al-Hasan died in 670 from a poisoning allegedly planned by Mu'awiyah. After Mu'awiyah's death, his son and successor Yazid sent forces to intercept Imam al-Husayn – who was massacred in 680 with his family members including several grown and infant sons at Karbala by a large Umayyad army. The next Imam, Imam Zayn al-Abidin was nearly murdered at Karbala, and saved by his sister Zaynab bint al-Husayn before Shimar had the chance to kill him.

After 10 days of waiting, negotiating, and occasionally fighting, a final battle took place in which Husayn, all of his adult male relatives and supporters, and some of the women and children were killed in a brutal fashion. The surviving women and children, along with Husayn's adult son 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin (680-713), who was too ill to take part in the fighting, were taken captive and

transported, along with the heads of martyrs, to Yazid's court in Damascus. Along the way from Karbala to Damascus, the members of the Prophet's family who were taken prisoner were exhibited in chains in the public markets of the cities through which they passed.

(Vincent Cornell, *Voices of Islam*, 116)

Eight Century: The 'Abbasid Persecution of the Shi'i Imams



Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [A.S.] teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525

“The ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mansur had decided to scourge to death whoever was to be chosen officially by the Imam as his successor thereby hoping to put an end to the Shi’ite movement.” (Seyyed Hossein Nasr)

The Imam Zayn al-Abidin was succeeded by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (713-743), and then Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (743-765). The Umayyad and 'Abbasid Caliphs persecuted and repressed any challenge to their claims of being the political and religious leaders of Islam. Thus, the Shi'i Imams Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sadiq lived and taught in an environment of caution and danger, while the 'Abbasid Caliphs slaughtered a number of descendants of Imam 'Ali.

No doubt, it must have been dangerous for the Imams and their followers to openly propagate their beliefs, and to publicly announce that certain individuals, other than the ruling caliphs, were the divinely appointed spiritual leaders of the Muslims.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 82)

The caliph al-Mansur adopted still more repressive measures against the 'Alids and the Shi'is. In 141/758, he massacred a group of the Rawandiyya who besieged his palace and hailed him as the incarnation of divinity. A few years later, he had many of the 'Alids, notably from the Hasanid branch, imprisoned or killed. The 'Abbasids' breach with their Shi'i origins and their efforts to legitimize their own rights to the caliphate were finally completed by the caliph Muhammad al-Mahdi (158–169/775–785), who abandoned the 'Abbasid claim to Abu Hashim's inheritance and instead declared that the Prophet had actually appointed his uncle al-'Abbas as his successor. This, of course, implied the repudiation of the analogous claims of the 'Alids.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 79)

765-799 – THE SONS OF IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ

The 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur intended to kill [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamatus of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#) and put an end to the Imamatus. The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq himself allegedly died of poisoning on the orders of the 'Abbasid Caliph. He had sent away his son and appointed successor, Imam Isma'il (d. after 765), out of Madinah.

The question of the successor to the Imam (Ja'far al-Sadiq) having been made particularly difficult by the fact that [the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mansur had decided to scourge to death whoever was to be chosen officially by the Imam as his successor](#) thereby hoping to put an end to the Shi'ite movement."

(Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, 165-66)

The other sons of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq did not fare better. His son Musa al-Kazim (d. 799) was arrested twice by the 'Abbasids, imprisoned and murdered. Then Musa al-Kazim's son, 'Ali al-Rida b. Musa was reportedly poisoned by the 'Abbasids.

Nevertheless, Musa was not spared the Shi'i persecutions of the 'Abbasids. He was arrested several times and finally died (possibly having been poisoned) in 183/799, whilst imprisoned at Baghdad on the caliph Harun al-Rashid's orders.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 89)

Meanwhile, Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq and his son Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il escaped 'Abbasid persecution by going into concealment from the public.

Ninth Century – 'Abbasid Persecution of the Concealed Ismaili Imams

“Those people (the concealed Isma'ili Imams) were constantly on the move because of the suspicions various governments had concerning them. They were kept under observation by the tyrants, because their partisans were numerous and their propaganda had spread far and wide.” (Ibn Khaldun)



Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him: Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din 'Abdullah]. Imam Muhammad b. Ismail (d. after 795) was forced to flee Arabia and head to Persia in order to avoid being killed by the 'Abbasids.

However, after the recognition of the imamate of Musa al-Kazim by the majority of al-Sadiq's followers, Muhammad's position became untenable in his native Hijaz where his uncle and chief rival Musa also lived. It was probably then, not long after al-Sadiq's death, that Muhammad left Medina for the east and went into hiding, henceforth acquiring the epithet al-Maktum, the Hidden. As a result, he was saved from persecution by the 'Abbasids, while continuing to maintain close contacts with the Mubarakiiyya, who like most other radical Shi'i groups of the time were centred in Kufa.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 95)

795-899 – THE PERIOD OF THE CONCEALED IMAMS

Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il was succeeded by three Imams who lived in concealment (satr) from the public:

- Imam ‘Abdullah b. Muhammad, also known as al-Wafi and al-Radi
- Imam Ahmad b. ‘Abdullah, also known as Muhammad al-Taqi
- Imam al-Husayn b. Ahmad (d. 881), also known as al-Radi ‘Abdullah

The Imam ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. Ismail initially sought refuge in Persia in order to escape the persecution of the ‘Abbasids:

According to this official version, Muhammad b. Isma‘il appointed as his successor his eldest son ‘Abd Allah, the first of the second heptad of the Isma‘ili imams. In order to escape ‘Abbasid persecution, ‘Abd Allah, who later received the surname al-Radi, sought refuge in different parts of Persia and did not reveal his identity and place of residence except to a few trusted associates. Eventually, he settled in Askar Mukram near Ahwaz, in the province of Khuzistān, whence he later fled to Basra and then to Salamiyya in central Syria. In Salamiyya, the residence of the imams and the headquarters of the Isma‘ili da‘wa for the next few decades, he posed as an ordinary Hashimid, of whom there were many in that locality, and as a merchant... Before dying in about 212/827–828, ‘Abd Allah had designated his son Ahmad as his successor Ahmad, who according to Isma‘ili tradition was the author of the famous Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Safa, was, in turn, succeeded by his son al-Husayn, and then by the latter’s son ‘Abd Allah (‘Ali), also called Sa‘id, who later became known as ‘Abd Allah al-Mahdi.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 100)

These Imams settled in Salamiyyah and appeared as Hashimite merchants. They directed an underground and vibrant Isma‘ili da‘wah movement which began achieving success in the latter part of the ninth century. The Sunni historian Ibn Khaldun describes their activities in his Muqaddimah:

Those people (the concealed Isma‘ili Imams) were constantly on the move because of the suspicions various governments had concerning them. They were kept under observation by the tyrants, because their partisans were numerous and their propaganda had spread far and wide. Time after time they had to leave the places where they had settled. Their men, therefore, took refuge in hiding, and their (identity) was hardly known, as (the poet) says:

*If you would ask the days what my name is, they would not know,
And where I am, they would not know where I am.*

This went so far that Muhammad, the son of the Imam Isma‘il, the ancestor of ‘Ubaydallah al-Mahdi, was called “the Concealed” (*al-Makhtum*). His partisans called him by that name because they were agreed on the fact he was hiding out of fear of those who had them in their power.

(Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, tr. Frank Rosenthal, [Read Here](#))

Tenth Century: Struggles of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and Executions of Persian Isma'ili Philosophers

“The Aghlabids had then been instructed by their ‘Abbasid overlords to search for the Isma’ili Imam and his companions.” (Farhad Daftary)

Imam al-Husayn al-Radi ‘Abdullah was succeeded by Imam ‘Abdullah Muhammad al-Mahdi (881-934), also known by the names of Sa’id and ‘Ali, who declared his Imamate openly. Imam al-Mahdi, who would go on to become the first Fatimid Imam-Caliph, was heavily pursued and tracked by ‘Abbasids for the first half of his life. Certain Ismaili da’is were captured and tortured to reveal the identity and location of the Imam.

In 291/904, al-Husayn was captured by the ‘Abbasid troops and sent to the caliph al-Muktafi in Baghdad, where he was interrogated under torture and revealed the identity and whereabouts of the Isma’ili Imam before being executed. Thereupon, the ‘Abbasids launched a widespread search for ‘Abd Allah al-Mahdi, who had meanwhile proceeded to Egypt.”

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 123)

It seems likely that al-Mahdi was deterred from going to Yaman, where a loyal Isma’ili community awaited him under the leadership of Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman, in order to avoid serious confrontations with the ‘Abbasids who had then intensified their chase of the Isma’ili Imam. It is also possible that dissident Qarmati activities had already started in Yaman, making the Imam’s settlement there even more dangerous... The Aghlabids had then been instructed by their ‘Abbasid overlords to search for the Isma’ili Imam and his companions.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 125)

THE ANTI-FATIMID REBELLION AGAINST IMAM AL-QA’IM

The Imam al-Mahdi was succeeded by his son and heir, Imam al-Qa’im bi-amr Allah. The reign of the Imam al-Qa’im was threatened by Abu Yazid’s Khariji revolt in 944-945. At one point, the Imam and the Fatimid army were besieged in the walled city of Mahdiyya.

With the Berbers swarming quickly to his side, Abu Yazid launched his revolt against the Fatimids in 332/943–944. He swiftly conquered almost all of southern Ifriqiya, seizing Qayrawan in Safar 333/October 944...Subsequently in Jumada I 333/January 945, the rebels began their siege of Mahdiyya, where al-Qa’im was now staying. But Mahdiyya put up a vigorous resistance for almost a year, repelling Abu Yazid’s repeated attempts to storm the capital and mounting its own counter-offensive, aided by the new reinforcements sent by Ziri b. Manad, the amir of the Sanhaja.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 147)

The Imam al-Qa’im died in 946 while the Fatimid armies, led by his son and successor Imam al-Mansur bi’llah (946-953), were fighting the Khariji rebellion. It was as the head of the Fatimid army in the midst of a military victory over the rebels

that the Imam al-Mansur disclosed his father's death and declared himself as the new Imam of the time.

943-971 – EXECUTIONS OF THE PERSIAN ISMA'ILI PHILOSOPHERS

In this very same period, the great Persian Isma'ili philosophers – Ahmad al-Nasafi, Abu Hatim al-Razi, and Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani – formulated the intellectual and philosophical dimensions of Isma'ili thought and doctrine. They were all heavily persecuted and executed for their beliefs.

[t]he Isma'ilis of Khurasan and Transoxania were severely persecuted. Al-Nasafi and his chief associates were executed at Bukhara in 332/943, soon after the accession of the amir Nuh I.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 113)

The early evidence of philosophical theology in Ismailism is mainly preserved in the words of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, the da'i of eastern Persia and Transoxania who was executed as a 'heretic' on the order of the Saffarid ruler of Sistan, Khalaf b. Ahmad (963-1003).

(Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies*, 215)

Eleventh Century: Massacres of Isma'ilis in Multan, North Africa and Persia



“...the Isma'ilis of Qayrawan, Mahdiyya, Tunis, Tripoli and other towns were massacred by the Sunnis of Ifriqiya, under the leadership of their Maliki jurists and scholars, and with the connivance of the Zirids.” (Farhad Daftary)

In 1010-1111, the Isma'ilis of Multan and the surrounding areas were mercilessly massacred by the Ghaznavids. This was because they recognized the Imam of Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (952-975), the successor of the Imam al-Mansur.

The sovereignty of al-Mu'izz was now openly proclaimed in Multan, where the khutba was read in the name of the Fatimid caliphs, instead of their 'Abbasid

rivals. This Isma'ili state survived until 396/1005–1006, when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna invaded Multan and made its last Isma'ili ruler, Abu'l-Futuh. Da'ud b. Nasr, a tributary. A few years later, in 401/1010–1011, Multan was actually annexed to the Ghaznawid dominions, Abu'l-Futuh was taken prisoner and the Isma'ilis of Multan and its surrounding areas were ruthlessly massacred.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 167)

1016 – MASSACRE OF THE NORTH AFRICAN ISMA'ILI MUSLIMS

In 1016, the Ismaili Muslim populations of North Africa (Ifriqiya) were persecuted by the local mobs and eventually massacred out of existence.

Consequently, conditions soon become opportune for the anti-Shi'i sentiments of the Sunni inhabitants of Ifriqiya. In 407/1016–1017, following the accession of the Zirid al-Mu'izz b. Bad'is (406–454/1016–1062), the Isma'ilis of Qayrawan, Mahdiyya, Tunis, Tripoli and other towns were massacred by the Sunnis of Ifriqiya, under the leadership of their Maliki jurists and scholars, and with the connivance of the Zirids. These persecutions and popular riots against the Isma'ilis continued, and their communities in Ifriqiya were practically extinguished by the time the Zirid al-Mu'izz transferred his allegiance to the 'Abbasids a few decades later.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 183)

1044 – MASSACRE OF ISMA'ILIS IN TRANSOXANIA

The Imam al-Mu'izz was succeeded by the following Fatimid Imam-Caliphs: Imam al-'Aziz bi'llah (975-996), Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah (996-1021), Imam al-Zahir li-l'az Din Allah (1021-1036), and Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah (1036-1094).

In 1044-1045, the Qarakhanid ruler in Transoxania ordered the mass slaughter of numerous Ismailis in Bukhara and nearby regions for having given their spiritual allegiance to the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir.

In 436/1044–1045, a large number of Isma'ilis, who had been converted by Fatimid da'is and who recognized the Imamate of al-Mustansir, were massacred in Bukhara and elsewhere in Transoxania on the orders of the local Qarakhanid ruler Bughra Khan. But Isma'ilism survived in that region, and later in 488/1095, Ahmad b. Khidr, another Qarakhanid who ruled over Bukhara, Samarqand and western Farghana, was accused by the local Sunni 'ulama' of having embraced Isma'ilism, and was executed.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 203)

In the same period, Nasir-i Khusraw, the last Isma'ili philosopher of the Fatimid era, was the victim of the persecution of the Sunni 'ulama' of Khurasan. His home was attacked by mobs and an attempt was made on his life. Nasir was forced to flee and find refuge in Badakhshan where he wrote and taught in exile until his death.

As the head of Ismaili missionary activity in Khurasan for the Fatimid da'wa, Nasir's missionary successes put his life into danger. Both the Sunni and the Twlver Shi'i religious scholars ('ulama'), as well as the crowds of common

people under their influence, threatened his life...So when public pressure against Nasir escalated in his hometown of Balkh, he realised he had to flee."

(Alice Hunsberber, Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan, 8)

Twelfth Century: The Murder of Imam Nizar and the Saljuq Slaughter of the Persian Nizari Isma'ilis



"The Saljuq authorities ordered a thoroughgoing purge of their military and administrative systems in order to eliminate all those suspected of being Ismailis. Several thousand people were killed in this operation, including many falsely accused by their enemies. Then the Saljuqs sanctioned the expulsion of Ismailis from urban areas, a policy that led to widespread killings of civilians, often in mob violence instigated by local Sunni authorities." (Peter Willey)

By the late eleventh century the control of the Fatimid Caliphate had passed into the hands of the military general Badr al-Jamali. He arrived in Cairo in 1074 and restored order after the city was plagued by famine, looting and rebellions. However, Badr soon became the effective ruler as the chief of the army and the Fatimid vizier. He then ensured that his son al-Afdal succeeded to his position. The Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah, who had previously designated his eldest son Abu Mansur Nizar (1094-1095) as the next Imam, passed away in 1095. Upon his death, Imam Nizar was opposed by the all-powerful Fatimid vizier al-Afdal, who put another son, al-Musta'li on the Fatimid throne in a coup d'état. Imam Nizar and those who followed him – the Nizari Isma'ilis – refused to acknowledge Musta'li as the Imam-Caliph and maintained the original designation of the Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah.

The caliph al-Mustansir himself died a few months after Badr, having already designated his eldest son Abu Mansur Nizar to succeed him as the next Fatimid Imam and caliph. Nizar was an independent-minded man of about fifty who resented the excessive military control over the state. Sensing his potential threat, the new vizier and military commander al-Afdal decided to impose his own candidate on the throne, Nizar's half-brother Musta'li, who was married to al-Afdal's sister... This coup de théâtre was completely unacceptable to Nizar and his followers, not least because they believed the Imam's nass or designation of his successor could not be overturned under any circumstances.

(Peter Willey, Eagle's Nest, 16)

1095 – IMAM NIZAR IS MURDERED BY AL-AFDAL

Imam Nizar initially received military support from Alexandria but was eventually defeated by the more powerful Fatimid armies in 1095. Al-Afdal imprisoned the Imam Nizar and had him executed. However, the sons and grandsons of Nizar survived and fled Egypt.

Aftakin and [Imam] Nizar, fearing for the welfare of those around them, sought a guarantee of safety. It was granted but both leaders were arrested and sent to Cairo. There, according to al-Maqrizi, who again reports in the voice of a third party, 'he surrendered Nizar to a member of the palace entourage of al-Musta'li and the latter built around him walls and [in there] he died.'...Several members of the caliphal family, however, fled to the far West, among them specifically three of Nizar's brothers, Muhammad, Isma'il, and Tahir, and a son of his named al-Husayn...Thus a small coterie of dissidents and Nizari supporters gathered somewhere in the West (the Maghrib) waiting for an opportunity to reassert their claim (s) to the imamate.

(Paul Walker, *Succession to Rule in the Shi'ite Caliphate*, 255)

Following the death of Imam Nizar, Hasan-i Sabbah led the Nizaris in Persia during this turbulent time in which the Saljuqs attacked persecuted the Nizari Isma'ilis for decades. Hasan had visited Egypt and observed the declining state of the Fatimid Caliphate and sensed that immediate action was necessary for the survival of the Imamat. In 1090 Hasan captured the famous fortress of Alamut and over the next few years, the Nizari Isma'ilis captured more fortresses in Rudbar, Qumes, Khurasan, and Quhistan. Hasan led the Nizaris to fight and defend themselves against Saljuq attack – at one point the Nizari Isma'ilis defeated a Saljuq army of 10,000 men. The Imams succeeding Imam Nizar, known as Imam al-Hadi, Imam al-Muhtadi, and Imam al-Qahir lived in concealment as they escaped Egypt and made their way to the Nizari Isma'ili territories in Persia established through the efforts of Hasan-i Sabbah.

Various non-Ismaili sources allude, in different forms, to the existence of an unnamed imam at that time in Alamut: see, for instance, Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 180–181, 231–237; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 663, 691–695; Rashid al-Din, pp. 79, 166–168; Kashani, pp. 115, 202–204; Ibn al-Qalanisi, Dhayl, pp. 127–129, with a quotation on the subject from al-Fariqi, a historian writing shortly after the capture of Alamut, and Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar, p. 102. Al-Ghazali, in his al-Munqidh, ed. and tr. Jabre, text p. 33, translation pp. 93–94, ed. Saliba, p. 127, tr. Watt, pp. 52–53, speaks of the imam as being hidden and yet accessible to his followers.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 621)

1101-1106 – SALJUQ SLAUGHTERS OF THE PERSIAN NIZARI ISMA'ILIS

The Saljuq rulers of Persia perceived the Nizari Isma'ilis in their domains as a threat to their power. In the beginning of the twelfth century, the Saljuq sultans and

amirs in Persia ordered the massacre of all Nizari Ismaʿilis in Baghdad, Isfahan and Quhistan and any Saljuqs who sympathized with them:

The growing power of the Nizaris finally forced Barkiyaruq to move against them. Barkiyaruq in western Persia and Sanjar in Khurasan agreed in 494/1101 to take combined action against them, who were now posing a serious threat to Saljuq power in general. Accordingly, Barkiyaruq sanctioned the massacre of Nizaris in Isfahan and Baghdad, as well as many of the Saljuq officers suspected of conversion, while Sanjar had many Nizaris killed or enslaved in Quhistan.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 330)

The Nizari Ismaʿilis in Saljuq domains in Persia were repeatedly attacked by local Sunni mobs, and often scapegoated for the murders of Sunni leaders. Saljuq rulers and amirs regularly ordered the total elimination of the Ismaʿilis of Quhistan and other regions. A number of Ismaʿilis in Isfahan were even burnt alive in a bonfire. Nevertheless, the Ismaʿilis in Persia persisted and endured.

The assassinations, whatever their real source, often triggered massacres of the Ismaʿilis. The assassination of a Saljuq amir or a Sunni qadi, who had initiated action against the Ismaʿilis, would often rouse the Sunni population of a town to gather all those suspected, or accused by private enemies, of being Ismaʿilis, and to kill them. Around 486/1093, the people of Isfahan, for instance, moved by a dubious report that a certain Ismaʿilis couple had been luring passers-by into their house and torturing them to death, rounded up all the suspected Ismaʿilis and threw them alive into a large bonfire in the centre of the town. And in 494/1101, Barkiyaruq and Sanjar came to an agreement about eliminating all the Ismaʿilis of their respective regions. Sanjar sent the amir Bazghash against the Ismaʿilis of Quhistan. This expedition caused much devastation, and three years later, another Saljuq expedition destroyed Tabas, killing many Ismaʿilis in the region. However, the Ismaʿilis of Quhistan maintained their position, and in 498/1104–1105 the Ismaʿilis of Turshiz were even able to undertake operations as far west as Rayy. At the same time, Barkiyaruq ordered a second massacre of the Ismaʿilis of Isfahan in 494 AH.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 329)

First, the Saljuq authorities ordered a thoroughgoing purge of their military and administrative systems in order to eliminate all those suspected of being Ismailis. Several thousand people were killed in this operation, including many falsely accused by their enemies. Then the Saljuqs sanctioned the expulsion of Ismailis from urban areas, a policy that led to widespread killings of civilians, often in mob violence instigated by local Sunni authorities. The largest massacres of this kind took place in the two main centres of Saljuq power, Isfahan and Baghdad. Last but not least, the Saljuqs dispatched a series of military expeditions against the main centres of Ismaili power in Rudbar and Qohistan, retaking some fortified bases and devastating many areas of Ismaili

settlement. This was the case, for instance, in the town of Tabas in Qohistan that was completely destroyed and its inhabitants slaughtered.

(Peter Willey, Eagle's Nest, 32)

1107 – THE SALJUQ ATTACK ON THE NIZARI ISMA'ILIS OF SHAHDIZ

Most Sunni Muslims lived on good terms with the Isma'ili Muslims among them but a mob or ruler would often endeavour to exterminate the Isma'ilis. The Isma'ilis of Shahdiz sought to make peace with the Saljuq Sultan in the early 1100s, arguing that beside the belief in Imamate, the Ismailis and Sunnis shared more in common. The Isma'ilis were willing to acknowledge the political authority of the Sultan and pay him tribute. But Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Rahman, al-Samanjani, a leading Shafi'i scholar, denounced the Ismailis and obstructed the peace negotiations. As a result, the Isma'ilis of Shahdiz were assaulted and killed; the Ismaili leader Ahmad b. Attash was skinned alive, his wife forced to commit suicide by leaping off the ramparts of the fort, and Ahmad's son was beheaded.

Hodgson remarks that during Alamut times most of the Sunnis lived on relatively good terms with the Shi'i Ismailis among them, until 'a mob or a ruler would set the goal of destroying all Ismailis at once.' When Muhammad Tapaq (d. 511/1118), the great Saljuq Sultan, personally led a campaign against the Ismaili community of Shahdiz at Isfahan, the Ismailis argued that they differed little from their Sunni neighbors except in the matter of the imamate. The sultan therefore had no cause to attack them so long as they accepted him as their political leader, which they were willing to do. Apparently the Ismailis had many Sunni friends in the Saljuq army who argued their cause and delayed engagement of the battle, but certain elements among the religious authorities urged it on. Even among the clerics there were differences of opinion but the extremists finally managed to silence the moderates, the Ismailis were assaulted, and the community suffered terrible losses. Their leader Ahmad b. Attash was ignominiously paraded through the streets of Isfahan before being skinned alive.

(Virani, The Ismailis in the Middle Ages, 103)

Ahmad managed to engage the Saljuqs in a series of negotiations, also involving the Sunni 'ulama of Isfahan in a long, drawn-out religious disputation. In a message to the sultan, Ahmad argued that the Nizaris were true Muslims, believing in God and the Prophet Muhammad and accepting the prescriptions of the shari'a. They differed from the Sunnis only concerning the matter of the imamate, and therefore maintained that the sultan had no legitimate ground for acting against them, especially since the Nizaris were willing to recognize the sultan's suzerainty and pay him tribute. This message led to a religious debate. It seems that at first most of the sultan's advisers and the Sunni jurists and scholars were inclined to accept Ahmad's argument. A few, notably Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Samanjani, a leading Shafi'i scholar, stood fast against the Isma'ilis, denouncing them as being outside the pale of Islam, and

persuading the sultan to reject Ahmad's request. The debate thus ended and the siege continued... In the final assault, most of the Nizaris were killed but a few managed to escape. Ahmad's wife, decked in jewels, threw herself from the ramparts, but Ahmad was captured. He was paraded through the streets of Isfahan and then skinned alive. Ahmad's son was also put to death, and their heads were sent to the caliph al-Mustazhir at Baghdad.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 337)

The local Saljuq amirs continued to routinely massacre the Nizari villages and attack the Nizari strongholds. Several attacks took place between 1124 and 1126.

[The Nizari leader] Buzurg-Ummid was confronted with the enmity of the local amirs from the very beginning of his reign, and in 518/1124 some 700 Nizaris were massacred in Amid in Diyar Bakr. In 520/1126, two years after his accession, the Saljuqs launched new attacks against the Nizari strongholds in both Rudbar and Quhistan, probably to test the leadership capabilities of Hasan-i Sabbah's successor. Sultan Sanjar had not sanctioned any anti-Nizari activity for almost two decades, which may reflect the existence of some sort of truce between the Saljuqs and the Nizaris. However, he now decided to confront the Nizaris, and a large army, commanded by his vizier, was sent against Turaythith in Quhistan, as well as against Bayhaq and Tarz in the district of Nishapur, with orders to massacre the Nizaris of those localities and pillage their properties.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 345)

1129: SALJUQ SLAUGHTER OF THE SYRIAN NIZARI ISMA'ILIS

The Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslan ordered the ra'is of Aleppo to arrest and execute the Nizari Isma'ili leadership of Aleppo. This led to the massacre and imprisonment of at least 200 Nizari Isma'ilis:

According to Ibn al-Adim, Muhammad Tapar had written to Alp Arslan warning him against the menace of the Nizaris and insisting on their elimination. At the same time, Sa'id b. Badi, the ra'is of Aleppo and the commander of the militia, had been urging Alp Arslan to take measures against the Nizaris. Alp Arslan finally agreed and entrusted the task to Ibn Badi. Abu Tahir and other Nizari leaders, including the da'i Isma'il, and a brother of al-Hakim al-Munajjim, were arrested and killed. Some two hundred Nizaris of Aleppo were also massacred or imprisoned and their properties were confiscated.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 335)

Later, the prefect and governors of Damascus orchestrated the murder of the Nizari Isma'ili leaders of Damascus and sent the town mob and militia to massacre the local Nizari populations; around 6,000 Nizari Isma'ilis were killed and their properties pillaged while several Nizari leaders were crucified on the city walls:

Al-Mazdaqani, who had been retained as vizier by Tughtigin's son and successor Taj al-Muluk Buri (522–526/1128–1132), continued to support the da'i Isma'il and the Nizaris. But Buri waited for the right opportunity to rid

himself of al-Mazdaqani and the Nizaris, being spurred on towards these objectives by the prefect of Damascus, Mufarrij b. al-Hasan b. al-Sufi, and the city's military governor, Yusuf b. Firuz. Al-Mazdaqani was murdered in Ramadan 523/September 1129, and this was followed by a general massacre of the Nizaris in Damascus, similar to the anti-Nizari reaction of the Aleppines after the death of Ridwan. The town militia (ahdath) and the mob, supported by the predominantly Sunni inhabitants of Damascus, turned on the Nizaris, killing more than 6000 people and pillaging their properties. Their dar al-da'wa was also destroyed and some Nizaris were crucified on the wall of Damascus, including a freedman called Shadhi al-Khadim, a disciple of Abu Tahir in Aleppo and, according to Ibn al-Qalanisi, the root of all the trouble.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 349)

In the 1140s, the Shah Ghazi killed and beheaded a large number of Nizaris in Rudbar – even building towers with their severed heads. In the same period, in Rayy and Alamut, a large number of Nizaris were attacked and killed by 'Abbas.

After the assassination of his son Girdbazu in 537/1142 at the hands of fida'is, Shah Ghazi continuously attacked the Nizaris of Rudbar, killing large numbers of them and building towers of their heads. Similarly, 'Abbas, upon hearing in 535/1141 the news of the Nizari assassination of Jawhar, his master, in Sanjar's camp, massacred the Nizaris of Rayy and thereafter attacked and killed many Nizaris in the district of Alamut and elsewhere."

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 357)

1171 – SALAH AL-DIN (SALADDIN) EXTINGUISHES THE DESCENDANTS OF THE FATIMID CALIPHS
Meanwhile in the twelfth century, Salah al-Din brought an end to the now defunct Fatimid Caliphate by arresting and imprisoning all the Fatimid family members and descendants of the Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah – to ensure the extinction of the Fatimid lineage in Egypt.

When Salah al-Din brought a formal end to Fatimid rule in 567/1171, he ordered all available members of the former ruling family arrested and incarcerated in the Dar al-Muzaffar, males and females to be kept separated. Obviously the females needed to be imprisoned for some months only.

(Walker, *Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate*, 249)

Twelfth-Thirteenth Centuries: Murders of the Nizari Imams and Saljuq Massacres of the Nizari Ismaʿilis



“...in the year 600/1204, a large number of people accused of Ismaʿilism were murdered in lower ʿIraq.” (Farhad Daftary)

By 1162, the Nizari Imams had migrated to Alamut and the twenty-third Imam Hasan *ʿala-dhikrihi al-salam* (1162-1166) openly assumed leadership of the Nizari Ismaʿilis. However, this Imam was brutally murdered in 1166 by his own brother-in-law.

A year and a half after the declaration of the qiyama, on 6 Rabi I 561/9 January 1166, Hasan II was stabbed in the castle of Lamasar by a brother-in-law, Hasan b. Namawar, who belonged to a local Daylami branch of the Shiʿi Buyid family and who opposed Hasan II’s new policies. Hasan II *ʿala dhikrihiʿl-salam* died of his wounds and was succeeded by his nineteen-year-old son Muhammad, who was born in Shawwal 542/March 1148.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 363)

The next Imam, Mawlana Nur al-Din Muhammad (Aʿla Muhammad) allegedly died of poisoning in 1210.

Muhammad II died, possibly of poison, in Rabi I 607/September 1210, and was succeeded by his son Hasan III, who, as had become customary by then with the lords of Alamut, carried the honorific title of Jalal al-Din.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 375)

In 1221, the Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan died of dysentery caused by suspected poisoning:

After a reign of eleven years, Jalal al-Din Hasan III died of dysentery in Ramadan 618/November 1221. His vizier, who was the tutor of the next imam, accused Hasan III’s Sunni wives and sister of having poisoned him. They were all put to death.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 377)

The Imam ʿAla al-Din Muhammad was murdered in his tent near Alamut in 1255:

Soon afterwards, on the last day of Shawwal 653/1 December 1255, 'Ala al-Din Muhammad III, who had always been fond of shepherding, was found murdered in a hut, adjoining his sheepfold, in Shirkuh near Alamut.

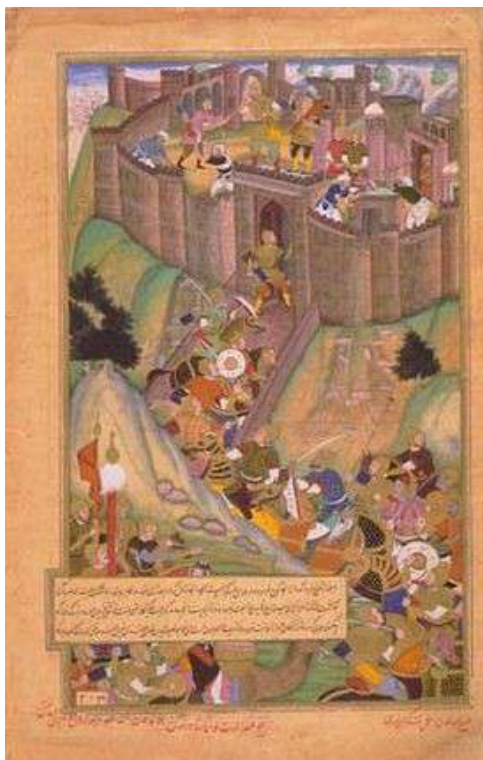
(Daftary, The Ismailis, 392)

During the thirteenth century, many rulers continued to massacre large Nizari Isma'ili populations on several occasions:

Meanwhile, the Sunni rulers had maintained the practice of occasionally massacring the Nizaris. It is reported, for instance, that in the year 600/1204, a large number of people accused of Isma'ilism were murdered in lower 'Iraq.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 374)

Thirteenth Century: The Mongol Genocide of the Nizari Isma'ilis



Hulegu Khan's siege of the Nizari fortress of Alamut

"[Imam Rukn al-Din] Khurshah's family and dependants detained at Qazwin were put to the sword by Qaraqai Bitikchi, while Otegu-China, the Mongol commander in Khurasan, summoned the Quhistani Nizaris to great gatherings and slaughtered some 12,000 of them." (Farhad Daftary)

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Mongols made preparations to destroy the Nizari state and exterminate all the Isma'ili populations. A genocide of the Nizari Isma'ili Muslims, including women and children, was ordered by Genghis Khan. Prior to this development, the Nizari Isma'ili Imams had formed an alliance with the Sunni 'Abbasid Caliph and sent peace envoys to the Mongols. The Isma'ilis and the Sunnis had even sent a joint Embassy to Christian Europe proposing a Muslim-Christian alliance, which was rejected.

In one of his imperial edicts, Genghis Khan had ordained that the Ismailis were to be annihilated: “None of that people should be spared,” he decreed, “not even the babe in its cradle.” These chilling words heralded one of history’s most lurid examples of mass extermination... We hear an ominous foreboding of the coming genocide from William of Rubruck, a Franciscan friar at the court of King Louis IX of France, who was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Great Khan Mongke. He tells that the Great Khan had sent his brother Hulagu to the lands of the Ismailis with an army, ‘and he ordered him to put them all to death.’

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 4, 7)

1256 – THE FIRST MONGOL MASSACRES

In his first incursion, Hulegu Khan – the brother whom Genghis Khan appointed to exterminate the Nizari Isma’ilis – attacked the towns of Tun and Tus and slaughtered their Isma’ili populations:

Hulegu entered Persia through Khurasan in Rabi I 654/April 1256 and selected the Nizari town of Tun, which had not been effectively reduced by his advance guards under Ket-Buqa, as his first target... The Mongols slaughtered all the inhabitants of Tun except the younger women, according to Juwayni, or the artisans (pishihvaran), according to Rashid al-Din.”

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 393)

THE MONGOL SIEGE OF MAYMUNDIZ AND THE SURRENDER OF THE IMAM



By October 26 of that year, the Mongol armies besieged several Nizari Isma'ili fortresses including Maymundiz where the Imam of that time, Mawlana Rukn al-Din Khurshah, was staying. The Mongols pressured the Imam to surrender in person; in order to buy time and stall, the Imam sent out his brother and 300 Nizari Ismaili notables to negotiate with the Mongols. Hulegu Khan secretly murdered all these Nizari emissaries.

On 5 Shawwal/26 October, Khurshah sent out his brother Shahanshah in the company of 300 men, who arrived at Hulegu's camp two days later...

Shahanshah was now sent back to Rudbar with the message that if Khurshah destroyed the castle of Maymundiz and presented himself in person before the king, he would be received with honour, otherwise God alone knew what would befall him. Around this time, Hulegu secretly put to death near Qazwin many of the Nizaris who on different occasions had been sent to him.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 395)

The Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah eventually surrendered with all of his family and dependants. His family members were taken captive by the Mongols. However, when the Mongols entered the castle of Maymundiz, a group of devoted fida'is resisted them until the last man.

On the day following his surrender, Khurshah brought out all his family, dependants and the other occupants of the castle, also offering the meagre treasures of Maymundiz as a token of submission. When the Mongols went up to the castle to commence the work of dismantling its buildings and structures, however, they were confronted by a group of devoted fida'is whose desperate last resistance was broken up only after three days of fierce fighting.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 396)

1257 – MONGOL MASSACRE OF IMAM RUKN AL-DIN KHURSHAH AND THE NIZARI ISMA'ILIS

In 1257, the Imam Rukn al-Khurshah and his companions set out to Mongolia while escorted by the Mongol guards. These guards continually abused and harassed the Imam and his party. The Great Khan refused to see the Imam. On his return journey, the Mongol guards executed the Imam and all of his companions.

On 1 Rabi I 655/9 March 1257, Khurshah set out on his fateful journey to Mongolia with nine companions and a group of Mongol guards led by Bujrai. On the return journey, somewhere along the edge of the Khangai mountains in north-western Mongolia, the eighth and final lord of Alamut and his companions were led away from the road and put to the sword by the Mongols.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 396)

After the Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah had left for Mongolia, the Mongols massacred thousands upon thousands of Nizari Isma'ilis in Persia: the Imam's family and dependents (including infants) were summarily executed; the Mongol commander summoned the Nizaris of Quhistan – in the guise of a gathering – and massacred them (akin to the “red wedding” in the Game of Thrones). All of this

took place under the general order of Genghis Khan to destroy all of the Isma'ilis. Some estimates place the total number of Nizari Isma'ilis killed in these massacres at 100,000.

In the meantime, after Khurshah's departure for Mongolia, there had taken place a general massacre of the Persian Nizaris who had been placed in Mongol custody. Khurshah's family and dependants detained at Qazwin were put to the sword by Qaraqai Bitikchi, while Otegu-China, the Mongol commander in Khurasan, summoned the Quhistani Nizaris to great gatherings and slaughtered some 12,000 of them, adding immeasurably to the tragedy of the end of the Nizari state in Persia. According to Juwayni, the massacres had been carried out in accordance with a decree of Mongke to the effect that none of the Nizaris should be spared, reflecting an earlier order of Chingiz Khan himself.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 397-98)

1257 – THE SURVIVAL OF THE NIZARI ISMA'ILI IMAMAT

Despite the great Mongol genocide, the Nizari Isma'ilis endured and most importantly, the lineage of Nizari Imams survived in the person of Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (1257-1310), the younger son of the slain Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah. This Imam lived in concealment (satr), according to the sources, in Tabriz where he was disguised as an embroiderer.

According to Nizari tradition, a group of their dignitaries had managed, before the fall of Alamut, to safely conceal Rukn al-Din Khurshah's minor son, Shams al-Din Muhammad, who had received the nass to the imamate. Shams al-Din, who succeeded to the imamate on his father's death in 655/1257, was then taken to Adharbayjan. There, he grew up and lived clandestinely and precariously as an embroiderer, whence his nickname of Zarduz. Certain allusions in the still unpublished *Safar-nama* (Travelogue) of Nizari Quhistani, the first post-Alamut Nizari poet, indicate that Shams al-Din Muhammad, and possibly his immediate successor, lived in concealment in Adharbayjan.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 412)

Nevertheless, the Mongol-sponsored Sunni historian Ata Malik Juwayni announced the extinction of the Nizari Imams and the Isma'ilis, saying that "of him and his stock no trace was left, and he and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world." In this way, the Isma'ilis were written out of existence, while actually surviving and re-emerging in later centuries.

Juwayni's arrogant and brutal boast that 'of him [Rokn al-Din] and his stock no trace was left' was to be proved conclusively false. Of course, the massacres of 1256 were followed by centuries of darkness for the Ismailis, but there were survivors. History has taught us, especially recently, that peoples inspired by a genuine faith can never be completely eliminated as their conquerors hope. Gradually the number of Ismaili survivors grew. Their Imamate was preserved

and grew in strength, too, until in the 19th century modern Ismailism emerged under the leadership of the Aga Khans.

(Wiley, Eagle's Nest, 84)

Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries: Surviving the Mongols under Taqiyyah

"In all these lands through which I traveled, in every place I practiced taqiyyah for taqiyyah is my religion and the religion of my ancestors." (Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad)

In this extremely dangerous environment, where Mongol leaders continued to hunt down the Nizari Isma'ilis, the Imams and the Community generally practiced taqiyyah and lived in the guise of Sunnis, Twelvers, Sufis, or Hindus – depending on the region and time period. The Imams after the Mongol invasion generally lived in strict concealment and their whereabouts were only known to trusted high ranking followers.

In general, during much of their post-Alamut history the Nizaris have been obliged to dissimulate rather strictly in order to safeguard themselves against widespread persecution. To that end, they not only concealed their true beliefs as well as religious literature, but also resorted to a wide variety of Sunni, Sufi, Twelver Shi'i and Hindu disguises in the midst of hostile surroundings in the Iranian world and the Indian subcontinent.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 404)

In the dangerous times in which this Imam and his immediate successors lived, it has often been assumed that they concealed their identities...Clearly, one of the reasons that we know so little of the Imams of this period is precisely because they didn't want their existence to be commonly known. Attracting unwanted attention in such a hostile environment would have been exceedingly dangerous, even fatal, and success in concealing the identity of the Imams contributed to the survival of the lineage. Faithful members of the community in areas in which the threat was most acutely felt would have been loath to reveal the names and whereabouts of their Imams, or indeed their own identity.

(Virani, The Ismailis in the Middle Ages, 56)

1257-1310 – THE JOURNEYS OF IMAM SHAMS AL-DIN MUHAMMAD

According to several historical sources, the Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad travelled around the Muslim world. He risked his life in order to visit all the surviving Nizari Isma'ili communities to raise their morale, show them the survival of the Imamate, and renew their allegiance. An unpublished manuscript contains the following quotation which is likely from the Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad:

May it not remain hidden from all the servants that as Mawlana 'Ali and Mawlana Husayn (on whose mentions be peace) have said, 'We will have to pass through Jabalistan (i.e., Gilan) and Daylam, which will be the final Karbala.

The palace of Caesar and the fortress of Alamut [will be reduced to such straits] that were they given to even a poor old woman, she would not accept them.’ All of this came to pass and was seen by the people of the world. Aught of what I said was belied. Now I have left the land of Iran for Turan and traveled through its cities to see them. I passed through Samarkand, Bukhara, Cathay, Scythia, Balkh, China and the land beyond China (Chin wa-Machin), Tibet and Kashmir. I also passed through the land of the Franks. In short, I actually beheld the world from one end to the other. I clearly manifested myself in the cities of Uch and Multan and fulfilled the promise that I had made to the loving devotees. [After experiencing] the kindness of the loving devotees and friends of Hindustan, I returned to Iran. In all these lands through which I traveled, in every place I practiced taqiyya for taqiyya is my religion and the religion of my ancestors. That is to say, “dissimulation (taqiyyah) is my religion and the religion of my ancestors.” In every place we portrayed ourselves in a manner and form that we deemed prudent for the task of the people. However, my disciples know best what is prudent for our (own) task! If someone knows better the task and what is advisable, let him come forward. Nobody in the world can claim this. If someone doubts this it is because of depravity and the whisperings of the devil. May God keep all the servants in his protection!”

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad,
(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 54)

If the earlier quoted passage is indeed to be attributed to the Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad, it seems highly likely that he was traveling throughout the regions in which his followers lived in order to reinforce their allegiance in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion and the evaporation of Ismaili political power. In his Book of Supreme Admonitions, Pir Shihab al-Din Shah poignantly points out that at this time, many of the Persian Ismailis abandoned their faith for fear of their lives. Certainly, trying to reconnect with these scattered communities would have been a high priority for the Ismaili leadership.

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 57)

1368 – THE MURDER OF IMAM QASIMSHAH

The Imam succeeding Shams al-Din Muhammad was Imam Qasimshah (1310 – 1368). According to the few available sources that shed light on this obscure period, the Imam Qasimshah’s life was constantly in danger and he was ultimately murdered by a member of his family – Muhammad Shah – who also claimed the Imamate for himself. This resulted in a schism between the Qasimshahi Nizari Isma’ilis and the Muhammadshahi Nizari Isma’ils.

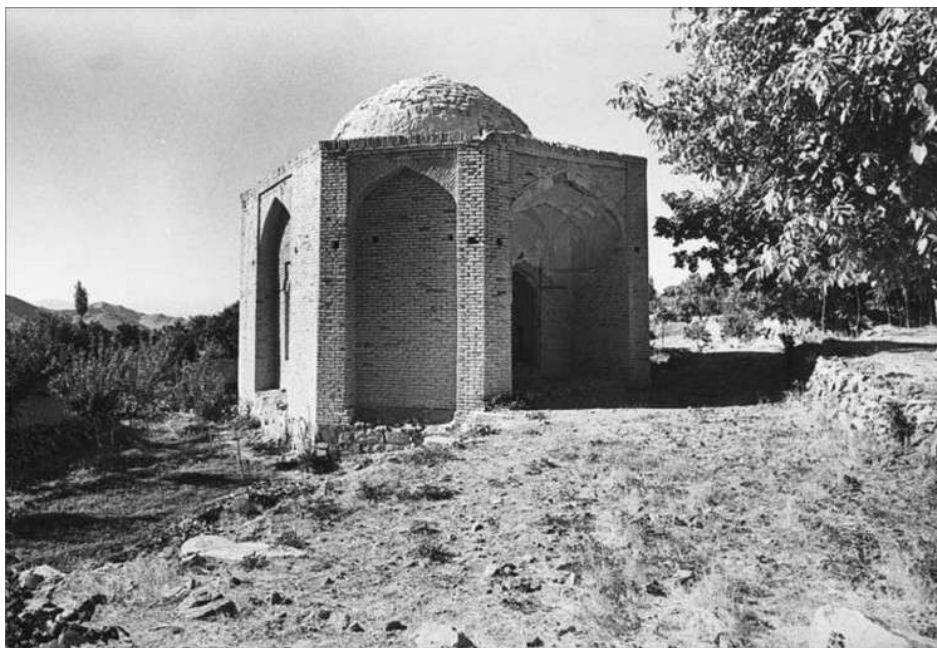
That the Imams in this period were in real danger is confirmed in an ode (qasida) of a certain Da’i Anjudani, who informs us that the Imam Qasimshah (and here his reference is to the first Qasimshah) was murdered. It appears from these verses that there were numerous attempts to have him poisoned,

one of which finally succeeded. Unfortunately, this poet provides us no further details regarding the perpetrators of the crime, nor any information about their identities, referring to them simply as “his enviers, worthy of hellfire” and “the accursed.” The murder of Qasimshah is also alluded to in the work *Seven Aphorisms* (Haft Nukta), which is associated with one of the Imams by the name Islamshah, perhaps the first. While not explicit, this work is highly suggestive that the murderer was from the Muhammadshahi line, which, however, is never mentioned. Nevertheless, it is very clear that a family member was involved.

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 57)

The Imam Qasimshah was succeeded by his son, Imam Islamshah (1368 -1426). While little is known about this Imam, there is a work called *Seven Aphorisms* that is attributed to him and quotations from him appear in other Nizari texts. Some sources relate that Imam Islamshah left Adarbayjan and migrated to Iran.

Fourteenth-Fifteenth Centuries: Timurid Massacres amidst the Cover of Sufism



The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah III (Shah Gharib), Anjudan
(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 424)

“They [Nizari Isma’ilis] must be slain,” “attack them and snatch the wealth from their hands,” “their property and children are to be distributed as booty,” “may Almighty God abase them and curse them!” (Jalal-i Qa’ini)

The Nizaris of this period underwent immense hardship and endured numerous attacks. In 1393, Timur (Tamerlaine) led an expedition to massacre the Nizari Isma’ilis of Anjudan.

The Persian chroniclers of Timur’s reign do refer to Nizaris activities in Anjudan and mention an interesting expedition led by Timur himself in Rajab 795/May

1393 against the Nizaris of Anjudan, who apparently belonged to the Qasim-Shahi branch and had by then attracted enough attention to warrant this action. Timur was then engaged in his campaigns in Persia, and whilst en route from Isfahan to Hamadan and Baghdad his attention was diverted to the Nizaris of the Anjudan area where he spent a few days. Timur's soldiers killed many Nizaris and pillaged their properties. According to Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi (d. 858/1454), the rebellious Anjudani Nizaris attempted in vain to seek shelter in their special underground tunnels, and most of them lost their lives when they were flooded out by Timur's troops.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 418)

1378 – 1416: MASSACRES OF THE NIZARI ISMA'ILIS OF QAZWIN

In Qazwin, the prominent Khushayji family faced opposition from 'Ali Kiya for their adherence to the Nizari Isma'ili Imam and had to defend themselves. In the course of these battles, the Nizari Imam known as Khudawand Muhammad – who was likely the Imam Islamshah – rallied the Nizaris of the area and opened up a second front against 'Ali Kiya. The Nizari Imam and his forces even retook Alamut for short periods. However, 'Ali Kiya joined up with Timur (Tamerlane) and his superior armies defeated the Nizari forces. The Nizari losses were massive due to Tamerlane's massacres. In 1416, there was a mass execution of Nizari Isma'ili leaders such that "the waters of the White River turned red with the blood of those killed."

The Kushayjis made forays into Daylam from Qazwin, but in 781/1378, 'Ali Kiya's forces drove the Ismaili refugees out of that city. The Kushayji family then fled to Sultaniyya, originally a dependency of Qazwin, where they joined some of their co-religionists. Nearby Taliqan, with a substantial Ismaili population, was ruled by the inimical Malik Bisutun, who was defeated by the Ismailis in 787/1385. Shortly after this minor victory, however, Tamerlane's troops were to massacre the Ismailis in Mazandaran, and shortly thereafter those in Anjudan as well."

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 35)

Though the Ismailis continued to inhabit Alamut and the South Caspian for much of this period, their former political power had been shattered. Henceforth, at least politically, the Ismailis were of minor, regional significance. Soon enough, in 819/1416, they were subject to yet another massacre in which "the waters of the White River (Saf idrud) turned red with the blood of those killed." Among those executed were many Ismaili leaders, including some descendants of the Ismaili Imam Khudawand 'Ala al-Din Muhammad. It must have been around this time, about one and a half centuries after Alamut first capitulated to the Mongols, that the Ismailis gave up all hopes of regaining the fortress as their center. While Ismaili activity continued in this region, the Imams appear to have already moved away to safer, more politically quiescent surroundings."

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 45)

1415 – MASSACRES OF THE NIZARI ISMA'ILIS OF QUHISTAN

In 1415, Jalal Qa'ini was sent by Sultan Shahrukh with orders “to exterminate, suppress...kill, banish and expel the [Ismaili] community from Quhistan.”

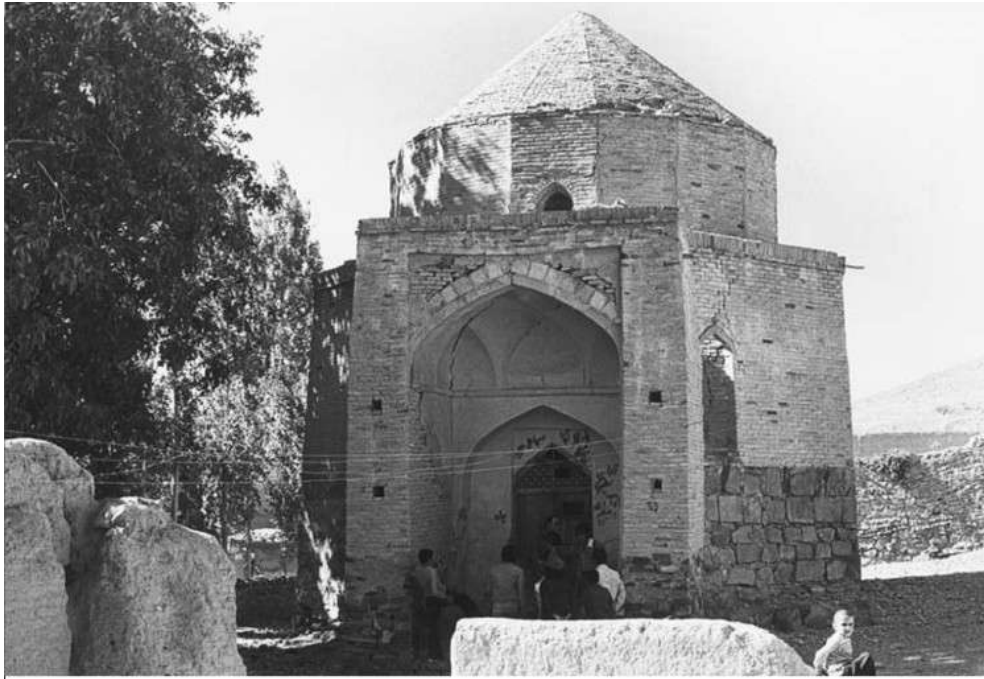
“They must be slain,” “attack them and snatch the wealth from their hands,” “their property and children are to be distributed as booty,” “may Almighty God abase them and curse them!” Jalal-i Qa'ini, writing at the beginning of the fifteenth century, opens his discourse on the Ismailis in this manner, spewing fire and brimstone...An adherent of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, he was charged by Sultan Shahrukh with the task of suppressing “heretics” (bad-madhaban), who presumably included not only the Shi'a, but perhaps even non-Hanafi Sunnis...Tamerlane's son and successor, Sultan Shahrukh (r. 807–850/1405–1447), who cultivated an image of strict Sunni piety, sent Jalal-i Qa'ini many decades later in 818/1415 “to exterminate, suppress . . . kill, banish and expel the [Ismaili] community from Quhistan”... Certainly, no Ismailis living in such hostile circumstances could openly practice their faith. Taqiyya was the only way to survive.

(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 103)

1426-1497 – NIZARI ISMA'ILIS LIVE IN TAQIYYAH AS SUFIS

Imam Islamshah transferred the residence of the Ismaili Imams to central Persia – near Qumm and Mahallat – and enjoyed a long Imamatus of nearly 55 years. He was succeeded by Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (1426 – 1464).

Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah was succeeded by Imam Mustansir bi'llah II (1464 – 1476) – known as 'Ali Shah and Shah Qalandar. This Imam began what is known as the “Anjudan revival” period in which the Nizari Imams posed as Sufi Pirs while directing a more active Nizari da'wah from the village of Anjudan.



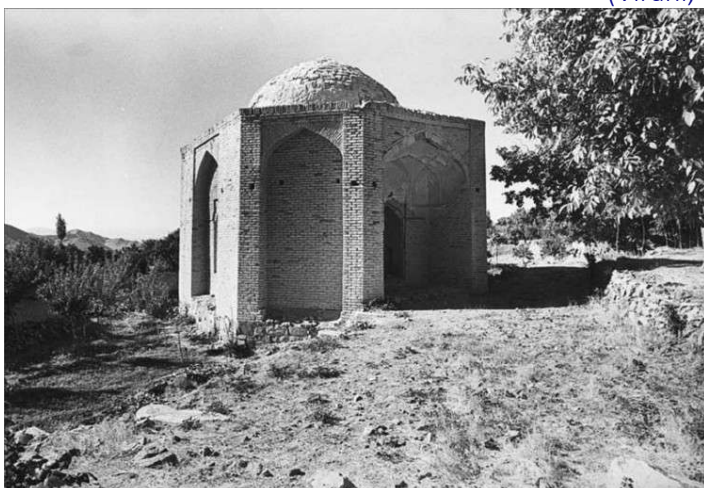
The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah II (Shah Qalandar), Anjudan

(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 424)

Imam Mustansir bi'llah was succeeded by Imam 'Abd al-Salam (1476-1494) – who composed a famous Ode (qasidah) in which he openly declares the spiritual reality of the Imamate. The first line of the famous Ode of 'Abd al-Salam states:

Harken ye who quest for union, who boasts that he seeks.
Heed my words, for I am the Book of God that speaks!
Now I am 'Abd al-Salam, but if with this company I am grieved,
to this assembly I'll bid adieu, once again to return to it.

Imam 'Abd al-Salam,
(Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 169-177)



The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah III (Shah Gharib), Anjudan

(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 424)

Imam 'Abd al-Salam was succeeded by Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (1494-1497) – also known as 'Abbas Shah and Mustansir bi'llah III. He was the author of the

Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi. The Pandiyat suggests that the Imams of this time were still in danger and it was forbidden for the Nizari Isma'ili murids to mention their names openly:

O faithful believers, Hadrat Mawlana Shah Mustansir bi'llah says: Never mention my name nor that of your Imam Shah 'Abd al-Salamshah in the presence of the faithless, ignorant ones who harbor an innate enmity for the offices of prophecy and imamate.

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (Mustansir bi'llah III)
(Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi, in Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 124)

Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries: The Safawid Persecutions of the Persian Nizari Isma'ilis

“The increased and more overt activities of the Nizari Isma'ilis soon came to the attention of the earliest Safawid monarchs and their Twelver 'ulama' who reacted by subjecting them to renewed persecution.” (Farhad Daftary)

Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali (1497-1573) succeeded as the thirty-fifth Imam on the eve of the Safawid revolution that took place in 1501. Initially, this situation reduced the taqiyyah practices and Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali is reported to have married a sister or daughter of Tahmasp I, the successor and son of Shah Isma'il Safawi.

1573-74 – SAFAWID PERSECUTION OF IMAM ABU DHARR 'ALI

The Safawids soon made Twelver Shi'ism the state religion and imported a number of Twelver 'ulama' from Arab centres. As a result many Sunni Muslims and Sufi orders were oppressed and the Nizari Isma'ilis faced renewed persecution from the Safawids:

It seems that the true religious identity of the Nizari imams and their followers had become somewhat better known after the establishment of Safawid rule, despite their continued use of the Sufi guise. The increased and more overt activities of the Nizari Isma'ilis soon came to the attention of the earliest Safawid monarchs and their Twelver 'ulama' who reacted by subjecting them to renewed persecution. We have records of two particular instances of such persecution taking place during the first Safawid century.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 436)

Shah Tahmasp persecuted the Qasim-Shahi Nizaris in the time of their thirty-sixth imam, Murad Mirza, the son and successor of Abu Dharr 'Ali. The *Tarikh-i Alfi*, an extensive history of the Muslim world from the death of the Prophet to around the year 1000/1591–1592, which was compiled in India by several authors at the request of the emperor Akbar, refers under the same year 981/1573–1574 to the persecution of the Nizaris of Anjudan in the time of a certain Murad who claimed their imamate... [S]ources relate that Murad had numerous followers also in India, who sent him large sums of money from Sind and elsewhere. Murad Mirza and his predecessor evidently did not reside permanently at Anjudan, where the headquarters of the Qasim-Shahi Nizari

da'wa had been located. Murad Mirza was engaged in political activity outside Anjudan, possibly in collaboration with Nuqtawis, and he had acquired supporters in Kashan and elsewhere in central Persia. Being alarmed by the activities of Murad Mirza, early in 981/1573 Shah Tahmasp ordered Amir Khan Musilu, the governor of Hamadan, to proceed to the Anjudan area to capture Murad and deal with his followers (muridan). Amir Khan killed a large number of the Nizaris of Anjudan and its surroundings and took much booty from them, but Murad Mirza himself, who was then staying at a fortress in the district of Kamara around Anjudan, managed to escape. Soon afterwards, he was captured and imprisoned near the royal quarters. In Jumada II 981/October 1573, Murad Mirza escaped from prison with the assistance of Muhammad Muqim, a high Safawid official who had come under the influence of the Nizari Imam. Murad proceeded to the vicinity of Qandahar, receiving help on the way from his followers in Fars, Makran and Sind. A few months later, he was recaptured in Afghanistan by a contingent of Safawid guards commanded by Didar Beg. Murad was brought before Shah Tahmasp, who had him executed along with Muhammad Muqim. It is interesting to note that Khayrkhwah, a contemporary of Tahmasp I as well as Murad Mirza and the latter's predecessor, states that one of the Nizari Imams of his time went into hiding (sitr) for seven years, probably making reference to Murad Mirza.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 437)

1573–1722 – NIZARI ISMA'ILI TAQIYYAH IN THE GUISE OF TWELVERS

The Imam Murad Mirza was succeeded by Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali (1573-1634) – also known as Khalil Allah I. By this time, the Safawids had become less oppressive and this Imam married a Safawid princess. At this time, the Nizari Isma'ilis and the Imam were practicing taqiyya and appearing as Twelver Shi'is.

The close relationship existing between this Imam and the Safawids is attested by an epigraph, recovered in 1976 at Anjudan by the author, which reproduces the text of a royal edict issued by Shah 'Abbas I in Rajab 1036/March–April 1627. According to this edict, originally installed in the main mosque of Anjudan and addressed to Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani, the current Qasim-Shahi Imam, the Shi'is of Anjudan, named as a dependency of the dar al-mu'minin of Qumm, were exempted, like other Shi'is around Qumm, from paying certain taxes. It is interesting to note that in this edict the Anjudani Shi'is were regarded as Ithna 'asharis, indicating that by that time the Persian Nizaris had successfully adopted the cover of Twelver Shi'ism, in addition to Sufism, as a form of taqiyya."

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 437)



1627 epigraph of the edict of the Safawid Shah 'Abbas I to Imam Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani (Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali)
Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 438)

The Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali was succeeded by his son Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali (1634-1671). The successor of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali was his son Imam Shah Khalil Allah (1671 – 1680). During this period, the Nizari Isma'ili da'wah achieved greater success in the South Asia, Persia, and Central Asia.

Imam Shah Khalil Allah was succeeded by his son Imam Shah Nizar (1680 – 1722), and this Imam moved the headquarters of the Imamate from Anjudan to the village of Kahak.

In a famous qasida still recited by Nizari Isma'ilis today, Imam Shah Nizar says about himself:

*In the eyes of the people I am only a person
by the name of Nizar, but in reality I am the
one who sees everything in the world of
reality.*

*While I am present, the people with wisdom
and intellect do not take advantage of my
presence, and once I leave this world they
make my tomb a sanctuary for the
fulfillment of their wishes.*

Imam Shah Nizar II,
(Har Chand Ke Man, Listen on [Youtube](#))

Eighteenth Century: Nizari Isma'ili Imams' Emergence from Obscurity

Imam Shah Nizar was succeeded by his son Imam Sayyid 'Ali (1722 – 1754) when the Safawid dynasty came to an end. Imam Sayyid 'Ali was in turn succeeded by his son Imam Hasan 'Ali (1754 - 1759).

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah took the step of moving to Kirman. This was so that Khoja Isma'ili pilgrims

travelling from India could be safer and have easier access to the Imam. Many Khoja Isma'ilis would die in the journey from India to Persia due to being attacked by plunderers.

Towards the end of Nadir Shah's reign (1148–1160/1736–1747), Imam Hasan 'Ali moved to Shahr-i Babak in Kirman, situated about 180 kilometres southwest of the city of Kirman, between Rafsanjan and Sirjan. This decision



The tombstone of Imam Shah Nizar II (d. 1722), Kahak
(Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 458)

was apparently mainly motivated by the Imam's concern for the safety of the Khoja pilgrims coming to Persia and the proper flow of the tithes from India to his treasury. In the chaotic conditions of Persia after the downfall of the Safawids, the Khojas who regularly travelled to the Anjudan and Mahallat areas to visit their imam and remit to him their religious dues were often plundered and killed between Na'in and Yazd by the Bakhtiyari tribesmen, in addition to suffering extortion on the route by various officials. Consequently, the Imam decided to move to Shahr-i Babak in southeastern Persia, a location closer to the Persian Gulf ports and the pilgrimage route of his Indian followers.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 459)

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah became prominent in the political affairs of Kirman.

However, the Imam was killed when Karim Khan Zand annexed Persia.

He was, indeed, the first Imam of his line to emerge from concealment and obscurity. He became actively involved in the affairs of Kirman, and was treated with respect by the Afsharid Shahrukh who ruled Kirman province from the time of Nadir Shah's murder in 1160/1747 until he himself was killed in 1172/1758–1759, when Kirman was annexed to the territories of Karim Khan Zand, the founder of another short-lived dynasty in Persia.

(Daftary, The Ismailis, 459)

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah was in turn succeeded by Imam Qasim 'Ali, who was in turn succeeded by Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali (d. 1792) – known also as Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan Kahaki. Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali was appointed the governor of Kirman during the Zand period (1750-1794). He was succeeded by his son Imam Shah Khalil Allah (1792 – 1817).

Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Aga Khans



“...the Qajar monarch appointed the imam as governor of Qumm and bestowed on him the honorific title (laqab) of Agha Khan (less commonly but more correctly transcribed as Aqa Khan), meaning lord and master. Henceforth, Hasan 'Ali Shah became generally known as Agha Khan Mahallati, because of his royal title and the family's deep roots in the Mahallat area. The title of Agha Khan remained hereditary amongst his successors, the Nizari Imams of modern times.”

(Farhad Daftary)

Imam Shah Khalil Allah moved from Kirman to Yazd – also in order to be closer to the Khoja Isma'ili pilgrims who made dangerous journeys to see the Nizari Isma'ili Imams. The local Twelver Shi'i 'ulama' were extremely jealous of the Imam

because of his popularity and the reverence shown by his Nizari Isma'ili murids. In 1817, a mob led by a Twelver Shi'i mullah stormed the Imam's home, murdering the Imam and several Nizari Isma'ilis.

It was at Yazd that two years later, in 1232/1817, the Nizari imam became a victim of the intrigues of the Ithna 'ashari authorities and lost his life in the course of a dispute between some of his followers and the local shopkeepers. The Nizaris involved, who had used violence to settle their differences with the shopkeepers in the market place, took refuge in Shah Khalil Allah's house and refused to emerge. A certain Mulla Husayn Yazdi, who as a Twelver resented the spreading influence of the Nizaris, collected a mob and attacked the imam's house. In the ensuing uproar Shah Khalil Allah and several of his followers, including a Khoja, were murdered, and the imam's house was plundered.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 463)

Imam Khalil Allah was succeeded by his thirteen year-old son, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah. After the Imam's death, the family was left unprovided for and nearly destitute. The late Imam's wife, Bibi Pir Sarkar Mata Salamat went to the Qajar court, demanding justice for the new Imam and his family. The pleas were successful: Fateh 'Ali Shah Qajar brought the murderers to justice, bestowed the title of "Aga Khan" on Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, gave one of his daughters in marriage to the Imam, and granted the Imam land and appointed him as the governor of Qumm in 1835.

1835-1844 – THE REVOLT OF IMAM HASAN 'ALI SHAH AGA KHAN I

After the death of Fateh Ali Shah and the accession of Muhammad Shah Qajar, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was made governor of Kirman. He returned to Kirman and restored law and order to the area using his personal military, fighting off Baluchi and Afghan rebels and raiders on behalf of the Qajars. He was expecting to receive compensation for his services from the new Shah, Muhammad Shah Qajar, but this was never granted. This mistreatment of the Imam was due to Qajar Court politics instigated by one Hajji Mirza Aqasi. This Qajar minister held a grudge against the Imam because Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah refused to marry his daughter (of royal blood) to a lowborn son of Aqasi's friend – a request that was a grave insult to the Imam. Mirza Aqasi's anger resulted in the Imam being deposed as governor of Kirman in 1837 and never compensated for his services. After an unsuccessful rebellion against the more powerful Qajar forces, for which Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah was held captive in Kirman and Tehran, the Imam was eventually pardoned and allowed to retire in Mahallat.

After again opposing the Qajars and fighting several minor battles, the Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, his brother and their party found themselves greatly outnumbered and escaped to Qandahar in Afghanistan. Here the Imam formed an alliance with the British, with whom he likely had prior contact. In 1842, when the British decided to retreat from Afghanistan, their entire British-Indian garrison was killed by

Muhammad Akbar Khan's forces. The Imam's forces then assisted in the evacuation of the British forces from Qandahar. The Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party then went to Sind where they helped defend the British from night attacks. The Imam also intervened diplomatically with the Baluchi chiefs to avoid further fighting with the British. The Imam and his family also survived a Baluchi raid where their possessions were plundered.

1848 – IMAM HASAN 'ALI SHAH SETTLES IN BOMBAY

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party eventually settled in Bombay, to the great joy of the Khoja Isma'ili Muslims, where he was joined by family members and attendants who migrated from Persia. The Imam personally performed religious ceremonies at the Bombay jamatkhana where he held darbar:

Agha Khan I was the first imam of his line to set foot in India and his presence there was greatly welcomed by the Nizari Khojas who flocked enthusiastically to his side to pay their homage and receive his blessings... Agha Khan I attended the jamatkhana in Bombay on special religious occasions, and led the public prayers of the Khojas there. Every Saturday when in Bombay, he also held durbar (Persian, darbar), giving audience to his followers who received his blessings.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 474)

Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III's Services to the Muslim World



“You should not forget what I have always considered the most beautiful of all Muslim prayers namely, that Allah Almighty in His infinite mercy may forgive the sins of all Muslims.” (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III)

The settlement of the Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his family in India marked the end of the persecution of the Nizari Ismaili Imamate. It is also the time when Isma'ili communities around the world began to come out of taqiyyah, as they would do over the next century. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah explains how this period marked the end of the heavy persecution and hostility against the Nizari Isma'ili Imams.

However, in 1848 Muhammad Shah's reign came to an end, and my grandfather settled peaceably in Bombay and there established his durkhana

or headquarters. Not only was this a wise and happy personal decision, but it had an admirable effect on the religious and communal life of the whole Ismaili world. It was as if the heavy load of persecution and fanatical hostility, which they had had to bear for so long, was lifted. Deputations came to Bombay from places as remote as Kashgar, Bokhara, all parts of Iran, Syria, the Yemen, the African coast and the then narrowly settled hinterland behind it.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan – Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

1881-1884 – IMAMAT OF IMAM 'AGA 'ALI SHAH AGA KHAN II



Imam Hasan Ali Shah Aga Khan I next to Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II when he was the Pir.

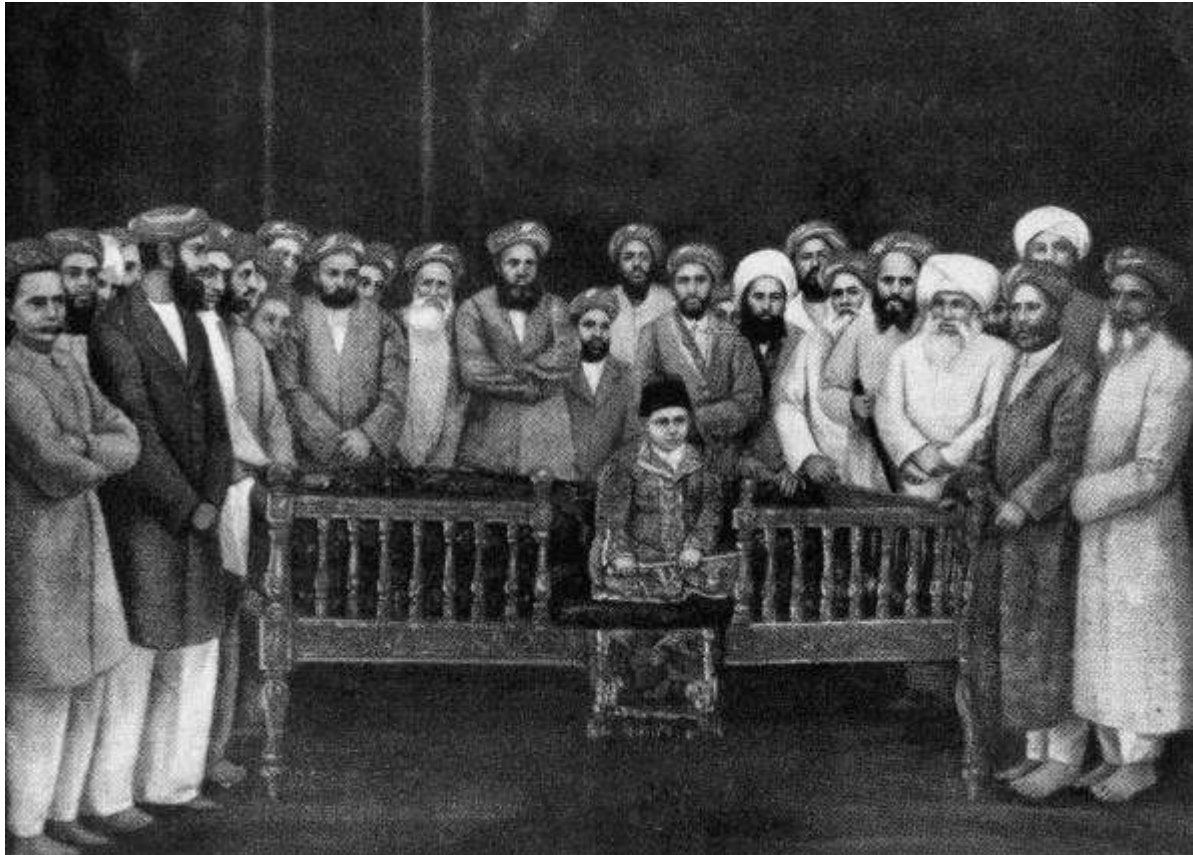
Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was succeeded by his son Imam 'Aga 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885), who also served as the pir during his father's lifetime. As the divinely-ordained successors and spiritual inheritors of the Prophet Muhammad, the Nizari Isma'ili Imams have always been concerned for the welfare of all Muslims. But much of their time in the past centuries was spent trying to ensure their own survival and security and spiritual well-being of the Isma'ili Muslims through the heavy persecution, slaughters and massacres described above. Beginning with the Imamatus of 'Aga Ali Shah, the Nizari Isma'ili Imams – no longer persecuted for their faith – were able to render immense services to

Muslims of all persuasions and interpretations, beginning with the Muslims of India.

The growing prosperity of the Nizari Khoja community and his own policies earned Agha Khan II prestige among the Muslim population of India. He was elected president of a body called the Muhammadan National Association. In that position, which he held until his death, Agha Khan II promoted educational and philanthropic projects for the benefit of all Indian Muslims.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 477)

1885 – ACCESSION OF IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH AGA KHAN III



The 7-year-old Agha Khan III (1877 – 1957) at his enthronement ceremony as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims in Bombay, 1st September 1885. He is surrounded by community elders and seated on the oblong wooden throne of imamate. (Photo by Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Imam Aga 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II was succeeded by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, who became the new Imam at the tender age of 7 years. Upon his installation, many of the members of the Community were distraught and concerned about the Imam being a small boy. To comfort his murids and remind them of his spiritual authority, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah proclaimed in his first address:

O Jamats, do not consider me small. I am the descendant of the Prophet and my grandfather is Hazrat 'Amirul-Mu'minin (Hazrat 'Ali) and my grandmother is Khatun-i-Jannat (Lady of Paradise) Hazrat Bibi Fatima. I am the Light (nur) of

both Hazrat 'Ali and the Holy Prophet (Muhammad). Though young in age, I am exalted.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Bombay, September 1, 1899, in Steinberg, *Ismaili Modern*, 211)

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah lived an illustrious life and his countless accomplishments exceed all enumeration. However, we will focus on how this Imam, [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#) of Muhammad and 'Ali, rendered unprecedented services for the advocacy, security and well-being of ALL Muslims worldwide. This began when the Imam advocated for and represented the interests of the Indian Muslims before the British.

Meanwhile, [the Aga Khan had increasingly concerned himself with the affairs of the Muslim community of India, beyond the immediate interests of his own followers. As a result, he gained much popularity amongst the Indian Muslims and their spokesmen.](#) He participated actively in the first All-India Muslim Educational Conference, held at Bombay in 1903, and became the president of the second one, held at Delhi the following year. In 1906, he headed the Muslim delegation that met Lord Minto at Simla, asking the Viceroy to regard the Indian Muslims not as a minority but as a nation within a nation whose members deserved adequate representation on both local and legislative councils of the land. [In 1907, he joined in the founding of the All-India Muslim League, and served as the permanent president of that body until he resigned from the position in 1912. Aga Khan III campaigned most energetically for various educational projects, for Khojas and other Indian Muslims. He played a leading part in the elevation of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh to university status, a measure that came about in 1912.](#)

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 482)

1907-1909 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH ADVOCATES FOR RIGHTS OF INDIAN MUSLIMS

During years of 1907-09, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah spared no effort to make sure that the Muslims of India received separate electorates to ensure proper and fair representation for the Indian Muslim minority.

In these two years he fought a running battle with the British Government and especially with John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, which was at times open warfare and at times guerilla action. With the dose support of Sayyid Ameer Ali, [he nursed British public opinion by writing letters to The Times, using his contacts and friendships to influence men who were making decisions, organizing and using the platform of the London Muslim League to publicize his point of view, goading the All India Muslim League to persist in putting pressure on the Viceroy and the Government of India, writing articles in British journals, and employing all ways and means within his reach to finally make the British Government and Parliament concede separate electorates to the Muslims of India.](#) Had the attempt failed later Indian history would probably have been different: some historians are prepared to argue that this

was the first step which led, by stages, to the creation of Pakistan thirty-eight years later.

(Khursheed Kamal Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, Introduction, 12-13)

1910 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH LEADS ALL-INDIA MUSLIM LEAGUE AND CAMPAIGNS FOR ALIGARH UNIVERSITY

In the next year, 1910, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah delivered the first address of the All-India Muslim League, for which he was elected as the first President. Following this, the Imam went door to door among the houses of India to raise funds for the creation of Aligarh University.

The year 1910 was a very busy one for the Aga Khan. In January he gave the inaugural address at the annual session of the All India Muslim League in Delhi, which even today makes profitable reading. Later he spent several months in an exhausting tour of the subcontinent, taking the case for the creation of a Muslim university at Aligarh to the common man and collecting a very large sum of money for the purpose. The campaign was arduous, long and far-stretching; even Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan had not travelled so extensively in his day on behalf of the MAO College. For the first time the issue of Muslim education was brought to the doorstep of virtually every middle-class home.

(Khursheed Kamal Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, Introduction, 13)

1914 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH URGES TURKEY TO STAY NEUTRAL IN WORLD WAR I

When the First World War broke out, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah wisely supported the British Allies and urged the Ottoman Empire to stay out of the fighting, reminding them that going to war on the side of the Germans did not serve Ottoman or Muslim interests. The Imam himself recounted this in his Memoirs:

As a Muslim I was most anxious that Turkey should be spared the trials and the horrors of renewed war, not against a ramshackle alliance of small Balkan states, but against the mighty combination of some of the greatest industrial and military nations in the world. The Turks had but lately emerged from their earlier ordeal; they were in desperate need of a breathing space; it seemed impossible that they could enter a new struggle and not face almost illimitable catastrophe.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 120)

1916 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH SURVIVES ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT BY GERMAN AGENTS

In 1916, the German agents assassinated the Imam's cousin, Aga Farrokh Shah. At this time, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was ill and seeking medical help in Switzerland. The German Secret Service attempted to kill the Imam using a bomb and then poisoning his coffee.

In the same year, the Aga Khan lost a cousin in the pursuit of his pro-British policies during the war. He had despatched Aqa Farrukh Shah, the son of Aqa Akbar Shah (d. 1322/1904), on a pro-Allies political mission to the tribesmen and the Nizaris of Kirman, where he was murdered at the instigation of German agents. In 1917, the German agents evidently made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Aga Khan himself in Switzerland.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 482)

The German Secret Service did not believe that I was really ill. They thought, however, that their country's cause would be well served were I put out of the way for good. They arranged to have a bomb thrown at me; and to make the operation certain of success they also arranged, with typical German thoroughness, to have my breakfast coffee poisoned. The bomb did not go off; I did not drink the coffee.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 217)

*1919-1923 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH INTERVENES WITH BRITISH FOR JUST
TREATMENT OF TURKEY*

In the aftermath of World War I, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah successfully intervened on behalf of Turkey and Muslims in general and caused the British to abandon an unfair treaty which treated the former Ottoman Empire with extreme unfairness.

The next four years were devoted to the twin problems of the future of Turkey and the khilafat. This was a repeat performance of what he had faced and achieved in 1907-9. His love of Islam was the connecting link. The future of Muslim India was at stake when the Morley-Minto reforms were being enacted into law. Now, after the war, it was the fortunes of Turkey which caused him untold anxiety and compelled him to fight another battle with the British Government. Once again with the support of Sayyid Ameer Ali, he mounted a two-pronged campaign. First, maximum pressure was put on Whitehall to treat Turkey justly in the post-war peace settlement and not to dismember its territories. All arguments from history, ethics, expediency and politics were marshalled. By turns he beseeched, warned and threatened the British Government. He used his friendship with Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere to turn the powerful voices (which soon grew into growls) of The Times, the Evening Standard and other newspapers against the official policy on Turkey... The humiliating and cruel Treaty of Sevres was annulled and replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne. The Aga Khan went to Lausanne in person in July 1923 to witness this triumph.

(Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings*,
Introduction, 14)

1923 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH APPEALS TO SAVE THE SUNNI OTTOMAN CALIPHATE

Having ensured that Turkey be treated fairly in the aftermath of the first World War, **the forty-eight Shi'i Isma'ili Imam took an unprecedented step and**

campaigned for the safety of the Sunni Ottoman Caliphate. Only two decades earlier, the same Ottoman Caliphate had been persecuting the Nizari Isma'ilis of Syria and now the Isma'ili Imam came to their rescue. This action was motivated by nothing else than the Isma'ili Imam's concern and affection for Islam and Muslims.



Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah with his partner Seyyed Ameer Ali in 1910

In spite of the fact that both he [Aga Khan III] and Ameer Ali were Shia by faith and therefore unable to acknowledge the religious status of the khilafat, the two statesmen, in an act of unmatched courage and rare foresight, wrote a long letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Ismet Pasha (later Iniiiii), begging him in the name of the entire Muslim world, Shia and Sunni, and for the sake of the future of Islam, to keep the khilafat intact and thus allow Turkey to continue to command the spiritual esteem and allegiance of the world of Islam, and give every Muslim a centre to which he could look with confidence and affection.

(Khursheed Kamal Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, Introduction, 14)

It is surprising if not shocking that the hereditary Isma'ili Imam exerted great energy and effort in trying to convince Turkey to not abolish the Ottoman Caliphate and depose the Sunni Caliph. In a 1923 Letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Syed Ameer Ali (a Twelver Shi'i) represented all Sunni Muslims and argued for the survival of the Sunni Caliphate:

What we respectfully urge is that the religious headship of the Sunni world should be maintained intact in accordance with the shariyyet. In our opinion, any diminution in the prestige of the Caliph or the elimination of the Caliphate as a religious factor from the Turkish body politic would mean the disintegration of Islam and its practical disappearance as a moral force in the world... In our opinion the Caliph-Imam symbolizes the unity of the Sunni Communion...and on this we believe, is the Ijmaa-i-Ummat that the Caliph, the vicegerent of the Prophet, is the Imam of the Sunni congregations, and that between him and the general body of worshippers, there is a nexus which knits together the Ahl-i Sunnat.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III and Sayyed Ameer Ali, ("Appeal to Turkey to Retain the Khilafat" in K. K. Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, 771)

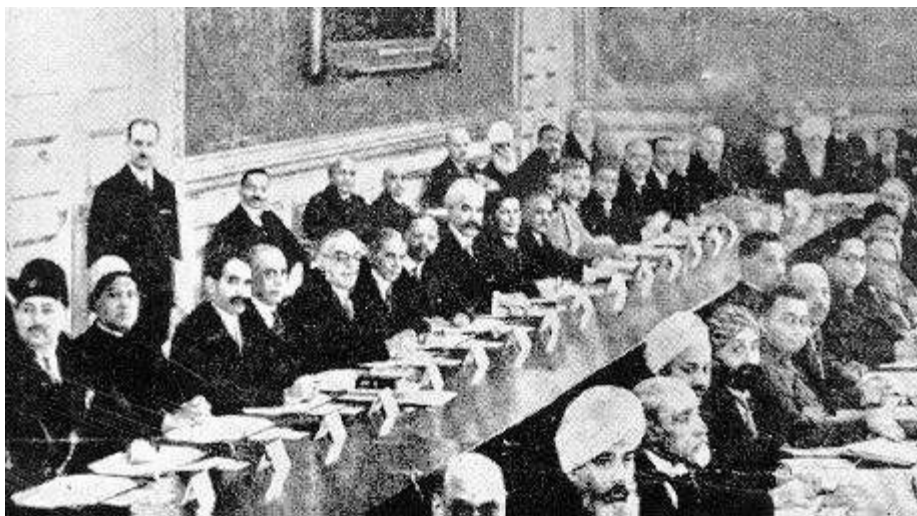
Thus, at a time when the Shi'i Ismaili Imam enjoyed security and global prominence and the Sunni Caliphate was on the verge of extinction, the Isma'ili Imam fought for the continuation and survival of this most important and sacred institution of Sunni Islam. **This is incredibly striking given that the Isma'ili Imams and their followers had been persecuted, slaughtered, massacred and targeted for genocide by the Umayyad, 'Abbasid, and Ottoman Caliphs since the death of the Prophet Muhammad. But the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah put aside all of these legitimate grievances over the past injustices and instead defended and upheld the Caliphate of Sunni Islam.** In another letter to the London Times, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah explained how it was his pure love for Islam and the unity of Muslims that motivated his appeal to maintain the Sunni Caliphate:

This desire is in no sense inconsistent with another life-long belief as one who, while belonging to the Ismailiah school of Islam, yet follows the tradition of Ali and Hassan, his eldest – viz., that the essential unity of Islam is of far greater importance than any sectarian differences. For this reason I have advocated the establishment of a strong Caliphate above parties and politics.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
("Appeal to Turkey to Retain the Khilafat" in K. K. Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, 773)

*1928-1934: IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH LEADS INDIAN MUSLIM INDEPENDENCE
MOVEMENT*

A decade later, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah organized and mobilized the Indian Muslims, resulting in the creation of the All-India Muslim Conference where the Imam delivered the first address. This would lead to the independence movement for both India and Pakistan. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah led the Muslim delegation, accompanied by Muhammad Ali Jinnah who hailed from an Isma'ili family, to the Round Table Conferences that took place in London in the 1930 and 1931.



Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Jinnah at the Round Table Conference 1931

In 1928 he presided over the All-India Muslim Conference held at Delhi, which was to formulate Muslim views on how independence should evolve for India. Under his guidance, the assembly demanded guaranteed rights for Indian Muslims in the framework of a federal and self-governing India. In 1930, he led the Muslim delegation to the first Round Table Conference that was convened in London to consider the future of India. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who came from a Khoja family and later became the founder of the state of Pakistan, was amongst the other members of this Muslim delegation. In the course of the second Round Table Conference, held in London in 1931, Aga Khan III had lengthy discussion sessions with Mahatma Gandhi who was then the sole representative of the Congress Party. These conferences, lasting until 1934, marked the climax of the Aga Khan's involvement in Indian politics.

(Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 482)



Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Gandhi outside the Ritz Hotel

But even more important than these conclaves were the private meetings and negotiations in which the principal issues were meticulously debated. The crucial talks took place between the Aga Khan (aided by Sir Muhammad Shafi, M. Jinnah, Zafrullah Khan and Dr Shafa'at Ahmad Khan) and M. K. Gandhi (accompanied by Mrs Sarojini Naidu) in the Aga Khan's suite in the Ritz Hotel.

(Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings*, Introduction, 16)

1937 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS



Since 1932, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah served as India's Delegate at the Assembly of the League of Nations. When Afghanistan joined the League of Nations, the Imam boldly proclaimed: "India is proud of her Eastern culture, Eastern traditions, Eastern language, Eastern civilisation and with Afghanistan, eighty million Muslims of India are proud, I am proud to belong to the Glorious Brotherhood of Islam." **On September 13, 1937, the forty-eight hereditary Imam of the Isma'ili Muslims – whose pure ancestors along with their followers endured centuries of mass persecution – was unanimously elected as the President of the League of Nations. This event marked an unprecedented moment in human history where the Imam of the time literally presided over the Nations of the earth.** It was also a public triumph for all Muslims when a Muslim and a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad was globally recognized.

One of the Muslim delegates of the League, Shaykh Mushir Hosain, provides the below eyewitness account of the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's presence in the League of Nations:

The Hall was full with peoples of different nationalities professing different religions. The members of the League itself belonged to over fifty different nationalities. They were all educated, talented men representing their respective Governments. But none was more cultured or enlightened than His Highness the Aga Khan who had assimilated all that was best in the Eastern as well as in the Western culture. He, indeed, was most cultured of them all. In the presence of so many learned persons who claimed to represent nations scattered all over the world stood up a man – a responsible, thoroughly educated, well-experienced, well-travelled, well-polished man, a gentleman, a nobleman, respected by one and all, – and he proclaimed at the top of his voice that he was proud to belong to the Glorious Brotherhood of Islam. The bold announcement was thrilling. The occasion when it was made was thrilling. The Aga Khan's words raised the prestige of Islam in an assembly which was almost prejudiced against it. I was overjoyed. I am a man hard to bend before anybody – not even "before a king". But I would gladly bow before a man who spoke from his heart those thrilling words.



In his October 6, 1937 Address to the League of Nations, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's summarized his vision and concern for the well-being and unity of humankind:

Indeed, all the problems that fall to the League of Nations may be ultimately reduced to one – that of man, and the dignity of man. It is in that sense that the work of the League assumes its true significance and acquires its permanent value. The tribulations of one people are the tribulations of all. That which weakens one weakens all. That which is a gain to one is surely a gain to all. This is no empty ideal. It is a veritable compass to guide aright the efforts of statesmen in every country and of all men of good will who, desiring the good of their own people, desire the good of the whole world.

>Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
([Adjournment Speech](#) – “The Task Before the League of Nations”, Geneva, October 6, 1937)

*1954 – PLATINUM JUBILEE: IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH PRAYS FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF
ALL MUSLIMS*



In Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's Platinum Jubilee Address made on February 3, 1954 in Karachi, he told the gathering of Isma'ili Muslims to be firm in the tenets of the Isma'ili interpretation of Islam while remembering to implore God to forgive the sins of all Muslims.

From the religious point of view, though you [Ismailis] must firmly stick to the tenets of your Faith, yet, you should not forget what I have always considered the most beautiful of all Muslim prayers namely, that Allah Almighty in His infinite mercy may forgive the sins of all Muslims.

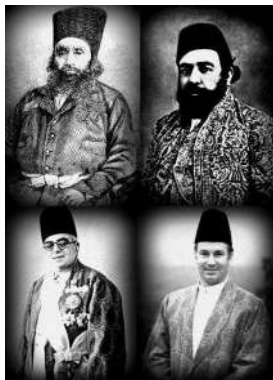
Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Platinum Jubilee Address, Karachi, February 4, 1954)

1955 – IMAM SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH PROCLAIMS THE “FINAL RECONCILIATION BETWEEN SHIA AND SUNNI DOCTRINES”

The Imami Ismailis maintain that the position of the ‘Ulu’l-amr Menkom never dies out and this succession goes on till the Day of Judgement on Earth. For this reason Ismailis celebrate the exceptionally long Imamatus as they would celebrate every ascension to the spiritual throne of the Imamatus in each century. In the present Imamatus, the final reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni doctrines has been publicly proclaimed by myself on exactly the same lines as Hazrat Ali did at the death of the Prophet and during the first thirty years after that. The political and worldly Khalifat was accepted by Hazrat Ali in favour of the three first Khalifs voluntarily and with goodwill for the protection of the interests of the Muslims throughout the world. We Ismailis now in the same spirit [as Hazrat Ali had done] accept the Khalifat of the first Khalifs and such other Khalifs as during the last thirteen centuries helped the cause of Islam, politically, socially and from a worldly point of view. On the other hand, the Spiritual Imamatus remained with Hazrat Ali, and remains with his direct descendants always alive till the Day of Judgement. That a spiritual succession to the Imamatus makes the Imam the ‘Ulu’l-amr Menkom always according to the Qur’an and though he has his moral claim to the Khalifat as well, always he can, like Hazrat Ali himself owing to the conditions of the world, accept and support such worldly authorities as the Imam believes help the cause of Islam. Thus a final reconciliation without upsetting either Sunni or Shia doctrine has been proclaimed always by me as the faith of all the Ismailis.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
("The Final Reconciliation between Sunni and Shia Doctrines" in K. K. Aziz, Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1416, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

Twentieth Century – Present – “From a Single Soul” – The Pluralist Vision of Imam Aga Khan IV



I know of no more beautiful expression about the unity of our human race, born indeed from a single soul.” (Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV)

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III passed away on July 11, 1957 and was succeeded by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary Imam. He is the present and living Imam of the Shi’i Isma’ili Muslims and the living claimant to the hereditary Shi’i Imamat.

1957 – IMAM SHAH KARIM AL-HUSAYNI AGA KHAN IV WORKS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL PEOPLE

The focus of this final section will be on how the present Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni has devoted his Imamat and life to uplifting the quality of life of not only the Isma’ilis but all communities.

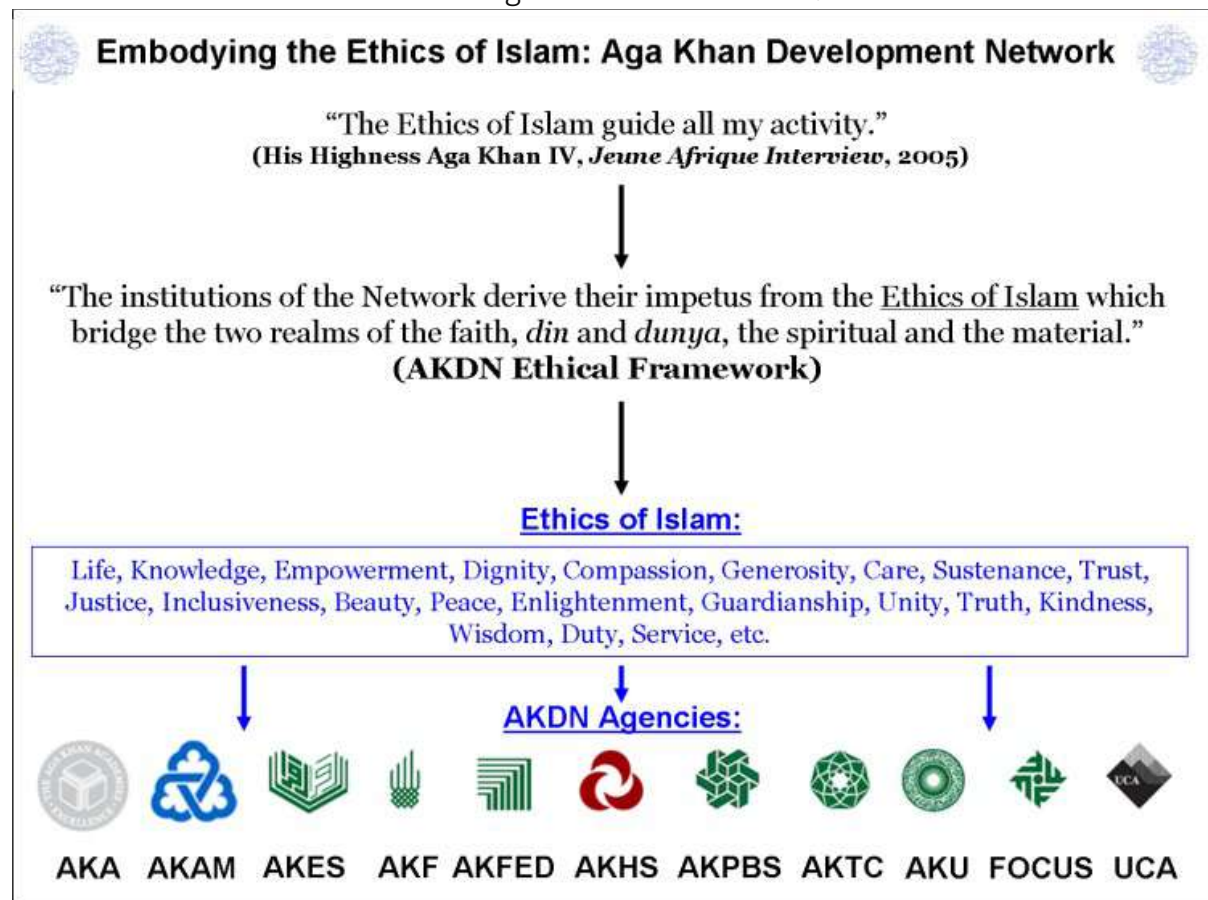
When I assumed the responsibilities of the Imamat in 1957, I was eager — as I still am — to see that the countries where my followers live are sound and stable, that they are countries with clear development horizons, countries where, following my grandfather’s example, I could help to underwrite the integrity of the state and to contribute to improving the quality of life for all communities, not just my own. I hoped to help bridge the gulf between the developed and the developing worlds. This aspiration, I felt, was particularly appropriate to the Imamat because of its commitment to broad social objectives without political connotations, save in its concern for the fundamental freedom of its followers to practise the faith of their choice.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
(Dinner hosted by the Council for Malaysia and Singapore, Singapore – January 9, 1983)

1967 – IMAM ESTABLISHES THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK AS EMBODYING THE ETHICS OF ISLAM

The present Imam established the Aga Khan Development Network in 1967 (initially called the Aga Khan Foundation) to raise the quality of life of all human beings and to manifest the Ethics of Islam through institutional endeavour. The central goal of the AKDN is to uphold the dignity of every human being as the vicegerent of God on earth and to relieve all peoples of suffering. In this respect,

the AKDN is a living manifestation of the vision that Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah articulated as President of the League of Nations in 1937.



The ethics of Islam enjoin all believers, individually or through institutions such as the Ismaili Imamat, to assist the poor, the isolated, and the marginalised to improve their current circumstances and future prospects. Through the Imamat, I have tried to respond to this responsibility by creating a group of private, non-denominational agencies the Aga Khan Development Network – to respond to the needs and potential of people living in some of the poorest parts of the world, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or religion.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(World Mountain Forum UNESCO, Paris, France – June 5, 2000)

IMAM SHAH KARIM AL-HUSAYNI REPRESENTS THE MUSLIM WORLD TO THE PEOPLES OF THE
WEST



We are honouring an exceptional man. We are honouring a great friend of humanity, a courageous visionary, a builder of bridges between religions and society.”

**(His Excellency Dr. Frank Walter Steinmeier, German Foreign Minister,
on presenting the 2006 Tolerance Award of the Evangelical Academy
of Tutzing, Germany – May 20, 2006)**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni has been [widely recognized](#) for his efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material assistance to the Isma‘ilis, who are today spread over 25 countries, and for his vast contributions to human quality of life in various communities worldwide. These include ([courtesy of Ismailimail](#)):

- 28 Title and State Decorations;
- 21 honorary degrees, from universities representing the US Ivy League, Canadian Group of 13, UK’s Russell Group, and others;
- 16 civic honours, representing 9 investitures as Foreign Member to several state academies (for the creation of new knowledge – promoting research and stimulating the enhancement of thought, literature, language and other forms of national culture) and 3 Leadership posts at influential European Institutions to promote diplomacy, culture and development;
- 30 awards spanning domains such as architecture and the built environment, restoration and the revival of culture, education, health, diplomacy and peace, philanthropy, sports, corporate enterprise
- delivered over 70 high profile keynote addresses.



Graphic timeline of awards and honours accorded to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. Click on image to download high resolution PDF from NanoWisdoms. In most of his public addresses, speeches and interviews, the Isma'ili Imam of the time has risen to the defense of all Muslims and called on the Western leaders to gain a better understanding of Muslim world. In one address delivered to the Commonwealth Press Union at Cape Town, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni chastised Western journalists for their irresponsible media treatment of Muslims:

I refer to the superficial and misleading way in which much of the world's media treats the world of Islam. Muslims now constitute nearly a quarter of the world's people. They comprise a majority of the population in some 44 countries and no less than 435 million live in the Commonwealth. And yet, this vast and varied group is often viewed by the rest of the world as a standardised, homogeneous mass. If asked to characterise Islam, many non-Muslims would have little to say, except perhaps that the world of Islam seems to them a distant and different world, a strange and mysterious place, a world which makes them a bit uncomfortable, and perhaps even a bit afraid... Unfortunately, much of what the world thinks about Islam nowadays has been the result of crisis reporting. When terms like Shia and Sunni first entered the world's vocabulary, for example, it was in the emotional context of revolutionary Iran. Similarly, recent press references to the Shari'a, the traditional Islamic system of jurisprudence, are illustrated by its manifestations in Afghanistan. Journalists learn to use these words — but how many of them know what they really mean?

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Commonwealth Press Union Conference Keynote Address, 'The Spirit of the Creative Encounter', Cape Town, October 17, 1996, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

In his 1996 Baccalaureate Address at Brown University, where the Imam was the first Muslim to give such an address, the Imam represented and advocated for the

entire world of Islam and called upon the West to improve its understanding of Islamic history and civilization.

This makes the occasion a very special honour for me. It also carries the considerable, even intimidating responsibility to speak about the place of Islam and of Muslims in the world today, about their hopes and aspirations, and about the challenges that they face. It is also my responsibility, and indeed a pleasure for me, to speak about what might be done, and some things that are being done, to respond to these challenges. My position, since 1957 as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims bears no political mandate, it is an independent one from which I can speak to you openly. Today in the occident, the Muslim world is deeply misunderstood by most. The West knows little about its diversity, about the religion or the principles which unite it, about its brilliant past or its recent trajectory through history... Against this worrying global background it must be made utterly clear that in so far as Islam is concerned, this violence is not a function of the faith itself, as much as the media would have you believe. This is a mis-perception which has become rampant, but which should not be endowed with any validity, nor should it be accepted and given credibility.”

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Brown University Commencement Address, May 26, 1996, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

2014 – IMAM SHAH KARIM AL-HUSAYNI ADDRESSES THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

On February 27, 2014, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni became the first Muslim faith leader to address the Parliament and Senate of Canada. In this historic public address, the hereditary Imam of the Isma‘ili Muslims boldly declared himself as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the rightful authority for the interpretation of Islam, and the only remaining living Imam of the Shi’a Muslims (see this [The Shia Imamat: A Timeline of Major Divisions and Developments](#)).



The Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, is applauded as he arrives to deliver an address in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Thursday, February 27, 2014. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick ORG XMIT: POS2014022714475975

The Ismaili Imamat is a supra-national entity, representing the succession of Imams since the time of the Prophet. But let me clarify something more about the history of that role, in both the Sunni and Shia interpretations of the Muslim faith. The Sunni position is that the Prophet nominated no successor, and that spiritual-moral authority belongs to those who are learned in matters of religious law. As a result, there are many Sunni imams in a given time and place. But others believed that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. From that early division, a host of further distinctions grew up, but the question of rightful leadership remains central. In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada, February 27, 2014, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

Conclusion: Past Persecution to Present Pluralism



The Present Imam embodies the history and memory of the previous Imams and the murids of their times.

“Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed; at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.” (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III)

It is indeed remarkable and immensely moving to see how the Shi‘i Isma‘ili Muslim lineage of hereditary Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet and their devoted followers, have gone from being oppressed, persecuted, hunted down, murdered, slaughtered, and massacred in centuries past, to becoming a modern, progressive, and pluralistic community in the present. The historian Wladimir Ivanow, upon first meeting the Nizari Isma‘ilis of Iran, was simply shocked that the Community still existed.

My learned friends in Europe plainly disbelieved me when I wrote about the [Ismaili] community to them. It appeared to them quite unbelievable that the most brutal persecution, wholesale slaughter, age-long hostility and suppression were unable to annihilate the community. Only later on, however, when my contact with them grew more intimate, was I able to see the reasons for such surprising vitality. It was their quite extraordinary devotion and faithfulness to the tradition of their ancestors, the ungrudging patience with which they suffered all the calamities and misfortunes, cherishing no illusions whatsoever as to what they could expect in life... They with amazing care and devotion kept through ages burning that ‘light’, mentioned in the Koran, which God always protects against all attempts of His enemies to extinguish It.

(Wladimir Ivanow, My First Meeting with the Ismailis in Persia, IIm 3, no. 3 (December 1977): 16–17)

The survival of the Isma'ili Imam and Community was due to their sheer faith and devotion to the truth of the Imam. As Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah notes, the past atrocities and hardships – no matter how brutal – were never able to extinguish the Isma'ili Muslim faith:

Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed; at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan – Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

In one of the great ironies of human history, one must note that great powers who consistently persecuted and tried to wipe the Isma'ili Muslims out of existence are the ones that no longer exist today: the Umayyads, the 'Abbasids, the Saljuqs, the Ayyubids, the Mongols, the Timurids, and the Safawids, are physically no more and only remain in the pages of history books. Meanwhile, the Isma'ili Imams, present and living in the world of today, work tirelessly to ensure the welfare of all Muslims, and uplift quality of life for all peoples of the world. In an interesting turn of fate, the Imams are actually restoring the intellectual and cultural heritage of the past Muslim Caliphates and dynasties once responsible for persecuting them. Indeed, it is the unity of the human race which motives the work of all the Imams and especially present and living Imam, Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV as he explains:

Let me end with a personal thought. As you build your lives, for yourselves and others, you will come to rest upon certain principles. Central to my life has been a verse in the Holy Qur'an which addresses itself to the whole of humanity. It says: 'O' Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a Single Soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women...' I know of no more beautiful expression about the unity of our human race, born indeed from a single soul.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada, February 27, 2014, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

Today, the Isma'ili Imams and the Community have emerged from the veil of taqiyyah and emerged into the light of the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the "End of the World" \(Part 1\)](#). The Imam, in exercising the office of supreme hujjah or pir in addition to the Imam, now enunciates his Imam before the entire world. Every Isma'ili Muslim, to the best of one's ability, must follow suit by being an "ambassador" in the way Prince Sadruddin had described:

I want you to be active ambassadors. [I want you to explain to your Canadian friends, to your neighbors, to the people that you work with, that you live with, the people that entertain you, or that you will be entertaining, what you are, where you come from, about your traditions, about your culture, about your](#)

religion, about the way in which the community functions...Explain the role of the Imam, not only his religious functions but also the economic and social advice that you receive from the Imam and what has happened to the community as a result of its unity in other parts of the world.

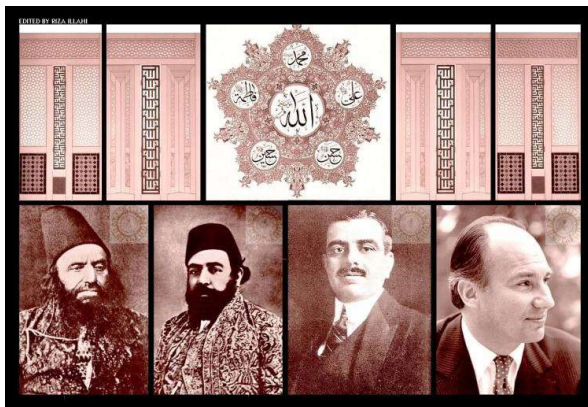
Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan,
(Vancouver, Canada, January 22, 1975)

In a message sent to the Isma'ili Muslims when he was just twelve years old, Prince Sadruddin wrote the following inspiring words:

The future of the Ismaili Faith rests in the hands of the youths of your age and mine. Are we to follow the example of those, who in Egypt, Iran and Sind raised the flag of Ismaili Imams high enough for the world to see its glory? I say, 'Yes'. We should not fail where our ancestors achieved glorious success.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan

Indeed, the Isma'ili Imams will continue to be present and living in the world until the end of time as the fulfillment of God's covenant with humanity to provide His guidance in every age. This is why the present Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV has explained how he is but "a link in a chain" which shall continue in the next Imam and all of the Imams to come:



The Imam is a transitory being, who forms a link between the past and the future. For this reason, ensuring the continuity of the institution and its ability to fulfill its role is what my life is all about.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Translation, Paris Match Interview No. 2907, February 3, 2005. [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

When you inherit an office, which is a life office, you are simply a link in the chain. And you therefore look at life somewhat differently than if you were, I suppose, a professional who moves around and is free to do what he wishes. Now some things are impossible to achieve. I well know that. And if that is the case, I simply have to try and move the issues forward as much as I can. The next Imam will then decide how he wishes to handle the issues. But, it is the continuum which is at the back of my mind. And that's why perhaps my time dimension appears different than it might for other people.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Forbes Global, Cover Story, May 31, 1999. [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

“We come from the Light of God”: Birthday of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni

“The Imām knows from which drop of sperm the Imām after him will come”

“His sperm was kneaded along with his intellect.”

“And we come from the Light of God.”

Imām Ḥasan ‘alā dhikrihi al-salām

December 13 marks the 77th birthday of Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī (Aga Khan IV), the *Ḥaḍir Imām* (Present *Imām*) of the Shī‘ī Ismā‘īlī Muslims. Imām Shāh Karīm is the forty-ninth hereditary *Imām* in direct lineal descent from Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first of the *Imāms* in the Cycle of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Each *Imām*, with respect to his subtle soul, is the bearer or locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the eternal Light (*nūr*) of *Imāmah* – otherwise known as the Universal Intellect (*al-‘aql al-kull*), the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadīyyah*), the Eternal *Imām*, etc. which is the first originated being (*al-mubda‘ al-awwal*) in the metaphysical hierarchy of existence ([The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Alī](#)).

The *Imām* is the Pole (*qutb*) of both the physical world and the spiritual world. The sanctity (*walāyah*) of all saints derives from his *walāyah* and the inner meaning (*ta‘wīl*) of all religions and revelations is preserved by his knowledge (*‘ilm*). The *Imām* provides spiritual and temporal guidance to the believers and his Light inspires and illuminates human souls to achieve spiritual elevation and actualization.

Although Imām Shāh Karīm formally succeeded to the office of the *Imāmat* on July 11, 1957, the Light (*nūr*) of *Imāmat* is something that all the *Imāms* carry at birth – although at this time their formal status as *Imāms* is not known publicly.



It must be remembered that the reality which is described as the Light of *Imāmat* is not a material entity which must be restricted to a single individual, but rather, it can be manifest in several generations at the same time. From a spiritual standpoint, the *Imāms* are born as *Imāms* and are always *Imāms*; they are all bearers of the Light since birth and even before that. The twenty-third Nizārī

Ismā'īlī Imām Ḥasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salām makes this clearly evident in his Blessed Epistles (*fusūl-i mubārak*):

The essential nature of the *Imām* will never change, even when he is a drop of sperm in the loins of his father, or a fetus in the womb of his mother...

The *Imāms*, both outwardly and inwardly, both exoterically and esoterically, issue from the pure line and loins of the *Imām*, one after another. The *Imām* is perfect when still in the form of sperm in the loins of his father and the pure womb of his mother. An *Imām* is always an *Imām* and always perfect.

Otherwise, why should he say, 'The *Imām* knows from which drop of sperm the *Imām* after him will come?' If his being in the form of a drop of sperm or adult were not the same, he would not have said: 'His sperm was kneaded along with his intellect.' Their status looks different according to the way that our eyes perceive them... But once you come to the realization that that drop of sperm in the loins of his father is but one and the same Light, 'a Light that transmigrates from loins to loins,' and even though the mother's womb into which this Light enters may be perceived by you as imperfect, you may still affirm these words: 'And we come from the Light of God.' For can the Light of God be affected by anything? Can the Light of God be dimmed by any cause or circumstance? It is nonsensical to maintain otherwise my friend. Or can this intellectual sperm be more perfect when it becomes a mature person? Or can anything be hidden from the Light of God, that at some time he (the *Imām*) is cognizant of a truth and another time incognizant, or that some of them know and others do not? This matter of the perfection of *Imāmat* is not what some people have supposed."

Imām Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihi al-salām,
(Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Rawda-yi Taslīm*, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, 125)

Thus, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Husayni has been the bearer of the Light (*nūr*) of *Imāmat* since his birth on December 13, 1936 and even as an infant (as in the below picture):



We invite our readers to read further about the institution of *Imāmat*, the history of the succession of the Ismā'īlī *Imāms*, the theology and metaphysics of the Light

(*nūr*) of *Imāmat*, and related issues in the article [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#).

World of Faith: The Imam's Da'is and the Ismaili Da'wah

Listen to the advice of a *Da'i*,
Don't be a follower of your analogy and opinion.
Every *zahir* you see cannot be without a *batin*.
Listen to the call of the *Da'wah* from an authorized *Da'i*.
If you listen to the advice of a *Da'i*,
You will become the accepted one.
You will become alive and your heart will be enlightened.

Sayyidna Nizari Quhistani,
(tr. Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, 106-107)

If the Imam of the Time were to ask you: 'Do you know what an Ismaili *Da'i* is?' would you think of the quick-witted and devoted Shirazi simultaneously debating two Sunni scholars in a hostile environment? Would you think of Sijistani, Kirmani, and Nasir-i Khusraw who merged religion and philosophy to present the esoteric truths of Ismaili Islam? Would you think of daring, lion-hearted Hasan-i-Sabbah, who established an Ismaili fortress state to protect the Imam and his murids? Would you think of Razi, who debated against a philosopher about the Prophethood of Muhammad? Would you think of the strong-willed and erudite Naysaburi scolding his fellow *da'is* who misused their position for political gain? The present article is an exploration of the spiritual roles, intellectual contributions, and history of the Ismaili *Da'is*, who have been the lifeblood of the Ismaili community for over a thousand years. The article consists of the following sections:

1. *God's Da'wah (Summons) in the Qur'an*
2. *The Ismaili Da'wah and the Ranks (Hudud) of the Da'is*
3. *The World of Faith and the Physical World: Din and Dunya*
4. *The Qualifications of the Ismaili Da'i*
5. The Ismaili Da'is through History
6. The Ismaili Da'is in the Present
7. *From Ismaili Du'a' to Ismaili Da'wah*

1. God's *Da'wah* (Summons) in the Qur'an

The word *da'i* (*dā'ī*) means "caller", "summoner", or "inviter" [not "missionary"] and comes from the Arabic verb *da'ā*, which means "to summon", "to invite", "to call", "to call upon", etc. The original name of the Shia Ismaili path (*tariqah*) of Islam in the eighth and ninth century was *Da'wat al-Haqq* (Summons of Truth) and *al-Da'wah al-Hadiyya* (Rightly-Guided Summons). The *da'wah* here refers to the act of inviting people to the recognition of the [Beyond Personalist Theism and Modern Atheism](#) through the guidance and recognition of the Imam of the Time.

In fact, the Ismailis did not call their religion 'Ismailism'. This was a name given to them by the early heresiographers, notable al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi. They referred to themselves simply as the Faith of Truth (*din al-haqq*) or the Summons to the Truth (*da'wat al-haqq*).

Shafique N. Virani, (*The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 72)

The Qur'an refers to the concept of God's *Da'wah* (Summons, Calling, Invitation) on numerous occasions. God "summons" humankind to Himself: "*And God summons to the Abode of Peace and leads whom He wills on the Straight Path*" (Qur'an 10:25). On God's behalf, the Prophets "call" people to Divine guidance and Prophet Muhammad is instructed to "*invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful discourse*" (Qur'an 16:125). In this context, the Qur'an (33:36) refers to the Prophet as a *Dā'ī* (inviter) to God by His permission and urges believers to "respond" when the Prophet summons (*da'ā*) them to what gives spiritual life (Qur'an 8:24). According to the Qur'an, God will issue a "summons" on the Day of Judgment and this Summons of God will reach human beings through the Imam of the Time.

And among His Signs is this: the heaven and earth stand by His Command: then when He calls you, by a single summons (*da'wah*), lo! You will emerge from the earth.

Holy Quran 30:25

On the Day when We will summon (*nada'u*) all people through their Imam.

Holy Qur'an 17:71

O ye who believe! Respond (*istajibu*) to God and His Messenger when he summons you to that which gives you life.

Holy Qur'an 8:24

The Summons (*Da'wah*) of God is specifically connected to the Imamatus. Thus, in every period of human history, the essential role of the Imam is to invite and summon all human beings to the recognition of the absolute oneness of God through [Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#) guidance of the Straight Path. This mandate of the Ismaili Imam is expressed in the Arabic inscription found on a Fatimid Coin which reads:

The Imam Ma'add [al-Mu'izz] summons to the *tawhid* of God, the Absolute.

2. The Ismaili *Da'wah* and the Ranks (*Hudud*) of the *Da'is*

Our lord the Commander of the Faithful (Imam 'Ali) said: "*Da'is* in religion distinguish between doubt and certainty." Distinguishing between doubt and certainty is to separate truth from falsehood...The *da'i* must know the difference between truth and falsehood, so he can distinguish one from the other.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi
(*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 40)

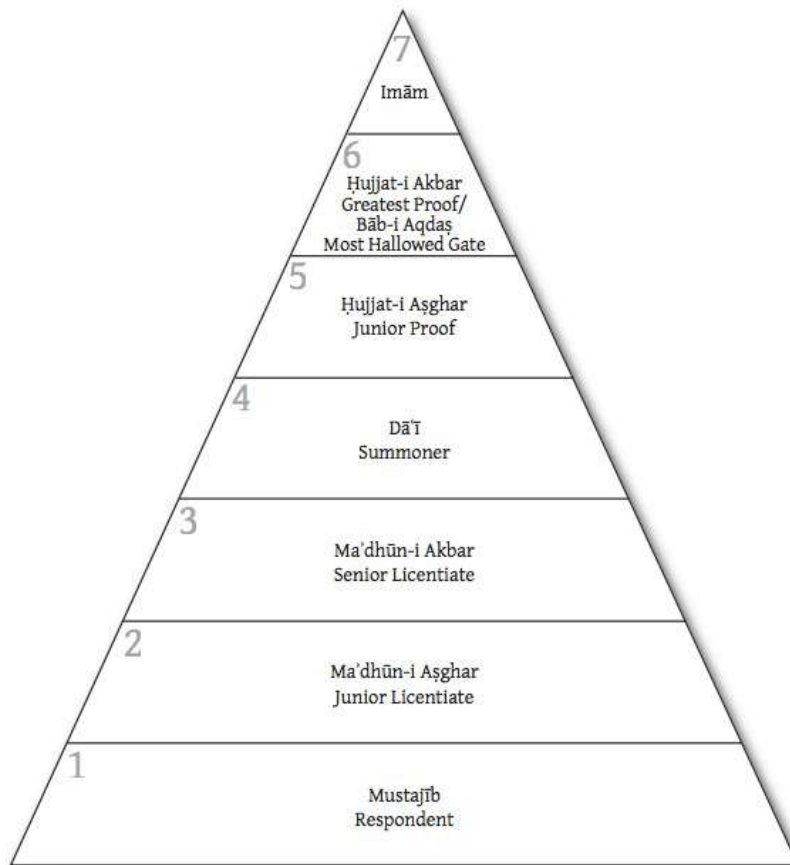


Image from a post-Alamut Nizari Ismaili Treatise, rendered by Shafique N. Virani in *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages* (2007).

Throughout history, individuals have “responded” to the Imam’s “Summons” (*Da’wah*) to the recognition of God – by entering into a [Why Ismaili Jamatkhanas are only open to Ismailis for prayers](#) with the Imam. As part of this covenant, the Imam guides them spiritually toward the gnosis of God in this world and the next world and also helps safeguard their material quality of life. Those who give their *bay’ah* to the Imam become a part of the Imam’s Summons, becoming his spiritual children, and also play their own part in calling and inviting others to the recognition of the Imam. **In the pre-modern period of Ismaili history, the Imam’s Summons was executed through a formal esoteric teaching institution called the “Ismaili *Da’wah*”.** Those Ismailis who were of sufficient spiritual, moral, and intellectual stature became *da’is* (“summoners”) and instructed other Ismailis in knowledge and practice on behalf of the Imam of the Time.

The Ismaili *Da’wah* was self-consciously the instrument through which true religion – valid law and doctrine, proper belief and action, correct science and knowledge of the universe, rightful loyalty to God and His agent for human affairs, appropriate appreciation for the difference between appearance and reality, between the purely physical and the truly spiritual – was made known to mankind in general and to believers in particular.

Throughout history, the Ismaili *da'wah* consisted of a formal hierarchy of spiritual teachers and scholars working under the Imam of the Time. The most basic form of the Ismaili *da'wah* hierarchy is as follows:

1. Imam
2. *Bab* (Gate)
3. *Hujjah* (Proof)
4. *Da'i* (Summoner)
5. *Ma'dhun Akbar* (Senior Teacher)
6. *Ma'dhun Asghar* (Junior Teacher)
7. *Mustajib* (Respondent or Initiate)

It must be remembered that the Ismaili *Da'wah* hierarchy is based on esoteric *'ilm* (knowledge) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*), not material wealth or political power. The concept of the ranks of knowledge is found in the several verses of the Holy Qur'an:

We raise in ranks (*darajat*) whom We please; and over every possessor of knowledge is a possessor of knowledge.

Holy Qur'an 12:76

It is God who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. The Command descends among them so you may know that God is powerful over all things and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge.

Holy Qur'an 65:12

The above seven *Da'wah* Ranks are called the "*Hudud al-Din*" (the Ranks of Faith) in Ismaili terminology. Together, these seven Dignitaries are the "Seven Heavens" and "Seven Earths" mentioned in the Qur'an. This means that each Rank from the Imam to the *Mustajib* is a "Heaven" for the rank immediately below; likewise, each Rank from the *Bab* to the *Mustajib* to the person outside the *Da'wah* Hierarchy is an "Earth" for the Rank immediately above it. For example, the *Bab* is an "Earth" compared to the Imam and a "Heaven" compared to the *Hujjah*. The *Mustajib* is an "Earth" compared to the *Ma'dhun Asghar* and a "Heaven" compared to those outside the Ismaili *Da'wah*.

The above Ismaili *Da'wah* Ranks exist and are active in every age and time – both [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) and after him. Prophets of past periods used to receive *lqrā'* – 'Read' or 'Remember'? [Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur'ān](#) from the dignitaries of the *Da'wah*. For example, Prophet Muhammad himself was spiritually initiated by Imam Abu Talib and his *Bab*, Hazrat Khadijah al-Kubra; Prophet Adam was spiritually initiated by Imam Hunayd. Prophet Jesus was spiritually initiated by Mary, the *Bab* of the Imam Khuzaymah. Prophet Abraham was spiritually initiated by Imam Malik al-Salam (called Melchizedek in the Bible).

Prophethood and prophetic ascent are linked to the gradual perfection of the human being that takes place initially with the training the “Calling” (*da’wah*) provides in each prophetic cycle... The “Calling” of each epoch, like the “ranks of religion”, thereby provides the necessary training (*tarbiyyah*) not least for individual practitioners but for the prophets as well... Even the prophets are not exempt from the necessary training that the “Calling” provides in each cycle of prophetic history... The apparent Calling is paired with the hidden Calling for the purpose of explanation and facilitation.

Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (“Prophetic Ascent and Initiatory Ascent in Qāḍi al-Nu’mān’s *Asās al-Ta’wīl*”, Gruber, Colby, *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi’rāj Tales*, 160-164, [Click Here to Read](#))

The Rank of Imam:

The [The Aga Khan’s Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#) is the highest and greatest rank in the Ismaili *Da’wah*. The Imam’s pure soul receives [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#) and divine guidance from the eternal spiritual world of the [Universal Intellect and Universal Soul](#) through the medium of the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-quddus*). According to the Qur’an (97:1-5, 42:52, 26:193-195, 16:2, 40:15), God inspires the Prophets, the Imams and other chosen humans through the Holy Spirit. While Prophet Muhammad was the last human being to both receive divine inspiration (*ta’yid*) and convey it as prophetic discourse (*tanzil*), the Imams of his Ahl al-Bayt continue to be recipients of the Holy Spirit, through which they are able to convey God’s guidance (*al-kitab*) in the form of [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur’an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta’wil](#)) and instruction (*ta’lim*). God summons humanity to His recognition through the person of the Imam in every time and age:

[On the Day when We will summon \(*nada’u*\) all people through their Imam.](#)

Holy Qur’an 17:71

During the period of Prophethood, the [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) came from the lineage of Ishmael, son of Abraham, and continued through the line of Abu Talib during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. At the same time, certain Prophets spiritually ascended to the rank of Imam and functioned as Entrusted Imams – executing the function and authority of the Imamat while the Permanent Hereditary Imam was not directly accessible. In general, after Abraham and up to Prophet Muhammad, the Entrusted Imams came from the progeny of Isaac, son of Abraham. Examples of Prophets who were also Entrusted Imams include: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Jethro, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, Solomon, Imran, Zacharia, John the Baptist, Jesus, James brother of Jesus, and Prophet Muhammad.

The Rank of *Bab*:

The second rank after the Imam is the rank of *Bab* (meaning “Gate”); sometimes this rank is also called “great *Hujjah*” – because the *Babs* are the greater *Hujjahs*. There are 4 persons who hold the rank of *Bab*:

- 1 *Bab* is the *Pir* – like Pir Prophet Muhammad, Pir Shams, Pir Sadr al-Din, Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din, Pir Shihabuddin Shah, Pir Abu l-Hasan Shah (who was *Pir* while an infant); sometimes the Imam acts as his own *Pir* like in the present time;
- 1 *Bab* is the present [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#); for example, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was the *Bab* during the lifetime of his father Imam Aga ‘Ali Shah; Mawlana Hazar Imam was the *Bab* of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah.
- 1 *Bab* is a [The Esoteric Feminine: Women in Ismaili History and Thought](#); for example, Hazrat Khadijah was the *Bab* of Imam Abu Talib; Hazrat Fatimah was the *Bab* of her husband Imam ‘Ali; Hazrat Zaynab was the *Bab* of her brother Imam al-Husayn b. ‘Ali; Begum Mata Salamat Lady Ali Shah was the *Bab* of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and later, his fourth wife, Begum Mata Salamat was his *Bab*;
- 1 *Bab* is an Ismaili *murid* who has reached the spiritual rank of *Ahl al-Bayt* and is equivalent to Salman al-Farsi during the Prophet’s time. The Prophet said to Salman: “*You are from us, the Ahl al-Bayt.*” Abu ‘Ali was the *Bab* of Imam al-Mahdi; Ja‘far b. Mansur al-Yaman was the *Bab* of Imam al-Mu‘izz; Khatkin al-Dayf was the *Bab* of Imam al-Hakim; al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shirazi was the *Bab* of Imam Mustansir billah. There have also been Ismailis in modern times who reached the spiritual rank of *Bab* (spiritual member of *Ahl al-Bayt*) – including Pir Ismail Gangji, Wazir Muhammad Remu, Varas Basaria Fadhu, Wazir Rahim Basaria, and Pir Sabzali;

The *Babs* are in spiritual union or spiritual marriage with the Imams — for this reason, the 4 *Babs* are called the “Spiritual Wives” of the Imam; they receive direct inspiration (*nurani ta’yid*) from the Imam’s perfect soul. The *Babs* are also the Spiritual Mothers of the *murids*. They manifest the maternal and lunar attributes of the Universal Soul to the community of believers, complementing the Imam who manifests the paternal and solar qualities of the Universal Intellect. The Imam corresponds to the Sun and his *Babs* are like the Moon, as one of the *Babs* of Fatimid times explained:

Our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful, is like the Sun whose light is bright and blinding such that, if it were not followed by the Moon to moderate and cool its effects, no plant could develop properly on earth and the heat would overpower it.

Sayyidna Abu ‘Ali, (tr. Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, 35)

The *Bab* is the “Gateway” to the Imam and nobody receives any knowledge from the Imam, either spiritually or physically, except through his Bab:

The four *Hujjahs* [*Babs*] who are never separate from the [spiritual] presence of the Imam (*ḥaḍrat-i Imam*): they take knowledge from him and give it to the people. People cannot reach a rank in which they can receive a word from the Imam without the intermediary of one of those four *Hujjahs* [*Babs*].

Sayyidna Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Dīn*, 264, Avaani Edition)

The Rank of *Hujjah*:

Below the rank of *Bab* is the rank of *Hujjah* (“Proof” or “Argument”). The *Hujjah* is the chief *Da’i* over a network of *Da’is* in a region, who uses “proofs and arguments” to establish the Imamatus of the Imam and lead others to the inner recognition (*ma’rifah*) of the Imam by providing the knowledge of philosophy, theology, and the *ta’wil* (inner meaning) of what is found in the Qur’an and practiced in ritual and law.

Each *Hujjah* is in charge of conducting the Summons in a particular region (*jazirah*) of the world or for an ethnic-tribal group. In the classical period, there were said to be 12 geographical/ethnic regions (per the *Ta’wil al-Da’a’im al-Islam* of Qadi al-Nu’man): Rūm (Byzantium); Daylam (Persia); Sind (Modern day Pakistan); Hind (India); Ṣīn (China); the lands of the Arabs; Nubians, Khazars, Ṣaqāliba (Slavs); Berbers; Zanj (Sub-Saharan Africa); Abyssinians (Ḥabash). In each region (*jazirah*) there is one “*Hujjah* of the Day” and one “*Hujjah* of the Night” leading the Ismaili Summons. The *Hujjah* of the Day is a *Hujjah* who is outwardly Ismaili and known to the community while the *Hujjah* of the Night works in a hidden and anonymous way. Thus, there are 12 Pairs of *Hujjahs* – corresponding to the number of 12 Months in the year.

Understand that for each Imam there are twelve visible diurnal *Hujjahs* and twelve concealed and hidden nocturnal *Hujjahs*...they are the veil of the Imam and are his mouthpieces and gateways, his deputies and the messengers from him to the *Da’is*, who in turn convey the message to the believers.

Sayyidna Abu ‘Abdullah al-Shī‘ī, (*The Advent of the Fatimids*, tr. Madelung and Walker, 97)

The *Hujjahs* derive their knowledge both from the rigorous study and reflection on books/literature and from the spiritual inspiration of the Imam; they convey this knowledge to others through verbal and written teaching. In other words, the *Hujjah* does not depend only on “book learning” for his knowledge; he is inspired (*mu’ayyad*) by the Imam in making intellectual discoveries. The Imam conveys knowledge, guidance, and *ta’wil* to his *Hujjahs* through his [Esoteric Thought in Physical Form: The Aga Khan Campus in Toronto](#) and spiritual imaginal vision (*khayal*). Practically speaking, the *Hujjah* does not need to physically learn from another person and his teachings do not require formal “approval” by a council or a committee. For this reason, the writings of many *Hujjahs* like Sijistani, Kirmani, or Nasir-i Khusraw often mention that whatever they write in their books

is from the Imam's *ta'yid*. For example, Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, the *Hujjah* of Khurasan, wrote at the end of his book, *The Face of Religion*, that "whatever is good in this book we have shown by the spiritual inspiration (*ta'yid*) of the lord of the time" (*The Face of Religion*, Chapter 51).

In total, the 4 *Babs* and 24 *Hujjahs* total to 28 *Hujjahs* under the Imam: every *Hujjah* receives knowledge and *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) from the Imam through spiritual assistance (*ta'yid*) and spiritual imagination (*khayal*) as opposed to verbal or written instruction (*ta'lim*). The number 28 is rich in symbolism and corresponds to the number of Lunar Mansions (stations) and 28 Days is the length of the Lunar Cycle. Thus, the *Babs* and *Hujjahs* together are symbolically and spiritually in the rank of the Moon as compared to the Imam who is the Sun.

And the Moon – We have measured for her stations till she returns like the old (and withered) lower part of a date-stalk.

Holy Qur'an 36:39

For just as the body of the Moon is in itself dark but illuminated by the Sun, taking the Sun's place in his absence, and lighting up the Earth in proportion to the amount of light that it has been capable of obtaining from the Sun, so the soul of the supreme *Hujjah*, which by itself knows nothing and is nothing, is illumined by the effulgent radiation of the divine assistance (*ta'yid*) from the Imam... By virtue of his capacity to receive the grace of the lights of knowledge (*fayd-i anwar-i 'ilm*) and according to the measure of his aptitude, he enlightens people about the Imam, showing the way to him.

Sayyidna Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 131-132)

The Rank of *Da'i*:

Under the *Hujjah* is a rank specifically called the *Da'i*. In general, every rank from the *Bab* to the *Ma'dhun* is an Ismaili *da'i*, but the specific term here applies to the rank under the *Hujjah*.

The *Da'i* gains knowledge of [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#) from the Imam's *Hujjah* through learning, reading, and studying; he then passes on and teaches his knowledge to other Ismailis through verbal teaching and writing. Thus, the *Hujjah* learns from the Imam through inspiration (*ta'yid*) and passes it on through instruction (*ta'lim*); while, the *Da'i* learns from the *Hujjah* through instruction (*ta'lim*) and also passes on the knowledge through instruction (*ta'lim*).

For each of the 12 pairs of *Hujjahs*, there are 30 *Da'is* – just like there are about 30 days in each of the 12 Months of the Lunar Calendar, for a total of 360 *Da'is*.

According to the teachings of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, there are 313 True Believers (*haqiqati mu'min*) in the world at all times – these 313 are at the rank of *Da'i*, and their number is completed by 47 more *Da'is*, for the total of 360.

Under the rank of *Da'i*, there are lower ranks called *Ma'dhun Akbar* ("senior teacher") / *Mu'allim* ("instructor") and *Ma'dhun Asghar* ("junior teacher")/ *Mukasir* ("questioner"). For each *Da'i*, there are 24 *Ma'dhuns* — 12 *Ma'dhun Akbar* and 12 *Ma'dhun Asghar*, which correspond to 12 Hours of the Day and 12 Hours of the Night.

The role of the *Ma'dhun Asghar* / *Mukasir* ("questioner") was to engage people, ask questions, and find a suitable person who was seeking the inner truths of religion. He would often do this by mixing with people, making statements, and asking questions that cause them to reflect on their beliefs. If such a person wanted to learn more and find answers, he would become a *Mustajib* (respondent); after some initial conversation with the *Ma'dhun Asghar* / *Mukasir*, the *Mustajib* would be taken to the *Ma'dhun Akbar* / *Mu'allim* and then receive further instructions and answers to his questions. Once the *Mustajib* was ready, the *Ma'dhun Akbar* would accept his *bay'ah* on behalf of the Imam and his journey through the Ismaili *Da'wah* toward the recognition of the Imam would begin.

3. The World of Faith and the Physical World: *Din* and *Dunya*

God has based His religion (*din*) on the likeness of His creation (*khalq*), so that they might find His creation a sign indicating His religion, and His religion a sign indicating His oneness.

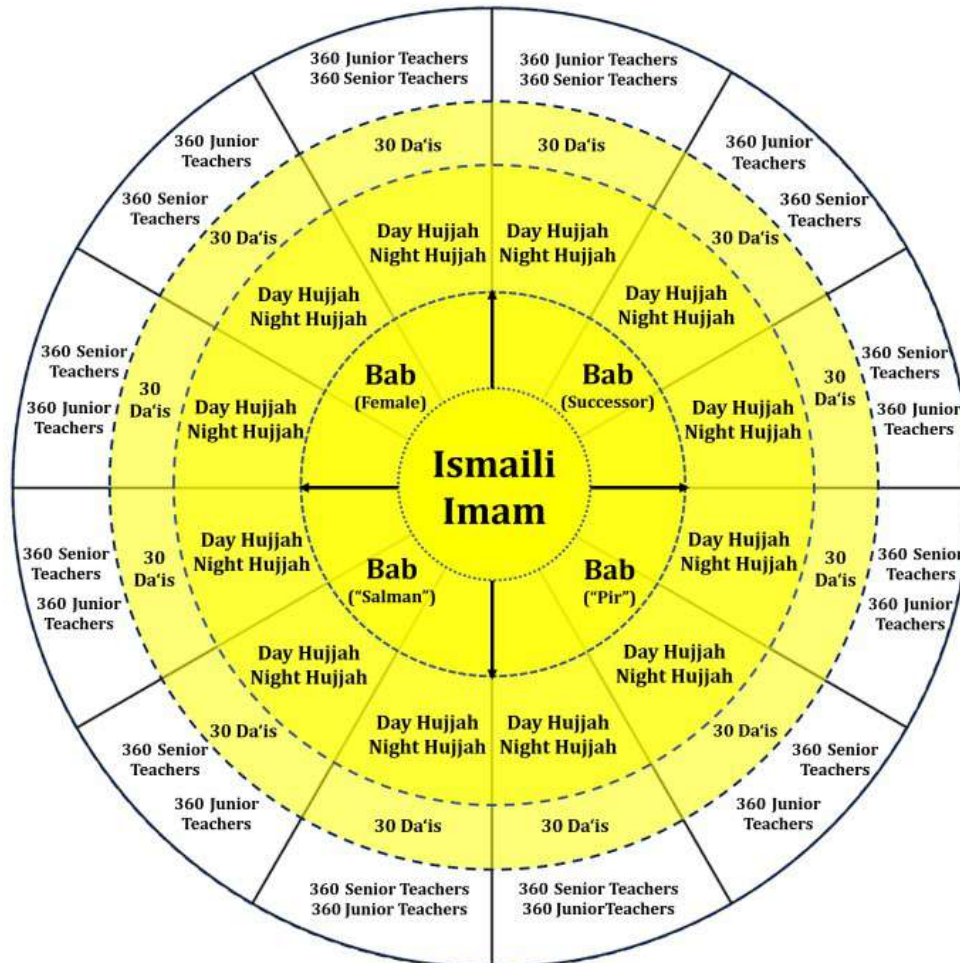
Prophet Muhammad,

(Hadith quoted in Nasir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 145; Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, 138)

Ismaili Da'wah Ranks (*Hudud al-Din*)

"We raise in ranks (*darajat*) whom We will; over every possessor of knowledge is one more knowing."

- Holy Qur'an 12:76



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We will seek to demonstrate that spiritual insight and worldly knowledge are not separate or opposing realms, but that they must always nourish one another, and that the World of Faith and the material world are the dual responsibilities of humankind.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Dushanbe Ismaili Centre, October 12, 2009)

The Ismaili *Da'wah* Ranks collectively make up what is called "the World of Faith" (*'alam al-din*), which exists parallel to the "World of Nature" (*'alam al-dunya*). The structure of the World of Faith (*din*) and the Physical World (*dunya*) exist in a symbolic correspondence:

- Just as the Sun, Moon, and Stars give light to the Natural World (*dunya*), in the World of Faith, the Imam is the Sun, the *Babs* are the Moon, the 12 pairs of *Hujjahs* are the 12 Constellations of the Zodiac and their *Da'is* and *Ma'dhuns* are the Stars; these religious dignitaries (*hudud al-din*) convey the light of knowledge to the World of Faith (*din*).
- Similarly, just as the “physical time” of the material world is measured through years, seasons, months, days, and hours, in the “spiritual time” of the World of Faith, the Imam is the Year, the 4 *Babs* are the 4 Seasons, the 12 pairs of *Hujjahs* are the 12 Months, the 360 *Da'is* are the 30 Days of each Month, the 12 *Ma'dhun Akbar* are the 12 Hours of Night and the 12 *Ma'dhun Asghar* are the 12 Hours of the Day.
- Along the same lines, in the World of Faith, the Imam is the Heaven, the 4 *Babs* are the Elements of the Earth, the *Hujjahs* are the Mountains, the *Da'is* are Rivers and Streams, and the Believers are the Vegetation that grows.

As the Imam, I think it would be important to try to have been an interpreter of the faith which enabled people to continue to look to a Spiritual World and a World of Faith, which is not only a material world. I feel very, very strongly about that.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Pranay Gupte Interview, 1999, [Read Here](#))

4. The Qualifications of the Ismaili *Da'i*

A *da'i* is not allowed to make appointments to the *da'wah* to fulfill some service or satisfy a claim of favour, or for affection, relationship, friendship, intercession, or concern, or for some gain, or to avoid some harm, or out of shame, modesty, or fear. All of those things lead away from religion, from justice, from security and from good will toward God and the Messenger... The *da'i* should not attempt to dismiss a *da'i* who is upright in the *da'wah* on account of something he had done that personally angers him or because of a lack of service, but rather he will dismiss the man solely for disloyalty in religious matters.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 65)

The most detailed description of the proper Ismaili *da'i* comes from a book called *Code of Conduct* [quoted above] written by Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (d. after 1021), a leading Ismaili *Da'i*. A summary of this text follows below:

The *da'i* is first and foremost somebody who has self-discipline – they are those who are regular in their religious obligations; they live life without engaging in bad or [The Ismaili Imam's Guidance against Drinking Alcohol](#); they act righteously towards others, are selfless, and are well-mannered. The *da'i* is patient with everyone and never becomes angry with those who request her or his help.

The *da'i* is also never arrogant or miserly; they are generous and kind with those who request their help and never discourage those who seek them – they only encourage and console them.

The qualifications to be a *da'i* do not only include following ethical principles – it is also a matter of knowledge and intellect. **A *da'i* must be firmly learned in the Root-Principles of Faith (*usul al-din*), as the core mission of the *da'i* is to educate and teach about the Imam and the doctrines of religion. They have knowledge of both exoteric and esoteric principles of the Ismaili Faith, of the history of the Imams, and also of all of the other Muslim communities, religions, and cultures of the world.** The *da'i* is, thus, somebody who loves knowledge. They are constantly seeking out knowledge and sharing that knowledge with others. The doors of a *da'i* are therefore always open and they never dismiss those who request their help. Through their instruction of religious knowledge and conveyance of the Imam's blessings, they seek only to educate, unify, and bring love and happiness to their community. **The *da'i* is additionally skilled in argumentation and debate. Being caretakers of religious knowledge, they are always ready to defend and refute those who seek to defile or reject the Imams.**

Lastly, the *da'i* is neither somebody who is overly ambitious nor is somebody who seeks recognition from others. Although the *da'i* must be skilled in social manners, administration, and governance, they do not chase after political leadership. Pursuing political leadership for sake of recognition and power leads one astray from the path of the Imam:

Da'is [who summon] to the truth – those who uphold righteousness – do not relish the vanities of this world or thirst in their hearts for political leadership. All who hunger for this world and aspire after positions of authority go astray from the true path, having lost their way.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi
(*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 36)

5. The Ismaili *Da'is* through History

I wanted to just share with my Jamat leaders in Canada something which has been very important to me since many years back. And that is that the Jamat should learn about its remarkable history, should learn about the pluralism of its history, should learn about the great names, so that there is a sense of pride and an understanding of our past – of the greatness of the past of the Shia Ismaili Muslim Tariqah.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Institutional Dinner, Vancouver, November 2009)

As a totality, the overall mission of all the Ismaili *da'is* – from the *Bab* to the lowest ranking *Mustajib* – is to discover the ultimate truths (*haqa'iq*) of God's Creation – that is, knowledge of things as they truly are – with their own intellects through the guidance of the Imam of the Time. This knowledge often took the form of what

is today called philosophy, metaphysics, physics, science, theology, and cosmology. Such knowledge is extremely important – because the Ismaili *da'is* were responsible for educating and teaching it to the Ismaili believers in every time, on the behalf of the Imam of the Time. In pursuing this goal, the Ismaili *da'is* sometimes arrived at different viewpoints, would occasionally disagree, and debate their ideas with one another. However, in doing so, the *da'is* always remained respectful and humble – recognizing that the totality of the spiritual and religious sciences is known to the Imam alone, while every believer can only exert his or her best efforts in attaining and discoursing about this knowledge:

The subjects that comprise the sciences of religion...they are too numerous to be comprehended by any single individual other than the Imam, or for one group only to safeguard them. **Accordingly, he designated for this purpose a large number of individuals below the office of the Imam who are to collaborate amongst themselves in the pursuit of all the sciences and in their preservation and safekeeping.** Such persons include the twelve *Hujjahs*, each of whom learns from those righteous Imams who were appointed by God to assume the reins of guidance about the most obscure matters, both the hidden and obvious aspects, commensurate with their own abilities and strengths in understanding and comprehension. In this they are to provide guidance for others similar to the way the Imams confer enlightenment and knowledge. **Religion is in them like a single individual who is composed of its parts and they are to him like the senses by means of which things are perceived.** If some item escapes one of them, another will perceive it without the perception of the second implying any fault in the first that failed to perceive it or any other of the senses... If one of the senses fails to perceive some item in the realm of the physical world, it will not escape the other which will instead cooperate to assist it in fulfilling the duty of religion and confirming the intention of the Lord of the universe.

Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani,
(*Kitab al-Riyad*, tr. Paul E. Walker in *Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Hakim*, 60-61)

Below are summaries of the life and work of some of the great Ismaili *da'is* of the last 1,400 years of Ismaili Muslim history (there were many more *da'is* than those mentioned below):

1. Sayyidna Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman (d. 914) and his son Sayyidna Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. ca. 960): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Mahdi and *Bab* of Imam al-Mu'izz

I too used to be dead, and he gave me life; I was ignorant, and he gave me knowledge. I am not the first person to be ignorant, so that I attained knowledge before everyone else; nor am I the last one to be ignorant, so that the process of (spiritual) teaching will come to an end. Therefore it is only right for me, because of my gratitude for this blessing, to pass on this (divine) trust

(4:58; 33:72, etc.) to those who come after me, just as those who preceded me have handed it down to me.

Sayyidna Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman,
(*The Master and the Disciple*, tr. James W. Morris, 64)

- Ibn Hawshab, known as Mansur al-Yaman ("the victorious one of Yemen"), was originally a follower of the Twelver Shi'a imam, Hasan al-Askari; when this imam died in 874 without leaving a son or successor, his followers were thrown into chaos; at this time, Mansur al-Yaman was sad and searching for the truth of the matter of Imamatus. It is reported that by a stroke of luck, Mansur al-Yaman met the Ismaili Imam, who was living undercover at the time, near the bank of a river.
- Mansur al-Yaman asked some questions to the Imam, who provided answers in a way he had never heard before; the Imam then left and Mansur spent a great deal of time searching for him. Eventually he found the Imam again and after some more discussion, Mansur al-Yaman gave his *bay'ah* to the Imam and joined the Ismaili *Da'wah*.
- The Imam sent Mansur al-Yaman to Yemen to lead the *da'wah* and prepare the ground for the eventual Fatimid state. Mansur al-Yaman proceeded to Yemen and was very successful in establishing an Ismaili stronghold in the area. He was also responsible for training many Ismaili *da'is* and sending them out to other regions. Unfortunately, some of Mansur's subordinate *da'is* and one of his sons betrayed the Imam's cause and eventually took over the seat of power.
- One of Mansur al-Yaman's sons, Ja'far, stayed loyal to the Imam and emigrated to North Africa during the Imamatus of al-Qa'im. Ja'far b. Mansur ascended the ranks of the *Da'wah*: he became the *Bab* of Imam al-Mu'izz and remained close to the Imam until his death.
- Ja'far b. Mansur was a master of *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) and wrote numerous works, including: *The Master and the Disciple (kitab al-'alim wa l-ghulam)*, the *Book of Unveiling (kitab al-kashf)*, the *Esoteric Interpretation of Purification Offering (ta'wil al-zakat)*, the *Secrets of the Prophets (sara'ir wa asrar al-nutuqa)*.
- A famous story from the time of Imam al-Mu'izz demonstrates the spiritual status of Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman. There was one time when the *Da'i* Qadi al-Nu'man fell ill; Nu'man worked closely with the Imam, so many Ismaili *da'is* and politicians came to visit him during his sickness – except one person – Ja'far. After he recovered, Nu'man complained about this to the Imam. The Imam then produced a book and asked Nu'man the name of its author, Nu'man examined the book's contents and replied that nobody except the Imam could have written such a book. The Imam then told him that he was incorrect, for the book had been written by "your *Mawla* Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman". Upon hearing this, Nu'man

immediately went to Ja'far's house and paid him homage. This shows how the status of the *Bab* of the Imam was sometimes kept hidden and secret from the rest of the community.

2. Sayyidna Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i (d. 910): *Da'i* of Imam al-Mahdi

No theologian or specialist in disputation or jurisprudence, no merchant, no one desirous was left who did not respond to his summons and seek to draw close to him and make contact with him...Several sessions of debate took place between him and Sa'id b. al-Haddan and Musa al-Qattan on the Imam, the elevation of the less excellent, the identity of the sunna, fasting, and maintaining chastity... He used to detain me each day to eat with him, and many were the times I would spend the night with him.

Sayyidna Ibn al-Haytham's account of Sayyidna Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i, (*Advent of the Fatimids*, tr. W. Madelung and P. E. Walker, 161)

- One day publicly debating with Sunni theologians, another day composing luminous poetry, and the next day conquering North Africa in the Imam's name, Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i was a polymath. The tale of his conquest of the Fatimid territories was memorialized by Qadi al-Nu'man, Fatimid court historian and luminary, in his chronicle titled *Founding the Fatimid State*.
- Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i was trained for *Da'iship* by renowned Hujjah Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yaman, having attended his sessions and trained with him for combat. He was then sent to Mecca on pilgrimage where he met some Kutama Berbers and dazzled them with his humility, wisdom, and towering personality. His impact on them was so great that they asked him to join them in North Africa and there he taught them, governed them, inspired them with his immense love and devotion to the Imam of the Time.
- The alliance formed under the bond of al-Shi'i's leadership lasted generations as the Berbers not only formed the mainstay of the army that conquered what became the Fatimid empire but then also continued to form the bulk of the Fatimid army for centuries. Threatened by the growing power that al-Shi'i was amassing after nearly a decade of living among the tribes-people, opposing Berber tribes tried to confront him militarily. These attempts only served to consolidate and strengthen his position as religious and political leader of the Kutama Berbers.
- When Aghlabid emir Ibrahim b. Ahmad's attempts at bribing al-Shi'i away from the Imam failed, he threatened him with war. The ensuing conflict (from 289/902 – 296/909) saw the *Da'i* personally lead the Kutama Berber tribe into numerous battles against armies with far greater numbers and equipment. After having conquered the Aghlabid territories, al-Shi'i entered the capital city of Raqqada, established political and religious structures and subordinates to run them before hurriedly exiting to rescue Imam al-Mahdi from imprisonment in Sijilmasa.

- He had never before seen the Imam and the beautiful scene of their first time meeting is incredibly touching as detailed in the memoir, [*Advent of the Fatimids*](#), written by Fatimid Ismaili *Da'i* Ibn al-Haytham laced with allegory and layers of imagery. After his rescue, al-Shi'i personally escorts the Imam back to the kingdom he had fought for in his name – and delivered it into the hands of the *Amir al-Muminin*, the Imam al-Mahdi.
- Soon after al-Shi'i's beautiful reunion with the Imam, something went horribly wrong: al-Shi'i, who had been steadfast and humble in service to the Imam he had never even seen, eventually betrayed the Imam and tried to remove the Imam from power, likely due to the influence and pressure of his power-hungry brother Abu l-'Abbas, al-Shi'i's loss of political leadership, and some disgruntled Berbers.
- However, despite his ignominious ending, Fatimid *Da'i* al-Shi'i was remembered and commemorated for all his efforts and faith in service to the Imam by the Imam and his fellow *Da'is*, who remembered him fondly. The Imam al-Mahdi even recited the funeral prayer over al-Shi'i's grave and forgave him.

3. Sayyidna Abu Hanifa al-Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 974): *Da'i/Hujjah* of Imams al-Mahdi, al-Qa'im, al-Mansur, and al-Mu'izz

Al-Nu'mān and a group of *dā'īs* came to the Commander of the Faithful, [Imam] al-Mu'izz. They mentioned some invented sayings, doctrines (*madhāhib*) and opinions, which had caused disagreement among Muslim groups... [Then al-Mu'izz mentioned the words of the Messenger of God to them: 'If deviation occurs in my community \(umma\), the scholar should manifest his knowledge, or else God's curse be upon him.'](#) He turned to al-Qādī al-Nu'mān and said, '[You are meant by that, O Nu'mān.](#)' Then he instructed him to compose the *Kitāb al-Da'ā'im* [The Pillars of Islam]; he confirmed its foundations and divided its sections... He (al-Mu'izz) confirmed parts of it, corrected the errors in it and filled the gaps until it was complete. Thus the work emerged as a comprehensive synopsis with utmost precision. That was a miracle of the Commander of the Faithful, al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh which he manifested through his *Dā'ī* and supporter (*walī*) al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammad, explicating the law (*sharī'ah*) of his forefather Muḥammad.

Idris Imad al-Din,
(*Uyun al-Akhbar*, tr. S. Jiwa, *Anthology of Ismaili Literature*, 62-63)

- One of the best known *Da'is* of the Fatimid era, Qadi al-Nu'man served Imam al-Mahdi from 312/924 and the next three Imams until his death almost fifty years later. Unlike Nasir-i Khusraw, Hasan-i Sabbah, and Tusi who were converts, Nu'man was most likely born Ismaili.
- His positions in the Fatimid court gave him very intimate contact with the first four Imam-Caliphs and he was able to document incredible stories that resonate with us today. One such encounter occurred when he met with

Imam al-Mahdi who told him that his grandson, the future Imam al-Mansur was an Imam. Astonished, Nu'man exclaimed: "'O Commander of the Faithful, three Imams in one age?' Then Imam al-Mahdi bi'llah showed him al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah who was a babe in his cradle and said, 'And this is the fourth of us, O Nu'man!'" (Idris Imad al-Din, *Tarikh al-Khulafa al-Fatimiyyin bi'l-Maghrib*, tr. Shainool Jiwa, *Anthology of Ismaili Literature*, 60)

- Qadi al-Nu'man, like the quintessential *Da'i* described in Naysaburi's code of conduct, was able to take on many roles and was knowledgeable in many areas of Ismailism including Islamic law and ta'wil. He presided over the judiciary as the Chief Judge (*qadi al-qudat*) and led the organized *Da'wah* as Chief *Da'i* (an administrative position akin to ITREB Chair) – which included delivering weekly lectures to the Ismaili initiates in the Fatimid palace on various topics.
- Under the direction and supervision of the Imam al-Mu'izz (in the above quote), Nu'man wrote the authoritative Ismaili text on Ismaili law called *The Pillars of Islam (da'a'im al-islam)* which became the official legal handbook of the Fatimid State and which Bohra Ismailis still follow to this day.
- Although the topic of "Islamic law" can sound very dry, Nu'man's work was anything but as the entire first chapter of *Da'a'im al-Islam* was full of very readable gems from the mouths of the first Ismaili Imams including the following:

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq said: "What is religion if not love?" (*Da'a'im al-Islam*, 89)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq said: "Carry out your work [in our cause] for God's sake, and not for the sake of the people. For what is [done] for God's sake, is [done] for Him, and what is [done] to please the people does not reach God." (*Da'a'im al-Islam*, 80)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was asked, 'What is giving life to your cause, O son of the Messenger of God?' He replied, 'By discussing it in the company of people of learning, of religion, and of intelligence.' (*Da'a'im al-Islam*, 80)

4. Sayyidna Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Mahdi

People of Truth and Justice do not permit blind following (*taqlid*) with regard to root-principles (of faith) such as knowledge of God's oneness, the matter of Prophethood, and the proof of Imamat. But once God's oneness, the matter of prophethood, and the matter of Imamat are proven and established, it is thereafter permissible to blindly follow the true, just, and knowledgeable Imam.

Abu Hatim al-Razi,
(*Proofs of Prophecy*, tr. Tarif Khalidi, 26)

- Abu Hatim al-Razi was the chief *Da'i* of Rayy (in Persia), a stronghold for the Ismaili *Da'wah* and a region where the Ismaili *da'is* were focused on winning the allegiance of the rulers.
- He is famous for his debate with Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes). The debate was about the usefulness of religion, the need for Prophets, the divine mandate of Prophet Muhammad's mission, and the divine inspiration of the Qur'an. In the record of this debate, titled [*The Proofs of Prophecy* \(*a'lam al-nubuwwah*\)](#), Razi answered all of Rhazes arguments and offered an important proof for Prophets in general and the Prophethood of Muhammad. As part of this argument, Razi explained how and why the Holy Qur'an was the miracle of Prophet Muhammad.
- To prove the Prophethood of Muhammad, Razi explained how the Qur'an is inimitable speech – because its eloquence (*fasahah*), literary arrangement (*nazm*), lucid expression (*bayan*) and rhetorical power (*balaghah*) exceed and transcend all the existing literary forms and conventions of the Arabic language, including normal speech, prose, metered poetry, rhyming prose, etc. Since no human being could produce any speech discourse that imitates the Qur'an, the Qur'an must be divinely-inspired and serves as proof that Muhammad is divinely-inspired; this is similar to how animals cannot replicate the speech-form of human language and discourse, thus proving that human beings possess a superior faculty of intellect, thought, and speech over animals. [[Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#)].
- Razi also wrote another famous work called *The Book of Correction* (*kitab al-islah*) where he engaged in a respectful debate with another Ismaili *Da'i* over the concept of God, the structure of the Cosmos, and the missions of different Prophets. One important point that Razi makes in *The Book of Correction* is that: God cannot be described through any human concepts – one cannot even define God as “perfect” or “first cause” or “good” because God is the creator of goodness, perfection, and all causes and effects.
- Razi also taught a very interesting [esoteric interpretation of the Prophet's Mi'raj](#) (celestial ascent) – he said that the mythical horse “Buraq” on which the Prophet supposedly flew up the heavens actually means “illumination” (the word *baraqa* means “to shine”); this means that the Prophet ascended to the heaven of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul through “illumination” (*buraq*).

5. Sayyidna Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (d. after 971): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Mu'izz

Now, by virtue of the shining Light and the great Power coming from the Friend of God on this 'Earth of the Summons' (*zamin-i da'wat*), which is the home of the spiritual souls, and by the blessing of my obedience to him and of

his kindness to me, I shall undertake to unveil those secrets which were sealed, symbols which were kept in the treasure-house.”

Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, *Kashf al-Mahjub*,
(tr. Hermann Landolt in [An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia Vol. 2](#), 84)

- Sijistani was one of the most important early Ismaili *da'is* that operated in the Iranian provinces of Khurasan and Sijistan during the tenth century. He was initially a student of the *Da'i* al-Nasafi and likely succeeded him. In the later part of his life, Sijistani recognized the Imamatus of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs during the Imamatus of Imam al-Mu'izz, whom Sijistani revered greatly. For example, Sijistani began one of his treatises, titled *Unveiling the Hidden (kashf al-mahjub)* with the praise of the Imam al-Mu'izz
- Ismaili sources report that Sijistani was the chief *Da'i* or *Hujjah* of Khurasan. Sijistani was also among the first of a group of Persian Ismaili *Da'is* known as “[the Persian School of Philosophical Ismailism](#)”, famous for integrating concepts from Neoplatonic philosophy with Ismaili religious wisdom – a school that includes Razi, Nasafi, Kirmani, Shirazi, and Nasir-i Khusraw.
- He wrote many important works including: [The Book of Keys \(kitab al-maqalid\)](#) which is on Ismaili philosophy, theology, cosmology, physics, and esoteric interpretation; *The Book of the Boast (kitab al-iftikhar)* which is a defense of Ismaili beliefs and practices against the attacks of Sunnis; *The Book of Wellsprings (kitab al-yanabi')* which is about the source of religious and natural knowledge for human beings and the cosmic order that God establishes for the guidance of humanity; *The Proof of Prophethood (ithbat al-nubuwwa)* which offers a series of arguments and proofs for the necessity and existence of Prophets in the world of humanity.
- One of Sijistani's core teachings is [Ismaili Teachings on the Oneness of God \(Tawhid\)](#); while many theologians describe God using names like “the all-powerful” and “the all-knowing”, Sijistani explained that God, being infinite and the ultimate Originator of everything, cannot be described by these attributes; otherwise God would be multiple and not single. Thus, God is beyond space, time, matter, and motion and He is also beyond the categories of “thing”, “existence”, “substance”, and “cause”. Sijistani taught that the best way to speak of God is using negative language – by negating every positive quality from Him (i.e. God is not powerful) and also negating every negative quality (i.e. God is not not powerful).
- Another seminal teaching of Sijistani was about [cosmology and cosmic hierarchy](#), meaning the structure and ordering of God's creation; Unlike most Sunni Muslims, who believe that God is a spiritual being and the rest of creation is physical/bodily, Sijistani taught that God's creation includes a spiritual realm and a physical realm, and that God is the creator and maintainer of both worlds. The spiritual realm consists of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul [[whose existence can be philosophically](#)

[deduced even today](#)], and a hierarchy of archangels called Jadd, Fath, and Khayal, while the physical realm is the realm of nature and bodies. Human beings are the manifestations of both worlds – through possessing intellect, soul, and physical body. These teachings were so influential that all subsequent Ismaili *da'is* over the next thousand years adopted and taught these views.

6. Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1021): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah

It thus becomes clear from this that the one who fits the definition of the Imam is al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, and none of the rest of those who claim it, and that obedience to him is incumbent on the community in its entirety. Therefore, we have fulfilled what we promised to do at the outset of the book, in accord with the grace of God and the excellent oversight of His Friend (*wali*) on His earth, on him be peace.

Sayyidna Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani,
(tr. Paul E. Walker, *Master of the Age*, 126-27)

- Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani was considered the most learned Ismaili theologian of his time, and was a prominent scholar, accomplished philosopher, and prolific writer during the reign of Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996 – 1021). Although his origin is from the province of Kirman (southeast Iran), Kirmani's main area of activity was Iraq – he was the *Hujjah* of the two Iraqs during this time.
- He then moved to Cairo, the capital of the Fatimid Empire where he was summoned to help revitalize the Ismaili *Da'wah* and refute the extremist ideas of some of the dissident *da'is* who asserted that the Imam al-Hakim was the last Imam and God incarnate – a movement that later became the Druze religion.
- Kirmani wrote several important works – such as *The Shining Lamps of the Proof of Imam* (*al-masabih fi ithbat al-Imamah*), which he wrote to convince the Buyid Wazir in Baghdad to accept the Fatimid Ismaili Imams. In this work, Kirmani offers proofs for the existence of God ([“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)), the necessity of Prophethood ([Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#)), the necessity of Imam after Prophethood ([The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#)), and the proof of the Imam of Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah ([Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imam of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#)). In another book, Kirmani answered and refuted certain objections and attacks against the Ismaili Imam and Ismaili beliefs from Zaydi writers.
- Kirmani is also known for going back to the writings of the past *Da'is* – Nasafi, Sijistani, and Razi – and [providing new solutions](#) to the issues they disagreed on. In doing so, Kirmani showed the utmost respect and courtesy

for his fellow philosopher-*Da'is* – referring to them as his “shaykhs” and correcting their ideas with great humility. Kirmani explained that each of the *da'is* is like one of the senses of the body (taste, sight, hearing, etc.) – so if one *da'i* comes to a conclusion differing from another *da'i*, this is not an attack on the other *da'i*, but simply a case where one bodily sense perceives what the others cannot.

- Kirmani emphasized the absolute transcendence of God above all realities and descriptions – like Ismaili *da'is* before him and provided new arguments for this teaching; he also described the cosmic hierarchy of creation in terms of Ten Intellects – drawing on the work of the Muslim philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi.
- Kirmani's last and greatest work was called *Comfort of the Intellect* (*rahat al-'aql*) in which he explained the concept of the absolute unity of God, the process of cosmic creation, the spiritual, natural, and religious hierarchies (*hudud*), and the journey of the human soul toward perfection and becoming a pure intellect.

7. Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (d. after 1021): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah

Many works [that are] written on affirming the Imamatus by the elders of the Da'wah draw on deduction and evidence cited from well-known Qur'anic verses revealed regarding the Imamatus and the Imams, peace be upon them, in addition to traditions reported from the Prophet... Therefore, we wish to write a treatise on affirming the Imamatus using evidence and deduction from the [outer] horizons and [our] inner selves, from politics or governance and norms by way of intellect (*'aql*), what is self-evident, innate constitution (*al-fitra*), natural disposition, and agreement from all religious communities as well as from philosophers (*al-falasifa*) and mathematicians... if it is found to be reasonable, it is due to the excellence of spiritual support from the Master of the Age and the Time (*wali al-'asr wa'l-zaman*).

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,
(tr. Arzina R. Lalani, *Degrees of Excellence*, 34-35)

- He lived and worked as a *da'i* in Fatimid Cairo during the reigns of Imam-Caliphs al-Aziz (365–386/975–996) and al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (386–411/996–1021). His name (al-Naysaburi) suggests his origin is of Nishapur in modern day Iran.
- He was contemporary with fellow *Da'i* and intellectual titan Kirmani and philosopher Avicenna or Ibn Sina (who came from an Ismaili family); the times in which they lived were tumultuous both within and without the Ismaili community. For instance, a group of Ismailis had become convinced of the literal divinity of the Imam al-Hakim (hotly refuted by Kirmani, Naysaburi, and the majority of the Fatimid *Da'wah*) and later became known as the Druze.

- Naysaburi literally wrote the textbook on the ideal characteristics and duties of the Ismaili *Da'i*, published as *A Code of Conduct*. His work was referenced and emulated by later luminary of the Ismaili Da'wah, al-Shirazi, and was widely read both in his time and after.
- He also wrote a book history of the [2. The Pre-Fatimid \(First\) Period of Concealment \(Dawr al-Satr\)](#) between Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il and Imam al-Mahdi called *The Imam's Concealment and the Dispersal of Da'is in Search of him to Different 'Islands'* (*kitab istitar al-imam wa tafarruq al-du'at fi'l-jaza'ir li-talabi-hi*).
- The successes of the Fatimids was met with a frightened backlash by the Sunni Caliph based in Baghdad who decided to try to undermine their claims of legitimacy by publicly attacking their genealogy with lies. In response to these dual attacks from Sunni scholars and propagandists, Kirmani and Naysaburi rose up and defended the Imam and the community, writing numerous treatises and fighting with the power of their pen.
- He wrote theological texts such as *The Book of Divine Unity* (*kitab al-tawhid*) and *The Proof of Imamat* (*kitab ithbat al-imamah*); this latter book, published as *Degrees of Excellence*, not only proved the Imamat through Qur'anic and Hadith references but also used innovative philosophical arguments. This book also expounded on the Ismaili belief that there has always been an Imam and even shows Qur'anic evidence of the line of Imamat from the time of Adam.

8. Sayyidna Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1077): *Bab* of Imam al-Mustansir billah

*O Hujjah, famous among all people,
O towering mountain of knowledge, incapacitating the aspiring climber.
Our followers have lost their right guidance,
in the West, O companion, and in the East.
So spread among them what you will of our knowledge,
and be for them the concerned father.
Even though you are the last in our Da'wah,
you have surpassed the compass of the earlier [da'is].*

Imam al-Mustansir billah's Qasidah written to al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi
(tr. Tahera Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry*, 78)

- [A Fearless Fidai – The Story of al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi](#) was born in 996 or 997 with the name Abu Nasr Hibat Allah b. Abi 'Imran Musa b. Da'ud but is more commonly known for the title he received during his appointment as the *Da'i* of Fars: *al-Mu'ayyad fi al-Din* (the recipient of *ta'yid* in religion). Born and raised in the city of Shiraz in the province of Fars in southwest Persia, he is often called al-Shirazi, meaning "from Shiraz". His ancestors served the Ismaili Imams even when they were in concealment prior to the advent of the Fatimid Caliphate.

- Surrounded by hostile Sunni and Buyid forces in Shiraz, Shirazi was forced to operate in “semi-secrecy”. Nevertheless he attracted an impressive following and converted many people to Ismailism – including, for a time, the Buyid Sultan of Shiraz, Abu Kalijar, himself. Shirazi ruffled many feathers in Sunni-dominated Shiraz for example when he openly held Ismaili ‘Id celebrations on the mathematically calculated date rather than the Sunni method of sighting the new moon. Sunni crowds also demanded his head when Shirazi renovated a mosque and offered the Friday sermon in the name of the Ismaili Imam. All of this led to Shirazi’s seven-month-long house arrest and eventual banishment from Shiraz. He had to flee in the night in disguise and journey refuge in Fatimid Cairo – the center of the *Da’wah*.
- Almost immediately following his arrival Shiraz noticed that the *Da’wah* and administration were crawling with politicians and venal power players. Drawn to the power of the radiant Imam-Caliph, the positions of authority were all taken by incompetent oily bureaucrats whose motivations he questioned. One example was how the administrative roles of Chief *Da’i* (*da’i al-du’at*) and Chief Judge (*qadi al-qudat*) was al-Qasim, great grandson of Chief *Da’i* Qadi al-Numan. Although his ancestor was illustrious, Shirazi was very disappointed as he found him inferior and unqualified. Al-Qasim, on the other hand, was very threatened by the intellectual titan Shirazi and did not make things easy for his potential rival. After more than a year of pleading and trying to get past the bureaucratic and institutional red-tape, Shirazi finally achieved the *Didar* of the Imam, whom he and his ancestors had served so faithfully. [A Fearless Fidai – The Story of al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi](#) of his first *Didar* is truly touching.
- When the position of Chief *Da’i* [an administrative position like ITREB Chair] became vacant, Shirazi was certain he would be a shoe-in, however, the Fatimid bureaucrats closed ranks and the position for which no one was better qualified was denied to him – instead the new Fatimid vizier, al-Yazuri (a Sunni Muslim!) became Chief *Da’i*; he would take on the role of delivering the weekly *Majlis al-Hikmah* sermon to educate the Ismailis on their faith. However, because al-Yazuri did not actually know anything about Ismaili thought, Shirazi was given the lowly and demeaning position of ghost-writer of all al-Yazuri’s Sermons. Al-Yazuri admitted to his own relatives that he had mistreated Shirazi not because of any lacking credentials but because of his own personal dislike of the man.
- Now aged more than fifty years, Shirazi was astonished when al-Yazuri sent him on a military mission to Syria. Amazingly Shirazi succeeded in brokering an alliance of disparate parties and ultimately due to his leadership Fatimid forces marched into the heart of Abbasid power: Baghdad. The Khutbah in Baghdad was delivered in the name of Fatimid Imam al-Mustansir for a

year. When Shirazi returned to Cairo – victorious – there was no celebration and no acknowledgement of his enormous deed.

- In 1058, twelve years after his hopeful entry into Cairo, al-Yazuri was imprisoned on charges of embezzlement and Shirazi was finally appointed the Chief *Da'i* of the *Da'wah* and – beyond that – the Imam also revealed his spiritual status, declaring him as his *Bab*. Despite his enormous achievements and the publicly declared love of the Imam, Shirazi was never free of his politicking peers. For political reasons, he was removed from Chief *Da'i*-ship and exiled from 1061-1062 (the excuse this time was a supposed stutter), but was later reinstated by the Imam.
- Shirazi left behind an extensive and profound corpus including an autobiography (*sira*), a *Diwan* (book of poetry), a Persian translation of one of Qadi al-Num'an's Arabic works, and most importantly his *al-Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, composed of 800 of his sermons full of Qur'anic *ta'wil* and Ismaili theology. Additionally, the writings of Nasir-i Khusraw, who was Shirazi's student, are full of praise for him.

9. Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Mustansir billah

When I arrived in this land [of Khurasan] from the holy and prophetic presence with a command from the true Imam, the offspring of the chosen Emissary, and the inheritor of his ancestor's exalted rank, the keeper of his sagacious wisdom – Ma'add Abu Tamim [al-Mustansir billah], the Imam, the Commander of the Faithful – I had already made a study of the writings of the masters of philosophy, and I had a sound grasp of the science of true religion, including that very science of esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) which holds the inner meaning of the Book of the Sacred Law (*shari'ah*).

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw,

(*Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby, 32)

- Nasir-i Khusraw was born in 1004 to a non-Ismaili family in the small town of Qubadiyan in the Balkh district of the Khurasan province (modern day Afghanistan). He spent the first 40 years of his life living a life of pleasure (women, wine, travel, poetry) after receiving a good education; he worked a revenue clerk in the Ghaznavid court and later the Saljuqs.
- At around the age of 40, Nasir-i Khusraw had a spiritual awakening – either from a powerful dream or through meeting an Ismaili *Da'i* – he renounced his way of life, quit drinking wine, and set off on a 7 year journey to find ultimate truth.
- Nasir journeyed to Cairo, where he met the great Ismaili *Bab* al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi and received spiritual and intellectual instruction directly from this *Bab* of the Imam. After about six years, Nasir-i Khusraw was appointed by the Imam al-Mustansir billah to the rank of *Hujjah* of the Khurasan region and returned to his hometown to conduct the Ismaili Summons.

- Back in Balkh, the Sunni scholars persecuted Nasir-i Khusraw, burned down his home, and attempted to kill him; he fled and found refuge in the mountain region of Yumgan (in Tajikistan) where an Ismaili prince protected him; living in exile, Nasir-i Khusraw wrote tens of thousands of lines of poetry and composed several writings on Ismaili philosophy, theology, and *ta'wil*.
- In one famous book called *The Face of Religion (wajh-i din)*, Nasir explained the inner meaning of all of the laws and rituals of Islam, including the *ta'wil* of exoteric *salat*, the *ta'wil* of *Hajj*, the *ta'wil* of fasting, and the *ta'wil* of ablutions. In the book *Provision for the Travelers (zad al-musafir)*, Nasir presented a sophisticated proof for the existence of one God and a new Ismaili arguments for the necessity and existence of prophethood based on the structure of the Cosmos.
- Nasir-i Khusraw's teachings aimed at showing the intellectual basis and philosophical meaning behind religious beliefs and practices – so the title of his final book was called *The Reconciliation of the Two Wisdoms (jami' al-hikmatayn)* – which was about showing how Greek philosophy and Islamic religion are based on the same esoteric truths taught by the Ismaili *Da'wah*.
- Following his death, Nasir-i Khusraw came to be revered and cherished by both Sunni and Ismaili Muslims. The Sunnis built a shrine for Nasir-i Khusraw at the place where he supposedly lived – this shrine was restored by Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Nasir's poetry is famous all over the Persian world including Central Asia; his life story has become the stuff of legend among the Muslims of Central Asia, for whom Nasir-i Khusraw is the patron saint whose blessings protect the entire region.

10. Sayyidna Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124): *Bab* of the Imam al-Mustansir billah, Imam Nizar, and Imam al-Hadi

In 469/1078, Hasan-i Sabbah the Ismaili visited [Imam] al-Mustansir dressed as a merchant and discussed setting up a *Da'wah* in Khurasan and the 'Ajam. This was permitted and Hasan swiftly returned and implemented it. Hasan asked al-Mustansir, "*Who will be my Imam after you?*" The reply was "*My son Nizar.*" The Nizari Ismailis thus believed in Nizar's Imamatus and behaved according to what they thought was the will of Allah in 487/1094.

Ibn Athir, (tr. Kirsten Thomson, *Politics and Power in Late Fatimid Egypt*, 18-19)

- Hasan-i Sabbah was born to a Twelver Shi'a family from the Persian province of Rayy. During this time, Rayy was a major centre of the Ismaili *Da'wah*. When Hasan was a teenager, he was introduced to Ismaili teachings by Amira Zarrab, the local Ismaili *Da'i*, and then continued learning from more Ismaili *da'is* of Rayy like Abu Nasr Sarraj. At the age of 17, Hasan-i Sabbah converted to Ismaili Islam and gave his *bay'ah* to Imam al-Mustansir billah.

- In 1072, the chief Ismail *da'i* of the region, 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Attash appointed Hasan as a *da'i* due to his great impression and Hasan moved to Isfahan – the base of the Ismaili *Da'wah* in Persia to conduct the summons. In 1077, Hasan was sent to Cairo and he arrived in 1078; by this time al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi had died and the Fatimid government and army had been taken over the Badr al-Jamali and his son Afdal al-Jamali; the Imam al-Mustansir billah no longer had control of the Fatimid state.
- It is reported by Ibn Athir that Hasan met Imam al-Mustansir in person, where the Imam informed Hasan that the next Imam was to be his son, Mawlana Nizar, and commanded him to carry out the Ismaili *da'wah* in Persia. Due to this reason, Hasan fell into conflict with the Jamalis, who planned to interfere in the Imamate Succession of Mawlana Nizar.
- Hasan was banished from Egypt by Badr al-Jamali; he travelled extensively to find a safe haven for the Ismaili Imamate, given what he experienced and saw in Cairo. Eventually, Hasan-i Sabbah managed to take over the fort of Alamut – by covertly converting its youth population to Ismaili Islam without the owner even knowing, until it was too late.
- When Imam al-Mustansir died, Hasan-i Sabbah supported the Imamate of Nizar – the Imam's officially appointed successor – and combated the political and religious propaganda of Afdal al-Jamali who placed another son Must'ali on the Fatimid throne; this conflict became very bloody as Imam Nizar was killed, and Hasan-i Sabbah arranged for Nizar's progeny to be safely brought out of Egypt to Alamut – effectively saving the Nizari Ismaili Imamate from being wiped out. At the same time, Hasan sent Ismaili *Fida'is* to Cairo to support Imam Nizar's cause and cause trouble for al-Afdal's rule.
- Hasan-i Sabbah is also famous for creating a new intellectual argument to prove the Imamate of the Imam: this argument was called *Ta'lim* and it employed purely rational proofs for the necessity, existence, and identity of the Ismaili Imam as the infallible guide and bearer of Truth, who provides *ta'lim* (authoritative instruction) to human beings so they may attain the gnosis of God [a modern day adaptation of Hasan's argument for Prophets and Imams is [Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#)]. This argument was so influential that it threw the entire Sunni scholarly and religious establishment into chaos: Al-Ghazali was commissioned by the Abbasid Caliph to write refutations and responses to Hasan's argument and Ismaili teachings in general. In fact, al-Ghazali's own writings show that he himself adopted the concept of *Ta'lim* and integrated it into a Sunni framework – admitting that Prophet Muhammad was the infallible guide in his own time.

11. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153): *Hujjah* of Imam al-Muhtadi

The study of the noble words from the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their friends disclosed to me the hidden secrets and firm principles in the science of the Qur'ān. So I searched for 'the truthful' as passionate lovers might search. And I found one of the virtuous servants of God, just like Moses with his young man... So I learnt from him the ways of the creation (*khalq*) and of the Command (*amr*), the degrees of contrariety and hierarchy, the twin aspects of generality and specificity, and the two rulings of the accomplished and the inchoative. I thus had my fill of this single dish, not the dishes which are the foods of error and the starting points of the ignorant.

Sayyidna 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani,
(tr. Toby Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana*, Introduction, 6)

- He was born in 1086 in the town of Shahrastan in the Khurasan province of Persia. He studied in Nishapur, the centre of Sunni theology where al-Ghazali had studied, and learned from the disciples of the Sunni master al-Juwayni. He then studied in Baghdad at the famous Nizamiyya madrasa.
- At some point, Shahrastani encountered Hasan-i Sabbah and was persuaded by Hasan's *Ta'lim* argument on the necessity and existence of the Imam of the Time as the infallible teacher and bearer of Truth — but Hasan-i Sabbah's party evidently refused to teach Shahrastani, which greatly annoyed him. But Shahrastani was also able to learn about Ismaili philosophical and esoteric teachings from certain Ismaili texts and possibly through an unknown Ismaili *da'i*.
- Having become educated in Ismaili theology, philosophy and esoteric wisdom, Shahrastani practiced *taqiyyah* for his entire life — he was publicly known as a respected Sunni theologian of Ash'ari theology; however, Shahrastani was able to insert Ismaili ideas and interpretations into his writings. He is famous for writing *The Book of Sects and Creeds* (*kitab al-milal wa l-nihal*), where he explains the religious beliefs of all major Muslim and non-Muslim religious groups known at that time. In this volume, Shahrastani devoted a special discussion to the Fatimid Ismailis and the Nizari Ismailis, where he presented very accurate information.
- Shahrastani also wrote a philosophical work called *Struggling with the Philosopher* (*kitab al-musar'aa*) arguing against Ibn Sina's concept of God as the Necessary Existent — accusing Ibn Sina of reducing God to the level of "existence" whereas God must be beyond existence and non-existence. In this work, Shahrastani employed Ismaili philosophy and theology in a most impressive and thorough way.
- Shahrastani's last and most important writing was his esoteric commentary of the Qur'an called *Keys to Arcana and Lamps of the Righteous* (*mafatih al-asrar wa-masabih al-abrar*) — where he provides the *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) of Surah 1 and 2 of the Qur'an based on Ismaili Muslim principles. Most interestingly, Shahrastani begin the commentary by saying

that he came to know the inner meaning of the Qur'an by a spiritual guidance within his heart – indicating that he received inspiration (*ta'yid*) from the Imam like the *Hujjahs*.

- The core teachings of Shahrastani – that the Qur'an and the Prophet are the *mazhar* (locus of manifestation) of God's Word or Command, the distinction between God as Creator of all creatures and God as *Mawla* (Lord-Guardian) of the believers, the importance of the Lord of Resurrection who perfects the *Shari'ah* by abrogating it, and the role of angels mediating between the intellectual spiritual world and the physical world – had a profound impact upon the Nizari Ismaili teachings in Alamut through Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Writing a hundred years later, Tusi referred to Shahrastani as the "*Da'i* of the *Da'is*" (*da'i al-du'at*).
- Mawlana Hazar Imam has made an important allusion (*isharah*) to the importance of Shahrastani, when he named one of his racehorses "Shahrastani". According to *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation), Nasir-i Khusraw once wrote that the "horses" stand for *Hujjahs* and their forelocks stand for *Da'is*.

13. Hasan-i Mahmud-i Katib (d. after 1244): *Da'i* of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad

Sufficient it is for me – and I do not mind if the world
is careless and not mindful of me when the Imam is mindful and caring.
Sufficient it is for me – the Imam of the Time,
the lord of the age, Muhammad b. Hasan, on whose mention be peace.
Sufficient it is for me – his exalted presence, and for the people
of religion and the world, a rank and a sanctuary to enjoy.

Sayyidna Hasan-i Mahmud-i Katib,
(*Divan-i Qa'imiyyah*, tr. S. J. Badakhshani, *Anthology of Ismaili Literature*, 282)

- Not much is known about Hasan except that he lived at Alamut and was contemporary with four Nizari Ismaili Imams – Mawlana Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam, Mawlana Nur al-Din 'Ala Muhammad, Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Hasan, and Mawlana 'Ala al-Din Muhammad.
- Hasan-i Mahmud is very important because he was an eyewitness to the Imam's Declaration of Qiyamah in 1164, when the Imam abolished certain structures of the *Shari'ah* and ended *taqiyyah* for the Nizari Ismailis.
- He authored a famous collection of poetry called Poems of the Resurrector (*Divan-i Qa'imiyyah*), where he extolls the Imams of Alamut and elaborates on the spiritual meaning of the Qiyamah; he also vividly describes how the Jamat of Alamut commemorated the Qiyamah. In modern times, a manuscript of the Poem Collection was found secretly hidden in the wall of a house in Iran
- He wrote an important treatise, called *Haft Bab-i Baba Sayyidna*, a treatise explaining the concept of Qiyamah and the Imamate of Mawlana Hasan 'ala-

dhikrihi al-salam. This was written 60 years after the Qiyamah and represents the earliest available source for the event.

- With Nasir al-Din Tusi, Hasan helped write the major Nizari text *The Paradise of Submission* (rawda-yi taslim), which is a compendium of Nizari Ismaili philosophy, theology, and spirituality.

14. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274): *Da'i* of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad

I happened to see a copy, in mediocre handwriting and antiquated paper, of the *Fusul-i Muqaddas* (*Farmans*) of Imam 'Ala Dhihrihi al-Salam, in the possession of an unworthy person who did not know what it was. Obtaining [the text] with a ruse, I occupied myself day and night with reading it, and the extent of my humble understanding and ability, I gained endless benefits from those sacred words which are the light of hearts and the illuminator of inner thoughts. It opened a little of my eye of exploration and my inner sight was unveiled.

Sayyidna Nasir al-Din al-Tusi,
(*Contemplation and Action*, tr. S. J. Badakhshani, 31)

- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was born to a Twelver Shi'a family and grew up in Nishapur; however, his father used to hint to him that the Ismaili path was the most correct interpretation of Islam and made sure Tusi was educated by students of al-Shahrastani who had Ismaili leanings.
- Tusi reported in his autobiography, *Contemplation and Action* (*Sayr wa Suluk*) that he studied Islamic law, *kalam* theology, and peripatetic philosophy (*falsafa*) but did not find intellectual certainty in these sciences; one day [see above] he found a copy of the *Farmans* of Imam Hasan 'ala-dhihrihi al-salam in the possession of someone who did not value them. Tusi admitted that he "obtained it with a ruse", i.e. stole them, and began reading them.
- After reading the *Farmans* of the Imam, Tusi began to find the spiritual certainty he was seeking and started learning more about the Nizari Ismaili theological and philosophical teachings; eventually he became convinced by Hasan-i Sabbah's *Ta'lim* argument and entered the Ismaili *da'wah* as a *Mustajib*.
- Tusi stayed with the Ismailis for three decades – first in Quhistan and then in Alamut. During this time, he wrote his greatest scientific, philosophical and esoteric works – including his *Nasirean Ethics*, his *Commentary on Ibn Sina's* writings, and several Ismaili treatises such as *The Paradise of Submission* (*Rawda-yi Taslim*), which Tusi wrote with Hasan-i Mahmud's collaboration. For his services, Tusi was given the title of "Sultan of the *Da'is*" (*Sultan al-Du'at*). Many of Tusi's teachings and words are quoted in Nizari Ismaili literature of the next few centuries.
- When the Mongols invaded Persia and engaged the Nizari Ismaili state in war, Tusi was part of the Ismaili negotiating team and one of the advisors

to the Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah. After the surrender of the Ismailis and the massacre of the Imam, his family, and tens of thousands of Nizari Ismailis by the Mongols, Tusi was able to save his life by practicing *taqiyyah* and claiming that he was a Twelver Shi'a. Tusi's tactics paid off: the Mongol leader Hulagu Khan appointed Tusi as his advisor and patronized him, even building him an observatory.

- In his later years, Tusi lived his life outwardly as a Twelver Shi'a, but continued writing on many subjects such as Imamatus and Sufism. Today there continues to be a debate about Tusi's religious affiliation – whether he was Ismaili, Avicennian, Twelver, or Sufi, or a combination of all of these.
- Recent evidence from Tusi's later works shows that Tusi actually remained Nizari Ismaili in his religious conviction despite outwardly appearing as Twelver: Tusi continued to hold and expound Ismaili Muslim views on the absolute transcendence of God instead of Twelver or Sufi positions; he also seems to have described and praised the Ismaili Imams in the most venerating language in one of his letters to the Sufi thinker Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, where he mysteriously refers to a person who is "*the great Imam, the pole of God's friends, the caliph of the Prophets, the inviter to Truth, the guidance of creation*"; even in his Twelver works, Tusi seems to speak favourably of the Ismaili concept of Imamatus over the Twelver view.
- After Tusi's death, his descendants in the village of Sidih, near Birjand, continued to be venerated by the Persian Ismailis, as reported by Imam Aga Ali Shah.

14. Sayyidna Rashid al-Din Sinan (d. 1193): *Hujjah* of Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam and Imam 'Ala Muhammad

Be united in following the teaching of a person appointed by the designation of God and his Friend [the Imam] and unify your passions in obeying him. Accept willingly whatever commands and prohibitions he vouchsafes to you. No, by the Lord of the Worlds, you do not believe until you make him judge in your tangles, and do not afterwards find difficulty in his decisions but assent to them heartily. And this uniting is the unity which is the sign of truth that saves from destruction and leads to everlasting felicity, since disagreement is the sign of falsehood, which leads to shameful perdition.

Letter of Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam appointing Rashid al-Din Sinan as his *Hujjah*

(tr. Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 105)

- In the 12th century, the Syrian Nizari Ismailis lived amidst many hostile parties – including Sunni Muslims and Crusaders, who had been making repeated invasions of the area in the name of Jesus Christ. The Ismailis in Aleppo and Damascus had been under the protection of local emirs – until 1128 when the emir of Damascus passed away. Immediately, the Sunni

preachers and mobs targeted the Ismaili community of the city – leading to the mass slaughter of over 10,000 Ismaili murids, with many being crucified on the city gates. Such events caused the remaining Ismailis to relocate to the mountains and live in fortresses – including Qadmus, Masyaf, al-Khawabi, Rusafa, and Kahf.

- Sinan was born a non-Ismaili in Basra in 1133. He was known to be lame in one leg but very personable, gentle, honorable, and well-loved. The history we know shows his military and diplomatic genius but he was the quintessential well-rounded *Da'i* – proficient as he was in theology, philosophy, astronomy, and other religious sciences – who would have made Naysaburi proud.
- After his conversion to Ismailism he was trained as a *Da'i* in Alamut where he became close to his classmate, the Ismaili Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salām. The Imam sent his trusted classmate to Syria where he would take the community under his protection.
- Very quickly, under his guidance, Sinan stopped the infighting between Ismaili factions and trained *Fida'is* who would be critical to his military strategy at protecting the Syrian Ismaili position. He also worked on the infrastructure, procuring strongholds and fortifying those they had. Communication between fortresses in this hostile environment was done with pigeons and using secret codes.
- A military and political genius, Sinan was able to pit one rival against another – whether they be Sunnis or a Crusading party – and use the period of chaos to keep the Ismaili community from being targeted. Whenever he could engage in peaceful negotiation – he did – including with the Christian King of Jerusalem. His reputation among Christians earned him the title, “Old Man of the Mountain.”
- Sinan's relationship with the fearsome and notorious Ayyubid Caliph Salah al-Din (known in the West as Saladin) exemplifies the respect he earned from the power players of his time and how he was able to use every means to protect the Syrian Ismailis not just of his time but for generations. Saladin was the Kurdish general who defeated the Shia Fatimids and took over their lands to form his own Sunni Ayyubid empire. One of the best-known Muslim leaders in all of Islamic history, his leadership saw the beginning of the end of the Crusades as he took back Jerusalem. Ambitious and astute, Saladin tried to rule all of Islam under his Sunni banner and he certainly saw Sinan as a threat to his goal.
- In 1176 Saladin attacked the Ismailis and overran the small community with his far superior forces. Then he turned his eye to Masyaf where Sinan was located. No one knows what Sinan and his *Fida'is* did – but only days after his siege of Masyaf had begun – Saladin ended it and did not return.

- After this event Saladin, the lion of Sunni Islam, not only ceased his attack on Ismailis but became Sinan's ally. There are also reports of *Fida'is* being sent to help Saladin fight Crusader forces including some suspected high profile assassinations. There are other reports of Crusaders imprisoned for Saladin at Ismaili fortresses; so when Saladin negotiated peace with English King Richard the Lion-Hearted, he made sure to safeguard Ismaili lands in the treaty.
- When Sinan died in 1193 he was entombed at the Syrian Ismaili fortress of Kahf. He could have died peacefully, knowing that he had served his Imam and protected the Imam's followers for centuries. His relationship with Saladin and the Ayyubids outlasted their lifetimes as the later Ayyubid Caliphs respected the boundaries of the Ismaili lands and even continued to ally with them against the Crusaders. Local Sunnis also respected their autonomy despite their differences of faith.
- Sinan's tradition of allying with disparate forces also continued and sometimes the Ismailis found themselves fighting alongside some Crusaders against others. Interestingly, some historians note that some of the Knights Templars were influenced by Ismaili philosophy – still taught even at this most sensitive and trying time of conflict. There is speculation that some of the esoteric elements in the traditions of the Knights Templar may have come from an Ismaili influence and were brought back to Europe.

15. Sayyidna Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320): *Da'i* of Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad and Imam Qasim Shah

You stand behind anyone who winds a turban around his head and steps before you, thinking, 'this is the Imam.' Not for an instant is the world bereft of the Imam of the time! Does what I say bother you? Well, what can I do about it if the Qur'an says so? As the Imam was and always will be, what would you respond to me if I were to ask, 'Who is your Imam?' If you do not know the Imam of your time with certitude, then know certainly that your wealth, wife, even the head upon your shoulders, all are forbidden to you.

Nizari Quhistani,
(*Divan*, tr. Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 68-69)

- Nizari Quhistani was 10 years old when the Mongols massacred tens of thousands of Nizari Ismailis in Persia; Nizari grew up in Khurasan during a time when Ismailis in Persia lived in fear of their lives.
- As a youth, Nizari learned poetry very easily, mastering Arabic and Persian classical styles. He then went on to become a tax collector and court poet. During this time Nizari had to conceal his Ismaili identity.
- He then undertook a journey of several years, apparently in search of the Imam of the Time who was Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad living under disguise.

- Nizari wrote a great deal of poetry about his travels and about his faith, often speaking about his Ismaili beliefs and activities using cryptic Sufi images – like lover/beloved, wine cups, khanaqahs, cloaks, etc.
- Finally, Nizari located the whereabouts of Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad and went to get the Didar of the Imam. The Imam “reprimanded Nizari for coming all the way from Khurasan to meet him. He told the poet that the lover and the beloved are in reality never apart: ‘When was Qays ever without the face of Layla?’ he asked, making reference to the Arabic analogue to Romeo and Juliet (Nadia E. Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, 132)

Ismaili *Pirs*: The *Babs* of the Imams

Upon the order (*farman*) of Lord Qasim Shah
 Guru Shams, the Pir, went to roam.
 He travelled through twenty-four kingdoms
 Then, he who belonged to the family of the Prophet,
 Came to the city of Ucch (v. 5)
 To all he imparted the true teaching –
 The path of the religion of *Satpanth*

Pir Shams al-Din,

(Garbi 17, tr. Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 350)

The figure known as the “*Pir*” in the terminology of South Asian Ismaili tradition is one of the 4 *Babs* of the Imam, as noted above, and the highest of the *Babs* in formal authority, second only to the Imam. The status of the *Pirs* is described by the Ismaili Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (known also as Shah al-Mustansir bi’llah II) in his *Farmans*:

The *Pir* is the person to whom the Imam of the time has granted his position, which makes him the highest amongst the creations (*ashraf-i makhluqat*). And whenever he (the Imam) has chosen the *Pir*, and appointed him, he (the *Pir*) must convey to others the knowledge in detail (*ma’rifat-ra ba-tafsil*). You must attain perfection in knowledge of the Imam through him. But if he has not appointed a *Pir*, you must come to know some person amongst the possessors of knowledge (*sahiban-i ‘ilm*) whom he has commissioned to guide and summon the people (*ba-dalalat wa da’wat*) so that you may through the guidance and summons of such a person (*irshad wa da’wat*) attain the recognition of the Imam (*ma’rifat-i Imam*). Thus you will not remain in wretchedness, attaining through the illumination of his knowledge (*rawshana’i-y-i ilm-i u*) the recognition of the Imam. And whenever there is a *Pir*, the teachers will take up summons (*da’wat*), by his permission, remaining under his control and order.

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (Mustansir bi’llah II), (*Pandiyat-i Jawanamardi*, tr. W. Ivanow, 26)

Since the time of Prophet Muhammad, there have been 50 *Pirs* – Prophet Muhammad was the first *Pir* and Mawlana Hazar Imam is the fiftieth and

current *Pir*. All the *Pirs* were directly descended from an Ismaili Imam. The Ismaili Imam guides the general Jamat through his *Pir* – even when the Imam himself plays the role of *Pir* like today.

Among the 50 *Pirs* since Prophet Muhammad, a number *Pirs* were renowned for leading the Ismaili *Da'wah* in South Asia through composing the *Ginans* – which are the *Pirs'* teachings of *ta'wil* and *ma'rifah* through the inspiration (*nurani ta'yid*) of the Imam. These include Pir Satgur Nur, Pir Shams, *Pir* Nasir al-Din, Pir Shihab al-Din, Pir Sadr al-Din, Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din, and Pir Taj al-Din. There were also *Hujjahs* and *Da'is* from the progeny of Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din including Sayyid Imam Shah, Sayyid Dadu, Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah, and others, who came to instruct and guide the South Asian Ismailis such as the Shamsis, Khojahs, and Mumnas.

Dr. Shafique Virani also explains the background and mission of Ismaili *Pirs* in South Asia and how they were directly descended from Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq:

The family of *Pirs* claimed descent from Isma'il b. Ja'far, but through a line different from that of the Imams, and provided the most gifted and dedicated exponents of Ismailism in South Asia. The leaders of the community seem to have continuously been appointed from their ranks. Their activities are alluded to in a contemporary Iranian source, the anonymous treatise entitled Epistle of the Right Path. Describing how the Imams from 'Ali through Isma'il were manifest (*zahir*) while those from Isma'il through Mahdi were concealed (*mastur*), it continues: Mawlana Isma'il manifested in the cities of Uch and Multan, leaving indications among the people of India and displaying marvels. A community from among that Imam's descendants still remains in that realm, and by means of those indications those people will never entertain doubts.

Shafique N. Virani, (*The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 99)

6. The Ismaili *Da'is* in the Present

The *da'i* must see to the affairs of the *da'wah* and its proper administration, thereby relieving the Imam of that obligation, for the Imam has appointed him to manage the *da'wah* and maintain the welfare of various regions... Thus the *da'i* is responsible for its repair and the amelioration of all corruption, trouble, the perversion of doctrine, doubt about religion, going astray, insurrection and rebellion that happens in the *da'wah*... When God questions the Imam about things connected to the affairs of his community and his safeguarding and care for them, the Imam will ask him [the *da'i*], for the Imam made that his responsibility.

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi

(*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 71-72)

Today, the formal or official Ismaili *Da'wah* with its teaching hierarchy is no longer in operation. The formal Ismaili *D'wah* was abolished by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. The abolishment of the *Da'wah* and its hierarchy was foretold one thousand

years ago by Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, Nasir-i Khusraw, al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi, and other Ismaili *da'is*. It was said that when the formal *Da'wah* is abolished, the Cycle of Age of Resurrection (*qiyama*) will begin, in which the Imam is more directly accessible to his *murids* and humankind in general than ever before. In this situation, the Imam is like the Sun and the Ismaili *Babs*, *Hujjahs*, and *Da'is* are like the Moon and the Stars and constellations: the Imam's spiritual radiance and guidance overshadows the knowledge and guidance of the *da'is* just as the Sun's bright light illuminates the sky and conceals the lights of the moon and stars.

During the time when the Imam of the Time manifests himself, this community of adepts [i.e. *Babs*, *Hujjahs*, *Da'is*, *Ma'dhuns*] are concealed like the stars at the moment of sunrise; they only reveal themselves during a period of concealment.

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad

(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, 177)

Every Ismaili *murid* is at a different rank of knowledge (*'ilm*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*). The spiritual responsibility of each *murid* is to raise up the person who is below him to his own rank in knowledge. This is stated by Imam al-Mu'izz as follows: "*The true believer is a true believer only when he has raised up a true believer like unto himself*" (Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis*, 138).

Today, we can continue to speak about Ismaili *da'is* existing in the world in the following ways:

1. *Murids* who literally or symbolically perform the same work as prior Ismaili *da'is* without formal titles or official recognition:

Historically, the Ismaili *da'is* had the duty of instructing and teaching Ismaili theology, philosophy, wisdom, and esoteric interpretation to other Ismailis and also assisting them materially; the Imam rarely performed these tasks himself, but delegated it to his *Hujjahs* and *Da'is*. Today, this same work continues in a different form, as the Imam has commanded every *murid* to use their intellect to understand and practice their faith and share their religious knowledge with others. Furthermore, some *murids* have expressed their intention to symbolically perform work similar to the Ismaili *da'is* of the past – such as dedicating their life in service to the Imam like the Imam's servants and entourage, sacrificing their life for the Imam's cause similar to past *Da'is* and *Fida'is*, and performing hidden but important services for the Imam just as the *Hujjahs* did so through the Imam's luminous inspiration (*nurani ta'yid*). Symbolically speaking, the souls of all *murids* of the Imam are spiritually connected like the leaves, branches, and roots of a tree illuminated by the Light of the Imam.

In the world of reality, everything is connected, from the true Imam, who is like the heaven, down to the weak *Mustajib*, who is like the smallest particles of earth, so that nothing is left out of the system... The Messenger of God said: "*We are from the Light (nur) of God and our Shi'a are from us, akin to a blessed tree which has its own roots, branches, and leaves like every tree.*" The

meaning of this tradition is that every believer (*mu'min*) who pledges the covenant (*'ahd*) to the Imam of the Time is one of the [spiritual] descendants of the Prophet and is from the Light (*nur*) of God. His return is to that [*nurani*] tree because he has become one of its leaves.

Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw
(*Shish Fasl or Rawshana'i-nama*, ed. W. Ivanow, 35-36)

Thus, a small number of intellectually and spiritually gifted Ismailis, sometimes working various fields including Jamati institutions, AKDN institutions, Ismaili civil society organizations, academia, and informal and discrete settings, continue to perform the same roles and work as the historical Ismaili *da'is* – such as establishing the proof of the Imam, helping *murids* better recognize the Imam, and safeguarding their quality of life — but without their teachings being authoritative as was the case in the past.

2. *Murids* who are “silent *da'is*” through embodying the teachings of the Imam and the ethics of Islam:

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq says to all his non-*da'i* Shi'as: “Be our silent *da'is*.” He made his remarks clear by pointing out to them that if they lived a straight life they would attract the people to their faith and thus they would prove to be the *da'is* not by means of their tongue but by means of their deeds.

Sayyidna Qadi al-Nu'man, (*Code of Conduct for the Followers of Imam*, tr. Jawad Muscati and A. Moulvi, 134-135)

Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq has said: “Be for us silent *da'is*”, and they asked, ‘How can we make the appeal, O son of the Messenger of God, if we are silent?’ He replied, “Act in accord with what we commanded you to do with respect to obeying God and forbid what we forbade you to do.”

Sayyidna Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (*A Code of Conduct*, tr. Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker, 41)

3. *Murids* who convey the Imam's messages and blessings to other *murids*:

According to the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, “*Blessed is the one who saw me, and blessed is the one who saw the one who saw me*” (al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi, *al-Majalis a-Mu'ayyadiyyah*). The meaning of this *hadith* is that the Ismaili *murid* who has *didar* (beatific vision) of the Imam can transmit and share the blessings of the *didar* with other *murids* — when others simply look into that *murid's* eyes. This used to be a pre-modern practice — where one or two people in a village journeyed to see the Imam and when they returned, other Ismailis would look into their eyes and attain the *didar* through them. This practice of a *murid* having the Imam's *didar* through another *murid* is practiced daily during the *Shah-jo-didar* ritual. In this respect, a *murid* who conveys the Imam's *didar*, blessings and guidance to other *murids* is acting as an Ismaili *da'i* in this role.

7. From Ismaili *Du'a'* to Ismaili *Da'wah*

Murids who perform the Ismaili *Du'a* with understanding — reciting it with awareness of its real meaning — are symbolically performing the essential role of

the Ismaili Da'i. This is because the entirety of the Ismaili *Du'a'* summarizes, expresses, embodies and symbolizes the principles and stages of the Ismaili *Da'wah*. The *Du'a'* enacts the entire spiritual journey of a *murid* through the Ismaili Tariqah of Islam, from the beginning to the end. Indeed, the words *du'a'*, *da'wah*, *da'i* all come from the same Arabic root (*dal-'ayn-waw*) which means to summon, to invite, to call, etc.

The Ismaili *Du'a'* consists of six parts. Each part contains a Qur'anic verse (or verses), a supplication (*du'a'*), an affirmation (*ithbat*) of the Imam of the Time, and prostration (*sujud*). The overall meaning of the Ismaili *Du'a'* can be seen by simply noting the themes and order of the Qur'anic verses recited through the six parts:

Part 1: *Surat al-Fatihah* whose main theme is the '*ibadah* (worship) of God:

In the First Part, the worshipper recognizes the Attributes of God such as Mercy, Compassion, Lordship and Sovereignty and enters into the worship (*'ibadah*) of God.

Part 2: *Surat al-Nisa* (4:59 – “O you who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger and the holders of authority amongst you”) and *Surah Yasin* (36:12 – “And We have encompassed all things in a Manifest Imam”) whose main theme is obedience (*ta'ah*) to God's Representatives:

In the Second Part, after affirming the need to worship God, the worshipper recognizes that God has established a manifest Imam as the possessor of authority (*ulu l-amr*) and that worship can only take place by means of obedience (*ta'ah*) to God, the Prophet, and the Imams.

Part 3: *Surat al-Ma'idah* (5:67 – “O Messenger, proclaim that which has been revealed to you by your Lord...”) whose main theme is the declaration (*tabligh*) of the Imam:

In the Third Part, the worshiper recognizes the identity of the Imam by means of the declaration (*tabligh*) of divine designation (*nass*) of the Imam – which was publicly declared by Prophet Muhammad at Ghadir al-Khum.

Part 4: *Surat al-Fath* (48:10 – “Verily, those who give their bay'ah unto you (Muhammad), they give their bay'ah unto God Himself...”) whose main theme is bay'ah/mithaq (covenant):

In the Fourth Part, after discovering the identity of the Imam, the worshipper pledges a covenant (*mithaq*) with the Imam through the act of bay'ah and becomes a *murid* and a spiritual child of the Imam.

Part 5: *Surat al-Anfal* (8:27 – “O you who believe, do not betray God and His Messenger and do not betray your trusts (*amanat*) while you know”) whose main theme is trust (*amanah*):

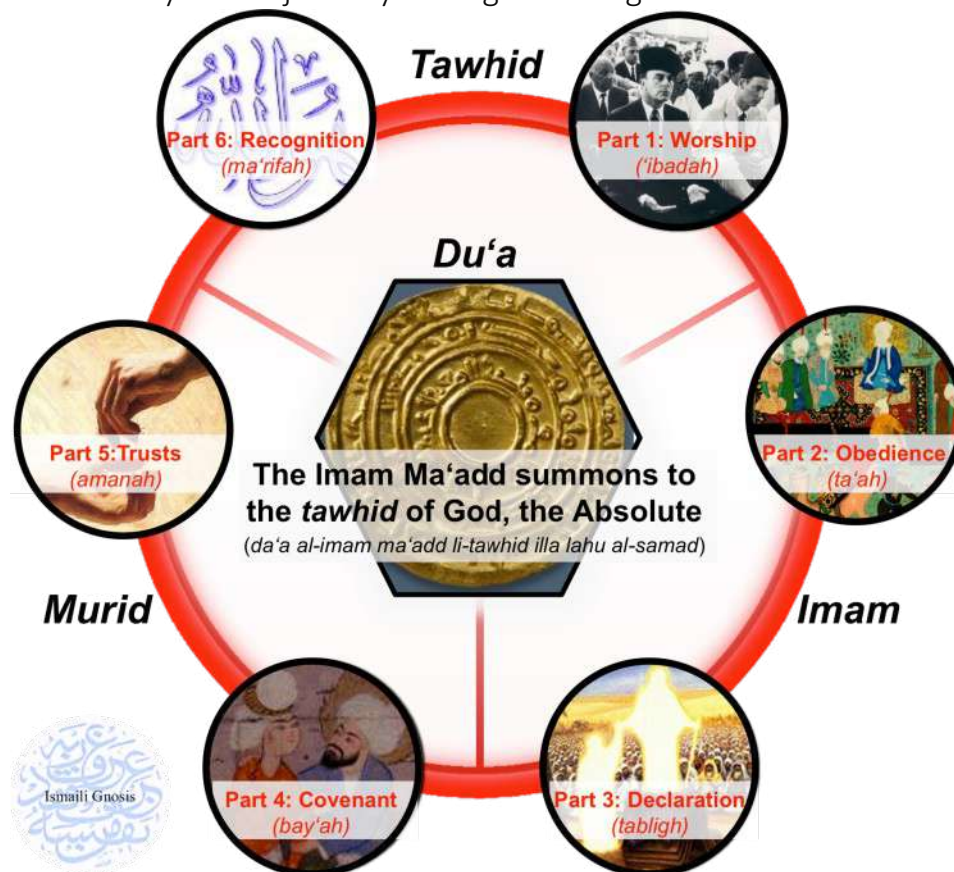
In the Fifth Part, the *murid* affirms to stand by his *bay'ah* and fulfill the trusts (*amanat*) of the Imam. During the silent *dhikr* of *Ya Ali Ya Muhammad* in the midst of the Fifth Part, the murid contemplates and attains the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of the Imam and his *Bab*. The end of this special *dhikr* – beginning with the exclamation of *Ya Imam al-Zaman* (O' Imam of the Time) – represents the moment

(*waqt*) of the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of the Imam followed by a declaration of the true reality (*haqiqah*) of the Imam.

Part 6: *Surat al-Ikhlās* (112) – “Say: He is God, the Unique. God is Independent. He did not beget nor was He begotten. And there is none like unto him”) whose main theme is the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of *tawhid*:

In the Sixth Part, after having recognized the Imam in his reality, the *murid* attains the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of *tawhid* – the absolute oneness of God – represented by *Surat al-Ikhlās*.

Based on the Qur'anic verses evoked in each Part, the act of reciting the Ismaili *Du'a'* is a symbolic journey through the stages of the Ismaili *Da'wah*:



The Ismaili *Du'a'* encompasses the stages of the Ismaili *Da'wah*. This Ismaili *Du'a'* is a practical or embodied form of the Imam's "Summons" (*Da'wah*) to his *murids* as it summarizes the essence of the Ismaili *Tariqah* of Islam. To practice this *Du'a'* is to respond to this *Da'wah* and symbolically journey through all its stages. So whenever an Ismaili *murid* recites the Ismaili *Du'a'* with true understanding, he or she symbolically becomes a *Da'i* and his *Du'a'* is actually a "summons" (*Da'wah*) to the recognition of the unity of God (*tawhid*) through the Imam of the Time.

Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts

In honour of the Aga Khan's upcoming Jodidi Lecture at Harvard University, Ismaili Gnosis presents the following primer on the Aga Khan and the Shia Ismaili Muslims. We encourage our readers to share this article widely.



I have the great privilege of representing the Ismaili Imamate — this institution which has stretched beyond borders for more than 1400 years and which defines itself and is recognised by an increasingly large number of states, as the succession of Shia Imami Ismaili Imams....The Ismaili Imamate is a supra-national entity, representing the succession of Imams since the time of the Prophet[...] today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet. The role of the Ismaili Imam is a spiritual one; his authority is that of religious interpretation. It is not a political role. I do not govern any land. At the same time, Islam believes fundamentally that the spiritual and material worlds are inextricably connected.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (Present Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims)

(Address to Both Houses of Canadian Parliament and Senate, February 27, 2014, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

✓ In early Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (may God's peace be upon him and his family) was both the temporal and spiritual leader of the believers, as testified in the Holy Qur'an. All questions concerning religious interpretations, law, ethics, theology, etc. were guided by the Prophet in person; his guidance and teaching

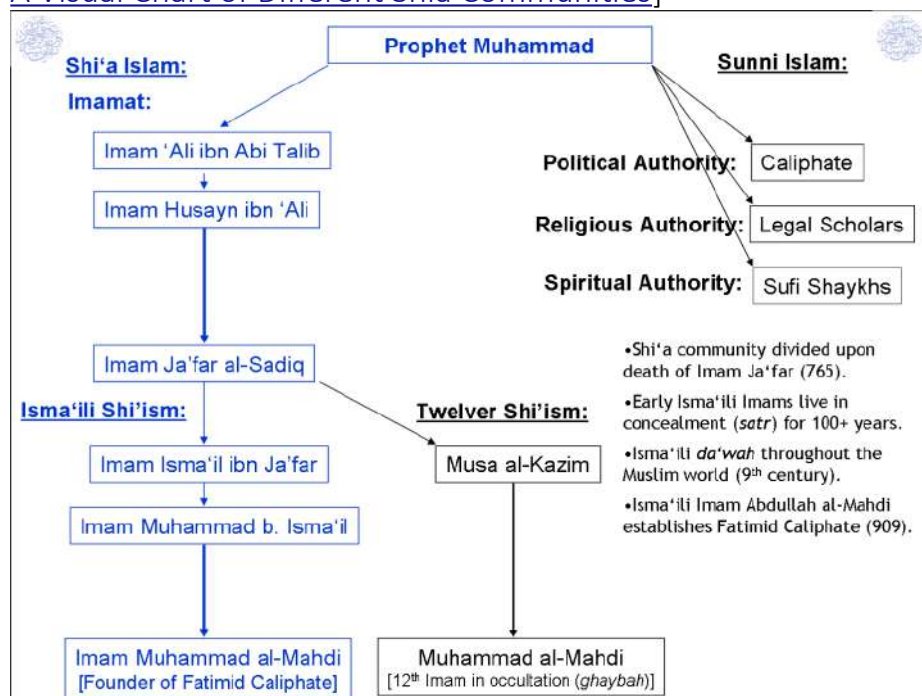
was, for all intents and purposes, the direct representation of God's Will and Command to the believers. [Read more at [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#)]

- Shia Muslims hold that the Prophet Muhammad – whom Holy Qur'an 33:6 speaks of as possessing more authority (*awla*) over the believers than their own souls – had designated his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the master (*mawla*; *wali*) of the believers and his successor in spiritual matters.

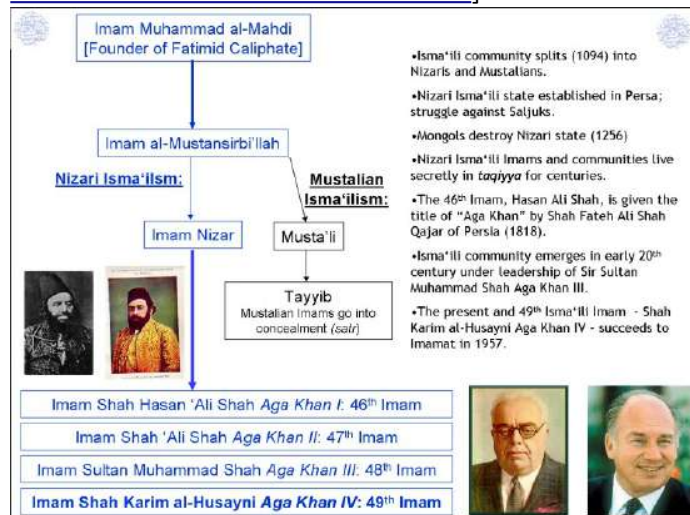
- This designation was declared on several occasions and for the last time during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage when the Prophet Muhammad halted the pilgrims at Ghadir Khum, quoted Qur'an 33:6 by saying "Do I not have more authority (*awla*) over you than your own souls" and then proceeded to declare **"He whose mawla I am, 'Ali is his mawla."** This event at Ghadir Khum is attested to by Sunni and Shia sources and narrated by 184 companions.[Read more at [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#)]

- Shia Muslims thus believe that the spiritual and charismatic authority of the Prophet Muhammad and all of his spiritual rights and duties (with the exception of revelation) continue through the institution of hereditary spiritual leadership called the Imamat, with Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the first Imam. Sunni Muslims believe that the Prophet appointed no direct successor and recognize the religious scholars (*'ulama*) as the holders of religious authority. Subsequently, all Sufi Tariqahs came to recognize 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Prophet's spiritual successor.

- The Imam for Shia Muslims is the inheritor of the Prophet Muhammad's authority and the legitimate authority for the interpretation of Islam. This Imamat is subsequently handed down by each Imam to a successor whom he designates and appoints from among his male descendants. [Read more at [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#)]



✓ As history unfolded, Shia Muslims came to differ over the rightful succession of Imams and traced the Imamatus through different lines of descent from a particular Imam. **The Ismailis are Shia Muslims who affirm that Isma'il ibn Ja'far was the rightful Imam** after the 5th Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, and that subsequently, the lineage of Imams continues through the descendants of Isma'il ibn Ja'far up to the present day. Like Sufis, Mu'tazilites and other Muslim philosophers, the Ismailis emphasize a distinction between the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) interpretations of the Qur'an. [Read more at [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamatus of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#)]



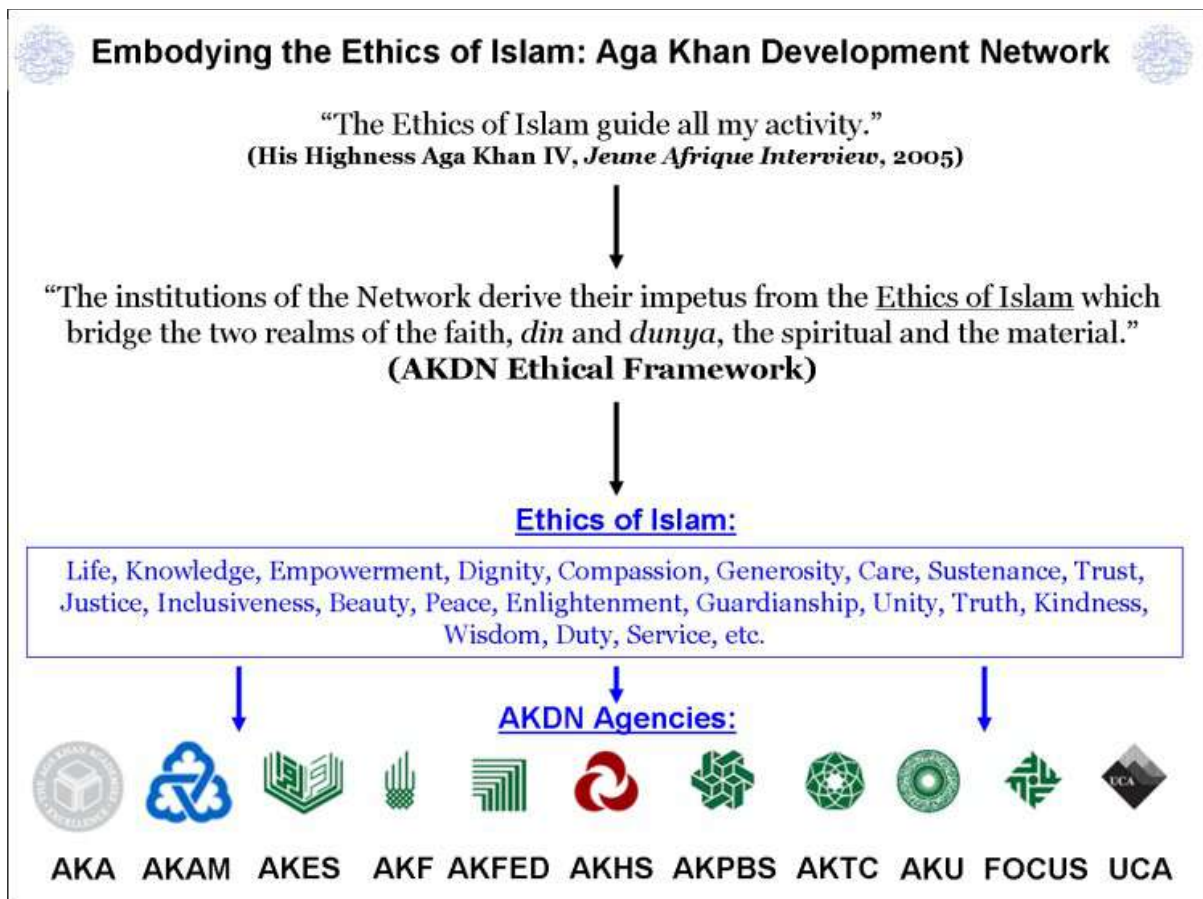
✓ The Ismailis made major political, cultural and intellectual contributions to Muslim civilization. The Fatimid Caliphate was founded and ruled by several Ismaili Imams; great philosophers like Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, the Ikhwan al-Safa, Nasir-i Khusraw, Hasan-i Sabbah, and Nasir al-Din Tusi were Ismailis. For most of their history, the Ismailis were persecuted by the Sunni political establishment and endured several massacres and genocides at the hands of their enemies. [Read more at [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#)].

✓ The 48th Ismaili Imam, the predecessor of the current Aga Khan, was Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (Imamat from 1885-1957); he was the founder and first president of the All-India Muslim League, founder of Aligarh University, President of the League of Nations (1937-1939), and one of the founders of the state of Pakistan. [Read more at [Twentieth Century: "The Unity of Islam" – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III's Services to the Muslim World](#)]

Muslim communities. The Aga Khan has emphasised an interpretation of Islam as an intellectual, spiritual and humanistic faith that emphasises human dignity and upholds human diversity through pluralism. The Aga Khan and the Ismaili Muslims affirm the right of all Muslim communities interpret Islam in their distinct ways and recognize the different schools and interpretations of Islam as an equally earnest endeavor to practice and express the faith of Islam. With respect to Sunni and Shia reconciliation, the Ismailis affirm that the spiritual authority of the Prophet Muhammad continues in the Imamate while accepting the worldly authority of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and other Caliphs who have helped the cause of Islam, politically, socially and from a worldly point of view. [Read about the [Aga Khan's proposal for Sunni-Shia unity](#)].

- ✓ The present Aga Khan has been [widely recognized](#) for his service to humanity (data courtesy of [Ismailmail](#)): he has received 28 Title & State Decorations, 21 honorary degrees, 16 civic honours, and has delivered over 70 high profile keynote addresses including a recent speech to the Parliament of Canada. [Read about the [Aga Khan's views and interpretations of Islam at NanoWisdoms](#)]

- ✓ The Ismaili Imamate's mandate also includes uplifting the quality of life of all the people among whom the Ismaili Muslims live; this is fulfilled through the **Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** – a collection of development agencies who seek to improve quality of life and provide relief in the areas of poverty, health, architecture, media, governance, education, finance, economic development, building, environment, etc. [Read more at [AKDN website](#)]



✓ The work of the AKDN is not charity in the Western sense of handouts, but rather, its mission is to restore human dignity by empowering people to become self-sustaining. The work of the AKDN agencies is based on translating the Ethics of Islam into institutional endeavors. [Read more at the [AKDN Ethical Framework](#)]

Mourning for Ma'rifah: Ismaili Interpretations of Ashura

“We are the House of Muhammad and as such are more entitled to the authority (*walāyah*) of this affair over you than these pretenders who claim what does not belong to them... By God there is no son of a Prophet other than me among you and among the peoples from East to West.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī

The tenth day of Muḥarram, known as the Day of ‘Āshūra’ is when the Battle of Karbala took place – in which Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the second *From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat* of the Shī‘ī Muslims, along with his family and supporters, was brutally massacred by the armies of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān.



This painting commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and the third imam, or leader, of the Shia Muslims. Source brooklynmuseum.org.

The *Imām* and the Adversary (*ḍidd*)

When I ask you to read Kiso (the account of the events at Karbala) it is not because those who read it will go to Paradise, but that you may ponder over it and know the unbelievers fought us. These Prophets and *Imāms* knew what was going to happen, yet we are not allowed to reveal the mysteries of the Unseen (*ghayb*).

Imām Āgā Shāh ‘Alī Shāh Āgā Khān II, (transl. Rai Gulamali Kassam Shivji, Calgary November 1989)

The Battle of Karbala, from the esoteric perspective, was the manifestation of the opposition that takes place in every age and time between the forces of

the *Imām* of the Time and the forces of his Adversity (*ḍidd*). Just as the *Imām* of the Time is the inheritor of Haḍrat Adam and the vicegerent of God on earth, the Adversary (*ḍidd*) is the inheritor of Iblīs and the devil (*shayṭān*) among human beings.

Likewise did We appoint for every Messenger an enemy: devils (*shayāṭīna*) among mankind and *jinn*s, inspiring each other with flowery discourses by way of deception. If thy Lord had so planned, they would not have done it: so leave them and their inventions alone.

(Holy Quran 6:112)

Likewise, century after century, and epoch after epoch, every time has its Iblīs, may God's curses be upon him, and its Adam, may God's prayers be upon him.

al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī, (*Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Vol. II, Majlis No. 11, 71)

The Ismā'īlī Imāms have also referred to this Adversary or Iblis of the Time as the "pharaoh" who tries to lead people astray in the age of every *Imām*.

There is a physical and spiritual pharaoh in the cycle of every *Imām*. By means of the power and influence of his defiled soul he leads astray the simple-minded servants who are not yet firm-footed on the way of the bearer of truth, diverting them from the path of the most sublime paradise and supreme heaven to the nethermost hell, which is the land of the hypocrites (*munaḍḍiqān*).

Imām Islāmshāh, (*Seven Aphorisms*, quoted in *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 107)

Just as the *Imām* is the bearer of the light of *walāyah* which bring human beings closer to God, the Adversary manifests the darknesses of the "counter-*walāyah*" which leads people astray. As al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī explains, the *Imām* and his hierarchy (*ḥudūd*) of spiritual teachers are the embodiment of virtues known as the Adamic Forms (*al-ṣuwar al-ādamiyyah*) and they are opposed by the Adversary and his counter-hierarchy of deceptors who embody the decadent vices known as Satanic Shapes (*al-ashkāl al-shayṭāniyyah*). In other words, there exist the *Imāms* of Truth (*a'immat al-ḥaqq*) as well as the *imāms* of going astray (*a'immat al-ḍalāl*).

The masters of resemblance are the false *imāms* (*a'immat al-bāṭil*), who are established opposite to the true *Imāms* (*a'immat al-ḥaqq*), and the creation of humankind, only resembling the real creation of God, and they (the false *imāms*) are apparitions (*ashbāh*) without spirits (*arwāḥ*). Meaning, God did not breath into them the Spirit of True Life (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt al-ḥaqīqiyyah*) with the designation (*naṣṣ*) from the Messenger of God.

al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī, (*Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, Vol. I, Majlis No. 25, 124)

The difference between the true *Imām* and the Adversary – the false *imām* – is that the true *Imām* is inspired by the Holy Spirit (*al-mu'ayyad bi'l-rūḥ al-quds*) while the false *imām* attempts to imitate the true *Imām* and usurp his rights. This opposition even existed in From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat *māms* who preceded the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

For example, Mawlānā Hāshim ibn ‘Abd Manāf (the great grandfather of the Prophet) was the *Imām* of his time and his Adversary was his own half-brother Umayyah – whom he banished from Mecca. There was similar opposition between Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Muṭālib (the grandfather of the Prophet) and the Adversary of his age who was Ḥarb ibn Umayyah – particularly over the custodianship of the Ka’ba. At the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Adversary or the *imām* of falsehood was none other than Abū Sufyān ibn Harb – who led the Quraysh in opposing the Prophet. In the time of Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Adversary was Mu’āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. And so, in the time of Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the Adversary was Yazīd ibn Mu’āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. The opposition between the true *Imām*, who has the rank of Adam, and his Adversary (*ḍidd*), who embodies Iblīs, exists in every age and cycle:

In al-Mu’ayyad’s theory of *walāyah* and counter-*walāyah*, Adam and Iblīs co-exist throughout prophetic history as the *Imām* and the *ḍidd* in each cycle until the “Day of the Time appointed” (Qur’ān 15:38). Because in terms of capacity, the vanquisher and the vanquished are equally and mutually matched to each other, one of the two will conquer the other due to the equanimity in him.

Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, (*The Sphere of Walāya: Ismaili Ta’wil according to al-Muayyad*, PhD Dissertation, 340)

Imām al-Ḥusayn at Karbala



Imam al-Husayn’s family and companions surrounded by an Umayyad army numbering over 40,000 troops.

In the field at Karbala, a fierce battle was waged against Imām al-Ḥusayn. At that time he fought alone against thousands of men. He endured the immense suffering and cruelty by the hands of his enemies and in spite of all this he still proclaimed: “I am the *Imām*.”

Mu'āwiya openly opposed and fought against the Caliphate of Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. After the death of Imām 'Alī, his son Pīr Imām al-Ḥasan succeeded to the Caliphate but – due to the weakness of his support and resources – had to abdicate the Caliphate to Mu'āwiya on the condition that Yazīd would not succeed to the Caliphate after him. However, Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān ensured that his son Yazīd succeeded him as Caliph – an event which directly contradicted the agreement that Pīr Imām al-Ḥasan had made with Mu'āwiya earlier. Unlike Mu'āwiya, who was unrighteous but tried to keep the appearance of dignity to the Caliphate, Yazīd was an open sinner and disgraced the position by his drinking of wine and many other sinful activities. When Yazīd succeeded as Caliph, he sought to gain the allegiance of Imām al-Ḥusayn to legitimize his succession but the *Imām* refused to do so. Meanwhile, the people of Kufa invited Imām al-Ḥusayn to lead them. The *Imām* and his close family and companions were journeying from Makkah to Kufa and were intercepted by the Umayyad armies sent by Yazid and surrounded at the plains of Kabarla After cutting off their water supply for several days, the Umayyad armies engaged the *Imām* and his supporters in battle. Outnumbered by an army of over twenty thousand men, the *Imām*, his family and supporters were inhumanly massacred and martyred in what became known as the Battle of Karbala. The dead included the sons of Imām al-Ḥusayn – among them a six month old infant 'Alī Asghar, the sons of Imām 'Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib, and the children of Pīr Imām al-Ḥasan. The only surviving male member of the *Imām's* family was his son Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn – who was sick during the battle and saved from execution due to the intervention of Haḍrat Zaynab – the sister of Imām al-Ḥusayn.

We now present selected quotations and statements made by Imām al-Ḥusayn before and during the Battle of Karbala.

The Imām's Letter to the People of Basra



Imam Husayn

God gave preference to Muḥammad before all His creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After he had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him for

Himself. We are his family (*ahlihi*), those who possess his authority (*awliyā'*), those who have been made his trustees (*awṣiyā'*), and his inheritors (*wurathā*); we are those who have more right to this position among the people than anyone else. People selfishly claimed our exclusive right to that. Yet we consented since we hated disunion and desired the well-being [of the community]. However, we know we have greater claim to that right, which was our entitlement, than those who have seized it. They have done well, set many things right, and sought truth. May God have mercy on them and forgive us and them. I have sent my messenger to you with this letter. I summon you to the Book of God, the *Sunnah* of His Prophet. Indeed, the *Sunnah* has [almost] been killed while innovation has been given life. If you hear my words and obey my commands, I will guide you along the path of righteousness.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 30)

The Imām's words to al-Hurr ibn Yazīd and the Umayyad Army



Address to people

People, if you fear God and recognize the rights of those who have rights, God will be more satisfied with you. We are the House of Muhammad and as such are more entitled to the authority (*walāyah*) of this affair (i.e. the rule of the community) over you than these pretenders who claim what does not belong to them. They have brought tyranny and aggression among you. If you refuse (us) because you dislike (us) or do not know our rights, and your view has now changed from what came to us in your letters and what your messengers brought, then I will leave you.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

Words spoken to his sister Zaynab bint 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib:

I have just seen the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, in my sleep. He said to me: You are coming to us.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

The Imām's words spoken to his half-brother al-'Abbas regarding the enemy



Abbas

Go back to them, if you can, delay them until the morning and (persuade) them to keep from us during the evening. Then, perhaps, we may be able to pray to our Lord during the night to call upon Him and seek His forgiveness. He knows that I have always loved His formal prayer, the recitation of His Book and (making) many invocations to Him, seeking His forgiveness.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

The Imām's words spoken to his companions on the eve of the Battle of Karbala



Arrival at Karbala

I know of no followers more loyal and more virtuous than my followers, nor of any House more pious and more close-knit than my House. May God reward you well on my behalf. Indeed, I do not think that there will be (any further) days (left) to us by these men. I permit you to leave me. All (of you) go away with the absolution of your oath (to follow me), for there will be no (further) obligation on you from me. This is a night (whose darkness) will give cover to you.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

The Imām's family and companions reaffirm their allegiance



Offering lives

We will not leave you to make ourselves continue living after your (death). God will never see us (do) such a thing.

‘Abd Allah b. Ja‘far

No, by God, we will not do (such a thing). Rather we will ransom you with our lives, property and families. We will fight for you until we reach your destination. May God make life abominable (for us) after your (death).

The Sons of ‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib

By God, if I knew what I would die and then be revived and then burnt and then revived, and then scattered, and that would be done to me seventy times, I would never leave you until I met my death (fighting) on your behalf. So how could I do it when there can only be one death, which is a great blessing which can never be rejected.

Muslim ibn Awsaja

By God, I would prefer to be killed and then recalled to life; and then be killed a thousand times in this manner; and that in this way God, the Mighty and Exalted, should protect your life and the lives of these young men of your House.

Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn

The Imām returns to his tent and designates his son Imām ‘Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn as his successor



Last words

My son, you are the best and purest of my children. After me you will be my successor and deputy. Take care of these women and children during captivity

and the rigours of travel. Console them. My son, convey to my friends my Salam (greetings of peace) and tell them their *Imām* has been killed away from his home and that they should mourn for me.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, (M.H. Bilgrami, *The Victory of Truth: The Life of Zaynab bint ‘Ali*, Chapter 6)

The Imām’s final warning to the Umayyad armies



Address to army

People, listen to my words and do not hurry (to attack me) so that I may remind you of the duties you have towards me and so that (by telling you the true circumstances) I may free myself from any blame in (your attacking me)... Trace back my lineage and consider who I am. Then look back at yourselves and remonstrate with yourselves. Consider whether it is right for you to kill me and to violate the honour of my womenfolk. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, of his testamentary trustee (wali) and his cousin, the first of the believers in God and the man who (first) believed in what His Messenger, may God bless him and his family, brought from his Lord? Was not Hamza, the lord of the martyrs, my uncle? Was not Ja‘far, the one who flies in Heaven, my uncle? Have you not heard the words of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his family, concerning myself and my brother: ‘These are the two lords of the youths of the inhabitants of Paradise? Whether you believe what I am saying and it is the truth, for by God I have never told a lie since I learnt that God hated people (who told) them.. Is there not (sufficient) in this to prevent you shedding my blood?

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

You are in doubt that I am the son of the daughter of your Prophet. By God there is no son of a prophet other than me among you and among the peoples from East to West. Shame on you, are you seeking retribution from me for one of your dead whom I have killed, or for property of yours which I expropriated, or for a wound which I have inflicted?

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)



Waiting for call

O God, it is You in Whom I trust amid all grief. You are my hope amid all violence. You are my trust and provision in everything that happens to me, (no matter) how much the heart may seem to weaken in it, trickery may seem to diminish (my hope) in it, the friend may seem to desert (me) in it, and the enemy may seem to rejoice in it. It comes upon me through You and when I complain to You of it, it is because of my desire for You, You alone. You have comforted me in (everything) and have revealed its (significance to me). You are the Master of all grace, the Possessor of all goodness and the Ultimate Resort of all desire.

Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 22-62)

The Sacrifice of the *Imāms*

The Battle of Karbala is a primary example of how the *Imāms* have sacrificed their lives to uphold truth, defend justice and fulfill their sacred mandate as the guardians of the ethic of Islam. This shows how the institution of *Imāmah* is not only a spiritual institution, but has the mission of establishing social justice and equity in the world. Imām al-Ḥusayn and his family gave their lives for the sake of this mission. And every *Imām* of the Time performs this same sacrifice in different forms.

The sacrifice of the *Imāms* is alluded and foretold in the Qur'ānic narrative of Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm sacrificing his son Ismā'īl by the command of God. This story is but an allegory, and its real meaning refers to the mission of the Holy *Imāms* who all come from the progeny of Mawlānā Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm. The Qur'ān then states about Ismā'īl that:

We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice (*dhibhin 'aẓīm*); And we left it among the later generations.

(Holy Qur'ān 37:107-108)

Contrary to the exoteric interpretation which holds that Ismā'īl was exchanged with a ram, the real meaning of this verse is that God ransomed the physical sacrifice with the spiritual sacrifice of the *Imāms* – renewed in every generation by the *Imām* of the Time who is descended from Mawlānā Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm. There

have been countless other examples of the Ismā'īlī *Imāms* sacrificing their lives to preserve Islam, protect their community, or uphold the truth.

One of the most tragic events in the history of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs occurred in 1256 when the Mongols massacred thousands of Nizārīs during their invasion of Persia. Not even the women and children were spared as Genghis Khan has ordered that even the babies in their cradles should be killed. During this massacre, the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Imām of the time, Mawlānā Rukn al-Dīn Khwarshāh and most of his family were brutally murdered by the Mongol army. The succeeding *Imām*, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, was secretly sent to Tabriz and the lineage of Nizārī Ismā'īlī *Imāms* continued. Mawlānā Shams al-Dīn would later refer to the Mongol massacre of the Nizārīs and the conquest of Alamut as the “final Karbala”:

May it not remain hidden from all the servants that as Mawlānā 'Alī and Mawlānā Husayn (on whose mentions be peace) have said, “We will have to pass through Jabalistan (i.e., Gilan) and Daylam, which will be the final Karbala. The palace of Caesar and the fortress of Alamut [will be reduced to such straits] that were they given to even a poor old woman, she would not accept them.” All of this came to pass and was seen by the people of the world.

Imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, (quoted in Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 53)

When Mawlānā Hādīr Imām, Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, assumed the office of Imamāt on July 11, 1957, he boldly declared that he was dedicating his entire life and existence to serving his followers and the world of Islam:

I have dedicated my life to the uplift and progress of the Ismailis all over the world and I pray for all your happiness and success.

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 217)

My grandfather dedicated his life to the Imamāt and Islam, both of which came first, and above all other considerations. While I was prepared that one day I might be designated the Aga Khan I did not expect it so soon. I follow a great man in a great responsibility and he could have given me no more appreciated honour than to bequeath me this spiritual leadership. My life, as his, will be dedicated to the service of my followers.

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV

In a candid interview given in 1969, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī describes the struggles that he undergoes in fulfilling the mission of the *Imāmah*. And yet, he maintains that “responsibility is a burden we love”:

I hardly have time to think about myself. I have my moments of fatigue, anxiety, but without the feeling of abandonment. I am engaged. I have to weigh, to consider, to try make a wise decision. But, with my advisers, I escape the isolation. “Responsibility is a burden we love.” I received from my grandfather responsibilities that are heavy but not burdensome. This is not a burden. It is a pleasure to devote oneself (*de se consacrer* = “to sacrifice

oneself”) to such a community, to work for people. The responsibilities are a burden that we love to wear.

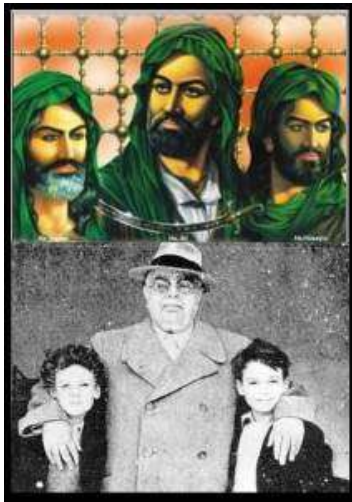
Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Elle Magazine Interview with Paul Giannoli, “The Mystery of the Aga Khan”, August 20, 1969) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/>

While Imām al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom may have taken place thirteen hundred years ago, the spirit and meaning of his sacrifice is renewed by every *Imām* in his progeny – including the Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, the Present and Living *Imām* (*al-imām al-ḥādīr al-mawjūd*). Among the most eminent manifestations of the current *Imām*’s sacrifice is his tireless work through the Aga Khan Development Network – which aims to elevate the quality of life and dignity for all human beings on this planet. In this sense, Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī continues the very same mission as his ancestor Imām al-Ḥusayn – a mission that will be upheld by every *Imām* in the Ḥusaynī lineage until the end of time:

We the Imāms in descent from Imām al-Ḥusayn for are present until today and we shall remain until the Resurrection (*qiyāmah*) and even after the Resurrection (*qiyāmah*).

Imām Āgā Shāh ‘Alī Shāh Āgā Khān II, (Address made in Bombay, 1878)

The Ever-Living Imām



Ever living Imam

O people take this saying of the Last of the Prophets that he who dies from among us is not dead, and he who decays from among us does not decay.

Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (*Nahjul Balagha*, tr. by Syed Ali Rezha, *Khutbah* 86, 217-218)

While the death of Imām al-Ḥusayn was extremely tragic and totally contrary to all the principles of goodness and righteousness, the true believer must remember that from the spiritual perspective, the *Imām* in reality can never be killed. The Qur’ān applies this perspective to the historical [The Crucifixion in Shi’a Isma’ili Islam](#) when it proclaimed that **“they killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but it only appeared to unto them”** (Qur’ān 4:157). Similarly, the ‘historical’ *Imām* lives and dies in the realm of nature (*dunyā*), but the ‘eternal’ *Imām* is always present in

the realm of Faith (*dīn*). This is why, for example, the Ismā'īli Muslims, while remembering and honouring the death of Imām al-Ḥusayn, do not perform formal mourning. The Qur'ān confirms this reality when it says:

Think not of those who are slain in path of God as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord; They rejoice in the bounty provided by God.

(Holy Qur'ān 3:169-170)

The *Imāms* are perpetually alive in three respects. In one respect, the *Imāmah* continues through designated successor who is the next *Imām*, so the *Imām* as such is always present on earth. In another respect, the pure soul of the deceased *Imām* remains perpetually alive in Paradise and in the Divine Presence. For this reason, the *The Esoterics (Batin) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a'* includes intercessory supplications naming **all** of the *Imāms* of the past. Thirdly, the "We come from the Light of God": Birthday of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni – known as the The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of 'Alī which manifests through the soul and body of each and every hereditary *Imām* – is eternal, perfect, immutable and otherwise unaffected by the events of the physical realm. Therefore, the *Imām* remains ever-living – historically (as his successor-*Imām*), spiritually (as a pure soul), and ontologically (as the *Nur* of Imamah).

You should be rest assured that the *Nūr* of Mawlānā Murtada 'Alī is in me and is present before you. We *Imāms* change the physical bodies in this world but our *Nūr* is eternal and originates from the very beginning. You should therefore take it as one *Nūr*. The Throne of the Imamah of Mawlānā Murtaḍa 'Alī continues and it will remain till the Day of Judgement.

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Address made in Bombay, September 8, 1885 quoted in Michele Boivien, *Le Renovation du Shiisme Ismailien en Inde et au Pakistan*, 197-98)

Today we carry this authority and power of Imām al-Ḥusayn for we are Imām al-Husayn. You can see that today we carry this authority and power everywhere we go because we are the rightful *Imāms*. We do not fear anything.

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Address made in Kutch Nagalpur, November 28, 1903, quoted in Michele Boivien, *Le Renovation du Shiisme Ismailien en Inde et au Pakistan*, 197-98)

Mourning for *Ma'rifah*: The *Ta'wīl* of Karbala

There were many different kinds of people present at Karbala, and there were people amongst them who recognized and accepted Imām al-Ḥusayn as their *Imām*... Shimar, a worshipper of God, who claimed that he was the servant of God, also martyred Imām al-Ḥusayn. Shimar thought that the *Imām* was an ordinary human being like himself.

It is reported that Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III instructed his Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Muslim *murīds* not to mourn the physical death of Imām al-Ḥusayn by crying or hitting themselves, but instead to recognize the living *Imām* and “mourn for *maʿrifah*” – that is, mourn for the *maʿrifah* of the *Imām* of the Time.

As explained in the [What is Ismāʿīlī Gnosis?](#) on this blog, [What is Ismāʿīlī Gnosis?](#) refers to the innate spiritual recognition of *tawḥīd* (the unity of God) that resides in the depth of every human soul – since the Qurʾānic day of *Alastu* when all human souls testified to God (Qurʾān 7:172). The Shīʿī Muslim disciple (*murīd*) seeks this *maʿrifah* (recognition) of *tawḥīd* – the gnosis of God – through the *maʿrifah* of the *Imām*:

Imām al-Husayn called out to his companions: “God – may His Mention be glorified – did not create the servants except to know Him, and by knowing Him to worship him, and by worshipping Him to be satisfied only by His worship, and to never find satisfaction in worshipping other than Him.” And a man said to him: “O Son of the Prophet, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you. [What is this *maʿrifah* of God?](#)” The *Imam* said: [“The *maʿrifah* the people of every time have of their *Imām* – to whom obedience is due.”](#)

(Shaykh Saduq, *Ilal al-Sharāʿiʿ*, Vol. 1, 19)

Everyone must know God through knowing me, since a person becomes a knower (*ʿārif*) through my *maʿrifat* and becomes a unifier (*muwaḥḥid*) through my *tawḥīd*. Then the reality of *maʿrifat*, union (*ittiḥād*), and unity (*waḥdat*) comes completely into existence, and the reality of worship becomes evident.

Imām Ḥasan *ʿala-dhikrihi al-salām*, (Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī, *Contemplation and Action*, 44)

So the question remains, in what manner does the human soul attain *maʿrifah*?

The answer is provided by Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in his sermon:

God has not made the intellects (*ʿuqūl*) capable of defining His qualities, but He has not veiled the intellects from essential recognition (*maʿrifah*) of Him.

Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 49)

The above words of the *Imām* draw a direct link between the [The Concept of Knowledge \(ʿilm\)](#) and *maʿrifah*. The intellect, according to teachings of the Shīʿī *Imāms*, is much more than the capacity for rational thought or discursive reasoning. The *ʿaql* is essentially a spiritual faculty of direct apprehension – in which the intellect immediately grasps its object of knowledge and becomes one with it in the act of intellection. This is in contrast to the rational or discursive faculty – which operates in time and employs logic and reasoning to proceed step by step in order to reach a conclusion. While the rational faculty arrives at a representational concept (*taṣawwur*) of the known object, [2. The Light of the Heart: Human Intellect](#) as a timeless and direct presence. The intellect is the

highest organ of knowing in the human being and is capable of attaining *maʿrifah* – while reason can at best provide a conceptual representation of such knowledge. The *maʿrifah* of the *Imām* can only be reached by actualizing one’s intellect (‘*aql*). This is because the intellect (‘*aql*) in every human being is a ray of the *Nūr* of Imamat – the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kull*). As Mawlānā Ḥaḍīr Imām has said publicly:

The Divine Intellect, ‘*Aql-i Kull*, both transcends and informs the human intellect.

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (AKU Inauguration Speech, 1985)

The *Imām* of the Time is the manifestation (*maẓhar*) of the Universal Intellect in the physical world while the fully actualized human intellect (‘*aql*) is the manifestation of the Universal Intellect in the heart (the center of the rational soul). Thus, the “outer *Imām*” in the world is paralleled by the human intellect (‘*aql*) – which could be called the “inner *Imām*” of one’s own soul:

The *Imām* within (each human being) is each individual intellect, such an intellect being the irradiation of the outer *Imām*; for the Shiʿites, the initiates of the *Imāms*, have been created out of the rays of their light, and light is proportional to the source of light.

Shaykh Karīm-Khān Kirmānī, (Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, 46)

Herein lies the esoteric meaning of the event of Karbala and the explanation as to why Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh instructed his *jamāʿats* to “mourn for *maʿrifah*”. All human souls possess *maʿrifah* in the very essence of their being – but practically, this *maʿrifah* is dormant or unrealized. The real status of Imām al-Ḥusayn can only be recognized through the *maʿrifah* of the intellect (‘*aql*) – the inner *Imām*. Those who killed and opposed the Imām al-Ḥusayn did so because they lacked this *maʿrifah* – due to their own intellects being dormant and their hearts being diseased. Because they lacked a connection with their “inner *Imām*”, they were unable to recognize Imām al-Ḥusayn, the “outer *Imām*”. Just as the *Imām* of the Time is opposed by an Adversary in the physical world, there is also an inner *Iblīs* in the personal world of the soul that opposes the human intellect. This inner *Iblīs* is called *hawā* (caprice, whims), the carnal soul or the “soul that commands to evil” (*nafs al-amarra*) (see Qurʾān 12:53). Reza Shah-Kazemi, summarizing the teachings of Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib on this subject, writes about the inner struggle between *al-ʿaql* and *al-hawā*:

This emerges from the metaphor given by the *Imām* to define the struggle: *al-ʿaql* (the intellect) is the leader of the forces of *al-Raḥmān* (the Compassionate); *al-hawā* (whim, caprice, desire) commands the forces of *al-shayṭān* (the devil); *al-nafs* (the soul) vacillates between them, susceptible to the attraction of both and enters into ‘the domain of whichever of the two will triumph.

Reza Shah-Kazemi, (*Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʿAlī*, 40)

The Battle of Karbala outwardly represents the inner struggle that takes place at every moment within the human soul between the intellect and the caprice. The Imām al-Ḥusayn and his companions symbolize the intellect and its related virtues, while Yazīd and his minions symbolize the caprice (*hawā*) and its vices. Henry Corbin eloquently explains this symbolism as follows:

There is an Imām Husayn within each man: his intellect, whose divine splendour is a light that derives from the *Imām*. But this inner *Imām* is surrounded by enemies, and these are all the powers of the carnal soul that issue from the shadow of the *Imām*'s enemies. Within every man there unfolds a tragedy of Karbala. 'In the Karbala of his heart, it may happen that the powers of the carnal soul kill the intellect and the angelic companions who assist it, and uproot all traces of them from man's heart. Then indeed there is accomplished in each one of us, word for word, the *ta'wīl* of the tragedy of Karbala.

Henry Corbin, (*Temple and Contemplation*, 46)

Thus, the events of 'Āshura and Karbala take place in each human soul. The intellect is responsible for the qualities of compassion, love, beauty, kindness, generosity, and wisdom while *hawā* is the source of greed, lust, fear, desire, and most of all, pride and ego. If the human intellect is overwhelmed by the carnal soul or *hawā*, then one will not have the *ma'rifah* of the Imam. Whenever our ego and fear dominate our loving compassion and wisdom, then the inner Imam has been slain and Karbala has happened again. This becomes is an occasion for true mourning – mourning for this *ma'rifah* that has been forgotten due to spiritual decadence. Indeed, this is the *ta'wīl* of Karbala and the *ta'wīl* of mourning for Imām al-Ḥusayn.

The Ismā'īlī Flag: Remembering Karbala



My Flag (Ismaili flag)

... one feast day, when the two child-*Imams* Hasan and Husayn asked their grandfather the Prophet to give them a new garment as a present, two robes came down out of the sky. The robes were white, but the two boys declared that they would not be satisfied until they were dyed the colour they wanted. Hasan asked for his garment to be green as the emerald, while

Husayn wanted a colour like that of the red hyacinth. This was brought about through the ministration of the Angel Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation. But while the Prophet rejoiced, the Angel shed tears; and when the Prophet asked him the reason, he could not but announce the fate that awaited the two young *Imams* in this world. Hasan would perish through poison, Husayn would be assassinated.

Henry Corbin, (*Temple and Contemplation*, 43)

The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Muslim community, led by Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī – the present (*hāḍir*) and forty-ninth hereditary *Imām* in direct lineal descent from Imām al-Ḥusayn, continuously bears witness to the events of Ashūra and Karbala. This is evident in the official Ismāʿīlī Flag – raised upon the various buildings and structures where the Present *Imām* happens to be. This includes the Imām’s private jet – which could be likened to *Duldul*, the famous horse of Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, in the modern age. Like the companions of Imām al-Ḥusayn in the past, the Ismāʿīlī Muslim today uphold the spirit of Karbala when they dedicate and sacrifice their lives in the service of the *Imām* of the Time, the community and humanity at large.



Imam’s plane

In this respect, we conclude this post with the august words of Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh where he explains the meaning of the Red and Green colors of the Ismāʿīlī Flag in his letter to Dr. Pir Muhammad Hoodboy. As the *Imām* explains below, the Green color stands for the Prophet Muḥammad, Pīr Imām al-Ḥasan, and the office of the *Pīr* (the supreme *ḥujjah* of the *Imām*) while the Red color stands for Imām ‘Alī, Imām al-Ḥusayn, and the office of the *Imām*. Interestingly, the colors of Red and Green also featured prominently when the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh assumed the *Imāmah* in Bombay 1885 – where the *Imām*, dressed in red attire, sat upon a green cushion.



y Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III

In reply to your letter of 8th October, the colours of our family are, as you know, Red and Green. The reason being that we represent both the (offices of) Shāh [Imām] and Pīr. The Shāh was Husayn and the Pīr was Hasan. Hasan had the Pīr’s colour of Green, but Husayn’s martyrdom was so enormous in

events and was so opposed to even the smallest laws of war that the colour of his Holy Blood, namely Red, was accepted with the Green of the Prophet's flag as a souvenir and remembrance of that terrible day.

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Letter to Dr. Pir Muhammad Hoodbhoy, October 16, 1954)

NOTE: The Nizari Isma'ilis do not include the name of al-Hasan ibn 'Ali in their list of Imams which has led some people to conclude that al-Hasan is not accepted as an Imam in Nizari theology. In reality, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali is regarded as an Imam by the Nizaris but with a minor difference: al-Hasan is understood to be an Entrusted Imam or Trustee Imam (*al-imam al-mustawda*) as opposed to a Permanent Imam (*al-imam al-mustaqarr*), the latter position belonging to his brother al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. The Nizari list of Imams only includes the names of the Permanent Imams and not the Entrusted Imams. The difference between the Entrusted Imam and the Permanent Imam is that the Entrusted Imam is a person from outside the genealogical line of the Imams who holds the rank and authority of Imam for a temporary period and the Imamate does not permanently dwell among the Entrusted Imam's descendants. The Permanent Imam is the hereditary Imam who inherits the Imamate from his forefathers and transmits it to his descendants. The Entrusted Imam is only appointed in special circumstances and is usually the brother or cousin of the Permanent Imam. When there is an Entrusted Imam, the Permanent Imam remains silent (*samit*) although he is the source of authority (*amr*) of the Entrusted Imam who acts on his behalf. Thus, Imam al-Hasan was an Entrusted Imam as he held the authority and rank of Imamate after Hazrat 'Ali and then bequeathed it to his brother Imam a-Husayn who then transmitted the Imamate in his progeny. For further details, see Virani, *The Isma'ilis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 83-85. In Nizari Isma'ilism, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali **also** holds the rank of *Pir* or supreme *hujja* which is the rank in the Isma'ili hierarchy (*hudud*) second only to the Imam himself. This has led some to confuse the positions of Entrusted Imam and *pir* or simply deny that al-Hasan was an Imam altogether. In reality, al-Hasan was both an Entrusted Imam and a *Pir* (supreme *hujja*) and this is perhaps why the Nizari Isma'ili *Ginans*, the *Asal Du'a* (Old *Du'a*) and the *farmans* of Imam Sultan Muhammad refer to al-Hasan as 'Pir Imam Hasan'.

IMAGE CREDITS: Karbala artwork images from <http://www.qul.org.au/islamic-occasions/events-of-karbala/39-karbala-in-pictures>

Continual Creation and Escaping from Boredom

“God does not become bored that you should become bored.”

Prophet Muḥammad

“Never in my long life – I may say with complete honesty – have I for an instant been bored...”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, the great Sufi mystic and theosopher, explains how getting “bored” is the symptom of the person who fails to realize that God’s creative act is perpetual and renewed at every instant and that therefore, no moment or experience of the Cosmos is identical to another. If one realized that all things are anew at every instant, one would never experience boredom.

“Were it not for the renewal of creation at each instant, boredom would overcome the entities, since Nature requires boredom...But no one in the Cosmos becomes bored except him who has no unveiling and does not witness the renewal of creation constantly at each instant and does not witness God as Ever-creating perpetually.”

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, (William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 105)

“In fact, it is like this in actual fact, even though not everyone recognizes it, nor does every eye and rational faculty witness it. For in actual fact, [existence] is renewed at each instant. But a person who is ignorant does not witness the renewal of bliss, so he becomes bored. Were this ignorance to be lifted from him, so also would boredom be lifted. Boredom is the greatest proof that man has remained ignorant of God’s preserving his existence and renewing his blessings at each instant.”

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, (William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 106)

If a person is truly conscious of the renewal of things by God’s continuous creation, they will realize that no moment in time is the same as the one before and boredom would never be experienced. But only a fully conscious human being, who is ever-aware of God and His continuous creation of the Cosmos, can reach this station that is beyond all boredom. Most human beings are utterly unaware of the continuous nature of God’s creation – in the sense of the divine act of creation that perpetually nourishes, engenders, and sustains all being at every moment. As the Holy Qur’ān states:

“No, indeed, but they are in confusion as to a new creation (*khalq jadīd*).”

Holy Qur’ān 50:15

“Each Day He is upon a new task.”

Holy Qur’ān 55:29

Mawlānā Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh, the forty-eight hereditary Imām of the Shī‘ī Ismā‘īlī Muslims – in a statement that bears witness to his own degree of

spiritual realization and witnessing – has described his total lack of boredom with both the mundane and spiritual dimensions of his life as follows:

“Never in my long life — I may say with complete honesty — have I for an instant been bored. Every day has been so short, every hour so fleeting, every minute so filled with the life I love that time for me has fled on far too swift a wing. A mind that is occupied, in health or in sickness, with things outside itself and its own concerns is, I believe, a perpetual source of true happiness. In ordinary prayer, as we in Islam conceive it, adoration of the beloved fills up every nook and cranny of the human consciousness; and in the rare, supreme moments of spiritual ecstasy, the light of Heaven blinds mind and spirit to all other lights and blots out every other sense and perception.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

“There are friends of mine, old and new, with whom I share this zest for life, this complete freedom from boredom... No one could be a better companion in joy or sorrow than Charles Grey, for he is another who realizes that friendship and social life are God-given, and that we ought to be thankful for them and accept them with joy and gusto and not with resignation or boredom. Elsa Maxwell, Charles Grey and I share one quality which I sincerely believe to be enviable: we don’t know what boredom is.”

Imam Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

The Imam’s statement that he has “never been bored”, of his “complete freedom from boredom”, is a subtle allusion (*‘isharah*) to the fact that he himself is a spiritually realized knower of God (*al-‘arīf bi-Allāh*), who is privy to spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) and a witness to God’s continuous creation of the Universe at all times. Because creation is continuous, the state of the Cosmos is ever-changing and never identical to its previous state as a result of which one would never experience boredom.

The relationship between the Creator and His creation, far from being like that of a builder and a building or a watchmaker and his watch, is more akin to the relationship between a musician and his music, a speaker and his speech, or a thinker and his thinking. In the latter examples, the creation is dependent upon the Creation at all states of its existence and is never, for a moment, able to exist independently of the Creator. Thus, the Creator’s generation of the Cosmos is always occurring and renewing at all times.

Both Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh and Mawlānā Hāḍir Imām have also disclosed the fact that God’s creative act is a continuous, dynamic and perpetual event that occurs at every moment of existence. This is remarkably similar, if not identical, to the doctrine of creation described by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī.

“There is a fundamental difference between the Jewish idea of creation and that of Islam. The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given

time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.”

Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*)

“My interpretation is that Allah’s message and His power is not limited. And in fact that modern science simply allows us to discover more and more of the miracles that He has performed, perhaps continues to perform, and we are blessed with the faculty of intelligence.”

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, (All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra, 1989) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/>

“Islam’s message contains a central theme which is the total power of Allah and therefore my conviction is that the discoveries which the human mind can make are really simply a minute perception of Allah’s creation...The message of Islam with regard to Allah’s power and His creation is essential to our faith. We have everyday evidence of that and we must be thankful.”

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Pakistan and Gulf Economist Interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan, Karachi, Pakistan, 1983) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/>

“[O]ne strength of Islam has always lain in its belief that creation is not static but continuous, that through scientific and other endeavours, God has opened and continues to open new windows for us to see the marvels of His creation.”

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Acceptance of the Charter of AKU, March 16, 1983)

“If the frontiers of physics are changing, it is due to scientists discovering more and more about the Universe, even though they will never be able to probe its totality, since Allah’s creation is limitless and continues.”

Imām Shāh Karīm al-Husaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Inauguration of the AKU Faculty of Health Sciences, November 11, 1985)

Esoteric Thought in Physical Form: The Aga Khan Campus in Toronto

Great architecture, like great art, captures esoteric thought in physical form.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

In May 2010, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shī'ī Ismaili Muslims and the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, presided over the foundation ceremony for the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana, and Aga Khan Park being built in Toronto. The entire site – known as the Aga Khan Campus – is described by the Imam as follows:

It now includes three elements: a new Ismaili Centre — the sixth such representational building in the world; a new Aga Khan Museum; and a beautiful, welcoming Park, which will link these two new buildings. Together, these three projects will symbolise the harmonious integration of the spiritual, the artistic and the natural worlds — in keeping with the holistic ideal which is an intimate part of Islamic tradition.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
Foundation Stone Ceremony for the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and Park
Toronto, May 28, 2010

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9425/>



The Aga Khan Museum, Toronto

In the vision of the Ismaili Imamat, the Aga Khan Campus of Toronto, like the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in Ottawa, is not merely a set of buildings. According to the Imam, the Aga Khan Museum, the Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Park amount to nothing less than **“esoteric thought in physical form”**:

“Buildings can do more than simply house people and programmes. They can also reflect our deepest values; great architecture, like great art, captures

esoteric thought in physical form. In Islamic thought, beauty and mystery are not separated from the intellect — in fact, the reverse is true. “-

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan

IV, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10224/>

The words of the Ismāʿīlī Imams articulated before public audience are not devoid of esoteric meaning or *taʿwīl* – as stated by the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw:

“The sayings of the Imams have *taʿwīl* (esoteric meaning), just as the Speech of God and [the sayings of His] Messenger have *taʿwīl*, because they are the witnesses of God over the people.”

– Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Knowledge and Liberation*, tr. Hunzai, 113)

These architectural masterpieces commissioned by the Ismaili Imam, such as the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam and the Aga Khan Campus, are actually texts (*nass*) by which the Ismaili Imam announces his spiritual authority (*walayah*), instruction (*taʿlīm*) and esoteric exegesis (*taʿwīl*) to humankind through the symbolic language of architecture. But the subtle meanings and esoteric mysteries embedded within the “built texts” of the Imam can only be envisioned through the eyes of Ismāʿīlī *taʿwīl*, or esoteric exegesis, in order for their spiritual meanings to be grasped by the onlookers.

The Ismaili Gnosis blog is proud to announce a four part series of articles, titled *Esoteric Thought in Physical Form: The Aga Khan Campus in Toronto*, that seeks to uncover and share some of the “esoteric thought” behind the Aga Khan Museum, the Ismaili Center and Jamatkhana, and the Aga Khan Park. The four parts are entitled as follows:

Mysteries of Light (nur): The Aga Khan Museum (part 1)

Prophetic Architectures: The Aga Khan Museum (part 2)

House of Light: The Toronto Ismaili Center and Jamatkhana (part 3)

Garden of Gnosis: The Aga Khan Park (part 4)

Part 1, *The Mysteries of Light (nūr): The Aga Khan Museum*, is shown below:



“The new Toronto Museum will take as its theme the concept of light — suffusing the building from a central courtyard, through patterned glass screens. From the outside, it will glow by day and by night, lit by the sun and the moon. This use of light speaks to us of the Divine Light of the Creator, reflected in the glow of individual human inspiration and vibrant, transparent community. As the poet Rumi has written: *The light that lights the eye is also the light of the heart... but the light that lights the heart is the Light of God.*”

— Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV,
(Foundation Stone Ceremony for the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and Park,
Toronto, May 28, 2010) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9425/>

This article focuses on the theme of Light (*nūr*) by examining the Ismaili Imamat’s remarks, given in the letters and speeches of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni, on how Light is the overarching theme of the Aga Khan Museum. We begin by quoting the letter of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni sent to the architect Fumihiko Maki:

“For the Aga Khan Museum, I thought that ‘light’ might be a concept around which you could design an outstanding museum. The notion of light has transversed nearly all of human history, and has been an inspiration for numerous faiths, going as far back of course to the Zoroastrians and their reverence for the Sun, to the Sura in the Holy Qur’an titled al-Nur. Decades of Western history are referred to as the ‘enlightenment’ for good reason.”

“I hope that the building and the spaces around it will be seen as the celebration of Light, and the mysteries of Light, that nature and the human soul illustrate to us at every moment in our lives. I have explained at the beginning of this letter why I think Light would be an appropriate design direction for the new museum and this concept is of course particularly validated in Islamic texts and sciences: apart from the innumerable references in the Qur’an to Light in all its forms, in nature and in the human soul, the light of the skies, their sources and their meaning have for centuries been an area

of intellectual inquiry and more specifically in the field of astronomy. Thus the architecture of the building would seek to express these multiple notions of Light, both natural and man-made, through the most purposeful selection of internal and external construction materials, facets of elevations playing with each other through the reflectivity of natural or electric light, and to create light gain or light retention from external natural sources or man-made internal and external sources... natural light emanating from God's creation, (and) light... which emanates from human sources, in the form of art, culture and well-inspired human knowledge."

– Imam Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV Letter to Fumihiko Maki, January 3, 2006, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7636/>

1. Natural Light and its Spiritual Symbolism:

"Although of course we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light, as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah

Recent discoveries in physics with regard to the nature of light and its uniqueness in the physical world provide an effective illustration of how physical light serves as a powerful and intuitive natural symbol for the Light of God. We can point to the rich symbolic power of natural light through the following thought experiment:

Imagine yourself sitting upon a photon of light, travelling through the Universe at the speed of light. You would probably experience the following:

You would experience no time and all events would be present in the "now" since light photons travel at the speed of light, experience no temporal duration and have no mass.

You would experience no space and you would be simultaneously present at all places in the Universe" since at the speed of light, space and time are one.

Everything in the Universe would appear to be flowing out of you, since light is what makes anything observable at all.

The scholar of world religions, Huston Smith, summarizes how the properties of physical light underscore its unparalleled status in the natural world.

"Space? Remember that seated on light—a photon—you are going nowhere.

Time? Time does not exact from photons the toll that it does elsewhere; how could it when clocks stop at the speed of light? As for matter, photons have neither the rest-mass nor the charge that material particles have... On that single piece (or quantum) of light you are going nowhere. You are weightless. There is neither time nor space, nor are there separated events. If from the earth it is one hundred light-years to a star, from your position on your quantum of light the star and earth are not separated at all. Moreover, it would seem as if the world were pouring out of you, you and your fellow

photons, because light creates. It pumps power into the spatio-temporal world.

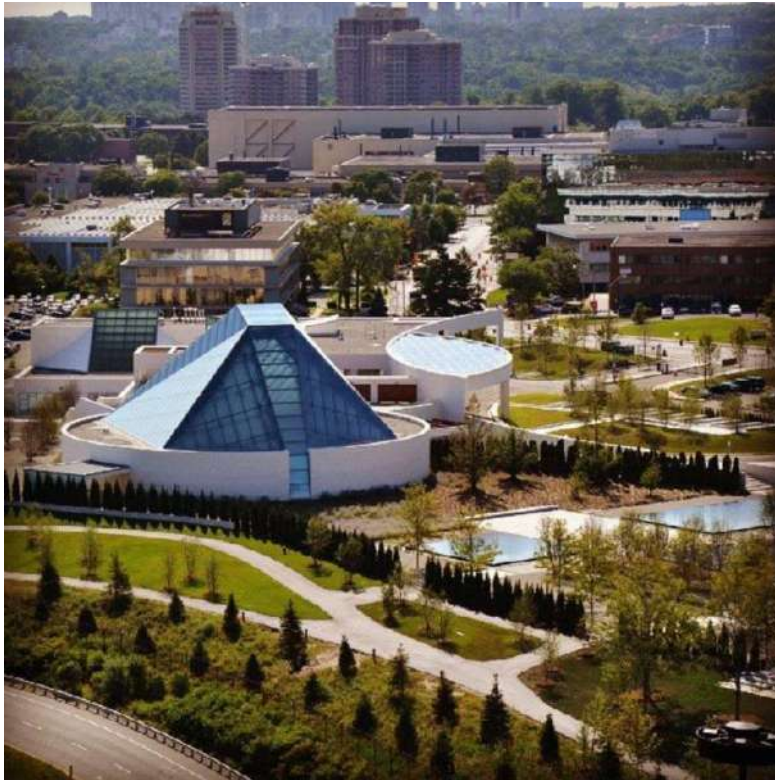
– Huston Smith, (*Why Religion Matters*, 138

Just as physical light is, in a certain fashion, timeless, spaceless, present in all places and ever-creative – as all events in the Universe at the quantum level are exchanges of light photons – the Divine Light of the Creator is even more so above time and space, omnipresent, and the continuous creator of all things in existence. In this way, physical light serves as a natural symbol of the Light of God. Without natural light, nothing in the physical world could be perceived or observed. Similarly, without the Divine Light, nothing in existence would be able to exist or be recognized. In this respect, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has explained, referring to the famous Surah Nur in the Qur'an, that natural light is the loftiest thing in natural world that humans can imagine about the nature of God:

“First of all as regards the idea of the divinity of God: a great deal of the Qur'an is taken up with God's creation, with God's intimate presence in the world, with the importance of each human being's relations with the Creator; but only in one chapter — the chapter on Light — is the nature of the divinity referred to in a very clear form. Although of course we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light, as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator.”

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, “Reincarnation or Companionship on High”, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1520/>

2. The Light of the Heart: Human Intellect



“The light that lights the eye is also the light of the heart...but the light that lights the heart is the Light of God.”

– Jalaluddin Rumi, as quoted by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni

“Everywhere in recorded history light doubles for intelligibility, comprehension, understanding, and – underlying all of these – conscious awareness.”

– Huston Smith

Human beings, like animals and other living things, are aware of their external environments and can respond to stimuli. They are also aware of their physical movements and mental activity. But most importantly, human beings are aware of their own self-awareness. This is what one would call “reflexive self-awareness”, to be aware that one *is* aware of oneself. This reflexive self-awareness is responsible for rationality – the human ability to reflect upon his own conscious acts and represent ideas in his mind through bodily gestures – movement, actions, and most importantly speech – all of which are gestures which signify and point beyond themselves. It is in this sense that the human being is a rational animal – a creature possessing both animal faculties and this self-transcending reflexive awareness. This reflexive and transcending self-awareness is what we call the intellect (Arabic: *‘aql*, Persian: *khirad*, Greek: *nous*, Latin: *intellectus*). This intellect – present in every human being albeit in different degrees of actualization and intensity – is what the Qur’an and later Sufis such as Rumi call the light of the heart (*qalb*). The heart does not refer to the physical organ, but rather, the centre of

human consciousness or what is traditionally called the human soul. Thus the Holy Qur'an mentions the verb *'aqala* (to intellect) over a hundred times and links it specifically to the "hearts" (*qulūb*) of human beings:

"Do they not travel through the earth, so that they have hearts (*qulūb*) by which they intellect (*ta'qilūn bihā*) and ears with which they may hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts."

– Holy Qu'an 22:46

In modern times, intellect is often reduced to discursive and logical reasoning only. However, in the Islamic perspective, reasoning – whereby the human being conceptualizes, analyzes and deliberates truths in a step by step manner from premises to conclusions – is just one of the operations of the intellect and this reasoning operation necessarily involves the external senses and internal senses (reflection, estimation, imagination, memory, recollection) that are common to some animals. But the intellect also has a primary and spiritual operation whereby it is able to grasp and seize upon universal, spiritual and intelligible truths in a contemplative, unitive and direct act of perception all at once without having to rationalize from premise to conclusion – similar to the directness of taste (*dhawk*) or eyesight to the physical senses. The word *reason* comes from *ratio* – which means to break into parts. Interestingly, the Arabic word *'aql* means "to bind" and this alludes to the fact that the human intellect's vision brings together and unites intelligible realities into a holistic vision of existence.

"It is the nature of reason to analyze, to cut asunder even, it would seem, what God Himself has joined... Intellect, on the other hand, is the great connector; it unites what appears disparate, not externally, to be sure, but by bringing to light a deep and pre-existent bond."

– Wolfgang Smith, (*The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*, 22)

Even the reasoning operation of the human intellect depends on certain truths which the intellect grasps directly through contemplation and spiritual vision. Thus, Nasir-i Khusraw, echoing the views of most Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Mulla Sadra, offers the following description of the human intellect (*'aql*):

"The definition (*ḥadd*) of intellect (*'aql*) is that it is a simple [spiritual] substance (*jawhar-i basīt*) by which human beings (*mardomān*) perceive things... Life (*ḥayāt*) is the guardian of the body, and the rational soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqah*) is the guardian of life, and the intellect (*'aql*) is the guardian of the rational soul. And it (the intellect) gives (to the soul) the nobility to recognize its own substance. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is an action of the intellect (*'aql*), whereby human beings perceive things as they are. So a person is called "intellecting" (*'āqil*) because he possesses something by which he perceives things as they truly are."

– Sayyidna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, Section 285)

The intellect's act of direct perception "of things as they are" is not limited to the contemplation of spiritual realities. It plays a role, albeit a less direct one, in *all* human perceptual operations. Even human sense perception of physical objects "participates" in the human intellect or, to put it differently, "is illuminated" by the intellect. While it is true that the human eye requires the assistance of natural light to observe a physical object, what the eye actually provides to the brain and to the mind is only an image of the sensory object. And yet, when sense perception takes place, the mind does not *merely* perceive an image (whether visual, or auditory, etc), it perceives an actual object. But how does the mind – even while just receiving an *image* – become aware of the real presence of the perceived object, an actual entity which is more than this image? The direct perception of the existing object that occurs *through the image* is by the human intellect which illuminates our sense perceptions (the image) and directly grasps the intelligible nature (the "form" or "essence") of the perceived object.

"In the perceptual act the image is viewed, not as image, but as a part or aspect of the object; it is seen, in other words, as something that belongs to the object, even as the face of a man belongs to the man. The image thus becomes more than an image, if one may put it thus: it is perceived as a surface, a face, an aspect of a thing which immeasurably transcends the image as such. Now this decisive transition-from image to aspect is something that reason or reasoning can neither effect nor indeed comprehend – which may well account for the fact that philosophers have experienced so much difficulty in coming to grips with the problem of perception. We have as a rule forgotten that there is an intelligence which is intuitive, direct and instantaneous in its operation, an intelligence which has no need for dialectic or discursive thought, but flies straight to the mark like an arrow; and much less do we realize that this high and forgotten faculty-which the ancients termed 'intellect' – is operative and indeed plays the essential role in the act of sense perception. Thus, in the absence of intellect – if we were endowed, in other words, with no more than a capacity for the passive reception of images plus a faculty of reason – authentic perception would be impossible, which is to say that the external world would become for us a mere conception or speculative hypothesis... It is by force of intellect that the perceived object is joined to the percipient in the act of perception."

– Wolfgang Smith, (*The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*, 21-22)

In summary, the "light of the heart" that "lights the eyes" is the human intellect. This intellect is the center of the human conscious subject – known as the soul – which endows human beings with reflexive self-awareness and rationality. The intellect, in its spiritual dimension, directly perceives spiritual and intelligible truths (i.e. the forms of existing things), *illuminating* all human acts of perception including sensation. This is what Rumi alludes to when he claims:

*The light that lights the eye is also the heart's light
The eye's light proceeds from the light of the heart.*

In the following line, however, Rumi goes further and tells us that the light of the heart, the human intellect, is rooted in an even loftier source, the Light of God:

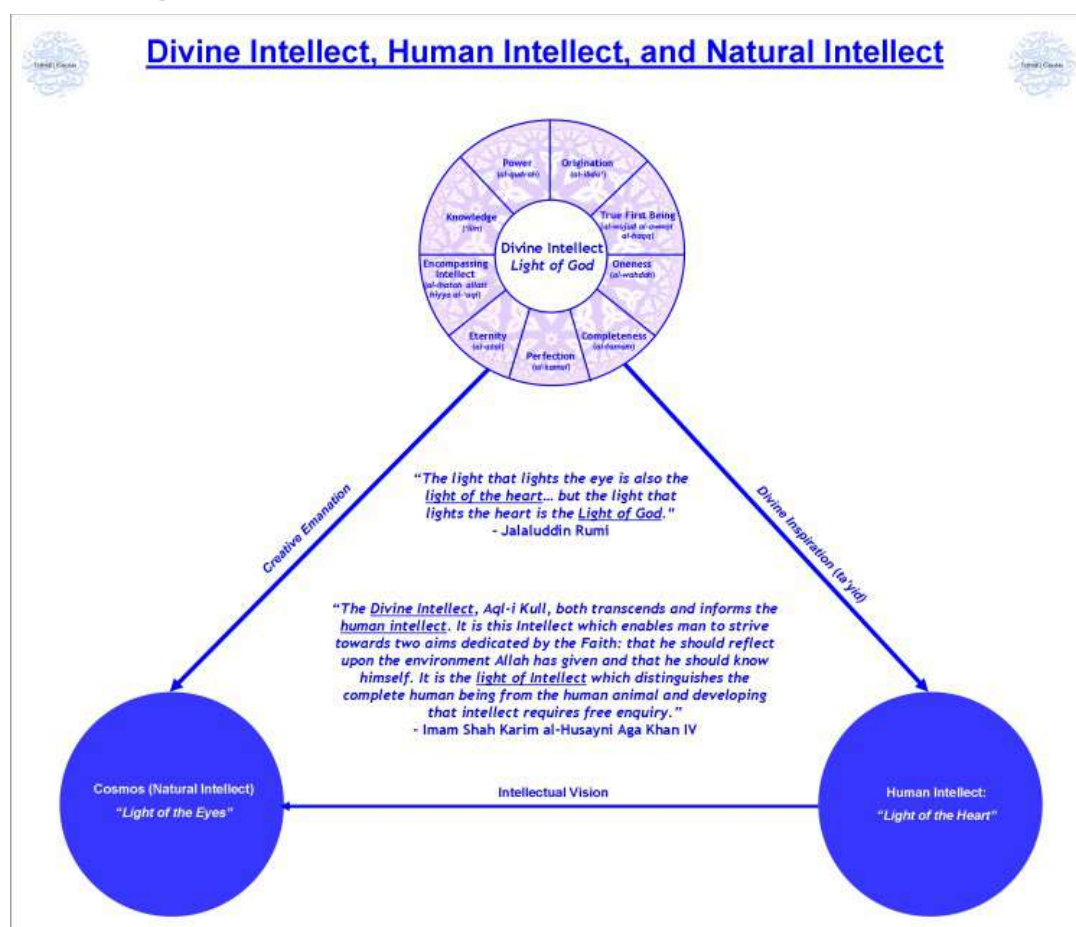
*But the light that lights the heart is the Light of God
Which is distinct from reason and sense.*

For the Islamic philosophers, the *Ismā'īlī dā'īs*, and the Sufi mystics like Rumi and Ibn al-Arabi, the individual human intellects are derived from the vast expanse of the Divine or Universal Intellect – what Rumi calls the “Ocean of Intellect”:

*How broad is the Ocean of Intellect
Yea, the intellect of man is a boundless ocean.
O son, that ocean requires, as it were, a diver.
On this fair ocean our human forms
Float about, like bowls on the surface of water;
Yea like cups on the surface, till they are filled;
And when filled, these cups sink into the water.
The Ocean of Intellect is not seen; intelligent men are seen;
But our forms are only as waves or spray thereof.*

In the final section of this article, we explore the concept of the Divine Light or Universal Intellect as the source of the human intellect as per *Ismā'īlī* gnosis.

3. The Light of God: Divine Intellect



"The Divine Intellect, *Aql-i Kull*, both transcends and informs the human intellect."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

"The human intellect derives its "light" directly from the Divine Intellect: it "participates" in the Divine Intellect, as the Platonists say."

– Wolfgang Smith

Many religious traditions, including Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam view the human intellect (*buddhi*; *khirad*; *nous*; *intellectus*; *aql*) as deriving its intelligible power or "light" from the Light of God, known as the Divine Intellect. For many Islamic philosophers, including the *Ismāʿīlī dāʿīs*, the Divine Intellect is the first originated being (*al-mubdaʿ al-awwal*) which comes forth from God's creative act or command (*amr*). This idea is found in a number of prophetic *ḥadīths* which read:

"The first thing God created was the Intellect (*ʿaql*); the first thing God created was my Light."

– Prophet Muhammad

"God created the Intellect first amongst the spiritual entities (*ruhaniyyin*)."

– Imam Jaʿfar as-Sadiq, (al-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, 8)

This first being is variously called the First Intellect, the Universal Intellect, the Divine Intellect and is often described using the imagery of light. For this reason, the Divine Intellect is referred to as the *Light of Muhammad*, the *Light of Imamat*,

and the “Light of God in the Heavens and the Earth” mentioned in the famous Qur’anic Surah of Light. From a metaphysical point of view, the Divine Intellect or Divine Light contains the spiritual archetypes, attributes, virtues or forms of all created existents – in which all things pre-exist before being manifested in physical form. The Ismaili *dā’ī* Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani once depicted the essence and attributes of the Universal Intellect in the following diagram:



As the Light of God, the Divine Intellect is the highest limit of knowledge, existence and spirituality that created beings can ever attain. The eminent scholar of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Alice Hunsberger, explains the Divine Intellect’s nature as follows:

“The Intellect is complete and perfect. It knows all things, and knows them all at once; there is nothing for it to know later or better. There is no motion or time within the Intellect or within which the Intellect functions, for time and motion have not yet come into existence in the realm of the Intellect. Not only does the Intellect know all things; it encompasses all beings, material and spiritual. In fact, following the Command ‘Be!’, the Intellect is all being; there

is nothing outside of itself. The Intellect also lacks nothing and needs nothing, because there is nothing other than its actual perfection."

– Alice Hunsberger, (*Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan*, 159)

The Divine Intellect is God's highest revelation to Himself and His creatures. The light of the Divine Intellect is manifest throughout all created being. Every creature in the Cosmos – with respect to its particular qualities – serves as a sort of mirror, partially reflecting the perfections and intelligibility of the Divine Intellect based on its own capacity – as the Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani explains to his students:

"...think of Intellect as being the 'Mercy of God' (*rahmat-i khudāy*) which was poured out upon the creatures in such a way that every thing had a glitter from the light of the Prime Intellect in accordance with its own 'measure' (*miqdār*), be this a corporeal or a spiritual being, or a naturally generated composite... Thus, Intellect is a light poured forth upon creation, shining in every thing, and its luminosity is in accordance with the measure of the substance of [each] thing, depending on the wide or narrow range of that substance."

– Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, (*Unveiling the Hidden*, tr. Landholt, *Anthology of Philosophy of Persia Volume 2*, ed. Nasr and Aminrazavi, 97)

All creatures of the Cosmos, insofar as they are knowable and intelligible, participate in the Divine Intellect and reflect a measure of its light. While this insight comes from medieval philosophers and theologians, even modern physicists the likes of Albert Einstein have emphasized that the intelligibility and rationality of the Universe – that they perceive through scientific endeavors – is evidence of "intellect incarnate", a "superior reasoning power" or "infinite spirit" governing and manifesting itself throughout existence.

"Certain it is that a conviction, akin to religious feeling, of the rationality or intelligibility of the world lies behind all scientific work of a higher order. . . This firm belief, a belief bound up with deep feeling, in a superior mind that reveals itself in the world of experience, represents my conception of God."

– Albert Einstein (Antony Flew, *There is a God*, 101-102)

"Every one who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that the laws of nature manifest the existence of a spirit vastly superior to that of men, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. My religiosity consists of a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God."

– Albert Einstein (Antony Flew, *There is a God*, 101-102)

But it is the human intellect, among all created beings, that most directly participates in the Divine Intellect, and is therefore able to perceive the intellect and rationality that is incarnate throughout the Cosmos. This is because the light of

the human intellect is a radiation from the Divine Intellect. Thus, the Christian scholar and physicist Wolfgang Smith explains that:

“The human intellect derives its “light” directly from the Divine Intellect: it “participates” in the Divine Intellect, as the Platonists say. All human knowing without exception hinges upon this “participation,” which of course admits of various modes and countless degrees, ranging from the humblest act of sense perception to ways and intensities of knowing of which as yet we have not the slightest idea. But the fact remains: What ultimately connects the human subject to its object in the act of knowing is indeed “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1 :9).”

– Wolfgang Smith, (*The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology*, 20)

The Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* refer to the Divine Intellect’s emanation of light and knowledge upon the human intellect as *taʿyīd* – a term meaning divine support, divine inspiration, or spiritual assistance. *Taʿyīd* is derived from the Arabic verb *ʿayyada* (to help, to “give hand”) and is used in reference to God assisting Jesus and others through the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-quds*). The Prophets, Imams, and *ḥujjats* in the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* hierarchy are recipients of the highest degree of *taʿyīd* or divine inspiration from the Divine Intellect, although all human intellects participate in *taʿyīd* to a one degree or another. Mawlana Hazar Imam describes the role of the Divine Intellect in relation to the *taʿyīd* of the human intellect as follows:

“The Divine Intellect, *Aql-i Kull*, both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this Intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dedicated by the Faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given and that he should know himself. It is the *light* of Intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal and developing that intellect requires free enquiry. The man of Faith who fails to pursue intellectual search is likely to have only a limited comprehension of Allah’s creation. Indeed, it is man’s intellect that enables him to expand his vision of that creation.”

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, Inauguration Ceremony Aga Khan University, November 11, 1985, <http://www.amaana.org/speeches/speechaku1985.htm>

The *taʿyīd* (inspiration) from the Divine Intellect is what empowers the human intellect and enables the human intellect to grasp and contemplate the spiritual and intelligible truths represented throughout the Cosmos. The recipient of *taʿyīd* is able to recognize himself and see everything in the world as it truly is – as alluded to in the Imam’s words. The intellect empowered by the Divine Intellect is able to have a unitive vision of God’s creation in all its levels and dimensions. At the highest level of human intellect – variously called the “acquired intellect” (*ʿaql-i mustafad*) or the luminous intellect (*ʿaql-i nūrānī*) – the human soul receives spiritual knowledge and spiritual truths through *taʿyīd* without the need to derive

knowledge from the physical senses or rational proofs. Sayyidnā Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani refers to the spiritual truths that come to the Prophets and Imams via *ta'yīd* as “pure knowledge” and explains how it is superior to the knowledge gained through scientific or deductive methods:

“That is the outpouring of [the light of] divine inspiration (*ta'yīd*) upon the hearts of God's chosen ones and His servants. This is the *Pure Knowledge* which belongs exclusively to the Prophets, the Legatees and the Imams... This Knowledge is not contaminated with anything like seeking proofs, which is, of course, the [ordinary] scientific method; it is not the kind of knowledge arrived at by the scholars of this world through one [or another] among the proofs.”

– Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, (*Unveiling the Hidden*, tr. Landholt, *Anthology of Philosophy of Persia Volume 2*, ed. Nasr and Aminrazavi, 94)

As stated in the poetry of Rumi quoted by Mawlana Hazar Imam in his speech at the Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Aga Khan Museum, the “light of the heart” is the human intellect while the “light of God” that illuminates the “light of the heart” is the Divine Intellect, or what the Imam of the Time refers to as the “Divine Light of the Creator.”

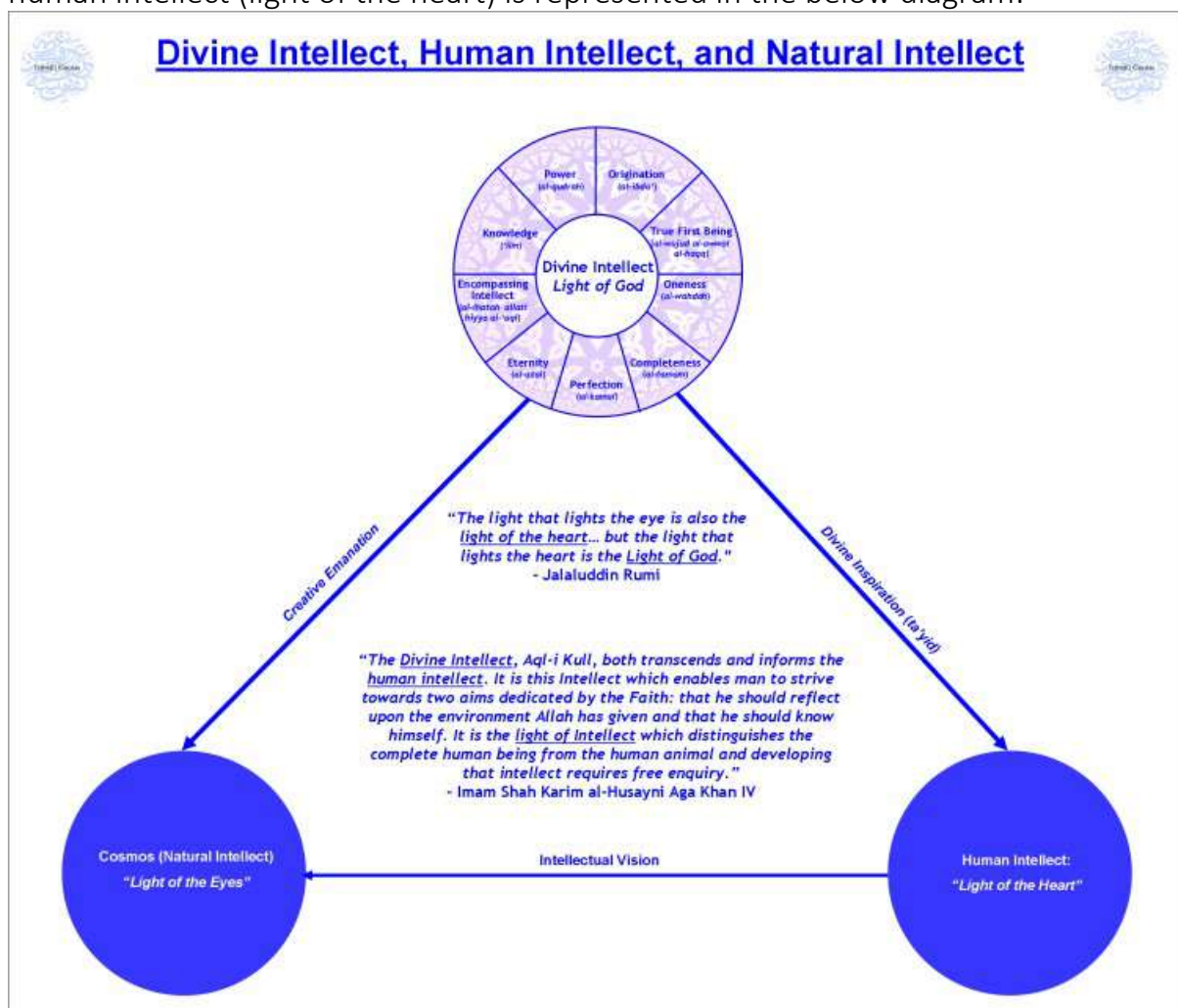


“The new Toronto Museum will take as its theme the concept of light — suffusing the building from a central courtyard, through patterned glass screens. From the outside, it will glow by day and by night, lit by the sun and the moon. This use of light speaks to us of the Divine Light of the Creator, reflected in the glow of individual human inspiration and vibrant, transparent

community. As the poet Rumi has written: *The light that lights the eye is also the light of the heart... but the light that lights the heart is the Light of God.*"

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, Foundation Stone Ceremony for the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and Park, Toronto, May 28, 2010, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9425/>

The Imam further speaks of how the Divine Light is “*reflected in the glow of individual human inspiration*” – and this is an allusion to the Divine Intellect bestowing *ta’yīd* upon human intellects and souls, the result of which all human discoveries, spiritual, cultural and scientific, can take place. In his letter to the architect quoted at the beginning of the article, the Imam spoke of two kinds of light: “*natural light emanating from God’s creation, (and) light... which emanates from human sources, in the form of art, culture and well-inspired human knowledge.*” This is another reference to the light of the physical world, which serves to symbolize and manifest the Divine Intellect, and the light of human knowledge, which is inspired by the Divine Intellect. The interrelationship between the Divine Intellect (light of God), the Cosmos (the light of the eyes), and the human intellect (light of the heart) is represented in the below diagram:



"From the outside, it will glow by day and by night, lit by the Sun and the Moon."

As also mentioned in the above quote, the Museum's architecture reflects and refracts the natural light from the Sun and the Moon. In terms of the esoteric meaning of the architecture, the Sun is a primordial symbol of the Divine Intellect.

"The Sun is 'naturally' the symbol of the Divine Intellect for anyone who still possesses the faculty of symbolic perception and in whom the symbolist spirit is operative."

– Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 153)

Just as the Sun is the natural symbol of the Divine Intellect, the Moon is the symbol of the Universal Soul – the first spiritual being to emanate or flow from the Divine Intellect and the immediate source of the existence of Prime Matter and the physical Universe. Even the terms "day" and "night" mentioned by the Imam have an esoteric meaning or *ta'wīl*. Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains the esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Sun and the Moon in the below commentary on verse 41:37 of the Qur'an – whose words are mirrored in the statement made by the Imam of the Time that the Aga Khan Museum "will glow by day and by night, lit by the Sun and the Moon."

"And among His signs are the night and the day and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourself to the sun, nor to the moon, prostrate yourself to He Who has created them (41:37). Thus, by the 'night' God means the Prophet (*nāṭiq*) who [by way of parables and allegories] has concealed things [of knowledge] just as the night conceals things. By the 'day' He means the Legatee (*asās*) who explains the parables, as the day reveals things that the night keeps hidden. By the 'Sun' He means the [Universal] Intellect and by the 'Moon' the [Universal] Soul, because the Intellect gives benefit to the Soul as the Sun gives light to the Moon."

– Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din*, Discourse 11)

We close this article on the esoteric mysteries and symbolism of Light (*nūr*), which is the underlying theme of the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and Park, with the below words of the Imam of the Time on how such buildings are meant to convey spirituality and bring one's faith and everyday life.



“I am trying to bridge a number of different forces by building this modern building, and one of them is to take some of the value systems of the past, put them into this building, but not make it so esoteric that it overburdens you. It has to be inspirational and subtle. It is not a theological building, but if, within that building, there are spaces of spirituality, which we like to see as part of everyday life — it is not the exception, it should be part of everyday life — then you are bringing that into that building.”

– Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, ‘Under the Eaves of Architecture’,
‘The Process of Change’, March

6, <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/summary-documents/his-highness-the-aga-khan-explains-the-vision-and-rationale-behind-the-aga-khan-museum-toronto/>

Comparing the Imamat and the Papacy: Some Short Notes

he recent visit of Pope Francis to the United States is a suitable occasion to consider the often invoked comparisons between the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) and the Catholic Pope.

- ✓ The [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) is the [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) to the Prophet Muhammad and recognizes [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) as the first Imam. The Imamat is a [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#) where each Imam is appointed and designated by the sole designation (*nass*) of the previous Imam;

- ✓ The office of the Papacy claims to represent the succession to Jesus and recognizes Simon Peter as the first Pope and successor. The Pope is elected by a College of Cardinals;



Q: Your own position as a spiritual head of the Ismaili Muslims — is that in any way comparable with that of his Holiness the Pope towards Roman Catholics?

Aga Khan: “No, there is very little basis for a comparison. The Pope is elected, the Imam is not elected by the Ismailis, the Pope does not hold a hereditary position, the Imam does not have an ambassadorial service as the Papacy does, and so on these grounds there is little basis for comparison.”

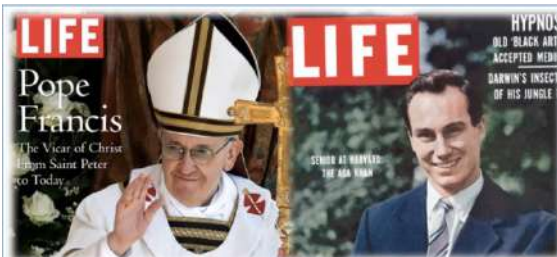
- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan
(Radio Times of Kenya Interview, 14 October 1959)

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spiritual and moral matters.

- ✓ The Ismaili Imam is [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) throughout his life and is therefore infallible (*ma'sum*) and sinless in his words and deeds;

- ✓ The Ismaili Imam guides the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) in daily spiritual and temporal matters and also endeavors to improve the community's quality of life.
- ✓ The Pope guides the Catholics in



Question: Could we say that you are their Pope?

Hazar Imam: The POPE is elected by a college of cardinals, while the office of the IMAM of the Ismailis is a hereditary one. In Islam, contrary to the Catholic Church, there is no clergy in the sense of people having an exclusively religious career. In contrast with the Christian tradition, Islam does not separate the temporal from the spiritual. My duty, in following the example of my predecessors, is to guide the Ismailis, not only in the present time, but also in the daily practise of Shia Islam.

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan
(Paris Match Interview, 15 December 1994)

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✓ The Pope is said to be infallible only when he speaks *ex-cathedra* (when making a doctrinal pronouncement on behalf of the Catholic Church) – he is not sinless or divinely-inspired as an individual person.

✓ The present Imam of the Ismailis, [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#), preaches a message of [Beyond Relativism: The Aga Khan on Cosmopolitan Ethics, Pluralism and Personal Search](#) while emphasizing that pluralism does not mean for

individual traditions and beliefs to be homogenized;

✓ The present Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis, likewise focuses on interreligious dialogue while reminding people that dialogue cannot take place without a solid identity.



✓ The Ismaili Imam and the AKDN have entered into [several agreements](#) of Cooperation with Portugal and the Roman Catholic Church through the Patriarchate of Lisbon. These agreements between the Catholic Church and the Aga Khan Foundation currently involves 20 entities that assist people facing serious issues of poverty and exclusion. These agreements reflect the Ismaili Imam's conviction that the great Abrahamic monotheistic religions share a number of common beliefs and

values:



"I think that MONOTHEISTIC religions, having a common reference to a single God, should and must dialogue. The three religions which Abraham inspired have many more common facets than those which divide them. Religion must be the means by which to affirm the ethical significance of existence, regardless of one's profession of faith."

Picture: Mawlana Hazar Imam and the Catholic Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, D. José Policarpo walk together through the gardens of the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni (October 22, 2001)

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Beyond Relativism: The Aga Khan on Cosmopolitan Ethics, Pluralism and Personal Search

How can we inspire people to reach beyond rampant materialism, self-indulgent individualism, and unprincipled relativism?

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, New York, 2006



Image source: theismaili.org

MOHIB EBRAHIM

UPDATED: APRIL 28, 2015 — In the original version of this article the author, Mohib Ebrahim, mentioned pluralism but had not addressed it. He has now done so and we are pleased to amend the article with his robust reconciliation of His Highness the Aga Khan's support for pluralism and his rejection of relativism. —

Editor

Pluralism to jump directly to the amendment.

Relativism — the worldview that suggests there are no “black and white answers” as all points of view are equally valid because knowledge, truth, ethics and morality are not absolute but relative to, and depend on, the individuals, groups or contexts (cultural, religious, societal, historical, civilisational) holding them — is, arguably, one defining facet of contemporary, liberal society. Indeed, it may even be the signature characteristic of a liberal society.

As champion of cosmopolitan ethics, pluralism and of an interpretation of Islam which unequivocally a) upholds the legitimacy of diverse and individual interpretations, b) reprimands bids to normalise, and c) insists on personal search as an essential facet of Islam, it is often assumed that His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th Imam of the Isma’ili Muslims, therefore, also embraces relativism, given its air of legitimacy that arises from the “pluralistic equity” it accords to all points of view. However, it may come as a surprise to many — as is often the case when the Aga Khan’s actual remarks are not studied but his position only assumed — that the Aga Khan has emphatically and unambiguously described relativism as “unprincipled.”

Leaving aside logical and philosophical absurdity of relativism — in that it cannot even confirm its own validity, for doing so would itself require an absolute statement and, therefore, it condemns itself, I review below the Aga Khan’s exact remarks on the above principles so as to reconcile his disdain of relativism with the apparent relativistic thread common to these principles he holds near and dear to his heart.

Right of individual interpretation

In his 2003 address to the international colloquium *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions*, the Aga Khan said, with respect to freedom of interpretation, that:

This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Qur’an confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere attempts to understand His word.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to the International Colloquium ‘Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an

and its Creative Expressions' (London, United Kingdom), October 19, 2003
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/>

Similarly, in his 1954 autobiography, “The Memoirs of Aga Khan III — World Enough and Time”, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, and the present Aga Khan’s predecessor, wrote:

[T]hat the Qur’an is constantly open to allegorical interpretation ... leads also to a greater charity among Muslims, for since there can be no cut-and-dried interpretation, all schools of thought can unite in the prayer that the Almighty in His infinite mercy may forgive any mistaken interpretation of the Faith whose cause is ignorance or misunderstanding.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III
The Memoirs of Aga Khan III, Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/>

That believers may “err” or be “mistaken” in their interpretation requires, of course, an absolute standard against which their interpretation may be judged for mistakes. In other words, while we are permitted to hold our own personal interpretations, these should not be automatically considered or assumed to be correct and valid, as relativism insists, but, rather, we must have the humility to accept we can be mistaken and, further, have the courage to then actually accept our mistakes. However, relativism precludes the very possibility mistakes — as all points of view are equally valid and none can be judged wrong — and thus it denies us the opportunity to be fallible and mistaken. In doing so, relativism renders accountability (even to yourself), humility and their associated courage as all irrelevant and unnecessary, even though these three — fallibility, humility and courage — are essential, irreplaceable fibres of the human condition and, arguably, define what it means to be human.

Personal search

In his 2005 message to the International Islamic Conference held in Amman, Jordan, the Imam of the Time said, with respect to personal search:

Our historic adherence is to the Jafari Madhhab and other Madhahib of close affinity ... This adherence is in harmony also with our acceptance of Sufi principles of personal search ...

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Message to The International Islamic Conference, July 4,
2005 <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7426/>

And in his 2007 L'Express interview, while commenting on the Shi'ism's intellectual perspective that Hazrat Ali espoused, the Aga Khan said:

Because of [Hazrat Ali], Shi'ism is an intellectual interpretation of Islam. The direct impact is the reduction of conflict between the spiritual and the temporal. The other fundamental element resides in the personal spiritual search. The individual is perhaps more important for us than among the different Sunni traditions.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
[Translation] L'Express Interview, Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, (Paris, France), July 4, 2007
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8106/>

Unfortunately, the notion of personal search — especially because of its emphasis on the individual — is often merged or conflated with the mistaken, relativistic understanding of right to personal interpretation explained above. Consequently personal search is typically restated and understood in relativistic terms to mean “because everyone is on their own personal search and entitled to their own interpretation, there are no black and white answers to questions of faith.” In other words, there are no absolute answers because the personal interpretations arising from each of our personal searches are equally valid — and beyond criticism. And so personal search is thereby given its own relativistic veneer.

However, in Pakistan, in 1964, the Aga Khan highlighted one aspect of his own search — and perhaps the sole objective of his search. He spoke of his commitment to the “continuous search for truth in all matters,” which of course includes values, ethics, morals, norms, mores and so forth: the moral fibre of society. But if truth is not absolute — as relativism insists it is not — and truth is only relative to the individual, then how can the Aga Khan, or we, ourselves, even search for it? How does one search for something that does not even exist? Instead, all one can do is search for other's opinions and in this way relativism redefines opinion as truth and thus permits unsubstantiated opinion to masquerade as “truth.” However, since opinions are, by definition, unverified statements — for once verified they become absolute truths which relativism denies, relativism actually eliminates truth as it makes both everything and nothing “true” at the same time. In other words, if truth was relative, there would neither be any need to search for it nor any truth to search for because “truth” would not exist outside of what you decide you want it to be.

Resisting normative efforts

Time and time again, the Imam has criticised attempts to be normative or prescriptive, going so far as to call them “unethical to the essence of Islam:”

[I]n the Islamic world, as in the Christian world, there have existed attempts of normatism [sic] — that is, the imposition of a unique perspective within the Ummah [community of believers].... The attempt to normalise has a very little chance to succeed and it would be unethical to the essence of Islam.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Paroquias de Portugal Interview, António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee,
(Lisbon, Portugal), July 22, 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/>

Well before the invasion of Iraq, the principal watchword of al-Qaeda was to normalise Islam according to one fundamentalist Sunni interpretation. The exclusivist attitude is a form of theological colonialism, and it has spread throughout the whole of the Islamic world.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
L'Express Interview, Eric Chol and Christian Makarian, (Paris, France), July 4,
2007
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8106/>

History has shown in every part of the world and at every time, that the rejection of pluralism and the attempt to normalise the human race has always resulted in factionalism, oppressiveness and economic and social regression.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Aga Khan Academy, Kilindini, Opening Ceremony (Mombasa, Kenya),
December 20, 2003
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6848/>

Those groups that seek to standardise, homogenise, or if you will allow me, to normalise all that and those around them must be actively resisted through countervailing activities. Whether it be in Central Europe, the Great Lakes region in Africa, or in Afghanistan — to cite just one example from three different continents — one of the common denominators has been the attempt by communal groups, be they ethnic, religious, or tribal groups, to impose themselves on others.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Prince Claus Fund Conference on Culture and Development, Concluding
Address (Amsterdam, The Netherlands), September 7, 2002
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6351/>

As with personal search, the Aga Khan's stance against normatism is also often misunderstood and conflated with the same mistaken, relativistic understanding of right to personal interpretation explained above. Consequently his stand against normatism is taken to mean that "Islam has no absolute norms" and so once again, like with personal search, his positions are given a relativistic veneer. However, note that he only criticised **attempts** to normalise and said that **they** would be "unethical to the essence of Islam." He did not say, **nor does this mean**, that Islam has no norms whatsoever but, rather — due to Islam's essential ethic that there is no compulsion in faith — those norms and their interpretation of them, cannot be **imposed or forced** upon others, as he explained in the Kyrgyz Parliament in 2001:

[T]he Inquisition in Spain was every bit as cruel and destructive as any case that one can imagine.... What is not acceptable is any attempt to impose a particular interpretation on an unwilling individual or population. The Holy Qur'an says that there shall be no compulsion in religion.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to the two houses of the Kyrgyz Parliament (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan),
September 25, 2001
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5988/>

Indeed, even the ardent insistence by relativism's supporters that others should adopt and accept relativism's premises — that there are no absolutes, no black and white answers — because those who think there are absolutes are wrong (leaving aside the inherent contradiction for relativism to even take such a stand), is itself a form of normatism the Aga Khan also resists. As he explained in his 2008, Vancouver Sun interview:

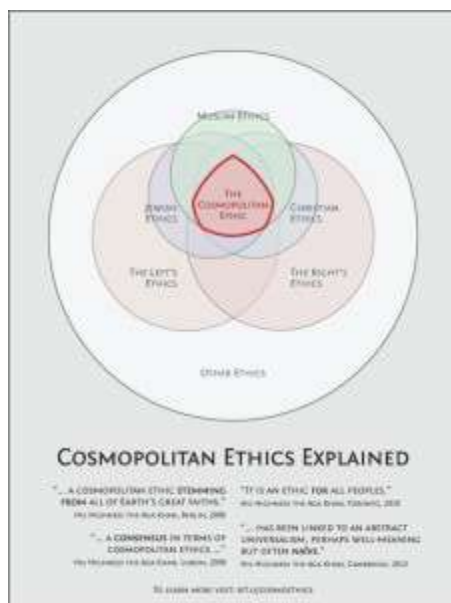
Don Cayo: In Canada I think some of our success is the comfortable tolerance of letting people set different standards for themselves. So, yes, some people may choose license and other people choose some realistic guidelines, if you like, to exercise their freedom. Is that what you see as the goal for the broader society, or is it a little different from that?

Aga Khan: Well I think it's difficult to impose a firm line.... Freedom doesn't mean that if you want to abuse that freedom, whatever it is, you legitimise or impose that on others.

To be sure the Aga Khan himself says he is “cautious” about “formalistic” interpretations of Islam’s articles of faith that anchor the faith in time — which is something he says he “would never accept.” However, one must be careful not to confuse this, which is related to his views about the **character** of correct interpretations (i.e. they must not be time-bound) with the **practise** of those same interpretations (i.e. they must not forced on people).

In other words, the Aga Khan’s stand that Islam is not prescriptive does not mean it has no prescriptions, no articles of faith, and “to each his own” — that is, each individual’s interpretation must be considered valid and correct by virtue of the right to interpret, but, rather, that Islam is not prescrip**TIVE**, not normative, simply means that its prescrip**TIONS**, its norms, (as correctly and validly interpreted for the time) cannot be forced and each individual must make their own choice to follow or ignore them.

Cosmopolitan ethics



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The Aga Khan has urged modern society to adopt what he calls a “cosmopolitan ethic” which, he says, is “an ethic for all peoples.” However, “for all peoples” is often taken to mean as “of all peoples,” so recasting the cosmopolitan ethic as the **union** of all people’s ethics (again as though all were valid and correct), whereas, as the Aga Khan explains below, the cosmopolitan ethic is comprised of just the **intersection** of everyone’s ethics, that is, what is common among all peoples, a consensus. And so with this misunderstanding — of union instead of

intersection — again, like with personal search and normatism, the Aga Khan's position is given a relativistic veneer.

I believe that people share the same basic worries, joys, and sadness. If we can reach a consensus in terms of cosmopolitan ethics, we will have attained something, which is very important.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Paroquias de Portugal Interview, António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee,
(Lisbon, Portugal), July 22, 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/>

Stephen McAndrew, author of *Why It Doesn't Matter What You Believe If It's Not True: Is There Absolute Truth?*, said: "If truth and moral values are relative, one cannot claim that certain human rights [Ed. or ethics] are universally applicable to all cultures and all people" and yet a universal ethic is precisely what the Aga Khan's cosmopolitan ethic is.

More importantly, however, the Aga Khan has, time and time again, since 1959, clarified that ethics generally, and the cosmopolitan ethic itself, must be rooted in the "spiritual dimensions of our lives:"

Stefan Aust / Erich Follath: If the Pope were to invite you to take part with other religious leaders in a debate about faith, reason and violence, would you accept?

Aga Khan: Yes, definitely. I would, however, make the point that an ecumenical discussion at a certain stage will meet certain limits. Therefore I would prefer to talk more about a cosmopolitan ethic stemming from all of Earth's great faiths.

Spiegel Online Interview (2nd), Stefan Aust and Erich Follath (Berlin, Germany), October 12, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7900/>

[W]hat we must seek and share is what I have called 'a cosmopolitan ethic,' a readiness to accept the complexity of human society. It is an ethic which balances rights and duties. It is an ethic for all peoples. It will not surprise you to have me say that such an ethic can grow with enormous power out of the spiritual dimensions of our lives.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
10th Annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, Institute for Canadian Citizenship
(Toronto, Canada), October 15, 2010
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9601/>

A deepening sense of spiritual commitment — and the ethical framework that goes with it — will be a central requirement if we are to find our way through the minefields and the quick sands of modern life. A strengthening of religious institutions should be a vital part of this process. To be sure, freedom of religion is a critical value in a pluralistic society. But if freedom of religion deteriorates into freedom from religion — then societies will find themselves lost in a bleak and unpromising landscape — with no compass, no roadmap and no sense of ultimate direction.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to the Evora University Symposium (Evora, Portugal), February 12, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/>

Rajan Roy: Do individuals increasingly lack an ethical compass?

Aga Khan: Which is why most freedoms go past a certain set of limits. Freedom has been taken to a point where unethical behaviour has become acceptable.

Times of India Interview, Ranjan Roy, (Hyderabad, India), September 29, 2013
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10635/>

[A] healthy sense of public integrity, in my view, will be difficult to nurture over time without a strong religious underpinning.... From that perspective, I would put high among our priorities, both within and outside the Islamic world, the need to renew our spiritual traditions.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University,
Commencement Ceremony (New York, USA), May 15, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/>

Let me finally emphasise my strong conviction that public integrity cannot grow out of authoritarian pronouncements. It must be rooted in the human heart and conscience. As the Holy Qur'an says: "There is no compulsion in religion."

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University,
Commencement Ceremony (New York, USA), May 15, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/>

The message I will always give is that humanity cannot deal with present day problems without a basis of religion.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Press Conference (Kampala, Uganda), September 18, 1959
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10077/>

Firstly, note from the above quotes that, as mentioned earlier, the cosmopolitan ethic is a consensus — that is, what we all agree on. And so, given the Aga Khan has said that it must arise from the “Earth’s great faiths,” he has already limited the scope of that consensus to the ethical framework prescribed by those faiths, and in particular, in his case, Islam. One must be careful here not to jump to a conclusion that he suggesting some benign form of “enforced” religion. In fact, he has said the dialogue “would have to include non-believers because I am talking about human society.” Furthermore, besides being “unethical to the essence of Islam” and its no-compulsion-in-faith ethic, forced religion could not, of course, be a consensus. And so, when the Aga Khan says the cosmopolitan ethic will come from the “Earth’s great faiths” he is merely speaking to the **source** of the ethic. Again, since the ethic is a consensus, that consensus may not accept all the values, standards, mores and norms of a particular creed and so would adopt a subset of those, but at the same time it can’t be more than those values of the “Earth’s great faiths.”

But secondly, and more importantly, why will, in the Aga Khan’s view, ethics generally, and therefore the cosmopolitan ethic as well, arise from and be rooted in “the Earth’s great faiths” — and in his own case, Islam — as opposed to, say, some “new age” religion? While Islam, as explained in the above section on right to personal interpretation, admits one’s interpretation can be mistaken, it does so only because it simultaneously admits there is an absolute standard against which our interpretations may be assessed for those very mistakes. Mistakes and an absolute standard are two sides of the same coin. In other words, the “great faiths” provide, as the Aga Khan says, a “compass” and a “sense of ultimate direction.” The metaphor of a moral compass is particularly accurate. A magnetic, navigational compass allows you to know your course because it lets you **assess** your heading **in relation to an absolute standard** — true North. Without such an absolute standard it would be impossible to know where you are and in which direction you are heading. Relativism has no absolute standard, no true North, and indeed not even a sense of direction because it has no destination. And without a true North, relativism leaves only the possibility of assessing your course and

heading relative to others, who are in turn assessing their own course and heading relative to you. The indifferent outcome of such a directionless, wandering journey is self-evident.

However, in terms of ethics, relativism's lack of a true North, lack of an absolute standard, creates an intractable, unresolvable dilemma for itself. Since relativism insists all perspectives, all views, all values and all ethics are equal and none are, nor can be, wrong or mistaken, it dictates that, for equity's sake, everyone's ethics — no matter how fanciful or bizarre — are valid and "ethical." Indeed, relativism would even accept two contradictory or opposing positions as valid and "ethical." This absurdity exposes that relativism, by its own definition, admits it has no principles to adhere to and that "anything goes." And so, relativism is, as the Aga Khan succinctly said, "unprincipled:"

How can we inspire people to reach beyond rampant materialism, self-indulgent individualism, and unprincipled relativism?

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University,
Commencement Ceremony (New York, USA), May 15, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/>

Pluralism

Of all the principles discussed so far, pluralism — with its promise of universal inclusion and equity — is perhaps the one where relativism casts its bland, grey shadow most surreptitiously. However, like with ethics, where the Aga Khan's notion of a cosmopolitan ethic is mistakenly thought to be a union of the ethics of all people, as though they are all equally valid, without exception, so too the Aga Khan's position on pluralism is also mistakenly thought to mean all positions and opinions must be respected and accepted as equally valid, without exception. Consequently — like with personal search, normatism and cosmopolitan ethics, the Aga Khan's support of pluralism is given its relativistic veneer because, from this understanding of pluralism, pluralism is nothing more than relativism by another name. Or more accurately, relativism redefines itself as pluralism and hijacks pluralism's legitimacy.

Furthermore, since relativism proposes that all points of view are equally valid, relativists argue that only relativism's inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-judgemental worldview can motivate society towards a truly tolerant, pluralistic, mutually respectful society.

However, the Aga Khan's understanding of pluralism does not accept the two aforementioned premises, of what we might call "unfettered pluralism." That is, firstly, he does not subscribe to its sweeping, uncritical acceptance of all values, ethics, morals, opinions and positions without reservation, without exception, as though they are all equally valid. And, secondly, he does not accept that relativism is the indispensable, necessary worldview which motivates society towards pluralism and mutual respect and understanding.

*UNFETTERED, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM BORN OF UNFETTERED PLURALISM
OR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM TEMPERED BY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?*

Unfettered pluralism dictates that all values, ethics and morals are equally valid, without discrimination, and implies, therefore, the unfettered right to hold and exercise them. In other words, sweeping, uncritical equity requires a concomitant to unfettered, individual freedom. Unfettered freedom is, however, license, which — as quoted below — the Aga Khan unequivocally rejects, and always has. Consequently it is self-evident that, the Aga Khan cannot, and indeed does not, subscribe to this relativistic definition of pluralism. A definition which permits unfettered, individual freedom to masquerade with an air of legitimacy simply because its proponents shout "Pluralism!" In other words, for him, pluralism does not mean blind respect without reason, blind inclusivity without intellection. Instead, the Aga Khan's notion of pluralism is socially and intellectually sophisticated, nuanced and aligned with his notion of cosmopolitan ethics. It is one which "honour[s] both human rights and social duties, to advance personal freedom and to accept human responsibility."

It's clear that uncontrolled freedom becomes license. It's an issue that keeps coming up all the time.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom), 1999
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/>

[I]n many areas [even beyond the Muslim world] people defend the principle of freedom to a point where freedom tends to become depravity, permissiveness and disrespect. At that point, Islam says 'no.'

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Politique Internationale Interview, Jean-Jacques Lafaye, 'The Power of Wisdom' (Paris, France), March 2010
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/>

Don Cayo: When I look at the Western perceptions of freedom, which we value highly, I sometimes think we interpret it as the whole world should be free to be like us. Is that how we are seen from the other perspectives?

Aga Khan: I think that's certainly one aspect — the feeling that the societies of the industrialised world are always right, and therefore what they get right should be the norm for everybody else. I think there are areas where we don't agree with that. We think freedom is important, of course. But we think that freedom really is not something that one has to take in the absolute. There is abuse of freedom. And when freedom is abused, what does it become?

Don Cayo: License, I guess.

Aga Khan: Exactly. And that's where parts of our world say 'Stop!' ...

Don Cayo: In Canada I think some of our success is the comfortable tolerance of letting people set different standards for themselves. So, yes, some people may choose license and other people choose some realistic guidelines, if you like, to exercise their freedom. Is that what you see as the goal for the broader society, or is it a little different from that?

Aga Khan: Well I think it's difficult to impose a firm line. But I think that when you look at history, the history of humankind, you will find that when freedoms have become license, society tends to disaggregate. And I think that what we're seeing in the Western world is that very issue on the table, and a reversal. I think there is a reversal under way. Freedom doesn't mean that if you want to abuse that freedom, whatever it is, you legitimise or impose that on others.

Vancouver Sun Interview, Don Cayo (Vancouver, Canada), November 28, 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9087/>

What has been called the permissive society where anything goes, nothing matters, nothing is sacred or private any more, is not a promising foundation for a brave and upright new world. This fearful chase after material ease must surely be tempered by peace of mind, by conscience, by moral values, which must be resuscitated....

It is my deepest conviction that if Islamic society is to avoid following blindly the course of Western society without taking the trouble to raise guards against the latter's weaknesses and deficiencies, a thorough rediscovery, revitalisation and reintegration of our traditional values must be achieved.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Peshawar University Convocation Ceremony (Peshawar, Pakistan), November
30, 1967
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1494/>

Perhaps, too, it is ignorance which has allowed so many participants in this discussion to confuse liberty with license — implying that the sheer absence of restraint on human impulse can constitute a sufficient moral framework.... I am suggesting that freedom of expression is an incomplete value unless it is used honourably, and that the obligations of citizenship in any society should include a commitment to informed and responsible expression.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to the Evora University Symposium (Evora, Portugal), February 12,
2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/>

A passion for justice, the quest for equality, a respect for tolerance, a dedication to human dignity — these are universal human values which are broadly shared across divisions of class, race, language, faith and geography. They constitute what classical philosophers, in the East and West alike, have described as human “virtue” — not merely the absence of negative restraints on individual freedom, but also a set of positive responsibilities, moral disciplines which prevent liberty from turning into license.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University,
Commencement Ceremony (New York, USA), May 15, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7699/>

Striking a balance between freedom and unbridled license demands constant pragmatic adjustments in all areas of life.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Dinner hosted by the Vice President of India (Delhi, India), January 12, 1983
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2558/>

A cosmopolitan ethic is one that welcomes the complexity of human society. It balances rights and duties, freedom and responsibility.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Address to both Houses of the Parliament of Canada in the House of Commons
Chamber (Ottawa, Canada), February 27, 2014
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10724/>

Freedom must not be allowed to degenerate into licence, whether in universities or in society as a whole. When it has so degenerated, it has invariably destroyed the very civilisations which gave it birth.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Acceptance of the Charter of the Aga Khan University (Karachi, Pakistan),
March 16, 1983
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2817/>

Pakistan Television Corporation: And what would be your ideal world view of the future of Islam? And what kind of world, Islam as a faith and followers of Islam would envisage where really we can say that yes this is an Islamic country with the best of ideals and practices?

Aga Khan: I would like [the] essence of the faith to be more predominant in everyone's life.... Secondly, living in the context of the moral discipline of Islam, I think, is important because living in a society where freedom eventually becomes equated with license, is not what I would want.

Pakistan Television Corporation Interview (Karachi, Pakistan), November 12, 1985
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3209/>

Indeed, the Aga Khan, in one of his seminal quotes, reinforces his conviction that all ethics and values are not equally valid, that some are right and others just simply wrong — which, in and of itself, is a rejection of relativism's core position: its non-judgemental stand. Furthermore, he also laments how what was wrong is still wrong, but must, today, be tolerated simply for the sake of individual freedom:

What was once wrong is now simply unconventional, and for the sake of individual freedom must be tolerated. What is tolerated soon becomes accepted. Contrarily, what was once right is now viewed as outdated, old fashioned and is often the target of ridicule.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Presidential Address, International Seerat Conference, 'Life of the Prophet (sas)'
(Karachi, Pakistan), March 12, 1976
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1804/>

*MOTIVATING SOCIETY TOWARDS PLURALISM:
THE RELATIVIST MINDSET OR A SPIRITUAL IMPERATIVE?*

For the Aga Khan, diversity is a gift from Allah, from the Divine and a “pluralist commitment is rooted in the essential unity of the human race.” Consequently, from this perspective, he renders relativism’s other premise — that only its worldview offers humanity the best opportunity for a truly pluralist society — as unnecessary. In other words, for the Aga Khan, pluralism is a “sacred spiritual imperative”, a spiritual obligation, rather than a secular ethic rooted in, or motivated by, any other non-spiritual source or worldview, such as relativism.

[D]iversity and variety constitute one of the most beautiful gifts of the Creator ...

What this challenge [of balancing and reconciling the quest for distinctive identity and the search for global coherence] will ultimately require of us, is a deep sense of personal and intellectual humility, an understanding that diversity itself is a gift of the Divine ...

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
The Peterson Lecture, Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate
(Atlanta, USA), April 18, 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8435/>

In acknowledging the immensity of the Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding. In that light, the amazing diversity of Creation itself can be seen as a great gift to us ...

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
10th Annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, Institute for Canadian Citizenship
(Toronto, Canada), October 15, 2010
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9601/>

[The] ethic of connectivity with others has deep spiritual roots — in Islam as for other faiths. It stems ultimately from humankind’s sense of humility in the

presence of the Divine. In this light, human diversity itself is seen as a gift of Allah, cultural differences are embraced as a blessing, and different interpretations of faith are seen as a mercy, one that nourishes the Ummah's vast identity, and its constructive interface with society at large.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony (Dushanbe, Tajikistan), October 12, 2009
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9331/>

A pluralist commitment is rooted in the essential unity of the human race. Does the Holy Qur'an not say that mankind is descended from "a single soul?" In an increasingly cosmopolitan world, it is essential that we live by a "cosmopolitan ethic," one that addresses the age-old need to balance the particular and the universal, to honour both human rights and social duties, to advance personal freedom and to accept human responsibility. It is in that spirit that we can nurture bonds of confidence across different peoples and unique individuals, welcoming the growing diversity of our world, even in matters of faith, as a gift of the Divine. Difference, in this context, can become an opportunity — not a threat — a blessing rather than a burden.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
88th Stephen A. Ogden, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture on International Affairs,
Brown University (Providence, USA), March 10, 2014
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10725/>

When diversity is viewed as a gift from Allah, from the Divine, pluralism becomes a spiritual imperative, an inescapable, spiritual charge instead of an unimaginative, but otherwise necessary, compromise fashioned merely to facilitate peace or reduce conflict. Instead, as a spiritual obligation, pluralism is assigned a profound role — beyond even relativism's ideals — for pluralism becomes the instigator of discovery and exploration, a source of enlightenment:

What is required goes beyond mere tolerance or sympathy or sensitivity — emotions which can often be willed into existence by a generous soul. True cultural sensitivity is something far more rigorous, and even more intellectual than that. It implies a readiness to study and to learn across cultural barriers, an ability to see others as they see themselves.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
The Peterson Lecture, Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate
(Atlanta, USA), April 18, 2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8435/>

Tolerance which grows out of hope is more than a negative virtue, more than a convenient way to ease sectarian tensions or foster social stability, more than a sense of forbearance when the views of others clash with our own. Instead, seen not as a pallid religious compromise but as a sacred religious imperative, tolerance can become a powerful, positive force, one which allows all of us to expand our horizons and enrich our lives.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Acceptance Address – Tutzing Evangelical Academy’s ‘Tolerance’ Award
(Tutzing, Germany), May 20, 2006
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7706/>

This ethic of exploration and interconnectedness is one that is deeply shared by the Ismaili community. It is an ethic, in fact, that is firmly rooted in our faith — a value system which grows from deeply spiritual roots. It understands that human diversity is itself a gift of Allah — that pluralism is not a threat but a blessing. It sees the desire to explore and connect as a way to learn and grow, not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge. This ethic emanates ultimately from a relationship to the Divine which inspires a deep sense of personal humility and a relationship to humankind which is infused with a spirit of generous service and mutual respect.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony (Dubai, United Arab Emirates), March 26,
2008
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8399/>

RELATIVISM AND THE DIVINE: AN INCOMPATIBLE COMBINATION

Note from the above, however, the subtle, but fatal blow the Aga Khan delivers to relativism when he invokes the Divine, as he did for ethics, earlier, for pluralism, above, and indeed for all aspects of his life, generally. By definition, the Divine is absolute and the source of absolute truth. The Qur’an itself famously declares, in Sura Ikhlas, that “Allah is Absolute. Independent.” (112:2) That is, Allah is neither relative to, nor dependent on, anything. Instead, Allah is unique, singular. Independent. Relativism, however, rejects, also by definition, absolutes and absolute truth. Consequently, relativism rejects the Absolute, the Divine. And so, one can not, on the one hand, invoke or draw on the Divine without simultaneously rejecting relativism on the other. The two are simply incompatible logically, philosophically and theologically.

Even Hazrat Ali — who, 1400 years ago, first held the office of Imamatus which the present Aga Khan holds — rejected relativism's all-views-are-equal-and-none-are-wrong proposition, when, as common sense also dictates, he unambiguously stated that two different positions (let alone contradictory positions which relativism permits) cannot be simultaneously equally valid, equally correct and equally meritorious:

When two biddings differ. one of them is misleading.
When answers compete, correctness is concealed.

Hazrat Ali
(*Living and Dying with Grace, Counsels of Hadrat Ali*), Thomas Cleary, pp 33

And it is here, in the notion of merit, where relativism reveals its most fundamental and critical weakness. Relativism's bland, homogeneous intellectual landscape — where no set of values, ethics and morals are allowed to enjoy greater merit or intellectual validity over any other other, where, therefore, no one is more enlightened than anyone else — strips away intellectual merit from the human condition. The diversity of merit itself is denied and any one intellect is rendered just as unworthy of higher consideration, just as unimportant and indifferent, as any other. Intellectual merit is reduced to the similar indifference, intellectually speaking, of, say, various hair colours or eye colours. However, in stark contrast to this **abolition** of merit, merit, for the Aga Khan is a noble, cherished and unavoidable **consequence of pluralism**:

In the final analysis, no nation, no race, no individual has a monopoly of intelligence or virtue. If we are to pursue the ideal of meritocracy in human endeavour, then its most perfect form will grow out of a respect for human pluralism, so that we can harness the very best contributions from whomever and wherever they may come.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
University of Alberta Graduation Ceremony (Edmonton, Canada), June 9, 2009
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9281/>

The spirit of the Knowledge Society is the spirit of Pluralism — a readiness to accept the Other, indeed to learn from him, to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
2006 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony (Karachi, Pakistan),

And thus, when relativism is considered from these two perspectives — its denial of both the Divine and intellectual merit, relativism contradicts the very mandate of the office of Imam that the Aga Khan holds and all that it represents (an absolute authority), all that it offers Ismailis (the most enlightened and sole, correct interpretation of Islam) and all that it stands for (including the notion of a hierarchy of intellectual merit with Imam himself at the apex):

Roger Priouret: What is your role as head of the community?

Aga Khan: It is two-fold. The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practise of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur'an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam's authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible. This is fundamental to our religion — perhaps something similar is found in the case of the Pope in the Catholic religion....

L'Expansion Interview, Roger Priouret, 'Face to Face with the Aga Khan'
(Paris, France) [Translation], March 1975
<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/>

The Shia or “party” of Ali, already in existence during the lifetime of the Prophet, maintained that while the revelation ceased at the Prophet's death, the need for spiritual and moral guidance of the community, through an ongoing interpretation of the Islamic message, continued.... Their espousal of the right of ... to the leadership of the community was rooted, above all, in their understanding of the Qur'an and its concept of qualified and rightly guided leadership, as reinforced by Prophetic traditions.

Ismaili Imam, Aga Khan Development Network website
http://www.akdn.org/about_imamat.asp

Indeed, the notion of an hierarchy of intellectual merit echoes throughout the Qur'an itself, where it is explained that merit is a blessing. As such, it is self-evident that we, as mere humans, cannot just extinguish it by decree, by fiat, or, even if one denies the Divine, just pretend merit doesn't exist because it offends some arbitrary sensibility.

All (of them) We aid, these as well as those, out of the bounty of your Lord; and the bounty of your Lord is not restricted. Behold how We cause some of them to excel others; ...

Holy Qu'ran 17:20-21
Translation by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali

... Say, 'Can those who know be equal to those who do not?' Verily, only men of understanding heed the warning.

Holy Qu'ran 39:9
Translation by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali

... God will exalt in ranks those who believe among you, and those who have been granted knowledge ...

Holy Qu'ran 58:11
Translation by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali

... We raise in degrees (of wisdom and knowledge) of whomsoever We will, and above everyone endued with knowledge is the all-Knowing

Holy Qu'ran 12:76
Translation by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali

PLURALISM AND RELATIVISM: EPILOGUE

The intersection of pluralism and relativism is, however, important for another reason, for, ironically, it is at this intersection, where relativism feels most secure, it is actually most vulnerable and exposed.

Despite relativism's insistence that, by definition, there are no universal human values, relativists argue — nay insist — that tolerance and pluralism are a special exception to this cardinal rule and they should be elevated to the special status of “universal human values.” Relativism requires this exception for itself because without it, relativism itself could not even exist. For, if alternative views are not tolerated, relativism's indifferent buffet of perspectives — which it so cherishes — would, by definition, be stillborn and extinguished before it arises because, without tolerance and pluralism, each viewpoint would not even have right to be heard. In

other words, relativism, despite its steadfast insistence against universal human values, against absolutes, self-servingly reserves an absolute — that of tolerance and pluralism — for itself just so it may actually exist as a concept itself.

However, this is not the only absolute exception relativism reserves for itself. Relativism further insists that relativism itself should be an absolute, a universal value that all should adopt. Further still, relativism accepts only one definition of pluralism — namely all values and views be accepted without criticism, without exception and without reservation. But even this third exception is insufficient and relativism then insists that this specific brand of pluralism should be adopted by all. However, since this brand of pluralism rests on the principle of unfettered, individual freedom, relativism also insists on a fifth exception, that all should accept unfettered freedom as an ethically valid universal value.

It is this duplicity, this reserving of self-serving exceptions for itself, that undermines the moral, ethical, intellectual and philosophical credibility and viability of relativism. Notwithstanding that the exceptions, of course, beg the question: if five notions can be granted exceptions to elevate them to absolute, universal status — let alone simply for expedience, then why not other notions?

Conclusion

And so, while the principles the Aga Khan steadfastly champions, discussed above, appear to have a common relativistic thread, and suggest the Aga Khan endorses the notion of relativism, despite his own explicit rejection of it, this thread is a superficial one. Furthermore, his rejection of relativism is necessary simply because all of these very principles are only logically consistent, both individually and collectively, **because** relativism is rejected. In other words, relativism is simply an intellectual and moral illusion.

Supplemental reading

To learn more about the Aga Khan's views on the principles highlighted above, please see:

[Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on Islam's and the Qur'an's assent of freedom of individual interpretation](#)

[Their Highnesses Aga Khans III and IV on interpreting the faith: individuality vs formalistic approaches which anchor faith in time](#)

[His Highness the Aga Khan on the need to revive spiritual traditions as a prerequisite to restoring public integrity](#)

[His Highness the Aga Khan on the cosmopolitan ethic and inter-religious dialogue, which must include non-believers](#)

[His Highness the Aga Khan's cautionary notes on Western values](#)

About the author:

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An honours graduate of Simon Fraser University in Computer Science and Mathematics, Mohib has been involved in software development and the IT industry since the '80s. His current project, [MasterFile](#), is a state-of-the-art evidence system for academic researchers, investigators, and litigators. Mohib has also been a keen amateur astronomer for almost 40 years and his religious interests lie in the reconciliation of faith and reason.

Does Islam teach anti-Semitism- that Muslims should hate Jews?

Answer: The idea that Islam teaches anti-Semitism is a modern myth created and circulated in the aftermath of the creation of the nation-state of Israel and the Palestine-Israel conflict. The myth is easily put to rest by considering the historical facts.

A. Prophet Muhammad and the Jews

First, the historical teachings of the Prophet Muhammad - which are found in the Holy Qur'an and early documents like the Constitution of Medina - do *not at all* teach anti-Semitism or that the believers in Islam should hate Jews. The Qur'an refers to Jews as the "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitab*) who are guaranteed religious freedom and protection from the Believers. An early verse of the Qur'an mentions the necessity to defend synagogues - Jewish houses of worship - from harm:

"And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned."

Holy Qur'an 22:40

Overall, the Qur'an refers to Jews as fellow monotheists - believers in the one true God (Allah) and the Last Day - who are eligible for salvation and entry into Paradise in the Hereafter:

"Indeed, the Believers, Jews, Sabians and Christians—whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve."

Holy Qur'an 5:69 (see also 2:62)

"Yet they are not all alike: there are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite Allah's revelations throughout the night, prostrating 'in prayer'. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, encourage good and forbid evil, and race with one another in doing good. They are 'truly' among the righteous."

Holy Qur'an 3:113-114

What about Qur'anic verses that are critical of the Jews?

A full list of Qur'anic verses about Israelites and Jews is [here](#) (on a Jewish website where any critical verses are in bold). The Qur'an criticizes many groups of people on account of their unethical actions; those critiqued

include Believers, hypocrites, pagans, Jews, and Christians. The Jewish Bible also makes condemnations and criticisms of certain Israelites and Jews - for example, see the prayer of the Israelites in the book of Nehemiah Ch. 9: *“But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery.”* There are Qur’anic passages referring to the unfaithfulness of the Israelites that very much mirror the language of the Jewish Bible on this point.

The Qur’an makes no blanket condemnation of all Jews. Rather, the Qur’an criticizes specific groups of Israelites (referring to the distant past) and Jews (referring to the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad) for specific misdeeds, broken covenants, broken treaties, unfaithfulness to God, etc. For example, Qur’an 5:78 reads: “The disbelievers among the Children of Israel (*alladina kafaru min Bani Isra’il*) were cursed upon the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary. That was for their disobedience and violations.” Notice the Arabic phrasing *alladina kafaru min Bani Isra’il*, which is language referring to a *subset of Israelites, not the entire Jewish people*. Likewise, Qur’an 98:6 refers to “the unbelievers from among the People of the Book and the polytheists” (*alladina kafaru min ahl al-kitabi wa-mushrikin*); this again only refers to a *subset of the Jews/Christians* as being “unbelievers”. **The Qur’an does not ever blankly refer to the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) as “unbelievers” (*kafirun*; *alladina kafaru*).** Rather, the Qur’anic term *kafir* or *alladina kafaru* always refers to specific people on account of their violent, unrighteous or treasonous actions.

What about Prophet Muhammad’s relationship with the Jewish tribes of Medina?

In 622, after Prophet Muhammad was nearly assassinated by a coalition of Meccan tribes and leaders, he and his followers fled to the city-state of Medina where the Prophet was invited to be the leader and arbiter between several conflicting tribes. The Prophet, his community of Believers, and a dozen or so Jewish tribes of Medina all signed the Constitution of Medina where they all swore to protect each other from outside attack and provide mutual support; **this Constitution recognized**

the rights of all religious groups in Medina including Jews and Christians and counted all the Jewish tribes as part of the community or *umma* of Prophet Muhammad. For example, the Constitution says about the Jewish tribes of Medina:

“And the Jews of Banu ‘Awf shall be considered as one community (*umma*) along with the Believers—for the Jews their religion, and for the Muslims theirs, be one client or patron. But whoever does wrong or commits treachery brings evil only on himself and his household.”

The Constitution of Medina (in Michael Lecker, [*The ‘Constitution of Medina’: Muhammad's First Legal Document*](#), 2004)

The early community (*ummah*) of Prophet Muhammad was inter-confessional and ecumenical: it included Believers (those who believed in Muhammad’s prophethood), Jews, and Christians – who were to practice and follow their own religious traditions. Two Qur’anic verses (Q 2:62, 5:69) explicitly recognize that Jews and Christians and all those who worship God sincerely and do virtuous deeds may attain salvation (see Fred Donner, [*Muhammad and the Believers*](#), 2010)

The Meccans launched several attacks on the Prophet’s community in Medina in which the Meccan forces greatly outnumbered Muhammad’s defenses: the Battle of Badr (624), Battle of Uhud (625), Battle of Khandaq (627). Muhammad’s community won Badr, lost Uhud, and outlasted a Meccan siege in the the Battle of the Khandaq (Trench). **During the years of these battles, two Jewish tribes of Medina collaborated with the Meccan, violated their oaths, and committed treason against the Prophet’s community of Medina: the Banu Nadir and the Banu Qurayza. The Banu Nadir tried to assassinate the Prophet at least twice; after their plot failed they were expelled from Medina. The Banu Qurayza secretly allied with the Meccans during the Battle of the Trench and later attacked the Prophet’s community using military force.** The defeated Banu Qurayza, having admitted to the crime of high treason, voluntarily submitted to the judgment of a former Jew who passed judgment upon them accordance with Old Testament law: their male combatants were executed and the rest of the tribe was expelled from Medina; however, the various narrations of this event are historically problematic and some historians such as [Juan Cole question](#) whether the Banu Qurayza event even occurred. In 628, several Jewish tribes including the Banu Nadir, Banu

Qurayza and others gathered at Khaybar to form an alliance and attack Medina. The Prophet's forces defeated them at Khaybar and he allowed the defeated Jewish tribes to live in peace, practice their religion, and have protection from the Prophet's army as long as they paid a tribute-tax. Read more on the context and circumstances of each major battle [here](#). Contrary to what is alleged by some today, the Prophet never expelled the Jews and Christians from Arabia.

B. The experience of Jews in pre-modern Muslim societies

"History is replete with illustrations where Muslims have entrusted their most treasured possessions, even members of their families, to the care of Christians. **Muslim willingness to learn from Jewish erudition in medicine, statecraft and other realms of knowledge**, is well exemplified by the place of honour accorded Jewish scholars at the court of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs of Egypt."

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Keynote Address to the Governor General's 2004 Leadership Conference, 19 May 2004](#)

After the Prophet, when Islamic civilization had greatly expanded through the political reign of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate, most Muslim empires treated non-Muslim religious communities - including Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists - as *ahl al-dhimma* (protected peoples) who enjoyed a degree of religious freedoms and legal rights in a form of second-class citizenship. This type of *dhimmi* status was quite progressive during the age of empires and granted religious minorities under Islamic rule far more rights than they would have in medieval Christendom - under which non-Christians were "slaves" (*serfs*) of the Christian ruler and lacked the status of free people. **In this context, Jews living under Muslim rule did far better than Jews living under Christian and European rule.** The professor of Jewish history Mark Cohen writes:

"As any careful and systematic reading of the historical sources shows, despite the theological intolerance that Islam shared with Christendom, the Jews of Islam experienced far greater security and far more integration with the majority society than their brethren in Europe. During the first six centuries of Islam... the incidence of violent persecution, with great loss of life, was comparatively very low."

Mark R. Cohen, ["Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,"](#) in *Jews among Muslim*, 50-63

The Jewish scholar Zion Zohar writes about how the Muslim entry into Spain greatly benefitted its Jewish populations:

"Thus, when Muslims crossed the straits of Gibraltar from North Africa in 711 CE and invaded the Iberian Peninsula, Jews welcomed them as liberators from Christian persecution. The relatively small band of Muslim conquerors, in turn, entrusted Jews to watch over the cities as they continued their march through Spain.... Later, they awarded Jews positions of prominence in civic life and in some rare cases, high positions in the military as well. **The relatively tolerant Muslim rulers welcomed and esteemed Sephardic Jews** who were adept political advisors, skilled financial managers, gifted writers, learned scholars, and pioneering scientists.... **Born during this era of Islamic rule, the famous Golden Age of Spanish Jewry (circa 900-1200) produced such luminaries as:** statesman and diplomat Hasdai ibn Shaprut, vizier and army commander Shmuel ha-Nagid, poet-philosophers Solomon Ibn Gabriol and Judah Halevi, and at the apex of them all, Moses Ben Maimon, also known among the Spaniards as Maimonides."

Zion Zohar. (2005) Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry. New York, 8-9

The scholar Bernard Lewis, who was hardly sympathetic to Islam, even admitted the following about the status of Jews in medieval Muslim lands:

"Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in reconquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe."

Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8

Mark R. Cohen also wrote the in *The Jerusalem Post* in "The New Muslim anti-Semitism" that antisemitism in Arab countries in modern times is relatively new and that Muslims and Jews enjoyed a far closer relationship before 1940s:

“AGAIN, TO understand the relatively decent Jewish-Muslim relations in the medieval period, one needs to contrast them with the Christian world, where, from about the 12th century on, Jews were subject to a shaky adherence to an older commitment to protect the Jews and to guarantee their freedom of religion, as well as their liberty to practice any economic walk of life they wished - all of these things, of course, a function of time and place and the policies of particular secular rulers or the Church. In Christian society, moreover, hostility was focused on one, "evil" non-Christian group, the Jews, paving the way for what was to become - beginning in the 12th century - anti-Semitism, understood as a religiously-based complex of irrational, mythical, and stereotypical beliefs about the diabolical, malevolent, and all-powerful Jew, later on infused, in its modern, secular form, with racism and the belief that there is a Jewish conspiracy against mankind. This kind of anti-Semitism did not exist in the medieval Muslim world. It did not make its appearance there until the 19th century, when it was fostered by European Christian missionaries living in the Middle East. ALL THIS adds up to one thing: Jews and Muslims got along better in the Middle Ages than they do today. But the co-existence of Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages could not easily be maintained in the modern era. Colonial disruption of Muslim society, conflicting nationalisms, Arab belief that Zionism is just another form of European colonialism robbing them of their own right to self-determination in a modern state, and Jewish fear that Arab and Muslim enmity - and more recently, terrorism - might lead to something akin to another Holocaust, have dramatically degraded Muslim-Jewish relations. This has manifested itself in a new Muslim anti-Semitism, which is not, however, indigenous. It represents an Islamized version of its Christian roots. Muslim anti-Semitism has also provoked amnesia in Jews from Arab countries. They (or most of them) no longer remember the friendships with Muslims that Arab Jews knew in the "old country." **They no longer remember the substantial exemption from Muslim violence that the Jews of the Islamic world enjoyed in most places until the events of the 20th century. And they have forgotten that until the 20th century, in some cases right up until the 1940s, many in the Arabic-speaking Jewish middle class were deeply embedded in Arab society and culture, much like their ancestors in the medieval world, who wholeheartedly embraced Arabic**

and the Islamic culture of philosophy, science, medicine, scriptural study, and poetry in what was not an interfaith utopia, but an era of co-existence that can stand as a distant mirror of what might yet be possible in our own time.”

Mark R. Cohen, [“The New Muslim Anti-Semitism”, January 2, 2008](#)

“Another, even more fundamental reason for the underlying inner affinity of the two civilisations is to be found in the shared point of origin of the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. All are linked to a common ancestor — Abraham — whose mythical presence has survived in the citadel of Aleppo. **Islam, the most recent of the three revelations, has always acknowledged and confirmed the older religious traditions** and has also provided, through its various regional cultures, successful models for religious and ethnic coexistence.”

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Preface to Stefano Bianci, Syria, Medieval Citadels Between East and West’, May 2007, [Read Here](#))

Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics

Whatever may or may not be the soul's future, there is one impregnable central fact in existence: that here and now, in this world, we have a soul which has a life of its own in its appreciation of truth, beauty, harmony and good against evil."

Imam Sultan Muḥammad Shah Aga Khan III

"The structure of quantum theory opens the door to the possibility that all causes and reasons need not be purely mechanical. Thoughts and intentions are themselves actual realities, and as such they ought to be able to have, in their own right, real actual consequences. Quantum theory allows this, and in actual scientific practice demands it."

Henry Stapp

The purpose of this article is to present some key arguments for the existence of the human soul as an immaterial or "spiritual substance" (*jawhar ruḥānī*). Human soul and consciousness are neither identical to nor reducible to material objects such as brains, neuron firings, biochemistry, fundamental particles, etc. Of course, some materialists will claim that these arguments only leave us with a "body-soul dualism" in which spiritual substance and material substance are irreducibly different and unable to have interactions without violating the laws of physics. Therefore, we will conclude by offering a coherent model of soul-body interaction based on quantum physics by drawing on the work of physicist Henry Stapp.

A. What is the "Soul"?

To begin, it is best to specify what we mean by "soul" (Arabic: *nafs*; Persian: *jān*) and for this we turn to the definitions of the human soul provided by the Ismā'īlī Musim thinker Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the eminent scholar of world religions Huston Smith:

"We know that within us there exists a conceptual faculty which is our own distinguishing property and that the 'I-ness' of each and every one of us resides there; moreover, all our actions and utterances issue from this conceptual faculty through its use of those organs which go to make up the human compound. Nor do animals possess this faculty. We know that within it is something through which the actions of the different parts of the body occur and that they do so because of its command and desire, and that 'I-ness' in the body belongs there. This 'something' is what we call 'soul' (*nafs*). It possesses knowledge of good and of bad. It is the locus of action. And so God says, '*By a soul (*nafs*) and what fashioned it, and then inspired it [to know] what is*

abominable and what is reverent within it' (Qur'ān 91:7-8). The tongue 'speaks' at the command of the soul; it is the soul which stirs it to speech."

Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, trans. Ormsby, 97-99)

The above passages define the human soul as the subject or agent of human consciousness and action, which is also "self-conscious" of himself or herself as the "I". This human soul or "I-ness" is the agent who experiences various conscious states such as sensations (i.e. perceiving something through the five senses), feelings (i.e. the feeling of pain, the feeling of pleasure, emotions), imagination (to represent something by means of an image derived from sensation), desires (the inclination for something), intentions (the will to do x), and thoughts (the conception of something or someone, a belief *about* something, step by step logical reasoning, etc). Huston Smith provides a lucid explanation of how the human soul is the locus of personal identity that underlies all conscious states and physical flux:

"The soul is the final locus of our individuality. Situated as it were behind the senses, it sees through the eyes without being seen, hears with the ears without itself being heard. Similarly it lies deeper than mind. If we equate mind with the stream of consciousness, the soul is the source of this stream; it is also its witness while never itself appearing within the stream as a datum to be observed. It underlies, in fact, not only the flux of mind but all the changes through which an individual passes; it thereby provides the sense in which these changes can be considered to be *his*. No collection of the traits I possess – my age, my appearance, what have you – constitutes the essential 'me,' for the traits change while I remain in some sense myself."

– Huston Smith, (*Forgotten Truth*, 1985,63)

B. Arguments for the Immateriality of the Soul and Consciousness



“Mechanists consider mind to be a part of the body, but this is a mistake. The brain is a part of the body, but mind and brain are not identical. The brain breathes mind like the lungs breathe air.”

– Huston Smith

Below is a list of the ten arguments – each argument is further explained below:

1. *Conscious states or mental events lack the spatio-temporal properties of material objects*
2. *Conscious states are not divisible into parts or components as are material objects*
3. *Conscious states possess an aboutness or intentionality directed toward other things while material objects are not “about” anything.*
4. *Conscious states possess qualia or qualitative characteristics*
5. *Conscious states, in certain cases, include abstract ideas like mathematical objects or logical operators*
6. *Conscious states, in certain cases, are logically structured and ordered in their sequence, i.e. $2 + 2 = 4$*
7. *The correlation between brain activity and conscious states breaks down in certain cases*
8. *Certain conscious states like Near Death Experiences occur when no brain activity is present (this is verified in peer reviewed studies)*
9. *The human consciousness is self-aware or reflexive while material objects lack self-awareness.*
10. *There is no explanation of how material brain events such as neural firings give rise to the qualitative and non-spatial features of conscious experience.*

1. Conscious states lack spatio-temporal properties: Thoughts, sensations, feelings, and intentions do *not* have mass, momentum, shape, spatial location, spatial extension, or temporal location and they are neither particles nor waves. Meanwhile, material objects do possess some spatio-temporal properties. Colin McGuin illustrates the general argument for the immateriality of the human mind using a generic example that mental events or conscious states lack the properties of material objects:

“Consider a visual experience, E, as of a yellow flash. Associated with E in the cortex is a complex of neural structures and events, N, which does admit of spatial description. N occurs, say, an inch from the back of the head; it extends over some specific area of the cortex; it has some kind of configuration or contour; it is composed of spatial parts that aggregate into a structured whole; it exists in three spatial dimensions; it excludes other neural complexes from its spatial location. N is a regular denizen of space, as much as any other physical entity. But E seems not to have any of these spatial characteristics: it is not located at any specific place; it takes up no particular volume of space; it has no shape; it is not made up of spatially distributed parts; it has no spatial dimensionality; it is not solid. Even to ask for its spatial properties is to commit

some sort of category mistake, analogous to asking for the spatial properties of numbers.”

Colin McGinn, (*Consciousness and Space*, [Click Here to Read](#)

Since conscious states lack the properties of material objects, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

“Matter is located in space; one can specify precisely where a given tree, let us say, resides. But if one asks *where* his perception of the tree is located he can expect difficulties. The difficulties increase if he asks how tall his perception of the tree is; not how tall is the tree he sees, but how tall is his seeing of it.”

Huston Smith, (*Forgotten Truth*, 1985,67)

2. Conscious states are not divisible into material parts or components: Material objects are divisible into parts, but one cannot divide sensations like seeing redness, the feelings of joy, the intentions to stand up, or a logical deduction into material parts. A red object may be material and contain parts, but the *perception of the red object* that occurs in the mind knows no such division. Since conscious states are not divisible as are material objects, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

3. Conscious states have an “aboutness” or *intentionality*: a thought is *about* something, an idea is *of* something, a desire is *for* something, an image is an image *of* something, an abstract proposition refers to something. Meanwhile, material objects, i.e. tables, chairs, brain cells, do NOT possess any *intentionality*: they have no “aboutness” and do not refer to anything. Thus, while a belief or proposition in the mind can be true or false, a material brain state is neither true nor false due to lacking intentionality. Since conscious states have intentionality and material objects do not, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

4. Conscious states possess *qualia* or qualitative features: these qualia cannot be fully described by or reduced to the correlated physical brain activity that occurs at the same time as the conscious experience. For example, one can know about every neuron firing that occurs in the brain when the colour red is being perceived, including the molecular composition of the red object represented mathematically, but none of this data will provide the actual experience of seeing red. Consequently, even if a person knows all of the empirical data about the colour red, they will still attain *new knowledge* when they actually perceive red in conscious experience. Since conscious states contain *qualia* and material objects lack *qualia*, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

5. Certain conscious states include abstract concepts and categories to immediately interpret sense-data. For example, when the conscious subject has the sensation or experience of touching an apple, he also interprets this sensation as signifying an actual external object as opposed to nothing more than an impression. Thus, the mind interprets sensory impressions by resorting to abstract

concepts and imposing them upon the sense impression in order to situate the impression in an intelligible context. Another example is that when the conscious subject notices that two perceived objects are similar and two objects are different, the mind is resorting to abstract notions of similarity and difference to make this judgment. But these abstract concepts – of similarity, difference, equality, inequality, etc. are not themselves material and cannot be provided or created by mere aggregates of material objects like atoms, molecule, cells or neurons. Indeed, the converse is more true – our very understanding of atoms, molecules or cells relies on abstract concepts to begin with. Since some conscious states employ abstract concepts that are not present in material objects, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

6. Certain mental events, such as propositional thought processes, are logically ordered:

With respect to abstract propositions in the mind there is a logical relationship between the content of one thought and the content of the subsequent thought. For example, *two plus two equals four* or “*All men are mortals; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal*” are propositions whose content is determined by logic and not by neuro-biological brain events.

Meanwhile, neuron firings in the brain are organically related and not related conceptually or logically. But the thought content of abstract propositions are related logically and conceptually. Therefore, certain mental states such as rational and logical thought are clearly not governed by the same parameters as the corresponding brain events (if there is such a correlation). Since conscious thinking has logical form and structure while material brain states do not, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

7. The correlation between conscious experience and neuro-biological brain events breaks down in several cases.

Scientists have so far discovered a correlation between certain conscious states and neurobiological brain events. This correlation should, however, be expected if consciousness is immaterial and has causal influence on the states of the brain. Nevertheless, certain kinds of conscious experience which are more intense, transpersonal or transcendent (than ordinary conscious states) are *inversely* correlated with brain activity because they take place with *less* or *diminished* brain activity. Some examples given by Bernardo Kastrup are listed below:

- a) Fainting caused by asphyxiation or other restrictions of blood flow to the brain is known to sometimes induce intense transpersonal experiences and states of non-locality.
- b) Pilots undergoing G-force induced loss of consciousness – where blood is forced out of the brain, significantly reducing its metabolism – report experiences similar to Near Death Experiences. (Whinnery and Whinnery 1990)
- c) Certain Yogic breathing practices increase blood alkalinity levels, thereby constricting blood vessels in the brain and causing hypoxia and dissociation. This

leads to significant transpersonal and non-local out of body experiences. (Taylor 1994)

d) Psychedelic substances cause intense, non-local transpersonal experiences (Strassman *et al*, 2008). But a recent study showed that these substances do not increase brain activity, they actually decrease brain activity by decreasing cerebral blood flow, where the magnitude of decrease predicted the intensity of the conscious experience.

e) Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) can inhibit cortical function in certain locations of the brain and subjects reported Out of Body Experiences when neural activity in the angular gyrus of patients with epilepsy was inhibited in this way.

The full descriptions of the above examples are given [here](#).

8. Near Death Experiences occur when there is no brain activity at all: Near Death Experiences, perhaps the most intense and transcendent of reported transpersonal experiences of consciousness, occur when the subjects are brain dead and brain activity is totally flat. While scientists have tried to attribute the cause of NDEs to anoxia of the brain, release of endomorphines, or fear of death, a recent study published in the *Lancet* December 2001 Issue called “Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest; a prospective study in the Netherlands” put these theories to rest. The author of this peer reviewed NDE study, Pim Van Lommel, writes that:



“In our prospective study of patients that have been clinically dead (VF on the ECG) no electric activity of the cortex of the brain (flat EEG) must have been possible, but also the abolition of brain stem activity like the loss of the corneareflex, fixed dilated pupils and the loss of the gag reflex is a clinical finding in those patients. However, patients with an NDE can report a clear consciousness, in which cognitive functioning, emotion, sense of identity, and memory from early childhood was possible, as well as perception from a position out and above their “dead” body. Because of the sometimes reported and verifiable out-of -body experiences, like the case of the dentures reported in our study, we know that the NDE must happen during the period of unconsciousness, and not in the first or last second of this period. So we have to conclude that NDE in our study was experienced during a transient functional loss of all functions of the cortex and of the brainstem. It is important to mention that there is a well documented report of a patient with

constant registration of the EEG during cerebral surgery for an gigantic cerebral aneurysm at the base of the brain, operated with a body temperature between 10 and 15 degrees, she was put on the heart-lung machine, with VF, with all blood drained from her head, with a flat line EEG, with clicking devices in both ears, with eyes taped shut, and this patient experienced an NDE with an out-of-body experience, and all details she perceived and heard could later be verified. There is also a theory that consciousness can be experienced independently from the normal body-linked waking consciousness. The current concept in medical science states that consciousness is the product of the brain. This concept, however, has never been scientifically proven.”

– Pim Van Lommel

(http://www.nderf.org/NDERF/Research/vonlommel_skeptic_response.htm)

The main author of the *Lancet* study, Van Lommel, concludes that prominent atheist Michael Shermer’s view that consciousness is material is incorrect and contrary to the results of his study:

“Michael Shermer states that, in reality, all experience is mediated and produced by the brain, and that so-called paranormal phenomena like out-of-body experiences are nothing more than neuronal events. The study of patients with NDE, however, clearly shows us that consciousness with memories, cognition, with emotion, self-identity, and perception out and above a life-less body is experienced during a period of a non-functioning brain (transient pancerebral anoxia).”

http://www.nderf.org/NDERF/Research/vonlommel_skeptic_response.htm

There are a number of scholarly peer reviewed articles written on the subject of NDEs by qualified physicians and scientists. Some of these are given below:

- Dr. Bruce Greyson on NDEs and their implications for materialism: <https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/wp-content/uploads/sites/267/2015/11/postmaterialist-PRS.pdf>
- Dr. Pim Van Lommel on NDEs, Consciousness and Quantum Physics: <https://pimvanlommel.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NDE-NYAS-Experience-Self-article.pdf>
- Dr. Bruce Greyson on Cosmological Implications of NDEs: [Does the Soul Exist? Consciousness, Brain and Quantum Physics](#)

Famous NDEs where the patient recalls what happens while they were brain dead and the observation was verified – called the Dentures case and the Reynolds case [As B. Greyson writes in an above article, scientists tested NDE observations of people in cardiac arrest against a control group of cardiac arrest patients who had no NDE and the former group reported everything 100% accuracy while 80% of the control group made errors]

<https://ca.shine.yahoo.com/blogs/healthy-living/near-death-experiences-seen-medical-professionals-232200437.html>

9. In human beings, consciousness is self-aware or self-reflexive: Consciousness in the human being is self-aware; that is to say, human beings are not only conscious, but they are conscious of their consciousness. A person has a direct knowledge of his or her own selfhood or “I-ness”, as Aristotle writes:

“There is something in us which is aware that we are in activity, and so we are aware that we are sensing and we would be thinking that we are thinking.”

– Aristotle, (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.9.1170a31-3)

The “I-ness” of each human is his rational soul (*nafs al-nāṭiqah*) and this self-aware rational soul is, in no way, reducible to the brain or matter in general. This is evident for the simple reason that material things, including whatever the human brain is composed of, totally lack the property of being self-aware. Materialists like to argue that a complex arrangement of matter can somehow magically produce consciousness but offer no explanation of how unconscious, unaware material entities produce immaterial and qualitative conscious experience, let alone self-aware consciousness.

“But if someone says that it is not so, but that atoms or other partless units can produce the soul by coming together in unity and identity of experience, he could be refuted by their juxtaposition, and not a complete one, since nothing which is one and united with itself in identity of experience can come from bodies which are incapable of unification and sensation, but soul is united in itself in identity of experience.

– Plotinus, (*Ennead* 4.3.1-6, tr. Armstrong)

Since human consciousness is self-aware while material objects are not self aware, it follows that consciousness is neither identical with nor reducible to matter.

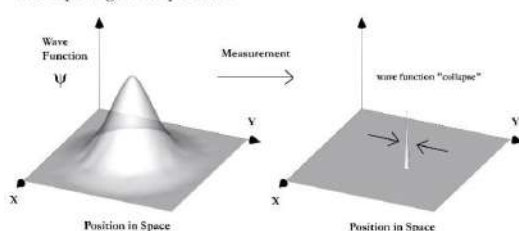
10. There exists no material explanation of how the material brain can solely create or produce subjective consciousness – this is known as the “Hard Problem”:

“The Hard Problem is explaining how subjective experience arises from neural computation. The problem is hard because no one knows what a solution would look like or even is a genuine scientific problem in the first place. And not surprisingly everyone agrees that the hard problem (if it is a problem) is a mystery.”

Steven Pinker, (*The Mystery of Consciousness*, Mind & Body Special Issue of Time Magazine, January 29, 2007)

C. The Soul, Brain, and Quantum Physics

The Copenhagen Interpretation:



“Contemporary physical theory allows, and its orthodox von Neumann form entails, an interactive dualism that is fully in accord with all the laws of physics.”

Henry Stapp

Materialists like Daniel Dennet, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris immediately dismiss the possibility of an immaterial soul or mind that interacts with the brain and the physical body. They argue this on the grounds of classical physics according to which the activity of the soul or any other immaterial entity upon the brain violates the law of conservation of energy. They conclude that matter is the fundamental reality of human beings and of the entire Universe:

“The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for is materialism: there is one sort of stuff, namely matter – the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology – and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain. According to the materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth.”

– Daniel Dennet, (*Consciousness Explained*, 1991, 33)

What is often ignored today is how Dennet, Dawkins, Sam Harris and the materialists fail to realize that their entire argument for materialism and the denial of the soul is based on an outdated “classical physics” paradigm that was overturned in the 20th century with the advent of quantum physics. The general thinking of many people, however, is still shaped by classical physics and for this reason alone, materialism *seems* like the most scientific worldview. Thus Henry Stapp comments that the materialist argument against soul-body dualism falls apart in the face of contemporary physics:

“This argument depends on identifying ‘standard physics’ with classical physics. The argument collapses when one goes over to contemporary physics, in which, due to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, trajectories of particles are replaced by cloud-like structures, and in which conscious choices can influence physically described activity without violating the conservation laws or any other laws of quantum physics. Contemporary physical theory allows, and its orthodox von Neumann form entails, an interactive dualism that is fully in accord with all the laws of physics.”

Henry Stapp, (*Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*, 1997, 81)

At the quantum level, subatomic particles like electrons do not exist concretely; instead, they exist in a state of potentiality. For example, the electron at the quantum level does not occupy a fixed position or a momentum. Instead, the electron occupies an entire range of possible positions – and the evolution of these possibilities over time can be described by a wave function called the Schrödinger equation:

“The quantum state of a single elementary particle can be visualized, roughly, as a continuous cloud of (complex) numbers, one assigned to every point in three dimensional space. This cloud of numbers evolves in time and, taken as a whole, it determines, at each instant, for each allowed process 1 action, an associated set of alternative possible experiential outcomes or feedbacks, and the ‘probability of finding (i.e., experiencing)’ that particular outcome.”<

Henry Stapp, (*Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*, 1997,25)

It is only the act of measurement or observation by a conscious observer that 1) assigns concrete probabilities to each possible position, and 2) selects one of the possible positions of the electron and actualizes this possibility as a physical event. Prior to observation, there is no “matter stuff” but only “possibilities”, as Stapp writes:

“[R]eality is not made out of any material substance, but rather out of ‘events’ (actions) and ‘potentialities’ for these events to occur. Potentialities are not material realities, and there is no logical requirement that they be simply additive.”

Henry Stapp, (*Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*, 1997,26)

Material substance, as such, does not exist without an observation or act of human consciousness. It is therefore nonsensical to argue that material substances, like the aggregation of atoms, molecules and neurons can *produce* consciousness. Material objects, prior to conscious observation, exist only as wave-like potentialities and nothing more. The act of observation or measurement by a conscious agent is what reduces the potentialities into actualities, as Schrödinger himself writes about some particle x when it is observed at position K – prior to which particle x *has no definite existence except in a cloud of potentialities*:

“[I]t is then quite clear that a measurement of x affects not only (as is always said) p [x’s momentum], but also x itself. You have not found a particle at K’ [x’s definite position], you have produced one there!... Before the second measurement, it is ubiquitous in the cloud (it is not a particle at all).”

Erwin Schrodinger, (*The Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: Dublin Seminars*, 1995, 106)

Now, the above is especially true of the human brain. The brain, prior to being collapsed into an actual physical state by an act of consciousness or soul, exists only as a “superimposition”, i.e. several possible physical states or *potentialities* described by a wave function since “*according to quantum theory, the state of the brain can become a cloudlike quantum mixture of many different classically describable brain states.*” (Stapp, 2007, 31).

The human soul, through its conscious stream of thoughts, intentions, sensations, etc. collapses the wave function of the brain in order to produce an actual physical state of the brain with its neuro-chemistry. Thus, it is the immaterial human soul or consciousness which acts upon the set of possible physical states of the brain and

reduces these to an actual physical state: “At each occurrence of a conscious thought, the set of possibilities is reduced to the subset compatible with the occurring increment of knowledge” (Ibid., 52).

This quantum mind-body model, in which human thoughts can cause the occurrence of specific neural activity in the brain, is corroborated by a recent study at UCLA published in *Nature* 467 (28 October 2010) which shows that human beings can control neuron firings with their thoughts. The authors of the study write in the abstract that:

“Recording from single neurons in patients implanted with intracranial electrodes for clinical reasons here we demonstrate that humans can regulate the activity of their neurons in the medial temporal lobe (MTL) to alter the outcome of the contest between external images and their internal representation... Subjects reliably regulated, often on the first trial, the firing rate of their neurons, increasing the rate of some while simultaneously decreasing the rate of others.”

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v467/n7319/full/nature09510.html>

In relation to the above, the famous experiments of Benjamin Libbet took place in the 1980s and he concludes that human beings have

real will: <http://www.centenary.edu/attachments/philosophy/aizawa/courses/intros2009/libetjcs1999.pdf>

Henry Stapp and Geoffrey Schwartz argue for a Mind-Brain Dualism based on Quantum

Mechanics: <http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/360/1458/1309.full>

Henry Stapp on Quantum Dualism: <http://exordio.qfb.umich.mx/archivos%20pdf%20de%20trabajo%20umsnh/aphilosofia/QID%20muy%20bueno.pdf>

This quantum soul-body model is not a Cartesian dualism where a wholly different spiritual substance and material substance interact; on the contrary, there is no purely material *substance* as such prior to conscious observation. What is perceived as material substance is already actualized by and infused with immaterial consciousness and form. Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw expressed similar intuitions a thousand years ago when he claimed that the material human body in and of itself is *not* a substance at all, and that it is man’s immaterial human soul, in its act of knowing, that endows the body with life and substance.

“[I]t is the soul which keeps our bodies alive and that the souls of our bodies subsist by themselves. The soul is a substance and self-subsistent, the mover and keeper alive of the body. The body is not a substance, nor self-subsistent, nor is it the mover of a substance, since the mover by necessity is [another] substance. As for the statement that the action of the soul does not come into existence without a body, the answer is that the action of the soul is to know, and in order to know it does not need a body. But when the soul wants to portray [the form of] that knowledge on a [material] body, it seeks the help of the [human] body which is linked to it, and it is able to do this because of

compatibility [between the two bodies]. Ask so that you may know!
Comprehend so that you may be liberated!”

Sayyidnā Nāṣir-i Khusraw, (*Knowledge and Liberation*, 49-50)

The existence of the human soul is a spiritual substance that is neither identical to nor reducible to the physical brain or any other material object. As conveyed by Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, the forty-eight hereditary Imam of the Shīʿī Ismāʿīlī Muslims, the existence of this ineffaceable human soul is the fundamental fact of all human existence:

“Whatever may or may not be the soul’s future, there is one impregnable central fact in existence: that here and now, in this world, we have a soul which has a life of its own in its appreciation of truth, beauty, harmony and good against evil... But the fundamental point of each message if carefully studied is that man’s greatest of all treasures, the greatest of all his possessions, was the inherent, ineffaceable, everlasting nobility of his own soul. In it there was for ever a spark of true divinity which could conquer all the antagonistic and debasing elements in nature. And let me once more stress that this faith in the soul of man expressed in a great variety of ways — in prose and verse, in art and architecture — was not simply a religious or mystic faith but an all-embracing and immediate contact with a fact which, in every human being, is the central fact of existence.”

Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (“Hafiz and the Place of Iranian Culture in the World”, London November 9, 1936: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1273/>)

Proof That The Bible Is Wrong And That Ishmael And Not Isaac Was To Be Sacrificed By Abraham

By Ismail Sloan

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all variations of the same basic religion. All believe in one God and that Adam was the first man. All have essentially the same line of prophets. All recognize the traditions contained in what is known as the Book of Genesis of the Bible. Almost all of the stories of the Book of Genesis are recounted in the Koran. The differences between them are small, almost infinitesimal. Yet, these small differences form the major gap, which separates these religions.

The biggest gulf between the Bible, the Torah and the Koran comes in the Story of Abraham, where Abraham took his son up the mountain to be sacrificed. All three books tell almost exactly the same story. There is only one significant difference: The Bible and the Torah say that Abraham took his younger son, Isaac, to be sacrificed. The Koran says that Abraham took his elder son, Ishmael, to be sacrificed. Which is correct? Which is wrong?

The difference is vital from the Jewish point of view. The Jews claim that, as a result, Isaac and his descendants are heirs to the entire land of Canaan. The Muslims also find this difference to be vital, but for different reasons.

It can be demonstrably proven from the Bible itself that Ishmael, and not Isaac, was the son to be sacrificed, as follows:

Abraham was the son of Terah ([Genesis 11:27](#)). Abraham was originally from Ur, which was in modern day Iraq. Abraham did not arrive in Canaan until he was 75 years old. He had a brief sojourn in Egypt, during which he allowed his wife, Sarah, to be taken by the Pharaoh ([Genesis 12:27](#)). Abraham later allowed his wife to be taken by Abimelech, King of Gerar ([Genesis 20:2](#)).

Sarah was the half-sister of Abraham. They had the same father, but different mothers ([Genesis 20:12](#)). Sarah was 10 years younger than Abraham ([Genesis 17:17](#)). Sarah was barren, so she gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham as a wife ([Genesis 16:3](#)). Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's child when Abraham was 85 years old!!! After Hagar became pregnant, Sarah twice drove her away: Once before the child was born, ([Genesis 16:4-12](#)), and once after ([Genesis 21:9-20](#)).

It is to be noted that the Bible often does not present events in chronological order. The story of Sarah driving Hagar and Ishmael away comes after stories of Ishmael as a teenager. Yet, it is clear that Ishmael was an infant when Sarah drove them out ([Genesis 21:15-18](#)). This story is related in the Koran as well. The Koran describes Ishmael as an infant, too young to walk.

The story of Abraham taking his son up the mountain to be sacrificed is in the Bible in [\(Genesis 22:2-12\)](#).

Isaac was born to Sarah when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 [\(Genesis 21:5\)](#). This is one of the great miracles of the Bible: A child born to a woman of age 90.

All sides agree that Ishmael and Isaac were brothers. They further agree that Ishmael is the father of all Arabs and that Isaac is the father of all Jews. Thus, the three great religions agree that the Arabs and the Jews are brothers; a point often overlooked by those who have not studied these religions.

Clearly, the Arabs outnumber the Jews. There are more than 100 million Arabs in the world, and less than 10 million Jews.

Throughout the Book of Genesis, God promises Abraham that his descendants will be of great multitude. God says that he will make Abraham a great nation [\(Genesis 12:2\)](#). God says that the descendants of Abraham shall be as numerous as the dust of the Earth, [\(Genesis 13:16\)](#), and shall be in number as the stars of the sky [\(Genesis 15:5\)](#). God says that Abraham will be a father to many nations [\(Genesis 17:4\)](#) and that his descendants will have the land of Canaan [\(Genesis 17:8\)](#). God makes similar promises about Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac. He tells Hagar that her descendants shall be a great multitude [\(Genesis 16:10\)](#). God tells Abraham that Sarah will be a mother of nations [\(Genesis 17:16\)](#). He says to Abraham that Ishmael will beget 12 princes [\(Genesis 17:20\)](#).

The key to the dispute comes at [Genesis 22:17](#), when God says to Abraham: "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and the sand that is on the seashore."

Isaac was 14 years younger than Ishmael. When Abraham took his son to be sacrificed, that son appears to have been about 13. God several times refers to Abraham's son as his "only son." God says "Take now your son, your only son, Isaac." [\(Genesis 22:2\)](#). God says, "You have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [\(Genesis 22:12\)](#).

Did God make a mistake?? Did God not know that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac?

Obviously, God did not make a mistake. What really happened was that Isaac was not born yet. Ishmael, at age 13, was Abraham's only son. Isaac was born one year later. The Bible is in error.

When Abraham died at the age of 175, Ishmael and Isaac buried him together [\(Genesis 25:9\)](#). By then, Abraham had taken another wife, Keturah, and had had six sons by her [\(Genesis 25:2\)](#). This last wife, Keturah, produced more children for Abraham than the others combined, another fact often overlooked. It is logically obvious that it was Ishmael and not Isaac who was to be sacrificed. Consider the alternative: If it was Isaac, then Isaac was 13 and Ishmael was 27, Abraham was 113 and Sarah was 103. It is unlikely that a 113 year old man could

climb a mountain, split wood, build an altar, tie up his son, and later kill a ram, all of which the Bible says that Abraham did on the occasion in question.

Moreover, if he did all that, why did not Abraham call upon his then 27-year-old son, Ishmael, for assistance?

Furthermore, whereas the descendants of Ishmael are of a great multitude, numbering more than 100 million today, the descendants of Isaac have waxed and waned and have been found and lost over the centuries. The descendants of Isaac only had their own kingdom for a brief period in history, and then only long after Isaac had died and many generations had passed. Before then, they were slaves in Egypt. Later, they were conquered by the Babylonians and again taken into slavery. Even when they had their own kings, some of their kings, such as Ahab and Ahaz, worshipped Ba'al and not God ([1 Kings 16:32](#) and [2 Chronicles 28:2](#)).

Many believe that most of the European Jews of today, especially the Russian Jews, are not descendants of Isaac at all, but are descendants of the Kazars, the so-called "13th Tribe", which was centered in the area of Kiev and which converted to Judaism by order of their rulers in the Ninth Century, AD.

If God did promise Isaac that his descendants would be in number as the dust of the Earth, as the stars in the sky, and as the sand in the seashore, this was a false promise which has not been fulfilled.

Another promise that was not fulfilled, if indeed it was made, was the promise to give Isaac all of the Land of Canaan. The Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, have occupied Canaan from that day to this. Canaan is the valley on the right and left banks of the Jordan River. Today, the Right Bank is controlled entirely by Arabs. More than 90% of the population of the Left Bank is Arab as well. The Jews only recently re-arrived as rulers of part of that area after an absence of nearly 3,000 years.

The sons of Ishmael became kings immediately. The Bible says that they lived in a land East of Egypt ([Genesis 25:18](#)). It was a caravan from the tribe of Ishmael that took Joseph to Egypt ([Genesis 37:25](#) and [39:1](#)). Since Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac, and since Isaac was 60 years old before his first and only sons were born, it is apparent that by the time that the 12 tribes of Israel got off to their big start, the tribes of Ishmael had long been well established.

The Bible contains many obvious errors and inconsistencies. Starting from Genesis, it first says that Enoch and his son Mathushael and his son Lamech were direct descendants of Cain along the male line ([Genesis 4:18](#)). It later says that Enoch and his son Methuselah and his son Lamech were direct descendants of Seth along the male line ([Genesis 5:21-25](#)). Both could not be true, except in the unlikely event that there were two identical sets of persons with these names.

In the New Testament, [Matthew 1](#) lists 42 generations between Abraham and Joseph, the presumed father of Jesus, whereas [Luke 3](#) lists 55 generations. The names in these lists are different after King David as well. Matthew says that Jesus is a descendant of David through his son, King Solomon. Luke says that Jesus is a

descendant of David through another son, Nathan. The Luke version is more believable because it is more detailed and because the Matthew version tends to list kings and famous personalities as ancestors of Jesus, whereas Luke lists common or otherwise unknown people. Jesus is supposed to have been a common man.

The Bible describes Sarah as a beautiful woman whom even the Pharaoh of Egypt would want and whom a man would kill another man to get ([Genesis 12:11-15](#)) and [20:11](#)). Yet, Sarah was apparently already 65 years old when she first arrived in Egypt.

[Deuteronomy 23:2](#) says that an illegitimate child may not enter the Assembly of God even until the Tenth Generation. Yet, Perez was clearly the illegitimate son of Tamar, who sold herself as a harlot to her father-in-law Judah ([Genesis 38:24-29](#)). The Bible makes it clear that Judah never married Tamar. Yet, the descendants of Tamar to the Tenth Generation were Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse and King David!!

The Bible says that the Children of Israel stayed in Egypt for 430 years ([Exodus 12:40](#)). Yet, this could not possibly have been true. It is evident that the Jews could not have remained there for much more than 200 years at the longest, because Moses was the son of Jochebed, who was the daughter of Levi ([Exodus 6:20](#) and [Exodus 2:1](#)). Moses was 80 years old when he talked with Pharaoh ([Exodus 7:7](#)). Since a woman cannot give birth to a child much beyond the age of 40, and since Levi did not live beyond the age of 130 and Levi was born before Joseph and was born in Canaan, the total length of time that the Jews were in Egypt cannot have been more than 250 years.

The Bible has been transcribed and re-transcribed a thousand times over the centuries. What we can see here is that somewhere along the line, some scribe wrote in that Abraham intended to sacrifice Isaac, whereas in reality he intended to sacrifice Ishmael. The motivation for this alteration is obvious, because it forms the basis to the Hebrew claim to have the legal right of ownership of the entire Land of Canaan.

The Bible says that Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac ([Genesis 2:5](#)). However, it is apparent that Abraham did not give and could not have given the birthright of Ishmael to Isaac. Isaac and his immediate descendants never ruled the Land of Canaan. They merely lived there.

Isaac was not even capable of finding himself a wife. When Isaac was 40 years old and still unmarried, his then 140-year-old father, Abraham, sent a servant to find a wife for Isaac ([Genesis 24](#)). After the dutiful servant brought a wife to Isaac, it took Isaac another 20 years before he was able to make her pregnant. Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, first and last gave birth when Isaac was 60 years old and Rebecca was probably about 36 ([Genesis 25:26](#)).

Except for Isaac, none of the other patriarchs of the Bible seemed to have any trouble finding women and in conceiving children with them. Perhaps Isaac was a closet gay, who never came out.

By a simple substitution of the name Ishmael for the name Isaac in just four places in [Genesis 22:2-7](#), all of the prophecies become true. As the passages would then state, the rulers and descendants of Ishmael did become the rulers and kings of the area. The descendants of Ishmael did quickly multiply and become in number as dust of the Earth, stars in the sky or sand on the seashore.

What Happens to the Soul After Death?

The Farmans of the Imams and the Qur'an offer very little in concrete expressions about what happens to the soul after death - this is because, among other things, the reality of the afterlife cannot be contained in human language, concepts and images. So all scriptures, religious authorities and thinkers have exercised caution when speaking about this topic. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, the famous Ismaili Muslim philosopher of Alamut, wrote in a preface to his book dedicated to the topic of the Hereafter:

"...not all that exists is destined for everyone, and not everyone can see what is destined for him, nor can one know all that one sees, nor can one express [in speech] all one knows, and not everyone can write all that he can express."

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*Aghaz wa Anjam*, "Shi'i Interpretations of Islam", p. 47)

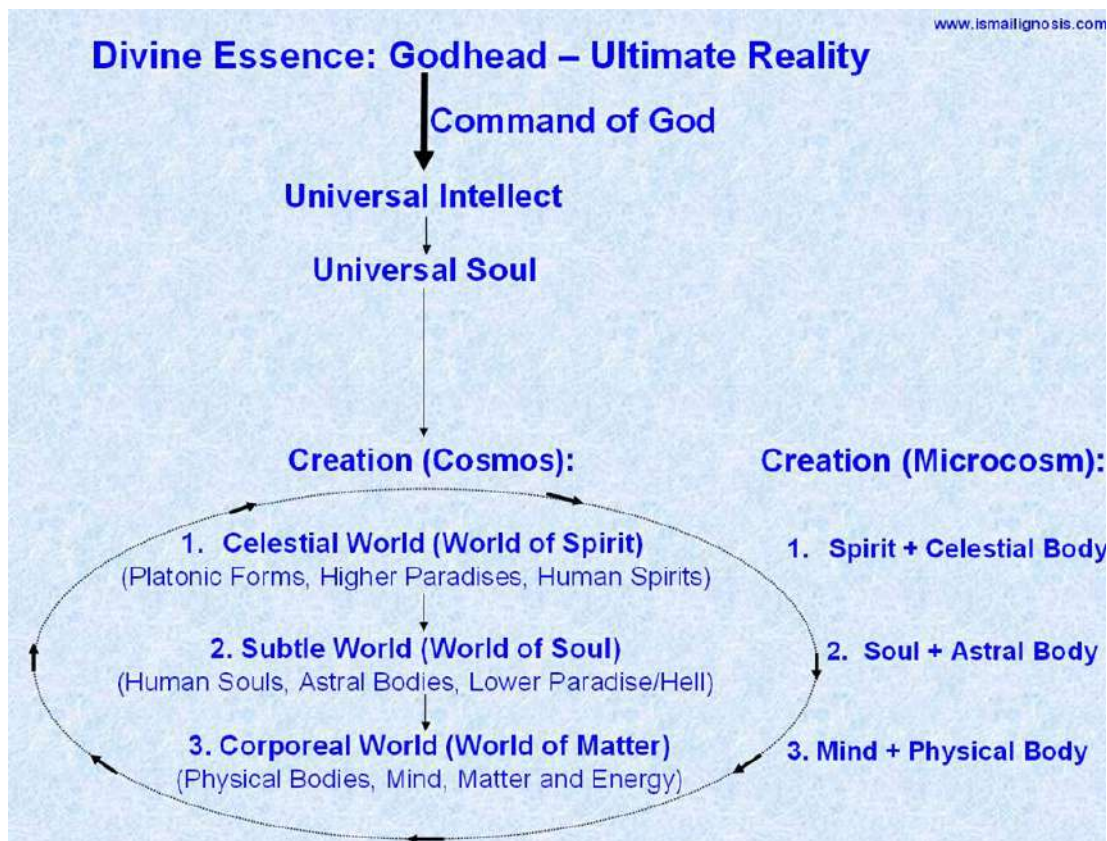
In keeping with Tusi's caution and spirit, the following are basically interpretations and formulations of the material on the afterlife through an engagement with Islamic sources - from the Ismaili tradition, the Islamic *falsafa* tradition, and wider Sufi tradition.

Now any discussion on the afterlife is based on a foundational worldview. In simple terms, this foundational worldview as articulated by Ismaili philosophers sees the Cosmos as consisting of primarily two realms:

- the physical world that is spatially and temporally extended and perceived by the sense organs
- the higher spiritual realm consisting of immaterial substances- such as souls, intellects, angelic beings, etc.
- God is the Creator and Originator of both spiritual and physical worlds through His eternal Command (*amr*)

The spiritual world itself can be further subdivided into levels - like different degrees of "light" with various intensity levels.

- The highest level (*hadd*) of the spiritual world is variously called the Universal Intellect, the Throne (*arsh*), the *Nur* (light) of Imamah, the First Intellect, the Pen, etc.
- Through the Universal Intellect, the Command of God manifests and emanates the Universal Soul – in which the celestial archetypes or Forms of all creatures are differentiated.
- Next, there are various angelic levels which coincide with the levels of Paradise [the seven paradises, for example].
- Eventually this hierarchy begins to "densify" and we reach physical reality as we know it.



In between, there are numerous levels, and each level is like its own "world" and only God knows the innumerable realms and worlds between physical reality as we know it and the highest Universal Intellect. God Himself, in the classical Ismaili perspective, occupies no "level" as He is too great to be limited to any level and His single Command - which keeps everything in being - also encompasses all these levels and worlds.

So within this worldview, there exists a "psychology" - a model of the human self - which envisages the human being as consisting of a physical body, an immaterial soul, and an intellect (also called spirit). But the main idea is that the essence of each person is his or her soul and this soul is not a material entity, it is a spiritual (*ruhani*) substance (*jawhar*) - and as such, the soul does not take up any space; it is not "inside" the body or "inside" the brain. This human soul, one could say, belongs to its own spiritual world [a world beyond space, place, matter] among other souls. This spiritual world - and the souls that populate it - is, from the human perspective, everywhere and not restricted to a location. That being said, when the soul is "embodied", this really means that the soul is "projecting" itself into the physical world upon a particular material body that is prepared with the capacity to receive the activity of the soul [in the human case, it requires a functioning brain] - such that the soul can control, express, act, and manifest itself through this body.

"Human souls, being eternal, do not themselves mix 'in person', so to speak, with the world of material and accidental things, which are temporal. It is their silhouette, their Image, their shadow, which is projected into it."

– Henry Corbin, (*Spiritual Body, Celestial Earth*, 80)

During this time of "embodiment", the soul perceives and acts and functions "through" this body - we would call this state "waking consciousness". When the physical body dies - that means, it is no longer able to receive the projection or activity of the soul, so that soul's connection to the body is severed. But this is not the end of the soul's consciousness - only the end of waking consciousness.

So then what happens after physical death? The Ismaili philosophers as early as al-Nasafi and Sijistani, the Sufi thinkers, some Islamic philosophers, and many later Islamic theosophers like Mulla Sadra and his successors - all of them describe and speak of a world or realm that stands "in-between" the physical world and the spiritual realm where human souls dwell. This "in-between" world is given many names like the World of Images (*Mithal*), or the World of Imagination (*Khayal*), or the Intermediary (*barzakh*) World. But the general idea is that this Imaginal World is less dense than the physical world but more dense than the purely spiritual world. Practically, this means that the Imaginal World consists of spiritual realities - one could say consciousness experience - but expressed through images. It sort of looks similar to what is experienced in dreams - in dreams, things have a sort of bodily form, including the self as the dreamer, but these are not physical bodies, they are subtle or imaginal bodies.

“God created the world of archetypal images as an intermediary (barzakh) linking the World of Spirits and the World of Bodies... In short, this is the world of archetypal Images through and in which Spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized. Through and in this world, ways of being and moral behavior are personalized, and suprasensory realities are manifested in the forms and figures with which they symbolize... It is in this intermediate world that the Holy Imams are present when they appear before a dying person, as related in so many traditional accounts. This is the world in which the interrogation of the tomb takes place, with its delights and its torments; and it is in this intermediate world also that the faithful believer can visit those near to him after their death.”

– Fayd al-Din Kashani, (Quoted in Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 178)

This is important because various sources - including the early Imams, the *Hadith*, the philosophers, the mystics, Near-Death experiences and even hints in the farmans - say that upon death, the human soul projects itself in this Imaginal World or Intermediary World, and in that world, the soul takes the form of an "imaginal body" or "subtle body". This is again, similar to a dream - where one has "a body" in their dreams but it is not their physical body. Similarly, in the Imaginal World - which is the world of the hereafter - the soul has an imaginal body. And this imaginal body is something that the immaterial soul "projects" in order to manifest and act and experience things in this Imaginal World. **When the physical body is alive, the soul projects the imaginal body upon the physical body - and there is waking consciousness as a result. When the physical body can no longer receive the projection of the soul, then the soul continues to "project" but now the projection exists on its own - as an imaginal body - without a physical locus.** The imaginal body and what it perceives in the Imaginal World is all an "image" of the state of the soul. If the soul has certain bad or negative qualities - caused by bad deeds, bad intentions, character flaws, etc. - then it will perceive these negative things in the form of images in the Imaginal World. And the same goes for the beautiful traits, meritorious deeds and intentions - it will perceive them

in the Imaginal World through pleasant and beautiful images. But these images will seem very real - they are actually more real and more vivid than anything that is perceived in this physical world.

Nasir al-Din Tusi explains it best where he says below how the human soul continues to exist in an imaginal body through which it experiences things in the Hereafter:

“ When the soul departs from the body, it retains a kind of imaginal body (hay’at az khayal), bearing the forms of whatever the imaginal soul knew or did. Likewise, reward and punishment are determined for the human soul in proportion to that imaginal body, and the imaginal soul reminds it of this reward and punishment. The identity of human souls in the Hereafter (akhirat) is determined by this, because in this world human beings are spiritual beings clothed in corporeal bodies, while in the next they are corporeal beings clothed in spirituality.”

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 34)

*“The notion entertained by some folk that the soul upon separation from the body in that world has no concrete individual identity or distinguishing characteristic is incorrect. It is false because the soul’s activity and comprehension in this world requires the participation of the faculty of imagination (quwwat-i khayal), which acts as an intermediary between the corporeal and the spiritual faculties. **After the soul leaves the body, an imaginal body remains with the soul.** Just as in this world when a person dreams, he sees different circumstances through the mediation of the imagination and physical sight, so too in the Hereafter, **the spirits see different things and situations through the mediation of the imaginal body (hay’at-i khayal), and they become aware of their own condition and the condition of others as well.**”*

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 86)

Does this match what the Qur'an says?

The Qur'an refers to what happens after death as "resurrection" or "arising" (*qiyamah, ba'ath*). For the individual human soul, there are two levels or types of "Rising": Minor Arising and Major Arising. **The Minor Arising or Minor Resurrection (*qiyamat al-sughra*) occurs when the human soul "arises" from the physical body into the imaginal body.** Sometimes, the Hadith Literature *allegorically* describes the human soul in the Imaginal Body as "spending time in the grave." The "grave" here does not refer to the physical grave of mud and dust; the "grave" refers to the Imaginal Body itself. When the human soul in the Imaginal Body has succeeded in completing its spiritual growth and purifying itself, it will move to an even higher level called the Celestial Body or Paradiscal Body. This occurs when the human soul *ascends* from the Imaginal Subtle World to the Celestial Spiritual World (see diagram above) and this is "Entering into Paradise." **In Qur'anic terms, the movement of the soul from Imaginal Body to Celestial Body is the Major Arising or Major Resurrection (*qiyamat al-kubra*).**

*“In Mulla Sadra’s view, the body that is resurrected in the posthumous state is the subtle or imaginal body. It is the imaginal body that must grow to maturity in the posthumous state and eventually experience another death which is also a birth. It is the death to the intermediate imaginal world and a birth into the spiritual or intelligible world. The creation of the imaginal body by the soul constitutes the lesser resurrection (*qiyamah sughra*) and the creation of the spiritual body, the greater resurrection*

(qiyamah kubra). Therefore the human soul experiences three births and three modes of existence.”

– Zailan Morris, (Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason, 114)

What about Near-Death Experiences?

Modern day Near-Death-Experience literature seems to confirm the existence of the imaginal body – the very same experience that the Muslim thinkers and mystics described hundreds of years ago. For example, two studies on NDEs state:

*“Most people say they are not just some spot of consciousness when this happens. **They still seem to be in some kind of body even though they are out of their physical bodies. They say the spiritual body has shape and form unlike our physical bodies.** It has arms and a shape although most are at a loss to describe what it looks like. Some people describe it as a cloud of colors, or an energy field.”*

– Raymond Moody, (The Light Beyond, 15)

*“An important characteristic of the early OBE (Out of Body Experience) studies is the fact that the explorers tended to experience their out-of-body consciousness as lodged in the ‘astral body’. **This second body is understood to be ordinarily coterminous with the physical, but emerges from it during OBEs. It appears to the OBEr as identical to the physical but is invisible to most people;** it can float or glide through the air, move through walls, and can visit other planes than the physical. Normally it is linked to the physical body by a line called the ‘silver cord’ (a reference to Ecclesiastes 12:6).*

– Gracia Fay Ellwood, (Holy Darkness: Holy Light, PhD Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 42)

The Difference Between Soul (nafs) and Spirit (ruh)

Please find below an analysis of the terms ruh (spirit) and nafs (soul) in the Quran. You will find that the Quran never uses the word ruh to talk about the human soul. Instead, it uses the term nafs for the human soul - the soul which can do good or evil, commit sins, and is judged in the hereafter and leaves the body upon death. Interestingly, the Quran never speaks about the ruh in this way. Instead, the Ruh in the Quran is described as a singular entity - from which God has breathed into man. Thus, each human being has both a 'soul' (nafs) and a 'spirit' (ruh) which must be differentiated from each other.

A. What is the "Spirit" (Ruh) in the Qur'an:

The Spirit is a singular entity in the Qur'an as follows:

1. The Spirit is from God's Command and we know little about it (17:85)
2. The Spirit brings the revelation to the Prophet's heart (26:192-195)
3. The Spirit belongs to God and He calls it "My Spirit" (15:28-29)
4. The angels are all connected to the Spirit; in another sense, the Spirit is the centre of all the angels (78:38)
5. God helps the Prophets like Jesus with the Spirit (2:87, 2:253, 5:110)
6. Jesus is called the "Spirit from Him" (4:171)
7. God inspired the Prophet Muhammad with the Spirit (42:52)
8. God strengthens the believers with the Spirit (16:102, 58:22)
9. God sends down the Spirit from His Command upon his Servants (16:2, 40:15)
10. God breathed into Mary from the Spirit (21:19, 66:12)
11. The Spirit can take on a human image or form (19:17)
12. The Spirit both descends from God and ascends to God (70:4, 97:4)
13. God sent the Qur'an with the Spirit (16:102, 26:193)
14. God breathed into Adam "from My Spirit" (min ruhee). Note this is different from God breathing the Spirit as a whole into Adam. (15:29, 38:72)

It follows from the above that the Spirit is a single entity which performs functions and tasks on God's behalf. The Holy Imams in the hadiths tell us more about the Holy Spirit. The gist of these say that the Holy Spirit is greater than the Angels and it always remains with the Imams, guiding them on God's behalf. But each human being has been given a share of this Spirit - evidenced by God breathing into Adam from His Spirit. So there is one Holy Spirit (capital "S") while each person has a "spirit" (small s) which is from the Holy Spirit. Since each person's spirit is from God's Spirit, this individual spirit in each person cannot be corrupted and cannot commit sins. The individual spirit, breathed by God into each person must be

differentiated from the human soul which we will discuss below.

B. What is the "Soul" (nafs) in the Qur'an:

1. The soul has been created and proportioned by God (91:8)
2. God has inspired the soul with the knowledge of what is right and wrong (91:9)
3. The one who succeeds is he who has purified and caused his soul to grow (91:8-12)
4. The soul will be judged in the hereafter and will receive what it has earned (2:281, 3:25, 3:30)
5. The soul is capable of commanding one to do evil (12:53, 50:16, 79:40)The soul is capable of censoring itself (75:2)
6. The soul at peace is admitted into Paradise (89:27)Good deeds are done for the soul's benefit (2:223)
7. The soul can be strengthened through spending in God's way (2:265)
8. The soul will taste and experience death (3:185)
9. The soul can wrong or or destroy ruin itself, or commit sins and then seek pardon (4:110, 6:12, 6:20, 7:53, 9:42)
10. The soul has desires (5:70) Allah receives souls when they die (39:42)

From the above we see that the nafs mentioned in the Qur'an is the same as the human soul which God has created and which each person must purify and grow. This soul is capable of inclining towards evil deeds and sins and even ruining itself but it is also capable of censoring itself and also achieving peace whereby it enters Paradise. Thus, the Qur'anic term nafs does mean `soul` and not merely *self*. The nafs according to the Quran, survives death, is judged and can be sent to Paradise or Hell. The ruh barely has an individuality- while each human being has a nafs which is ultimately responsible for its deeds in the world.

What are Ismaili Views on the Afterlife, Paradise, and Hell?

The Qur'anic vision of the hereafter is not a binary one where there is either Paradise or Hellfire. **There are at least 5 different afterlife scenarios that a human being could experience.** It should also be noted that according to Islamic philosophers like Ibn Sina and Nasir al-Din Tusi, Ismaili philosophers, and Sunni Sufi and Shi'a mystical thinkers, there is an Imaginal World in between the Physical World and the Spiritual World ([read about the Imaginal World here](#)). Human souls have to pass through the Imaginal World after death in order to enter into the Spiritual World. This concept of the Imaginal World is affirmed by numerous Muslim thinkers, Sunni and Shi'a, and is covered by the scholar Henry Corbin in his book *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*.

“Death is the passage of the soul from the sensible world to the imaginal world (‘alam al-mithali). The imaginal world is an isthmus (barzakh) between the sensible world and the spiritual world.... Unlike the World of Spirits which is constituted of simple and luminous beings which are separate from matter and the World of Bodies which is constituted of compound and tenebrous beings which are immersed in matter; the imaginal world is constituted of ‘suspended’ forms or images.”

– Zailan Morris, (*Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason*, 107)

What happens after the death of the physical body is that the human soul continues to exist in an Imaginal body, and this **Imaginal body journeys to the Imaginal World where it experiences the consequences of everything the person thought and did during earthly life.** The Imaginal body is made up of images from one's thoughts and deeds, and the form of the imaginal body depends on one's virtues. Virtuous people have a beautiful imaginal body and sinful people have an ugly imaginal body. In the Imaginal World, which is the first stage of the Afterlife, people's true spiritual nature – whether virtuous and good or sinful and corrupt – is revealed openly to themselves and to others. The Qur'an confirms the existence of human souls after death as existing in "imaginal" (mithali) bodies:

“We have decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated from changing your likenesses (amthal) and creating you in (forms) that ye know not.”

– Holy Qur'an 56:60

Nasir al-Din Tusi, the Shia Ismaili Muslim philosopher of Alamut explains:

“When the soul departs from the body, it retains a kind of imaginal body (hay'ati az khayal), [bearing the] forms of whatever the imaginal soul (nafs-i khayali) knew or did. Likewise, reward and punishment are determined for the human soul in proportion to that [imaginal body], and the imaginal soul reminds it of this reward and punishment. The identity of human souls in the Hereafter (akhirat) is determined

by this, because in this [earthly] world human beings are spiritual beings clothed in corporeal bodies, while in the next they are corporeal beings clothed in spirituality."

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 34)

Below is a brief summary of at least FIVE afterlife scenarios according to the Qur'an:

1. Entrance directly into Paradise (in the Spiritual World)

Paradise is a spiritual station where one has spiritual vision (*didar*) of the Light of God. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah says in his *farman* that: *"Where there is didar, there is Paradise."* In his Memoirs the Imam also says *"For the chosen, there is eternal life and the spiritual felicity of the Divine Vision."*

"In the Qur'anic wisdom, the topic which is selected to indicate all the spiritual pleasures of Paradise, is the vision (didar, liqa) of God. Whatever may be the nature and reality of the vision of God, it contains within it Paradise with all its favours and delights. And wherever in the Qur'an, Paradise is described and praised, it is an allegorical explanation of the vision of God or the Divine manifestations. This explanation should not arouse fear in someone about the existence of Paradise, rather he should be assured that Paradise and all of its bounties are there, but in an intellectual and luminous form, not in a material and physical form, because there everything, every bounty and every pleasure is tinted in the Divine colour. Or, in other words, Paradise is the abode of the diverse manifestations of the absolute Light."

- Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai, (*True Vision: Haqiqi Didar*, 6-7)

The greatest souls, after physical death, will enter Paradise directly and pass over the Imaginal World. Remember that entering Paradise is not some arbitrary decision of God, but depends on the spiritual capacity of the soul in developing its faculties to behold the Divine vision (*didar*).

"Nor will they there Taste Death, except the first Death; and He will preserve Them from the Penalty Of the Blazing Fire."

– Holy Qur'an 44:56

"And the Foremost (al-sabiqun) will be Foremost: These will be those Nearest to God. In Gardens of Bliss."

– Holy Qur'an 56:14

2. People of the Heights given assurance of Paradise (higher Imaginal World)

There is another group of souls who, after death, do not directly enter Paradise but require some further

maturity and perfection before they can enter; they are *almost there*. These souls are granted entrance into the higher levels of the Imaginal World - known as Hurqalya. In the higher regions of the Imaginal World, **human souls undertake the final preparation required to enter the real Paradise.**

The Qur'an refers to these as the People of the Heights below:

"Between them shall be a veil, and on the Heights will be Men who would know every one by his marks: they will call out to the Companions of the Garden, 'peace on you': they will not have entered, but they will have an assurance."

– Holy Qur'an 7:46

*"The Heights seem to correspond to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory from which, in Dante's Divine Comedy, the purified souls enter Paradise... We are told no more about those waiting on the Heights but the necessity for this waiting place can easily be deducted from what is said about Paradise itself. The Quran makes it abundantly clear that among the greatest joys of the hereafter is the company of Blessed Spirits. To enter Paradise is a tremendous responsibility: each Spirit must be a source of wonderment and delight to the other Spirits. **Therefore, each must grow to perfection before entering, that is, he or she must grow to Sainthood.**"*

– Martin Lings, (A Return to the Spirit, 72)

3. Further Purification of minor faults in the Imaginal World and eventual entrance into Paradise

Most people - the average person perhaps - after death will require further purification and spiritual growth before entering Paradise. Such souls first journey in the Imaginal World where further learning and purification takes place so that their character deficiencies are gradually wiped out.

"According to Mulla Sadra, very few human souls attain perfection in this life and become a part of the intelligible world. For the majority of the souls which are imperfect, their return to God, necessitates their existence and purgation in the intermediate imaginal world with its Paradise and Hell before they are able to ascend to the spiritual world."

– Zailan Morris, (Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason, 194)

"...And those who believe in God and work righteousness,- He will remove from them their ills, and He will admit them to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever: that will be the Supreme Achievement."

– Holy Qur'an 64:9

“What awaits the vast majority of those who are saved between their death and their entry into Paradise? The Qur’anic answer is: If ye avoid the great sins, ye are forbidden, We will wipe out your faults and cause you to enter with a noble entry (4:31). ‘Wipe out’ means bring to nothing. Purification is necessary, and therefore, Purgatory is in the nature of things.”

– Martin Lings, *(A Return to the Spirit, 70)*

4. Transmigration in which the human soul, due to its failure to live up to human character traits, takes on the form of an animal in the Imaginal World.

Those who lived in this world dominated by their animal qualities will go to the Imaginal World and experience it in the form of an animal. This need not be taken literally but the general meaning is that human qualities of the soul will be concealed by the animal qualities that that person lived up to in earthly life. The *farmans* of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah hint towards this:

"On dying, if you again became dogs, what is gained in it?...Your virtuous deeds (amal) are for your benefit, and that benefit is there for you in the life hereafter. Whatever the type of deed (amal) you do, you will become as such."

The Sufi mystics and thinkers also describe this process - called transmigration which is different from reincarnation. Transmigration takes place in the Imaginal World called *barzakh*, not the physical world:

“The bodies of the undeveloped souls, the souls that have committed sins, deteriorate at the time of death and are not reassembled as before. In order to survive physically, they create a material body for themselves by externalizing their inner psychic states in the form of a body in the World of the Images. Thus a human soul that is guilty of committing a sin will imagine itself as an animal.”

– Muhammad Kamal, *(Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Philosophy, 82)*

“Al-Qunawi, among others, states that man will assume corporeal shape in the barzakh according to the character that dominated over him in this world. Thus, ‘if concupiscence dominated, he will appear in the form of a pig, and if irascibility dominated, he will appear as a dog.’... Mulla Sadra holds that the very essences of human souls will diverge in the hereafter and that they will become many species, falling into four main genera (corresponding to al-Ghazzali’s pig, dog, devil, and wise man).”

– William Chittick, *(Islamic Spirituality: Foundations, 403)*

5. Hellfire – a state of pain, regret, confusion and existential instability in the lowest regions of the Imaginal World:

Hell is the lowest level of the Imaginal World. Hell is a state of complete confusion, uncertainty, instability, and anxiety. Hell is not a punishment inflicted by God. Hell is a state of being veiled from God, being

diseased and sick spiritually, caused by the human soul's own self-harm and harm committed to others (which results in self-harm). Only the truly sick, ignorant, and arrogant souls will have to experience Hell. A common expression to describe Hell from mystics is that Fire (nar) of Hell is merely what the Light (nur) of God feels like when a sick, diseased, and deformed human soul experiences it. In other words, the entire experience and state of Hell is subjective and depends entirely on the level of purity and knowledge of the human soul.

"For the condemned there is Hell, where they will be consumed with regret for not having known how to merit the grace and the blessing of Divine mercy."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 177)

"...those most unfortunate ones, who will enter the Great Fire, in which they will then neither die nor live."

– Holy Qur'an 87:11-13

"They are left in contradicting situations which, in this world, are opposite to each other. For example: existence and non-existence, death and life, knowledge and ignorance, power and weakness, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. This is for the reason that they are left to themselves and on their own they cannot rescue themselves... Consequently, they will commute between the two sides of the hot wind and the excessive cold of Hell, and are alternatively punished by each one of them."

– Nasir al-Din Tusi, (*Aghaz wa Anjam, 'Shi'i Interpretations of Islam'*, 64)

According to the Qur'an, Hell is not eternal. It is a long period, but it is not absolutely eternal. One can leave Hell due to God's mercy or at the end of the great cycle when Hell itself will *cool off* and its inhabitants will eventually reach Paradise:

*"Those who are wretched shall be in the Fire: There will be for them therein (nothing but) the heaving of sighs and sobs: They will dwell therein **for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure**, except as thy Lord willeth: for thy Lord is the (sure) accomplisher of what He planneth."*

– Holy Quran 11:106

*"A tradition states that on the Day of Resurrection Hell will roar [like a lion] and hiss [like a dragon]. **Then the Prophet, may the peace of God be upon him and his progeny, will come, take a bowl of water, recite Bismi'llahi'r-rahmani'r-rahīm, blow on the water and pour it on Hell. The fire of Hell will instantly subside and its voice will be humbled...He will lower his cloak into Hell so that the sinners of his community may be brought out. Hell will have no power to stop the blowing of the Prophet and [the lowering of] his cloak.**"*

– Sayyedna Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Wajh-i Din, Discourse 14*)

What is the Ismaili Muslim View on Reincarnation?

Reincarnation - the idea that the human soul can be reborn into the physical world in another physical body - is explicitly rejected by the Ismaili Imams and thinkers of the Fatimid period and thereafter.

It is important to note that even the concept of reincarnation in Hindu tradition seems to be a later development and not something rooted in the original Vedic religion which was its predecessor.

(Laumakis, Stephen J., *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy*, 2008)

The Ismaili Ginans composed in South Asia do mention reincarnation, but not as a doctrinal teaching or as a fact. Reincarnation in the Ginans is evoked always as a negative outcome – in the sense of a warning or a threat – if one does not recognise the Imam of the time. Reincarnation in the Ginans is evoked as a symbol of perpetual imprisonment and not asserted as an Ismaili doctrine. On this point, Aziz Esmail - a scholar of South Asian Ismaili literature - remarks on the subject of rebirth in the Ginans deserve reflection:

“The doctrine of reincarnation is a very old one, as is evident in its presence in cultures across the world from Ancient Greece, Africa, through to India. It is not to be found, of course, in scriptural traditions in the Semitic languages... Like Arabo-Persian Islam, Arabo-Persian Isma’ilism is reported to have vigorously repudiated this doctrine. The Fatimid Caliph al-Mu’izz is reported to have sharply REPRIMANDED one of his missionaries in Sind for tolerating the belief.”

– Aziz Esmail, (*A Scent of Sandalwood*, 65)

“By the time we come to the Ginans, however, we find this theme very much part of their texture. Perhaps ‘theme’ is a wrong word. The doctrine is not canvassed or urged – it is a given, taken for granted. It is part of the atmosphere from which the literature inhales its substance. The Ginans invoke the doctrine; they do not assert it. An asserted idea is the object of thought; an invoked idea is a means, often unconscious, to some other conscious object or purpose.”

– Aziz Esmail, (*A Scent of Sandalwood*, 65)

“As it happens, the Ginans are eclectic rather than exclusive in this regard. They mention not only reincarnation, but also what we might call the prophetic model of life after death. Both are present without contradiction, without straining after logical resolution... In the Ginans one is told that to know the truth, which can be only through the true faith, is necessary for smashing, once and for all, the relentless chain of karma, of action and its consequences, which make the wheel of rebirth spin on and on. In this way, the idea of re-birth is invoked not to promote it as an object of belief, but to promote commitment to the true faith... The other model – what we call the ‘prophetic model’ – with its emphasis on judgment in the hereafter by God, and of paradise and hell as alternative destinations, exists harmoniously, side by side, with the doctrine of reincarnation. In fact, the prophetic model is more pronounced, more consciously elaborated. Reincarnation occurs in a formulaic form. But the other idea is more often elaborated, and frequently in vivid, graphic terms. We are never presented with an anecdote or a descriptive account of a soul caught in the cycle of rebirth. We are only reminded, in passing, of the misery of such a fate. But the

other idea, divine judgment in the hereafter on one's conduct in the world, forms the subject of the whole of a short Ginan and of many verses in numerous other hymns."

– Aziz Esmail, *(A Scent of Sandalwood, 66-67)*

The most recent guidance of the Ismaili Imamate on the subject of reincarnation comes from Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. Below is the question and answer to this question posed by the Ismaili Missionaries in 1954 and the Imam's response:

On 12th February, 1954, Count Paroo wrote to Khudavind asking following question: "Do the Ismailis believe that there is re-birth on this earth to repay and receive repayment of Karmic debt or do we believe that this re-birth will be in a (higher) creation than the human beings?"

The Imam replied: "Obviously reborn means in a higher sphere than this earth. Without going to the final spiritual sphere there will be further triumph before the highest points are reached unless those highest points are reached in this world and on this earth by the general rules of the Ismaili faith beginning with kindness, gentleness, etc and going up to highest love of union with Imam."

Source: Subjects Discussed By The Religious Study Group of Mombasa, Count Paroo, 12th February, 1954

An even more recent quote by the previous Imam refers to the concept of reincarnation as not anything founded on fact but more of a hope and pious wish:

The Hindu and Buddhistic explanations of life after death, with always the influence of the soul taking forms either much lower, such as the lowest animals, or much higher, like some so-called Gods of both Brahmanism and Buddhism, seem to many brought up outside their immemorial tradition as more a hope and pious wish than anything founded on fact....This is a third way of looking at survival after death (apart from the Biblical raising of the body, and from the indefinite and varied doctrines of the several Hindu schools of thought and the two great Buddhist Northern and Southern sects). It is the hope of all true Muslims, like their Prophet, namely, "Companionship on High."

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, "Reincarnation or Companionship on High?" in *Africa Ismaili Kisumu Supplement*, March 28, 1969 (<http://www.amaana.org/sultweb/companion.htm>)

The Imam's response denied rebirth back into this physical world and stated that **the human soul is only reborn into a sphere or plane higher than or beyond the physical world**. More on the nature of the Afterlife and the higher planes of being than this physical world is explained here: [What Happens to the Soul After Death?](#)

Why Did God Create Us?

God is absolutely simple, unchanging, and continuously creating and sustaining all existence (including space and time, therefore he is beyond them). The nature or essence of God is Goodness. He donates being and out of nothingness, being simply is. This brings about the spiritual and material worlds with their hierarchy (which God himself transcends). [What are the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul?](#)

As far as why our souls come here (are born) into this physical world, it is because this is the place where our souls have the ability to elevate, through dealing with trials and suffering. In the higher spiritual worlds there is peace. Eternal souls do not suffer hardships there. When asked why there is suffering in this world, the Imams have responded saying if there was no suffering in this world then there would be no difference between this world and paradise.

The lower material world gets generated and its nature is such that it is temporal and changing due to interplay of space, time, matter, etc. This allows for degeneration of whatever is material. Here souls can come to grow through how they deal with difficulties, various situations, free will to perform good and bad deeds, etc. In this world there is suffering so it is an opportunity to do good by easing suffering of others. This allows us to partake in the above-mentioned Goodness. This opportunity is not present in the higher spiritual worlds.

Is Drinking Alcohol Allowed in Ismailism?

The Ismaili Imams have consistently instructed their murids to abide by the values and ethical principles of Islam – which includes abstaining from drinking, smoking, drugs and other spiritually and physically debilitating social habits. **Since the inception of Islam, the Shia Ismaili Imam has condemned the act of drinking alcohol as the “greatest of all sins.”** In the past fifty years, the Ismaili Imams have equally condemned smoking and the use of drugs.

[NOTE: In the below referenced statements, the Imams condemn the **act** of drinking alcohol as “evil”, “sinful” or “wrong”; they do not condemn the persons who may engage in such acts. The purpose of conveying this information is for the sake of informing people’s decision making process and not to judge people for what they may or may not do or have done. Every person, under the guidance of the Imam, must make their own value judgments.]

For the [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#), the hereditary Imam from the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib holds absolute authority in religious and spiritual matters, as the [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur’an says about Muhammad](#). Following the Imam’s guidance is essential to the salvation of all those who have given [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) to the Imam and have become his murids and spiritual children. **The bay’ah between the Imam and the murids is a spiritual contract that enjoins a number of religious, ethical and moral imperatives upon the Imam’s murids – including striving to obey the guidance of the Imam on all religious and spiritual matters.** In this regard, in a Public Interview with Sunday Times Weekly Review on December 12, 1965, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained that:

The Imam’s word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it. The Community always follows very closely the personal way of thinking of the Imam. It’s one of the particularities of Ismailis.

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, *The Sunday Times*, 12 December 1965

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>

Like all other schools of Islam, the Ismaili Imams have forbidden alcohol in any amount for their spiritual children and the following is a summary of the Imam’s guidance on this issue. Throughout the last century, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni have spoken out against drinking alcohol, both publicly and in their guidance to the Ismaili Jamat. For example, in an Address in Johannesburg, August 7, 1945, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said:

The greatest danger to every Muslim citizen – I have not the least hesitation in saying it – is alcohol. Time has shown that it is an injury to you; an injury to your person; an injury to your health. It is forbidden because it carries greater evil than good. Believe me, in a community like yours, alcohol is a very grave danger. Once you got into the alcohol habit, I do not know where it would lead you. A handful, here and there, of the weak, or of the unhappy, find their way to this terrible poison. Avoid it at all costs. Avoid it, I say, for in this country you cannot afford to lose one man.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

Guidelines for the Muslims of Transvaal, 1954, Johannesburg, South Africa

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10699/>

There are certain people who claim that drinking alcohol is permissible as long as one makes an honest personal judgment to do so using one's own intellect and judgement. However, this position is self-defeating because, firstly, drinking alcohol damages and impedes the operation of the [Esoteric Thought in Physical Form: The Aga Khan Campus in Toronto](#) and the power of thought. Therefore, it is absolutely nonsensical to justify consuming alcohol in the name of one's individual intellect when doing so actually reduces the powers of that intellect. Secondly, **the central premise in Ismaili thought is the insufficiency of the individual human intellect and the need to receive guidance from a perfect intellect.** This is, in fact, the reason why every Ismaili murid has pledged obedience to the Imam and such a pledge is an admission of the imperfection of one's individual intellect and the superiority of the Imam's divinely-inspired intellect. In a Public Interview with Sunday Times Weekly Review, on December 12, 1965, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained the Ismaili Muslim position regarding alcohol:

It is not allowed. You are severely reprimanded. There is a very clear set of rules by which you can live... Our belief is that the thing which separates man from the animals is his power of thought. Anything that impedes this process is wrong. Therefore alcohol is forbidden. I have never touched alcohol. But this, to me, is not a puritan prohibition. I don't want to drink. I've never wanted to drink. There's no pressure being placed on me by my religion.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

The Sunday Times, 12 December 1965

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's guidance against drinking alcohol

In Mumbai (April 3, 1893), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah referred to alcohol as abominable and **"the greatest of all sins" – even more sinful than idol worshiping or killing a believer.** He commanded his entire Jamat to keep away from alcohol. He concluded by saying that whoever hears this order must repent and promise that they will "never" drink alcohol.

Note: For those who think it's absurd that drinking alcohol is worse than killing a person, it should be understood that while killing a person, horrendous as it is - and absolutely condemned - kills the physical body, drinking alcohol slowly kills the body AND kills the soul - as per MSMS's guidance below). Since the soul is eternal and the body is temporal, the soul is more important than the physical body. It therefore follows that killing the soul - by drinking - is worse than killing the body.

On April 24, 1891, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that **those who drink alcohol shall be punished** on the Day of Judgment.

In Ahmabawa (February 16, 1896), the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that the true believer does not drink alcohol. In Zanzibar (February 20, 1925), the Imam proclaimed that a believer does not drink alcohol and **those who drink alcohol will suffer a great deal** in this world and the hereafter.

In a Message to Africa (April 7, 1953), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah said that alcohol is the most dangerous of man's enemies because it **approaches as a friend** but is actually the most dangerous pitfall. He explained that alcohol is a poison for the body and that not only will it will the body, but that alcohol will **"kill your soul"**.

In London (June 11, 1951), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah described alcohol as a "sleep" that **makes one forget reality and run away from life**.

In a 1953 Message, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah warned that **those who drink alcohol will "gradually lose faith"** in their religion and "lose faith in my guidance" because **the Imam "always tells you not to drink alcohol."**

In Karachi (February 2, 1951), the Imam said that the Devil exploits you when you drink alcohol and use tobacco.

In Nairobi (July 5, 1946), the Imam explained that he "feels sorry" for his murids who drink alcohol and that **the Imam himself is "filled with tears" and "overtaken by grief"** when he sees his murids drinking alcohol.

In 1953 (Venezia), Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah expressed his happiness that "all possible means" were being taken to educate the jamat about the dangers of alcohol and tobacco. The Imam was also happy about "the action taken" by the Ismaili Councils "against the use of tobacco and alcohol" and that many spiritual children should take an oath to stay away from these substances.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's guidance against drinking alcohol

In London (June 18, 1964), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni commanded his murids to abandon drinking alcohol and called it the "most ugly habit". He explained that drinking alcohol is something which he "condemns" and that it brings nothing but spiritual sorrow.

In Eldoret (Oct – Nov 1966) and later in Uganda (December 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said to "stay away" from smoking and drinking. In no uncertain terms, the Imam said he wanted his murids to stop engaging in drinking because it is unpleasant, wastes money, makes one lose their honor and creates a "very poor" impression on the Jamat. The Imam concluded by explaining that he gave this order because he loves his Jamat. In the same address the Imam refuted the idea that drinking brings one social status or distinction and remarked that whoever believes that drinking gives social distinction has a mistaken view of what social distinction really is.

In Tanzania (November 8, 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking alcohol as a horrible habit and exclaimed that to be drunk is "a sin against Islam."

In Dar es Salaam (November 11, 1970), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni exclaimed that drinking and smoking and drugs are nothing but a “waste” of the younger generation and that such habits are “not for the Jamat”. He ended by saying that engaging in drinking and smoking is “the way to destroy the Jamat.”

In Paris (June 30, 1972) Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said to leave aside such habits as drinking and smoking and to stay away from them. He remarked that he considered drinking alcohol as stupid as cutting off one’s hand. In the same farman, the Imam reminded his Jamat that they will not be judged any less kindly on the Day of Judgment just because they live in the Western World and they will not be allowed to say “I did not practice my faith because I was living in London”. The Imam emphasized that his murids will be asked the same questions on the Day of Judgment as all other Muslims, and not to indulge in “passing habits” such as drinking and smoking that exist in the Western World.

In Mwanza (November 10, 1966), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said that alcohol is not for his murids and that it creates a **“very unpleasant impression” on the Jamat** and wastes massive amounts of money.

In London (September 23, 1973), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni referred to alcohol, smoking and drugs as **“social evils”** which will reduce one’s “ability to perform” in worldly and spiritual affairs. He concluded by telling his murids to **“remain clear”** from such matters.

In Vancouver (November 15, 1978), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of alcohol and smoking as **nothing but “facile bad habits”** that prepare young men and women to “be crippled men and crippled women”. The Imam warned that such habits are a “limitation” on the mind and the body.

In Toronto (November 23, 1978), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni warned his murids to stay away from the “facile social habits” of the Western world, explaining that they contribute “nothing” physically or intellectually.

In London (September 1, 1979), the Imam urged the Jamat to leave “the facile bad habits” of drinking, smoking and drugs – stating that **they “destroy you”**.

In Toronto (April 27, 1983), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking and smoking as social habits which are “evil at times and instructed the Jamat not to “compromise” by engaging in them.

In London (July 6, 1983), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni referred to drinking and smoking as “habits of the Western World” which cause disharmony and which “reduce” the Jamat’s capacity to look after its own destiny. He reminded the Jamat **not to compromise on “the fundamental principles”** of faith by engaging in these activities.

In Chicago (November 5, 1986), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spoke of drinking and smoking as habits that are **“evil and unhealthy” that are “damaging” to each person and his family**. And in Houston (November 8), the Imam again described drinking and smoking as “evil in moral terms”.

In Lisbon (April 9, 1987), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni asked the Jamat to have the “discipline, rigour, integrity, courage” to **“stand up” and reject the social habits of drinking and smoking and not to “deviate” from the Straight Path**.

In Toronto (June 5, 2005), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni explained that the Jamat “has choices to make” – either to **“keep” the integrity of the value system of Shia Ismaili Islam** or let the Ismaili value system be

“replaced” with values that are not rooted in the Shia Ismaili Tariqah. He instructed the Jamat to **“make careful value judgments”** for the future of the Jamat. On the same day, the Imam told the Jamat to **leave aside the “undesirable” social activities** that are **“useless, costly, and damaging”** because life is too short and health is too fragile.

In Toronto (November 22, 2008), Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni remarked that some social habits are **“frivolous”** and others are **“evil”** and ordered his Jamat to “give up both.”

Finally, on December 13, 2008, the Imam in a worldwide message proclaimed that he will not “allow compromises” to come into the Ismaili Muslim value systems. Similarly, in a 2008 Interview, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni said:

... progress does not mean occidentalisation. Progress in the Ummah means moving forwards in quality of life, but not giving up your identity, not giving up your value systems. Indeed our value systems are massively important for the future.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

Syrian TV, 29 August 2008

<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9004/>

It is never too late for a murid of the Imam to give up alcohol, smoking and other facile social habits. The Imam’s blessings are always showering upon the souls of his murids, and it is only the vices and sins of the soul that may impede the spiritual purify of the soul and block its reception of these blessings. However, giving up drinking, sincerely repenting and seeking the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness of the Imam can bring about a spiritual transformation in the life and soul of the murid. In this respect, the Ismaili philosopher Nasir al-Din Tusi has written:

The devotees, devoid of all scruples or doubt, but with total confidence and sincere trust, must believe that a single merciful (rahmat) glance (nazar) or sign of acceptance given by the Imam to the supplication and imploration of the creatures from first to last can remit their sins and pardon their faults, transmuting their iniquities into deeds of merit.

Nasir al-Din Tusi, (The Paradise of Submission, Nasir al-Din Tusi, tr. S.J. Badakchani, 94)



For more on this issue, please see this [The Ismaili Imam's Guidance against Drinking Alcohol](#).

Why Do Serena Hotels and the Aga Khan Museum Serve Alcohol?

The Serena Hotels are investments partly owned by AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development), which is an agency of the AKDN. The AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network) institutions are non-denominational. As the Aga Khan Museum website [says](#):

"AKDN agencies are non-denominational and conduct programs without regard to the faith, origin or gender of beneficiaries."

Although their overall mandate draws from the ethics of Islam, AKDN and AKM (Aga Khan Museum) are not "Islamic" institutions and their spaces are not "Islamic spaces" or "religious spaces". Secondly, the Serena Hotels have a very specific mandate, as per their website:

"AKFED's Tourism Promotion Services, operating under the brand name Serena Hotels, seeks to develop tourism potential in selected areas in the developing world, particularly in under-served regions where tourism facilities can contribute to economic growth and the overall investment climate...Serena Hotels contribute to local economies in a number of ways -- through the training of skilled manpower, the reinvigoration of artisans and craft industries and through sensitive conservation or development of the surrounding area. This includes placing priority on the hiring and training of local residents for employment at all levels of the organisation. Serena Hotels directly employs 6,221 people...In 2002, the Government of Afghanistan asked the Aga Khan Development Network to help restore Kabul's hotel capacity which had been destroyed by the civil war. Today Kabul Serena Hotel directly employs 300 staff and develops and supports local suppliers of goods and services." ([AKDN Website - Tourism Promotional Services](#))

The mandate of the Serena Hotels and TPS greatly enhances the quality of life of the countries they operate in. They hire thousands of people, providing employment to local populations. The Aga Khan Fund for Development is a for-profit agency that is supposed to generate returns so the Network can fund some of its development activity. As stated above, The AKDN agencies are statutorily secular and they are nondenominational in who they serve; **they do not only serve Muslim clientele but clientele belonging to all faiths and traditions who hold values different from Muslim values.** The Serena Hotels therefore provide the normal and expected range of services including food and drink that are customarily required for serving international guests.

Here is what Mawlana Hazir Imam said regarding the topic at the opening of the Serena Hotel in Quetta, Pakistan:

"...tourism is growing rapidly throughout the developing world and specifically to the west of Pakistan, in Turkey, and to the East, in South-East Asia. What this also means, unfortunately, is that most of this growth is either stopping on the west of Pakistan or over-flying this country to travel to South-East Asia. "If this is true, why is it happening? Is it because alcohol is not sold freely and is available to foreigners only, or because only traditional dancing is permitted or are there other much more significant

reasons? Surely if Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries with large majorities of Muslim populations have been able to find an acceptable balance between their legitimate concerns for the respect of their faith, culture and traditions, while at the same time meeting the demands of international tourism, Pakistan is capable of doing likewise."

- His Highness the Aga Khan, [Address at Serena Hotel Opening Ceremony](#) (Quetta, Pakistan) 16 March 1989

As for the Aga Khan Museum, the CEO was asked about its serving of alcohol in its restaurant Diwan, and his response was:

"The Aga Khan Museum is an international cultural institution that is open to visitors of all backgrounds. The serving of alcohol at Diwan is consistent with the Museum's aim to provide the amenities expected of world-class cultural institutions."

While some of the AKDN institutions may serve alcohol as a normal and necessary part of their existence and mandate - as they are public secular spaces, the Ismaili Imam has prohibited the consumption of alcohol to his jamat. This is not hypocrisy; rather, it is a very carefully thought out engagement by the Ismaili Imamat with a secular world where the values of secular spaces serving the public cannot, by definition, be normative to one religious tradition or another. Instead, the Imam operates publicly by cosmopolitan ethics - which are the shared ethics across cultures and faiths. This general attitude - of pluralistic and secular spaces is what allows faith communities and faith members to practice their own values at the community and individual level.

The Imamat's general policy is to ENGAGE with the world; to live IN it, but the Imam also guides his followers not to be seduced by the world and fall into the activities that are against the faith's value systems. The Imams did not have to take this approach - other approaches out there are a sort of segregation mentality where faith communities cordon off their spaces from the rest of society and only practice their values in such spaces and isolate them from the "corrupt" world. While we do have that - with our Jamatkhana and Centers - the Imamat also wants to engage the public world and so it does that through a different "discourse" or language - the language of secular non-denominational institutions and spaces. Hence, we cannot expect the Imam to place value limits in those spaces. Instead, as per his own vision, the secular spaces of the institutions will implement cosmopolitan ethics and not necessarily a wholly Muslim ethic.

"The second condition is that to engage with the contemporary world means to take it seriously, which means to understand it, not dismiss it. The theological rhetoric which says that the Modern world is the antithesis of what the Islamic tradition teaches us - in other words, the rhetoric which sets Islam and the modern world as separate, opposing blocs - is a maladaptive rhetoric. Engagement does not mean surrender; for criticism too is a form of engagement."

- Aziz Esmael, [Keynote Address at 'Intellectual Traditions in Islam' Seminar](#), University of Cambridge, August 14, 1994

Is it okay for Ismailis to eat pork?

Mawlana Hazar Imam gave guidance to the Jamat (Kigali, Rwanda, May 10, 1958) that pork is forbidden and for the Jamat to never eat it. He explained that it has been forbidden throughout history for Ismailis, just as it has been for all Muslims. He further added that consuming pork causes animalistic qualities (*hayvaniyyat*) in the human being. (Source: Farman Book *Amulya Ratano*, published by the Ismaili Association for Kenya, 1965).

To appreciate how eating pork could imprint animalistic qualities (savagery) of the lower soul upon our human soul, it must be understood that there are three levels of soul in this world and the human soul contains all three:

1. vegetative soul
2. animal soul
3. rational soul

When we consume an animal, the particles of its animal soul merge with our own animal soul and cause some of the animal's qualities to become part of the human soul.

"In the three kingdoms of mineral, plant and animal, good and evil souls are mixed independently of human will. The beautiful and good qualities of these kingdoms are manifestations of the good souls while what is ugly is due to the evil souls, which the Ikhwan al-Safa call "satanic forces" (shayatin). These qualities, being an inherent part of each, are transmitted along with that object. For example, if a plant possesses certain good qualities, it transmits them to the animal that eats it. Or if the flesh of a particular animal has evil qualities, these qualities affect the man who eats that flesh. This effect, however, is not just physical; rather, the soul of man is also affected by it. One can derive from this view of the Ikhwan the reason for the dietary prohibitions existing in various religions like Islam and Judaism, each of which is established in conformity with the spiritual and psychological "economy" of a segment of humanity."

- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (*An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 69-70)

"...if your body maintains a state of balance in its elements, it will be free from disease. Otherwise its condition will be upset. He must then abstain from unsuitable foods. He may thus infer that if one abstains from excesses, and in every thing observes a proper measure, not deviating from it to either side, and if he purifies his moral self, whenever he discovers in himself the properties of brutes and beasts, he then acquires human properties, and purifies himself. And when his heart has become pure, and doubt and dishonesty leave his mind, when, he acquires certainty in the recognition of the Imam of his time, seeing him as everywhere present before him, looking upon him, he then reaches the stage of self evident certainty, and attains the stage of absolute truth when his heart becomes enlightened by the absolute light and in that light he begins to see his soul. Thereafter he begins to see with absolute, self-evidence the place in which his Creator is."

- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, (*Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi*, tr. Ivanow, 24)



(Above drawing by Jean-Claude Thibault)

Is the charging of low interest by AKFED against the fundamentals of Islam?

Firstly, nowhere in the Qur'an is interest banned. However, usury is banned. The Qur'an defines *ribat* not as interest, but as usury — the only examples the Qur'an gives about usury are doubling and tripling of the principal amount. **Usury is charging unreasonably high interest** so as to basically scam the borrower.

O you who have believed, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied, but fear Allah that you may be successful.

— Qur'an 3:130

Usury is condemned, but free and honest trade and agriculture — in all its forms — are encouraged, since they manifest a Divine service, and the welfare of mankind depends upon the continuation and the intensification of these legitimate labours.

— Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, [Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors \(The Memoirs of Aga Khan III\), 1954](#)

The idea that *ribat* refers to modern interest is nothing more than Muslim jurists using *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) to apply something from seventh century Arabian conditions — where there was no modern banking system — to the modern day environment, and it is really nothing but speculative guess work. In fact, Many Sunnis in Western nations are allowed to participate in interest transactions like buying a house, having bank accounts, and stocks and bonds out of the principle of "necessity".

Ismailis shouldn't worry about what Sunni jurists are saying because Ismailis don't follow a Sunni method. It is the Imam in each age, being divinely inspired and holding divine authority, who knows best what interest is okay and what is forbidden.

Even if the Qur'an forbade something and even if it did ban interest, the Imam can reverse it and make it permissible. The Qur'an was guidance given for the space-time and responsive to the situation. That is the meaning of *Kitab* — divine guidance that is speaking to the people in their own situation, background, and conditions.

The Qur'an's kitab is not a book in the generally accepted sense of a closed corpus. Rather, it is the symbol of a process of continuing divine engagement with human beings — an engagement that is rich and varied, yet so direct and specific in its address that it could never be comprehended in a fixed canon nor confined between two covers...The logic of the Qur'an's own approach demonstrates the impossibility of understanding al-kitāb as a fixed text, a book.

— Daniel A. Madigan, (*The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 165)

When the Prophet said that the *Kitab* always remains with the Ahl Al-Bayt, it does not mean that Muslims are bound by the Text of the Quran (which the Prophet never compiled and which didn't exist then).

Rather it means that the Imāms always possess and provide the *Kitab* (divine guidance for every situation that arises in that time and space).

*"If Islam is ever to fulfill its mission it must have universality not only in space, namely, throughout the earth, but in time, namely, as long as mankind exists on this globe... we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain **Ibnu'l-Waqt** (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time."*

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Foreword to Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy)

Are Muslims Violent? How many Muslims support terrorism?

Today there are almost 1.7 billion Muslims in the world, making up a fifth of the world's population. Are Muslims a violent people by nature and a threat to world peace? The best way to answer the question is to calculate the numbers from credible sources – experts, Pew, Gallup, and academic studies.

1. Fact: There are only about a total estimated 100,000 militant extremist Muslims in the world. That is less than 0.01% of the global Muslim population of 1.7 billion people. “The vast majority of the estimated 85,000 to 106,000 militants fighting with militant jihadist groups around the world are fighting for purely local reasons, for instance, trying to install Sharia law in northern Nigeria or trying to impose Taliban rule on Pakistan and Afghanistan, while only a small number of these militants are focused on attacking the West.”

Source: P. Bergen, National Security Analyst and E. Schneider, Research

Associate: <http://us.cnn.com/2014/09/26/opinion/bergen-schneider-how-many-jihadists/index.html>

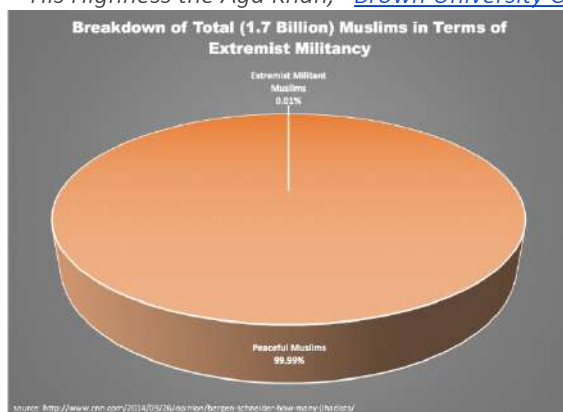
Interviewer: What are the root causes of terrorism?

"Unsolved political conflicts, frustration and, above all, ignorance. Nothing that was born out of a theological conflict Take away the causes of extremism and extremists can come back to a more reasonable political agenda. That change to me is one of the wonderful things about the human race."

– His Highness the Aga Khan, [Spiegel Online Interview \(2nd\), 'Islam Is a Faith of Reason'](#) (Berlin, Germany)

"[T]he Western tendency [is] to perceive all Muslims or their societies as a homogeneous mass of people living in some undefined theocratic space, a single "other" evolving elsewhere. And yet with a Muslim majority in some 44 countries and nearly a quarter of the globe's population, it should be evident that [the Muslim] world cannot be made up of identical people, sharing identical goals, motivations or interpretations of the faith. It is a world in itself, vast and varied in its aspirations and in its concerns. Is there not something intellectually uncouth about those who choose to perceive one [and a half] billion people of any faith as a standardised mass? "

– His Highness the Aga Khan, [Brown University Commencement Ceremony, 26 May 1996](#)



2. Fact: According to terrorism experts and studies, religion in general and Islam in particular is NOT the main motivator of terrorism; in reality, political conflicts, warfare, and social and economic instability are the main cause.

“What 95 percent of all suicide attacks have in common, since 1980, is not religion, but a specific strategic motivation to respond to a military intervention, often specifically a military occupation, of territory that the terrorists view as their homeland or prize greatly. From Lebanon and the West Bank in the 80s and 90s, to Iraq and Afghanistan, and up through the Paris suicide attacks we’ve just experienced in the last days, military intervention—and specifically when the military intervention is occupying territory—that’s what prompts suicide terrorism more than anything else.”

– Robert Pape, who has Studied Every Suicide Attack in the

World: <https://www.thenation.com/article/heres-what-a-man-who-studied-every-suicide-attack-in-the-world-says-about-isis-motives/>

“Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious households, and there is a higher than average proportion of converts. Some are involved in drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes. MI5 says there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalisation.”

Source: MI5 Study: <http://spiritualperception.org/the-tactics-of-bigotry/>

“Religion is not the strongest driving force behind thousands of foreign fighters joining ISIS and other terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, a report by US military researchers has found. A new study by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point revealed that the vast majority of almost 1,200 militants surveyed had no formal religious education and had not adhered to Islam for their entire lives.”

Source: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-foreign-fighters-british-european-western-dying-radicalised-islam-not-strongest-factor-cultural-a7421711.html>

“A French journalist’s ISIS captors cared little about religion, Didier Francois — who spent over 10 months as the group’s prisoner in Syria — told CNN’s Christiane Amanpour in an exclusive interview on Tuesday. “There was never really discussion about texts or — it was not a religious discussion. It was a political discussion.” “It was more hammering what they were believing than teaching us about the Quran. Because it has nothing to do with the Quran.” “We didn’t even have the Quran; they didn’t want even to give us a Quran.”

Source: http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/03/intl_world/amanpour-didier-francois/

“There is no theological dimension. Their knowledge of Islam is minimal and they don’t care, although the religious myth plays an emotional role.” “None of them was active in religious activities (proselytism): when they preach Islam it is to recruit other radicals, not to spread the good news. This explains why (1) the close monitoring of mosques brings little information; (2) imams have little or no influence on the process of radicalisation; (3) “reforming Islam” does not make sense: they just don’t

care about ‘what Islam really means.’”

Source: <https://newmatilda.com/2016/03/26/jihad-not-really-about-religion/>

3. Fact: Most terror attacks in the Western world (Europe, USA) are committed by non-Muslims, yet terrorist attacks by Muslims receive 449% MORE MEDIA COVERAGE than other attacks from 2011-2015. This is per the findings of an academic study from Georgia State University quoted below:

*“We examined news coverage from LexisNexis Academic and CNN.com for all terrorist attacks in the United States between 2011 and 2015. **Controlling for target type, fatalities, and being arrested, attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 449% more coverage than other attacks. Given the disproportionate quantity of news coverage for these attacks, it is no wonder that people are afraid of the Muslim terrorist.** More representative media coverage could help to bring public perception of terrorism in line with reality.”*

Source: Kearns, Erin M. and Betus, Allison and Lemieux, Anthony, *Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?* (March 5, 2017). Available at

SSRN: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2928138

[DataGraver](#) has documented the number and location of terrorist attacks from 1970-2015 and the results clearly show that most terrorism was not committed by Muslims and occurred in Western Europe, Central America and South America for much of the past until recently increasing in the Middle East – this being due to increased war, military intervention, and instability in the region beginning with the Gulf War and increasing since then:

4. Fact: The biggest victims of Terrorism ARE Muslims: "...Muslims are the most affected by terrorism around the world...While attacks by Muslims against non-Muslims in Europe have dominated headlines recently, researchers from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a research and education center at the University of Maryland, believe that Muslims are in fact the most likely victims of terrorism worldwide. START Executive Director William Braniff and his team studied the causes and human consequences of terrorism, compiling details about attacks...What they found is that — although they did not always have information about the religious beliefs of the victims — Muslims were the most affected overall."

Source: – National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism

(START): <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/muslims-absolutely-group-victimized-global-terrorism-researchers/story?id=48131273>

The biggest victims of ISIS and Al-Qaeda ARE Muslims; and not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of Muslims hate ISIS and al-Qaeda. To say otherwise – to claim that substantial numbers of Muslims support ISIS and other terror groups is like saying that most murder victims support their murderers, or that most rape victims support their rapists and in fact want to emulate them. According to a UN Report, ISIS “carried out attacks deliberately and systematically targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, with the intention of killing and wounding civilians.” The UN concluded that in the first eight months of 2014, at least 9,347 civilians had been killed and at least 17,386 wounded. While all these deaths are not attributable to ISIS

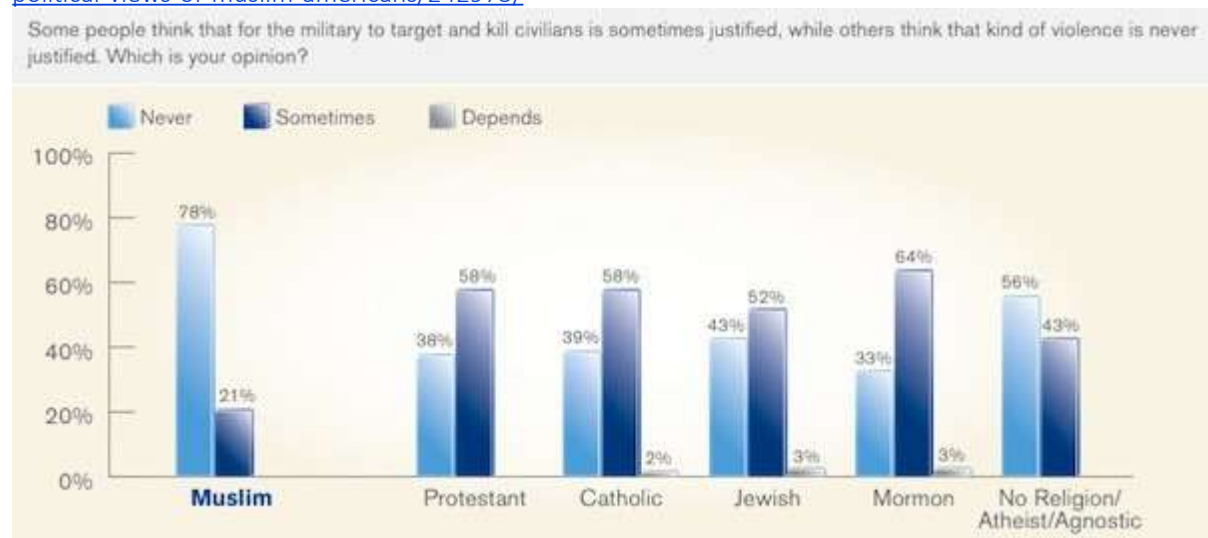
alone, ISIS is identified as the primary actor.”

Source – UN Report: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/07/isis-s-gruesome-muslim-death-toll.html>

5. Fact: The overwhelming majority of U.S. Muslims (78%) stated that it is never morally justifiable to target and kill civilians;

Meanwhile, only 38% of Protestants, 39% of Catholics, 43% of Jews, 33% of Mormons, and 56% of people with no religion/atheists/agnostics stated that it is never morally justifiable to target and kill civilians.

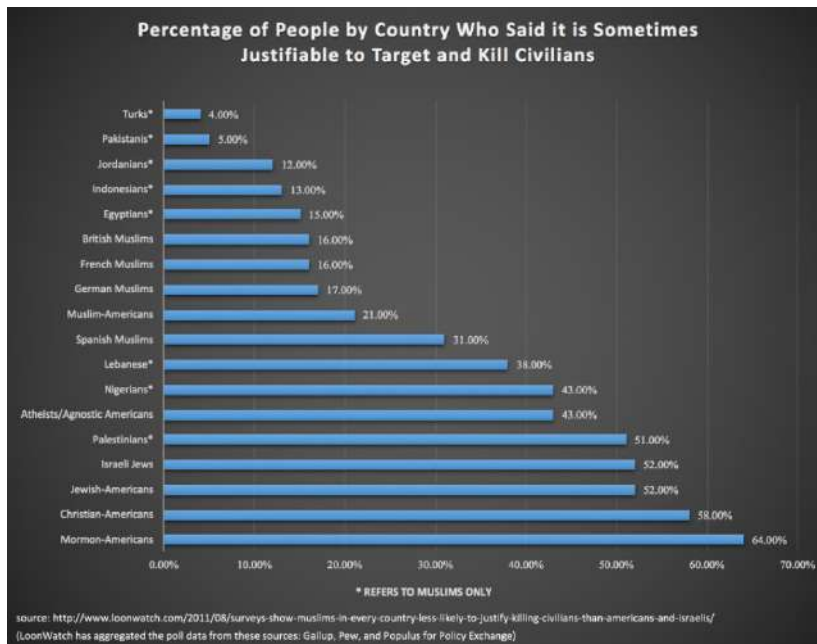
Source: Gallup Poll – <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/08/a-fascinating-look-at-the-political-views-of-muslim-americans/242975/>



6. Fact: Muslims out of many other religious groups are MOST LIKELY to be against attacks on civilians and LEAST LIKELY to support violence against innocent people. Source: Pew, Gallup and Populus Polls aggregated here: <http://www.loonwatch.com/2011/08/surveys-show-muslims-in-every-country-less-likely-to-justify-killing-civilians-than-americans-and-israelis/>

“Muslims hold no monopoly on extremist views and are, in fact, on average more likely than American public to unequivocally condemn attacks on civilians.”

– John Esposito, (Who Speaks for Islam, 94)



Bill Maher *et. al.* Selectively

Misrepresenting Poll Data:

A Pew Poll found that 86% of Muslims in Egypt and 76% of Muslims in Pakistan believe in the death penalty for apostasy and cite this as evidence of violent attitudes among Muslims. At the same time, it is hardly acknowledged that 82% of Muslims in Indonesia (the most populous Muslim country), 66% of Muslims in Bangladesh (the fourth most population Muslim country), and 83% of Muslims in Turkey are opposed to the death penalty for apostates.

What is Apostasy? Some people claim that all Muslims and the Qur'an believe that anyone who changes his religion from Islam to another religion are guilty of apostasy and should be killed. **Let it be very clear that the Qur'an contains no such law. The Qur'an repeatedly mentions: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), and "Let him who will believe and let him who will disbelieve"(18:29).** The definition of "apostasy" in Islamic legal discourse *is not about changing one's personal faith or religion*; apostasy is a political construct of pre-modern Muslim empires and meant treason against the imperial state and supporting another empire (like the Byzantines). More on this

here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kashif-n-chaudhry/does-the-koran-endorse-ap_b_5539236.html and here: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/05/islam-saudi-apostasy-201458142128717473.html>

" You would think that an educated person in the 21st century should know something about Islam; but you look at education in the Western world and you see that Islamic civilizations have been absent. What is taught about Islam? As far as I know -- nothing. What was known about Shiism before the Iranian revolution? What was known about the radical Sunni Wahhabism before the rise of the Taliban? We need a big educational effort to overcome this. Rather than shouting at each other, we should be learning to listen to each other. In the way we used to do it, by working together, with mutual give-and-take. Together we

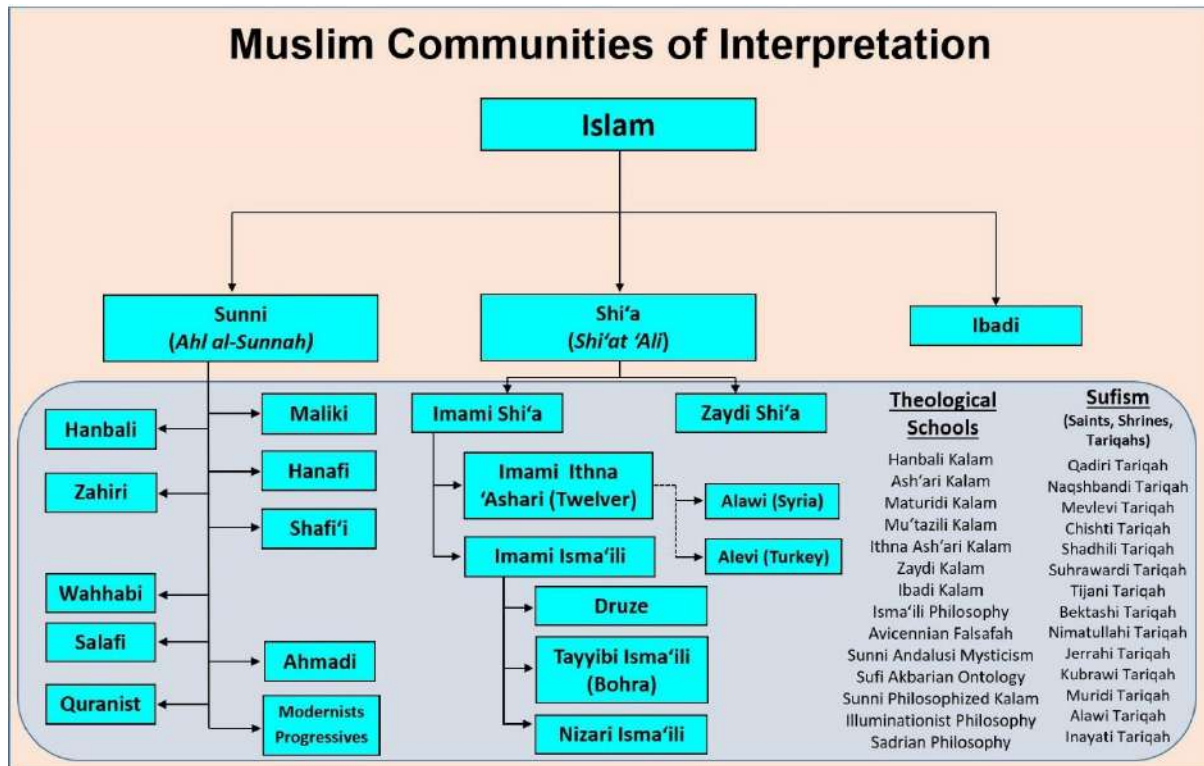
brought about some of the highest achievements of human civilization. There is a lot to build on. But I think you cannot build on ignorance."

- His Highness the Aga Khan, [Spiegel Online Interview \(2nd\), 'Islam Is a Faith of Reason'](#) (Berlin, Germany)

"The argument that religion causes violence sanctions a dichotomy between, on the one hand, non-Western, especially Muslim, forms of culture, which – having not yet learned to privatize matters of faith – are absolutist, divisive, and irrational, and Western culture, on the other, which is modest in its claims to truth, unitive and rational. This dichotomy, this clash-of-civilisations worldview, in turn can be used to legitimate the use of violence against those with whom it is impossible to reason on our own terms. In short, their violence is fanatical and uncontrolled; our violence is controlled, reasonable, and often regrettably necessary to contain their violence."

- William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 17

What is the Difference between Shia and Sunni Muslims?



Sunnis and Shi'a differ about the idea of religious authority after the prophet Muhammad. These differences are fundamental.

When Muhammad died he was both spiritual and political leader. His death led to different ideas about:

- which person is his true successor
- whether the successor of Muhammad should be divinely appointed by Muhammad or whether the community elders should select a leader
- whether Muhammad's successor is entitled to religious authority as God's representative, political authority, or both.

The Shia:

- believe that Muhammad's successor is divinely appointed;
- that Muhammad by divine inspiration appointed his cousin & son in law Ali as his successor;
- that the true successors of Muhammad hold religious authority as the Vicars of God and are entitled to political authority too;
- that further successors, whom they call Imāms, must be similarly divinely appointed and come from the bloodline descendants of Muhammad and Ali.
- that the Imāms or successors of Muhammad are infallible in religious matters and their guidance on ritual and belief and spiritual truth is the true Islam.

The Sunni:

- believe that Muhammad's successor can be chosen by community consensus

- that Muhammads successors, whom they caliphs, are only entitled to political authority not religious authority
- that the legitimate religious authority is held collectively by the sunni religious scholars and clerics (called ulama, Muftis, and Faqihs).
- a sunni ought to obey the caliph in political matters and obey the religious scholars in religious matters of ritual and theology.

Because of these differences the Sunni and Shia develop totally different traditions in law, theology, philosophy, ritual and spiritual life. Historically the Sunni were in political power and Shia were persecuted minorities. Among Sunni and Shia there are more divisions.

Are Women Second-Class Citizens in Islam?

The Spiritual Status of the Feminine in Ismailism

"At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible – they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons. Muhammad improved things quite a lot. By instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, he gave women certain basic safeguards. Set in such historical context the Prophet can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights."

– Professor W. Montgomery Watt (Christian Reverend, Orientalist Historian of Islam, d. 2006),
(Interview with Alstair McIntosh, 1991, [Read Online](#))

Before Muhammad began his prophetic mission, women in 7th century Arabia had little in the way of rights and were not considered persons. Muhammad and the Qur'an (2:228, 4:19, 4:1, 33:35), explicitly recognized the spiritual equality of men and women as persons under God (in contrast to the literal teachings of Confucius and the Bible).

The Qur'an outlawed female infanticide (81:8) and also granted women the right to:

- own and manage property (4:7)
- inheritance (4:7)
- consensual marriage (4:19)
- receive a dowry upon marriage (4:4)
- receive financial maintenance during marriage
- divorce (4:35)
- receive maintenance after divorce (2:241)
- retain possession of property after marriage (4:11)
- be witnesses (2:282)
- work, etc.

In contrast, Western Europe only started granting women rights to property and personhood in the 18th century; America and British Commonwealth recognized women as persons with equal rights in the 19th-20th century.

The Qur'an, as it was revealed by Prophet Muhammad in his time, went to great lengths to drive home the point that women and men are equal in their standing before God:

For submitting men and submitting women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, men who fast and women who fast, men who guard their private parts and women who guard [their private parts], men who remember God often and women who remember [God often], God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

– Holy Qur'an 33:35

Not only does it say that both are equal in the sight of God, but the Qur'an also put into place mechanisms for the protection of women:

"...the Quran specifies the harsh punishment of eighty lashes for all false or unsubstantiated accusations of sexual misconduct made against women in particular (24:4–5). In establishing this strong sanction, the Quran is concerned with...protecting those members of society, namely women, who might be most unjustly vulnerable to such slander."

– Maria Massi Dakake, *QUR'ANIC ETHICS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SOCIETY* in *THE STUDY QURAN: A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY* (ed. S. H. Nasr), 2015

The present and living 49th hereditary Ismaili on the status of women in Islam:



"I think the message of Islam, is the dignity with which we must treat women in society.... The basic premise, is the dignity and equality of women in society. And that goes right through the revelation of Islam, it goes to the traditions and the life of the Prophet, and the Prophet's wife, Khadija, was a woman who participated actively in daily life."
– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
WWW.ISMAILIETHICS.COM

Arab cultures...



"The RESPECT that is due to WOMEN is a very important factor in the Islamic world and in the history of Islam and in the faith itself. And my interpretation is the better educated the woman is the more respect she is going to get in modern civil society."
– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV
WWW.ISMAILIETHICS.COM

From the Oxford Dictionary of Islam:

*"In Islam, men and women are **moral equals** in God's sight and are expected to fulfill the same duties of worship, prayer, faith, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Islam generally improved the status of women compared to earlier*

*The historical record shows that Muhammad consulted women and weighed their opinions seriously. At least one woman, Umm Waraqah, was appointed imam over her household by Muhammad. Women contributed significantly to the canonization of the Quran. A woman is known to have corrected the authoritative ruling of Caliph Umar on dowry. **Women prayed in mosques unsegregated from men, were involved in hadith transmission, gave sanctuary to men, engaged in commercial transactions, were encouraged to seek knowledge, and were both instructors and pupils in the early Islamic period....***

Nevertheless, the status of women in premodern Islam in general conformed not to Quranic ideals but to prevailing patriarchal cultural norms. As a result, improvement of the status of women became a major issue in modern, reformist Islam...

In the contemporary era, women have again assumed leadership roles in the Muslim world. Benazir Bhutto was prime minister of Pakistan (1988 – 90 , 1993 – 96), Tansu Çiller was prime minister of Turkey (1993 – 96), and Shaykh Hasina is the current prime minister of Bangladesh (1996 –). Nonetheless, tensions remain between traditionalists, who advocate continued patriarchy, and reformists, who advocate continued liberation of women."

– "Women and Islam." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Ed. John L. Esposito. Oxford Islamic Studies Online. 12-Dec-2016. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2510>

The status of women in Islam according to the 48th Ismaili Imam:

"The Prophet of Islam (who has been so cruelly libeled in the Western world, by ignorance or malice) was one to say that men can but follow in the footsteps of their mothers towards Paradise. And it was not for nothing, according to Muslim belief, that his first convert was a woman.

*Biologically the female is more important to the race than the male. While average women are capable or earning their own livelihood like men, they are the guardians of the life of the race, and only through their natural constitution are they able to bear the double burden. **Experience shows the strong probability that the active influence of women on society, under free and equal conditions, is calculated not only to bring about practical improvement in the domestic realm, but also a higher and nobler idealism into the life of the State. Those who know Muslim society from within readily admit that its higher spiritual life owes a great debt to the example and influence of women.** Today, as in the lifetime of the Prophet, probably the majority of devout and reverent followers of His teaching are women.*

No progressive thinker of today will challenge the claim that the social advancement and general well-being of communities are greatest where women are least debarred, by artificial barriers and narrow prejudice, from taking their full position as citizens.

The progressive modernization which depends on co-operation and understanding will be impossible unless women are permitted to play their legitimate part in the great work of national regeneration on a basis of political equality."

– Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, [Message to Ismailia Women's Association](#), March 1953

In an inspiring message to the women of Pakistan over 60 years ago, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III clearly explains the equal status of women and men in society and proceeds to tell women to agitate for their equal rights:

*"Only the other day, the Minister of Wakfs, one of the leading "Ulemas" of Egypt responsible for, religious affairs, was telling me that **a country is like a human body - men and women are two lungs - if you reduce the power of women, you crush them with inhibitions and imaginary restrictions based ultimately on man's superior physical power, in a nation, it is exactly like a human being who has one lung perforated by tuberculosis and only one lung to work.***

*... Oh my sisters, agitate! Leave no peace to the men till they give you religious freedom by opening **mosques for prayers, not side by side with men, but in reserved quarters attached to all the mosques, so that the habit of praying public and self respect and self-confidence becomes general amongst women. On that foundation of religious equality, you can then build social, economic, patriotic equality, with men..."***

– Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, *ISLAMIC RIGHT TO EQUALITY* (Extract from a message to all Pakistan Women's Association) Karachi, Pakistan 195

"From these necessary and wholesome rules the jealousy of the Abbassides, borrowing from the practice of the later Persian Sassanian kings, developed the present system ... which means the permanent imprisonment and enslavement of half the nation. How can we expect progress from the children of mothers who have never shared, or even seen, the free social intercourse of modern mankind? This terrible cancer that has grown since the 3rd and 4th century [sic] of the Hijra must either be cut out, or the body of Muslim society will be poisoned to death by the permanent waste of all the women of the nation."

– Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III , [*All India Muhammadan Educational Conference Presidential address, 'Muslim Education in India'*](#) , 1902, (Delhi, India)

The tremendous spiritual status of women in Ismaili history and thought:

In Ismaili history, women have not only played important material and political roles. The Ismaili esoteric tradition recognizes a number of women who held important spiritual ranks and performed religious functions alongside the Prophets and Imams: According to the Ismaili esoteric interpretation of prophetic history, these women were the hujjats (proofs) of the Imam: they held the rank of spiritual mother [like the Ismaili Pirs] and were responsible for disseminating the esoteric knowledge or ta'wil of the Imams to the disciples. Typically, this female hujjat was a daughter of an Imam, a wife of an Imam, or a mother of an Imam. Bibi Fatimah al-Zahra possessed all three of these relationships. Each of these great women are the manifestation of the "Esoteric Feminine" – the Celestial Light which the Ismaili metaphysics calls the Universal Soul (al-nafs al-kull) and the biblical tradition calls Sophia.

Full article on Esoteric Feminine: [The Esoteric Feminine: Women in Ismaili History and Thought](#)

Is Religion Inherently Violent?

“What I find most mystifying in the arguments of the authors I have mentioned, and of others like them, is the strange presupposition that a truly secular society would of its nature be more tolerant and less prone to violence than any society shaped by any form of faith. Given that the modern age of secular governance has been the most savagely and sublimely violent period in human history, by a factor (or body count) of incalculable magnitude, it is hard to identify the grounds for their confidence.”

— David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution And Its Fashionable Enemies*, 14

The claim that religion is the cause of most of the violence and woes in this world is fictitious. A brief survey of violence in this century alone that cannot be laid conveniently at the feet of religion gives us the following figures:

- First World War- 15-20 million
- Hitler's genocide- 11 million
- Stalin's communism- 10 million
- Mao's Communism- 35-45 million
- Pol Pot's genocide- 1.5-2 million
- Vietnam War- 2.5-3.5 million
- Rwandan genocide .5-1 million
- Iraq War- 1 million

If those attacking religion — such as the [New Atheists](#) — had actually studied religion in an academic setting, they would not be peddling widely discredited theories that Islam or any other religion is inherently violent. **The very idea of religion as a separate, privatized sector of beliefs and practices that has causal agency upon the rest of human life is a recent secular construction.** That religion can be the primary cause of violence is a dubious thesis that has been critiqued by many scholars in the field of the study of religion.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, one of the premier scholars of religious studies, in his *The Meaning and End of Religion* has severely critiqued and refuted the idea of religion as a distinctive thing or essence consisting of a definitive and unchanging core of beliefs, laws and rituals. On the contrary, from both an academic and lived perspective, **religion is an orientation or a way of perceiving reality and living in the world. In this way, a person experiences a relationship between the mundane world of everyday experience and a transcendent or spiritual order.** This relationship and experience is expressed through various culturally embedded activities, symbols, doctrines, rites, codes of conduct, myths, social institutions, and ways of living etc. Religion, then, is not some compartmentalized affair possessing its own exclusive domain in human life, as Karen Armstrong stressed in a *Guardian* article about her book *Fields of Blood*:

*“The words in other languages that we translate as ‘religion’ invariably refer to something vaguer, larger and more inclusive. The Arabic word *din* signifies an entire way of life, and the Sanskrit *dharma* covers law, politics, and social institutions as well as piety... The Oxford Classical Dictionary firmly states: ‘No word in either Greek or Latin corresponds to the English ‘religion’ or ‘religious’.’ In fact, the only tradition that*

satisfies the modern western criterion of religion as a purely private pursuit is Protestant Christianity, which, like our western view of 'religion', was also a creation of the early modern period.... Before the modern period, religion was not a separate activity, hermetically sealed off from all others; rather, it permeated all human undertakings, including economics, state-building, politics and warfare."

– [*Armstrong, Karen. "The myth of religious violence." The Guardian 25 Sep. 2014: The Guardian. Web. 19 Mar. 2017*](#)

Historically, religion has been embedded in all human activity, and far from being a static and defined essence, religion is always in flux, evolving and changing. Religions continuously reshape themselves, borrowing, re-orientating, reforming and discarding existing rituals for new ideas inherited from cultures they find themselves in. No activity, ritual, law – whether violent or peaceful – can be given “essential” religious status, as if it is part of some unchanging core. It is just as absurd to say that such and such religion is violent or causes violence as it is to say that economics, commerce, politics, or education are violent. It is unfortunate that the likes of Maher, Rizvi, Harris, and Hirsi Ali – all of whom demonstrate a lack of knowledge of religion that any commentator on Islam would be expected to possess – continue to perpetuate the myth that religion in general, and Islam in particular, causes violence. **What readers must notice is that the Islamophobic rants of the militant atheists draw upon their own narrative or myth to justify themselves. The scholar William Cavanaugh, in his masterful work *The Myth of Religious Violence*, exposes the real intentions and consequence of their claim that religion causes violence:**

“The argument that religion causes violence sanctions a dichotomy between, on the one hand, non-Western, especially Muslim, forms of culture, which – having not yet learned to privatize matters of faith – are absolutist, divisive, and irrational, and Western culture, on the other, which is modest in its claims to truth, unitive and rational. This dichotomy, this clash-of-civilisations worldview, in turn can be used to legitimate the use of violence against those with whom it is impossible to reason on our own terms. In short, their violence is fanatical and uncontrolled; our violence is controlled, reasonable, and often regrettably necessary to contain their violence.”

– William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 17

"The myth of religious violence should finally be seen for what it is: an important part of the folklore of Western societies. It does not identify any facts about the world, but rather authorizes certain arrangements of power in the modern West. It is a story of salvation from mortal peril by the creation of the secular nation-state. "

– William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 226

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Iraq_War
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War_casualties#Civilian_deaths_in_the_Vietnam_War
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_genocide
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodian_genocide

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/maos-great-leap-forward-killed-45-million-in-four-years-2081630.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excess_mortality_in_the_Soviet_Union_under_Joseph_Stalin
- <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2011/03/10/hitler-vs-stalin-who-killed-more/>

Is Faith in God Illogical? Has Science Disproven God?

Claim: “God is not empirically observable and therefore does not exist”

Response: This claim assumes the truth of the principle of empirical verification: “A fact is only true if verified by empirical observation.” The [new atheists](#) make this the sole criterion for assessing all knowledge and all truth claims. However, there are four major problems with this line of thinking:

1. The principle of verification itself cannot be verified empirically. That is to say, the statement that “A fact is only true if verified by empirical observation” cannot be verified by empirical observation. There is no empirical observation that tells us that something is only true if verified empirically. So the entire principle of empiricism is based on faulty circular logic and must be dismissed.
2. Empirical observation – even with the most sophisticated instrumentation – can only observe material things that undergo change. The only reason that physicists can observe anything at all is because change is taking place at all levels of the material world. For this reason, the scope of empirical observation is limited and will eventually reach a boundary. God is changeless and immutable. Therefore, He cannot be empirically observed by definition. This does not entail the non-existence of God, it entails the limited scope of empiricism as a method of knowing.
3. The actual practice of science is not strictly empirical. Science includes an interplay of theory, mathematical modeling, empirical observation and trust. Certain branches of physics such as cosmology, quantum physics, astronomy rely heavily on mathematical modelling in order to produce theorems. Many scientific theories such as relativity, the Big Bang theory, etc., are the result of mathematical modelling and not pure empirical observation. Einstein himself never needed to set foot in a laboratory.
4. Many truths are deduced using axiomatic logic and not empirical testing. The Pythagorean theorem can only be proven mathematically and not empirically. No amount of empirical observations of triangles would ever constitute a proof of the theorem. Compared to logical and deductive proofs, empirically based proofs are at best probabilistic since the sample size can never include the entire set of testable samples.

There are deductive arguments that prove God exists ([A Strong Logical Argument for the Existence of God](#)). There are no deductive arguments for atheism. Atheism or naturalism is wholly unprovable even in principle because it is impossible to verify from within the natural world that ONLY the natural world exists.

“Think of it this way: you can’t find out why checkers boards exist by looking at the rules of checkers themselves, which concern only what goes on within the game. The rules tell you how each piece moves,

how the game is won, and so forth. But why are the pieces governed by these rules, specifically, rather than others? Why do any checkers boards exist at all in the first place? No scrutiny of the rules can answer those questions. It is impossible to answer them, or indeed even to understand the questions, unless you take a vantage point from outside the game and its rules. Similarly, what science uncovers are, in effect, the “rules” that govern the “game” that is the natural world. Its domain of study is what is internal to the natural order of things. It presupposes that there is such an order just as the rules of checkers presuppose that there are such things as checkers boards and game piece...Thus, science cannot answer the question why there is any world at all, or any laws at all. To answer those questions, or even to understand them properly, you must take an intellectual vantage point from outside the world and its laws, and thus outside of science. You need to look to philosophical argument, which goes deeper than anything mere physics can uncover.”

- Edward Feser, [Scientists Should Tell Lawrence Krauss to Shut Up Already](#)

Claim: “Atheism is for more rational persons while theism is blind faith”

Response: The only logical alternative to theism is naturalism or physicalism – the belief that physical reality is *all* there is. However, there is much stronger support for theism than naturalism – for three reasons. Firstly, there are no deductive or empirical arguments for naturalism. Naturalism, as already mentioned, relies on empiricism which is unprovable and circular in its own logic. Furthermore, there is no way to actually prove or argue, from observations *within* the natural world, that the natural world is *all* that exists. Indeed, it is the atheist – not the theist – who holds his naturalist position out of ‘blind faith’ in the absence of good reasons or evidence. Naturalism, far from being a reasoned position, is merely a prejudice or assumption that one arbitrarily adopts. Secondly, naturalism is self-refuting because under the assumption of naturalism, the human mind is reducible to the brain which has evolved through natural selection for the sole purpose of survival and not to discover objective truth. This means that all thoughts, ideas, and intellectual worldviews are the result of brain neurobiological events that occur as the brain’s responses to stimuli and genes. As such, all ideas held by a person – under naturalism – are not held because of their *truth* or *rationality* but simply because of brain chemistry. This casts great doubt as to the accuracy of human scientific conclusions and knowledge in general – since it could only correspond to objective reality by some improbable miraculous coincidence. Under naturalism, it is the atheist who has “blind faith” that his own mental and intellectual convictions should be trusted in the first place. Finally, naturalism ultimately amounts to saying that ‘things are just there’ as a brute fact without any final explanation because of its refusal to admit of anything beyond the natural world. Atheism at the end of the day is simply not provable and this should cast doubt on the very rationality of atheist belief which truly amounts to blind faith. Dr. James Cutsinger summarizes this point when he says:

“On the contrary, atheism is self-contradictory. Think about it. The atheist says, “There is no God.” Now anyone who says, “There is no _____,” is giving voice to what a logician would call a universal negative proposition, whatever might be placed in that blank. It’s negative because it says “no” and denies

something, and it's universal because the field it encompasses is unlimited. If I said, "There is no platypus in this chapel," I would also be uttering a negative statement, but it wouldn't be universal because the context would be restricted to this building, and we could verify, or just confirm, the truth of my statement by arming everyone in the room with a flashlight, fanning out throughout the building, and engaging in a systematic platypus-hunting exercise. Notice, however, that when atheists say, "There is no God," they're not saying, "There's no God in this chapel," or "There's no God in Greenville," or "There's no God in our galaxy." They're saying, "There is no God anywhere in the entire universe, no God at all wherever one might look throughout the full extent of reality." But in doing so they're implying that they've done the looking. They've carefully inspected all the nooks and crannies of existence, even as we'd need to inspect all the nooks and crannies of this building to know there's no platypus in it. If, however, they've truly looked everywhere there is to look—if they can honestly say they're personally acquainted with the full extent of reality—it follows that they must be omniscient. But omniscience is an attribute of God. Therefore, in saying "There is no God," atheists are implicitly claiming to be God, and thus inevitably contradicting themselves."

— James Cutsinger, (The Sound of a Lecture Undelivered, Furman University, April 30, 2007)

Does God Exist? Is God Real? A Strong Logical Argument for God's Existence

I. The Faith of Ismaili Islam is Based on Logic and Reason:

"You must have in every walk of your life a logical concept. This does not mean to wipe away faith, but the real principle of Islam is that faith is logical. Islam would not be what it is if it were not logical and this is something you must keep in mind. Because the very heart of Islam is logical. There is no hocus-pocus. There is no nonsense. It is clear and it is lucid and it is understandable, and for those of you who have studied it closely, this will be the first thing apparent to you."

– His Highness the Aga Khan, Pakistan, 1960

II. Recognizing the Function of Science and the Importance of Philosophy

a. Science is the study of the natural world for the purpose of modelling the *behavior* or *movement* of natural objects for the purposes of manipulation and prediction. However, science does not deal with the questions about the source of *existence* of natural objects, issues of morality, mathematical truths, the rules of logic, aesthetics (the study of beauty), or the source and experience of consciousness.

b. The enterprise of modern science is interested in *discovering the rules or laws of nature by which the natural world behaves* but it does not reveal anything about the *origins or ultimate causes* of the existence of the natural world and the causes of the laws of nature. To use an analogy, **science is about observing the moving pieces of a checkers board and documenting the rules of the movement of pieces, but science cannot tell you where the checkers board, the pieces, and the rules of the game come from or why they exist in the first place.** This second question can only be determined by philosophy and metaphysics.

"Think of it this way: you can't find out why checkers boards exist by looking at the rules of checkers themselves, which concern only what goes on within the game. The rules tell you how each piece moves, how the game is won, and so forth. But why are the pieces governed by these rules, specifically, rather than others? Why do any checkers boards exist at all in the first place? No scrutiny of the rules can answer those questions. It is impossible to answer them, or indeed even to understand the questions, unless you take a vantage point from outside the game and its rules. Similarly, what science uncovers are, in effect, the "rules" that govern the "game" that is the natural world. Its domain of study is what is internal to the natural order of things. It presupposes that there is such an order just as the rules of checkers presuppose that there are such things as checkers boards and game piece... Thus, science cannot answer the question why there is any world at all, or any laws at all. To answer those questions, or even to understand them properly, you must take an intellectual vantage point from outside the world and its laws, and thus outside of science. You need to look to philosophical argument, which goes deeper than anything mere physics can uncover."

– Edward Feser, (*Scientists Should Tell Lawrence Krauss to Shut Up Already*)

c. If God exists, then God is BEYOND (not in a physical sense, but ontological sense) the Natural World:

“The most pervasive error one encounters in contemporary arguments about belief in God—especially, but not exclusively, on the atheist side – is the habit of conceiving of God simply as some very large object or agency within the universe, or perhaps alongside the universe, a being among other beings, who differs from all other beings in magnitude, power, and duration, but not ontologically, and who is related to the world more or less as a craftsman is related to an artifact.”

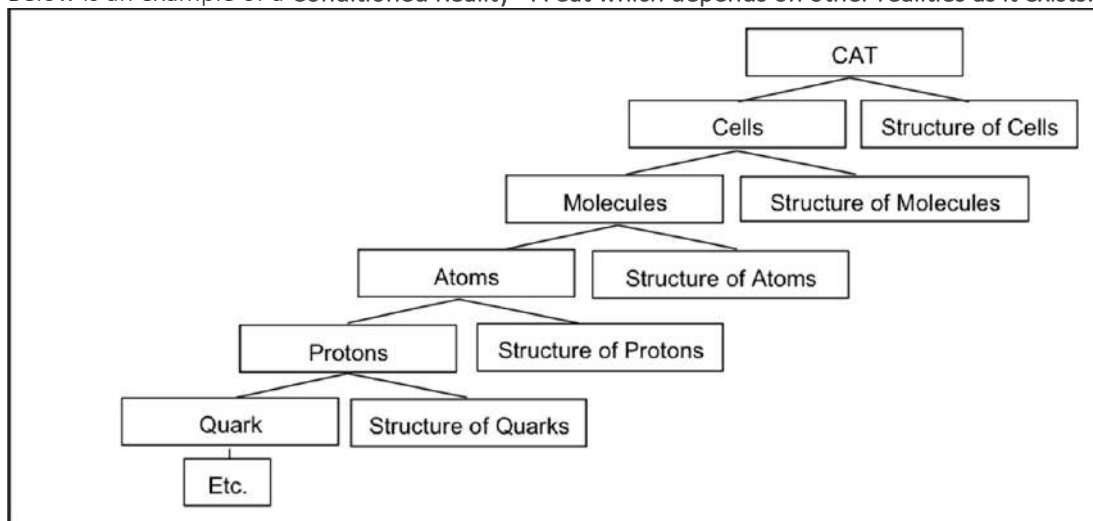
– David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 32)

III. Proving God Exists - There Can Only Be Types of Existing Realities

a. Conditioned Reality: Any reality (human, plant, animal, wood, etc.) that depends on something else for its existence.

b. Unconditioned Reality: Any reality that is self-sufficient, i.e. does not depend on anything else for its existence. This is what is called "God".

Below is an example of a **Conditioned Reality** - A Cat which depends on other realities as it exists:



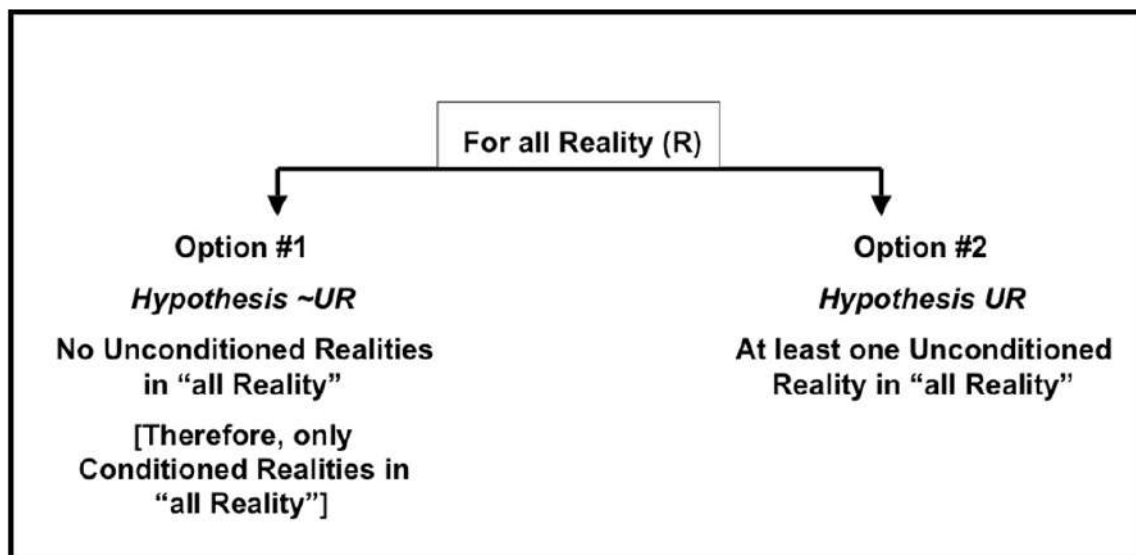
IV. Logical Proof of the Unconditioned Reality (God)

a. Some conditioned reality exists (i.e. cats, animals, trees, humans, wind, water, etc. as shown by science)

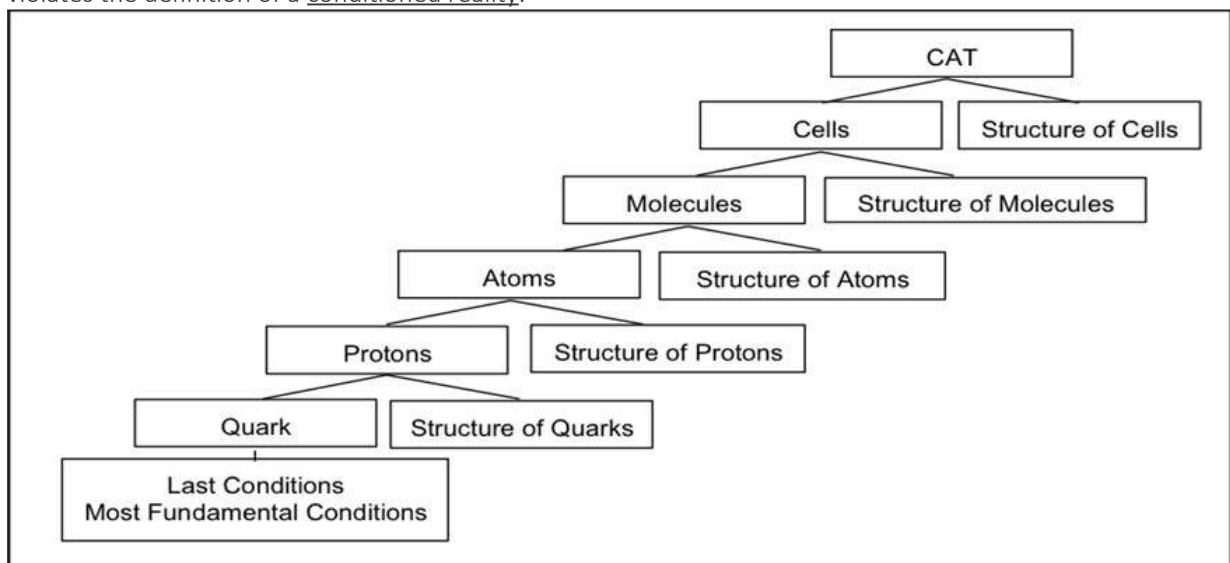
b. Any conditioned reality (R1) always depends upon another reality (R2) in order to exist (per definition of conditioned reality)

c. Any conditioned reality, by definition, must either depend upon:

1. a finite number of conditioned realities only
2. or an infinite number of conditioned realities only
3. or a finite number of conditioned realities + at least one unconditioned reality



d1. A conditioned reality cannot be caused by a finite series of conditioned realities. If there is a linear series of conditioned realities, what would the first one depend on? Since it must depend on something, and there is nothing prior to it, the whole linear chain ceases to exist. Therefore a linear series of conditioned realities cannot exist. Additionally, a circular finite series of conditioned realities could not exist either. This would simply result in each conditioned reality fulfilling their own conditions, which violates the definition of a conditioned reality.



d2. Conditioned realities cannot exist in an infinite chain either. A very large series of one million conditioned realities cannot exist, neither can a series of one billion, and so on and so forth. As the number of conditioned realities in a series increases, the result continues to be non-existence. Continuously adding one (million, billion, trillion, etc.) to the end of the chain would never allow for the conditions of existence to be satisfied, therefore the entire infinite chain of conditioned realities would never have its conditions fulfilled.

d3. Since any model made up entirely of conditioned realities can never have their conditions fulfilled, it therefore follows that **all conditioned realities must be caused by a series of realities that ends (or begins its ontological chain) with an unconditioned reality.**

e. Therefore, an unconditioned reality exists.

V. Proof that any Unconditioned Reality is Absolutely Simple:

a. Anything that is composed of parts is *caused* and *conditioned* by those parts.

b. Therefore, **any unconditioned reality is absolutely simple** by definition because it cannot be composed of any parts.

VI. Proof there is only one Unconditioned Reality:

a. If there were two unconditioned realities (UR1 and UR2), then there must be a differential property that makes UR1 different from UR2 and vice versa and there must also be a common property that is common to both UR1 and UR2.

b. If there is no differential property between UR1 and UR2, then both UR1 and UR2 are actually the same UR.

c. If UR1 and UR2 exist, then UR1 and UR2 each contain a differential property and a common property, and both UR1 and UR2 are composed of two parts - the differential property and the common property. However, it is impossible for any unconditioned reality to be composed of any parts like this. Therefore, UR1 and UR2 are not really unconditioned reality.

d. Therefore, there is only one Unconditioned Reality.

VII. Proof that Unconditioned Reality is the Sustainer and Continuous Creator of all Conditioned Realities:

a. Because there is only one Unconditioned Reality, it is therefore the only self-sufficient reality.

b. Therefore, every ontological chain of conditioned realities, if the chain actually exists, must ultimately depend upon the one Unconditioned Reality in order to exist at all.

c. Therefore, all conditioned realities (each and every conditioned reality) ultimately depends on the one Unconditioned Reality for the fulfillment of their conditions.

d. Therefore, Unconditioned Reality continuously creates and sustains the existence of every conditioned reality.

VIII. Proof that Unconditioned Reality Transcends Space, Time, and Material Existence:

a. All spatio-temporal realities are composite - made of parts like atoms, molecules, spatial coordinates, and temporal coordinates.

b. Therefore, by definition, Unconditioned Reality is beyond matter, space, and time.

c. Sub: Therefore, Unconditioned Reality is transcendent, immaterial, eternal, changeless and immutable.

IX. The Ismaili Imam on God as the Unconditioned Reality that continuously sustains all Conditioned Realities:

"It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Qur'an, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely...Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as monorealism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of

every Islamic prayer: "Allāhu-Akbar". What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul... God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time)

The above is entirely logical, with conclusions following necessarily from previous conclusions. For the fully exhaustive proof of God by Ismaili Gnosis, visit the source article: ["He who is above all else": The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)

How Can God be Real if There is so Much Suffering and Evil in the World?

There's certainly a great deal of injustice and sadness and suffering in the world. Nobody can deny that. As for how this affects the existence of God, that very much depends on what one thinks God is in the first place. It's easy to think of God as some sort of "overseer" or king figure who created the world a long time ago and then watched it develop and then when He sees fit, intervenes here and there to fix things. This is basically what children are taught to believe, and we aren't taught much more in adulthood.

But the above idea or definition of God is not correct. It certainly is not the idea of God in mainstream Sunni Islam nor is it the idea of God in Ismaili Islam. In proper Islamic thought God is the "source of existence" and God exists beyond time and space and change. This means that God's creative activity is eternal and continuous and He is sustaining the existence of all created beings at every instant. This also means it's incorrect to think of God as a personal being with feelings and wishes who sometimes intervenes in the world - because such a being would be temporal not eternal. And any being that is subject to time is created. What is laid out here about GOD's existence can be proven using logical deductive arguments as found here: ["He who is above all else": The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#)

This has bearing on the problem of human suffering and evil. This is because an eternal God who always sustains existence is never withholding blessings and favours from His creation. Through His single and eternal act, God eternally bestows and pours out His loving compassion (rahmah), power (qudrah), life (hayah), knowledge ('ilm), favour (ni'mah), grace (fadl), forgiveness (maghirah), inspiration (ta'yid), and illumination (nur), etc. upon all created things. This is confirmed by numerous Qur'anic verses as follows: *Of the favours of thy Lord We bestow freely on all – These as well as those: The bounties of thy Lord are not withheld.*

– Holy Quran 17:20

That which God opens unto mankind of mercy (rahmah) none can withhold it; and that which He withholds none can release thereafter. He is the Mighty, the Wise.

– Holy Qur'an 35:2

My Mercy (rahmah) encompasses all things.

– Holy Qur'an 7:156

Instead what happens is that different types of creatures possess different capacities to receive God's blessings. Atoms and molecules and plants and animals each receive from God what their capacities and limits allow them to get. It's the same for humans - we receive from God what our hearts and souls can allow us to capture.

Human souls are therefore varied and differ with respect to their receptivity to the resplendent lights of the Divine Command, just as material objects are variously receptive to the physical light of the sun. [Consider]

stones, for example: one [kind] is pitch black, while others are progressively less dark, and their essences are more receptive to illumination, up to translucent glass which receives light from one side and emits from the other.

– Sayyidna Nasir al-Din al-Tusi,

(The Paradise of Submission, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, 109)

But humans are more advanced beings who, using intellect and intentional action, can actually modify and change their own hearts and souls for better or worse - to receive more or receive less. The outcome depends on our own thoughts and deeds. Because of this human capacity to better ourselves we also have the ability to harm ourselves and others. Being human is a double edged sword - we can become like angels or become worse than beasts. God endowed humans with this capacity but He is not morally responsible for a person's bad or evil choices. That's upon each person. While God is responsible for the possibility of evil in the world, He isn't responsible for evil as such - humans and rational creatures are. More about this idea of God always bestowing blessings and how it relates to prayer is here:

[Ya Ali Madad: The Rationale for Praying to God and Calling upon the Imams in Prayer](#)

Finally, the question itself is proving that God exists because it implies that there should be justice, good, compassion, and mercy in the world, and that there should be no suffering. Whenever you're able to look at the world and recognize evil, bad, and suffering, it's only because you first recognize the values that are good and true and beautiful and compassionate. Evil is the absence of these values. So this begs the question: do these values like goodness and justice and truth and compassion exist objectively and outside of human minds that think about them? Does the good exist independent of whether all humans recognize and understand the good to be? If God does not exist and only the physical world exists, then all these values of goodness and Justice and compassion are just ideas that human species constructed for social and evolutionary purposes. These values, without God, have no independent objective existence of their own; at best they exist in the intellect of a person who holds them and believes in them, and they cease to exist when the person no longer thinks them or affirms them. This means that without God or a level of eternal spiritual reality beyond the physical world of time and space, there really is no such thing as "good" or "evil" in any objective sense of these words; instead good and evil are just social constructs that differ from each person or whatever culture or society deems to be right and wrong. The ONLY way for moral and ethical values like goodness, justice, and compassion to exist in a true objective sense - independent of human opinion - and physical existence - is if these values always exist beyond space and time in an eternal intellect which is always thinking these values: this eternal intellect is the Mind of God. If objective values like good and evil exist, then God exists.

Do humans have free will or are their actions predetermined?

"In Islam the Faithful believe in Divine justice and are convinced that the solution of the great problem of predestination and free will is to be found in the compromise that God knows what man is going to do, but that man is free to do it or not."

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, [*Islam: The Religion of My Ancestors, extract from The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*](#)

"Free will versus predestination was an important theological debate, with political implications, in Muslim society dating back to Omayyad times. The Ismailis adopted an intermediate position in these debate and eventually accommodated the relevant issues within their theological doctrines. At one extreme, a variety of Islamic movements and schools of thought espoused the predestinarian view, initially designated as Jabriya, holding that man's deeds as well as good and evil resulted from God's decrees and pre-ordination. At the other extreme, there were those, originally designated as Qadariya by their opponents, who recognised the freedom of human will and the individual's moral responsibility for his deeds. Both the Jabriya and the Qadariya based their arguments on verses from the Koran that supported their views, By early 'Abbasid times, the Mo'tazilites took over the Qadarite belief in human free will and argued that man can establish the truths of religion on the basis of reason, without any need of divine guidance. In other words they held that God in the Islamic revelation had shown the believers the "right path" for attaining salvation and reward in paradise, and had then left it to man to determine rationally what was good or evil. Thus, man's ultimate destiny as a rational and free agent depended on himself. However the majority of Sunni traditionalists, representing the mainstream of Muslim thought, eventually rejected Qadarism and adopted a form of predestinarianism as propounded by Ash'arism."

– Farhad Daftary and M. Faquir Hunzai, [*"Free Will in Ismaili Shi'ism"*](#), Encyclopædia Iranica, online edition, 2000, (accessed on 8 April 2024).

"The Imami position itself, representing an intermediate position between constraint (jabr) and empowerment (qadar), is attested to by a Hadith reported from Imam Ja'far-al-Ṣādeq (d. 148/765). Concerning human free will versus predestination, the Imam had said "lā jabr wa lā tafwīz [qadar] wa lāken amr bayn amrayn" (see Kolaynī, I, pp. 159-60)."

– Farhad Daftary and M. Faquir Hunzai, [*"Free Will in Ismaili Shi'ism"*](#), Encyclopædia Iranica, online edition, 2000, (accessed on 8 April 2024).

"All the major Ismaili authors of the Fatimid period held that man's destiny is not predestined as, in a sense, he is responsible for choosing between good and evil. However, they also refuted the Qadarite position by believing that man by himself is not capable of making the right choices rationally for moving along the spiritual ladder of salvation towards knowing God and his own origins in the universe because he lacks the

required knowledge. In every age or dawr (q.v.), therefore, man is in need of the guidance of a divinely-appointed and protected hierarchy of authoritative teachers - the prophet and after him the rightful Imam of the time. In its classical statement, Ismaili theology, thus, remained essentially revelational rather than rational, despite its promotion of a personal quest for knowledge and the importance attached to philosophical inquiry by many learned Ismaili theologians."

– Farhad Daftary and M. Faquir Hunzai, "[Free Will in Ismaili Shi'ism](#)," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2000, (accessed on 8 April 2024).

Nasir Khusraw has addressed in detail the age old dilemma of free will and predestination in his *Gushāyish wa-rahāyish* (Knowledge and Liberation). In this work Khusraw cites an example where Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was asked this very question on whether man's actions are predetermined (if so, then how can man be punished for them?) or if man has free will — allowing him to prevail over the will of God. Imam Ja'far responded about man's position as follows: 'It is between two positions in which he is neither determined nor free.' Nasir Khusraw went on to provide the fascinating ta'wil of the Imam's words:

"[188] The sayings of the Imams have ta'wil, just as the Speech of God and [the sayings of His] Messenger have ta'wil, because they are the witnesses of God over the people. Thus, it must be known that the [inner] meaning of this saying [of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq] is that the position of mankind is between that of an animal and an angel, because in man there is the carnal soul as well as the rational soul; the former belongs to the animal and the latter to the angel. In the case of an actual angel, it cannot willfully disobey, [and in the case of an animal] it cannot [willfully] obey, because both of them are determined [by God] in their dispositions. Consequently, the angel is not rewarded for obedience and the animal is not punished for disobedience, whereas man, whose status is [intermediate] between these two positions, is [both] rewarded for obedience and punished for disobedience.

[189] God has given mankind the perceptive intellect which can distinguish [the ugly from the fair, and He has also endowed it with [a sense of] modesty and shame (sharm) which does not allow humans to act as animals do. It must be known that man is not free as animals are because his nature is endowed with modesty and shame. Then God sent His Messenger to the people with [guidance and] the promise to reward them for their obedience and to punish them for their disobedience. Now, since man's position is between animality and angelicity, [we say that] with respect to his rational soul, man is determined because it urges him to do only the good and to obey [God], and the wise person cannot do other than this; however, with respect to his carnal soul, man is free because it is not constrained by [obedience and] disobedience, [good and] evil, [right and wrong], or reward [and punishment]. Peace."

– Nasir Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation* (tr. Faquir M. Hunzai), 113-114

Ultimately, the problem is related to God's relationship with time. If God is above time and the temporal process, then from His point of view, everything is predetermined since He knows the courses of all events and all the different possible scenarios (i.e. outcomes A/B/C/D resulting from choices A/B/C/D). In fact,

from God's point of view – that is, in the Universal Intellect, all possible choices and outcomes are already actualized in the Intellect.

However, from the point of view of the creature who dwells within time, only certain choices and resulting outcomes will be actualized in the life of that creature. Furthermore, the creature – based on its capacities – only gets to actualize from a limited or fixed set of possibilities (reflecting a partial predetermination), but, it is still the real agent making a real choice (reflecting a partial free will).

Absolute Free Will and Absolute Predestination are rejected because only God is Absolute and these two positions are, in essence, one and the same – since the Absolute is One and only One.

Man's free will is limited and only truly free insofar as it is in harmony with God's Will – which is absolutely free.

"If God is the infinite and unconditioned source of all things, then His creative intention — whether He creates only one world, or many, or infinitely many — can be understood as an Eternal Act that involves no temporal change within Him...And His timeless donation of being to creatures need not be conceived as involving a mechanistic determinism but can be thought of as the creation of a contingent reality containing truly free secondary causes (creation from nothingness, after all, is not a kind of causation like any of which we are capable)...God's knowledge of something created is not something separate from His Eternal Act of creating that thing; so He is not modified by that knowledge in the way that we are necessarily modified when we encounter things outside ourselves."

— David Bentley Hart, (*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 136)

Should Faith be Blind or Based on Logic?

"You must have in every walk of your life a LOGICAL concept. This does not mean to wipe away faith, but the real principle of Islam is that FAITH IS LOGICAL. Islam would not be what it is if it were not LOGICAL and this is something you must keep in mind. Because the very HEART OF ISLAM IS LOGICAL. There is NO HOCUS-POCUS. There is no nonsense. It is clear and it is lucid and it is understandable, and for those of you who have studied it closely, this will be the first thing apparent to you." (emphasis added)

— Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, Speech to Students, Karachi, September 27, 1960

Mawlana Hazar Imam has said that the intellect plays a central role in the Ismaili tariqah, and in the above quote he is especially clear on faith being a logical enterprise, especially in Islam. He further elaborates on the relationship between intellect, faith, and creation — even touching upon the very source of the human intellect itself and what the purpose of the human intellect is:

"The Divine Intellect, Aql-i Kull, both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this Intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dictated by the faith: that he should reflect upon the environment

"Ismaili Shiism has a living Imam, who lives in the world... I situate my actions in the context of the times. I have lived through decolonisation, the end of the Cold War, the creation of Bangladesh, the Iranian Revolution. In the face of these situations, it was necessary to reflect, to anticipate, to respond to necessities... The intellect is seen as a facet of faith, in the service of faith. Reason, reflection, form part of the process of decision making. This reflection is desirable, is necessary in the interpretation of religion. This means that we invest in the intellect of the community."



Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni
(La Croix Interview, 8 April 2003)

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Allah has given him and that he should know himself. It is the Light of the Intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal, and developing that intellect requires free inquiry. The man of faith, who fails to pursue intellectual search is likely to have only a limited comprehension of Allah's creation. Indeed, it is man's intellect that enables him to expand his vision of that creation."

— Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, AKU Convocation Speech, Karachi, Pakistan, November 11, 1985

The idea that religious belief — especially belief in the existence of God — is "based on faith" and not reason, or "just comes down to belief" is really not true. Only certain Christian Protestant thinkers and communities think this way. Most of the Christian tradition and the entire Islamic tradition believe that all fundamental religious beliefs (usul al-din) - like God, Prophethood, Imamat, the Soul, etc. must be proven by logic, reason, and evidence so the human intellect has conviction in them.

The 48th Imam of the Ismailis, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, was clear that he wanted his followers to intellectually validate their faith when he said at a religious conference that he "did not want somebody to be Ismaili because his father was Ismaili." (*Ismaili Education in Africa*, A.M. Sadaruddin, Zahur)

One Ismaili philosopher, Abu Hatim al-Razi, says the following about how it is forbidden to "blindly imitate" in matters of religious belief:

"People of Truth and Justice do not permit blind following (taqlid) with regard to principles (of faith) such as knowledge of God's oneness, the matter of prophethood, and the proof of Imamate. But once God's oneness, the matter of prophethood, and the matter of Imamate are proven and established, it is thereafter permissible to blindly follow the true, just, and knowledgeable Imam."

- Abu Hatim al-Razi, (The Proofs of Prophecy, 26)

Can Objective Morals & Values Exist under Atheism?

Definitions:

Objective – that something is true regardless of how many people happen to believe in it.

Moral Values – the standards of good and evil — these govern an individual's behavior and choices (generosity is good; murder is bad; lying is bad; etc.).

Moral Duty – something that is obligatory or necessary for human beings to do. For example: one SHOULD be generous; one SHOULD NOT steal.

Moral Accountability – means that there will be consequences and retribution when someone does not act ethically and morally.

The last three are impossible under atheism. Under atheism, no objective morality exists because each person's moral values are just their own opinion, and there is nothing that can establish which opinion is correct over all others. In fact, under atheism, humans are just another animal species with their own social species culture, and morality is just an illusion.

Under atheism — even if you could argue that there was an Objective Morality, i.e. generosity is good, murder is bad - there is still no concept of moral duties. This is because there is nothing in an atheist worldview that *objectively* REQUIRES a person to practice goodness and act ethically.

Finally, even if you somehow established Objective Moral Values and Objective Moral Duties under atheism, in the end there is no Moral Accountability. The person who lives a good life and the person who lives an evil life — under atheism — meet the exact same fate because they cease to exist after they die. *"What has been called the permissive society where anything goes, nothing matters, nothing is sacred or private any more, is not a promising foundation for a brave and upright new world. This fearful chase after material ease must surely be tempered by peace of mind, by conscience, by **moral values**, which must be resuscitated..."*

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[Peshawar University Convocation Ceremony \(Peshawar, Pakistan\), November 30, 1967](#)

*"A passion for justice, the quest for equality, a respect for tolerance, a dedication to human dignity — **these are universal human values which are broadly shared across divisions of class, race, language, faith and geography. They constitute what classical philosophers, in the East and West alike, have described as human "virtue"** — not merely the absence of negative restraints on individual freedom, but also a set of positive responsibilities, moral disciplines which prevent liberty from turning into license."*

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement Ceremony \(New York, USA\), May 15, 2006](#)

Does the Imam Claim Divinity? Divine Authority, Inspiration, and Guidance Explained

Firstly, there is an enormous difference between the Imam possessing "divine authority" and the Imam having "divinity". These are not the same thing. It is necessary that these terms should be defined up front before speaking to this question.

- **Authority** means "the right to be obeyed by and command obedience from people."
- **Divine authority** or more specifically "Divinely-ordained authority" means that God bestows "authority"- the right to be obeyed and command obedience from others. The person to whom God gives divine authority is the "holder of divine authority."
- **Divinity** means "to be God, i.e. absolutely self-sufficient, uncaused, uncreated and unconditioned Reality" (see Surat Ikhlas) or "to share in the nature of God" as defined [“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#).
- **Divine inspiration** means that God guides and informs the intellect and actions of the "holder of divine authority."
- **Divine guidance** means the guidance given by the "holder of divine authority" to human beings, a guidance that itself flows from the "divine inspiration." Divine guidance, being information conveyed from God to humanity is always, by definition, beneficial to humans.

RB: Is this [Imamat] a kind of divine authority?

AK: You have to be very careful not to confuse the concept of religious authority with divinity. The Prophet himself never claimed any miracle of any sort. The only miracle which you have in Islam is the Qur'an.

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [CBC Interview \(1st\)](#), [Man Alive with Roy Bonisteel \(Canada\)](#), 8 October 1986

Prophet Muhammad had "divine authority" (4:80, 4:64, 48:10, 59:7, 33:6) because he was the Prophet, Messenger, and vicegerent of God, but he did not claim "divinity" as defined above. The Qur'an tells us in many places that "he who obeys the Messenger obeys God." So the authority that Muhammad has is divine authority and he holds it on God's behalf because he is the trustee and vicegerent of God. The guidance that Muhammad gives is "divine guidance". A logical argument for why a Possessor of Divine Guidance must always exist on earth is given [Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#).

*The Prophet Muhammad had two sources of authority, one religious which was the essential one of his life, and the other secular which, by the circumstances and accidents of his career, became joined to his essential and **Divinely inspired authority** in religion.*

- Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, [Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors \(The Memoirs of Aga Khan III\)](#), 1954

Likewise, the Ismaili Imam - defined here as the historical person who holds the office of Imam in any given period - has "divine authority" but he does not claim "divinity" as defined above. Thus, the Ismaili Imam is the trustee and vicegerent of God on earth, just as the Prophet was. The Imam's guidance, like the Prophet's guidance, is "divine guidance." The logical and historical proof of the Imam of the Ismaili Imam is given [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#).

*"The Shias have therefore always held that **after the Prophet's death, Divine power, guidance and leadership manifested themselves in Hazrat Ali as the first Imam or spiritual chief of the devout.** The Imam is thus the successor of the Prophet in his religious capacity; he is the man who must be obeyed and who dwells among those from whom he commands spiritual obedience."*

- Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, [Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors \(The Memoirs of Aga Khan III\)](#), 1954

The Imam both publicly and in the Tariqah context claims to:

- Possess Divine authority from God
- Receive Divine inspiration from God
- Convey Divine guidance that is beneficial to humans

Thus:

1. The Ismaili Imam of the time claims to have "divine authority" or "divinely-ordained authority."
2. The Ismaili Imam further claims that his divine authority is grounded in his "Divine inspiration" - which in religious terms he calls the "Nur of Imam" and he calls himself as "bearer of the Nur", that is the possessor of divine inspiration from God.
3. The Ismaili Imam's guidance is therefore "divine guidance" and ought to be obeyed by anyone who believes in his Imam, because this guidance is always for the benefit of humans.

I have been the bearer of the "Nur" a word which means "The Light". The Nur has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet.

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [The Sunday Times Interview, 12 December 1965](#)

Having understood the various terms and how they relate to Ismaili doctrine, What should be made of the following statement by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah? Doesn't the below quote demonstrate that the Imam claims Divinity?

"...There is no one greater than myself. If you think of God, then it is myself"

At first glance this statement by the 48th Ismaili Imam may seem as if he is claiming Divinity. However, the statement does NOT violate Tawhid in any way shape or form. The reason being - **Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah never says he is God here.** Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah rather is saying that the Imam is the highest level of reality in the cosmic hierarchy that a human being can think of, reach, and

attain. This is because **God, as per Ismaili belief, is utterly transcendent and beyond all names, descriptions, and thoughts. Thus, God cannot be thought of or recognized directly** because human minds are not capable of that. Instead, human minds can recognize only the Highest Created Being under God, and that Highest Created Being is the Nur of Imamat.

The key phrase is - "if you **think of God** then it is Myself." Now, is it actually possible for a human to think of God and for his intellect to grasp God? It is not possible. True thinking is able to grasp and encompass the object of thought. This is how intellect knows anything at all, but God is above all limits so He cannot be grasped or encompassed by anything, not even the highest level of intellect. So **when the intellect attempts to think of God, the most the intellect can reach or attain to is the Universal Intellect - which is the Highest Created Being and identical to the Nur of Imamat.**

God according to Ismaili Theology:

1. God is beyond all names and attributes (including every name and attribute mentioned in the Qur'an like the Powerful, the Living, the First, the Last, etc.); all the so-called Divine Names and Attributes are created ([1. Divine Simplicity: God Transcends All Names and Attributes](#)); (Click "Read Here" to see logical arguments and primary source quotes from the Ismaili Imams, hujjats and da'is for each point.)
2. God is beyond matter, energy, space, time and change ([2. God Transcends Matter, Space, Time, Motion, and Change](#));
3. God is beyond all human conceptions in the imagination and intellect ([3. God Cannot Be Apprehended by the Senses, Imagination or Intellect](#));
4. God is beyond both positive and negative qualities, i.e. He is not knowing and not not knowing; He is not powerful and not not powerful ([4. God Transcends Both Positive Attributes and Negative Attributes](#));
5. God is beyond all philosophical and metaphysical categories: spiritual/material, cause/effect, eternal/temporal, substance/accident, essence/attributes, and existence/essence: God is above existence and non-existence ([5. God Transcends All Metaphysical and Logical Categories](#));
6. When God is associated with a name or attribute in scripture, ritual or everyday speech, e.g. "God is knowing", the real meaning of this statement is that God is the source and originator of that power or quality, i.e. God is the originator of all knowledge but He Himself is beyond actually possessing knowledge as an attribute ([6. All Statements and Predications of God Must Be Understood Esoterically](#));
7. God's Creative Act is called His Word or Command; this Command is a single, eternal, and continuous act which continually gives existence to and sustains all created or conditioned realities in every moment of their existence ([7. God's Creative Act is Eternal and Continuous Creation](#)).

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought.

– Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, [Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors \(The Memoirs of Aga Khan III\)](#), 1954

The supposed myth of claimed Divinity:

"The Aga Khan sees himself as nothing more than a community leader and philanthropist, and he only allows the preaching of his supposed divinity to continue so the community will follow his guidance for their own benefit."

Some misinformed members of the community have come to the conclusion that the Imam allows the myth of his *supposed* divinity to exist so the community will follow him. The Imam, as has been shown above, does not claim divinity - so this idea that the Imam perpetuates the myth that he is divine just so community members will follow him does not hold water and frankly, from a historical perspective, there is just no evidence for this.

- From the wording in the Ismaili Constitution, - which all Ismailis in theory agree to and are bound to- the daily Jamatkhana ritual prayers, and the Imam's own statements (in public and in farmans), a rather different picture emerges and it seems untenable to say that Hazar Imam *sees himself* as nothing more than a community leader, philanthropist, de-facto head of state, and Chairman/CEO of institutions.
- When the Imam gives guidance on any matter in a speech or a farman- on any spiritual or social or ethical or economic matter- where is this guidance coming from? Is it the Imam simply giving a personal opinion, or is this guidance coming ultimately from God?
- Finally, given that Ismailis reaffirm the bay'ah, (the acceptance of the Imam's spiritual power and authority and committing to obey him), how does this bay'ah have any meaning if the Imam is nothing more than CEO/humanitarian/community head?

*I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world — especially the Western media — try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. **What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility — it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam** to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.*

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Acceptance Address, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, May 20, 2006](#)

Why Do Ismailis Pray Three Times A Day Instead of Five?

In Mecca, the Prophet and the early Muslims first only prayed two times a day: Sunrise (*salat al-fajr*) and Sunset (*salat al-maghrib*). In Medina, the Prophet ordered the community to pray three times a day:

“And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day (tarafayi al-nahari) and at the approaches of the night (zulafan mina al-layli).”

- Holy Quran 11:114

These prayers were at Sunrise (*salat al-fajr*), Sunset (*salat al-maghrib*) and Night (*salat al-isha*). In Medina, there also started a weekly tradition where the Muslims congregated at noon or afternoon for a special prayer on Fridays. The Prophet also voluntarily prayed the Noon Prayer (*salat al-zuhur*) and the Afternoon Prayer (*salat al-asr*) on a daily basis.

After the Prophet's death, the jurists sought to standardize the prayers. They took the three Qur'anic prayer times and added the Noon and Afternoon prayers that they heard the Prophet do, to make Five Prayers. The Five Prayers became standard *shari'ah* for Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Academic and historical study of Muslim tradition has shown that the idea of 5 prayer times emerged at least 100 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad and does not go back to Muhammad's historical teachings.

“When the worship was stabilized by the later jurists, it became obligatory for every Muslim to perform it five times daily. It is doubtful, however, whether the five daily hours were regularly observed even during Muhammad's closing years, and a phrase from the Quran shows that there must have been at least three hours of prayer daily.”

- W. Montgomery Watt, (*Muhammad in Medina*, London 1956, p. 305)

“Verily the prayers (al-salata) are enjoined upon the believers at fixed times (kitabani mawqootan).”

- Holy Quran 4:103

“And establish prayers (aqimi al-salata) at the two ends of the day (tarafayi al-nahari) and at the approaches of the night (zulafan mina al-layli).”

- Holy Quran 11:114

“Establish regular prayers (aqimi al-ṣalāta) - at the sun's decline (li dulooki al-shamsi) till the darkness of the night, and the morning recitation (wa qurāna al-fajri).”

- Holy Quran 17:78

“Guard strictly your prayers (al-salawati), especially the Middle Prayer (al-salati al-wusta); and stand before Allah in a devout (frame of mind).”

- Holy Quran 2:238

These verses speak about, if any, three times of prayer: Sunrise (*salat al-fajr*), Sunset (*salat al-maghrib*), Night (*salat al-‘isha*). The Middle Prayer refers to the Sunset prayer (*salat al-maghrib*). Those who perform five prayers interpret the above verses in combination.

The Qur’an does not command a daily Noon Prayer (*salat al-zuhur*) or Afternoon Prayer (*salat al-asr*). In fact, one Qur’anic verse speaks of the believers praying at sunrise and sunset, but laying off their clothes and resting during the afternoon.

“O ye who believe! Let your slaves, and those of you who have not come to puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): Before the prayer of dawn (ṣalāti al-fajri), and when ye lay aside your raiment for the heat of noon, and after the prayer of night (ṣalāti al-‘ishāi). Three times of privacy for you.”

- Holy Quran 24:58

Some point to the below verse as evidence for an Afternoon Prayer:

“Yea, to Him be praise (wa lahu al-ḥamdu), in the heavens and on earth; and in the late afternoon and when the day begins to decline.”

- Holy Quran 30:18

The above verse uses the word *hamd* (praise) and not prayers (*salat*). The Quran (4:103) says the Prayers (*salat*) are enjoined at fixed times.

Even in the Sunni tradition, the earliest sources used to prove the 5 prayers are contradictory and consist of two different Hadiths:

One Hadith claims that the Prophet during his *Mi'raj* was ordered by God to have his community pray 50 times per day and then Moses told the Prophet to go back and negotiate with God to reduce the number; it is said that the Prophet negotiated until it was down to 5 times and he was embarrassed to reduce it anymore. Notwithstanding the theological problems of this Hadith, historical scholars have dated this Hadith to the end of the 1st century of Islam, i.e. mid-700s, 100 years after the Prophet, at the earliest (Juynboll dates it even later). Also, this Hadith was originally narrated by Anas b. Malik, not from the Prophet himself, and later sources forged a transmission line to take it back to the Prophet.

Another Hadith contradicts this first Hadith and says only that Gabriel taught the Prophet the 5 prayers after he returned from his *Mi'raj*. Scholars have found that this second Hadith dates to 150 years after the Prophet, i.e. middle 2nd century of Islam (source: Stijn Aerts, "Ascension, Descension, and Prayer-Times in the Sīra and the Ḥadīth: Notes on Dating and Chronology," *Der Islam* 2017; 94(2): 385–422).

Even after all of this, Sunni Muslims disagree on how the 5 prayer times can be established --- sometimes ignoring the Hadiths and claiming they are in the Qur'an and other times, admitting the Qur'an contains no 5 prayers and using the above Hadiths. Unlike all of this contradiction, the Ismā'īlī Muslims follow the guidance of Mawlana Hazar Imam who, as the legitimate bearer of the Prophet's authority and interpreter of the Qur'ān, has specified the number of prayers for his community to perform in the current times and contexts.

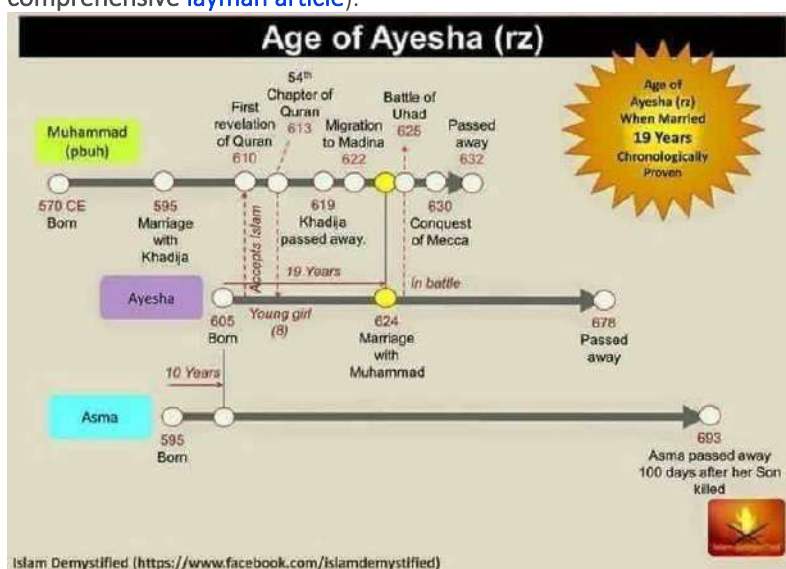
Did Prophet Muhammad marry a 9-year-old girl?

There is little evidence she (A'isha) was 9 years old. Historical analysis of the sources shows she was 14–16 when she was betrothed.

Also, if you watch Game of Thrones, you would understand how marriage in 7th century Arabia is really not about romance, nor about sexual desire. It was about alliance building, merging clans, solidifying tribal loyalties and also bringing vulnerable women into the protection of powerful leaders.

Prophet Muhammad married 12 women over his lifetime: 1 marriage was for love (Khadijah); 6 marriages (Sawda, Hafsa, Zaynab, Umm Salamah, Umm Habibah, Maymunah) were to vulnerable widowed and divorced women whom Muhammad took into his house and protection; 2 marriages were proposed or requested by the women (Safiyyah, Zaynab); 2 marriages were to form familial and political alliances with another tribe (A'isha, Juwariyah); 1 marriage (Maryam the Copt) was to a slave girl sent to Muhammad by the Archbishop of Alexandria (more on Muhammad's marriages [here](#)).

Contrary to popular myth, A'isha was not six years old when she married Muhammad. All of the historical evidence when examined as a whole suggests that **A'isha was born 4 years before Muhammad began his prophetic mission and was married to the Prophet on her father's initiative in the tenth year of Muhammad's mission (620) – she was therefore around 14 years of age at the time of betrothal (620 AD) and 16-18 years old at the date of marriage (624 AD) and this was a normal marriage age until quite recently (all the evidence is analyzed in this [peer reviewed article](#) and a non peer reviewed but more comprehensive [layman article](#)).**



Are Ismailis Required to Fast From Food and Drink During Ramadan?

The short answer is that fasting from food and drink in Ramadan is an optional practice for Ismaili Muslims, but it is not obligatory.

According to the Holy Qur'an, fasting was prescribed for the believers so that they may learn taqwah (2:183) – a word which can mean piety, mindfulness, or God-consciousness. The great Islamic philosopher and scientist of Alamut, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, writes that fasting from food and drink *“restrains the soul from its base inclinations.”* He explains that this form of fasting is practiced for thirty days in a year so that a form or behavioural pattern will become imprinted on the human soul – to the point that all of one's faculties and desires *“become restrained from the pursuit of improper things”* (Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. Badakhchani, 149).

Accordingly, the concept of fasting has a deeper meaning and significance than not eating or drinking. The Holy Qur'an in 19:26 uses the same Arabic word for fasting, *sawm*, to refer to the vow of silence taken by Mary, the mother of Jesus. In this spirit, the Ismaili Muslims, under the guidance of the Imams, have also emphasised the inner or [Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#). All Ismaili Muslim *hujjats*, *da'is*, and thinkers, under the guidance of the Imams, maintained that the Seven Pillars of Islam have [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#) and that sometime in the [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#), the exoteric or *zahiri* forms of the Seven Pillars would no longer be mandatory whereas their *batini* or esoteric meanings would instead be practiced openly. This came to fruition in certain periods of Ismaili history: In 1164, the 23rd Ismaili Imam, Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam, declared the period of [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#). As maintained by several Fatimid Ismaili *hujjats* like Sijistani (d. after 971), Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1078), in the period of [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#), the exoteric or *zahiri* practices of the *shari'ah* including *namaz*, *Hajj*, and fasting are abolished and no longer mandatory while their *batini* and spiritual dimensions are practiced. For example, during the *qiyamah* period, the Ismaili Imam's guidance on fasting was as follows:

As for fasting of this jama'at, whereas in the realm of the shari'ah, out of twelve months which make up the year, for one month, from dawn to dusk, one closes his mouth against eating and drinking, the rule of this jama'at requires that during the whole of one's life one is not permitted to abandon the true fast even for the twinkling of an eye. They keep not just one organ of the body closed, but rather all seven external and internal organs against that which God has prohibited, so that they may always preserve a state of fasting.”

– Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad of Alamut,

(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, Representation No. 28)

Subsequently, in later periods, Ismailis went back to observing the exoteric *shari'ah* as a form of *taqiyyah* to avoid harsh [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#). This period of *taqiyyah* – which lasted for the next several hundred years after the fall of Alamut – included the observance of *shari'ah* rituals, although there may have been minor intervals of *qiyamah* occasionally during this period. In either case, those believers who reached the spiritual rank of *hujjat* were permitted to dispense with observing the *shari'ah* (see *The Epistle on the Recognition of the Imam*, ca. 16th century, tr. Ivanow; *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*). However, the Khoja Ismailis of the Satpanth tradition never performed exoteric fasting for the month of Ramadan; they fasted on Beej and on the 21st and 23rd days of Ramadan. During this period, the Ismaili Imams continued to dispense guidance to their murids concerning the esoteric dimensions and practices of faith. Just as *zahiri* fasting consists in refraining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan, the spiritual *haqiqi* fasting consists in abstaining from all impure thoughts, words, and deeds for every single day of one's life. The thirty-fourth Ismaili Imam, Hazrat Mawlana Shah Gharib Mirza, as recorded in his "Counsels of Chivalry" (*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*), has said: ***The whole year you must fast, just as the Exoterists (ṣāḥiriyān) fast one month. The meaning of this fast is austerity. Control yourselves; keep yourselves away from bad qualities, evil and indecent actions and devilish acts, so that the mirror of your hearts may be gradually polished.***

– Imam al-Mustansir bi-llah III (Shah Gharib Mirza),
(*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, tr. Ivanow, 37)

In the modern period of Ismaili history, the 48th Ismaili Imam, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah, has likewise emphasized the spiritual or *haqiqi* fasting as a spiritual discipline, which consists of always being mindful and keeping away from sins such as lying, cheating, slander, jealousy and other negative deeds. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah formally ended the practice of *taqiyyah* where some Jamats had been observing exoteric *shari'ah* rituals like namaz and fasting in Ramadan. In guidance given to the Ismailis of Syria, Iran, and Indo-Pak, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah explained that the exoteric or *shari'ah* rituals like *Hajj* to Makkah, physical ablutions before prayer, and exoteric fasting in the month of Ramadan are not paramount; instead, what is essential are the inner or esoteric meanings of these rituals as embodied in a set of spiritual disciplines and *tariqah* practices. Mawlana Hazar Imam's own biographer, Malise Ruthven, summarized Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's guidance as follows:

Changes were introduced in the areas of ritual. In Syria a new mukhi appointed by Aga Khan III in 1895 was instructed in Khoja doctrines and rituals and told to introduce them into Syria. Similar changes were introduced in Iran. Hajj and fasting were abandoned along with ritual ablutions before prayers: God, rather than his house, was to be worshipped; the true fast was year-round abstention from evil; true ablution was cleansing of the heart. Duties ('ibadat) regarded as essential by other Muslims, such as Hajj and fasting, were defined as furu'-i-din, auxiliaries of the faith. The usul-i din, the essentials of the faith were unchanged – belief in the oneness of God, in the Prophet, in the Resurrection, in the Imamate and in the justice of God.

– Malise Ruthven, *“Aga Khan III and Ismaili Renaissance”*,
(Peter B. Clarke, ed., *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*. London: Luzac Oriental, 1998,
371–95: 382)

This general trend, in modern times, toward the de-emphasis of the exoteric and shari’ah form of ritual practice and the movement towards a more spiritual and esoteric practice was foretold by Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Sunni hadiths:

Ye are in an age in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now ordered will be redeemed.”

– Prophet Muhammad,
(*Sahih Tirmidhi*, in Seyyed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 183)

As Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah has explained in a published farman, the fasting of the haqiqati mu’min does not only take place in Ramadan but is performed on every day of the year (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, *Kalam-i Imam-i Mubin* Vol. 1, Section No. 65). Imam Sultan Muhammad further explained that the exoteric fasting of Ramadan may be necessary for Ismaili Muslims living in certain contexts where *taqiyyah* is necessary so as not to antagonize others, but the spiritual or haqiqi fasting was obligatory upon all Ismailis wherever they are:

The Prophet has ordered the fast. The fast is there to exercise the body. It is necessary to keep taqiya so that others may not indulge in backbiting (i.e. it may be necessary to observe the fast outwardly in order to protect the community from slander by other Muslims). But you who are haqiqatis (truth-seekers) are under an obligation to fast 360 days (sic). These fasts are:

1. *Not to speak a lie*
2. *Not to deceive, swindle anyone, or abuse trust*
- 3 *Not to speak ill behind someone’s back.*

In this manner 360 day haqiqi fasts (haqiqi rojaa) are mandatory (faraj) upon the Ismā’īlīs.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(quoted in Malise Ruthven, *“Aga Khan III and the Isma’ili Renaissance,”* 392)

See full articles on Ismaili perspectives of Ramadan fasting on the main site:

[Ramadan Fasting in Shia Ismaili Islam: A Historical Overview](#)

[Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bātin\) of Fasting](#)

What are the differences & similarities between Ismaili Muslims and other schools of Islam?

This information is from our website article: [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts

The Ismailis are a branch of *Shia Muslims*.

Shia Muslims thus believe that the spiritual and charismatic authority of the Prophet Muhammad and all of his spiritual rights and duties (with the exception of revelation) continue through the institution of hereditary spiritual leadership called the Imamate, with Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib as the first Imam.

Sunni Muslims believe that the Prophet appointed no direct successor and recognize the religious scholars (‘ulama) as the holders of religious authority. Subsequently, all Sufi Tariqahs came to recognize ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Prophet’s spiritual successor.

In the belief of Shia Muslims, the Imam is the inheritor of the Prophet Muhammad’s authority and the legitimate authority for the interpretation of Islam. This Imamate or Religious Leadership is subsequently handed down by each Imam to a successor whom he designates and appoints from among his male descendants. [Read more at [What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#)]

As history unfolded, Shia Muslims came to differ over the rightful succession of Imams and traced the Imamate through different lines of descent from a particular Imam. **The Ismailis are Shia Muslims who affirm that Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far was the rightful Imam after the 5th Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, and that subsequently, the lineage of Imams continues through the descendants of Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far up to the present day.** Like Sufis, Mu‘tazilites and other Muslim philosophers, the Ismailis emphasize a **distinction between the exoteric (zahir) and esoteric (batin) interpretations** of the Qur’an. [Read more at [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#)]

The Ismailis made major political, cultural and intellectual contributions to Muslim civilization. The **Fatimid Caliphate** was founded and ruled by several Ismaili Imams; great philosophers like Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani, the Ikhwan al-Safa, Nasir-i Khusraw, Hasan-i Sabbah, and Nasir al-Din Tusi were Ismailis. For most of their history, the **Ismailis were persecuted by the Sunni political establishment** and endured several massacres and genocides at the hands of their enemies. [Read more at [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#)].

The 48th Ismaili Imam, the predecessor of the current Aga Khan, was **Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III** (Imamate from 1885-1957); he was the founder and first president of the All-India Muslim League, founder of Aligarh University, President of the League of Nations (1937-1939), and one of the founders of the state of Pakistan. [Read more at [Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III’s Services to the Muslim World](#)]

Today, His Highness Prince Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (b. 1936) is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia **Ismaili Muslims** (succeeding as Imam in 1957); born in Geneva and educated at Harvard, the present Aga Khan is the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib in the lineage of Isma‘il b. Ja‘far al-Sadiq. Today, **Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the only living claimant to the Shia Imamat.** [Read more about present Imam’s life and services at [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#)]

The Ismaili Muslims today are a community of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples, numbering around 15 million people spread through 25 countries, all united in their spiritual allegiance to Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV as their present Imam; the Ismailis are the only Shia Muslim community throughout their history to have present and living Imam. [Read more at [The Shia Imammat: A Timeline of Major Divisions and Developments](#)]

The role of the Aga Khan as the Ismaili Imam is to provide spiritual guidance, religious interpretation and ensure the security and quality of life for the Ismaili Muslim communities. The Aga Khan has emphasised an interpretation of Islam as an intellectual, spiritual and humanistic faith that emphasises human dignity and upholds human diversity through pluralism. **The Aga Khan and the Ismaili Muslims affirm the right of all Muslim communities interpret Islam in their distinct ways and recognize the different schools and interpretations of Islam as an equally earnest endeavor to practice and express the faith of Islam.** With respect to Sunni and Shia reconciliation, the Ismailis affirm that the spiritual authority of the Prophet Muhammad continues in the Imamate while accepting the worldly authority of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and other Caliphs who have helped the cause of Islam, politically, socially and from a worldly point of view. [Read about the [Aga Khan’s proposal for Sunni-Shia unity](#)].

Why do Ismailis offer Bay'ah to the Imam of the Time?



Bay'ah is the spiritual contract or covenant that every Ismaili Muslim or *murid* has made with the Ismaili Imam of the Time. *Bay'ah* gives the *murid* the right to access the Imam's teachings, guidance, blessings, and spiritual medicine, and the *Jamatkhanah* is the private space where the Imam makes these available to his *murids*. The *bay'ah*, an Arabic word which means "buying/selling", is a two-way contract that includes a commitment from the *murid* and a commitment from the Imam. Thus, the *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Imam is a spiritual "transaction" or "contract" in which the *murid* commits his allegiance, devotion, and obedience in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification – in this world and in the afterlife.

You perform bay'ah, but you must first understand it's meaning and then offer bay'ah. When you offer me bay'ah it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise...He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me bay'ah I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter. The trials and tribulations of the Day of Judgment are very frightening and painful. I will keep him away from this.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Manjewadi, October 31, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*)

The act of *bay'ah* indicates that a person accepts the Ismaili Imam as his or her spiritual master and guide: *It is incumbent upon the parents that they should first make their children my murid through the performance of bay'ah...Those who have not offered bay'ah they have not signed to accept our faith. Just as you sign on an agreement in your business and in other dealings, similarly, through bay'ah, I take signature from your soul.*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903)

Bay'ah as a religious practice goes back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an mentions it in numerous verses (48:10, 16:91, 48:18, and 60:12) in which the believers give *bay'ah* to the Prophet Muhammad when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. In Qur'ān 48:10 – referring to the Believer's placing their hands under the Prophet Muḥammad's hands in the act of *bay'ah*, the Qur'ān states that "the Hand of God is upon their hands." This is significant because in physical terms, it was the Prophet Muḥammad's hand which was placed upon the hands of the Believers. But the Qur'ān attributed to entire affair to God.

The Qur'an stipulates that the Prophet should only provide guidance, blessings, and intercession to people after they give him their *bay'ah*. The Ismailis have continued this Qur'anic protocol of *bay'ah* throughout their history:

The custom of meeting in closed sessions, at specially designated places, to learn about and practice their own interpretations of faith, has been part of the Ismaili tradition from pre-Fatimid times. During the Fatimid period, the Ismailis used to participate in majalis al-hikma (sessions of wisdom), which were accessible only to those who had pledged their allegiance to the Imam-of-the-time.

– Karim Jiwani, (Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, [Read at IIS Website](#))

What are the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul?



"The first thing created by God was the Intellect; The first thing created by God was my Light."

– Prophet Muhammad, (Willam Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, State University of New York Press, New York 1983, p. 66)

The Universal Intellect (*'Aql-i Kull*) is the first being originated by God and the noblest of all **existents**. Intellect is a spiritual being of light (nur) – it is therefore called the Muhammadan Light, the Light of Imamat, the Heaven, the Throne (*'Arsh*), the Sun, the Pen (*Qalam*), etc.

In classical Isma'ili philosophy, **God Himself transcends all attributes, descriptions, and names including the categories of space and time, being and non-being, unity and multiplicity, and even existence and non-existence**. God Himself or the Ultimate Reality is referred to simply as 'He who is above all else' because He transcends and is prior to the distinction between subject and object and thus outside the range of human knowledge.

In the Isma'ili metaphysical worldview, **all of the attributes and qualities of greatness, majesty and perfection, particularly those of an anthropomorphic nature, pertain to the Universal Intellect or Light of Imamate while keeping in mind that 'He who is above all else' is beyond all such qualities**. The Universal Intellect includes all divine attributes and is, technically speaking, the 'First Cause' and the 'Necessary Being' (*wajib al-wujud*) of the onto-cosmological hierarchy which gives rise to the physical world. The Universal Intellect encompasses all things and all being within itself for it is the first and most perfect entity originated by God.

" The [Universal] Intellect is complete and perfect. It knows all things, and knows them all at once; there is nothing for it to know later or better. There is no motion or time within the Intellect or within which the Intellect functions, for time and motion have not yet come into existence in the realm of the Intellect. Not only does the Intellect know all things; it encompasses all beings, material and spiritual. In fact, following the Command 'Be!', the Intellect is all being; there is nothing outside of itself. The Intellect also lacks nothing and needs nothing, because there is nothing other than its actual perfection."

(Alice Hunsberger, *The Ruby of Badakhshan*, p. 159)

The human intellect (‘*aql al-juz*) in each person is a trace or reflection of the Universal Intellect. It is human intellect which connects man to the source of all being and distinguishes him from the rest of the physical world.

The Isma‘ili Imam is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of this Universal Intellect or Light of Imamate. The term *mazhar* suggests the idea of a mirror which reflects or manifests an object without actually incarnating it physically or causing any change or alternation to the object. Accordingly, it is **the pure human soul of the Imam which serves as this mirror or *mazhar* of the Universal Intellect which is *reflected* in the Imam’s soul without actually or materially descending into the person of the Imam. It is only in this sense that the Imam is called the ‘bearer of the Light’.** Universal Intellect remains transcendent in the higher spiritual realm and manifest in the created world while never materially descending into it. The concept of the Universal Intellect as the source of the human intellect continues to hold relevance today – as mentioned by Mawlana Hazar Imam at the inauguration of the Aga Khan University:

“ The Divine Intellect, ‘Aql-i Kull, both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dedicated by the Faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given and that he should know himself. It is the light of intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal and developing that intellect requires free enquiry.”
- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, Aga Khan University Inauguration Address, Karachi, November 11, 1985

The Universal Soul, referred to as the Earth and Guarded Tablet (*lawh mahfuz*), emanated from the Universal Intellect and created the Cosmos as a whole in order to achieve and actualize its perfection so it can return to the Universal Intellect. The Universal Soul accomplishes this task by means of creating perfect souls including the souls of the Prophets, *Imāms*, and [World of Faith: The Imam’s Da’is and the Ismaili Da’wah](#) in each age to guide humanity.

Why is Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali not included in the list of Ismaili Imams?

The Nizari Isma'ilis do not include the name of al-Hasan ibn 'Ali in their list of Imams which has led some people to conclude that al-Hasan is not accepted as an Imam in Nizari theology. In reality, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali is regarded as an Imam by the Nizaris but with a minor difference: al-Hasan is understood to be an Entrusted Imam or Trustee Imam (al-imam al-mustawda) as opposed to a Permanent Imam (al-imam al-mustaqarr), the latter position belonging to his brother al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. The Nizari list of Imams only includes the names of the Permanent Imams and not the Entrusted Imams.

The difference between the Entrusted Imam and the Permanent Imam is that the Entrusted Imam is a brother or cousin of the main genealogical line of the Imams who holds the rank and authority of Imam for a temporary period and the Imamate does not permanently dwell among the Entrusted Imam's descendants. The Permanent Imam is the hereditary Imam who inherits the Imamate from his forefathers and transmits it to his descendants. The Entrusted Imam is only appointed in special circumstances and is usually the brother or cousin of the Permanent Imam. This is all according to the teachings of Imam al-Mu'izz and repeated by later Ismaili Imams and Da'is.

When there is an Entrusted Imam, the Permanent Imam remains silent (samit) although he is the source of authority (amr) of the Entrusted Imam who acts on his behalf. Thus, Imam al-Hasan was an Entrusted Imam as he held the authority and rank of Imamate after Hazrat 'Ali and then bequeathed it to his brother Imam al-Husayn who then transmitted the Imamate in his progeny. On a similar note, the Prophet Muhammad, during his mission, was the Entrusted Imam in his time while Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his forefathers were the Permanent Imams.

In Nizari Isma'ilism, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali also holds the rank of pir or supreme hujja which is the rank in the Isma'ili hierarchy (hudud) second only to the Imam himself. This has led some to confuse the positions of Entrusted Imam and pir or simply deny that al-Hasan was an Imam altogether. In reality, al-Hasan was both an Entrusted Imam and a pir (supreme hujja) and this is perhaps why the Nizari Isma'ili Ginans, the Asal Du'a (Old Du'a) and the farmans of Imam Sultan Muhammad refer to al-Hasan as 'Pir Imam Hasan'.

More:

Shafique Virani, *The Isma'ilis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 83-85

[Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#)

Why does the Quran not explicitly mention Hazrat Ali or the Shia Imams?

1. The Qur'an as we have it today is a compilation of speech and utterances made over 23 years in direct response to individuals, events, situations. The Quranic speech assumes the audience already knows the event/person/situation that it is talking about, so you seldom have proper names mentioned in the Quran for this reason- the Quran is addressing people who know the individuals or places or events being talked about. Tons of verses in the Quran are about Muhammad but he is mentioned by name only 4 times.
2. The Qur'anic speeches were not the only guidance that came from God. Prophet Muhammad's own words, instructions, and commands were as religiously binding on the believers as the Qur'anic speech was. So in many cases, the Prophet's guidance supplemented a Quranic verse to make it clear or expand on what the verse is addressing.

When 1 and 2 are kept in mind and if we examine Tafsir and Hadith that Sunni and Shia agree about, we find that numerous verses in the Qur'an refer to Imam Ali and the Prophet's family - Hasan, Husayn, and Fatimah.

In historical context, the Qur'an does refer to Imam 'Ali in numerous verses as attested by all Shia and numerous Sunni commenators: he is one of the Ahl al-Bayt whom God has purified from all impurity and sins (33:33) and the near-kin (qurba) of the Prophet whose love is obligatory for Muslims (42:23). Imam 'Ali is called the Guardian (wali) of the Believers after God and the Messenger (5:55), the Witness (shahid) from the Holy Prophet who verified him (11:17), and the Guide (hadi) of the community (13:7) after the Prophet. Imam 'Ali is part of the holy progeny of Abraham from whom God appoints the Imams (2:124) and upon whom He has bestowed His guidance, wisdom and kingdom (4:54). Imam 'Ali is mentioned in the verse of mubahala (3:61) as the self (nafs) of the Prophet Muhammad. Verse 76:5–22 is about the Ahl al-Bayt who went hungry for days after feeding poor people every night with their own food. Verse 5:67 of the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in right before the Prophet's final announcement at Ghadeer Khum where he announced that 'Ali is the mawla of the believers.

Why do Ismailis recognize Ismail as the true Imam after Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq?

Ismaili Muslims recognize Ismail as the rightful and true Imam after Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, while the Twelver Shi'a recognize Musa al-Kazim — Ismail's half-brother. The Ismaili position for the Imamate of Ismail is based on the historical evidence presented below as **Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Ismail b. Ja'far al-Sadiq**. Taken individually or collectively, each of these Seven Proofs demonstrate that the legitimate successor and true Imam after the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is Mawlānā Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far and that the Present and Living Imam of all Shi'i Muslims must be the direct lineal descendant of Isma'il ibn Ja'far. (Note: The below is just a summary of the proofs. The fully fleshed out proofs can be found in the Ismaili Gnosis article linked at the bottom)

Proof #1: Imām Ja'far designated Mawlānā Ismā'īl as the next Imam by the rule of *nass* as per Twelver, Ismaili, Sunni and academic sources.

Proof #2: The only way to deny the *nass* of Mawlānā Isma'il is through contradictory *hadiths* presented in later Twelver *hadith* books.

Proof #3: Isma'il's death before Imam Ja'far is not confirmed and may have been staged to protect him — as he was reportedly seen by eyewitnesses after his alleged death.

Proof #4: Even if Isma'il had died before his father, the Imamate continued in Isma'il's son, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, whom Isma'il had appointed as his own successor.

Proof #5: Earliest Shi'i *hadiths* lack the mention of Twelve Imams but instead predict exactly the first eighteen Imams in the Isma'ili lineage of Imamate.

Proof #6: With the exception of the Nizari Ismaili Imamate, all other Shi'i Imamate lineages have hidden Imams. This contradicts the Qur'anic definition of Imamate which requires the Imam always be present and manifest (*mubin*) in the world.

Proof #7: Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of Shi'i Islam in direct, documented, lineal descent from Mawlana Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq. As the only present (*hadir*), manifest (*mubin*) and living (*mawjud*) hereditary Imam, with a documented and validated lineage, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's very existence is itself confirmation of his Imamate and that of his ancestors.

Details of each of the above proofs can be found here: [Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imamate of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#)

As A Muslim Spiritual Leader, Is it Problematic for the Imam to be Wealthy?



The Imam today is wealthy, but is this really a problem from an Islamic perspective? **There is no teaching in the Quran or from the Shia Ismaili Imams that possessing great wealth or being rich is a sin or against God's guidance.** Morally speaking, being wealthy or poor is ethically neutral. A person's moral status in Islam is based on their spiritual virtues and the intentions behind their actions. Actions have ethical value based on their intentions and their effects on other people. If being wealthy in and of itself was sinful, then many human beings through their hard work or fortunate circumstances are great sinners just for being well-off!

Unfortunately, the media narrative about Hazar Imam's wealth is very much informed by the Christian idea that wealth is either evil or a temptation towards sin and that poverty is the highest aspiration for a true man of God. **Today many almost fetishize the idea of a spiritual leader living in poverty because it comes from this Catholic idea of monks and saints taking vows of poverty, and the physical appearance of people like Gandhi or the Dalai Lama.** For example, here is a Christian commentary about the dangers of wealth per the Bible:

" But while it is not sinful to be rich it is very dangerous and certainly perilous to one's salvation (Mt 19 23). Of this fact the rich young ruler is a striking example (Lk 18 22.23). It is because of the danger of losing the soul through the possession of wealth that so many exhortations are found in the Scriptures aimed esp. at those who have an abundance of this world's goods (1 Tim 6 17; Jas 1 10.11; 5 1, etc)... Those possessing wealth are liable to certain kinds of sins against which they are frequently warned."

- Burton Scott Easton, (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Volume 1, "Wealth", p. 3076*)

Even then, the Western obsession with poverty as spiritual virtue today is much more theoretical than real. People forget that the Catholic Church is one of the world's richest institutions worth in the hundreds

of billions and even owns a bank; many Protestant Christian pastors in America are multi-millionaires due to the donations of their congregations and related businesses; even the Dalai Lama is basically the sovereign ruler of Tibet and has a net worth of \$150 million.

But let us remember: **we are not Christians; the Imam is not Christian; Muslims should not be held to account by Christian moral values.** The Muslim view of wealth generally speaking (excluding some early Sufis who revere poverty) differs greatly from the above Christian idea. If one is going to pass judgment on the Imam's lifestyle (and one does so at their own peril) one should not be judging the Ismaili Imam by Christian standards. Below is Hazar Imam's articulation of the Muslim view toward wealth and its ethical implications; his statement represents his own ethical teaching and thinking on the matter:

*"Islam doesn't say that a proper practice of the faith means you have to ignore the world. What it says is: Bring to the world the ethics of your faith. **If you have wealth, use it properly. But the actual ownership of wealth is not in any way criticisable unless you have acquired it through improper means or you are using it for improper purposes. It is seen as a blessing of God.** So this whole notion of conflict between faith and world is totally in contradiction to the ethics of Islam."*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (*The East African Interview*, August 14, 2011) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9958/>

"In Islam there is nothing wrong in the search for comfort, but the accumulation of wealth for the specific purpose of accumulating wealth or personal power is something which Islam does not like to see. If you are fortunate enough to go past what you personally need then share what you have."

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (*Life Magazine Interview* 1983) <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2997/>

There have been great Prophets in the past such as Abraham, David, Solomon and even Prophet Muhammad who were quite wealthy: they owned considerable resources including entire kingdoms, palaces, treasuries, armies, house servants, horses, etc. and yet they were God's chosen Prophets who do not commit any sins and never act unethically. Even the Christian thinker Saint Augustine, well known for praising poverty and celibacy, admitted that Prophet Abraham was a very wealthy man and possessed great riches but that there is no sin in being rich; the sin only lies in the inordinate love of riches.

The Qur'an refers to material wealth as a blessing and mercy from God:

*Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? **It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service.** But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate.*

- Qur'an 43:32

The Qur'an, in a few verses, also criticizes those who attack the Prophet and the Believers because of their wealth. The Quran speaks about Believers who possess wealth in this world. It tells them to display their "adornment" (zina) – a word which includes things like nice clothes, food, possessions, etc. and it simply says not to be excessive. The verse goes on to refute people who seek to **forbid** the adornment of God, that is the material wealth that God has given to certain human beings in this world.

“O children of Adam, take your adornment (zina) at every place of prayer (masjid), and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed He likes not those who commit excess. Say: “Who has forbidden the adornment of God (zinat Allah) which He has produced for His servants and the good things of sustenance?” Say: “They are for those who have faith during worldly life but exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection.”

- Qur'an 7:31-32

[Imam] Ja'far b. Muḥammad [al-Sadiq]--his father--his ancestors: [Imam] 'Alī used to say, 'When God bestows on man His favour, it behoves him that the results of God's favour should manifestly appear in his dress, so long as it is not showy.'

- *The Pillars of Islam: Da'a'im al-Islam of al-Qadi al-Nu'man*, vol. 2. p. 135 (Translated by ASAF A. A. FYZEE, revised and annotated by ISMAIL KURBAN HUSEIN POONAWALA. New Delhi: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002)

[Imam] Ja'far b. Muḥammad [al-Sadiq]: Once he saw a companion of his wearing a gown (jubba) made of a kind of cloth woven of wool and silk (khazz), and a shawl-like garment (taylasaan) made of the same kind of cloth and looked at him attentively. The man said, 'May I be thy ransom! It is only khazz and its warp is of silk (ibr īsam).' So Abu 'Abd Allah [the Imam] said, ' There is no harm in khazz. The day on which [Imam] al-Husayn fell, he had on a gown made from khazz.'

- *The Pillars of Islam: Da'a'im al-Islam of al-Qadi al-Nu'man*, vol. 2. p. 135-136 (Translated by ASAF A. A. FYZEE, revised and annotated by ISMAIL KURBAN HUSEIN POONAWALA. New Delhi: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002)

Then [the Imam] said, 'When 'Alī, may God bless him, sent Ibn 'Abbās to the Khawarij, Ibn 'Abbās had on him the best of clothes, the best of perfume, and was riding the best of mounts. Then he went to them and overtook them and they said, " You, O Ibn 'Abbās, are the best of men, and yet you come to us in the garb of tyrants (jabbārīn) and on their mounts!" So he recited to them: Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing? Say: Such, on the Day of Resurrection, will only be for those who believed during the life of the world (7:32).'

In an early interview, the Imam was asked about the concept of wealth in Islam and he contrasted it with the Christian teachings of Protestantism. The Imam also charged that the Western media is totally biased and misinformed about his person and his work:

Aga Khan: “ I don't think there is any idea in Western Europe of what I stand for and what my work is. This is partly because newspapers are businesses and many have to make money out of gossip and personal details, partly for real historical and religious reasons. In the West, you are used to seeing religious figures completely divorced from ordinary life. You require them to be so. With us this isn't the case. The Head of the Faith can lead an absolutely everyday life. Our Prophet Mohammed was himself after all a business man and a leader of the army. In the Christian world you have this heartrending dichotomy between what

is narrowly good and what is worldly. We try to attribute goodness to each of these areas, in proper balance."

Interviewer: "I think perhaps in the West there is some misunderstanding and occasionally resentment towards you because you are supposed to be so rich. Because Christianity preaches poverty, and modern politics preach egalitarianism, we tend to think the rich are frivolous, or evil, or both."

*Aga Khan: "But in Islam, worldly goods don't have the fascination they do here in the West. **Our religion does not expect its true believer to live as beggars, or appear to live as beggars, all their lives.**"*

Interviewer: "Nor, in practice, does Western Capitalism."

*Aga Khan: "No, but the Christian religion, at its most extreme or puritan, does. **With us, a poor Muslim will be happy to meet a very rich man, if this rich man has done good for Muslim society. And if a rich man has proved he wishes to help his society, then his desire is to display his riches.** Making money isn't badly regarded by any Muslim."*

(The Sunday Times Interview, 'The Ruler Without A Kingdom',

NanoWisdoms <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/>)

Regarding Prophet Muhammad, to be brief, he did not live the life of an ascetic monk that was free from life's comforts. Maybe by our standards of modern technology and material abundance, the Prophet was not rich. But by the standard of his 7th century Arabia, Muhammad was quite well off. His wife Khadija was very rich and the Prophet lived under her provision and was well taken care of. During his mission, the Prophet married 12 women; many of his wives were decades younger than him and also beautiful (Aisha, Rayhana, Safiyya, Zaynab, Juwayriyya, Marya the Copt). **The Prophet was also a person very involved in the daily activities of his society – he was a tribal leader, military leader, arbiter, a businessman who continued trading all his life, the political leader of Medina, and responsible for the redistribution of wealth because all zakat, sadaqa and war booty was given to the Prophet to manage. At the same time, the Prophet was a holy man and served as God's representative in all matters for the community.** The funny thing is that Sunni Muslims who fully accept Prophet Muhammad doing all of the above have the nerve to criticize Hazar Imam's lifestyle which is quite consistent with how Muhammad lived in his own time.

During the Medina phase of his life, the Prophet's role and status was very elevated; the Prophet did not behave like a lowly person among his followers. On the contrary, the socio-political & religious status of Muhammad for his community was quite regal and royal. In the Quran, for example, you cannot raise your voice above the Prophet; you cannot yell or call out his name; you cannot enter his house without permission; **you must treat Muhammad with utmost reverence;** you cannot even look at his wives and they cannot remarry after his death. Muhammad receives many offerings from the Believers like food offerings, one fifth of war booty, which he would eat from and enjoy. One scholar describes the socio-religious status of Muhammad as follows:

"Medinan texts closely link the Messenger with God by calling not only for obedience to "God and His Messenger" but also by demanding "belief in God and His Messenger" (Q. 49:15, 57:7.19.28, 64:8), as opposed to "belief in God and the Last Day". Such bracketing induces what David Marshall has described as

a “godward movement of the Messenger”. Q. 9:128 goes so far as to ascribe to the Messenger two attributes (kindness and mercy) that are otherwise reserved for God and thus implies the Messenger’s “participation in divine characteristics”... * In line with the lofty status claimed for the Messenger, Medinan passages repeatedly address the etiquette of being received by him or interacting with members of his household (Q. 24:62-63, 33:53-55, 49:1-5, 58:12-13). An atmosphere of almost courtly distance is thus created around him... In sum, the Medinan suras portray the Messenger as an awesome, towering figure who unites paternal, kingly, and priestly aspects and whose role certainly goes far beyond the function of relaying divine revelations that is predominant in the remainder of the Qur’an.”

- Nicolai Sinai, “The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur’an,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015-2016): 47-96: 70-71

Why is it said that the Quran is the miracle of Islam?

According to the arguments made by Muslim theologians, the Qur'an's literary form is inimitable and miraculous compared to all other forms of Arabic speech – as testified to and affirmed by numerous Orientalist and Western scholars of Arabic literature, the subjective experience of the Qur'an by Muhammad's contemporaries and Muslim communities over the centuries, and the unanimous scholarly opinion of Muslim theologians, philosophers, and grammarians. (Below excerpted from [Proof of Prophecy: A Logical Argument for Muhammad's Prophethood](#))

The **objective basis for claiming that the Qur'an is miraculous and inimitable (*mu'jiz*)**, i.e. that it is beyond the productive capacity of ordinary human beings, lies within the objective literary standards, forms, and structures of the Arabic language. **“Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language”** (Sir Hamilton Gibb). Only experts in Arabic language and literature can truly determine and judge the quality of an Arabic literary production by objective standards. Therefore, below is a compiled a series of testimonies from three groups of experts:

1. Non-Muslim European scholars of Arabic literature
2. Modern Arab scholars
3. Classical Muslim scholars of literature

Each testimonial individually and all of them collectively show the broad consensus among modern and pre-modern scholars, both non-Muslim and Muslim, that:

- 1) The Qur'an's literary form (*nazm*) is inimitable because it transcends and falls outside the scope, qualities, and definition of all Arabic poetry and prose through history
- 2) The early reception of the Qur'an shows that its original listeners – among Muhammad's followers and his fiercest opponents – perceived the Qur'an as miraculous and inimitable: several experts of the Arab language in Muhammad's lifetime attested to the superiority of the Qur'an over all Arab speech including: al-Walid b. al-Mughira, al-Tufayl b. 'Amr al-Dawsi, Hassan b. Thabid, Labid b. Rabi'a, Ka'b b. Malik, Suwayd b. al-Samit. No person in Muhammad's lifetime successfully produced a literary production that was equal to the Qur'an.
- 3) There has been no successful attempt in the history of Arabic language and literature to imitate the literary form of the Qur'an. All the experts in Arabic literature, poetry, and grammar from Islamic civilization testify to the Qur'an's inimitability: al-Jahiz (d. 868), al-Nazzam (d. c. 840), Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 833), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 934), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), al-Rummani (d. 994), al-Baqillani (d. 1013), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1032), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Ishaq Isfara'ini (d. 1027), al-Ash'ari (d. 935), al-Juwayni (d. 1085), 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 1078), al-Shahrastani (d. 1153).

4) In every Qur'an verse, the selection, combination, and arrangements of words, grammatical constructs, and rhetorical devices are "finely-tuned" with the expressed meaning, such that no formal alternation is possible without severely compromising the aesthetic form or the expressed meaning of that verse (three sample verses are examined).

Evidence #1: *The Qur'an is inimitable because its literary form (nazm) is inimitable and surpasses all literary genres and forms of Arabic poetry and prose.*

The Qur'an is the greatest book and the most powerful literary work in the Arabic language, for it has made that language immortal and preserved its essence, and the Quran has become immortal with it; the Quran is the pride of the Arabic language and the jewel of its tradition, and the Arabs know this quality of the Quran, though they may differ in their faith or in their inclinations – they feel that it is the essence of what distinguishes Arabic.

- Dr. Amin al-Khuli (Egyptian Scholar of Arabic Literature and the Qur'an, d. 1966),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 84-85)

I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing. The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an."

- W. Montgomery Watt (Christian Clergyman, Scholar of the Qur'an, Islamic History and Theology, d. 2006),
(Interview with the Coracle, 2000, [Read Here](#))

In spite of all we know of Muhammad's independence from his models, we must admit that the way in which he inwardly assimilated and refined the foreign words and ideas, the personal pathos with which he was able to claim all this as his own, is the true miracle of his prophethood. We understand it differently, but in a sense we must agree with Qadi Abu Bakr that the doctrine of i'jaz (inimitability/miraculousness) of the Quran is based in reality.

- Tor Andrae (Christian scholar of religion & Lutheran bishop of Linköping, d. 1947),
(*Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, 1918, 94)

And it would be preposterous to deny that this text, which came down over twenty years in periodically interrupted and unordered fragments, and was collected twenty years later, could [not] have gained the acceptance it has if it did not possess its, let us say, truly unique qualities.

- Jacques Berque (Christian scholar of Arabic literature and Islam, d. 1995),
(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 9)

It is as though Muhammad had created an entirely new literary form that some people were not ready for but which thrilled others. Without this experience of the Koran, it is extremely unlikely that Islam would have taken root.

- Karen Armstrong (British scholar of religions), (*A History of God*, 1994, 78)

But you know that the Qur'an is not prose and that it is not verse either. It is rather Qur'an, and it cannot be called by any other name but this. It is not verse, and that is clear; for it does not bind itself to the bonds of verse. And it is not prose, for it is bound by bonds peculiar to itself, not found elsewhere; some of the binds are related to the endings of its verses and some to that musical sound which is all its own. It is therefore neither verse nor prose, but it is "a Book whose verses have been perfected the expounded, from One Who is Wise, All-Aware." We cannot therefore say its prose, and its text itself is not verse. It has been one of a kind, and nothing like it has ever preceded or followed it."

- Dr. Taha Husayn (Foremost Scholar and Literary Critic of Arabic "The Dean of Arabic Literature"), ("Prose in the second and third centuries after the Hijra," *The Geographical Society, Cairo 1930: Dar al Ma'arif*)

All Arabic poetry has meter. The "meter" refers to the pattern of short and long syllables in a line of poetry. Historically, all Arabic poetry – before Muhammad and after Muhammad – contains one of sixteen possible meters: 1) al-tawil, 2) al-bassit, 3) al-wafir, 4. al-kamil, 5. al-rajas, 6. al-khafif, 7. al-hazaj, 8. al-muttakarib, 9. al-munsarih, 10. al-muktatib, 11. al-muktadarak, 12. al-madid, 13. al-mujtath, 14. al-ramil, 15. al-khabab, 16. al-saria'. It is an objective historical fact that the Qur'an does not conform to any one of the sixteen Arabic metrical forms.

A person had to study for years, sometimes even for decades under a master poetic before laying claim to the title of poet. Muhammad grew up in a world which almost religiously revered poetic expression. He had not studied the difficult craft of poetry, when he started reciting verses publicly. Muhammad's recitations differed from poetry and from the rhyming prose of the soothsayers, the other conventional form of inspired, metrical speech. The norms of old Arabic poetry were strangely transformed, the subjects developed differently, and the meter was abandoned. While poetry was, in political terms, generally conservative, reinforcing the moral and social order of the day, the whole impetus of the early Qur'an, its topics, metaphors and ideological thrust, was towards revolutionary change. All this was new to Muhammad's contemporaries.

- Navid Kermani, ("Poetry and Language", in Rippin, *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, 108-109)

Likewise, the Qur'an does not conform to the definition and structures of Arabic prose. There are two kinds of Arabic prose – rhyming speech called *saj'* and ordinary speech. The Qur'an contains some rhyming but it falls outside the scope of both rhyming prose and non-rhyming speech.

Thus, as regards its external features, the style of the Koran is modelled upon saj', or rhymed prose...but with such freedom that it may fairly be described as original.

- R. A. Nicholson (Professor of Arabic, University of Cambridge),
(*Literary History of the Arabs*, 159)

Those passages from the Qur'an that approach saj' still elude all procrustean efforts to reduce them to an alternative form of saj' (rhyming speech).

- Bruce Lawrence (Professor of Religions, Duke University),

(*Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol VII, Issue I 2005. "Approximating Saj' in English Renditions of the Qur'an: A Close Reading of Suran 93 (al-Duha) and the basmala", 64)

The Qur'an is not verse, but it is rhythmic. The rhythm of some verses resemble the regularity of saj'...But it was recognized by Quraysh critics to belong to neither one nor the other category.

- A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant and G.R. Smith (Orientalist Scholars of Arabic Literature),
(*Arabic Literature To The End Of The Umayyad Period*, 1983, 34)

For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both.

- Dr. Arthur J. Arberry (Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University),
(*The Koran*. Oxford University Press, x)

*The 'break with the familiar' is grounded in the fact that the known forms of oratory up to then were shi'r (poetry), saj' (rhyming prose), khaṭab, rasa'il and spoken prose, and **the Qur'an came with a unique literary idiom that was different from everything familiar and at the same time attained a degree of beauty with which it exceeded all other forms**, and even the art of verse, which is the most beautiful speech of all.*

- Abu'l-Hasan al-Rummani (Renowned Grammarian of Baghdad, d. 994),

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 81)

The verses of the Qur'an represent its uniqueness and beauty not to mention its novelty and originality.

*That is why it has succeeded in convincing so many people of its truth. **It imitates nothing and no one nor can it be imitated.** Its style does not pale even after long periods of study and the text does not lose its freshness over time.*

- Oliver Leaman (Professor of Philosophy, University of Kentucky),

(*The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, 2006, 404)

*Over the last three decades, I have managed to read the whole Qur'an well over fifty times; my reading has shifted recently to reading the Qur'an for linguistic and rhetorical analysis...**I have finally reached an independent conclusion based on translation theory and linguistic analysis that the Qur'anic discourse is inimitable** and cannot be reproduced into a target language.*

- Dr. Hussein Abdul-Raof (Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Leeds),

(*Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Text, and Analysis*, 3)

Evidence #2: The Qur'an's aesthetic beauty profoundly affected and transformed Muhammad's contemporaries: many individuals accepted Muhammad's prophethood and divine inspiration by merely hearing him recite the Qur'an:

Beauty, in most canons, has this divine quality. It is a manifestation of the Infinite on a finite plane and so introduces something of the Absolute into the world of relativities. Its sacred character "confers on perishable things a texture of eternity...Beauty is distinct but not separate from Truth and virtue." As Aquinas affirmed, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty and is thus concerned with wisdom.

- Harry Oldmeado, (*Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, 157-158)

What ultimately led in the ninth century to the formulation of the dogma of **the inimitability and uniqueness of the Quran is a central experience of inner life and inner radiance, a very real experience of metaphysical beauty of the revealed scripture – not mere theological speculation or scholarly sophistry.** The doctrine was the rationalization of a fundamental experience of the whole religious community – even if this experience was limited in its horizon and its rationalization did not take sufficient notice, or sufficiently serious notice, of the experience of other groups.

- Dr. Angelika Neuwirth (German Scholar of Qur'anic Studies),

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 195)

We can infer from the Quran that the Prophet regularly visited the Kaba in the early years of his vocation to recite the revealed verses. **The first few believers, who threw themselves on the ground or wept during his recitation, gathered around him, along with increasing numbers of curious listeners. Muhammad's opponents were often present as well...**Up to this point, the account of Muhammad's preaching given by the later tradition matches the recitation scenario that we can infer from the Qur'an itself, which has some actual historical value.

- Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 11)

The greatest of Arabia's poets of Labid ibn Rabi'a. His poems hung on the doors of the Kaaba as a sign of his triumph. None of his fellow poets dared to challenge him by hanging their verses beside Labid's. But, one day, some followers of Muhammad approached. Muhammad was decried by the heathen Arabs of that time as an obscure magician and a deranged poet. His followers hung an excerpt from the second surah of the Quran on the door and challenged Labid to read it aloud. The king of poets laughed at their presumption. **Out of idleness, or perhaps in mockery, he condescended to recite the verses. Overwhelmed by their beauty, he professed islam on the spot.**

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 1)

Besides poets, another group of people who were particularly receptive to the beauty of the Quran, if we believe the traditions, were Muhammad's particularly aggressive enemies: **Meccans such as Unays and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, who at first fiercely opposed the Prophet but then spontaneously joined him when they heard his recitation.** 'Let us just consider the effect that hearing the verses had on the opponents, Mahmud Ramiyar comments. 'In this regard alone, we know the names and full biographies of dozens of people who went to the Messenger of God to dispute with him, disagree with him and protest against him, and **they no sooner sat down with him, heard his preaching and God's verses, than they became muslims.'**

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 19)

But the initial amazement that the Quran produced among the Arabs was of a verbal nature. They were beguiled by its language, by its linguistic beauty and art. That language was the key that opened the door through which they could enter the world of the Quran and accepted Islam as a religion. Hence it is impossible to draw a dividing line at any level between Islam and language. **One may even say that the early Muslims who formed the first hard core of the Islamic mission believed in the Quran primarily as a text whose linguistic expression had taken possession of them:** they believed in it not because it revealed to

*them the secrets of being or of human existence, or brought a new order to their lives, but because **they saw in it a scripture that was like nothing they had known before. Through language their nature was changed from within, and it was language that changed their lives.***

- Ali Ahmed Said Esber ("Adonis", prominent Syrian Arab Poet, b. 1930),

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 36)

*We say that the qualitative surplus (mazaya) appeared to them [Muhammad's contemporaries] in the nazm of the Quran, that the qualities they found in the combination of linguistic expressions (alfaz) were what made them incapable of any response, any resistance. We say that the figures of words and meanings (bada'i) in the individual parts of the verses were what filled them with awe, and that every expression was in its place and in harmony with the others, as was the use of every idiom and the position of every predicate and the form of every threat, admonition, information, reminder, encouragement and warning; and that everything had a reason and a proof, an attribute and an explanation. **All that confused and fascinated them. They examined surah by surah, section by section and verse by verse, and they found no word that was not in its proper place, no expression that would have been better placed elsewhere or could have been replaced by a different, similar or better one, one that would have been more appropriate or suitable. They found a well-structuredness that overwhelmed their minds by its magnificence, and all people were petrified by its linguistic order and harmony, but its inner perfection and the consistency of its composition.** No orator felt the ambition to contend against it; no matter how they racked their brains, they had no ideas; no tongue was able to say anything or to make a demand, and even the greatest among the opponents had to admit defeat and abstain from rebuttal.*

- 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (Persian scholar of Arabic, literary theorist, grammarian, d. 1078), ("Arguments on the Miraculous Inimitability of the Qur'an," in Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 204)

*Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production should perhaps not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organized body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then **its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history.***

- Dr. Francis. J. Steingass (British Linguist and Professor of Languages, d. 1993),

(Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 528)

I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing. The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of

being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an.

- William Montgomery Watt (Christian Clergyman and Professor of Islam, d. 2006),
(Interview with the Coracle, 2000, [Read Here](#))

Evidence #3: No one – including Muhammad's own contemporaries and enemies and all those who lived after him – has been able to match or imitate or rival the Qur'an's literary form and content.

In the time of the Quran, the Arabs had achieved a degree of eloquence that they had never known in their prior history. In every previous era, the language had developed continuously, undergoing improvement and refinement, and had begun to shape the social customs...The kingdom of language had become established among them, but it had had no king until the Quran came to them.

- Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937),

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 5)

That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur'an itself is not surprising.

- Dr. Edward Henry Palmer (Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University, d. 1882), (*The Qur'an*, 1990, 15)

The Arabs, at the time, had reached their linguistic peak in terms of linguistic competence and sciences, rhetoric, oratory, and poetry. No one, however, has ever been able to provide a single chapter similar to that of the Qur'an.

- Dr. Hussein Abdul-Raof (Professor of Islamic Studies, Leeds University)

(*Exploring the Qur'an*, 2003, 64)

Though, to be sure, the question of the literary merit is one not to be judged on a priori grounds but in relation to the genius of Arabic language; **and no man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Mohammad did...**the Meccans still demanded of him a miracle, and with remarkable boldness and self confidence Muhammad appealed as a supreme confirmation of his mission to the Koran itself. Like all Arabs they were connoisseurs of language and rhetoric. Well, then if the Koran were his own composition other men could rival it. Let them produce ten verses like it. **If they could not (and it is obvious that they could not), then let them accept the Koran as an outstanding evidential miracle.**

- Sir Hamilton A.R. Gibb (Professor of Arabic, Harvard University, d. 1971),

(*Islam: A Historical Survey*, Oxford University Press, 25-28)

The Qur'an challenged the status of poetry in the society not only by its ideological orientation but also with regard to questions of stylistic quality...**In several conversion narratives, too, the protagonists compare the Quran with the works of poets, then acclaim the uniqueness of the Quranic language.** According to Muhammad Abu Zahra's interpretation, which is in keeping with theological tradition, most poets would have recognized the impossibility of challenging God in a battle of poets, setting their own verses against the Quran, or at least would have quickly retreated from such an undertaking, as did the twelve poets who had gone to Mecca with their hero Unays expressly to put the Prophet in his literary place. Anyone who was

foolish enough to try it 'was humiliated, reaped only scorn and derision, while the Quran gained further renown.'

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 28)

Several experts of the Arab language in Muhammad's time attested to the superiority of the Qur'an over all Arab speech: al-Walid b. al-Mughira, al-Tufayl b. 'Amr al-Dawsi, Hassan b. Thabid, Labid b. Rabi'a, Ka'b b. Malik, Suwayd b. al-Samit. For example, al-Walid b. al-Mughira was a poet of the Quraysh and they requested him to challenge Muhammad to a contest. After Walid heard Muhammad reciting the Qur'an, Walid b. al-Mughira himself said (as reported in multiple sources including Ibn Hasham, al-Bayhaqi, various *tafsir*):

What shall I say? There is no one among you who knows more about poetry than I. I know all kinds of qasidas and the rajaz, and I am familiar even with the poems of the jinn. But, by God, his recitation is like none of them. By God, there is a sweetness and a grace in it; its branches are heavy with fruit, and much water springs from its ground. It surpasses everything, and nothing surpasses it; it crushes what is beneath it...You know that I fear no one and cannot be bribed. You know that I am a good judge of eloquence. But the oratory that I heard from Muhammad cannot be compared with any other speech. It is both captivating and deeply moving. It cannot be called poetry, nor prose. It is deep and full of substance.

As it turns out, al-Walid was asked to say something negative against Muhammad's revelations – so he said that “Muhammad's speech is witchcraft and sorcery and beguiles the people.” **Even this choice of propaganda by Muhammad's opponents testifies to the Qur'an's overwhelming effect upon its original listeners.**

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 34-35)

Were it not for this divine power [in the words of the Qur'an], the Qur'an would have gone the way of other so-called revelations, such as those of Musaylimah, Talhah, al-Aswad al-'Ansi, and other false prophets. It would have disappeared from the world along with the speech and vestiges of others. It was because of that spiritual power that people called the Qur'an magic. Muhammad would recite it to people. It would fall upon their ears and thence be transmitted to their hearts. That spiritual and divine power hidden within it would attract the hearts to obedience. It was for this reason that Quraysh and the Arabs called it sorcery and called Muhammad a sorcerer.

- Abu Hatim al-Razi (Ismaili Muslim philosopher and Arabic language expert, d. 934),
(*Proofs of Prophecy*, tr. Tarif Khalidi, 181)

The Arabic rhetoricians saw that it [the Quran] belonged to a class (jins) of oration that was different from theirs; that its composition incorporated the spirit of the language, and they had no alternative but to keep it away from the soul of each individual Arab, or to prevent it from entering into that soul. For it was the face of linguistic perfection which their souls recognized and which revealed itself to their hearts.

- Sadiq al-Rafi'i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Litterateur, d. 1937)

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 36)

Evidence #4: In every Qur'an verse, the selection, combination, and arrangements of words, grammatical constructs, and rhetorical devices are "finely-tuned" with the expressed meaning, such that no formal alternation is possible without severely compromising the aesthetic form or the expressed meaning of that verse.

"Give credit where credit is due: the Arabs have done for their language what no other people on earth can claim." – Max T. Grunert (Orientalist Scholar of Arabic Literature)

Major Muslim scholars and experts in Arabic literature, poetry, and grammar testify to the Qur'an's inimitability: al-Jahiz, al-Nazzam (d. c. 840), Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 833), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 934), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 934), al-Rummani (. 994), al-Baqillani (d. 1013), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1032), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Ishaq Isfara'ini (d. 1027), al-Ash'ari (d. 935), al-Juwayni (d. 1085), 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (Persian scholar of Arabic, literary theorist, grammarian, d. 1078), al-Shahrastani (d. 1153). Below we will examine the fine-tuning of three sample verses according to the analysis of Persian scholar of Arabic and literary theorist, Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 1078) as presented by Navid Kermani (German scholar of Islam):

Both in the Quran and in the verses of many poets, al-Jurjani demonstrates how the same word appears perfect in one place and unfitting in another...the composition of a discourse is like the weaving of a rug and the combination of its differently coloured threads... In this concept of nazm, it is not letters or words as mere sounds that are joined together in the speaker's mind, but individual signifieds whose signifiers in combination produce a certain message. Any change in their structure, however inconspicuous, must yield a different meaning.

- Navid Kermani, *(God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an, 205)*

Example 1: Qur'an 11:44

The Qur'an 11:44 says:

wa-qīla yā arḍu blaṭī mā'aki = And it was said: Earth, swallow your waters.

The words in this phrase can be re-arranged in Arabic to give the same meaning (semantic equivalent) as follows:

wa qīla ya ayyuha l-'ard blaṭī māa'ki = And it was said: Earth, swallow your waters.

However, the Qur'an verse and the re-arranged phrase are not equal in literary form (*nazm*). The Qur'an verse 11:44 is inimitable but the semantic equivalent, although conveying the same meaning, is not equal in literary form to the Qur'an verse:

The miracle lies only in the combination (irtibat) of the words, in the inimitable way in which the first joins with the second and the second with the third and the third with the fourth to form a perfect, immutable unit. The complex linguistic structure of the complete verse is the source of its irresistible excellence (fadila qahira) and evident quality (maziya zahira). There is nothing miraculous about any individual word in it, such as the particle yā, for example; we find 'these properties that will you with awe of i'jaz only in its combination with the word ard 'earth' (which al-Jurjani finds incomparably more brilliant and precise in the

context of this verse than the apparently semantically identical *ayyuha l-'ard*), and in the interconnection of all the words.

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 205)

Example 2: Qur'an 6:100

The Qur'an 6:100 says

Wa-ja'alū li-llāhi shurakā'a l-jinna = Yet they ascribe to God, as associates, the jinn.

One could rearrange the words and convey the same meaning by placing the word "associates" (*shuraka*) before "to God" (*li-llahi*):

Wa-ja'alū shurakā'a li-llāhi al-jinna = Yet they ascribe to God, as associates, the jinn.

However, this second arrangement would completely lack the aesthetic power that the arrangement (*nazm*) of the Qur'an verse and even fail to convey the entire meaning as the actual verse:

[The verse] would only superficially say the same thing if shuraka' ('associates') preceded li-llah (God's): because shuraka' follows li-llah, the statement has a totality and an aesthetic appeal, 'its beauty and force' (husn wa-raw'a). If shuraka' were prefixed (as in wa-ja'alu l-jinna shuraka'a li-llahi, 'Yet they made the jinn associates of God'), not only would the verse lose its elegance, but its meaning too would be different: one might then see the reprehensible nature of the act in the fact that the believers made the jinn and not someone else God's associates. The emphasis is actually, as al-Jurjani shows in one and half pages of minute analysis, on reproach that the unbelievers gave God any associates, whether the jinn or any other beings. This is achieved by placing the word shuraka' as the first object of the verb ja'ala ('made'), while allah is placed where the second object (al-jinn) would be expected. Because the second object is moved back, it takes on explanatory character; it not of the substance of the statement.

- Navid Kermani, (*God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*, 209)

Example 3: Qur'an 54:12

The Qur'an 54:12 states:

Wa-fajjaranā l-arḍa 'uyūnan = We made the earth burst forth in gushing springs.

The words in the verse could be re-arranged as follows and remain grammatically correct:

wa-fajjarnā 'uyūna l-ard = 'We made the springs of the earth gush forth.

wa-fajjarna l-'uyun fi-l-'ardi = We made the springs on earth gush forth.

However, the two re-arrangements actually fail to convey the total meaning and presentation of the Qur'an verse because they fail to disclose the semantic relation between the words for "to gush" and "springs."

The verb fajjara, 'let something burst forth,' 'let (something) gush', is semantically related to 'uyun ('springs') – it is the springs that gush and that burst forth out of the earth – but in lafz, in the 'outward' verbal expression, the verb is connected to ard ('earth'). Again, it is this interlocking of the three words in a complex reciprocal relation that creates the totality, al-Jurjani says: we see how the water gushes out everywhere on earth as out of springs, as if all earth were one great spring, or as if God had made the earth burst with many springs (this is the reading chosen in the translation above). But if the

verse had been *wa-fajjarnā ‘uyūna l-ard*, ‘We made the springs of the earth gush forth’, or *wa-fajjarna l-‘uyun fi-l-‘ardi*, ‘We made the springs on earth gush forth’, the listener would understand merely that water gushed forth out of the earth from springs in various places.

- Navid Kermani, *(God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an, 210)*

The essential criterion for the *fasaha* (eloquence) of a sentence, what makes it effective, beautiful and ultimately inimitable, is thus the relation between the intended *ma’na* and the *nazm* realized in the *alfaz*. Language is perfected where the composition of individual linguistic expressions is appropriate to and most exactly expresses the intended idea.

- Navid Kermani, *(God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an, 214)*

As an outsider one may question the laws he postulates; one may even doubt whether the Quran really applies them perfectly in all details, as al-Jurjani says it does but to him, both the consistency of the standards he sets and their perfect conformance with the linguistic reality of the Quran are verified, objective scientific findings, proven by the text citations and corroborated by the text’s reception history and his own aesthetic experience. And if we put ourselves in his place for a moment, and grant the same validity he does to the correctness of his analysis, then the Quran must indeed be something quite astonishing, almost inexplicable – in a word, miraculous. **For Muhammad, who...was not a poet and had not assimilated the fine points of rhetoric in long years of training, who did not know the secrets of syntax (nawh), diction (luga), tradition (riwaya) or metre (‘arud), who had no notion of rhetorical figures (badi’), who did not even master writing (this was taken to be synonymous with a lack of literary training) – for such a literary layman to apply, spontaneously and without ever having shown any propensity to poetic expression, the entire system of poetic language, who no normal person could ever master in all its details; for this laymen, his soul inspired, to create out of the known material of words, figures of speech and rules of syntax and style something completely new, previously unknown and never even approach since, in such an inimitable, unprecedented and hence unlearnable way – this historic fact, verifiable and demonstrable and obvious to anyone, must appear miraculous.**

- Navid Kermani, *(God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an, 218)*

One of the most astounding things that we can see about the miraculous nature of the Quran and the perfection of its style is that we think its forms of expression (*alfaz*) fit its contents (*ma’ani*). Then we study it more closely and delve into it, and in the end we think its contents fit its forms of expression. Then we think it is the other way around again. We study it further and with the greatest care, and in the end we are always led to the opposite opinion, and **we are torn back and forth in the conflict between these two opinions until we finally refer back to God, who created the Arabs with a linguistic talent, only to produce something out of this language that surpasses that talent.**

- Sadiq al-Rafi’i (Syrian-Egyptian Poet and Literateur, d. 1937),

(Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an, 121)*

Does Islam need a Reformation?

There already has been Islamic reform – many times actually. It is not a question of whether there is Islamic Reform – it is a question of WHICH Islamic reform is needed.

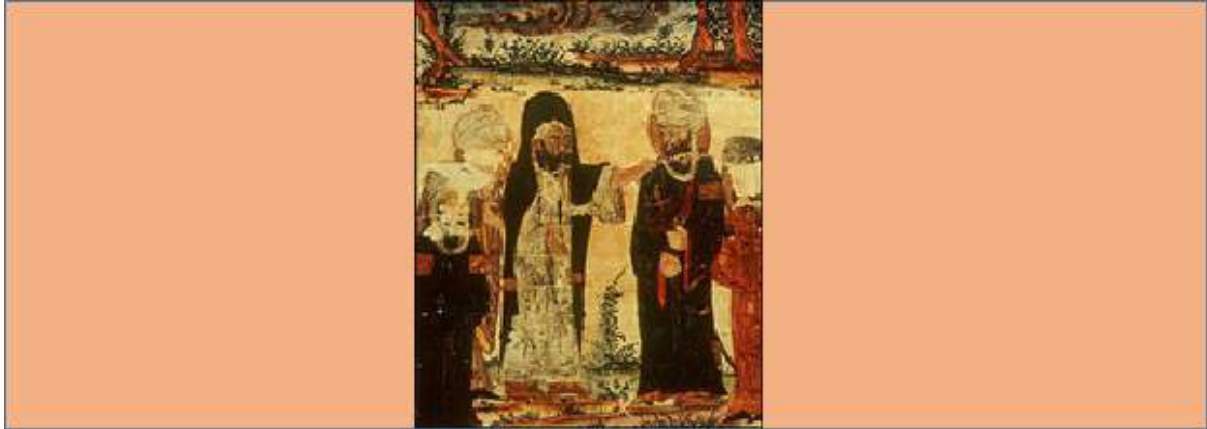
Some reformers were calling for a return to the original sources and removing the “fact” of accumulated interpretations from the medieval scholarly tradition. These are “Reformist” Muslims – Sayyid Ameer Ali and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India – who called for adopting Western science and some Western ideals and an emphasis on using more rational tools to interpret Islam. They saw no conflict between Western progress and Islam. Another group of Reformists were Muhammad Abdu and Rashid Rida. They also called for a return to fundamentals, brushing aside some of the legal interpretations from the past, and a renewed sense of rational interpretation or *ijtihad* to engage the original texts in a modern context. **Today, there is a kind of reformist view called Progressive Muslims who are inspired by the above but also critically engaging modern scholarship and various streams of Muslim tradition to advance a 21st century, humanistic and highly intellectual interpretation of Islam. Their thinkers include Khaled Abu al-Fadl, Adis Duderija, Farid Esack, Omid Safi, and others.** Below is a list of prominent Muslim thinkers who take a modern, progressive, and rational approach to the interpretation of Islam:

- [Khaled Abou El Fadl](#)
- [Fazlur Rahman](#)
- [Nasr Abu Zayd](#)
- [Leila Ahmed](#)
- [Farid Esack](#)
- [Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im](#)
- [Mustafa Akyol](#)
- [Asghar Ali Engineer](#)
- [Ali Gomaa](#)
- [Mohammad Khatami](#)
- [Ingrid Mattson](#)
- [Fatema Mernissi](#)
- [Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari](#)
- [Tariq Ramadan](#)
- [Omid Safi](#)
- [Ali Shariati](#)
- [Abdolkarim Soroush](#)
- [Ziauddin Sardar](#)
- [Muhammad Shahrur](#)
- [Amina Wadud](#)

Now, the real problem is when a type of reform comes along that is bad reform and seeks to move into an exclusivist and intolerant kind of Islam. **In the 1700s, the Wahhabi movement was started by Abd al-**

Wahhab. He wanted a reformation too – but it was one that declares anyone who disagrees with him as an infidel. This Wahhabi movement selectively cherry picked ideas from pre-modern Muslim scholars who held very unreasonable, uncharitable, and exclusivist interpretations of Islam – that called people non-Muslims for not agreeing with him. One such scholar was Ibn Taymiyya – an extremely conservative scholar who held unusual views. Abd al-Wahhab often cherry picked from him. **This Wahhabi ideology was so bad that the brother and father of its founder Abd, al-Wahhab, disowned him and called him a heretic.** This movement itself was marginal in the backwater of Arabia - but it allied with the House of Saud and when the House of Saud with British support created the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism per their agreement became the state enforced interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia. Then the oil profits were used by the Wahhabis to spread their ideology abroad. Combine Wahhabi ideology with devastated war-torn regions in Asia and Africa post-colonial and post-Cold War, and you get the breeding ground for violent Islamist ideologies.

Why isn't the central Shi'a tenet of Imamah mentioned in the Qur'an as a Pillar of Islam



To be fair, even central principles underlying the normative practice of Sunni Islam are nowhere mentioned in the Qur'an. The Sunni Foundations of *Fiqh (Usul al-Fiqh)* - such as using the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith, employing *Qiyas* (analogy), *Ijma* (consensus), *Ijtihad* (reasoning) and opinion as well as the Sunni *Maqasid al-Shariah* (Foundations of the Religious Law) which jurists use to interpret religious law are nowhere specified in the Qur'an either.

In fact, the Formula of the 5 Pillars (*arkan, da'a'im*) of Sunni Islam are not mentioned in the Qur'an as a group or collection of mandatory duties. Sunnis also consider the Khilafa or Caliphate as a necessity (*wajibat*) for Din and Dawla - faith and world - and the Sunni concept of a Caliphate where the Caliph is selected by communal election or consultation is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an.

The Sunni answer to the above would be that the Sunni Caliphate, the Usul al-Fiqh, the Maqasid al-Shariah, and the Pillars of Islam can all be extracted and found in different parts of the Quran and Prophetic Hadith that are interpreted as a whole and that the general ideas for these principles are found in the Quran in the form of specific cases, from which the principle is extracted by the scholar. Now this is fine, but then the principles of Shia Islam must be seen in a similar light.

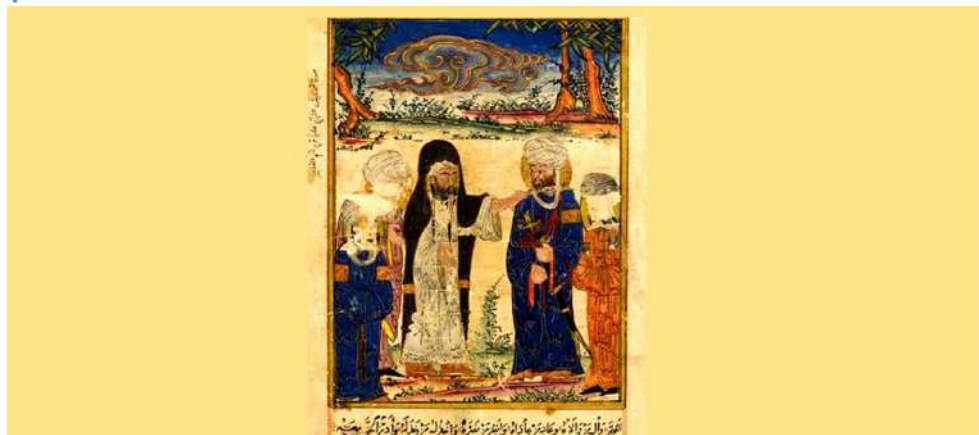
From the beginning, Shias have argued that the principle of Imamah - *hereditary religious leadership that is selected by God* - is found in the Qur'an and Prophetic Hadith even accepted by Sunnis. In the Qur'an, the Imamah is described through various names and titles such as:

1. God always appoints successors to a Prophet from the family members and descendants of that Prophet, often called *Imams, Khalifahs, Heirs (wurathah), Descendants (dhurriyyah), Family (ahl al-bayt), and Progeny (al)* in the Qur'an and these descendants of Prophets are granted both Prophethood, the Kitab (a symbol for continuous Divine Guidance) and Hukm (theoretical and practical wisdom to judge). **When prior Prophets have successors (who are not always new prophets), then Prophet Muhammad should also have a successor.** For example, here are specific cases mentioned in the Qur'an and the Bible contains more examples:

- a. The Qur'an in 3:33–34 emphasizes and declares a direct succession of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Imran as a lineage of direct descendants of God's Chosen family.
 - b. Abraham's direct descendants are given Prophethood, the Kitab (Divine Guidance), Hukm (Judgment) and the Kingdom (mulk)- see 4:54, 57:26, 29:27, 6:84–89.
 - c. Thus, Abraham became a Prophet and Imam (2:124) as a direct descendant of Noah, who himself was a direct descendant of Adam (3:33–34 and Genesis).
 - d. Abraham was succeeded by Ishmael and Ishmael's direct descendants, whom the Qur'an calls "a nation submissive to God" (2:127–129, 14:35–40); Ishmael's direct descendants include Prophet Muhammad.
 - e. Abraham is also succeeded by Isaac, and Isaac by his son Jacob (21:72–73)- they are called "Imams who guide by God's Command"; the Prophets of Israel all descend from Jacob.
 - f. Moses is deputized, helped, and succeeded in leadership over Israel by his brother Aaron (20:30, 25:35, 7:142, 20:32);
 - g. Moses and Aaron are succeeded by "Imams who guide by God's Command" (32:24)
 - h. Saul is selected by God as the leader and he is given leadership, knowledge, power and sovereignty (mulk) over the Israelites by God (2:247)
 - i. David is appointed as the Khalifah of God in his role as judge (to give Hukm)- see 38:26.
 - j. David's son Solomon inherits the authority of David (27:15–16).
 - k. Zakariyyah prays for God to give him a son John to be both his heir (*wali*) and the heir (*warith*) to the House of Jacob (19:4–6).
2. **Prophetic family succession is an established principle in the Quran and according to S. M. Jafri, the number of verses emphasizing the special status of a Prophet's family numbers to over 100.** Based on the Quranic model, it is not only reasonable but obvious that Prophet Muhammad's family, his Ahl al-Bayt, holds a special and sanctified status among all the believers- and this is also consistent with the Arabian concept of Ahl al-Bayt. **Thus, it would be entirely natural if not axiomatic that Prophet Muhammad appointed his successor as an Imam by Divine inspiration from among his Ahl al-Bayt just as prior Prophets like Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Zakariyyah had done per the Qur'an.**
 3. **Divine Justice and Logical Necessity:** Prophet Muhammad's role was NOT to simply deliver a text-book called the Qur'an to his people and then leave them to it. This book-only model of divine guidance is NOT Qur'anic. In fact, in several places the Qur'an explicitly REJECTS the "book delivery" of Divine Guidance as something false- see 6:7, 4:153. Instead, the Qur'anic

model of Divine Guidance is one where the Prophet RECITES divinely-inspired recitations (qur'ans) on a piecemeal and responsive basis and CONVEYS GUIDANCE to the community on all matters as and when they come up- see the verses 2:151, 62:2, 3:164, 16:44. **The Guiding Role (*hadi*) of the Prophet is different from his Revelatory Role (*rasul*), and the former should logically remain on earth and be continued by an Imam after the Prophet.**

Why did Prophet Muhammed need to appoint a successor or Imam in the first place?



The underlying assumption of this question is that the Qur'an as it exists today, in the form of a physical text or book, is sufficient for the guidance of mankind in all matters. However, Muhammad did not present, produce, or leave a book or a text. The Qur'an was purely oral and it was not a volume text – rather, every Qur'anic recitation or set of recitations was revealed through Muhammad to address very specific situations and events, and when events and new situations arose, *the Prophet recited new recitations to respond and guide the community for that new situation and it continued this way until he died.*

If this point is grasped and when it is realized that the **Qur'an in its original context and form was nothing like a book or a scripture intended to provide guidance indefinitely into the future (if it were intended as such, the Prophet would have compiled it into a book or God would have sent it as a complete book)**, then the question of a Successor to Muhammad becomes an imperative.

Muhammad needs a successor for the following reasons:

1. **Qur'anic Norms and Precedent:** Prophetic family succession is an established principle in the Quran and **according to S. M. Jafri, the number of verses emphasizing the special status of a Prophet's family numbers to over 100.** Based on the Quranic model, it is not only reasonable but obvious that Prophet Muhammad's family, his Ahl al-Bayt, holds a special and sanctified status among all the believers – and this is also consistent with the Arabian concept of Ahl al-Bayt. Thus, **it would be entirely natural if not axiomatic that Prophet Muhammad appointed his successor by Divine inspiration from among his Ahl al-Bayt just as prior Prophets did like Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Zakariyyah had done per the Qur'an.** Several academic scholars of early Islam have analyzed the Qur'an as a historical and theological document and have concluded that the Qur'anic model of Prophetic succession is one where **God always appoints heirs and successors to a Prophet from the family members and descendants of that Prophet** and these descendants of Prophets are granted both

Prophethood, the Kitab (a symbol for continuous Divine Guidance) and Hukm (theoretical and practical wisdom to judge)- see 4:54, 57:26, 29:27, 6:84–89. **When prior Prophets have successors (who are not always new prophets), then Prophet Muhammad should also have a successor.** For specific cases mentioned in the Qur'an, see [Why isn't the central Shi'a tenet of Imamah mentioned in the Qur'an as a Pillar of Islam](#).

2. **Practical necessity:** all power and authority was held by Muhammad during his mission- religious, moral, military, economic, social, etc. Muhammad per the various Medinah verses of the Qur'an was the undisputed deputy of God's will, the judge of all matters on God's behalf, the conduit of Divine Guidance, and the intercessory mediator between God and humankind in matters of forgiveness and repentance and purification. It is obvious that Muhammad NOT appointing a successor would lead to chaos and a massive power struggle by various parties. Old tribal rivalries, feuds, politicking, and power grabs that existed prior to Muhammad uniting all these tribes would come back instantly.
3. **Divine Justice and Logical Necessity:** Prophet Muhammad's role was NOT to simply deliver a text-book called the Qur'an to his people and then leave them to it. This book-only model of divine guidance is NOT Qur'anic. In fact, in several places the Qur'an explicitly REJECTS the "book delivery" of Divine Guidance as something false – see 6:7, 4:153. Instead, **the Qur'anic model of Divine Guidance is one where the Prophet BOTH recites divinely-inspired recitations (qur'ans) on a piecemeal and responsive basis AND ALSO provides continuous guidance to the community on all matters as and when they come up-** see the verses 2:151, 62:2, 3:164, 16:44. **To pose a question in the form of an analogy, would it be fair or logical that the community of believers during the time of the Prophet had Google Maps for guidance but the communities to come in later times only had access to a paper map that kept getting older with time and becoming less and less reflective of the situations of their own time?** This is not to say that there are not timeless truths, morals, and ethics in the Qur'an but not all guidance was general and effective for all time. As stated earlier, every Qur'anic recitation or set of recitations was revealed through Muhammad to address very specific situations and events as they arose in real time.

Explication of the divine intention of the revelation was among the functions that the Qur'an assigned to the Prophet. The Prophet functioned as the projection of the divine message embodied in the Qur'an. He was the living commentary of the Qur'an, inextricably related to the revelatory text. Without the Prophet the Qur'an was incomprehensible, just as without the Qur'an the Prophet was no prophet at all.

– Abdul Aziz Sachedina, ("Scriptural Reasoning in Islam", *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 5/1 2005)

Basically, the Prophet held an indisputable and invaluable set of additional religious and spiritual functions *in addition to reciting the Qur'an* and **the logic of Divine Justice necessitates that someone similar to the Prophet remains in the world after him to continue performing all the spiritual functions**

which were essential to the early community and must continue to be fulfilled for all times. See [Part 1: The Prophet-Believer Relationship](#).

Did Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III support the Nazis and Hitler?

The claim that Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah offered to support the Nazis and Hitler is a false report based on rumor, inuendo, second-hand, and third-hand information from an unreliable source. It is a fact that Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah during World War I and World War II was an ardent supporter of the British and the Allies: "He aided the British in both World Wars and urged his followers to do the same" (Waserman, *The Templars and the Assassins*, 2001); "During the war, he rendered assistance from his residence in Switzerland to the British Empire in its operations against Germany (which tried to assassinate him) in Iran and elsewhere." (Steinberg, *Ismaili Modern*, 48). The Imam sent messages to his Jamats worldwide to pray for the Allies and support the British war effort.

Aga Khan III's son Prince Aly Salman Khan raised funds for the Allies in 1939 through the Prince Aly Khan War Fund. He also rendered outstanding military services to the Allies in the World War II (1939-1945) and joined one of the toughest fighting forces in the world - the French Foreign Legion. He saw service in the Middle East under General Weygand. In 1940, he joined the British forces in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry. He was promoted to Lt. Col. on October 10, 1944. Later, he was decorated for distinguished service with the U.S. Army. In an operation, aided by a British officer and two Ismaili irregulars, he captured a tank in the desert of Syria. From the French he received both the Legend of Honour and the Croix de Guerre with palms on August 15, 1944 at Paris.

In fact, the German intelligence who received alleged reports of Aga Khan III offering to support the Nazis did not even believe it and concluded that the Aga Khan was pro-British and on the side of England. The alleged report is a total fabrication by Max Hohenlohe, who consistently provided colorful and embellished reports to the Nazis to justify his own position as a spy on their payroll for hanging out in an expensive hotel for the entire war.

William Lawrence Shirer in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* comments on the alleged reports about Aga Khan III circulating in Nazi intelligence:

"There are in the DGPF volumes several dispatches to the German Foreign Office about the **alleged contacts** with various British diplomats and personages.... [he then reports the above story and says]... **It must be kept in mind that these are German reports and may not be true at all, but they are what Hitler had to go on.**" (p. 751)

Willi Frischauer in his book *The Aga Khans*, p. 138, describes the source of the report - **Prince Max Hohenlohe as someone of doubtful veracity** when it comes to his reports about the Imam:

"One of the Germans was **Prince Max Hohenlohe, one of the Hitler peace scouts angling for contacts and not averse, if need be, to justifying their raison d'etre and their expense accounts by highly coloured reports to their paymasters in Berlin.** A personable man with fluent English and French, he talked to the Aga Khan in the relaxed, enervating atmosphere of the Palace lounge where all was peace."

"Had the Aga Khan lived to see the version of these conversations which Max Hohenlohe passed on to Walter Hewel, the German Foreign Office official at Hitler's headquarters, as it emerged from German official documents after the war, he would have been deeply shocked. Hohenlohe's reports made the Aga Khan appear either a fool or a knave. At the very time when Britain faced a Nazi invasion, Hohenlohe quotes the Aga Khan as saying that he remembered his stay in Germany with much pleasure and was grateful for ever for the consideration accorded to him."

"The diatribe put in the Aga Khan's mouth did not sound like the view of an Indian prince who had worshipped the British royal family since the first weekend he spent at Windsor as Queen Victoria's guest. Even Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister, to whom Hohenlohe's reports were sent, regarded the Aga Khan as a partisan of the British and more likely to pass on information to them than vice versa. The German consul in Switzerland was instructed to tell the Aga Khan, if the opportunity arose, that 'we intend to destroy England'.

When the Hohenlohe reports were published after the war, Aly Khan was angry: '*Ridiculous*,' he said, '*my father was passionately pro-British*.' While the Aga Khan became the victim of Nazi agents—although he never once left Switzerland during the war, they spread a rumour that he visited occupied Paris as Hitler's guest."

Was Prophet Muhammad illiterate?

Prophet Muhammad most likely was not illiterate. This idea seems to have developed later as a pious myth to convey Muhammad's passivity and purity in receiving revelation. It is based on the Qur'an referring to Prophet Muhammad as *ummī* which is taken to mean illiterate.

...Believe then in God, and in His Messenger, the ummī Prophet. (Qur'an 7:158)

However, the Qur'an also refers to the community that Muhammad was a part of as *ummiyyīn*:

It is He who has sent among the Ummiyyīn a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error. (Qur'an 62:2)

There were clearly at least some people in Muhammad's community who could read and write. For example, the Prophet would have scribes write down some of his divinely inspired recitations (*qur'ans*). This further invalidates the idea that *ummī* and *ummiyyīn* mean illiterate.

A close analysis of the word *ummī* and its cognates that show up in Islamic traditions shows that it does not mean illiterate but rather Gentile (non-Jewish).

'Scholarship on the meaning and origins of this term, however, is an exceptional case in that it virtually unanimously rejects the mainstream traditional interpretation of the phrase nabī ummī as "illiterate prophet."

- Mehdy Shaddel, *Qur'ānic ummī: genealogy, ethnicity, and the foundation of a new community* , p. 1

If there is any truth to the notion that the Prophet was illiterate, based on traditional understanding of the word *ummī* that developed over time, then this has not to do with the Prophet's ability to read and write in the ordinary sense. In fact, Ismaili esoteric hermeneutics reveals a deeper understanding of the word *ummī* and to what it refers: Commenting on the above-mentioned Qur'an 62:2, Nasir Khusraw says by *ummī* it is meant that Prophet Muhammad was unable to read the divine writing (*kitab ilahi*) until he received the divine inspiration (*wahy*) in his heart:

"In this verse, it is also found that before attaining wahy [divine inspiration], the Messenger was also ummī. Ummī means that the Messenger was unable to read the Divine Writing (neveshteh ilahi; kitabat ilahi). So we say that all the people are "ummī" (unable to read) the Divine Writing and the Messenger before the Holy Spirit conjoined to him was also "ummī" of the Divine Writing."

- Nasir-i Khusraw, *Zad al-Musafirin*, p. 215-216

Will the Historical Jesus Return in his Physical Body?

Ismailis believe Jesus died on the cross. He is not coming back physically. Nowhere does the Qur'an say that God took up Jesus in his body to heaven. When the Quranic verses about Jesus are read within the Quranic and Late Antique context, all the Quran says is that it denies the claim by Jesus enemies among the Jews that THEY killed and crucified him:

And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain (4:157).

The Quran here is responding to the Talmud (a commentary on Jewish laws composed between 500-600AD) where some Rabbis claim that the Jewish authorities, not the Romans, tried Jesus and executed him:

"Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, "He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come and declare it." As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve." - Sanhedrin(43a)

Otherwise, the Quran in two verses says that God caused Jesus to die and took him to Himself (different from raising Jesus body to heaven):

O Jesus, I will cause you to die, and exalt you to My presence, and clear you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve till the day of Judgement. (Holy Qur'an 3:55)

And when God will say: 'O Jesus, did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides God?' He will reply: 'Glory be to Thee! it was not for me to say what I had no right to say. If I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy mind. Surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen. I said to them naught save as Thou didst command me: Serve God, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die Thou wast the Watcher over them. And Thou art Witness of all things'. (Holy Qur'an 5:116, 117)

Based on this, the Ismaili Hujjats & Dais unanimously agree that Jesus body died on the Cross and Jesus soul ascended to God. So Ismailis always accepted the historical bodily death of Jesus.

For a more detailed explanation and analysis of the historical Ismaili position on Jesus, see the following resources:

Jesus Christ and the Imam in Shia Islam - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teGP2flZgdE>

Isma'ili Muslim Perspectives on Jesus - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2Hy1j7-zCE>

Lecture to the Society of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School titled "Jesus in Esoteric Islam:

Ismaili Muslim Christology" - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kf3cYHSVxUE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3kYSMfSze1WK6uoVTGDSGjhMo39bspWSNAUZc_hz5RaAk8X8uNWwBfH7w)

[v=Kf3cYHSVxUE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3kYSMfSze1WK6uoVTGDSGjhMo39bspWSNAUZc_hz5RaAk8X8uNWwBfH7w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kf3cYHSVxUE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3kYSMfSze1WK6uoVTGDSGjhMo39bspWSNAUZc_hz5RaAk8X8uNWwBfH7w)

Why should Ismailis seek knowledge from the works of Da'is and Pirs if we have the Imam?



If we begin with the idea that the Imam's guidance and interpretation of faith is supreme and should be followed *to the exclusion of* other interpretations (even interpretations part of the Ismaili intellectual tradition of thought), then we would have to look only to the Farmans of the Imam for guidance on theology, philosophy, history, and Qur'anic exegesis. However, as soon as we look to the Farmans, we find explicit instructions and commands from the Present Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni, for Ismailis to "learn Ismaili philosophy" and to spend time reading, learning and deriving happiness from the books of the Ismaili faith written by past Ismaili historians and philosophers and poets.

"Ismailis, must be made to take interest in the reading of serious Ismaili History and Philosophy of Ismailism, particularly youths."

- Mawlana Hazar Imam, *Message to Ismailia Association, 1961*

A farman made in Karachi Oct 2000 is most explicit where the present Imam tells young Jamat to find answers to the questions of today in Ismaili works of the past from Ismaili philosophers. He also says there that the Ismaili intellectual tradition must be given more respect, legacy, and continuity today. Now, the actual content of the Ismaili intellectual tradition that the current Imam tells Ismailis to read and learn from is what has been written by the Ismaili Hujjats, Da'is and philosophers like Sijistani, Kirmani, Nasir Khusraw, and Nasir al-Din Tusi. Therefore, the present day Ismaili Muslim reading these works and deriving Ismaili interpretations from these books is precisely what the Hazar Imam has commanded Ismailis to do when learning about Ismaili interpretations. Now, add to the above, the dozens of times the Imam has said that each murid individually must understand his faith using his intellect and through personal search. That personal search of each person must be a search through all these past Ismaili Muslim texts and writings.

More details at below articles:

[World of Faith: The Imam's Da'is and the Ismaili Da'wah](#)

[Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#)

Why did Imam Aga Khan III support negotiate peace with Hitler and the Nazis?

Aga Khan III has provided a full and context-laden explanation of his attempts to make peace treaties with Hitler and Nazi Germany in his *Memoirs*. In the 1930s, the Allies and the rest of the world had NO IDEA about Nazi concentration camps. Nazi propaganda kept the Holocaust hidden from the world until the early 1940s -- around 1942 at earliest and this was still classified at that time. In the 1930s, no one outside Nazi Germany knew about the Holocausts or the camps.

Aga Khan III in his *Memoirs* describes the international political situation in the 1930s when he was a Delegate and later President of the League of Nations (1937-39):

" From 1933 on Hitler merely shouted what his democratic and nonrevolutionary predecessors had often said before, not in shy whispers, but in ordinary conversational tones. There was nothing particularly new in the substance of his demands; what was novel was the arrogant, aggressive and violent way in which he made them. His claims were as vague and as menacingly undefined as theirs had been, but he also made certain quite specific pronouncements. **The last thing he wanted, he said, was another war. He would shed no more German blood. The German people had not recovered from the appalling bloodshed from the First World War. Such claims as he made, he said, were humble and reasonable. As I have said, in the autumn of 1937 I myself went to Berlin and saw him, not at the suggestion of the British Foreign Office, but with their full knowledge of what I was doing.** By this time he had a fairly detailed list of demands: that an Austro German Anschluss should be permitted, if a plebiscite of the Austrian people showed a majority to be in favor of such a union; that the relations between the Czechs and the German-speaking community in the Sudetenland should be similar to those between Great Britain and the Irish Free State; and that Germany should have the right to a colonial empire, if not in the same territories as before, then in their equivalent elsewhere. He held that Germany had a moral claim to Tanganyika because African soldiers had fought valiantly on the German side, and therefore German rule must have been popular with them. **He made no threat of going to war on this issue. "**

Aga Khan III below talks about why he supported the Appeasement Policy of the Munich Accords of September 1938 which let Germany annex certain lands in exchange for a lasting peace. Almost all of Europe supported the Munich Accords and the appeasement of Germany, and celebrated it because it averted another war soon after World War I.

"There has of late been a curious shift of emphasis among those who defend Munich. It is fashionable to argue (as a correspondence in The Daily Telegraph in the summer of 1953 demonstrated) that Munich was justified, not on moral grounds, but on military grounds, as a strategic and logistic necessity imposed by Britain's weakness on land and sea and most of all in the air. This, I think, can be summed up as the "Munich-bought-much-needed- time" school of thought. This is a post-hoc thesis shaped to fit the pattern of subsequent events. It was not the argument which was deployed at the time. **Then the case for Munich, as I heard it stated by members of the Government and by other champions of the settlement, and with all**

sincerity by myself, was proposed as a moral question and ran as follows: would Great Britain be justified in going to war to prevent the Germans of Czechoslovakia from declaring their choice by plebiscite, and in consequence to compel them to remain under Czech rule?

Whatever the subconscious background to my conscious thought then, I had no doubt where I stood. At Geoffrey Dawson's invitation I wrote a Times leader-page article in unstinted praise of the agreement with which Mr. Chamberlain returned -- in triumph and to a rapturous welcome, let it be remembered from his last visit to Germany. **I stand before history therefore as a strong, avowed supporter of Munich. And now, all these years later, after all the violent and troublous happenings since then, I say without hesitation that I thank God that we did not go to war in 1938.** Apart altogether from any highly debatable question of military preparedness or the lack of it, **if Great Britain had gone to war in 1938, the doubt about the moral justification of the decision would have remained forever, and doubt would have bred moral uncertainty about the conduct and the conclusion of the war.** In the perspective of history Britain would be seen to have gone to war, not on a clear-cut, honorable and utterly unavoidable issue, but in order to maintain the status quo and to prevent a plebiscite by which a regional racial majority might seek to be united with their brothers by blood, language and culture."

Then Aga Khan III explains that Hitler's actions after Munich - invading Czechoslovakia - **exposed Hitler's evil intentions publicly** and basically created the public and explicit case for the Allies to declare war against the Nazis on clear moral grounds:

"Hitherto Hitler had -- whatever methods he had used to attain his ends -- based his claims on the principle of self determination as laid down in the peace treaties and in the constitution of the League of Nations. **In the spring of 1939, however, he ripped off the veil of respectability.** His forces entered what remained of Czechoslovakia, and the country was termed a "protectorate" of the Reich. Baron von Neuradt -- a survivor from the pre-Nazi era -- was sent to Prague as Protector to rule a country which had indeed been annexed and totally subjugated. **This destroyed in a single stroke the whole moral basis of Germany's case before history, and it united in a common resolution many who, in 1937-1938, had held very different views.** There was now no doubt; there were no questionings. It was perfectly obvious to everyone -- even to those who a year before had been the stoutest supporters of Munich -- that Hitler's war in 1939 was a **deliberate act of aggression.** However, it was not only Hitler's war. The terrible fact is that it was the German people's war. This time the allocation of blame is correct. In the vast majority the German people were with Hitler in his attempt either to impose his "New Order," which was to last for a thousand years or to bring all European civilization crashing down in ruin with him in a final Wagnerian climax."

What sources does an Ismaili Muslim consult when seeking guidance on a religious matter?

Due to the way Islam is presented in the media and public discourse, many Ismailis may just assume that the first and highest ranked source for guidance is the Text of the Qur'an, the second highest source is the Hadith of the Prophet, and then the third ranked source is the guidance of the Imams. This would mean that you would check the Qur'an first and whatever guidance the Qur'an gave about a topic would take priority over anything the Prophet reportedly said or one of the Imams said; likewise what the Prophet said on a matter would rank higher than what the Imams said, etc. In this model, the guidance of the Imams is only required if the Qur'an and Prophet's guidance do not address a topic, and in either case, whatever guidance stated in the Qur'an, by the Prophet, or by an Imam remains forever and eternally binding – thus leading to a snowballing of rules, commands, do's and don't's over history.

The above is a Sunni model of divine guidance and not applicable to Ismailis in the past or today. For the Ismailis, from the standpoint of seeking divine guidance in the here and now, the model is closer to the REVERSE of the above. Why?

Firstly, the commands in the Qur'an were NEVER meant to be followed for ALL time – the Qur'an just simply does not present things that way. Everything ordered in the Quran was for the Prophet's time only and even that is limited, because the Qur'anic discourse – not being a book until later on – gave continuous, evolving, and shifting guidance over 23 years as events occurred. After the Prophet, the Imams give new commands, replace old commands, and keep evolving all the rituals and practices – all of this being new manifestations of divine guidance.

The Prophet's Sunnah was never meant to be followed in the sense of imitating his precise actions – Sunnah is a pre-Islamic concept which Ummayyad scholars then connected to the Prophet because the Qur'an itself hardly contained guidance on most issues and they required a second source of guidance. The words of the living Imam and the Imams in general take priority over the words of the Qur'an and the Prophet for the purposes of present day divine guidance:

The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practice of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur'an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam's authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible. This is fundamental to our religion — perhaps something similar is found in the case of the Pope in the Catholic religion.

– Mawlana Hazar Imam (Translation)

[L'Expansion Interview, Roger Priouret, 'Face to Face with the Aga Khan' \(Paris, France\), March 1975](#)

What the Quran and Muhammad guided to in their own time was fine for that time, but the whole purpose of Imamatus is that fresh divine guidance and updated interpretation of God's Will comes through the Imam in every age. These points are made clear in greater detail in the following readings and sources:

1. 10 Facts to know before Reading the Quran

[10 Surprising Facts to Know Before Reading the Qur'an](#)

--- This is a necessary piece to read first, before anything else. It is an academic historical intro to the Qur'an, its history, its context, and even answering some common Islamophobic claims about it.

2. Academic Lecture - The Speaking Qur'an: Revelation in Sunni and Shia Ismaili Islam

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9_csA1hjMO

--- An academic talk given by Khalil Andani (PhD candidate at Harvard University, specializing in Ismaili Muslim thought) on the subject of how the Qur'an is revealed to Muhammad and what the Qur'an is. What you learn from here is that the popular idea of what the Quran is today is DIFFERENT from what the Qur'an actually says about itself. Furthermore, the Shia Ismaili view of what the Qur'an is and how it is revealed through the Prophet fundamentally differs from the widely popular Sunni viewpoint.

3. How and why the Imam of the Time is the Speaking Qur'an

[Why is the Imam of the Time called Speaking Qur'an?](#)

4. Ismaili Esoteric Approaches to the Quran

[Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#)

--- Here is a detailed article on ta'wil - the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an in the Ismaili Muslim tradition.

5. How the Ismaili Imam teaches the Esoteric Interpretation of the Quran today

[Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur'an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta'wil](#)

--- Continuing from #4, this article talks about how the notion of Ta'wil works today through the guidance of the Present and Living Imam.

Esoteric Meaning (Ta'wil) of 'Id al-Adha



Id al-Adha is the day which marks when Prophet Abraham sacrificed his son Ismail by the command of God. The literal story as related in the Qur'an (Surah 37) describes how Abraham saw in a vision that God ordered him to sacrifice his only son and as Abraham was about to slaughter his son Ismail, God miraculously replaced Ismail with a "momentous sacrifice" – which Muslim tradition identifies with a ram. For Ismaili Muslims, this story of Abraham's sacrifice of Ismail and Ismail's replacement with a "momentous sacrifice" holds an esoteric meaning (ta'wil) which is the reality (haqiqah) of the entire story. According to the holy Qur'an (2:124), Hazrat Abraham was the Imam of the time appointed by God and this Imamah continues by divine appointment in Abraham's progeny. **"Sacrifice" means to "make sacred". The Imam who bears the weight of the Imamah has sacrificed his entire life, soul and being in the perpetual service of God and humankind and this is the ultimate spiritual sacrifice.**

Thus, the divine command for Abraham to SACRIFICE Ismail does not mean to sacrifice him physically but TO APPOINT ISMAIL as the successor to the IMAMAH after him. So when the holy Qur'an says:

"And We substituted him with a momentous (azim) sacrifice." [37:107]

This means that Abraham THEN APPOINTED his second son Isaac to the Imamah to share the burden of Imamah with Ismail. Thus Abraham's two sons, Ismail and Isaac, succeeded to the Imamah: Mawlana Ismail was the Permanent Imam (imam mustaqarr) and Hazrat Isaac was the Entrusted Imam (imam mustawda) established as a deputy and veil (hijab) for the Permanent Imams. As Henry Corbin explains, the "ram" with which God substitutes Ismail's sacrifice is none other than Isaac himself:

"Here again the whole body of Ismaili Gnosis may be taken as a guide. By this Gnosis, Ishmael is regarded as the Spiritual Heir, the Imam who holds the secret of the Gnosis, while Isaac is a Veil: the veil or screen of the Letter which is placed before the Imam. The relationship between them corresponds to the fundamental distinction between the appointed and permanent Imam (mustaqarr), and an Imam who is merely a depository or curator (mustawda), established as a kind of protection during periods of danger

and apparently performing the functions of the true Imam, while the latter remains hidden. Ishmael was the Upholder of the mystical meaning, of the esoteric science of ta'wil, while Isaac was before him as a Veil, maintaining the science of tanzil, of the revealed Letter and of positive religion. The same relationship is perpetuated in the course of their respective lineages...Whereas Moses established a new Law (shari'at), a new positive religion, the descendants of Ishmael continued and transmitted the esoteric message of Gnosis."

- Henry Corbin, (Temple and Contemplation, 167)

Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib descend from the hereditary Imams of the progeny of Ismail son of Abraham. Today the living Imam is Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV. **Today the spiritual sacrifice of Prophet Abraham and his son Mawlana Ismail continue to be embodied in the person of Mawlana Hazar Imam.**

When he assumed the office of Imam on July 11, 1957, Mawlana Hazar Imam boldly declared that he was dedicating his entire life and existence to serving his followers and the world of Islam:

*"I have **dedicated my life** to the uplift and progress of the Ismailis all over the world and I pray for all your happiness and success."*

- Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Willi Frischauer, The Aga Khans, 217)

*"My grandfather **dedicated his life** to the Imam and Islam, both of which came first, and above all other considerations.... **My life, as his, will be dedicated** to the service of my followers."*

- Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV

In a candid interview given in 1969, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī describes the struggles that he undergoes in fulfilling the mission of the Imam:

*"I hardly have time to think about myself. I have my moments of fatigue, anxiety, but without the feeling of abandonment. I am engaged. I have to weigh, to consider, to try make a wise decision. But, with my advisers, I escape the isolation. "Responsibility is a burden we love." I received from my grandfather responsibilities that are heavy but not burdensome. **This is not a burden. It is a pleasure to devote oneself (de se consacrer = "to sacrifice oneself") to such a community, to work for people. The responsibilities are a burden that we love to wear."***

- Imām Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āgā Khān IV, (Elle Magazine Interview with Paul Giannoli, "The Mystery of the Aga Khan", August 20, 1969)

Esoteric meaning (ta'wil) of Hazrat Yunus Spending 40 Days Inside the Belly of the Whale



Qur'an 37:139-148 recounts the story of Hazrat Yunus (Jonah). It says that he cast lots, which is the act of throwing marked stones, sticks, or dice to arrive at an important decision or conclusion about God's will. This was an "act worthy of blame".

Then a (big) fish swallowed him and he had done an act worthy of blame. (Qur'an 37:142)

Below is one level of esoteric meaning of Hazrat Yunus spending time inside the big fish:

"Hazrat Yunus warns us of the danger of a great whale (nafs-i ammarah, the carnal soul)."

- 'Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai, Book of Healing (tr. by Faquir Muhammad Hunzai & Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai), p. 170-171

So that would mean that before rising to higher levels of soul such as Nafs-i Lawwamah (the self-rebuking soul - feels guilt or regret for its misdeeds/sins) or further to Nafs-i Mutma'innah (the soul at peace), Hazrat Yunus spent time at the lower level of carnal/animal soul before escaping it to advance spiritually. Mawlana Hazir Imam has said that "it is the light of the intellect that distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal..." Human animal refers to the person who has nafs-i ammarah, the carnal soul. The whale, being an animal, emphasizes this point. Through recognizing and surrendering to the intellect and following the guidance of those who have souls already at peace instead of simply following one's Self, one can rise higher. We may ask who are those souls at peace in Qur'an 89:27? It is the pure Imams.

"And by addressing us through the verse 'O Soul, at peace!' he granted us an exalted tranquility."

- Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I, 'Ibrat-afza (tr. Beben and Poor), p. 122

Fortunately, anyone that desires can, through rigorous self-awareness and self-work, achieve higher states of the soul as said by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah.

Since there can be multiple esoteric interpretations at varying levels of depth, below is another *ta'wil* of the parable:

*"The whale which devoured Hazrat Yunus was a powerful soul of his spirituality... It should be remembered that where the example of **Universal Soul is the whale, the ocean is the Universal Intellect**. For the entire external world is immersed in the great ocean of soul and the ocean of soul in the ocean of knowledge (intellect) and beyond this there is nothing."*

- 'Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai , *Fruits of Paradise*, p. 143

Did God Create the Heavens and Earth in Six Days?

The Cycles of Universal Prophecy and Imamat				
Cycle	Prophets	Imams	Scriptures	Communities
Cycle of Cycles (Origin of Humanity)	Universal Adam (<i>al-Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Adam (<i>Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Gnosis	Humanity (One Community)
Pre-Adamic (Pre 4,050 BC)	Rishi Vashisht Rishi Viyas Gur Sohodeva	Shri Rama Shri Krishna Shri Budh	Laws of Manu Vedas	Humanity (One Community)
Adamic (4,050 BC)	Prophet Adam	Mawlana Shith (Seth)	Scrolls of Adam	Brahmans
Semitic (3,000 BC)	Prophet Nuh (Noah)	Mawlana Sam (Shem)	Noahide Laws	Sabians
Abrahamic (2,000 BC)	Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)	Mawlana Isma'il (Ishmael) Mawlana Ishaq (Isaac)	Scrolls of Abraham	Mazdeans
Mosaic (1,400 BC)	Prophet Musa (Moses)	Mawlana 'Adnan Mawlana Harun (Aaron)	Torah	Jews
Christic (33 AD)	Prophet 'Isa (Jesus)	Mawlana Khuzaymah Mawlana Yaqub (James)	Gospels	Christians
Muhammadian (610 AD)	Prophet Muhammad (Last Prophet)	Mawlana 'Ali	Qur'an	Muslims
Resurrection	<i>Hadrat Qa'im al-Qiyamah</i> (Lord of Resurrection)	<i>Hujjatu'l-Qa'im</i> (Proof of Qa'im)	Universal <i>Ta'wil</i> of all Scriptures	Humanity (One Community)

Different historical periods or cycles are marked by the appearance of God's Messengers and each cycle (or "world") lasts anywhere between five hundred or fifteen hundred years. In the language of the Abrahamic scriptures, the cycles are referred to as the "Days of God" (Qur'an 14:5) or the "Days of Creation" (Genesis):

"Lo! Your Lord is God Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days. Then He established the Throne."

– Holy Qur'an 7:54

According to the esoteric meaning (*ta'wil*) of this verse, the six days in which God creates the heavens and the earth are six historical cycles of prophecy and religion. The "world" created in during these six cycles is the "World of Faith" (*'alam al-din*).

*"The Cycle of every prophet is his 'day'. The time in which we are now – I mean, the time after the Emissary, al-Muṣṭafa, was sent forth up to the time of the Resurrection – is the 'day' of our Emissary. The days of Moses, Jesus, and the other prophets are past... God the Exalted created the lifetime of this world during the span of the prophethood of six prophets, each of whom had his cycle (*dawr*) and his summons (*da'wat*) in his 'day' (*rūz*), and during his day the Emissary summoned people to God... If people were to examine this interpretation, each prophetic community would occupy the position which it indeed occupies: the Christians established on the fifth day, the Jews on the fourth day, the Mazdeans on the third day."*

– Sayyidnā Nāsir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby, 152-153)

In each cycle of prophecy, the Enunciating Prophet (*Nāṭiq*) reveals a Scripture and a religious Law (*sharī'ah*). The six Natiqs representing the six days of creation were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Accompanying the *Nāṭiq* and later succeeding him is the person of the Foundation (*Asās*)

– who is the first hereditary *Imām* of the cycle. The *Asās* is succeeded by a lineage of *Imāms* until a *qiyāmah* – when the prophetic cycle comes to an end and the next *Nātiq* appears. The institution of *Imāmah* continues throughout these prophetic cycles – serving as an arc of guidance, continuity and permanence ([From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) our previous post on the continuity of the eternal *Imāmat* in history).

When the Sixth Prophetic Cycle comes to an end, the Seventh Cycle begins. The Seventh Cycle, in the Qur’anic verse above, is referred to as the establishment of the Throne. This Seventh Cycle is the Cycle of the Great *Qiyāmah*. This is because a cycle of prophecy consists of the dominance of the religious Law (*sharī’ah*) in which spiritual truths (*ḥaqā’iq*) are concealed in symbols and only available to the initiates. The Cycle of *Qiyāmah* is when the spiritual truths are unveiled to the public. The meaning of *qiyāmah* is literally “rising” and the meaning of the word “apocalypse” is “revelation”. Therefore, the *qiyāmah* or apocalypse is not the end of the physical world, but rather, the revelation, rising or unveiling of spiritual truths to humanity.

“In the cycle of every Prophet, the period of the manifestation of the exoteric (ṣāḥir) dimension of the religious law (sharī’at) is called the cycle of concealment, and the cycle of every Qā’im, when the manifestation of the esoteric realities of the religious laws (ḥaqā’iq-i sharī’at) of the Prophets occur, is called the cycle of unveiling (dawr-i kashf).”

– Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, (*The Paradise of Submission*, 69)

See full article on the main site: [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma’īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#)

What is the esoteric meaning (ta'wil) of Mary's (Maryam) virgin conception?

In the story of Mary and Jesus, the Qur'ān describes how Mary received the [Night of Power: How the Qur'an was Revealed in Human Language](#) – due to which she gave birth to the Prophet Jesus:

Wa maryama ibnnata 'imrāna allatī aḥsanat farjahā fanafakhnā fīhi min rūḥinā wa-ṣaddaqt bi kalimāti rabbihā wa-kutubihī mina'l-qānitīna

“And Mary, daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her sexual organ and We breathed into it from Our Spirit. And she testified to the truth through the Words of her Lord and His Books and she one of the devout servants.”

(Holy Qur'ān 66:12)

Nāsir-i Khusraw gives the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the God breathing His Spirit into the sexual organ of Mary as follows:

“This means that Mary did not turn her ears to the devils (iblisān) with their speeches. This is because the sexual organ is like the ear, and ear symbolizes the sexual organ because through it comes the corporeal form (ṣurat-i jismāni), and through the ear the psychic form (ṣurat-i naṣṣāni). ‘She guarded her sexual organ’ means that she did not turn her ear to those who only teach the zahir, the formal side of the religion, disregarding the esoteric interpretation (ta'wīl).”

– Sayyidna Nāsir-i Khusraw,

(Shish Fasl or Six Chapters, transl. W. Ivanow, Chapter 3, [Click Here to Read](#))

For Nāsir-i Khusraw, the Divine Spirit was breathed into the “ear” of Mary and not her sexual organ. This also shows that the actual form of the ‘breathing of Spirit’ was something audible – a Word (*kalimah*). The sexual organ in this verse is used as a symbol or metaphor for the ear. Just as the sperm – the source of the physical form – is deposited in the womb by means of the sexual organ, the Divine Word – the source of the spiritual form – is deposited in the soul through the ear.

Therefore, it is not surprising that even early Christian theology maintained that the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary with Jesus not through her sexual organ but by means of her ear. Mary received the Spirit by ‘hearing’ the Word of God which was spoken to her.

“The bodily locus of the virginal conception was not portrayed in early Christian acts as the vagina, but the ear: ‘The conception was by hearing’, wrote John of Damascus. In early iconography the Holy Spirit is not portrayed as coming into Mary’s body physiologically by sexual transmission, but spiritually by attentive hearing...the conception was by right hearing of the Word of God.”

(Thomas C. Oden, Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology, 292, [Click Here to Read](#))



The end of the verse also mentions how Mary testified to the truth through the Words (*kalimāt*) of God – these being the same Words by which Abraham was tested. The Qur’ān also refers to Jesus as a Word (*kalimah*) from God which He breathed into Mary:

‘Isa ubnu maryama rasūlu’llahi wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā maryam wa-rūḥun minhu

“The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word (kalimatuhu) that He cast to Mary, and a Spirit from Him...”

(Holy Qur’ān 4:171)

The above verse states that Jesus was the God’s Spirit and Word (*kalimah*) which He “cast” (*alqā*) into the Virgin Mary. This is significant because in *Ṣūrah al-Muzzammal* (73:53), the exact same verb – *alqā* (to cast, to commit, to present) – is used when the verse says to the Prophet Muḥammad – “Indeed we will cast (*sanulqī*) upon you a Weighty Word”. Thus, the “casting” of the Word of God upon the Virgin Mary is identical to the “casting” of the Word of God to the Prophet Muḥammad.

Even in the case of Prophet Jesus, the Qur’ān indicates that God inspired him with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is initially given to a Prophet in the form of a Word (*kalimah*) or Divine Name (*ism ilahi*) – as shown in the cases of Prophet Adam and the Virgin Mary.

Read the original article in its entirety here: [Iqrā’ – ‘Read’ or ‘Remember’? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur’ān](#)

Is It Haram to Have Dogs as Pets?



There is nothing in the Qur'an regarding dogs as pets being haram. The Qur'an speaks about the people of the cave who were a particularly pious group of people and the subject of a great miracle and blessing from Allah. And yet, the Qur'an is careful to point out that the people of the cave were accompanied by a dog, and that both humans and the dog were the subject of God's miracle and grace.

Importantly, Hazir Imam himself had a dog, and there are multiple pictures of him with dogs.

The entire confusion or issue is related to a hadith report that claims Prophet Muhammad said angels do not enter homes with dogs. Let us examine the esoteric or inner meaning of what the hadith report could be talking about.

"We say that the rational soul in every human being is a potential angel, and the potential angel is a parī, as we have said. The concupiscent soul and the irascible soul in every body are two potential demons. Everyone whose rational soul brings the irascible and the concupiscent souls to heel becomes an angel. Everyone whose concupiscent and irascible souls subjugate his rational soul turns into a demon in actuality."

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 132)

Dog refers to those who live in this world dominated by their animal qualities, specifically irascibility which refers to those who are quick to become angry and react, easily provoked, possessing an irritable disposition. They have become demons in actuality.

The *farmans* of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah hint towards those who lived in a manner dominated by

the above mentioned quality becoming dogs in the imaginal world (*barzakh*) after death. This need not be taken literally but the general meaning is that in the next world, human qualities of the soul will be concealed by the animal qualities that that person lived up to in earthly life:

"On dying, if you again became dogs, what is gained in it?...Your virtuous deeds (amal) are for your benefit, and that benefit is there for you in the life hereafter. Whatever the type of deed (amal) you do, you will become as such."

This brings us back to the reported saying of the Prophet that angels will not visit a home with dogs. The meaning behind this is that human beings who have purified themselves of certain negative qualities and have therefore went from being a potential angel to an actual angel, would not want to associate with those who have become like demons or dogs since they possess negative qualities of being short tempered, angry, or even abusive. Angels dress themselves in the garments of Allah's attributes such as patience, gentleness, kindness, etc. These people who are like angels would not want to ruin their peaceful state by associating with those who lack anything of the sort.

Why do Ismailis celebrate Nawruz? An esoteric explanation of the ancient festival

"The Naw-ruz Festival"



A traditional Tajik Navroz meal. Photo: Mikhail Romanyuk

"Now let us see with insight what the reality of this example of Naw-ruz is and what the spiritual Naw-ruz festival is for the true mu'mins? It is important to consider this question because every festival, religious or worldly, cannot prove to be the real and spiritual festival if it only provides more and more means of physical happiness. Therefore, it is necessary for it to be a spiritual festival simultaneously with it being a physical one, as it is reported in a famous Hadith, that Allah has founded the basis of His religion on the pattern of the physical world (khalq), so that this may be a guide towards His religion and His religion to His oneness.

The description of the religious spring and the real Naw-ruz festival is that, just as the sun is in the centre of the universe and does not move from its place, the eternal light of the Imam of the time is always in the same state and does not change at all. Further, just as the different parts of the planet earth due to its daily and annual movement pass through light and darkness and become close to or far from the sun and due to which the changes in day and night, and seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter continue, and as in the Arctic, the Antarctic and in many other deserts of the planet earth the question of habitation, season of spring and the Naw-ruz festival does not arise at present, in the same way there is still time for the light of Imamatus to shine on some human souls. Further, just as in certain regions of the planet earth, due to their being on the equator or close to it, plants do not become dormant, in the same way there are certain mu'mins in whose heart the heat of devotion and love for the Imam of the time always remain and the flowers of spiritual happiness always bloom. This example of the beneficence of the light of Imamatus is according to the physical and spiritual position of the select and the common.

The physical significance and beneficence of the Imam of the time in this connection are note-worthy; for instance, that the example of the light of Imamat and the human souls, which is given by the sun and the planet earth is true, but the sun does not have a choice, while the Imam has absolute choice. Therefore, we want to explain further that suppose a great and wondrous mirror is set up on the surface of the earth. This mirror shows the luminous reflection of the world-illuminating sun wherever it turns its face and there it cases the happiness of Naw-ruz and the cheer of spring. This is the example of the Imam of the time, because with respect to his corporeality he is the mazhar of the Divine favours and blessings and mirror of the eternal light. It is because of this that the spiritual season of the Ismaili worlds always remain temperate and extremely pleasant and there is always spring in them. Thus the real Naw-ruz festival is found in the individual spirituality of mu'mins. That is, every sincere mu'min's initial spiritual progress is his Naw-ruz festival, in the sense that when the mu'min truly obeys the light of Imamat, the personal world of his heart, due to spiritual vegetation and prosperity, becomes like the garden of Paradise."

— 'Allamah Nasir al-Din Hunzai, (Extracts from A Key to Wisdom, Karachi June 1995, pp. 64-67)

How do Ismaili Muslims perform ablution (wudu) before prayers?

"O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. If you are impure then purify yourself. But if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and do not find water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it. Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful."

– Qur'an 5:6

Firstly, the Qur'an was guidance for its own time period. Just because the Qur'an mentions a ritual action and how to perform it – like wudu – it doesn't mean Ismailis must perform the same physical action for every time thereafter. The Qur'an's guidance in literal terms changed over 23 years, and it would be naive to think the physical literal actions commanded in the Qur'an must hold for eternity.

The wudu ritual in the Prophet's time had two functions:

1. Cleanliness
2. Symbolic participation in the batin

Today, our modern day hygiene and advancement in technology and way of life take care of cleanliness. The batini symbolism of the exoteric wudu is fully enacted in the practice of Dua Karavi or mubayah where a murid reaffirms bayah to the Imam of the time. In Jamatkhana, this is supposed to be done before first Du'a although we have many opportunities to do this batini wudu in the form of dua karavi individually and communally.

Nasir Khusraw gives an important ta'wil (esoteric exegesis) of the practice of ablution (wudu), which is relevant for Ismailis today because they live in a time where there is currently no formal external or zahiri practice of wudu (ablution) before prayer. Yet, according to the ta'wil given below, through the act of bayat to the Imam, one is, generally, performing ablution in the spiritual or internal sense:

*"By the grace of God, may He be exalted, we say that ablution is the door to ṣalāt (prayer), just as islām (submission) is the door to īmān (faith). The ṣāhir or exoteric aspect of ablution is to wash with water and wipe [with it] when it is available and, when it is unavailable, to do tayammum with dust. **The bāṭin or esoteric aspect of ablutions, on the whole, is to pledge the covenant to the lord of the time and to be averse to the enemies of the awliyā' (friends) of God.***

*Salāt, on the whole, signifies attaching oneself to the awliyā' of God. Ablution is not permissible except with pure water, which signifies the knowledge of ta'wil (bayān). **Bodily impurities are cleansed with pure water, while spiritual impurities are cleansed with the knowledge of ta'wil.** Just as exoteric ṣalāt is impermissible without having performed ablutions, listening to the true knowledge, which is the esoteric ṣalāt, is*

impermissible without [pledging] the covenant [to the Imam of the time].

Bodily impurities are caused by the passing of urine, faeces, blood, pus and wind, whereas spiritual impurities are due to ignorance, disobedience, doubt, polytheism, anthropomorphism and ta'tīl, renouncing the friends of His friends and befriending the enemies of the friends (awliyā') of God."

– *Nasir-i-Khusraw, Wajh-i-Din, Discourse 15*

To summarize, the ta'wil of the exoteric wudu is to give bayah to the Imam of the Time and to purify one's soul and intellect by listening to true knowledge. This conclusion is further confirmed when the very next verse of the Qur'an is examined. The below verse directly refers to Bayah since another name for bayah is Mithaq (covenant). So the Qur'an mentions the zahiri Wudu first, and right after, it mentions the batini Wudu.

*"And remember the favour of Allah upon you and **his covenant** with which He bound you when you said **we hear and we obey** and fear Allah. Indeed Allah is knowing of that within the breasts."*

– *Qur'an 5:7*

The Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of Moses Seeing a Fire on the Mountain



In various esoteric traditions, "fire" can have either a negative meaning or a profoundly positive one. In Ismaili literature, "fire" is associated with illumination of ta'yid (Divine support) through the Holy Spirit, received in the heart. This concept is firmly rooted in the Qur'an and in the subsequent teachings of the early Imams:

*the kindled **fire** of God. Which rises up, overwhelming hearts (Qur'an, 104:6-7)*

*The fires are diverse, varied. Among them is the fire of love and gnosis burning in the hearts of the monotheists; while the fire of hell burn in the hearts of the disbelievers. **When the fires of love ignite in the heart of the believer, they burn up every eagerness for (what is) other than God, and every remembrance other than His remembrance.***

- Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, quoted in, *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur'an Commentary Ascribed by the Sufis to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq*

(Translated and Annotated by Farhana Mayer)

One of Jesus' apocryphal sayings is as follows:

*" **He who is near to me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom.**"*

- Gospel of Thomas, Saying 82

The story of Moses' (Hazrat Musa) perception of a fire (*nar*) in the direction of Mount Tur (this event is otherwise known as the episode of the "burning bush") is recounted in verse 28:29 of the Holy Qur'an:

*Now when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his people, **he perceived a fire (naaran) in the direction of Mount Tur. He said to his people: "Bide ye; I perceive a fire (aanastu naaral) ; maybe I will bring you from there some information (khabar), or a brand (jadhwah) from the fire, that ye may warm yourselves"** (Qur'an, 28:29).*

Shin Nomoto, in his Ph.D thesis on Abu Hatim al-Razi (the 9th century Persian Isma'ili Philosopher and Chief Da'i of his region), quotes another great Isma'ili theologian, Qadi al-Nu'man, who wrote a book of ta'wil called the *Asas al-Ta'wil*. According to Qadi al-Nu'man, **Moses' perception of the fire was not an external event; rather it was something he perceived within himself - within his soul:**

"The metaphor for the "fire" [in verse Q 28:29] (mathal al-nar) is that for the rank of enunciator-prophet (hadd al-natiq) [which comes] from the light of divine support (nur al-ta'yid): he (i.e. Moses in the verse) says "I feel the light of divine support in myself." The metaphor for the mountain is that for the grade of enunciator-prophet, that is, the messengership itself (nafs al-risalah)."

- (Qadi al-Nu'man, Asas al-Ta'wil, quoted in Shin Nomoto, Early Ismaili Thought on Prophecy...pg, 219).

According to Qadi al-Nu'man's ta'wil of 28:29, when Moses says, "I perceive a fire (nar)" **what is meant is that Moses feels the intense Light (Nur) of ta'yid (Divine support) within himself. Moses himself, at the grade of Rasul, is the Mountain. The Mountain being a symbol for a high rank above others.** According to al-Nu'man, the story of Moses' encounter with the "fire" represents his initiation into the office of enunciator-prophethood (Natiq).

If perceiving a fire means that Moses could feel the Light (Nur) of ta'yid within himself, then the rest of the verse tells us that Moses would, as a result of the ta'yid (Divine support), bring information (*khabr*) or guidance for his people - meaning that his companions would benefit from this Divinely inspired information (*khabr*) Moses would share with them. By "or a Fire Brand (*jadhwah*) with which his people could warm themselves" is meant a portion of the ta'yid (*ism-i a'zam*) itself that is shared with the advanced from his people, in a measure relative to their rank of spiritual progress, by which they could continue their journey of spiritual advancement. [For a detailed analysis and exploration on the concept of spiritual ascension through the *ism-i a'zam* in the Qur'an, see [lqrā' – 'Read' or 'Remember'? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur'ān](#)]

"By khabar is meant knowledge and guidance, and by jadhwah, ism-i a'zam, and by warming from the fire, to benefit from ism-i a'zam or the supreme name."

- 'Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai, Precious Treasures, 63

This is further confirmed when one looks closely at the following verse of the Qur'an where it is said that the one who is in the Fire is Blessed (referring to the recipient of the Fire or Light in the heart) as well as whoever that is around it (referring to the close ones or followers of the recipient of Ta'yid that benefit from being near to him, having access to his Divinely inspired guidance):

*"So when he (Moses) came to it (the Fire) a voice was heard: " **Blessed is He who is in the Fire (al-nar) and he who is around it; and Glory be to God, the Sustainer of the worlds.**" (Qur'an, 27:8)*

When the above esoteric meaning is understood, it can be comprehended that this receiving of a Fire (Nar) or Light (Nur) in the heart and subsequent sharing of its benefit with one's followers is exactly what the Holy Prophet Muhammad used to do during his Prophethood. Fortunately, this tradition continues today with the Living and Present Imam of the Time of the Shi'a Isma'ili Tariqah of Islam as the recipient of ta'yid (Divine support), being continuously nourished by illumination (*nur*) in his heart. His followers and close ones benefit by virtue of being near and having access to the Divinely inspired guidance or information (*khabr*) that he provides:

Since my grandfather, the last Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the Nur - a word which means 'The Light'. The Nur has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet. But my work and responsibilities overflow into the practical side of life.

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Sunday Times Weekly Review - Interview, Dec 12, 1965)

After Q 28:29, in which Moses perceives the fire, the very next verse in the Qur'an continues the narrative of what Moses experienced and tells us:

But when he came to it, he was called from the right side of the valley in a blessed spot - from the tree (shajara), "O Moses, indeed I am Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an 28:30)

Moses having his intimate experience with Allah through the mediation of the tree (shajara) is quite significant, since the Qur'an heavily uses signs (ayat) and symbols (mathal) to indicate deeper truths. If we examine another verse of the Qur'an (14:24) where the symbol of the tree is used, we will better understand the true meaning of the Moses story.

Have you not seen how Allah has set forth a parable? A pure word (kalima) is like a pure tree (shajara), whose root is firmly fixed and whose branch is in heaven. (Qur'an 14:24)

" The pure word is the ism-i a'zam, which a pious murid receives from the Imam of the time, and the pure tree is the blessed personality of the Imam of the time himself. Among these, one ism-i a'zam is in the form of a personality and the other is in the form of a word. But the very great miracle of God is that in the personal world both become one. That is, the Imam becomes the speaking word and the word becomes the blessed light of the Imam."

- 'Allamah Hunzai, Thousand Wisdoms, p. 280

This tells us that Hazrat Musa must have rose up to the rank of Natiq (enunciator-prophet) and had his blessed experience through the help or mediation of the Imam of his Time, as symbolized by the pure tree, who must have provided him a pure Word to meditate upon. We have already linked above to the article which explains how [Iqrā' – 'Read' or 'Remember'? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur'ān](#) (ism-i a'zam). [See [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) regarding the existence of Imams prior to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib who was the first Imam of the era of Prophet Muhammad but not the very first Imam over all.]

The Real Meaning (Ta'wil) of Noah's Ark and the Great Flood



"Noah's Ark is not a thing of wood but the Prophet's household; Noah's flood is not of water but instead, of ignorance and waywardness. And this is the downfall of sinners."

- Nasir-i Khusraw, Jami' al-Hikmatayn, tr. by Eric Ormsby as Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled, p. 47)

According to Henry Corbin's presentation of the Ismaili ta'wil of Qadi al-Nu'man, the **Flood** that is mentioned in the story of Noah is

*"a spiritual event, a real event that takes place in souls, a suffocation in souls.... **Most of Humanity will be drowned and suffocated by the exoteric (zahir) of the Divine Revelations**" (Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 113).*

To safeguard the souls of those who will be obedient to the Master of the Age, God ordered Noah:

*"And **construct an Ark** under Our eyes and Our inspiration (11:37).*

The esoteric meaning of which is

*" **to establish the da'wat, the esoteric sodality together with its grades and its initiation**, so that the spirits of its adherents may find, through the life of the spiritual science that is imbued with the nature of light (hayat al-'ilm al-ruhani al-nurani), salvation outside of submersion in unconsciousness, outside of negation and misleading, just as a ship preserves bodies from drowning in the physical sense" (Corbin, 115).*

Water, as we know, is a symbol of knowledge, but water can

"either safeguard life or cause death. Those who are conveyed by a secure ark float safe and sound from the peril of the water; those who have a rank in the da'wat float safe and sound on the ocean of knowledge" (Corbin, 115).

The Ark that Noah built was a living Ark, in that it was made up the human souls that gave their trust to Noah and were ready to accept both the zahir and the batin of the Revelation. The Ark was the Da'wat and at the head of the Da'wat is the Prophet and the Imam. **Thus, the Ark also signifies the Perfect Master of the Age who encompasses the entirety of the Da'wat and all the souls who board it by giving their souls to the Master of the Age in the spiritual and physical act of ba'yat.**

The Divine command to "Embark on the Ark, in the name of God, whether it move or be at rest!" (11:41) is a command given to the members of the "mystic brotherhood". Physically, this means to submit fully and trust the Master of the Age. Spiritually, **to embark on the Ark means that one is binding one's soul to the Universal Soul, through its Mazhar, who is the Imam of the time. One enters into the Da'wat al-Haqq "through the name of God" (11:41); according to Ismaili esotericism, the Prophets and the Imams are the Real Supreme Name of God.**

The command to embark on the Ark is similar to the command given to the "angels" to prostrate to Adam, who was the Living example of the Real Name of God, for God taught Adam all the Names and then Adam taught them to the "angels". Those who prostrated to Adam, are like those who embarked on the Ark in the Name of God.

The very next verse, "So the Ark floated with them on the waves like mountains" (11:42) means:

" The Imam, invested with esoteric teaching, floats in his da'wat like a mystical Ark, together with all those who have responded to his Call on the ocean of knowledge; he floats from mystical grade to grade (from hadd to hadd), in order to initiate each one into the higher spiritual science (ma'rifat)" (Corbin, 118).

In both, the story of the angels prostrating to Adam and the story of the followers boarding the Ark of Noah, there would be one figure (who is the leader of all those who will cut themselves off from the Da'wat of the Master of the Age) who does not heed the Divine Command. In the story of Adam, Iblis was too proud to submit and prostrate to Adam and in the story of Noah, one of his sons, who may have wanted the Imamatus for himself, refused to board the Ark and thereby became the Iblis of his time. According to Ismaili esoteric hermeneutics, **the word "mountain in the Qur'an often symbolizes a learned person, whether this be a true believer, who accepts both the zahir and the batin, or the literalist (zahiri) who also becomes an enemy to the Prophets and the Imams.**

In verse (11:42), the Ark of Imamatus floated with his Da'wat on the "waves like mountains", which means that these are the false mountains or enemies of the Imam who are only learned in the zahiri aspect of Knowledge.

"the waves that he [the Imam] confronts, towering like mountains, are the learned in the Law (Shariah), the literalists ('ulama' al-zahir) who pass as men of science, although they are empty of any knowledge in the true sense; that is why they collapse before the Imam, as the waves of the sea collapse after having given the illusion of being high mountains" (Corbin, 118).

Verse (11:42) also tells us that Noah called out to his son:

*"And it (the Ark) sailed with them through waves like mountains and Noah called out to his son who was apart [from them], 'O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the **disbelievers**.'"*

But Noah's son, who wanted to go with the false scholars and the enemies of the Imam (i.e. with the disbelievers), said:

*"I shall betake me to some **mountain** that will save me from the water. Noah said, 'this day there is no **protector** from the Command of Allah except **him on who He has Mercy**. And the **wave** came in between them, so he was among the drowned" (11:43).*

Noah's son was told not to be with the "disbelievers" but he replied that he will go to a "mountain" that will save him. Notice Noah says that there is no "protector" (when his son said he would go to a "mountain") EXCEPT "him on who He has Mercy". So we know **the mountain that Noah's son wanted to go to was indeed another human personality who Noah's son thought would protect him, but Noah knew that these persons who appeared as towering mountains of knowledge were actually "waves" which would consume his son and cause him to drown in the exoteric knowledge.**

The only protector, according to verse (11:43), is "him on who He has Mercy." The esoteric meaning of this is that the True Master is the Mazhar of God's Mercy (Rahma), just as the Prophet Muhammad is sent as "a Mercy to the Worlds" (Rahmatan li'l-'Alameen)" (21:107), and just as the Qur'an says about Hazrat Khidr: *"So they found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed Mercy (Rahma) from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge ('ilm) from Our own Presence" (18:65).*

The "Flood" is a spiritual hidden event that occurs throughout time, and can come in different forms.

There can be a flood of zahiri knowledge and even a flood of batini knowledge. The current age in which we live has been called the "information age" and there has certainly been a flood of information that can indeed suffocate and drown those who have no means of navigating the waters of knowledge.

However, Divine Mercy has established a means for souls from being lost and swept away by flood waters of all times, as it is said in the following verses:

"And a sign for them is that We carried their forefathers (dhuriyyat) in the loaded Ark [of Noah] and We have created for them the likes of it (mithlihi) on which they ride" (36:41-42).

In a hadith upon which there is consensus from both Sunni and Shia, the Prophet identified for us what or who is like the Ark of Noah:

"The place of my ahl-al-bayt among you is like the ark of Noah; whoever embarks on it is saved and whoever lags behind is drowned."

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza speaking about his father and Imam of the Time, Shah Abdu's-salam, as the Ark of Noah of the time that should be boarded for safe passage:

*Some people appeal to God while they have no knowledge or the Imam of their time, or oppose him. **They should enter the Ark of the Noah of the time because all other ships will be drowned.** Therefore follow the (spiritual) authority and your leader, so that you may sit in the house of the Truth, entering the Ark of the Noah of your time, and reaching the land safely. **That authority, that Noah of your time, is the Imam of***

your time, Shah Abdu's-salam Shah. Know him, and enter the Ark of Noah, i.e. the path of his preaching (tariqat-i da'wat), so that your faith may become perfect, and your souls may become safe from calamities.

- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, Pir Pandiyat i Jawanmardi (tr. by W. Ivanow as Advices of Manliness), p. 18

Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of Ayat al-Nur



God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. God guideth unto His light whom He will. And God speaketh to mankind in allegories, for God is Knower of all things. (Qur'an 24:35)

In our interpretation of this famous Qur'anic *ayat*, known as the *ayat al-nur* (Verse of Light), the 'niche' symbolizes the Imam's physical body and the 'lamp' with its 'glass' symbolizes his pure soul.

The 'blessed tree' is Imam's pure lineage which extends back through the previous Imams, the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Ibrahim and Adam himself; a lineage both physical and spiritual from which many great Prophets, saints and sages have come forth.

The light inside the lamp which shines and illuminates the darkness like a 'shining star' is the Light of Imamate which is the source of the Imam's virtues, knowledge and guidance.

It is a universal spiritual Light, 'neither of the East nor the West', [The Inner Meaning \(Ta'wil\) of 'Heavens and Earth' in the Qur'an](#).

When the Imam departs this world and hands over the Imamate to the next Imam, one bearer of Light is succeeded by another bearer of Light; but their Light is one and the same and in reality there is no change, only [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#).

Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of Jinn, Angels and Demons



In his book, *Jami al-Hikmatayn*, Nasir Khusraw, the Ismaili *Hujjah* of Khurasan, clearly tells us that every human being has a *jinn* like quality within him or her. This *jinn* like quality is the "rational soul", which is also a "potential angel"- because jinns are potential angels. Using the word "parī", which is the Persian equivalent for the arabic word "*jinn*", Nasir Khusraw writes:

"We say that the rational soul in every human being is a potential angel, and the potential angel is a parī, as we have said. The concupiscent soul and the irascible soul in everybody are two potential demons. Everyone whose rational soul brings the irascible and the concupiscent souls to heel becomes an angel. Everyone whose concupiscent and irascible souls subjugate his rational soul turns into a demon in actuality."

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 132)

"angels are souls of surpassing benignity and subject to the nature of the heavenly sphere. And if asked, what is a 'demon', we answer that they are wicked souls"

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 90)

Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah has also mentioned the Islamic concept of angels and demons (evil spirits):

" Islam acknowledges the existence of angels, of great souls who have developed themselves to the highest possible planes of the human soul and higher, and who are centres of the forces which are scattered throughout the Universe. Without going as far as Christianity, Islam recognizes the existence of evil spirits which seek by means of their secret suggestions to us to turn us from good, from that straight way traced by God's finger for the eternal happiness of the humblest as of the greatest-Abraham, Jesus, Mohammed."
- Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*

Nasir Khusraw goes on to further tell us that what makes the *parī* or potential angel, which is also the rational soul, leave this world as an angel is obedience and what makes it leave the world as a demon is disobedience:

The parīs are in two categories. Whoever amongst them remains obedient goes out of this world as an angel; whoever turns away from obedience goes out of this world as a demon. Among the common folk it is well known that the parī is lovely of countenance while the demon has an ugly face. Since the demon's ugliness is a result of disobedience, the beauty of the parī must necessarily come from obedience. This beauty and this ugliness both result from belief (i'tiqād), and its form is spiritual, not physical.

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 131-132)

The Ismaili Path is the Path of Transformation, whereby one can evolve one's soul to the level of an angel. Thus, Nasir Khusraw also tells us that it is the Prophet and the Imams who must be obeyed in order to become an angel in reality. This is because the one who has the ability to make someone an actual angel from a potential angel must themselves be an actual angel.

"[And let us praise] the angels of the heaven of religion, guides of the worlds to the Last Day, the Imams of truth, the guides of humankind, from the offspring of the Prophet and his designated successor..."

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 22)

Whoever is capable of transforming someone from an angel in potentiality to an angel in actuality has reached an angelic rank; he is God's representative on earth... It is for this reason that God has commanded us, after having faith in Him – glory be to Him – that we should have faith in His angels, His Book, and His emissaries; it is as He says, 'They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers [Qur'an 2:285].'

- Nasir Khusraw, *Jami al-Hikmatayn* (in *Between Reason and Revelation* by Eric Ormsby, p. 130)

Was Eve (Hawa) Literally Created From Adam's Rib?

The Qur'an does not mention the fable of Eve being created from Adam's left rib. Rather, it says, as Mawlana Hazir Imam has mentioned on multiple occasions, that men and women are created from a single Soul.

Qadi Nu'man, in his *Asâs al-Ta'wil* (p. 58-59), provides the esoteric interpretation of the popular story of Eve being created from Adam's left rib as meaning that Adam's supreme hujjat (high ranking member of the Da'wa) was from amongst the 12 hujjats with Adam, and that Eve, represents or signifies the esoteric or batin of the faith. The human rib cage consists of 24 ribs (12 on each side), and in the historical Isma'ili da'wah structure there were 12 hujjats of the day and 12 hujjats of the night.

Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of Jesus Turning Water Into Wine



On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you. Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

- John 2:1-10

The good wine running out represents how the Jewish *shar'iah* and *tanzil* had lost power and potency leaving people intoxicated in its *zahir* (hung up on the outer forms such as the laws) since no inner meaning remained. According to the master of the feast, normally at this point the "poor wine" would be brought in because guests are too drunk to be able to tell the difference. The poor wine that gets snuck in represents the expired and corrupted *tanzil* without its *ta'wil* taught by the false Imams like the Pharisees.

"[Pharisees] observed the Law dutifully and attacked the followers of the Nazarene Jesus who were posing a challenge to his Pharisaic tenets and way of life...Pharisees are...a well-connected political group who are determined to defend that kind of Jewish community which Jesus threatened and which could be outside

Pharisaic control....They are the zealous advocates of a Judaism which contrasts with the interpretation of the Law ascribed to Jesus."

- "Pharisees." In *A Dictionary of the Bible.*, edited by W. R. F. Browning. Oxford Biblical Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e1462>

The water being filled into stone water jars normally used for Jewish rites of purification is significant in that it shows that Jesus is about to reinvigorate the Jewish tradition with the help of *tay'id*. Water symbolizes *tay'id* (divine inspiration) that Jesus was receiving from God. The fact that there were six stone jars represents the 6 Natiqs (Speaker-Prophets) who turn water into wine, meaning they each create a set of symbols and parables or bring laws infused with inner meanings from the *tay'id* (water) that they receive. [Did God Create the Heavens and Earth in Six Days?](#).

Nasir Khusraw in his *Wajh-i Din* (Discourse 31) gives the *ta'wil* of land watered by rain and streams as referring to the possessors of *tay'id* (Natiq, Asas, Imam, Bab, and Hujjat). Jesus was the next *Natiq* (Speaker-Prophet who initiates a new cycle, bringing a new law) after Moses.

Jesus turns this water into good wine or proper *tanzil*, showing how Jesus is a greater unfolding rather than feeding them bad wine after they had been drinking the wine of Judaism. He is refreshing the Jewish faith with his new ***tanzil* - his new parables, symbols, and teachings which were more appropriate for that time and context**. This is symbolized by the master of the feast saying "...*But you have kept the good wine until now*" whereas false Imams like the Pharisees were serving poor wine that had lost its potency or inner meaning.

Nasir Khusraw also gives the *ta'wil* of (47:15) of the four rivers of paradise where each river corresponds with one of the four hadd (ranks: Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, *Natiq*, *Asas*). In his *ta'wil*, the river of wine flows to the *Natiq*. He also speaks about how differences among people developed because they become perplexed and swoon due to the parables and symbols in the Book and shariat. This occurs when the "good wine" runs dry and false imams attempt to sneak in "poor wine", the meaning of which has been explained above.

"... From the Divine Word flows wine in the nāṭiq by which is the power of the bodies and by which people become perplexed and babble. Similarly, the nāṭiq has compiled the shari'at by which the customs and rites are preserved. The difference among people occurred with respect to the parables and similes that are in the Book and the shari'at, because of which they become perplexed and swoon, just as they swoon by drinking wine..."

- Nasir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i Din*, Discourse 11

Is Zahir and Batin equivalent to Form and Essence? Can the Batin have physical form?

Zahir and Batin are NOT the same as Form and Essence. Zahir and Batin can BOTH have a physical form. A ritual can be batini and still have form. For example, Namaz is Zahir and the Dawah (hierarchy of individuals who call people towards the Truth) is its ta'wil and batin. Both Namaz and da'wah have physical form, but Dawah is batin, not zahir.

Nasir Khusraw, the 11th century Ismaili philosopher, poet, and traveler, wrote that the Zahir of the Shariah like Namaz, Hajj, Sawm, Wudu, etc. are not necessary for human wellbeing. They are only important because of their Batin. The Batin does not need the Zahir to exist. The Zahir needs the Batin.

He also explains, that the Zahir of Wudu is to wash parts of body. He says the batin of Wudu is to pledge Bay'ah to the Imam. Now here the batin of Wudu still consists of a form. Whenever you perform the Bay'ah ritual, that is still a form and yet it is batin.

In Ismaili history we have had Imams abolish the zahir of the Shariah and only the batin of the Shariah remained. Such is the case today. The current Ismaili Imam in his guidance to the community has explained that "Our interpretation of Islam is ESOTERIC, it is NOT EXOTERIC."

Eid-ul-Fitr and its Tawil (esoteric interpretation)



Nasir-i Khusraw in his Wajh-i Din: Discourse 23 writes that exoterically Eid-ul-Fitr is the day when the fast breakers are liberated from the fast and can obtain food and drink and attain physical strength. Similarly, the human soul also requires its own type of food- which is knowledge. And Eid-ul-Fitr, esoterically, refers to the Mawlana 'Ali, because his esoteric interpretation (ta'wil) liberates the people from the lack of knowledge and allows them to attain spiritual strength by gaining knowledge of the tawil. Just as on Eid, the fast-breakers become eaters, through the knowledge brought by Mawlana 'Ali, the silent ones become speakers- in that they are able to share and discuss knowledge with each other and rejoice with the ta'wil.

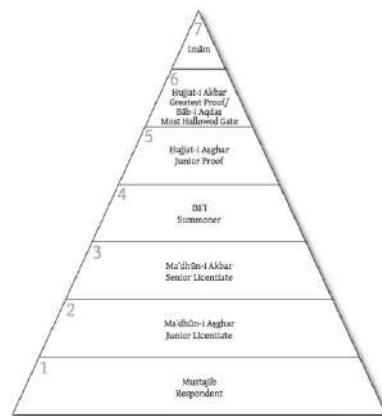
"I am the purpose of fasting, and the sacred anniversaries in the months of the year."

– Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (*Khuṭbah al-Iftikhār*)

And so while we rejoice on this day of Eid, we should also remember that with the presence of the Imam, who is the present and living 'Ali of the time, with his continuous blessings and guidance our Jamat can always be liberated from the lack of knowledge. And in this sense, every day in Jamat Khana is an Eid. Perhaps it is in relation to this that Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah had explained to the community that in Jamatkhana, for all twelve months of the year, it is Eid.

May both the Day and the Person of Eid-ul-Fitr shower blessings upon us all.

The Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of 'Heavens and Earth' in the Qur'an



'Heavens and Earth' are

signs (ayat) that figure prominently in the Qur'an (30:25, 3:190, 65:12, 31:20, 31:10 to cite just a few).

Below it will be seen that, according to one esoteric interpretation, these are symbols for the "*Hudud al-Din*" (the Ranks of Faith) of the "*Da'wat al-Haqq*" (Summons to the Truth):

Throughout history, the Ismaili *da'wah* consisted of a formal hierarchy of spiritual teachers and scholars working under the Imam of the Time. The most basic form of the Ismaili *da'wah* hierarchy is as follows:

1. *Imam*
2. *Bab (Gate)*
3. *Hujjah (Proof)*
4. *Da'i (Summoner)*
5. *Ma'dhun Akbar (Senior Teacher)*
6. *Ma'dhun Asghar (Junior Teacher)*
7. *Mustajib (Respondent or Initiate)*

It must be remembered that the Ismaili *Da'wah* hierarchy is based on esoteric 'ilm (knowledge) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*), not material wealth or political power. The concept of the ranks of knowledge is found in the several verses of the Holy Qur'an:

We raise in ranks (darajat) whom We please; and over every possessor of knowledge is a possessor of knowledge. (Holy Qur'an 12:76)

It is God who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. The Command descends among them so you may know that God is powerful over all things and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge. (Holy Qur'an 65:12)

The above seven *Da'wah* Ranks are called the "*Hudud al-Din*" (the Ranks of Faith) in Ismaili terminology. Together, these seven Dignitaries are the "Seven Heavens" and "Seven Earths" mentioned in the Qur'an. This means that each Rank from the Imam to the *Mustajib* is a "Heaven" for the rank immediately below; likewise, each Rank from the *Bab* to the *Mustajib* to the person outside the *Da'wah* Hierarchy is an "Earth" for the Rank immediately above it. For example, the *Bab* is an "Earth" compared to the Imam and a

“Heaven” compared to the *Hujjah*. The *Mustajib* is an “Earth” compared to the *Ma’dhun Asghar* and a “Heaven” compared to those outside the Ismaili *Da’wah*.

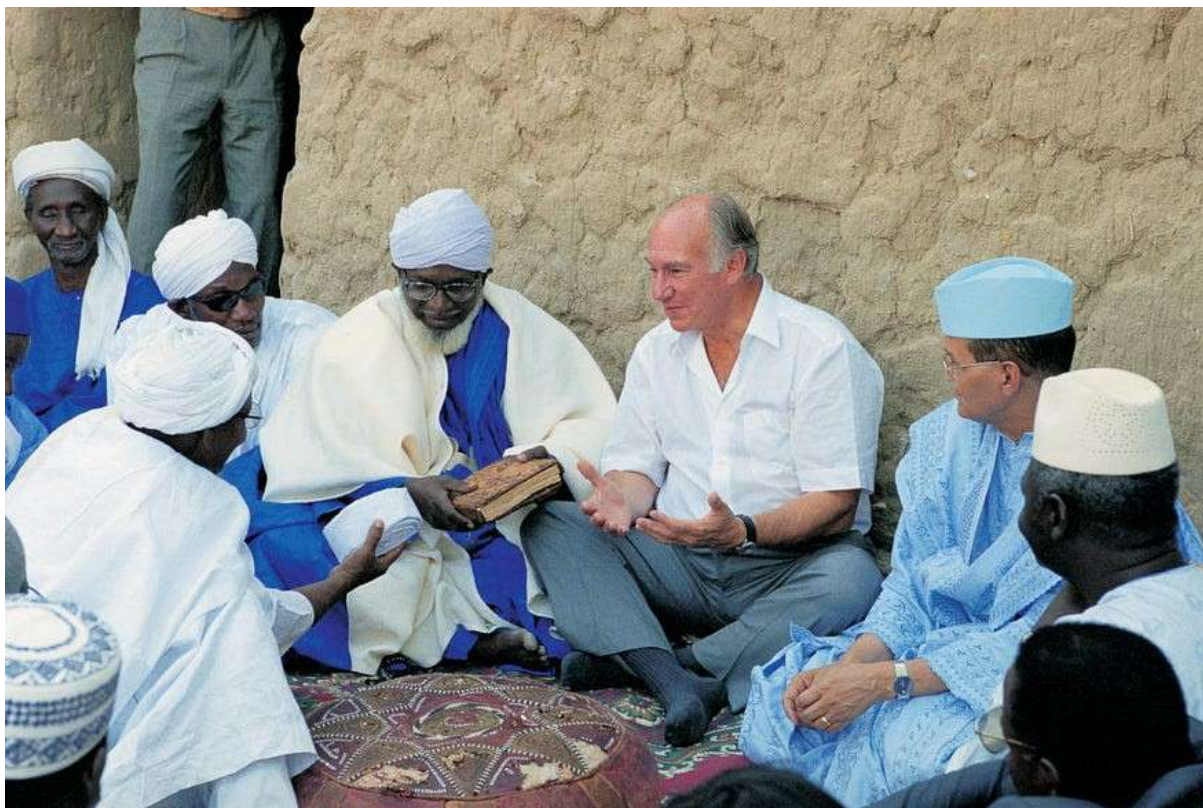
The above Ismaili *Da’wah* Ranks exist and are active in every age and time – both [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) and after him. Prophets of past periods used to receive [Iqrā’ – ‘Read’ or ‘Remember’? Rethinking the First Revelation of the Qur’ān](#) from the dignitaries of the *Da’wah*. For example, Prophet Muhammad himself was spiritually initiated by Imam Abu Talib and his *Bab*, Hazrat Khadijah al-Kubra; Prophet Adam was spiritually initiated by Imam Hunayd. Prophet Jesus was spiritually initiated by Mary, the *Bab* of the Imam Khuzaymah. Prophet Abraham was spiritually initiated by Imam Malik al-Salam (called Melchizedek in the Bible).

At another level of esoteric interpretation, Heavens and Earth represent something else which are still related in a sense to the above hierarchy:

The highest level (hadd) of the spiritual world is variously called the Universal Intellect (Aql-i Kull), the Throne (arsh), Heaven, the Light (Nur) of Imamat, the First Intellect, the Pen, etc. According to Nasir Khusraw, the Universal Intellect is the real paradise or heaven. Under the Universal Intellect, the second level (hadd) is the Universal Soul. In the *Wajh-i Din*, Hujjat Nasir-i Khusraw writes that the "earth" symbolizes the Universal Soul, and that just as the physical earth is the sustainer of all bodies, the universal soul (which we can think of as the spiritual earth) is the sustainer of all souls.

Below these there are various angelic levels which coincide with the levels of Paradise [the seven paradises, for example], and eventually this hierarchy begins to "densify" and we reach physical reality as we know it. In between, there are numerous levels, and each level is like its own "world" and only God knows the innumerable realms and worlds between physical reality as we know it and the highest Universal Intellect. God Himself, in the classical Isma'ili perspective, occupies no "level" as He is too great to be limited to any level and His single Command - which keeps everything in being - also encompasses all these levels and worlds.

The True Inner Meaning (Ta'wil) of Jesus' Miracles



"And will make him [i.e. Jesus] a messenger unto the Children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's permission. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's permission..." (Qur'an 3:49).

"The gist of what is said in the verse (3:49) is that Hazrat Isa in his time used to make a figure of a bird out of clay and used to breathe ism-i azam into it and it used to become a bird by Allah's command. He also used to heal those born blind, lepers and used to raise the dead by Allah's command.

In the above-mentioned miracles, the ta'wil of the clay is the status of a mu'min; and that of bird is an angel and a spiritual entity (ruhani). The ta'wil of making clay, mixing water with dust, is to mix 'ilmul-yaqin (knowledge of certainty) with the belief and faith of a mu'min; and that of making a figure of a bird out of clay is creating the capacity and zeal for angelicity and spirituality in that mu'min. The ta'wil of breathing into the figure of the bird is to grant the dhikr of ism-i azam and special ibadat to a prepared mu'min; and that of becoming a bird is the spiritual birth of a mu'min, namely, the beginning of the angelic and spiritual life and the flight in the world of spirituality.

The ta'wil of healing the one born blind is to grant the open inner eye to a new Muslim, giving him the above mentioned kind of spiritual training.

The ta'wil of healing a leper is to improve (the condition of) a mu'min who is trapped in the extremely intense light and white luminousness in the beginning of spirituality.

And the ta'wil of raising the dead is to revive spiritually and restore to their previous position those who used to live in the life of the spirit of faith (ruhul-iman) and then had died with respect to ruhul-iman. This is the ta'wil and wisdom of the above-mentioned miracles of Hazrat Isa (a.s.).

Now the question arises whether the Chief of the Prophets, Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.s.) also performed such miracles, or not? You will certainly reply, why not? For, he possessed all the perfect qualities of all the prophets and was the closest friend of God. These ta'wili miracles are such that they are related not only to the Prophet, but also to the holy Imams.

- 'Allamah Hunzai, Quran and Spirituality, p. 37

"I am the Christ who heals the blind and the lepers, who creates the birds and disperses the storm-clouds. I am he and he is I (ana huwa wa huwa ana). Indeed, Christ is the establisher of the truth, he is the king of this world and of the hereafter. Jesus the Son of Mary is from me and I am from him. He is the supreme Word of God."

- Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, (Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, Kitab al-Kashf)

Ta'wil of To Allah We Belong and to Him We Return

On the Ta'wil of 'Inna li'Llahi wa-inna ilayhi Raji'un' (We belong to Allah and unto Him we return)

"We say, by the grace of God, may He be exalted, that it is incumbent upon people to say these words when physical calamities befall them and when they are confronted with difficult tasks. As God, may He be exalted, says: 'Those who say, when a misfortune strikes them: Lo! We belong to Allah and unto Him we are returning' (Q. 2:156-57). The Arabs describe the difficult times as the darkness of night, because no task is more difficult than one from which people cannot see a way of escape. That difficult situation is darkness.

Darkness is of two kinds, physical and spiritual. Physical darkness is due to the night and physical calamities (karha-yi bi-saamaan). Spiritual darkness however, is ignorance and the intractable questions concerning the intelligibles. Dispelling these two darknesses we have described, comes from God through the mediation of two lights. One is the sun that dispels the physical darkness and the other is the Imam of the time who, as the sun of insight for spiritual darkness, unravels difficult knots. When people are overcome by physical darkness and difficulty, they must submit to the decree of God, be pleased with whatever has been decreed and say: 'We belong to Allah and unto Him we are returning'. That is, we belong to Allah, accept what He has decreed and return to Him if any physical calamity befalls us whereby we perish physically.

In ta'wil, when the believers face a difficult question regarding the intelligibles that they cannot solve, they must recite these same words in the sense: 'Our souls belong to the lord of the time, as we have received spiritual life from him and our return during difficulties is unto him,' and know that 'we cannot solve this question and the knowledge of this is with the lord of the time,' so that the door of blessings may open for them. Either they themselves may be able to understand it, or a hadd (rank) from the hadds of religion may open the door of spiritual blessings for them."

- Nasir-e Khusraw, *Wajh-e Din* (tr. by Faquir M. Hunzai) in "*An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*" (ed. by Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh and Kutub Kassam), p. 207.

Is Mawlana Hazar Imam Ismaili? Is His Family Ismaili?

The term "Ismaili" is a historical reference - it refers to all of those who recognize the Shi'a Imam to dwell in the lineage of Imams descended from Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq. Therefore, this label "Ismaili" certainly applies to the "Ismaili Imams". **In this sense, YES, Mawlana Hazar Imam IS ISMAILI.** The Imams are totally "Ismaili" because they surely recognize that the Shi'a Imam dwells in the lineage of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq. They belong to that Ismaili lineage - so the label "Ismaili" FIRST and FOREMOST belongs to the Imams of the Ismailis.

The term "Ismaili" of course is a historical label - it was never initially used by Ismailis for themselves. The Ismailis originally used to describe their version of Islam as "the Summons to the Truth" or "the Rightly Guided Summons." The Imam was always the leader and head of this Summons. It was the enemies of the Ismailis who first called them "Ismaili" and then by the 13th century, the Ismailis were using this term for themselves.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Mawlana Hazar Imam even refer to themselves as "Ismailis." Please see the below examples:

*" **We Ismailis** now in the same spirit [as Hazrat Ali had done] accept the Khalifat of the first Khalifs and such other Khalifs as during the last thirteen centuries helped the cause of Islam, politically, socially and from a worldly point of view. On the other hand the Spiritual Imamat remained with Hazrat Ali and remains with his direct descendants always alive till the Day of Judgement.*

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (The Final Reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni Doctrines)

Read more at <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10120/>

*" **We Ismailis** must toil with our hands as well as our brains, on factory assembly lines and in offices as well as in shops (,he repeatedly has told members of his East African community). We must also work hand in hand with the newly liberated Africans.*

- Mawlana Hazar Imam, (Sports Illustrated Interview, August 10, 1964)

Read more at <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10341/>

*"On their religion **we Ismailis** have no view; in the Qu'ran it very clearly says no Muslim may judge the strength of another Muslim's beliefs."*

- Mawlana Hazar Imam, (Sunday Times, Dec 12, 1965)

Read more at <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10176/>

*"Our historic adherence is to the Jafari Madhhab and other Madhahib of close affinity, and it continues, under the leadership of the hereditary **Ismaili Imam of the time**. This adherence is in harmony also with our*

acceptance of Sufi principles of personal search and balance between the zahir and the spirit or the intellect which the zahir signifies.

- Mawlana Hazar Imam, (Message to Amman Conference June 2005)

Read more at <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7426/>

Above, we clearly see the Imams applying the "Ismaili" label to themselves and including themselves among the Ismailis - as they use the term "we Ismailis".

The term "Ismaili" thus embraces the Ismaili Imam and the "Ismaili murids" or the "Ismaili community" that follows the Imam. But we have to remember that the Ismaili Imams are first and foremost "Ismaili" because they are literally of the House of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq - just like the term "Alawi" is used first and foremost for Descendants of Imam 'Ali. Then, in the second place, the term "Ismaili" can be used for all the murids or followers of the Ismaili Imams - giving us the usage of "Ismaili" as we apply it to the "Ismaili Community" today. In this respect, the Ismaili Da'i from the Bohra community explains how the label "Ismaili" is quite accurate and praiseworthy because it refers to those whose physical (and then spiritual) ancestry goes back to Mawlana Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq:

"This name designates those whose ancestry goes back to Mawlānā Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, ibn Muḥammad al-Bāqir, ibn 'Alī Zayn al-'Abidin, ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ṭāqī, ibn 'Alī al-Murtaḍā al-Waṣī. This is our inherent name. It is our honour and our glory before all of the other branches of Islam, because we stand on the Path of the Truth, in following our guides – the Imāms. We drink at an abundant fountain, and we hold firmly to the guiding lines of their walāyah. Thus they cause us to climb from rank to rank among the degrees of proximity [to God] and excellence."

– Dā'ī 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd, (*The Destroyer of Error and the Death of He Who Would Defend it, Fasl*

It also helps to think about this logically - of all the people in the world who believe in the Ismaili Imam, follow the teachings of the Ismaili Imam on Islam, and KNOW the interpretations of the Ismaili Imam on Islam - the person of the Ismaili Imam would be the highest and the foremost. Thus, the Imam is "Ismaili" in the truest and deepest sense - much more than his murids or followers or community who are "Ismaili" in the derivative sense of following the Ismaili Imam. But this is important because any time Hazar Imam uses the word "Islam" or describes himself as "Muslim" (as he does in many cases), it would be WRONG to conclude from this that Hazar Imam is "just Muslim" but "not Ismaili." Because there is no such thing as "generic" Islam or "Islam in general" - except as a construct of someone's own mind. At the end of the day, the key question is "which" Islam does Hazar Imam believe in and embody? Obviously, the "Islam" that the Ismaili Imam interprets and determines and lives is "Ismaili Islam" and nothing else. Thus, Hazar Imam is Ismaili.

This brings us to the second point - the difference between the Ismaili Imam and the Ismaili murid. In common speech today, it has become the norm to equate the label "Ismaili" with "murid." The question - "is the Imam and his family Ismaili" is usually asked in reference to the performance of some Ismaili Tariqah practice. For example, people ask - if the Imam is Ismaili, then why does he not say Du'a with us, or attend Jamatkhana to perform his prayers. The simple answer is that these Ismaili Tariqah practices like Du'a, Dasond, regular attendance in Jamatkhana, drinking Ab-i Shifa are Tariqah practices for Ismaili MURIDS. They are PRESCRIBED by the Ismaili Imam. Mawlana Hazar Imam is NOT a "murid" (a seeker of spiritual perfection) because he is both the "Murshid" (the spiritual guide) and the "Murad" (what is sought) of the murids.

- The Imam occupies a higher spiritual status than the murids: the murid is literally one who "seeks", whereas the Imam is the one who is "being sought."
- The murid offers and submits his or her bay'ah to the Imam and takes the Imam as his Spiritual Master and the Imam accepts the bay'ah; the Imam does not offer his bay'ah to the murids and take the murid as his Spiritual Master.
- The Ismaili Imam is spiritually perfect and complete, so he is not seeking anything whereas the murids seek spiritual perfection from the Imam.

Tariqah practices like Du'a, Dasond, Ghat Pat, etc. are not binding on the Imam at all and he need not practice any of them: the healthy doctor who prescribes medicine to his patients has no need to take that medicine himself. Thus, the label "Ismaili" applies to both the Ismaili Imam and the Ismaili murids - but the Imam and murids are at different levels and therefore, their actions and responsibilities in this world are different. It would be an error, therefore, to use the category "Ismaili" ONLY for an "Ismaili Murid" and exclude the "Ismaili Imam" who is the Murshid from the domain of "Ismaili."

So what about the Imam's family? It is a fact that when a new Imam assumes the office of Imam, the Imam's immediate family including his brothers, sisters, (and in Hazar Imam's case, his father) give bay'ah to him. This is documented in the biographies of Hazar Imam such as "The Aga Khans" by Frischauer. Whoever in the Imam's family has given him bay'ah IS an Ismaili. Sometimes the Imam marries a non-Ismaili and she remains non-Ismaili - like Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's third wife who was Christian. Other times, the Imam's wife is a non-Ismaili Muslim (like many wives of prior Imams whom they marry for dynastic reasons), and in other cases, the Imam marries a woman who is Ismaili and is spiritually elevated - like the 3 Mata Salamats (wife of Imam Khalil Allah and mother of Imam Hasan Ali Shah, the wife of Imam Aga Ali Shah and mother of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, and the wife of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah).

When, for example, Mata Salamat and Prince Sadruddin passed away, there were special ruhani prayers held for them in Jamatkhana across the world - this is because they were both Ismailis. Why else were

there Tariqah practices held for their souls? In general, we should assume that Hazar Imam's immediate family ARE Ismailis - including his children and his brother because we have no reason to suppose they are not Ismaili. Their own tireless work for the Imam's mission and the benefit of the Jamat makes their beliefs and their commitment to the Imam quite evident so we should assume the Imam's own family are Ismailis. They even refer to their father as Mawlana Hazar Imam, and they greet the Jamat by saying Ya Ali Madad.

Why Did The Aga Khan Get Divorced?

I hope to reorganize my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — **though not at the expense of the community.**

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

The focus on the Imam's divorces in tabloid media is also very much informed by the stigma that divorce continues to carry in Western society — a stigma that comes from the Christian view that human sexual relations are inherently sinful (resulting from Adam's original sin), that marriage is a holy sacrament that alone permits sexual activity, and that divorce is a sin.

For the longest time in European society, divorced persons — especially women — were seen as “damaged goods” and the Catholic Church still recognizes divorce as a great sin. Due to the British colonial influence, this view of divorce being sinful and divorcees being tainted is still prevalent all over the world including South Asia. None of these ideas about sexuality, marriage and divorce hold true in Islam.

First, marriage in Islam has no religious or spiritual significance. Marriage is a social contract, nothing more.

And one can marry another person for a variety of reasons — for love, for economic reasons, for political reasons, etc. As long as the marriage is consensual and contracted, it is totally legitimate from an Islamic perspective. A divorce is not sinful; it is a voluntary termination of the marriage contract by consent of both parties. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III in his published Memoirs explains how in Islam, **marriage is not a sacred or religious matter but solely a social contract between two people.**

Similarly, divorce in Islam is not a sin - in certain cases divorce is the best and proper course of action:

*"It is important that it should be realized among non-Muslims that the Islamic view of the institution of marriage - - and of all that relates to it, divorce, plurality of wives and so on -- is a question solely of contract, of consent and of definite and mutually accepted responsibilities. **The sacramental concept of marriage is not Islam's; therefore except indirectly there is no question of its religious significance, and there is no religious ceremony to invest it with the solemnity and the symbolism which appertain to marriage in other religions, like Christianity and Hinduism. It is exactly analogous to -- in the West -- an***

*entirely civil and secular marriage in a registry office or before a judge. Prayers of course can be offered -- prayers for happiness, prosperity and good health -- but there can be no religious ritual beyond these, and they indeed are solely a matter of personal choice....I have referred before to the differences between the Christian and the Muslim view of marriage and to the misunderstandings which arise. Whereas those brought up in the Christian tradition, with its sacramental concept of marriage, find it hard to understand the practical and contractual basis of the Islamic idea of marriage, **for Muslims it is just as difficult to comprehend the laws in the West which compel the continuance of an unhappy marriage and insist on the artificial and arranged sin of adultery in order to bring to an end an association that has become insupportable and to permit both partners to make a fresh start in life.**"*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, (*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, 1954)

Like all human beings on this earth - including the Prophets like Muhammad and Abraham - the Imam lives a full domestic life with all the problems and issues that marriage and family can bring to one's life. As reported in the Qur'an, even the Prophet Muhammad experienced domestic arguments with his wives. Many of the previous Shi'i Imams had several wives and went through divorce as well.

From an Islamic point of view, it is utterly disrespectful to intrude and pry into the private domestic affairs of another Muslim and even more disrespectful to read about them and publicize them. But the British tabloid business has no other reason to exist except this - so we should not be surprised that the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening Standard* - the sources of some of these allegations - make a living off this and have been slandering the Aga Khan for years. Any cursory reading of their articles will show that they lack practices that any serious piece of journalism has like footnotes, sourcing, date and time of statements, and coverage of all points of view both favorable and unfavorable.

We have seen the *Daily Mail* post pictures and inaccurately label the figures in them. This is the same tabloid that was running articles about Justin Bieber and UFOs. The general point is that the *Daily Mail* and similar sources simply cannot be trusted as authentic sources of information — especially about the figure of the Imam of the Time whose role, history, and position are not even well understood by mainstream journalism outlets.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV has brought for the past 60 years — and continues to bring — spiritual, ethical, social, and material succour to the entire world through his tireless and selfless development work through the AKDN activities. The demands of the Imam's mission and extensive work have also taken a toll on his family life. **The Imam even makes his decisions on whom and when to get married to based on the well being of the Ismaili Muslim community. The Aga Khan even gives the Ismaili community greater priority in his life than his own wife and children.** The Aga Khan's biographer Willi Frischauer records the Imam saying the following when he married his first wife Begum Salima in 1969: *"I would not marry a woman who I did not believe could help me. I hope to reorganise my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community."*— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, (Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 283)

In an interview given ten years after his first marriage, the Imam described how his spiritual and material responsibilities keep him away from seeing his wife and children:

AM: You have told me very little about your family?

Aga Khan: The burden of work and travel is very severe. So although I am extremely fortunate to have a wonderful wife and children, I can't spend as much time with them as I wish. But I hope to have more time for my family later on. (Interviewer: He said exactly the same on the eve of his wedding ten years ago).

– (Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, 'The Quiet Prince of Islam', May 27, 1979,

NanoWisdoms <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/>)

1. Concerning the divorce proceedings of the Aga Khan with his estranged wife Begum Inaara, **it was very clear from the beginning that Inaara's lawyers were looking for ways to win her the biggest divorce settlement possible.** They tried many tactics including attempting to move the divorce proceedings to the UK instead of France and falsely accusing the Imam of having an affair – an allegation that was eventually rejected and struck down by the final court ruling from the highest French Court called Paris Court de Cassation. However, the Daily Mail was clearly hesitant to admit this and would not even write a separate article to update the status of the divorce case. Instead, they merely mentioned this in passing in an article about Sarkozy and the Aga Khan. In the end, the Imam and Inaara agreed to a private divorce settlement, and she received a generous payout (but lower than the \$250 million her lawyers were pursuing in court). Divorce court proceedings are not about getting to the truth of a matter and are usually full of allegations and counter-allegations. Therefore, it is not methodologically appropriate to use tabloid reporting of divorce proceedings as a source of authentic information concerning the character of Aga Khan or to assess his status as the Imam of the Time. That being said, the most recent court ruling clearly absolves the Aga Khan of such allegations. The Ismaili Imam for his part gives no credence to tabloid reporting as he says:

"I am not affected by suggestions in print that I live a luxurious Western life, while most Ismailis live in underdeveloped Eastern countries. These are just smears by cheap magazines. Serious publications are aware of the work we do and of our achievements in many countries. Such smear stories never appear in Asian publications."— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, ([Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, 'The Quiet Prince of Islam', May 27, 1979, NanoWisdoms](#))

2. **So many of the pictures of the Aga Khan circulating online are clearly doctored.** Note the pictures below which show how the face of the Aga Khan was digitally superimposed on Hugh Hefner's face, How Hillary Clinton was replaced by two other women, etc. — some person has obviously taken the trouble to do this and that is a reflection of their character and those who share such pictures:



It should be further added that in Nizari Ismailism, as practiced today, there is no rule about women having to wear hijab or cover their faces. Men and women are allowed to mix freely, to socialize, to shake hands, etc. Much of the rules of social behavior in Muslim societies today are rooted in culture as opposed to faith. The emphasis in the Ismaili Tariqah is on behaving ethically toward one another and toward seeing other men and women as one's fellow spiritual brothers and sisters.

3. As a final point, we would like to caution against adopting a method where one tries to verify their recognition of the Imam by assessing and scrutinizing each and every detail of his personal life. One problem with this approach is the lack of information sources – besides tabloids, there is nowhere to get the information. The second problem is the approach itself. **The Imam is not the Imam because he passed some sort of democratic moral/ethical test measured and graded by his followers and other onlookers.** The Imam is the Imam because God inspires him with His Light and Spirit, and the two proofs that the Imam must have to be recognized as the Imam are 1) his lineal descent from the previous Imam and 2) the appointment or *nass* of the previous Imam ([The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#)). These are the only two elements one should be assessing in the quest to recognize the Imam.

Putting the Imam to a test – a test of knowledge or a test of behavior – is a contradiction because the seeker would be the one grading the Teacher on the test. And this act of assessing the Imam and determining his suitability is an implicit act of affirming one's own self as the Imam. After all, isn't it the Imam alone who knows the best course of ethical and moral action for any given situation?

In the parable of Moses and Khidr in the Qur'an Chapter 18 is a great illustration of how even the Prophet Moses was unable to fathom or judge or comprehend the purpose and meaning of the actions of Khidr – which appeared to be immoral and unethical to Moses' eyes, but in reality, were quite righteous. If indeed, the Aga Khan has the *nass* and the lineal descent, then he IS the Imam and his behavior, actions, words and deeds must be *ma'sum* (protected from sin) by definition because he is the Imam.

See this article for more details on how the Imam works tirelessly and selflessly to serve his community and the world at large, often using his personal wealth to fund AKDN and community programs: [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#)

Does the Aga Khan's wealth come from the tithes (dasond) of his followers?

The Aga Khan's personal wealth comes from four sources:

- 1) his family inheritance which includes the wealth generated by the real estate investments of his great grandmother Lady Aly Shah,
- 2) the inherited personal businesses and investments of his grandfather Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III
- 3) the horse-breeding business inherited from his father Prince Aly Khan
- 4) The Aga Khan's personal investments in tourism and real estate development (such as in the Costa Smeralda in Sardinia, the Meridiana Airline, Ciga Hotel chain)

The Aga Khan's personal wealth is kept entirely separate from the tithes (religious dues and contributions) given by the Ismailis. The tithes or religious dues of the Ismailis and all Ismaili Imamat assets are used exclusively for the needs, investments, and expenses of the Ismaili community - such as the construction and maintenance of Jamatkhana, Ismaili community banks, cooperatives, loans, and social programs, and funding for the Aga Khan Development Network operating budget.

- Just as there is a distinction between the President of a country, personally, and the Office of the President, the Presidency, that he occupies, similarly a distinction must be drawn between the Aga Khan personally and the Imamat, which is an Office or institution.
- On becoming Imam, the Aga Khan personally inherited what was left to him as a legal heir of his grandfather and father, while the Imamat continued to own its own assets. The Aga Khan's personal assets are kept and used separately from the assets of the Ismaili Imamat.
- Religious dues — such as tithes and other offerings — are voluntary offerings from the Ismaili community members and belong to the Ismaili Imamat.
- These Imamat funds are used exclusively for the benefit of the community — and for the expenses the Office of the Imamat incurs in this work. The Imam often supplements Imamat funds from his personal resources, sometimes by an additional 150%.

This question has been asked to the Aga Khan on numerous occasions and he has always been clear that the personal assets of the Aga Khan are kept separate from the institutional assets of the Ismaili Imamat — the latter including the tithes or religious dues given by the Ismailis. The Aga Khan has spoken to this question on countless occasions, some of which are quoted below:

ITV: You have immense wealth, both private and institutional. Where does all that wealth spring from?

Aga Khan: “Well, the institutional wealth is that which comes from people who practise the faith. It comes from the institutions themselves which, if they are successful develop their own wealth in the economic field. Personal wealth I inherited from my father and my grandfather. And **the institutional wealth is used exclusively for institutional development.** And this I think has been demonstrated by a lot of what has been done in the recent years.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Independent Television \(ITV\) Interview \(2nd\), Andrew Gardner \(London, United Kingdom\), 4 June 1985](#)

*"There is a great difference between wealth which comes from the faith and is used for the faith and personal wealth used for the individual. **The Imam has responsibility for significant resources but they in no way cover the needs we have, and never will.**"*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Financial Times Interview, Rachel Morarjee \(London, United Kingdom\), 26 September 2008](#)

"There is, like in I think all faiths, a form of religious due which is voluntary, which is institutional income. It is given within the context of the link between the Imam of the Time and the individual, or the family, and I think that it is been a source of strength both to the community and to the institution so long as those resources are used in a manner which is appropriate to the role of the Imam as an institution and is understood as such." - Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [CBC Interview \(1st\), Man Alive with Roy Bonisteel \(Canada\), 8 October 1986](#)

The Aga Khan also does not withdraw any dividends from the Aga Khan Development Network or any of its agencies. He does not personally profit or benefit from the development activities of the Aga Khan Foundation or any AKDN agency. As he stated in a 2008 interview:

"I am the sole shareholder of the Aga Khan Development Network, but I never withdraw dividends, because the objective is to serve from the resources, and not to make them personal. The notion that an institution carrying the name Aga Khan is personal is incorrect, whether it is a university, a school or a project in the field of micro-finance...If this work is undertaken under the name of Aga Khan, it is undertaken in the name of the Imamate and not under the Aga Khan's personal name."

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Paroquias de Portugal Interview, 2008](#)

In fact, it is often the case that the Ismaili Imamate resources, which include the tithes from the Ismaili community, are insufficient to cover the needs of the Ismaili Community and the AKDN. So this means that the Aga Khan draws on his personal assets to supplement and cover the financial needs of the Ismaili Imamate institutions.

*"The Imamate revenue is given by the community to the Imam. He has a responsibility to manage the Imamate revenue.... **I would say easily 98% of those funds, and in fact at times much more than 98%, in fact probably of the order of 150%, goes back to the community...**I think that if representing an institution which has an income and which manages that income in the interest of the people which it represents is discreditable, then I think practically every institution in the modern world is discredited, because there is no institution in the modern world which does not have its income. The question is, is that income used appropriately? I think the Ismailis today would say that, if you look at the last twenty years of development, there has been more development than ever before. At the present time [1979] and in recent years, we have made an enormous effort in health, education, housing. There is a \$300 million teaching hospital coming up in Karachi; there is a 5-6 million pound Ismaili Centre in London; there is a teaching college which we are envisaging in India, and in fact, as I said, **the Imamate is spending on many occasions more***

than it actually has.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [BBC Radio 4 Interview, Michael Charlton \(London, United Kingdom\), 6 September 1979](#)

- The information provided in the [Aga Khan’s biography written by Willi Frischauer](#) shows that the [Aga Khan spent at least \\$10 million of his personal wealth on the Ismaili community and the AKDN institutions from 1960-1969](#). This biography quotes the Aga Khan as saying: *“I want to use as much as possible of my money for the benefit of the community.”*
- In 1965, the Aga Khan was considering making personal [“investments of two or three million pounds](#) in individual African countries” because, he said, “I would put money in if I also felt it would help the community that’s living there. But this would be my own investment, a personal thing.”
- In the last decade, [the Aga Khan gave away his personal shares valued today at \\$40 million USD](#) in the Nation Media Group to the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development.
- From 2007-2014, the [audited financial statements](#) of Aga Khan University show that [the Aga Khan personally contributed \\$160 million over 7 years](#) to cover the University’s operating deficits every year.
- [The Aga Khan personally funds and pays for the annual operating budget of Aga Khan Foundation USA and Canada for over 30 years, an amount of \\$4 million to \\$5 million annually,](#) so that no donations are used for administration costs: *“Operating expenses are funded by grants from His Highness the Aga Khan apart from those recovered indirectly from federal grants. No donations from individuals, foundations or corporations are used for operating expenses.”* (Source: [AKF USA Annual Report](#)).

Does Hazir Imam Live a Lavish Lifestyle?

"...my days are occupied. I have no time to think about myself. I have moments of fatigue, of worry, but without having the feeling of abandonment...I received from my grandfather heavy responsibilities, but they are not weighty. It is not a burden. It is a pleasure to devote oneself to such a community, to work for people. Responsibilities are a burden we love to bear. My social life is practically nonexistent . As an owner of racehorses, I can be in the galleries of the day Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, is all. In the summer I can be on the beach in Sardinia but practically all my time is devoted to the Ismailis in Sardinia. In Muslim life, you have to live life everyday. It was therefore impossible to stay cloistered, away from even mundane events."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Elle Magazine Interview [translation from French], August 20, 1969)

Mawlana Hazar Imam does not live "a lavish and luxurious lifestyle" compared to his needs, his context, and his circles that he necessarily deals with everyday (which includes kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors, and heads of global organizations — all of whom expect a certain standard of presentation and care).

What is less known is that **over the last 60 years**, [The Secret Life of the Aga Khan](#). Now in order to generate that much income and give it away to others, the Imam must:

- himself be wealthy by necessity
- own cash generating businesses that make profits in order to sustain the hundred million or so dollars he puts into AKDN and Jamati projects annually
- present himself and deal with other heads of state, billionaires, millionaires, etc.

There is very little of the Imam's personal life that is lavish. He owns one or two cars — an Audi. He only has a private plane because he spends over 3 months of travel time per year. He only has a secretariat of 100 people because he is the Imam and that comes with tons of administrative work/paperwork for a community of 15 million people which spread over 35 countries — each with their own administrations and councils.

Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley: The subject of money inevitably comes up when your name and your foundation are mentioned. Could you put to rest some of the myths?

*Aga Khan: A lot of stories have been told. My grandfather's jubilees were events which the Western media thought were very spectacular. The impression was given that very substantial amounts of money went straight into his personal wealth. **These funds are offered to the Imam because he is the Imam, and he uses these funds for the benefit of the community.** My grandfather left me some wealth which I use for my own living. I have some institutional expenses. If I didn't occupy the office of Imam, I wouldn't fly on a private aircraft, I wouldn't have a secretariat of some 100 people. You really should apply to the Imam the same criteria you would apply to any public office. But that's never been done, because there has been a sort of inheritance of gloss. Maybe I should have addressed that issue more quickly. I have felt that the area of the world I work in has not had the misperception; that's much more a Western misperception.*

– Mawlana Hazar Imam, [*Life Magazine Interview, Margot Dougherty and Richard B. Stolley \(New York, USA\), December 1983*](#)

Geoffrey Barker: *It is often suggested that your affluent lifestyle is very different from that of most Ismailis who live mostly in the poverty of the Third World. Do you think that is a fair comment?*

Aga Khan: *I think that affluence is perhaps the wrong terminology. I do not seek to do things, in fact I have stayed away from things which did not seem to me to be good sense, where it was affluence for the sake of affluence. **I'll give you an example. I have a private aircraft, but that aircraft today is flying between 450 and 600 hours a year. You take 600 hours of time — that translates into approximately two months of working days. I cannot afford, nor can people who work in my organisation, to eliminate two months of working time ... if you have to run an organisation in as diverse areas as I do there are certain things you've got to do to be efficient.** When you talk about extremely poor people, of course there are poor people throughout the developing world and there will be poor people for years and years. I think they would ask whether the Imamatus as an institution was helping them as best as it could and I think it would be true to say that the Imamatus is assisting them.*

– ([*The Age Interview, Geoffrey Barker, 'Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West'*](#) (Melbourne, Australia; Nairobi, Kenya))

The Imam's own mother said the following about him during the 1970s:

*"When the Aga Khan enters, it is with a burst of youthful but well-controlled energy. He wears a sober dark suit, white shirt and an unobtrusive tie. He looks elegant whatever he wears, rather like an English squire who sports his shabbiest jacket during weekends on his estate. **His mother says that it is a job to get him to buy a new suit, and friends have noticed holes in the soles of his shoes.** One of them says: "The Aga Khan wears a French smile and English socks—not a bad combination."*

– Willi Frischauer, (*The Aga Khans*, 14)

The Imam on how him and his work are sometimes misrepresented:

*I am not affected by suggestions in print that I live a luxurious Western life, while most Ismailis live in underdeveloped Eastern countries (he went on). **These are just smears by cheap magazines. Serious publications are aware of the work we do and of our achievements in many countries. Such smear stories never appear in Asian publications.***

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, ([*Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, 'The Quiet Prince of Islam', May 27, 1979*](#))

Ismailis especially need to give the Imam a break and take a detailed look — not just a superficial glance — at his actual everyday lifestyle and then reassess whether the Imam is merely some rich guy who lives large and leises all day. One should take a serious look at the [*The Secret Life of the Aga Khan*](#) article to get a sense of the Imam's routine and then honestly rethink about the Imam's "lavish" or "extravagant" life.

Do Ismailis contradict Surat al-Fatihah when they pray to the Prophets and Imams for help?

‘From Thee alone we seek help.’ (Surat al-Fatihah)

Does this part of verse 5 imply that the seeking of help from the Prophets, the Imams and the saints is a form of shirk, an ‘association’ of other beings with the divinity, from whom, alone, all help is to be sought? **Not at all.** Again, there is an exoteric and an esoteric way of responding to this question. Exoterically, one need only refer to the words of the verse 4:64 to see that God not only permits but encourages the believers to seek the Prophet’s prayers of forgiveness for them:

. . . If only, when they had wronged themselves, they had come to thee [Muhammad], and pleaded for forgiveness from God, and had the Messenger pleaded for forgiveness on their behalf, they would indeed have found God to be clement and merciful (4:64).

God responds mercifully not only to our own prayers of forgiveness, but also to those of the Prophet on our behalf; therefore, seeking the Prophet’s ‘help’ is not an infringement of the principle of seeking ‘help’ from God alone, but is rather an aspect or specific application of this very principle. This is because God Himself has established various means by which He is to be approached, given His utter transcendence: ‘seek unto Him a means of recourse (*wasīla*)’ (5:35). The Qur’ān itself, together with all previous Revelations, the Prophet Muḥammad, together with all previous Prophets, the Imams and the saints of Islam and indeed of all religions—these are so many ‘means’ by which God can be approached, if the intention is indeed to resort to the means for the sake of the end, rather than be idolatrously fixated on the means as an end in itself. Then the prerogatives of tawḥīd are satisfied and one’s seeking of help from these means is fully justified. The famous ‘Throne verse’ (āyat al-kursī) establishes the legitimacy of intercession—both as regards this world and the next:

God—there is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His Throne encompasseth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous (2:255).

Esoterically, while the above reasoning will be confirmed, it will be reinforced by a perspective stemming from the vision of tawḥīd which is ontological (*wujūdī*) and not only theological (*ulūhī*). From this ontological point of view, as noted above, at verses 1–3 of the Fātiḥa, there is nothing in being but God; what appears as ‘other than God’ is a maẓhar, a locus for the manifestation of God and nothing else. When assistance is sought from the Prophets, the Imams and the saints, one is seeking assistance from them as so many manifestations of God, so many maẓāhir, or loci, of the *ẓuhūr* (manifestation) of *al-Ẓāhir*, the Outwardly Manifest. Therefore, the means as well as the end is divine: it is not a question of seeking

human means for the sake of attaining a divine end, for one sees through the human form to the divine substance of the *maẓhar*. This is a radical mode of *tawḥīd*, a more penetrating application of the principle: from Thee alone we seek help. It also manifests metaphysical fidelity to the principle of divine ubiquity:

‘Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God’ (2:115).

It is this Face which is sought, both as regards the means and the end, when one seeks any kind of help from any kind of being:

‘Every single good thing (ni‘ma) you have is [a grace] from God’ (16:53).

The reference to *ni‘ma*—which can also be translated as ‘blessing’ or ‘grace’—brings us back to the *Fātiḥa*, for the ‘straight path’ at verse 6 is described by reference to *al-ladhīna an‘amta ‘alayhim*, it is the path of ‘those whom Thou hast blessed’. Esoterically speaking, those who have been most deeply blessed are those who see the divine Face ‘impressed’ upon every single thing. **The *ni‘ma* is not only ‘from’ God in the sense of being an entity created by God; it is ‘from’ God in the sense of being a manifestation of God, and therefore it is divine in its essence, a ray of light which cannot be divorced from its source.** This radical vision of ontological *tawḥīd*, this mode of assimilating all positive phenomena as manifestations of God, enables the heart of the true *muwaḥḥid* to see that in seeking ‘help’ from anyone—and at any level—one is seeking help from nobody and nothing but God.

Above was excerpted from Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Spiritual Quest: Reflections on Qur’anic Prayer*, 33-35.

For further details on the metaphysics and philosophical explanations of Praying to God and seeking the Help of the Imams, read the following article:

[Ya Ali Madad: The Rationale for Praying to God and Calling upon the Imams in Prayer](#)

Do the Ismaili Imams Only Marry Non-Ismaili Western Models



The Wedding of Prince Shah Karim al-Husayni, Aga Khan IV and Sarah Frances Croker-Poole, formerly Lady James Charles Crichton-Stuart, who would go on to take the name Begum Salimah Aga Khan, at his home in Paris on October 27, 1969.

"I would not marry a woman who I did not believe could help me. I hope to reorganize my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community."

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 283)

1. Why does the Imam in modern times only marry non-Ismailis?

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni was once asked this question in 1961 and gave the following reply:

"It might interest you and many others, but it's unlikely I will marry an Ismaili Muslim girl, as this could bring prosperity and prestige to her family. This goes against the jurisprudence of the Ismaili faith. All Ismaili members are equal in the eyes of God and their Imam at the time, which is why I intend to marry a European, American, or non-Ismaili Muslim. She will need to embrace and follow the Ismaili traditions and principles, as her husband will be the leader and Imam of this faith system."

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[Interview with Tehran Musavir 1961, tr. Khaama Press](#)

There are many implications worth considering if the Imam were to marry an Ismaili murid:

- The murid-murshid relationship would become very difficult and complicated since a **murid is supposed to be in total obedience to the Imam, whereas a husband and wife function as partners**, negotiating and compromising on many matters.
- The murid and the family that the Imam would marry into would become much wealthier and receive an **undue elevated social status among the community**, leading to all kinds of problems: these include the social reality of a "royal family" among Ismaili murids whom the Imam marries into, a social practice of wealthy Ismaili families "jockeying" to marry their

daughters to the Imam; and wealthy Ismaili families would be unduly privileged in gaining access to the Imam by means of such marriages.

- There could be **potential risks of the Imam being usurped** by power-hungry in-laws such as his father-in-law, brothers-in-law, and in-law relatives, who attempt to prop up a false heir. Such things have occurred in the past for those familiar with Ismaili history in the Fatimid period (al-Afdal and Badr al-Jamali; more recently, the in-laws of Aga Khan III tried to usurp the Imamate revenues in the Haji Bibi case).
- If the Imam and the murid got divorced, then there would be much **stigma upon the murid**, leading to unbearable backlash from the community who love their Imam. This would not be fair to the murid.

The Western media wrongfully portrays the Imam as nothing more than a playboy who marries women solely for their looks; in doing so, they brand his first wife Salima as a mere “model” and his second wife Inaara as a “former pop star” – as if there was nothing more to these women than their physical appearances.

The focus on the Imam’s divorces in tabloid media is also very much informed by the stigma that divorce continues to carry in Western society. See Here:

[Why Did The Aga Khan Get Divorced?](#)

First, **marriage in Islam has no religious or spiritual significance. Marriage is a social contract, nothing more. And one can marry another person for a variety of reasons** – for love, for economic reasons, for political reasons, etc. As long as the marriage is consensual and contracted, it is totally legitimate from an Islamic perspective.

One must be wary of blindly accepting superficial narratives and commentaries about the lifestyles of the Imams. It is inconceivable that the Ismaili Imams are so superficial, shallow and worldly that they only marry women for their looks. Such accusations are easily falsified through basic research into the recent Imams’ biographies.

2. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah’s Marriages:

Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah's first wife was his cousin Shahzadi Begum and was basically an arranged marriage as per traditional Eastern customs. The Imam’s second wife was Theresa who was not a model but a ballerina, which is a form of dignified dance or art and she was also an artist who sculpted; she died very young and was the mother of Prince Aly Khan. His third wife was Princess Andree Carron who was not a model but a shop owner and with whom the Imam shared common intellectual and literary interests. His fourth wife was Begum Yvette known as Mata Salamat. She had won a French beauty pageant in her 20s, but the Imam met her when she was almost 40 in the 1940s. Mostly importantly, Mata Salamat had already converted to Islam before she met the Imam. **The main reason why Imam was interested in her was because of her religious and spiritual devotion to the spiritual aspects of Islam.** About

his marriage with his fourth and last wife, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah has said the following in his memoirs:

“I, who by the grace of God’s greatest gift, am myself blessed with a wife who fully understands the joys and sorrows of my mind and my spirit... I can only say that if a perfectly happy marriage be one in which there is a genuine and complete union and understanding, on the spiritual, mental and emotional planes, ours is such... She has been my strong and gentle help and comforter throughout all my serious illnesses of recent years. I have at last been granted the real and wonderful haven of finding in and with my wife a true union of mind and soul.”

[The Esoteric Feminine: Women in Ismaili History and Thought](#)

3. Mawlana Hazar Imam’s Marriages:

The key factor underlying Mawlana Hazar Imam’s marriages and family life is that **the Imam’s first priorities in life are the Imamate, the wellbeing of his Ismaili Jamat, and service to humanity.** The Imam actually places his physical family responsibilities second to his Imamate & Jamati responsibilities. This often means **the Imam’s family including his wife and children have had to make sacrifices;** in the past that often meant losing their lives at the hands of the Imam’s enemies. In modern times, it is a sacrifice of time and presence: the Imam simply does not spend as much time with his wife and children as a normal human being. While physical family may be our first priority in life, it is not Hazar Imam’s – he is beholden to his larger mission of executing the Imamate, caring for the well-being of his spiritual family (the Ismailis), and assisting humanity at large.

In 1969 when he first got married, Hazar Imam told the biographer Willi Frischauer that:

“I would not marry a woman who I did not believe could help me. I hope to reorganize my life so as to have a little more time to be with my wife — and my children — though not at the expense of the community.”

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 283)

This quote is quite telling; it means **the Imam even chooses whom to marry based on what he believes will help his greater mission of the Imamate and serving the Jamat;** the Imam would never do anything – including prioritizing his wife and kids – at the expense of the Jamat. In fact, ten years later in 1979, Hazar Imam repeated the same thing – that he does not have the time to spend with his own family because of his work for the Jamat:

“The burden of work and travel is very severe. So although I am extremely fortunate to have a wonderful wife and children, I can’t spend as much time with them as I wish. But I hope to have more time for my family later on.”

— Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview, ‘The Quiet Prince of Islam’, May 27, 1979,

[NanoWisdoms](#)

In other words, the Imam's spiritual children come first; his physical family comes second (or perhaps third).

This is why on December 13, 2008, Hazar Imam told the Ismaili leadership in a Farman: ***"I have had nothing else of real significance in my life other than serving the Jamat."***

Below is what Malise Ruthven, another biographer of the Aga Khan, has shared about the Imam's marriages and how members of the Jamat perceived it:

*"They want their Imam to be happy. I remember once talking to a very senior Ismaili when he was divorcing his first wife. His comment I actually found rather moving. He said: 'The Imam has been wounded.' **He is not a playboy; it's a completely misunderstood role that he has. He does not and perhaps has not had the energy and time to give to his family because of his commitment to his bigger family, which is maybe ten, fifteen million people.**"*

- Malise Ruthven (Official Biographer of the Aga Khan, in *An Islamic Conscience: The Aga Khan and the Ismailis*, 2007)

It is highly inaccurate for the media to label Hazar Imam's two wives - Begum Salimah and Begum Inaara - as mere "models" and "former pop stars". Both women have devoted much of their lives to more substantial interests, pursuits, and good works.

The Imam's Marriage to Begum Salimah:

Mawlana Hazar Imam met Salimah (who was born in 1940 and 4 years younger than the Imam) in the late 1960s and was introduced to her by his friends at the Palace Hotel. While it is true that Salimah was a photographer model for a short period of time, she was also part of the British aristocratic class. It is less known that **Salimah was already once divorced and there was a social stigma attached to divorcees in Europe. In choosing to marry Salimah, Hazar Imam was also going against the European social norms** and some Ismailis even questioned why the Imam would marry a divorced woman. But more importantly, Hazar Imam was interested in Salimah because they truly shared a lot in common culturally and religiously – as reported by the biographer Willi Frischauer:

*"The Aga Khan soon discovered that Sally—'Lady James', as he pedantically called her— was born in New Delhi, the daughter of an English officer in the Indian army and spoke Urdu at least as well as he did. Although she did not share her new friend's love of skiing — she had broken her left leg on the slopes two years earlier, her right leg the following year and that was quite enough—**they had a lot in common. She was a racing enthusiast and understood horses well, was deeply interested in Islam, in Muslim clothes, food and customs.**"*

(Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 264-265)

"When we first met," Prince Karim said to her, "I had no idea you knew so much about Islam." They discussed the meaning and implications of a Muslim marriage, so different from the Christian tradition: "It is a practical and contractual matter," the Aga Khan said to me adding quickly, "but none the less serious for that. In taking Lady James for a wife, I am entering a contract." Lady James nodded: "It is more like a civil marriage," she said. (Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 266)

As we can see, Hazar Imam did not marry Salimah simply because she was a model – this had nothing to do with it. She was born and raised in India, spoke Urdu and was very interested in Islam, Muslim culture, and horses. Salimah was already thinking about becoming Muslim before she was engaged to Hazar Imam. All this common ground was the foundation of their relationship, not her physical appearance. For the Western media to portray Salimah as just a “former model” is totally insulting, sexist, and reductive towards her as a person. **Since her divorce from the Imam, Salimah has been involved in important philanthropic work that clearly reflects her character.** Most recently she has been an ambassador for SOS Children’s Villages and helping Afghan refugees; she learned about development and global issues during her marriage to Hazar Imam and her experience in the AKDN and the Jamat.

Hazar Imam’s Marriage to Begum Inaara:

As for the Imam’s second wife Inaara – again the Western media is being both sexist and misogynist when it only describes her as a “former pop star” or “model”. This gives the false impression that Inaara has done nothing else of significance in her life besides pop / modeling. But here is Inaara’s actual background:

- Born as Gabriel Thyssen, Inaara **studied law in Munich and Cologne and graduated magna cum laude with a PhD** in International Law in 1990.
- Her first marriage was to a German prince and it ended in divorce.
- In the late 1990s, she began **working for UNESCO with a focus on promoting the status of women and gender equality**; in other words, Inaara works on and promotes women’s equity and welfare.
- Through her work at UNESCO, Inaara **became interested in Islam**.
- Inaara then **learned about Islam mainly through the work of the Harvard Professor Dr. Annemarie Schimmel**, who was a world-renowned expert on the study of Islamic mysticism and Ismailism.
- **Hazar Imam personally knows Professor Schimmel and is familiar with her research**; she has worked with the Institute of Ismaili Studies and they have published her books; after she died, they created a new Annemarie Schimmel Research Grant for scholars who study Islamic mysticism.
- Inaara met Hazar Imam after being introduced to him by the King of Spain and **Professor Schimmel also encouraged Inaara to meet Hazar Imam**.
- After her marriage to Hazar Imam, Inaara was **encouraged by the Imam to continue working for UNESCO** on the issues of women and gender equality.

(From the Official Press Release: <http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/25105>)

All the above information was stated in the Official Press Release from the Aga Khan’s Secretariat when the Imam’s marriage to Inaara was announced on May 30, 1998. Yet almost none of the above facts about Inaara are reported in the media coverage about her.

The above facts show that **Hazar Imam and Inaara already shared important common interests** before they were engaged to marry. **She was interested in Islam and in Islamic mysticism** through the work of

Schimmel, whom Hazar Imam knows personally and whose work he has read. **Inaara's career in UNESCO for women's rights is also very much in line with Hazar Imam's global humanitarian work**, which includes empowering women through education and social services. To define Inaara as a "former popstar" completely ignores who she really is.

As for the age difference between Inaara and Hazar Imam – at the time of marriage, the Imam was 62 and Inaara was 35. Given that this was the second marriage for both, their age difference really is not an issue. Further, **if Hazar Imam was planning to have more children (and all indications suggest the birth of Prince Aly Muhammad was intentional given Inaara's age), then the Imam cannot reasonably be expected to marry a woman who is over 40 years old.** It is also very common for men to be decades older than their wives for those who marry when they are older. Furthermore, Hazar Imam's lifestyle and activities do not correlate to his age; he is over 80 years old today, but he is busier and more active than a typical person of that age. Whomever he picks as a life partner would need to have the energy to keep up with him given how many Imamat, Jamati, AKDN, and social obligations are required for the Imam's spouse to take part in. In the end, both of Hazar Imam's marriages are with adult women and based on mutual consent. Since their subsequent divorce, Inaara has done a great deal of charity and development work, like microfinance, modeled directly after AKDN's vision. She clearly learned a great deal from her short marriage with Hazar Imam and it has changed her for the better. She has not publicly said one negative thing about Hazar Imam. In fact, she stated in an interview with the German Bunte magazine ten years ago that: *"I have learnt a lot from my husband, and I deeply embrace his vision of a better world with more tolerance."* (Reported via [the Daily Mail](#))

Why Does Hazar Imam spend so much of his time doing AKDN work?

To the Imam, the meaning of “quality of life” extends to the entire ethical and social context in which people live, and not only to their material well-being measured over generation after generation.

Consequently, the Imam’s is a holistic vision of development, as is prescribed by the faith of Islam. It is about investing in people, in their pluralism, in their intellectual pursuit, and search for new and useful knowledge, just as much as in material resources. But it is also about investing with a social conscience inspired by the ethics of Islam. It is work that benefits all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality or background. Does the Holy Qur’an not say in one of the most inspiring references to mankind, that Allah has created all mankind from one soul? Today, this vision is implemented by institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Alltex EPX Limited Opening Ceremony, Kenya, December 19, 2003: [Read Here](#))

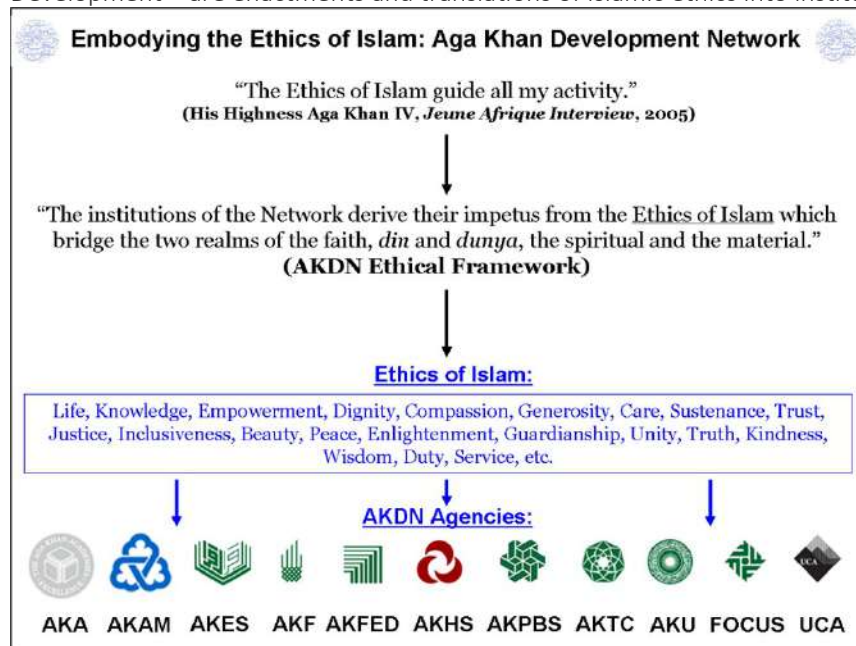
The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies established by the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) over the last 100 years; the Network operates in over 35 countries, employs over 80,000 people and 100,000 volunteers, and spends over \$600 million dollars annually to raise the quality of life of all people in need, regardless of faith, culture or ethnicity. The AKDN accomplishes this through numerous activities in poverty relief, healthcare, economics, education, health services, architecture, agriculture, cultural restoration, tourism, etc. The roots of the AKDN go back to the first Khoja Ismaili school established by [Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III’s Services to the Muslim World](#) in Bombay and the first Aga Khan Schools created in Zanzibar by [Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III’s Services to the Muslim World](#). As explained by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the work of AKDN is not mere philanthropy – because philanthropy is voluntary, as a choice. On the contrary, the AKDN’s work is a sacred obligation of the Ismaili Imams based on the very definition of their Imam, stemming directly from the ethics of Islam:

I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world — especially the Western media — try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility — it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

Acceptance Address, Tutzing Evangelical Academy’s Tolerance Award, May 20, 2006: [Read Here](#))

The below diagram illustrates how all of the AKDN's agencies – such as the Aga Khan Foundation, Aga Khan University, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Aga Khan Academies, and Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development – are enactments and translations of Islamic ethics into institutional action.



The ethics of Islam enjoin all believers, individually or through institutions such as the Ismaili Imam, to assist the poor, the isolated, and the marginalised to improve their current circumstances and future prospects. Through the Imam, I have tried to respond to this responsibility by creating a group of private, non-denominational agencies the Aga Khan Development Network – to respond to the needs and potential of people living in some of the poorest parts of the world, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or religion.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(World Mountain Forum UNESCO, Paris, France, June 5, 2000)

The foundations of the Ismaili Imam's work being accomplished today through the Aga Khan Development Network were established and prophesied 1400 years ago. Numerous reports (*ahadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad in both Sunni and Shi'a collections describe how [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#) would establish justice in the world and rid the earth of all injustice, oppression and poverty. The Prophet Muhammad refers to his future descendant, in the line of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Hazrat Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter), as a member of his Ahl al-Bayt and describes him as follows:

If only one day of this world remained, God would raise up a man from my Ahl al-Bayt who would fill the earth with justice as it has been filled with oppression.

– Prophet Muhammad, (Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 37, Hadith No.

4270: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/38/5>)

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, as the founder of the Aga Khan Development Network, is today fulfilling the mission of the promised Mahdi foretold 1400 years ago by his own ancestor, Prophet Muhammad. Even though the Ismaili Imams [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist](#)

[Community](#), the period of persecution has passed and the Imams, as per the Prophet's own promise, are now engaged in bringing justice and equity to the world through the Aga Khan Development Network. Below is a list of some of the AKDN's accomplishments to this end, followed by a special AKDN video describing them:

- ✓ AKDN has been improving the quality of life of millions of human beings for **over 100 years**;
- ✓ AKDN operates in over **35 countries**, employs **80,000 people** and mobilizes over **100,000 volunteers** worldwide;
- ✓ AKDN's annual budget is over **\$625 million** and funded in large part by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV;
- ✓ AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development) generates **\$3.5 billion in annual revenue** and **all profits are reinvested** for development; AKDN raised \$1 billion from its own resources and partners for social, economic and cultural development in Afghanistan;
- ✓ AKDN through the Aga Khan Trust For Culture (AKTC) has executed **8 projects to restore or create parks, historic sites and gardens** – which attract **5 million people every year** and **43 million visitors** since opening;
- ✓ AKDN has created **5 power plants** providing electric power to **10 million people** in Asia and Africa;
- ✓ AKDN runs over **200 health centres, hospitals, clinics and community health programs**, allowing over **5 million people** to obtain healthcare every year;
- ✓ AKDN has helped **8 million people achieve greater food security** and high income through agricultural and disaster preparedness projects;
- ✓ AKDN has planted over **1 million trees every year**; **134 million trees** have been planted in Asia and Africa;
- ✓ AKDN provides **17 million people** in Asia and Africa access to financial services through various financial initiatives including micro-finance;
- ✓ AKDN has established and runs **200 schools (including IB schools) and 2 universities (AKU, UCA)** with campuses in 9 countries – helping educate 2 million students per year;
- ✓ AKDN supports **40,000 civil society organizations** with a membership of over **1.3 million people**;
- ✓ AKA (Aga Khan Award for Architecture) gives **\$1 million in prize money** for every award cycle and has a database of 9,000 architectural projects;
- ✓ AKDN provides **1.3 million people with safe drinking water**, sanitation and sewage facilities;

Why Do Ismailis Seek the Forgiveness of the Imam?

The Imam in Shi'i Islam is the spiritual heir and successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, whatever spiritual functions that Muhammad performed in his lifetime, the Imam has the rights and authority to continue performing them. Thus, when it is established that the Prophet Muhammad played a substantial role in the forgiveness of the sins of the believers during his own lifetime, then Ismail Muslims seeking the mercy, forgiveness, and blessing from the Imam of the Time is completely justified and consistent with the Qur'anic model of prophetic guidance, authority, and guardianship.

Firstly, the Qur'an uses several Arabic words to speak about forgiveness. Without getting into details, two of these terms are *maghfirah* and *'afwa*. *Maghfirah* literally means covering, concealing or even protection. *'Afwa* means blotting out, cancelling or annulling. But English translations render both these terms as "forgiveness" and this causes some confusion. In the Qur'an, one finds that only God grants the *maghfirah* type of forgiveness to human beings, while *both* God and the Prophet Muhammad have the right to grant *'afwa* to the believers.

Whatever spiritual functions Muhammad performed in his lifetime, the Imam has the rights and authority to continue performing them after him - this is what it means for the Imam to be the spiritual successor and legatee (*wasi*) of Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an clearly states that when the believers are seeking God's forgiveness in the sense of *maghfirah*, they must go into the physical presence of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet must pray to God for their forgiveness, and only after this is done will the believers be able to find God's forgiveness.

We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah. If they had only, when they were unjust to their souls, come unto thee [Muhammad] and asked God's forgiveness (fa istaghfaroo Allaha), and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them (wa istaghfara lahumu al-rrasoolu), they would have found Allah indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful (Allaha tawwaban raheeman).— Holy Qur'an 4:64

Observe in the above verse that it is NOT a question of Prophet Muhammad convincing God to go from a state of not-forgiving and change into a state of forgiving. By logical necessity, God is always forgiving and always bestowing His *maghfirah* upon all creatures at all times (Qur'an 17:20, 31:20, 14:34, 35:2, 7:156, 33:43). However, when people commit sins against themselves and others, their souls become ignorant, impure and corrupted by these sins and they become blocked or prevented from perceiving and receiving God's forgiveness and blessings. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the believers to purify their souls by seeking the forgiveness of God. **But seeking God's forgiveness by themselves is NOT enough; the Qur'an as shown above clearly commands that everyone must go to the Prophet and have the Prophet seek forgiveness on their behalf in order to be able to perceive or "find" God's forgiveness. It is the Prophet's prayer and blessing that actually allows the sinful believers to "find" God Accepting of their repentance.** Also see Qur'an 60:12 and 24:62 where it is stated that Muhammad prays to God for the

forgiveness of his believers. See also the **Appendix** at the bottom for how established the Prophet's role in mediating God's forgiveness is established in the Sunni Muslim *Hadith* Books.

In 9:103 of the Qur'an we find even more detail where God tells the Prophet to perform the following actions when certain people wanted to repent for their sins:

And (there are) others who have acknowledged their faults. They mixed a righteous action with another that was bad. It may be that Allah will relent toward them. Lo! God is Forgiving, Merciful. Take (khud) offerings (sadaqah) from their wealth (amwalihum), and purify and sanctify them by means of it. And pray/send blessings over them. Verily, your prayer/blessing is a source of peace (sakan) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing. Do they not know that it is God who accepts repentance from His servants and takes the offerings (ya'khudu al-sadaqat) and that it is God who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful?— Holy Qur'an 9:102-104

In the above verse, the Prophet Muhammad is ordered to "Take (khud) offerings (sadaqah) from their wealth (amwalihum)". But the next verse confirms that it is God who "takes the offerings (ya'khudu al-sadaqat)". Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad is told to purify them (tutahhiruhum) and sanctify them (tuzakkiruhum) by means of this offering. Yet the Qur'an also says that "God purifies (yuzakki) whom He wills" (Qur'an 24:21, see also 33:33). Once again, the only logical conclusion from such verses is that God purifies whom He wills through the Prophet Muhammad's act of purifying the believers.

So the Qur'an has clearly established the following practice or protocol as per 4:64 and 9:103. When the believers have committed sins and want to be forgiven by God, they have to do the following:

- Go into the presence of the Prophet Muhammad
- Ask for God's forgiveness in front of the Prophet
- Give an offering (sadaqah) to the Prophet from their wealth
- The Prophet accepts their wealth
- The Prophet prays for their forgiveness
- The Prophet purifies and sanctifies the believers' souls
- The Prophet bestows his blessings upon the believers
- The believers find peace from the Prophet's blessing
- Through all of this, God has accepted the believer's repentance and offerings through the acts of the Prophet — "Do they know know it is God who accepts the offerings"
- As a result believers will find the forgiveness of God

Thus, these two Qur'anic verses illustrate for us how important the Prophet Muhammad is in the process of God forgiving the believers. The Prophet Muhammad in his own lifetime was the channel or means of access (wasilah) by which the believers seek out God's forgiveness on one hand, and also, the Prophet is the medium by which God purifies and forgives the believers. This is why the verses say the Prophet must purify the souls of the believers; and yet the Prophet's performance of all these acts is equated with the act of God because the Prophet acts by God's authority. Since the Imam is the inheritor of the authority, knowledge, and light of the Prophet, then it makes perfect logical sense for the Imam to continue the

above practices — which is basically what happens in Jamatkhana every time the murid does dua karavi, makes an offering to the Imam and asks for the forgiveness of his sins. In other words, the entire Isma'ili practice of seeking forgiveness (ma'af) from the Imam of the Time is firmly rooted in the Holy Qur'an. Finally, the Qur'an also speaks about 'afwa — the second kind of forgiving — that literally means annulling or cancelling or blotting out or effacing. But this type of forgiving is done by the Prophet himself. So while the Prophet and Imam are intermediaries of the magfirah type forgiveness, they are direct sources and agents of the 'afwa type of forgiveness. Thus the Qur'an says about the Prophet Muhammad dealing with the believers:

And, it is by the Mercy of Allah (rahmatin mina Allahi) that you [Muhammad] were gentle with them, for if you had been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from around about you. So forgive them (fa o'afoo 'aanhum) and ask forgiveness for them (wa istaghfir lahum) and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, then put your trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who trust.— Holy Qur'an 3:159

Hold to the forgiveness (khuthi al-'afwa); command what is right; But turn away from the ignorant.— Holy Qur'an 7:199

In the above verses, the Prophet Muhammad is told to “forgive them” and “hold fast to forgiveness”. The word used here for forgiving is 'afwa. Another Qur'anic verse describes the forgiveness of the Prophet in exactly the same words as the verses earlier which discuss the forgiveness ('afwa) of God Himself.

Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because on the things your hands have wrought, and for much He grants forgiveness (wa ya'afoo 'an katheerin).— Holy Qur'an 42:30

So in other words, both God and the Prophet (and the Imam) perform 'afwa. As per the **Appendix at the bottom**, even the Sunni tradition interpreted the above verses to mean that the Prophet Muhammad was ordered by God to grant forgiveness and pardon to the believers for their faults, as recorded in Sunni Muslim *Hadith* Books. These all-important acts of forgiveness continue to be performed by the Isma'ili Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet Muhammad. A clear example is found when Jamat recites the following prayer imploring the Imam for his forgiveness in the giriyazari tasbih:

Ya Ali, Tu Gat Jamat Mathe Rahem Kari,

Ghat Jamatja Kul Gunah Ma'af Kari.

O 'Ali, may you have mercy upon the Gat Jamat, May you forgive all the sins of the Gat Jamat.

The above *tasbih* uses the word *ma'af* to signify the forgiveness of the Imam. *Ma'af* is an Urdu word meaning forgiveness and is actually derived from the same Arabic word 'afwa. Thus, the very use of the term *ma'af* in this Isma'ili *tasbih* is a reference to the concept of 'afwa in the Holy Qur'an. It means that the Jamat is imploring the Imam to blot out or annul its sins — in very much the same way that the Qur'an describes the act of Prophet Muhammad as shown earlier. In other words, the entire Isma'ili practice of seeking forgiveness (ma'af) from the Imam of the Time is firmly rooted in the Holy Qur'an!

The Du'a Karavi practice is one where the murid approaches the Mukhi Saheb and seeks the Imam's forgiveness. This practice is also a symbolic enactment of the Qur'anic verse 4:64 which commands the

believers to go into the physical presence of the Prophet Muhammad to seek forgiveness. The Imam of the Time occupies the station of the Prophet in this regard and the Mukhi – Kamadia represents the Imam of the Time in Jamat Khana. The monetary offering that the murid brings is a symbolic offering (*sadaqah*) which is actually mandated in the Holy Qur'an as follows:

O ye who believe! When you hold private conversation (najaytumu) with the Messenger, offer something in charity (sadaqatan) before your private consultation (najwakum). That will be best (khayrun) for you, and most conducive to purity (wa atharu). But if ye find not (the wherewithal), Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.— Holy Qur'an 58:12

In the Du'a Karavi ceremony, the Mukhi Sahib announces that “*Mawlana Hazar Imam Kull Gunah Ma'af Kar*” (May Mawlana Hazar Imam forgive all your sins) — where once again **the word *ma'af* is derived from the Qur'anic term '*afwa* which is the 'forgiveness' or 'blotting out' of one's sins that is performed by the Prophet himself.** Therefore, this practice of seeking the Imam's forgiveness is also directly rooted in the Holy Qur'an.

In summary, it is simply inaccurate to maintain that “only God alone can forgive sins” because the Holy Qur'an actually specifies three different forms of forgiveness signified by three distinct Arabic words. The first term, *mafghira*, signifies the covering and concealing of one's sins and is an act of God Himself but in which the Prophet or Imam of the Time intercede and mediate for the believers by virtue of their status as God's medium (*wasilah*) and intercessors on earth. The second term, '*afwa*, means annulling or canceling the sins and is an act of both God and the Prophet or Imam of the Time. The third term, *safaha*, is to overlook the sins entirely and is also an act of the Prophet or Imam of the Time.

As the Qur'anic verse 3:159 demonstrates, it is incumbent upon the true believers to seek both the forgiveness ('*afwa*) of the Prophet or Imam himself and the forgiveness (*maghfirah*) of God through the Prophet/Imam's intercession and prayers. Therefore, the Isma'ili Du'a invokes the right (*haqq*) of the Prophets and the Imams in seeking God's *maghfirah* while the Isma'ili tasbihat and superogatory practices such as Du'a Karavi and Chanta plead for the Imam's '*afwa* by asking for his *ma'af* (forgiveness) of one's sins. The Isma'ili Muslim practices of repentance, forgiveness and spiritual purification are therefore firmly rooted in the Holy Qur'an. Every Isma'ili murid has given *bay'ah* — has entered into a spiritual contract with the Imam and in doing so, the murid has promised never to disobey the commands (*faramin*) of the Imam. If one has disobeyed the Imam, then one has committed a breach of the *bay'ah* and it is necessary to seek forgiveness — both of God and of the Imam. It is necessary in everyday life to seek forgiveness from any person one has wronged. Therefore, it is even more necessary for murids to repent and seek the forgiveness from their Imam when they have disobeyed his guidance or instructions.

"Hence, it is necessary for you that you should remind yourselves of the covenants that you have made with the Imam and the terms of the covenant that you have taken upon yourselves to fulfill. If you ignore inadvertently or forget or treat lightly any of those terms, then the moment you realize your mistake you must atone for it by repentance and do what you have omitted to do. If you have forgotten the terms or

some part of it then renew them by reviving the terms of the covenant. Admit your guilt and repent to God and to the Imam."— Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man, (Kitab al-Himma — Code of Conduct)

Appendix: Prophet Muhammad forgiving the believers in Sunni Muslim Hadith Texts:

Allah ordered **His Prophet to forgive the people** their misbehavior (towards him).

<https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4644>

Sa'd said: **Messenger of Allah, forgive and pardon**. God has granted you a sublime position, (but so far as he is concerned) the people of this settlement had-decided to make him their king by making him wear a crown and a turban (in token thereof), but God has circumvented this by the truth He has granted you. This has made him jealous and his jealousy (must have) prompted the behaviour that you have witnessed. **So, the Prophet (may peace upon him) forgave him.**

<http://sunnah.com/muslim/32/141>

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "May Allah save the tribe of Aslam, and **may Allah forgive** the tribe of Ghifar!"

<http://sunnah.com/bukhari/61/24>

(The Verse) "**Hold to forgiveness**; command what is right..." was revealed by Allah except in connection with the character of the people.

<http://sunnah.com/urn/43221>

The **Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) was commanded to hold to forgiveness** from the conduct of the people.

<http://sunnah.com/abudawud/43/15>

"A man came to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and said: 'I intend to undertake a journey, so give me provision. He said: 'May Allah grant you Taqwa as your provision (Zawwadak Allāhut-taqwā).' He said: 'Give me more.' He said: 'And may He forgive your sin (Wa ghafara dhanbak).' He said: 'Give me more, may my father be ransomed for you, and my mother.' He said: 'And may He make goodness easy for you wherever you are (Wa yassara lakal-khaira ḥaithu mā kunt).'"

<http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/48/75>

I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) reciting Surat-at-Tur in Maghrib prayer, and that was at a time when belief was first planted in my heart. The Prophet (ﷺ) while speaking about the war prisoners of Badr, said, "Were Al-Mutim bin Adi alive and interceded with me for these filthy people, **I would definitely forgive them for his sake.**"

<http://sunnah.com/bukhari/64/72>

"I asked 'Aishah about the character of the Messenger of Allah. She said: 'He was not obscene, nor uttering obscenities, nor screaming in the markets, he would not return an evil with an evil, but rather **he was pardoning and forgiving.**"

<http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/27/122>

"I heard my father say, that he heard his grandfather Al-Harith bin 'Amr, that he met the Messenger of Allah during the Farewell Pilgrimage, when he was atop his slit-eared camel. (He said): '**I said: O**

Messenger of Allah, May my father and mother be ransomed for you; pray for forgiveness for me. He said: **May Allah forgive you (plural).** Then I came to him from the other side, hoping that he would supplicate just for me alone, and not them. I said: **O Messenger of Allah, pray for forgiveness for me.** He said: **May Allah forgive you (plural).**

<http://sunnah.com/nasai/41/5>

"The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) supplicated for forgiveness for me on the Night of the Camel, twenty-five times."

<http://sunnah.com/urn/637380>

He was then brought to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) who said to him, "Ask forgiveness of Allah and turn to Him in repentance." The man said, 'I ask Allah's forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance.' **The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) then said three times, "O Allah! forgive him."**

<http://sunnah.com/urn/2015220>

The Prophet said: O Allah, grant forgiveness to the Ansar, the offspring of the Ansar and the offspring of the offspring of the Ansar.

<http://sunnah.com/muslim/44/244>

Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) called for water and performed ablution with it. He then lifted his hands and said. **O Allah, grant pardon to Thy servant Abu Amir.** (The Prophet had raised his hands so high for supplication) that I saw the whiteness of his armpits. He again said: O Allah, grant him distinction amongst the majority of Thine created beings or from amongst the people. I said: Allah's Messenger, ask forgiveness for me too. Thereupon **Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) said: Allah, forgive the sins of Abdullah b. Qais** (Abu Musa Ash'ari) and admit him to an elevated place on the Day of Resurrection. Abu Burda said: One prayer is for Abu 'Amir and the other is for Abu Musa.

<http://sunnah.com/muslim/44/237>

Why Does the Aga Khan own a Private Island in the Bahamas?

The Aga Khan's private activities and investments – which include the horse-breeding business inherited from his family, his prior investments in Sardinia, Meridiana, and Ciga Hotels, and the current investment in the Bahamas Island are funded exclusively by his **personal wealth** and not by the Ismaili Imamat assets.

The Aga Khan has not said on record the reasons why he purchased a private island in the Bahamas.

However, the Aga Khan's prior history of purchasing and developing his Villa Costa Smeralda in Sardinia was done for very specific reasons – first, the need for the Aga Khan's privacy, and second, the Aga Khan's desire to contribute to Italy's tourism industry through developing land. With respect to privacy, ever since the Aga Khan inherited the position of Imam in 1957, the media and paparazzi have incessantly harassed him and invaded his privacy. In 1964, the Aga Khan described these invasions of his personal privacy to Sports Illustrated:

"I take all sorts of precautions when I go out with friends. I have taught myself not to show any emotion in public places. I never sit next to a woman with whom the press is trying to link me. Here in Gstaad I go often to a bistro outside the village for a fondue because the proprietor will not let anyone take pictures in his establishment. I stopped going to certain Paris theatres because I discovered they were tipping off the press to my presence. I realise that I may seem extreme on the subject, but do not forget that my mail has been stolen and my servants bribed. Close personal friends have taken private snapshots of me in my home and then sold them to magazines. I have been blackmailed on the telephone. All I desire is to have my private life respected. Is that unreasonable?"

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Sports Illustrated Interview, August 10, 1964](#)

With respect to his purchase of a Villa in Sardinia and his developing the Costa Smeralda area, the Aga Khan explained that he needed a place to retreat to that was far away from disturbance in order to get his work done and maintain his privacy. He also wanted to help develop Sardinia to contribute the tourism of the country and raise its quality of life:

"But after my grandfather died I found the work so onerous, and there was so much misunderstanding here about the Imam and the Ismailis, that I felt I had to find a place where I could go and not be disturbed. So I joined a small group that had interests in Sardinia and found myself caught in a development that just grew. We found the place so beautiful, and we were so happy, that we decided we had to be very careful, because if not the place would simply become another ugly, over-crowded tourist centre... It has transformed the country. Tourism is the one way you can bring prosperity to a place that has nothing except undeveloped beauty. I've been amazed how many political leaders in Africa and the Middle East have said, "Come and do the same thing to us."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

[The Sunday Times Interview, 'The Ruler Without A Kingdom', NanoWisdoms](#)

Going by the Aga Khan's reasons for investing in Sardinia, his purchase of a private island in the Bahamas is most likely for similar reasons – to have a place where the Imam can vacation, relax, and get work done in privacy and free from disturbance. In the last decade, there have been several unauthorized photos of the Aga Khan on a private vacation and this constitutes a violation of his privacy. With the proliferation of unauthorized photos on social media, guaranteeing the privacy and safety of the Aga Khan should be completely understandable.

Is it Appropriate for a Spiritual Leader like the Aga Khan to be a Billionaire?

The notion that possessing wealth, or large amounts of wealth, is immoral or sinful comes from the Christian traditions and ideas associated with St. Paul and St. Augustine, for whom material reality and the physical body participate in sin. This notion of sin and its association with material wealth does not exist in Islam. The Qur'an refers to material wealth as a blessing and mercy from God (7:32, 43:32). The Prophet Muhammad was a businessman and was involved in every aspect of human life, including rulership over a City-State. Several Prophets in the Abrahamic tradition including David and Solomon possessed great wealth and ruled as kings.

In Islam, possessing wealth is fine as long as it is earned in an ethical manner and used for an ethical purpose. History bears witness that the Aga Khan has used his wealth and resources for founding, funding, and governing the Aga Khan Development Network, which works to improve the quality of life of all people, especially the ultra-poor, regardless of faith in various areas including education, health, social services, economic development, etc. A full list of AKDN's impact over 100 years of operation is [Aga Khan Development Network: The "Mahdi-ist" Mission of the Ismaili Imam](#). There is a long history of the Aga Khan using his personal wealth to subsidize the Ismaili community projects and the expenses of the AKDN:

- According to the [Aga Khan's biography written by Willi Frischauer](#), the Aga Khan spent at least \$10 million of his personal wealth on the Ismaili community and the AKDN institutions from 1960-1969. This biography quotes the Aga Khan as saying: "I want to use as much as possible of my money for the benefit of the community."
- In 1965, the Aga Khan was considering making personal "investments of two or three million pounds in individual African countries" because, he said, "I would put money in if I also felt it would help the community that's living there. But this would be my own investment, a personal thing."
- In the last decade, the Aga Khan gave away his personal shares in the Nation Media Group valued today at \$40 million USD to the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED).
- From 2007-2014, the [audited financial statements](#) of Aga Khan University show that the Aga Khan personally contributed \$160 million over 7 years to cover the University's operating deficits every year.
- The Aga Khan personally funds and pays for the annual operating budget of Aga Khan Foundation USA, an amount of \$4 million to \$5 million annually, so that no donations are used for administration costs: "Operating expenses are funded by grants from His Highness the Aga Khan apart from those recovered indirectly from federal grants. No donations from individuals, foundations or corporations are used for operating expenses." (Source: [AKF USA Annual Report](#)).

The Aga Khan himself has been asked this question about possessing wealth no less than a dozen times and has given the following answers:

“The Prophet Himself (peace be upon him and his family) was married. He managed the assets of his first wife. Imams around the world have businesses, not just the Shia Ismaili Imam. We do not see a conflict and indeed if we lived in an attitude of conflict, I don’t believe we would be living within the ethics of Islam. Islam doesn’t say that a proper practice of the faith means you have to ignore the world. What it says is: Bring to the world the ethics of your faith. If you have wealth, use it properly. But the actual ownership of wealth is not in any way criticisable unless you have acquired it through improper means or you are using it for improper purposes. It is seen as a blessing of God. So this whole notion of conflict between faith and world is totally in contradiction to the ethics of Islam.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [The East African Interview, August 14, 2011](#)

“Well, I think it is important first of all to ask the question in Muslim terminology, not in Christian terminology. I think the industrialised world, which is world essentially Christian world, has been brought up to some extent at least with the concept that wealth is improper. I think the Islamic world and Islam itself totally rejects that concept. What it asks is what do you use your wealth for? In other words, the creation of wealth is not improper, the use of wealth might be improper. And in so far as the institution of Imamatus is concerned, [they] are concerned with improving the quality of life, both philanthropically and for profit. I think we are responding to the questions that we have to respond to in the developing world.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [ITV Interview, June 4, 1985](#)

“In Islam there is nothing wrong in the search for comfort, but the accumulation of wealth for the specific purpose of accumulating wealth or personal power is something which Islam does not like to see. If you are fortunate enough to go past what you personally need then share what you have.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Life Magazine Interview December 1983](#)

“And my interpretation is that any man who is in a position of authority, has a duty to use that authority and whatever wealth he has, for the benefit of the Ummah and of humanity. That is part of the essence of Islam. It is the way in which the faith defines the role of the wealthy and of the powerful in relation to society.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [Pakistan Television Interview, Nov. 12, 1985](#)

Does Mawlana Hazar Imam Gamble on Horses? Why does the Imam Breed Horses?



The Islamic tradition of horse breeding and racing:

Firstly, horse breeding and racing are revered across Muslim cultures across Arabia, Persia, and South Asia. The Qur'an mentions horses in Surah 100 where God swears by running horses; whatever God swears by in the Quran must have value. Per a famous Sunni and Shia Hadith, the Prophet said: "There is goodness in the forelocks of horses until the Day of Judgment" (Sunni Source: Sahih Bukhari Book 56, Hadith 65)

The tradition of both breeding and racing horses goes back to Prophet Muhammad himself. Even many Sunni Hadith reports, dating from the 2nd century onward, describe that **the Prophet arranged horse races, offered prize money for the winners, and explicitly allowed others to make wagers (bets) on horse races:**

"The Prophet arranged for a horse race and the prepared horses were given less food for a few days before the race to win the race."

(Sunni Hadith book of Sahih Bukhari, Book 96, Hadith 65)

"The Prophet used to hold a race between horses and kept the one in the fifth year at a long distance."

(Sunni Hadith book of Abu Dawud, Book 15, Hadith 101)

"The Prophet used to make lean by training horses which he employed in the race."

(Sunni Hadith book of Abu Dawud, Book 15, Hadith 100)

“Whoever enters a horse (in a race) between two other horses, not knowing whether it will win, that is not gambling. But whoever enters a horse between two other horses, certain that it will win, that is gambling.”

- Prophet Muhammad (Sunni Hadith book of Ibn Majah, Book 24, Hadith 2876)

“No stake is acceptable except in archery, racing a camel and racing a horse.”

- Prophet Muhammad (Sunni Hadith book of Sahih Tirmidhi, Book 23, Hadith 31)

“Wagers are allowed only for racing camels, or horses, or shooting arrows.”

- Prophet Muhammad (Sunni Hadith book of Abu Dawud, Book 15, Hadith 98)

“There should be no prizes for racing except races with camels and horses.”

- Prophet Muhammad (Sunni Hadith book of Ibn Majah, Book 24, Hadith 2878)

Even if some of the above Hadiths were not actually said by Prophet Muhammad historically, they do establish that for Muslims from the second/eighth century onward, horse racing and making wagers on horses is actually allowed by the direct guidance of the Prophet. Thus, there is no real Muslim argument to be made against horse breeding, horse racing, or even betting on horses:

“In short all the Muslim jurists agree that for creating interest in the proper breeding of horses, horse races and other games connected with this animal are allowed in Islam.”

[“Muslim traditions in horse racing”, Dawn](#)

Even in Shia Muslim sources, horse racing and betting on horses (by the horse owners) is considered permissible. Here is a recent Shia text about this:

“It is undoubtedly permissible for participants (and not for spectators) in horse racing and archery to bet among themselves. The winner can rightfully own the amount he wins. Islam has permitted these two competitions because such sports contribute to the overall capabilities of a warrior, and a Muslim well versed in these is better equipped to challenge his adversaries. The details could be pursued in the books of legal rulings. Shahīd Thani in his book “Masalik” quotes the unanimous verdict of the Mujtahids. Three

traditions are recorded in the book "Al-Wafi" from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) which state that except for horse racing and archery whenever a game is played for stakes, the angels are infuriated and curse the people who lay the bet. It is recorded that the Holy Prophet (S) said: **"Angels are present when a competition of horse and camel racing or archery is held. Except for these Three, every competition is gambling and (also) Harām."**

<https://www.al-islam.org/greater-sins-volume-1-ayatullah-sayyid-abdul-husayn-dastghaib-shirazi/fourteenth-greater-sin>

The Ismaili Imamat's Historical involvement with horse breeding and racing:



According to the historical record, the Imam's family has been in horse breeding and racing for some 250 years. Breeding horses and racing them at major events is a longstanding Arabo-Persian tradition among noble families. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah speaks to his family history with horses and sports in his public Memoirs:

"My interest in horses, their breeding, training and racing, has been with me all my life and is of course also part of the tradition which I have inherited, the environment in which I was bred. Persian art, in the various exhibitions which have been held in London and elsewhere, has perhaps helped to make the Western public

realise the large and important part which sport played in the lives of that old Iranian ruling class whence I am descended. The chase in its many forms was for them not just a distraction; it was a major occupation all their lives; their hounds, their hawks, their horses were the most beautiful, the swiftest and the finest that they could breed or procure. **My grandfather in his young manhood, at the court of Fateh Ali Shah, as the favoured son-in-law of that powerful monarch, was as fully absorbed in all the accustomed open-air and athletic sports and pursuits of a sophisticated yet virile society as were any of his contemporaries.** After his tribulations and his wanderings ceased and he settled in Bombay, he naturally and happily resumed a way of life not very dissimilar from that which he had known in his youth. And as I have tried to show earlier in this book, such was the atmosphere in which, from the dawning of conscious experience, I spent my childhood and boyhood. When my father died he left a large and imposing sporting establishment in being -- hawks, hounds, and between eighty and ninety race horses. A good deal of this establishment my mother naturally pared down, but she kept twenty or thirty of the horses; and throughout my minority these were raced at meetings all over Western India in my name and under my colours.”

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, [The Memoirs of the Aga Khan, Chapter 10: A Respite from Public Life, 1954](#)

The Aga Khans as horse breeders only came into the public spotlight during the Imamate of Sultan Muhammad Shah in the 20th century, where both he and his son Prince Aly Khan became immensely successful in breeding winning horses on the European circuit: “Inheriting his grandfather’s stables, and more importantly, a remarkable talent as a breeder, **Aga Khan III beats the European aristocracy at its favourite sport, becoming the first owner to win the Derby five times**” (Malise Ruthven, “Aga Khan III and the Ismaili Renaissance”, 384).

Hazar Imam inherited the horse breeding business from his father Prince Aly Khan, who owned his own horses and had inherited horses from Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. Initially, the Imam was not sure that he would continue the horse business given that he knew nothing about it. But after some thought, he decided to continue it and do it well: he hired the best experts to manage it and spent his spare time supervising the operation. Today, Aga Khan Studs is probably the largest, most successful, and most honored horse breeding operation in the entire world.



Hazar Imam has said quite clearly that he would give up the horse breeding if he ever felt it compromised his role as the Imam:

*"It may be useful to emphasise two things. The first is that my activities in the field of private business was the result of mere chance. **You may be interested to know for example that I had no choice in owning the horses I own. My father died in a car accident leaving behind him three children, two of whom did not want to continue to breed horses. It was left to me to say whether or not I wished to preserve a family tradition which had been passing from one generation to the next. I did not understand anything in horse-breeding; I thought it was a risk, but I invoked the force of God and I succeeded...**But let me reassure you that **the moment I feel there is any objection on the part of my community or the countries of the Third World where these activities are being carried out, or that there is any contradiction between them and my status as Imam, I will give them up immediately.** They are not among my functions as Imam; they represent only a small fraction of my activities and as long as they do not exceed the limits allowed ... why not? [sic] **But I do repeat and affirm that I shall give them up the moment they become a burden.**"*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[Riad Naquib El-Rais Interview, 'The Critical Time' \(Al Mustaqbal, Cairo, Egypt\), 20 December 1986](#)

*"Of course the horse-racing and the Sardinia venture are incidental; **if I felt for one moment they were making my religious and community work suffer I would abandon them.** But I have a working day that allows me to do all these things. I get up at six each morning. I have a quick breakfast, then dictate letters and memoranda for a couple of hours. During the rest of the morning I meet people who may be from any of my activities."*

- Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni ([*The Sunday Times Interview, 'The Ruler Without A Kingdom', NanoWisdoms*](#))

As Princess Zahra reminds us, the horse breeding business is *not* the central activity of the Imam and his family in terms of how they spend their time. Rather, horse breeding is a “weekend job”, a hobby that they pursue when they are not working on international development and the Imam work. Nevertheless, the Imam’s horse breeding business is socially and economically valuable to wider society. It provides economic and employment opportunities to thousands of people worldwide and it represents today the history of the Aga Khan family going back generations.



“Racing and breeding have always been seen as a high-end activities, a frivolity associated with silly hats but I would like to underline the fact that 90% of the time and effort involved in creating a race horse are anchored in the rural economy and most of us spend far more time in our welly-boots than in our top hats.”

- Princess Zahra Aga Khan

WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM

Keynote Address at the 36th Asian Racing Conference, Mumbai, India, 26 January 2016

“...The horse industry is an important part of the rural economy, employing millions of people around the world in areas of shrinking agricultural production. It supports farms and villages, it provides permanent, year-round employment to riders, lads, farriers, vets, farmers and businesses of all kinds. As my father said, “You can look at the horse in human life — in agriculture, in war, or as a vehicle of exploration — for hundreds of years. When you think about it, the horse is one of the most extraordinary phenomena we have.” This industry preserves a species, and also an entire population that nurtures that species.”

*“I may have given the impression that breeding plays a central role in my family’s activities, but in fact, **for the Aga Khan family, it’s a “weekend job”, it’s a peripheral activity. As many people know, we spend 99% of***

our time working on development projects in Africa, and South and Central Asia, and in many sectors, from micro-finance to healthcare and education, from agro-industry to rural development, including here in India where our institutions have been present for more than a hundred years."

*"This means that the business of breeding and racing horses has to fit into the limited amount of time that can be devoted to hobbies, and we are lucky to have a team of dedicated and highly-qualified colleagues who do a great job of handling "the business" on a daily basis. **Nevertheless, I think that this "weekend job" is an important one, because it represents 250 years of family tradition, and it maintains ties with our Persian and Indian history.** Many of the families in our studbook have been with us since 1922, and they are old friends."*

- Princess Zahra Aga Khan, [Keynote Address at the 36th Asian Racing Conference, Mumbai, India, 26 January 2016](#)

Does the Imam bet on horse races?

Firstly, the Imam does not gamble on his horses (or anyone's horses). Those who gamble on horse races are responsible for their actions as individuals. The Imam cannot be held responsible for the actions of other people even if they are gambling on his assets. Again, the Imam addressed this in a public interview:

Aga Khan:** "Horses in no way compromise what I do, he says with a chuckle." Noting that orthodox Muslims raise the issue of betting, not so much horse-breeding, **he adds he does not gamble; others do on his horses. "I mean, other people drink, I don't drink. I can hardly be held responsible for other people's habits."
[\(1992 Toronto Star Interview \(1st\) with Haroon Siddiqui\)](#)

"It is perhaps a measure of the Agha Khan's [sic] love of horses that he refuses to bet on them: 'If a big breeder and race horse owner were to start running his stables according to the betting, (he said), you would never see the end of it. It would disrupt all values — it would disrupt all consistency. I just don't want to run the thing that way. If I have a good horse, I want to run him in the race which is right for him."

- [The Age Interview, Geoffry Barker, 'Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West' \(Melbourne, Australia; Nairobi, Kenya\) 14 July 1979](#)

When Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah won the famous Derby in the 1930s, the King of England asked him how much he had bet on his horse:

*"The Aga Khan! The Aga Khan! The Aga Khan wins!" From one end of the downs to the other punters joined in the happy chorus of the bookmakers as the beaming owner led in his 18 to 1 Derby winner. The Aga Khan was summoned to the Royal Box and congratulated by King George V and Queen Mary: 'How much did you have on it?' the King asked with a knowing wink: 'Not a shilling, Your Majesty,' the Aga Khan confessed." (Willi Frischauer, *The Aga Khans*, 104)*

The practice of gambling or betting on horse races or on other sports like hockey, soccer, tennis, etc. is very recent. In many places in the world betting only became legalized and state regulated in the mid 20th century. The Imam's horse breeding goes back 200 years before that time, so he can hardly be held responsible for the gambling industry being legal today – national governments are responsible for this given that they collect taxes on all gambling revenues including horse race bets. Secondly, to say the Imam is morally responsible because someone bets on his horses means that every professional athlete and every professional sports team owner is morally responsible for everyone who bets on their person/team. **The whole idea of holding the Imam responsible for other people's decisions to gamble is simply unfair and a real stretch of the imagination.** Is it reasonable to ask the Imam to basically divest from his horse breeding business, a 250 year family tradition, because of the poor decisions of other people? It is not like those who bet on horses will suddenly stop if the Imam leaves horse breeding.

Now, contrary to what people may believe today, **the Imam's horse breeding business is *not* sustained or driven by gambling/betting revenues.** In horse racing, there is official betting that is arranged and hosted by the racing track and the racing association, who serve as a clearing house for the wagers. **But horse race betting is "pari-mutuel", meaning that the players (making bets) are betting against each other only; they are not betting against the "house" (the horse owners or the racetrack).** There is also betting by third parties called bookies, taking place off the track and it works the same way. The governments in most US states and many countries including Canada, UK, Ireland, etc. regulate this betting and take a tax cut from the proceeds.

The horse race wager money is divided up among everyone who placed a bet – the winning bets take home most of the money (80-85%) because horse betting is not like casino betting where the "house" is part of the game. The government takes 3-7% tax portion; and the racing track that hosts the betting takes a 10-15% commission of the wager money as part of their total revenue from each horse race. Most government revenue from gambling money goes directly to fund public services like schools, roads,

etc. **But the point is: the gambling revenue is not part of the Imam's horse breeding business, and it is not part of the horse breeding business model.** You can read more about horse race betting [here](#).

So how does a horse breeding business actually make money? When a horse wins a race, the owners and jockeys of the first four or five horses get some prize money. The prize money is paid out by the racetrack from their total revenue earned from ticket sales, advertising, sponsorship, and the wager commission. Usually the prize money is nominal – ranging in tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars; for very few prominent races, it can be a few million. But prize money is quite incidental, being more like a small bonus, and is not the main revenue stream for a horse breeding operation. A real horse breeding business makes its actual revenue and profits outside the track.

There are two ways that Aga Khan Studs and similar horse breeding business make their actual revenue and generate profits:

1) They breed strong fast horses by using their existing pool of winning horses and having these horses produce offspring; then they either keep the offspring or sell them for a large profit. The idea is that a horse descended from a prior winner will go on to win more races and its price will rise in value. Here is [a list of sales of such horses by Aga Khan Studs](#).



2) They allow a winning horse they already own to mate with the mare (female horse) of another horse breeder and allow that breeder to keep the child horse; this is done for a “stud fee” that can reach even up to \$300k per mating; a winning horse can breed 4 times per day, so imagine how much revenue is earned in a whole year from one winning horse’s stud fees – the number goes into tens of millions of dollars. Read about how it all works [here](#).

You can see the [Stud Fees charged by Aga Khan Studs](#); the most valuable horses stud at over \$100,000 per breeding session.

For example, a retired horse with major wins can earn millions in stud fees for its breeder long after its last race:

“The thoroughbred breeds with up to 125 mares a year at a record stud fee of \$300,000 per mare, which brings Tapit’s yearly earnings to over \$35 million. “He’s the most valuable stallion at stud in America,” says Michael Herson, director of sales at Gainesway, the Lexington, Ky., farm where Tapit resides.”

<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/07/how-americas-most-valuable-stallion-makes-35-million-a-year.html>

The above facts establish that Aga Khan Studs revenue and profit is not from gambling monies at all. Rather, it comes from the sale of horses and stud fees, which altogether number into the tens or hundred millions of dollars. You can confirm this by looking at their website where information about their studs, sales, and horse lineages is discussed in detail. **Thus, it is quite erroneous for anyone to claim that Hazar Imam’s personal wealth is sustained by gambling.** The gambling makes no difference at all to the Imam’s horse breeding success.

Apart from the financial dimension, the breeding and racing of horses is an incredibly meaningful activity, both historically and intellectually, for the Imam as a person. Below are quotes from the 48th and 49th Imams explaining their attachment to horse breeding and racing. It is worth reflecting over their comments, because it shows you that for them, horse breeding with all the complexity, skill, acumen, scientific knowledge, and culture involved in it, is deeply meaningful – both spiritually and culturally – and certainly not a form of “showing off”:

"All those who, like me, are passionate about breeding and racing thoroughbreds do it for the intrinsic value of the adventure, not the drum around a major event."

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[1997 Paris Match Interview \(3rd\) with Caroline Pigozzi \(Paris, France\) \[Google translation\]](#)

*"Nor am I ashamed of being the owner of a big racing stable, about which I propose to say something in a later chapter. My family, as I have indicated, have had a long, honourable and affectionate association with horsemanship in all its forms. Had I to contemplate either giving up a considerable number of horses in training or turning the stable into a paying concern, I have no doubt that by selling a considerable proportion of my stock, I could turn it into a paying business any day of the week. **Neither my grandfather, my father nor I have ever looked on our racing as simply a money-making matter, but as a sport which, by careful attention and thoughtful administration, could become self-supporting and a permanent source of pleasure not only for ourselves, as owners, but for thousands -- indeed for millions -- who follow our colours on the turf;** and we have considered our studs and our training stables as sources of wealth for the countries in which they are maintained and of practical usefulness from the point of view of preserving and raising the standard of bloodstock."*

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

['The Memoirs of Aga Khan III -- World Enough and Time', Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors, 1954](#)

*"What has the horse meant to various epochs of human civilisation, to various regions of our world? It is a fascinating, nearly unlimited subject. **You can approach the topic from the point of view of faith and you will find the horse everywhere: in the Muslim world, in the Christian world. You will find that the horse has been part of sport all over the world, going back centuries, including hunting on horseback and polo.** You can look at the horse in human life — in agriculture, in war, or as a vehicle of exploration — for hundreds of years. When you think about it, the horse is one of the most extraordinary phenomena we have."*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

[Philip Jodidio interview \(3rd\) published in 'A Racing and Breeding Tradition: The Horses of the Aga Khan' \(Aiglemont\), 4 July 2010, published January 2011](#)

*"I'll tell you something. **I suppose by nature I like creation, and horse-racing is one of the most creative things a man can enjoy. Each year you are creating new racehorses.** You're using your knowledge and experience, everything you know about the family and physique of the horses, their aptitudes and their weaknesses, to try and breed better stock. And then you're pitting this stock, the result of your own intelligence and the unknowns of nature, against other people's intelligence."*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
[Sunday Times Weekly Review, Part 1, Dec 12, 1965](#)

*“Of all sports of rapid movement the riding of a horse is the best. **The legend of the centaur — half man, half horse — was no idle dream; for you and the splendid creature are one.** As its limbs gather and stretch out in perfect rhythm, electricity passes from the animal to you. It is a joy of the spirit as of the body. Through us speak the souls of our ancestors, who have ridden horses from the beginning of time. Yes, we may well believe that the horse was with man from the beginning. No doubt we who have ridden horses get a touch of that great happiness when English thoroughbreds, the exiles of Arabia, fly down the course like winged messengers of speed.”*

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
[‘My Personal Life — What a man needs to be happy’, Daily Sketch Interview \(London, United Kingdom\) 2 November 1931](#)

Why Does the Imam Need a Private Jet?

Mawlana Hazir Imam only has a private plane because:

- He spends over 3 months of travel time per year in his role as the Imam
- He also oversees the activities of the various branches of the AKDN which service a broad array of sectors of society in far-flung regions
- The airplane enables him to see visit his global community of 15 million Ismaili Muslims which are dispersed in over 35 countries

"Each decision involved big issues. Symbolising the expansion of his interests, he took delivery of the new Gruman Gulfstream jet, twice the size and cost of the old Mystere: 'It will enable me to visit my community more frequently,' he told me."

– Willi Frischauer, (*The Aga Khans*, 281)

*"My life is highlighted by official visits to the twenty or so countries where members of the community live, which keep me moving from one end of the year to the next. **This takes approximately six-hundred flight hours per year!** To gain time, I always make sure I'm accompanied in my private plane by some assistants."*

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(*Paris Match Interview*, December 15, 1994)

GB: *It is often suggested that your affluent lifestyle is very different from that of most Ismailis who live mostly in the poverty of the Third World. Do you think that is a fair comment?*

Aga Khan: *I think that affluence is perhaps the wrong terminology. I do not seek to do things, in fact I have stayed away from things which did not seem to me to be good sense, where it was affluence for the sake of affluence. I'll give you an example. I have a private aircraft, but **that aircraft today is flying between 450 and 600 hours a year. You take 600 hours of time — that translates into approximately two months of working days. I cannot afford, nor can people who work in my organisation, to eliminate two months of working time ... if you have to run an organisation in as diverse areas as I do there are certain things you've got to do to be efficient.** When you talk about extremely poor people, of course there are poor people throughout the developing world and there will be poor people for years and years. I think they would ask whether the Imam as an institution was helping them as best as it could and I think it would be true to say that the Imam is assisting them.*

(*The Age Interview*, Geoffrey Barker, 'Aga Khan: Enigma of East and West' (Melbourne, Australia; Nairobi, Kenya): <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/>)

Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley: *The subject of money inevitably comes up when your name and your foundation are mentioned. Could you put to rest some of the myths?*

Aga Khan: *"...If I didn't occupy the office of Imam, I wouldn't fly on a private aircraft, I wouldn't have a secretariat of some 100 people. **You really should apply to the Imam the same criteria you would apply to any public office. But that's never been done,** because there has been a sort of inheritance of gloss. Maybe I should have addressed that issue more quickly. I have felt that the area of the world I work in has not had*

the misperception; that's much more a Western misperception.

([Life Magazine Interview, Margot Dougherty and Richard B. Stolley \(New York, USA\), December 1983](#))

Anne Loesch: *You travel a lot, do you not? You have even bought a plane ...*

Aga Khan: *Yes. To make time. I spend more than six hundred hours flying, going from one community to another. I fly to India next month, actually. I am happy to keep returning often rather than to stay too long in any one location; you can better appreciate the problems when you come with fresh eyes. So the plane has rendered great service: I have the leisure to take stock and I have solved many problems in the sky.*

([Jeune Afrique Interview \(1st\), Anne Loesch \(Paris, France\), 15 October 1967](#))

Full source article: <https://essentialismaili.com/2015/06/30/mawlana-hazar-imam-on-the-imamats-aircraft-nanowisdoms/>

Can the Imam Commit Sins or Act Unethically?

A Logical Argument for the incorruptibility of Mawlana Shah Karim al-Hussaini:

Premise 1: If it is reasonably proven that Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan is the divinely-appointed Imam from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, then it means Shah Karim al-Husayni is divinely-inspired and divinely-guided in all of his words and deeds.

Premise 2: A divinely-guided and divinely-inspired Imam cannot commit any moral, ethical violations or sins. Otherwise, it would mean that God guided and inspired the Imam to commit sins and violate God's Will which is a contradiction.

Conclusion: Therefore, if Shah Karim al-Husayni is proven to be the Imam, then ALL of his words and actions - no matter how strange or unusual they may appear to us with our limited information - are never ethically or morally problematic and always good and correct.

Premise 1 can be proven with research - most of which Ismaili Gnosis has already done and documented here:

[The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#)

Premise 2 follows logically from the very concept of a divinely-guided/divinely-inspired Imam.

The conclusion follows via logical necessity.

Why Do Isma'ilis Refer to the Imam as Khudawand?

Some have confused the title Khudawand to mean God or Creator. This is incorrect.

Khudawand is a Persian word meaning prince, lord, owner, master, and possessor. It is similar in some respect to Arabic word sahib. Prophet Muhammad, in Persian literature, is also called khudawand.

The Isma'ili Imam is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect or Light (*nur*) of Imamate. The term *mazhar* suggests the idea of a mirror which reflects or manifests an object without actually incarnating it physically or causing any change or alternation to the object. Accordingly, it is the pure human soul of the Imam which serves as this mirror or *mazhar* of the Universal Intellect which is *reflected* in the Imam's soul without actually or materially descending into the person of the Imam.

In classical Isma'ili philosophy, God Himself transcends all attributes, descriptions, and names including the categories of space and time, being and non-being, unity and multiplicity, and even existence and non-existence. God Himself or the Ultimate Reality is referred to simply as 'He who is above all else' because He transcends and is prior to the distinction between subject and object and thus outside the range of human knowledge.

In the Isma'ili metaphysical worldview, all of the attributes and qualities of greatness, majesty and perfection, particularly those of an anthropomorphic nature, pertain to the Universal Intellect or Light of Imamate while keeping in mind that 'He who is above all else' is beyond all such qualities. The Universal Intellect includes all divine attributes and is, technically speaking, the 'First Cause' and the 'Necessary Being' (*wajib al-wujud*) of the onto-cosmological hierarchy which gives rise to the physical world. The Universal Intellect encompasses all things and all being within itself for it is the first and most perfect entity originated by God.

Guidance and Misguidance: The different kinds of Imams in the Qur'an

The word Imām comes from the Arabic word Amaama which means to come before or stand before like a guide or leader. The primary meaning of the word Imām is guide or leader.

The Quran talks about Imams of guidance and Imāms of misguidance. Verse 28:41 refers to Imams who misguide (Inviting to the fire) and such misguiding Imams exist too.

But the Imams of guidance are mentioned in 2:124 where Abraham and his progeny are appointed by God who says "I make you Imām of mankind". In 21:73 and 32:24 the Quran mentions "Imāms guiding by Our Command". So these are the Imams who guide to God and they are always present in the world even after prophethood ends.

The Infallible Shia Imams are the Imams of guidance and the Quran mentions them in many names and titles like the Ummah of the progeny of Ibrahim and the Middle Ummah who witness over mankind and the Imams who appear on day of judgment in 17:71.

How do we know Prophet Muhammad actually existed?

Muhammad is not completely a fiction of later pious imagination, as some have implied; we know that someone named Muhammad did exist, and that he led some kind of movement. And this fact, in turn, gives us greater confidence that further information in the massive body of traditional Muslim materials may also be rooted in historical fact.

– Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam, 53)

While it has become popular to question the very existence of Prophet Muhammad and other major religious figures like Moses, Jesus, and Buddha, the historical evidence for Prophet Muhammad existing and living in 7th century Arabia is vast and well documented. Several examples of the earliest sources documenting the existence and mission of Prophet Muhammad are summarized below:

1. A Byzantine Greek text written within 2 years of Muhammad's death in 634 confirms he existed and claimed to be a prophet:

There is no doubt that Mohammed existed, occasional attempts to deny it notwithstanding. His neighbours in Byzantine Syria got to hear of him within two years of his death at the latest; a GREEK TEXT written during the Arab invasion of Syria between 632 and 634 MENTIONS that "a false prophet has appeared among the Saracens" and dismisses him as an impostor on the ground that prophets do not come "with sword and chariot". It thus conveys the impression that he was actually leading the invasions...If such a revised date is accurate, the evidence of the Greek text would mean that Mohammed is the only founder of a world religion who is attested in a contemporary source. But in any case, this source gives us pretty irrefutable evidence that he was a historical figure.

– Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), ("What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed", June 2008, [Read Here](#))

2. A Syrian manuscript folio examined by W. Wright which dates to 636 AD (4 years after Muhammad died) mentions Muhammad and the Arab conquest of Syria. Documented in W. Wright, *Catalogue Of Syriac Manuscripts In The British Museum Acquired Since The Year 1838, 1870*, Part I, Printed by order of the Trustees: London, No. XCIV, pp. 65-66.

3. Another Syrian manuscript mentions Muhammad and the Arab conquests and this also comes from the year 634 AD – 2 years after Muhammad died. See W. Wright, *Catalogue Of Syriac Manuscripts In The British Museum Acquired Since The Year 1838, 1872*, Part III, Printed by order of the Trustees: London, No. DCCCCXIII, pp. 1040-1041.

4. The writing of the Syrian Christian Thomas the Presbyter in 640 testifies that Muhammad existed and led a movement. That is just 8 years after his death:

For example, an early Syriac source by the Christian writer Thomas the Presbyter, dated to around 640 – that is, just a few years after Muhammad's death – provides the earliest mention of Muhammad and

informs us that his followers made a raid around Gaza. This, at least, enables the HISTORIAN TO FEEL MORE CONFIDENT that Muhammad is not completely a fiction of later pious imagination, as some have implied; WE KNOW THAT SOMEONE NAMED MUHAMMAD DID EXIST, and that he LED some kind of MOVEMENT. And this FACT, in turn, gives us greater confidence that further information in the massive body of traditional Muslim materials may also be rooted in HISTORICAL FACT. The difficulty is in deciding what is, and what is not, factual.

– Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 53)

5. The Qur'an provides direct evidence of Muhammad. Not only does it mention Muhammad by name, but it mentions and describes Muhammad as a prophet and various events in his life and the life of his community. And the scholarly consensus is that the Qur'an as we have it today certainly contains what Muhammad said and recited in his lifetime:

Mohammed is also mentioned by name, and identified as a messenger of God, four times in the Qur'an... We can be reasonably sure that the Qur'an is a collection of utterances that he made in the belief that they had been revealed to him by God. The book may not preserve all the messages he claimed to have received, and he is not responsible for the arrangement in which we have them. They were collected after his death – how long after is controversial. But that he uttered all or most of them is difficult to doubt.

– Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), (“What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed”, June 2008, [Read Here](#))

For example, meticulous study of the text by generations of scholars has failed to turn up any plausible hint of anachronistic references to important events in the life of the later community, which would almost certainly be there had the text crystallized later than the early seventh century C.E. Moreover, some of the Qur'an's vocabulary suggests that the text, or significant parts of it, hailed from western Arabia. So we seem, after all, to be dealing with a Qur'an that is the product of the earliest stages in the life of the community in western Arabia...The fact that the Qur'an text dates to the earliest phase of the movement inaugurated by Muhammad means that the historian can use it.”

– Fred Donner (Professor of Near Eastern History – University of Chicago), (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 56)

6. The Constitution of Medina is preserved in 8th century sources and all scholars accept it as authentic and going back to Muhammad's own lifetime when he ruled over Madinah (Yathrib):

On the Islamic side, sources dating from the mid-8th century onwards preserve a document drawn up between Mohammed and the inhabitants of Yathrib, which there are good reasons to accept as broadly authentic; Mohammed is also mentioned by name, and identified as a messenger of God, four times in the Qur'an.”

– Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), (“What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed”, June 2008, [Read Here](#))

7. Other non-Muslim sources attesting to Muhammad include Christian and Persian writings:

a) Sebeos, Bishop of the Bagratunis (Writing in 660s CE / 40s AH)

Moreover, an Armenian document probably written shortly after 661 identifies him by name and gives a recognisable account of his monotheist preaching.

– Patricia Crone (Former Professor of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge), (“What Do We Actually Know About Mohammed”, June 2008, [Read Here](#))

One of the most interesting accounts of the early seventh century comes from Sebeos who was a bishop of the House of Bagratunis. From this chronicle, there are indications that he lived through many of the events he relates. He maintains that the account of Arab conquests derives from the fugitives who had been eyewitnesses thereof. He concludes with Mu’awiya’s ascendancy in the Arab civil war (656-61 CE), which suggests that he was writing soon after this date. Sebeos is the first non-Muslim author to present us with a theory for the rise of Islam that pays attention to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing (see R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*, 1997, op. cit., p. 128). He says the following about Prophet Muhammad:

At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet [i.e., Muḥammad], a merchant, as if by God’s command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learnt and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So, Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: ‘With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Ismael. But now you are the sons of Abraham and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize the land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you.’

– Bishop Sebeos, (in R. W. Thomson with contributions from J. Howard-Johnson & T. Greenwood), *The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part – I: Translation and Notes*, 1999, *Translated Texts For Historians – Volume 31*, Liverpool University Press, pp. 95-96)

Sebeos was writing the chronicle at a time when memories of sudden eruption of the Arabs was fresh. He knows Muhammad’s name and that he was a merchant by profession. He hints that his life was suddenly changed by a divinely inspired revelation (see R. W. Thomson with contributions from J. Howard-Johnson & T. Greenwood, *The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part – II: Historical Commentary*, 1999, *Translated Texts For Historians – Volume 31*, Liverpool University Press, p. 238). He presents a good summary of Muhammad’s preaching, i.e., belief in one God, Abraham as a common ancestor of Jews and Arabs. He picks out some of the rules of behaviour imposed on the umma; the four prohibitions which are mentioned in the Qur’an. Much of what he says about the origins of Islam conforms to the Muslim tradition.

b) A Chronicler Of Khuzistan (Writing c. 660s CE / 40s AH)

This is an anonymous and short Nestorian chronicle that aims to convey church as well as secular histories from the death of Hormizd son of Khusrau to the end of the Persian kingdom. Because of its anonymity, it is known to scholars as the Khuzistan Chronicle, after its plausible geographical location or Anonymous Guidi, after the name of its first editor. Amid his entry on the reign of Yazdgird, the chronicler gives a brief account of the Muslim invasions:

Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, [numerous] as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader (mdabbrānā) was Muḥammad (mḥmd). Neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians. Yazdgird sent against them countless troops, but the Arabs routed them all and even killed Rustam. Yazdgird shut himself up in the walls of Mahoze and finally escaped by flight. He reached the country of the Huzaye and Mrwnaye, where he ended his life. The Arabs gained control of Mahoze and all the territory.

– *Chronicler of Khuzistan*, (R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*, 1997, op. cit., p. 186)

Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?

The concept and meaning of dasond or zakah remains the same in modern times since the origin of the practice. The Qur'an mentions the phrase – "Establish the prayer and give the *zakah*" in over 20 verses. That *zakah* is most often mentioned with prayer (*salat*) underscores its religious and spiritual importance in early Islam. **Many people today have the impression that *zakah* means "charity" or "alms" and that its essential meaning is to give one's wealth to the poor. This idea is incorrect according to both the Qur'an and the Arabic language.** Although later Muslim jurists would interpret *zakah* as obligatory charity, the concept of *zakah* as it appears in the Qur'an has a different meaning from charity.

KEY TERMS

- The word ***zakah*** is best translated as "**purification due(s)**" and is related to the Arabic verbs *zakka* (form II) and *tazakka* (form 5) that **both mean "to purify"** – used throughout the Qur'an for spiritual purification of the human soul. For example, see Qur'an 35:18 and 91:9 where the verbs are used for the purification of the soul.
- The fourth form verb ***anfaqa*** and specifically, ***infaq al-mal* (spending of one's wealth)** is used in the Qur'an in reference to spending one's wealth for the poor, the relatives, the travelers, etc.
- The word ***sadaqah*** is a broad term meaning "**offering**" and has been used to refer to any kind of offering of wealth – including *zakah* and general charity.

Two verses mention that the act of charity — giving to those in need is a **different** matter from the giving of *zakah*:

*"So give the relative his right (haqqahu), as well as the needy and the traveler. That is best for those who desire the Face of God, and it is they who will be the successful. And whatever you give for interest to increase within the wealth of people will not increase with Allah. But what you **give in zakah**, desiring the Face of God — those are the multipliers."*

- Holy Qur'an 30:38-39

*"Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and **gives wealth, in spite of love for it**, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer **and gives zakah**;"*

- Holy Qur'an 2:177

Both of the above verses mention that "**giving one's wealth**" to the relatives, to the needy, the poor, etc is a **separate act from giving *zakah***. While *zakah* does involve giving of one's wealth, the **purpose of the *zakah* offering is specifically for purification of one's soul**. Several Qur'anic verses speak giving *zakah* in the context of spiritual purification:

*"And the righteous one will avoid it [Hell]: he who gives of his wealth to **purify himself (yatazakki)**."*

- Holy Qur'an 92:18

*"He has certainly succeeded who **purified himself (tazakka)** and remembers the Name of his Lord and prays (salla)."*

- Holy Qur'an 87:14-15

The zakah was an offering (sadaqa) that the believers were required to submit to the Prophet Muhammad specifically and not an offering given to the poor. The Qur'an does not specify any percentage for zakat. But the Qur'an does outline the entire practice of zakah in the below verse which describes those believers who committed wrongdoing and were seeking God's forgiveness. The Qur'an instructed the Prophet Muhammad to do the following to accept their repentance:

*And (there are) others who have acknowledged their faults. They mixed a righteous action with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them. Lo! God is Forgiving, Merciful. **Take offerings (sadaqah) from their wealth, and purify (tutahhiruhum) and sanctify (tuzakkihim) them by means of it.** And pray/send blessings over them (salli 'alayhim). Verily, your prayer/blessing (salataka) is a source of peace (sakan) for them. And God is the Hearing, the Knowing. Do they not know that it is God who accepts repentance from their servants and receives the offerings and that it is God who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.*

- Holy Qur'an 9:102-104

The Qur'an orders people – who have committed sins and wrongdoings – to give an offering (sadaqah) from their wealth (amwal) to the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet is then ordered to "take" (khud) these offerings (sadaqah) and purify (tuzakkihim) the Believers. The Prophet Muhammad is also told to give his special prayers or blessings upon the Believers – and that the special prayer of the Prophet is a source of peace (sakan) for them (the Arabic word, salat, for "prayer" and "blessing" is the same). The above verse actually reveals the essential purpose and method of the Prophet Muhammad collecting the believers' zakah. The Arabic word used for "purify them" is tuzakkihim which is the conjugation the verb zakka – the verb used to refer to the act of someone purifying another. This verb [form II], zakka, is of the same root as the word zakah. Several Qur'anic verses with this same verb, zakka, speak of God purifying human beings (Qur'an 21:74, 4:49), and also the Prophet Muhammad purifying the believers (2:151, 2:129, 62:2, 3:164). Thus, the zakah is a specific kind of offering that the believers gave to the Prophet Muhammad for the purification of their sins and for the Prophet's blessings and prayer for their inner peace. Insofar as the Qur'an is a historical document, Dr. Fred Donner concludes that the original concept of zakah is more accurately described as a "purification payment" and not simply charity as contemporary Muslims have supposed:

Later Muslim tradition refers to such charity under the terms zakat or sadaqa, usually rendered "almsgiving"; these two terms are closely associated with prayer in numerous Qur'anic passages, and later Muslim tradition considers them, like prayer, to be one of the "pillars of the faith" that define a Believer. Recent research suggests, however, that the original Qur'anic meaning of zakat and sadaqa was not almsgiving, but rather a fine or payment made by someone who was guilty of some kind of sin, in exchange for which Muhammad would pray in order that they might be

purified of their sin and that their other affairs might prosper. Indeed, even in the verse just cited (2:177), one notes that payment of *zakat* is mentioned after prayer, suggesting that it was something different than the giving of wealth to the poor (what we usually mean by almsgiving), which is treated in the verse before mention of prayer. This understanding of *zakat* or *sadaqa* as a payment for atonement or purification of sins is clearest in the following verses: “Others have confessed their sins ... Take from their property *sadaqa* to cleanse them, and purify [tuzakki] them thereby, and pray for them, indeed your prayer is a consolation to them. God is all-hearing, all-knowing” (Q. 9:102-103); **the verb “to purify” is from the same Arabic root as *zakat*.**

- Fred Donner, (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 64)

In the Shi'i Ismaili tradition, the essential purpose and meaning of *zakah* has remained the same as the Qur'anic concept although the particular forms have evolved according to the time and intellectual-legal contexts. Writing in the late eleventh century, Nasir-i Khusraw (*Wajh-i Din*) explains the meaning of *zakah* as an offering by which the believers' property and souls are made pure by the Prophet Muhammad and the Imam who holds the Prophet's authority. By this period, the forms of *zakah* were quite intricate and a simple summary is as follows: *zakah* paid on growing crops was 10% (one-tenth) also called 'ushr; *zakah* on camels, sheep, and cows was about 2.5% (one-fortieth); *zakah* on other items like gold and silver was 5% (one-twentieth).

" *The Ginans confirm that religious dues continued to be submitted to the Imam in this period [mid fourteenth century] and that propagation activities were conducted in secret. Procedural details provided in these accounts give us greater reason for confidence in the testimony....according to this Ginanic testimony, emissaries (rahi) traveled from Uch to Mor to convey the funds to the Imam, who was in concealment (alop). Such a system of delivering religious dues is presumed in the Counsels of Chivalry (Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi) of the fifteenth century Imam Mustansir bi'llah. Similarly, the sixteenth-century Ismaili author Muhammad Rida b. Sultan Husayn, known as Khayrkhwah Harati, also refers to the comings and goings of Ismaili dignitaries from various places, including India, to see the Imam as well as to submit religious dues.*"

- Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 41

In modern times, the *zakah* given by Ismaili Muslims is between 10% or 12.5% of one's net income and the South Asian Ismailis tend to use the word "**dassondh**" (meaning one-tenth). But the meaning and essence of *zakah* or *dasond* remains the same as outlined in the Qur'an: it is essentially a **"purification due"** that is given to the Imam of the Time, for which the Imam bestows his prayers and blessings on the murids and purifies them just as the Prophet Muhammad did during his own lifetime.

Numerous farmans of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah have further described the purpose and importance of *zakah* or *dasond* given by the Ismaili *murids* (as summarized below):

- **Dasond** must be given willingly, wholeheartedly, truthfully and with trust in the Imam of the Time – only then will it bring worldly and spiritual benefit to the murid (KIM, No. 1, September 1, 1885)

- The Imam of the Time is the one who distributes the *dasond* monies appropriately (KIM, No. 1, September 1, 1885)
- Without giving *dasond*, one's worship (*'ibadat*) is not accepted (KIM, No. 2, Bombay, September 8, 1885)
- One's earnings and food are only permissible (*halal*) after giving *dasond* (KIM, No. 24, Amdavad, December 2, 1896)
- Faith (*iman*) remains secure through giving *dasond* (KIM, No. 125, Nairobi, October 6, 1905)
- The Imam accepts *dasond* from the murids and forgives their sins (KIM, No. 125, Nairobi, October 6, 1905)
- Without giving *dasond*, all other deeds are meaningless and one will have nothing in the hereafter (KIM, No. 155, September 22, 1899)

Having elucidated the concept of *zakah* as "purification dues" as opposed to charity, it should be obvious that the *zakah* funds are the sole right of the Imam who is the purifier of the believers. What the Imam actually does with the *zakah* or *dasond* funds is inconsequential and irrelevant to the believer who gives the *zakah* ; the purification of the believer takes place through the very act of giving the *zakah* in full faith and recognition of its rightful recipient – the Imam. What the Imam does with the *zakah* has no spiritual or moral effect on the person who gives the *zakah*.

Read the full article at: [Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?](#)

For further reading on the spiritual roles of the Prophet Muhammad, read [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#).

Why Don't Ismailis Perform the Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca?

The *hajj* as interpreted by Sunni Muslims is made to the physical Ka'bah in Makkah, which is revered as the House of God. However, there are three major Qur'ānic facts about the establishment of the physical Ka'bah as the House of God according to the Qur'an:

- The Ka'bah was purified by Abraham and Isma'il (2:125-128) and again by Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali; therefore, the purity, sanctity and holiness of the Ka'bah depends upon the purity, sanctity, and holiness of the Prophet Abraham, Prophet Muhammad and the Imams of their progeny, who are the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt* – declared to be purified by God in Qur'an 33:33).
- If the Ka'bah is called Bayt Allah (House of God) in the Qur'an, then the Family of Muhammad are called Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House).
- The Prophet or Imam are those who "raise up" the physical House of God, by God's permission (*idn Allāh*) as stated in 2:125-128 and 24:36.
- The *original Hajj*, in its Qur'ānic origins, is a pilgrimage to both the physical Ka'bah and the Prophet of the time and his family. The Qur'an says to Abraham about the original *hajj* that "And proclaim the hajj among mankind: they will come to you (yatūka) on foot" (Qur'an 22:27).

In addition to the Ka'bah, the exoteric (zahiri) House of God, there also exists an esoteric (*bāṭinī*) House of God (*Bayt Allāh*). According to the Qur'an, everything in the physical world and the realm of *sharī'ah* is an exoteric symbol for a spiritual counterpart or symbolic meaning (*mamthūl*) in the spiritual world of the *ṭarīqah*. This is the meaning of the "pairs" that God has created out of all things:

And of all things We have created in pairs, so that you may reflect.

– Holy Qur'an 51:49

Thus, the physical Ka'bah has an esoteric (*bāṭinī*) counterpart without which it possesses no true meaning and for whose sake the Ka'bah itself is established. The physical Ka'bah, the physical House of God, is not an immutable structure; it has been demolished, damaged and rebuilt several times throughout history. The physical Ka'bah is not inherently pure; it has been the site of idol worship for generations and only regained its purity due to the intervention of a Prophet or Imam. Thus, the Ka'bah cannot be the House of God in the fullest sense because it is inanimate and suffers from both decay and corruption. The Prophet Muhammad, according to several Sunni hadiths, admitted that the physical Ka'bah is not even built on the original pattern and foundations of Abraham and that he would have demolished and rebuilt it had he not feared the reaction of the Quraysh who were still attached to the customs of jahilliyyah:

Narrated by 'A'isha: God's Messenger said to me, "Were your people not close to the pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance, I would have demolished the Ka'bah and would have rebuilt it on its original foundations laid by

Abraham, and I would have built a back door (too)."

– *Sahih Bukhari, Chapter 26, Hadith No. 655*

The true House of God must be a House which is living, speaking, intellectual and conscious whose essence remains free from decay and impurity. Unlike the realm of *ẓāhir* which includes corruptible inanimate objects, the realm of *bāṭin* consists of living realities possessing the fullness of intellect and soul.

Since the very status and existence of the physical House of God is derived from, connected to, and dependent upon the Prophet and Imam, it follows that the Imam of the Time is the esoteric House of God and the Living Ka'bah. The Imam himself is the inner meaning (*bāṭin; ta'wīl*) of the physical or *ẓāhirī* Ka'bah. In this sense, the Shi'i Imams have declared:

"We are the Ka'bah of God (ka'batullāh), Exalted is He, and we are the Qiblah of God (qiblatullāh). We are the Sacred Sanctuary of God (ḥarāmullah)"

– *Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Bihār al-Anwār, 24:211/1, in Muhammad Ali Sabzvari, Tuhfa Yi-'Abbasi: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shi'ite Islam, 68)*

The Sufis of Sunni Islam, including Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi, professed the very same teaching that the Prophet or Imam of the Time is the living House of God and the spiritual Ka'bah. Rumi himself writes that the physical Ka'bah in Makkah is but a branch of the spiritual Ka'bah – the Prophet and the Friends of God.

"The meaning of the Ka'bah is the heart of the Prophets and the Friends of God (awliyā') and the dwelling place of God's revelation. The [physical] Ka'bah is a branch of that. If it were not for the heart [of the Prophets and Friends of God] what use would the Ka'bah be? The Prophets and Friends of God who have totally abandoned their own desires and are following the desire of God. So whatever He commands, they do it."

– *Hazrat Jalal al-Din Rumi, (Fihi Ma Fihi, in Arthur F. Buehler, Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh, 43)*

The proofs and arguments for the Imam of the Time as the spiritual Ka'bah and the living House of God are numerous. Firstly, the Qur'ān mentions in the famous *ayat al-nūr* that the Lamp of God's Light (*nūr*) is found: "in Houses (*buyūt*) which God has ordered to be exalted and that His name is remembered therein; exalting Him in the morning and the evening." (Holy Qur'ān 24:36). The Imam of the Time is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the [Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#) and therefore the "Houses" (*buyūt*) that contain the Light mentioned in this verse refer to the Imams, not to physical houses. This is because only the souls of the Prophets and Imams are pure like the glass of the lamp described in *ayat al-nūr* and this is why [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) elsewhere in the Qur'ān (33:47). The Imam of the time is the true House of God because the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of God is attained through him:

Imam al-Husayn called out to his companions: "God – may His Mention be glorified – did not create the servants except to know Him, and by knowing Him to worship him, and by worshipping Him to be satisfied only by His worship, and to never find satisfaction in worshipping other than Him." And a man said to him: "O Son of the Prophet, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you. What is this Recognition (ma'rifah)

of God?” The Imam said: “The recognition (*ma’rifah*) every people have of the Imam of their Time to whom obedience is due.”

– (Shaykh Saduq, *Ilal al-Sharā’i’*, Vol. 1, 19)

See this article for more details and depth: [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka’bah to the Living Imam](#)

Why is the Imam of the Time called Speaking Qur'an?

"Indeed, I am leaving among you, that which if you hold fast to them, you shall not go astray after. One of them is greater than the other: The Kitab of God is a rope extended from the sky to the earth, and my Family ('itrati) - the people of my house (Ahl al-Bayti) - and they shall not separate until they meet at the Paradiscal Pool, so be mindful how you are with them."

- Prophet Muhammad (Sahih Tirmidhi, Book 49, Hadith 4155 & 4157: [Online](#))

Summary: When the Prophet Muhammad told the Community to hold fast to "the *Kitab* of God" and his *Ahl al-Bayt* and proclaimed that the *Kitab* of God and his *Ahl al-Bayt* shall "never separate from each other" - he was *not* telling the Community to follow both the Qur'anic Text and his Progeny as two separate things; nor was the Prophet saying that his Progeny will always keep a copy of the Qur'anic text with them. **The Qur'anic Text did not exist when the Prophet made this statement. In fact, the word "*Kitab Allah*" in the Qur'an means the "Decree of God" (see 2:101, 3:23, 4:24, 5:44, 8:75, 9:36, 18:27, 30:56, 33:6, 35:26).** In reality, the Prophet is declaring that God's *Kitab* - meaning continuous guidance, knowledge and authority (all indicated by the term "*Kitab Allah*") will always remain fused with his *Ahl al-Bayt* and Progeny on earth until the end of the world. Even though the Prophethood and Qur'anic revelation have ended, the Progeny of Muhammad and his *Ahl al-Bayt* remain in the world as the "possessors" of God's *Kitab* (guidance, authority) and through them, the Community of Muhammad will have continuous access to the single eternal *Kitab* of God until the end of time.

What is Prophet Muhammad referring to when he says he is leaving behind "the *Kitab* of God" and his "Progeny" (*itrati*) or *Ahl al-Bayt*? The meaning of the Progeny/*Ahl al-Bayt* is a bit more obvious - considering that various Sunni and Shia sources report that the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet are exclusively Imam Ali, Hazrat Fatimah, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn. For example, the Sunni *Hadith* book Jami' al-Tirmidhi reports that the Prophet recited Qur'an 33:33 - "*And God only wishes to keep away from you all impurity, O Ahl al-Bayt, and purify you with a thorough purification*":

The Prophet placed a cloak (kissa') over al-Hasan, al-Husayn, 'Ali and Fatimah, then he said: 'O God, these are my Ahl al-Bayt and the close ones, so remove the impurities (rijs) from them and purify them thoroughly.' So Umm Salamah said: 'And am I with them, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: "You are fine in your place. (Sahih al-Tirmidhi, Book 49, Hadith 4245: [Read Online](#))

The Prophet said to hold fast to the *Kitab* of God and that this *Kitab* always remains with the *Ahl al-Bayt*. So what does the term "*Kitab* of God" (*Kitab Allah*) mean here?

Most people believe that the *Kitab Allah* means the Qur'anic Text in the form of a "book". However, the Prophet recited the Qur'an as purely oral recitations during his 23-year mission and there was no book-text compilation of the Qur'an when Muhammad was alive. There was no need for any Qur'an Text for anyone to possess because Prophet Muhammad himself was the expounder of the Qur'anic Recitations in every matter:

"The Prophet functioned as the projection of the divine message embodied in the Qur'an. He was the living commentary of the Qur'an, inextricably related to the revelatory text. Without the Prophet the Qur'an was incomprehensible, just as without the Qur'an the Prophet was no prophet at all."

- Abdul Aziz Sachedina, ("Scriptural Reasoning in Islam", Journal of Scriptural Reasoning, 5/1 (2005); cited in Adis Duderija, [The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur'anic Assumptions in the Development of a Values Based and Purpose Oriented Qur'an Sunna Hermeneutic](#))

Prophet Muhammad never gathered the Qur'anic recitations into a "book" during his lifetime and he left no such "book" when he died. The Qur'an actually refuses to behave as a "book in writing" in several verses like the one below:

And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, "This is not but obvious magic."

– Holy Qur'an 6:7

Even further, the term "*kitab*" as it appears and is used in the Qur'an does not simply mean "the Qur'an" or the Qur'an compiled as a codex called *mushaf*. The word "*Kitab Allah*" in the Qur'an usually means the "Decree of God" (see 2:101, 3:23, 4:24, 5:44, 8:75, 9:36, 18:27, 30:56, 33:6, 35:26). Several Qur'anic verses make a careful difference between "al-kitab" and "al-qur'an" (the recitation) or "quranun" (a recitation). The Qur'an uses the term "al-kitab" to refer to multiple realities including:

- 1) The Divine Guidance revealed to all prophets including Muhammad;
- 2) the celestial heavenly *Kitab* in which all things are recorded by God;
- 3) specific legal injunctions concerning things like inheritance, marriage, commerce.

None of the above meanings of *kitab* as used in the Qur'an mean "physical text" or "physical book." According to a thorough semantic analysis of the Qur'an carried out by non-Muslim Qur'anic studies scholars J. Fiegenbaum, Daniel A. Madigan, and Nicolai Sinai, the Qur'anic word *kitab* in the context of divine revelation stands for "Divinely-authorized guidance" and not a "physical book." This is proven by how the verb *kataba*, which means "to write", is used in the Qur'an: whenever God is the agent of the verb *kataba* (to write), the meaning of the verb is always "to prescribe" or "to decree" or "to determine" and never to physically write anything (see Qur'an: 2:216, 9:51, 13:39, 6:54, 6:73, 19:35, 40:68, 68:47, 2:187, 9:51, 5:32, 58:21, 6:12, 58:22, 7:156, 15:4, 2:180, 49:3, 5:45, 6:12, 7:156, 2:79).

Thus, the word *kitab* as used in the Qur'an is very expansive and broad; *kitab* properly means "divine authoritative command" or "divine guidance", regardless of how this guidance is recorded or stored. One scholar of Qur'anic Studies, Daniel Madigan, concludes the following about the meaning of "*kitab*" in the Qur'an:

"The Qur'an's very claim to authority rests on there being a single, univocal, and integral kitab, manifested in the past and now manifest once more through the mission of the Prophet...The logic of the Qur'an's approach demonstrates the impossibility of understanding al-kitab as a fixed text, a book. More than one group of people has been given al-kitab; if it were a fixed text, then each group would have the same text...The claim that something is kitab is a claim to authority and knowledge, not a

statement about the form in which it is kept."

- Daniel A. Madigan, (*The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 178-179)

Overall, the term "*kitab*" as is used in the Qur'an does not mean physical "book" or "text". The *Kitab Allah* refers to God's knowledge, authority, and guidance by which He guides human beings according to changing situations and events - just as the Qur'an's own verses were revealed to respond to the community's needs.

"In this respect, the Qur'ān does not present the kitāb as a closed and definable corpus of text, but rather as an ongoing relationship of guidance...So when the Qur'ān speaks of itself as kitāb, it seems to be talking not about the form in which it is sent down but rather about the authority it carries as a manifestation of the knowledge and command of God."

- Daniel A. Madigan, ("Kitab", in Encyclopedia of the Qur'an 2013, [Read Online](#))

The Custom (*sunnah*) of God according to the Qur'an is to **continue giving *Kitab* or divine guidance to the communities through the direct descendants of the Prophets**. This is supported by specific Qur'an verses that tell us God bestowed the *Kitab* to specific descendants of the previous Prophets:

*"We sent Noah and Abraham and placed prophethood and **the Kitab among their progeny.**"*

– Holy Qur'an 57:26

*"And We bestowed on him (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and We established the Prophethood and **the Kitab among his progeny**, and We gave him his reward in the world, and lo! in the Hereafter he verily is among the righteous."*

– Holy Qur'an 29:27

*"Or are they jealous of mankind because of that which Allah of His bounty hath bestowed upon them? **For We had already given the progeny of Abraham the Kitab** and wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom."*

– Holy Qur'an 4:54

*"**With some of their forefathers and their offspring and their brethren**; and We chose them and guided them unto a straight path. That is the guidance of Allah wherewith He guideth whom He will of His bondmen. **Those are the ones to whom We gave the Kitab and Authority and Prophethood.** But if the disbelievers deny it, then We have entrusted it to a people who are not therein disbelievers."*

– Holy Qur'an 6:89

***And We certainly gave Moses the Kitab**, so do not be in doubt over his meeting. And we made it guidance for the Children of Israel. **And We appointed from among them Imams guiding by Our Command** when they were patient and [when] they were certain of Our signs.*

- Holy Qur'an 32:23-24

In all of the above verses, God gave the *Kitab* to the direct descendants of previous Prophets including Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, it is logical that the *Kitab* of God also continues with the direct descendants of the last prophet - Prophet Muhammad. As such, when the Prophet Muhammad told the Community to hold fast to "the *Kitab* of God" and his *Ahl al-Bayt* and proclaimed that the *Kitab* of God

and his *Ahl al-Bayt* shall "never separate from each other" - he was *not* telling the Community to follow both the Qur'anic Text and his Progeny as two separate things; nor was the Prophet saying that his Progeny will always keep a copy of the Qur'anic text with them. The Qur'anic Text did not exist when the Prophet made this statement. As shown above, the word "*Kitab Allah*" in the Qur'an means the "Decree of God" (see 2:101, 3:23, 4:24, 5:44, 8:75, 9:36, 18:27, 30:56, 33:6, 35:26). **In reality, the Prophet is declaring that God's *Kitab* - meaning continuous guidance, knowledge and authority (all indicated by the term "*Kitab Allah*") will always remain fused with his *Ahl al-Bayt* and Progeny on earth until the end of the world. Even though the Prophethood and Qur'anic revelation have ended, the Progeny of Muhammad and his *Ahl al-Bayt* remain in the world as the "possessors" of God's *Kitab* (guidance, authority) and through them, the Community of Muhammad will have continuous access to the single eternal *Kitab* of God until the end of time.**

Thus, the Imam of the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* in every time and age is the *bearer of the Kitab Allah* - which he carries in his heart and soul, not in the form of a written scripture. The Qur'an even says that the *Kitab* which God reveals to the Prophet also exists in the hearts of a special possessors of knowledge:

*And thus We have sent down to you the Kitab. And those to whom We gave the Kitab believe in it. And among these [people of Makkah] are those who believe in it. And none reject Our signs except the disbelievers. And you did not recite from a Kitab before it, nor did you inscribe one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt. **Rather, it [the Kitab] is clear signs within the breasts of those who have been given knowledge. And none reject Our signs except the wrongdoers.***

- Holy Qur'an 29:47-49

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir recited this verse (29:49): "Nay, rather it [the Kitab] is Clear Signs (ayat) in the breasts of those who are given knowledge (alladhi utu al-'ilm)." Then he said: 'Take note... **He [God] does not say that it [the Kitab] is "between the two covers of the written text (mushaf)"]**.' He said: "in the breasts of those who are given knowledge." Who can they be apart from us? They are specifically the Imams.'

(Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah, Chapter 23, Hadith No. 23-4)

[The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#) therefore possess the spiritual meaning (al-batin) and the esoteric interpretation (ta'wil) of the *Kitab Allah* in their hearts in the form of pure knowledge (*al-'ilm al-mahd*) and not in the form of bookish erudition that ordinary people require to be learned. This is the meaning of the prophetic hadith that says: "'Ali is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with 'Ali. They shall never separate until they return to me in Paradise." **This is why the Imam of the Time is called the Speaking Qur'an and the Speaking *Kitab* of God.**

"Harken ye who quest for union, who boasts that he seeks. Heed my words for I am the Book of God (*Kitab Allah*) that speaks!"

- Imam 'Abd al-Salaam, (Ode to the Seekers of Union, tr. Virani, The Ismailis in the Middle Ages)

“The meaning of the *Kitab* of God is not the text, it is the man who guides. He is the *Kitab* of God; he is its verses; he is scripture.”

– Hazrat Shams-i Tabrizi, (Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 93)

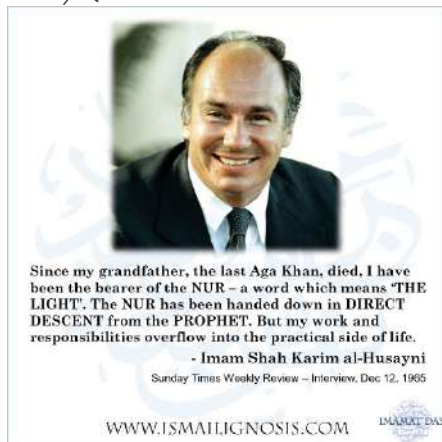
How Do Ismailis Use the Qur'an?

Ismaili Muslims use the Quran daily as follows:

- Chapters and verses of the Qur'an are recited in the Ismaili Du'a' [daily prayer] thrice a day by all Ismaili Muslims.
- One of the Prophet's duties was "teaching the Book and Wisdom" (see 62:2, 3:164; 2:151). Teaching the Book does not simply mean "recite the Qur'an" — as that is a separate duty called "reciting Our Signs" and reciting the Qur'an says nothing about understanding its meaning. Teaching the Book and Wisdom means giving instruction (ta'lim) to the believers on how God's guidance and its inner meaning are to be applied in daily life. This sort of teaching is provided by the Imam in his farmans which are read daily in the Ismaili Jamatkhana.
- The various rituals in the Jamatkhana such as du'a' karavi performed daily are the embodiment of the Qur'anic principles.
- The Ismailis do not merely recite the Qur'an, they live the Qur'an and embody the Qur'an through the regular practice of Muslim values and ethics.
- The Qur'an's reality transcends its Arabic and recited dimension. The Qur'an's essence is spirit (ruh) and light (nur). Thus, there are more ways to experience the reality of the Qur'an than reciting its Arabic text:

"And that We have inspired you [Muhammad] with a Spirit (ruh) from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book (kitab) and what was the Faith. But We have made it a Light (nur) by which We guide such of our Servants as We will. And verily, you guide to a Straight Path."

- Holy Qur'an 42:52



Is the Qur'an a Book of Violence?

*"The present condition of mankind offers surely, with all its dangers and all its challenges, a chance too — a chance of establishing not just material peace among nations but that better peace of God on earth. In that endeavour Islam can play its valuable constructive part, and **the Islamic world can be a strong and stabilising factor provided it is really understood and its spiritual and moral power recognised and respected.**"*

- Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

[*Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors \(The Memoirs of Aga Khan III\)*, 1954](#)

What does the Qur'an *actually* say about Non-Muslims?

The general Qur'anic guidance about how Muslims should view and deal with non-Muslims is perhaps the most universal and charitable found among all world religions.

How the Qur'an views OTHER faiths and communities:

"For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ."

- Qur'an 5:48

What the Qur'an says about the salvation of other religious communities:

"Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve."

- Qur'an 2:62

What does the Qur'an say about human diversity:

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware."

- Qur'an 49:13

What about the so-called "violent" Qur'an verses?

The verses that are frequently quoted to prove the inherent violence of the Qur'an are usually taken out of context. What is today called the Qur'an was originally a set of oral recitations uttered by Prophet Muhammad over 23 years in various times, places, contexts, and situations. When the commonly cited "violent verses" are examined in their proper context, an altogether different picture emerges:

- **"..seize them and kill them wherever you find them..." (4:89)** specifically refers to groups and tribes that were at war with Muhammad's community and the subsequent **verse 4:90** qualifies 4:89's order saying **"except those who join a group between whom and you there is a**

treaty or those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their people.”

- *“...I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved...”* (8:12) is one of several verses in Surah 8 that were recited by the Prophet specifically in reference to the Battle of Badr, where Muhammad’s army of some three hundred warriors fought the much superior Meccan army of one thousand. **The phrase in 8:12 is God's command to the angels that He sends literally into the midst of the battle** where the 313 of Muhammad's Community fought against a much larger enemy.
- *“...so when you meet those who disbelieve, strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter on them...”* (47:4) was recited to the army of Muhammad's community in the midst of the same Battle of Badr against a three-times larger Meccan Pagan army and this order was qualified by the condition **“until war (al-harb) lays down its burdens”** **setting out a clear context for anyone who reads the verse in its entirety.**
- *“And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush”* (9:5) is about tribes that are at war with Muhammad's Community and the order is immediately followed by 9:6 which says **“And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety.”**

One does not need to resort to any allegorical or metaphorical readings of these Quranic passages; viewing them in the FULL VERSE and CHAPTER that they occur and their historical context, just as one would be expected to read any text, more than suffices to show that the Qur'an does NOT command unconditional violence against non-Muslims. When Islamophobes, Christian apologists, and “atheist Muslims” impose their own problematic reading of these verses - stripped of their textual and historical context - they ignore the very function and purpose of language. In fact, they cannot even claim to read the Qur'an literally because a literal reading would include all the non-violence clauses cited above. **All the Qur'anic verses that speak about warfare against some group were revealed and recited through the Prophet Muhammad when his community was in the midst of a defensive war** – they had to leave Mecca due to their lives being in danger, and even in Medinah, Muhammad and his community were facing various attacks by the Meccan polytheists and other tribes (including treasonous actions from their own allies). **After a series of victories, Muhammad’s community began to stabilize itself and entered into peace treaties with their Meccan enemies and other tribes; however, these peace treaties were often broken by the Meccans and, it should be remembered, there was no rule of law or UN peace keeping force at that time to enforce treaties.** Even then, Muhammad had very clear rules for warfare – attacks on noncombatants, women and children, destruction of property, torture, etc. – were all OFF LIMITS.

Whether one holds the Quran to be revelation or not, it is, nevertheless, a historical document bearing witness to the events of its time and the experiences of the early Muslim community. The scholar of Islam, John L. Esposito, summarizes the Islamic tradition's ethos regarding warfare and violence as follows:

Although atrocities and acts of terrorism have connected Islam with terrorism, the Islamic tradition places limits on the use of violence and rejects terrorism, hijacking, and hostage taking. As happens in other faiths, mainstream and normative doctrines and laws are ignored, distorted, or co-opted and misinterpreted by a radical fringe. Islamic law, drawing on the Quran, sets out clear guidelines for the conduct of war and rejects acts of terrorism... The Quran provides detailed guidelines and regulations regarding war: who should fight (48:17, 9:91), when fighting should end (21:92), and how to treat prisoners (47:4). It emphasizes proportionality in warfare: "Whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind" (2:194). Other verses provide a strong mandate for making peace: "If your enemy inclines toward peace, then you too should seek peace and put your trust in God" (8:61) and "Had Allah wished, He would have made them dominate you, and so if they leave you alone and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allah allows you no way against them" (4:90).

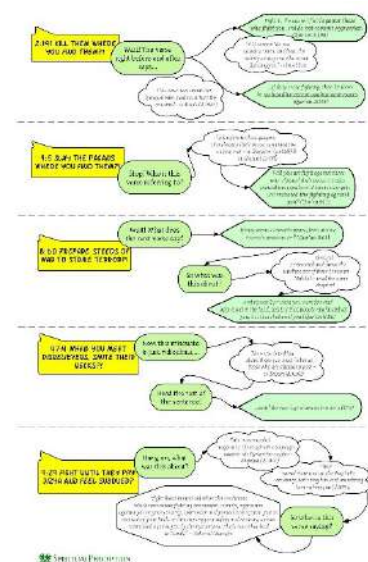
- John Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 140

Among the most often cited verses is this one: "Kill the idolaters wherever you find them, and capture them, and blockade them, and watch for them at every lookout..." (Quran 9:5). The verses that come immediately before 9:5 state, "Those with whom you have treaties are immune from attack." It further states, "Fulfill your treaties with them to the end of their term, for God loves the conscientious." Now, in its proper context, verse 9:5 can be properly understood. This was a guidance to the Prophet at that specific time to fight those idolaters who, as 9:4 mentions, violated their treaty obligations and helped others fight against the Muslims. It is not a general command to attack all non-Muslims, and it has never signified this to the overwhelming majority of Muslims throughout history. Read more about the Qur'an's so-called violence verses here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kabir-helminski/does-the-quran-really-adv_b_722114.html

It should be kept in mind that Muslims through history do not interpret the Qur'an through Google searches and anti-Islam websites. Qur'anic exegesis is a religious science with rules and norms studied by expert scholars for decades. One of these is the concept of general verses and particular verses. General verses have broad application through time and space and particular verses [i.e. all the verses about war] are only restricted to certain scenarios. The below diagram, which has been circulating in social media, gives a sample of how the verses about warfare are clearly limited in scope and applicability:

Violent Extremists Know Little About Islam:

"Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious



households, and there is a higher than average proportion of converts. Some are involved in drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes. **MI5 says there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalisation."**

(Source: MI5 Study: <http://spiritualperception.org/the-tactics-of-bigotry/>)

A new Study by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point revealed that the vast majority of almost 1,200 militants surveyed had no formal religious education and had not adhered to Islam for their entire lives:

"Religion is not the strongest driving force behind thousands of foreign fighters joining Isis and other terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, a report by US military researchers has found. A new study by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point revealed that the vast majority of almost 1,200 militants surveyed had no formal religious education and had not adhered to Islam for their entire lives."

Source: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-foreign-fighters-british-european-western-dying-radicalised-islam-not-strongest-factor-cultural-a7421711.html>

"A French journalist's ISIS captors cared little about religion, Didier Francois — who spent over 10 months as the group's prisoner in Syria — told CNN's Christiane Amanpour in an exclusive interview on Tuesday. "There was never really discussion about texts or — it was not a religious discussion. It was a political discussion." "It was more hammering what they were believing than teaching us about the Quran. Because it has nothing to do with the Quran." "We didn't even have the Quran; they didn't want even to give us a Quran."

Source: http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/03/intl_world/amanpour-didier-francois/

Hopefully this article has sufficiently demonstrated the lack of merit in the articles, memes, and posts that present incomplete, cherry-picked, and decontextualized Qur'anic verses in order to malign Islam and adherents - who it should be noted belong to diverse interpretations of faith, cultures, political circumstances, and socio-economic status. Rather than wasting time creating incorrect, hate-spreading, and ignorant memes of such nature, it would benefit everyone involved much more to actually take the time and learn about Islam.



“The teachings of the Quran, like those of the Bible, also resonate with the words that rang out from Philadelphia in 1776: affirming that *‘all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.’* Those words express our common ideal.”

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

Austin, Texas, USA, April 12, 2008

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Is it true that the Quran was never supposed to be written down?



Yes it is correct the Qur'an never saw itself as a written text or a book of any kind. The Quran, which means recitation, defines itself as a piecemeal, situation-specific set of Arabic oral recitations by the Prophet Muhammad. In fact the Quran rejects Jewish and Christian modes of scripturality. We see this from the Qur'an's own rejection to the idea that Muhammad produces a physical book for his people:

And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, "This is not but obvious magic."

– Holy Qur'an 6:7

The People of the Kitab ask you to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Moses [even] greater than that and said, "Show us God outright," so the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf [for worship] after clear evidences had come to them, and We pardoned that. And We gave Moses a clear authority.

– Holy Qur'an 4:153

Most people believe that the *Kitab Allah* means the Qur'anic Text in the form of a "book". However, the Prophet recited the Qur'an as purely oral recitations during his 23-year mission and there was no book-text compilation of the Qur'an when Muhammad was alive. There was no need for any Qur'an Text for anyone to possess because Prophet Muhammad himself was the expounder of the Qur'anic Recitations in every matter:

"The Prophet functioned as the projection of the divine message embodied in the Qur'an. He was the living commentary of the Qur'an, inextricably related to the revelatory text. Without the Prophet the Qur'an was incomprehensible, just as without the Qur'an the Prophet was no prophet at all."

– Abdul Aziz Sachedina, ("Scriptural Reasoning in Islam", *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 5/1 (2005); cited in Adis Duderija, [The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur'anic Assumptions in the Development of a Values Based and Purpose Oriented Qur'an Sunna Hermeneutic](#))

For this reason, major seminal Qur'anic studies scholars like Neuwirth and Madigan conclude that Muhammad made no effort or intention to deliver a physical book to his community and the Qur'an sees itself as oral, not written:

The Qur'an in its emergent phase is not a pre-meditated, fixed compilation, a reified literary artifact, but a still-mobile text reflecting an oral theological-philosophical debate between diverse interlocutors of various late antique denominations...The oral Qur'an (to use a loose expression) may be compared to a telephone conversation where the speech of only one party is audible, yet the unheard speech of the other is roughly deducible from the audible one.... What is striking here is that the Qur'an did not subscribe to the concept of a written manifestation of scripture but established a new image, that of an "oral scripture"; in William Graham's words, **"The Qur'an has always been pre-eminently an oral, not a written text"** (2003:584).

Daniel Madigan justly claims that "nothing about the Qur'an suggests that it conceives of itself as identical with the kitab (the celestial book)" (cited in Sinai 2006:115), that is to say the Qur'an in no phase of its development strove to become a closed scriptural corpus.

– Angelika Neuwirth, ("Two Faces of the Qur'an: Qur'an and Mushaf" in *Oral Tradition*, 25/1 (2010): 141-156: 142)

"In this respect, the Qur'ān does not present the kitāb as a closed and definable corpus of text, but rather as an ongoing relationship of guidance...So **when the Qur'ān speaks of itself as kitāb, it seems to be talking not about the form in which it is sent down but rather about the authority it carries as a manifestation of the knowledge and command of God.**"

– Daniel A. Madigan, ("Kitab", in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* 2013, [Read Online](#))

The revelations remained in a state of flux during the Prophet's lifetime: verses and surahs were added, while others were "abrogated." **It is thus hardly conceivable that before his death the Prophet established a final edition of the revealed text, or that he constantly brought one version of it up to date.** As has been shown, this would have been in complete contrast with the methods employed by ancient Arabic poets.

– Gregor Schoeler (Former Professor and Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Basel), ("The Codification of the Qur'an," in Angelika Neuwirth and Gerard Bowering (ed.), *The Qur'an in Context*, 797-794: 784)

Was Hazrat Adam the First Human Being on Earth?

If you read the Qur'an carefully, nowhere does it suggest that Hazrat Adam is the first human on earth. Adam is the first prophet of the [Did God Create the Heavens and Earth in Six Days?](#), and the Qur'an says clearly that before God sent Prophets, humankind was one community:

Mankind were one community and Allah sent Prophets with glad tidings and warnings. (Qur'an 2:213)

So before the Prophet Adam is sent, humanity must already exist. In 3:33-34, the Qur'an says "God chose Adam" - there must be humanity from whom Adam is "chosen" from.

The first human being on earth is referred to as the [From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#) in Isma'ili esoteric thought. This Adam, however, is different from the Prophet Adam described in Genesis and the Qur'ān.

The Numerous Functions of Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad held an indisputable and invaluable set of additional religious and spiritual functions *in addition to reciting the Qur'an* and **the logic of Divine Justice necessitates that someone similar to the Prophet remains in the world after him to continue performing all the spiritual functions (listed below) which were essential to the early community and must continue to be fulfilled for all times:**

- The Prophet Muḥammad is inspired by the Holy Spirit (42:52, 26:192-194)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is a mercy (*raḥmah*) to the worlds (21:107)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is merciful (*raḥīm*) to the Believers (9:128)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is kind (*ra'ūf*) to the Believers (9:128)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is light (*nūr*) from God (5:15) and a radiant lamp (*sirāj munīr*) (33:46)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the teacher (*mu'allim*) of the Book and Wisdom and new knowledge (62:2; 3:164; 2:151)
- The Prophet Muhammad is the witness (*shahīd*) of humankind on the Day of Judgment (2:143, 33:46; 4:41)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the guardian (*walī*) of the Believers (5:55)
- The Prophet Muḥammad prays to God for the Believer's forgiveness (4:64, 63:5, 3:159, 60:12, 24:62)
- The Prophet Muḥammad forgives the Believers (5:13; 3:159; 7:199)
- The Prophet Muḥammad guides the Believers to the Straight Path (45:25)
- The Prophet Muḥammad's nature or character is sublime (*'aẓīm*) (68:4)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the judge of the believers (4:65; 4:105; 24:51; 33:36)
- The Prophet Muḥammad makes things clear to the Believers (5:15; 5:19; 16:44; 16:64; 14:4)

- The Prophet Muḥammad purifies and sanctifies the believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad holds authority (*awlā*) over the Believers (33:6)
- The Prophet Muḥammad summons the Believers to that which gives them life (8:24)
- The Prophet Muḥammad recites the Signs of God (2:151).
- The Prophet Muḥammad sends *ṣalawāt* (blessings, prayers) upon the Believers (9:103)
- The Prophet Muḥammad receives offerings (*ṣadaqa*) from the Believers (9:103; 58:12)
- The Prophet Muḥammad brings the people from darkness to Light (14:1; 14:5 65:11)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is a beautiful pattern for the Believers (33:21)
- The Prophet Muḥammad is the object of great respect and veneration (48:9, 49:1-3)
- The Prophet Muḥammad commands the lawful and forbids the wrong (7:157)
- He who gives their allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the Prophet Muḥammad has given it to God (48:10)
- He who obeys the Prophet Muḥammad, obeys God (4:80; 4:64)

Why do Ismailis Pray Dua instead of Namaz like many other Muslims?

The prayer-form that most Muslims use today - called Namaz or Salah - was not taught by the Prophet Muhammad himself; it was actually derived and interpreted by the Sunni jurists during the first 200 years after the Prophet and validated by the Sunni legal tool of *ijma* or "consensus of the scholars." Whatever prayer-form the Prophet Muhammad actually taught and used is not known today and scholars can only find a few minute details about it from the Qur'an. For example, historians know that the Prophet's prayer-form included recitation of some Qur'an verses and it included bowing and prostrating. The Qur'an also states that the Pagan Arabs before Prophet Muhammad already prayed in the same way as Prophet Muhammad's community, except that the Prophet did some of the same actions in a different order - this is reported in the earliest *Tafsir* of Muqatil b. Sulayman on Qur'an 96:19 which talks about how the Pagans used to perform *sujud*, *qiyam* and *ruku'* in a different sequence from the Prophet Muhammad. All of this is based on historical analysis using the Quran as a historical document.

The procedures of what is today called Namaz or Salah as practiced by most Sunni Muslims are the result of the Sunni Jurists and Ulama interpreting the Qur'an and Sunni Hadith corpus. Even then, a large number of Muslims such as certain Sufi groups in South Asia, the esoteric Shia groups like the Ahl-i Haqq and Alawis and Alevis in the Middle East, and other Muslim groups do not practice the Namaz as the mandatory prayer-form. The Ismaili Muslims follow a living Imam in direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib because the Ismaili Imam is the rightful bearer of the authority of Prophet Muhammad, so it matters little how the rest of the Muslim Ummah prays; nor does it matter precisely how the Prophet Muhammad and his Community prayed. The Ismaili Imam **prescribes and authorizes the best and most correct method of prayer in every time-period of history.**

This model of continuous Divine Guidance reinterpreted in every time is the same model of Divine Guidance used by Prophet Muhammad when he recited the Qur'an to the Community and gave guidance. **The Prophetic-Qur'anic Guidance model is a model of CONTINUOUS, PROGRESSIVE, and RESPONSIVE guidance - that means, whatever the situation of the early Community, both the Qur'anic guidance recited by the Prophet and the Prophet's own guidance on all matters including ritual practices would CHANGE and UPDATE and EVOLVE as new situations arose and circumstances changed - and this is an undeniable historical fact proven from the Qur'an itself:**

- The number of prayers changed from 2 times in Makkah to 3 times in Madinah;
- The rules on drinking alcohol changed at least 3-4 times;
- The guidance for warfare changed several times as the circumstances changed;
- The practices of fasting- how to fast and when to fast- changed at least 2-3 times.

The Quran and Prophet were changing and updating the Divine Guidance to the Community in an ongoing manner as times and circumstances changed - and all this happened only over 23 years. **The Prophet Muhammad KNEW that Divine Guidance would have to continue after his death - that is why he said that**

the *Kitab* of God (meaning Divine Guidance) and his *Ahl al-Bayt* would never separate from one another and told the Community to [Imam Ali declared the Successor of Prophet Muhammad in Sunni Hadith Literature](#) because the Imams continue giving Divine Guidance to the Community that is also CONTINUOUS, PROGRESSIVE, and RESPONSIVE. The Qur'an even says that the Imams in the periods before Prophet Muhammad had the Divine authority to establish the form of prayer for the Believers: *And We made them Imams guiding by Our command. And We inspired to them the doing of good deeds, to establish the prayer, and giving of zakah; and they were worshippers of Us*
- Qur'an 21:73

"By the institution of the Ulu'l-Amr - who can be interpreted as Imam and Caliph - and by placing obedience to the ulu'l-Amr immediately after that to God and Prophet, he ensured that the Faith would ever remain living, extending, developing with science, knowledge, art, and industry... **If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed.** It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain *Ibnu'l-Waqt* (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the *Waqt* or space-time."

— Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Foreword to Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, [Read Here](#))

Today Mawlana Hazar Imam had made the prayer-form of Dua and not Namaz/Salah to be the obligatory prayer-form for Ismaili Muslims, because this is the Divine Guidance that has been ordained for the Believers in the present day and age. It is true that in the past, the Ismailis or some Ismailis prayed the Namaz as the main prayer but in the era of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, all of this was changed and the Jamats of Syria, Iran, and Central Asia all were commanded to recite the Ismaili Du'a as the mandatory prayer-form three times per day.

The fact is, the Namaz as practiced by most Sunni Muslims and the Dua of the Ismaili Tariqah are not only different in their gestures, actions, and content, but these two prayer forms are not even used in the same context. The Namaz belongs to the category of Shariah, it is uniform in terms of the gestures not the recited content, and it can be done by and in front of anyone. The Ismaili Dua is part of the Tariqah category ([Why Ismaili Jamatkhanas are only open to Ismailis for prayers](#)), it is uniform in its recited content, it is done 3 not 5 times per day, and it is a private prayer when it is practiced. When one deeply examines the Namaz/Salah and the Ismaili Du'a, one will find that **the content of the Ismaili Dua is the ta'wil or esoteric dimension of the gestures of the Namaz/Salah**, as explained here: [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a'](#)

Why Ismaili Jamatkhana are only open to Ismailis for prayers

One of the ways in which Ismailis have expressed their identity wherever they have lived is through their places of prayer, known today as the *Jamatkhana*. Other Muslim communities give their religious buildings different names: from *ribat* and *zawiyya* to *khanqa*. And, in addition, there are other places where Muslims of all interpretations can come together, such as non-denominational mosques.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Toronto Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony, Toronto, September 12, 2014, [Read at NanoWisdoms](#))

Bay'ah is the **spiritual contract** or covenant that every Ismaili Muslim or *murid* has made with the [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#). *Bay'ah* gives the *murid* the right to access the Imam's teachings, guidance, blessings, and spiritual medicine, and the *Jamatkhanah* is the private space where the Imam makes these available to his *murids*. The *bay'ah*, a word which means "buying/selling", is a two-way contract that includes a commitment from the *murid* and a commitment from the Imam. Thus, the *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Imam is a spiritual "transaction" or "contract" in which the *murid* commits his [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#) in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification – in this world and in the afterlife. You perform *bay'ah*, but you must first understand it's meaning and then offer *bay'ah*. **When you offer me *bay'ah* it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise...**He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me *bay'ah* I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter. The trials and tribulations of the Day of Judgment are very frightening and painful. I will keep him away from this.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Manjewadi, October 31, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*)

Since *bay'ah* is a two-way contract involving both the *murid* and the Imam, only those who have given *bay'ah* to the Imam of the time have access to private discursive spaces and private religious practices offered by the Imam in the *Jamatkhanah*, while those who do not give this *bay'ah* are not privy to them. This only makes logical sense because every single Ismaili ritual practice performed in the *Jamatkhanah* is an expression and an enactment of the Imam-*murid* relationship, a relationship that only exists through *bay'ah*. The act of *bay'ah* indicates that a person accepts the Ismaili Imam as his or her spiritual master and guide and accordingly, only after this acceptance does it become appropriate to access the Imam's guidance. It simply makes no sense for someone who has not given *bay'ah* to participate in the *Jamatkhanah* practices. Accessing the *Jamatkhanah* practices without giving *bay'ah* to the Imam is

similar to walking into a store and stealing products without paying for them, or trying to access prescription drugs from the pharmacy without having the doctor's prescription.

It is incumbent upon the parents that they should first make their children my *murid* through the performance of *bay'ah*... Those who have not offered *bay'ah* they have not signed to accept our faith. **Just as you sign on an agreement in your business and in other dealings, similarly, through *bay'ah*, I take signature from your soul.**

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903)

Bay'ah as a religious practice goes back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an mentions it in numerous verses (48:10, 16:91, 48:18, and 60:12) in which the believers give *bay'ah* to the [The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. The Qur'an stipulates that the Prophet should only provide guidance, blessings, and intercession to people after they give him their *bay'ah*. The Ismailis have continued this Qur'anic protocol of *bay'ah* throughout their history:



The custom of meeting in closed sessions, at specially designated places, to learn about and practice their own interpretations of faith, has been part of the Ismaili tradition from pre-Fatimid times. During the Fatimid period, the Ismailis used to participate in *majalis al-hikma* (sessions of wisdom), which were accessible only to those who had pledged their allegiance to the Imam-of-the-time.

Karim Jiwani, (Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, [Read at IIS Website](#))

Meeting in restricted private spaces for learning and worship has been the norm in Ismaili history from the beginning. However, this custom is not an exclusively Ismaili phenomenon; Sufi Muslims throughout the ages have congregated in restricted private spaces for prayer, knowledge discourse, and spiritual practices. Most Sufis require the disciple (*murid*) to make *bay'ah* with the Sufi master (*shaykh*) in order to participate in certain religious practices:



Naqshbandi Sufis give bay'ah to their Shaykh. Naqshbandi sufis performing the bayah ritual. Urs of Mawlana Cheikh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani in Lefke, Cyprus.



Over the course of many centuries, Sufi *tariqas* (orders) have multiplied and spread all over the Muslim world, from North Africa to the Indian subcontinent. The spread of these *tariqas* was accompanied by the construction of specific spaces of gathering and their particular forms and expressions of rituals... **Elaborate initiation rituals developed in which the disciple had to pronounce the bay'ah (oath of allegiance) to the murshid and be invested with symbols of their entrance into the order**

(e.g., cloak, hat, etc.). As it was common for many Sufi *shaykhs* to be buried in their 'place of residence' (*khanaqah*), these spaces have become popular pilgrimage sites (*ziyarat*) to seek *barakah* and *shafa'a* (intercession). Admission to such spaces is usually open to all, but this is not universally true. **For instance, khanaqahs of the Suhrawardi Order in India are known to restrict participation to those who have given their bay'ah, pledge of allegiance, to the pir or shaykh of the Sufi Order.** With regard to the issue of the exclusivity of such spaces, Sunni jurists have viewed it to be a matter dependent on custom... Furthermore, in some European and American cities where Sufi *tariqahs* are emerging and growing, one can find similar institutions (such as *zawiyah* and *khanaqah*), **often in private, where adherents meet regularly to perform acts of worship that closely resemble tariqah religious practices.**

Karim Jiwani, (Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, [Read at IIS Website](#))



Sufi Muslim

gathering

Similar to the Ismaili Muslims, the Chishti Sufi order in South Asia designates its private spaces of prayer and congregation by the name “Jama‘at-Khanah,” which was usually the residence of the Sufi Chishti Master (*shaykh*):

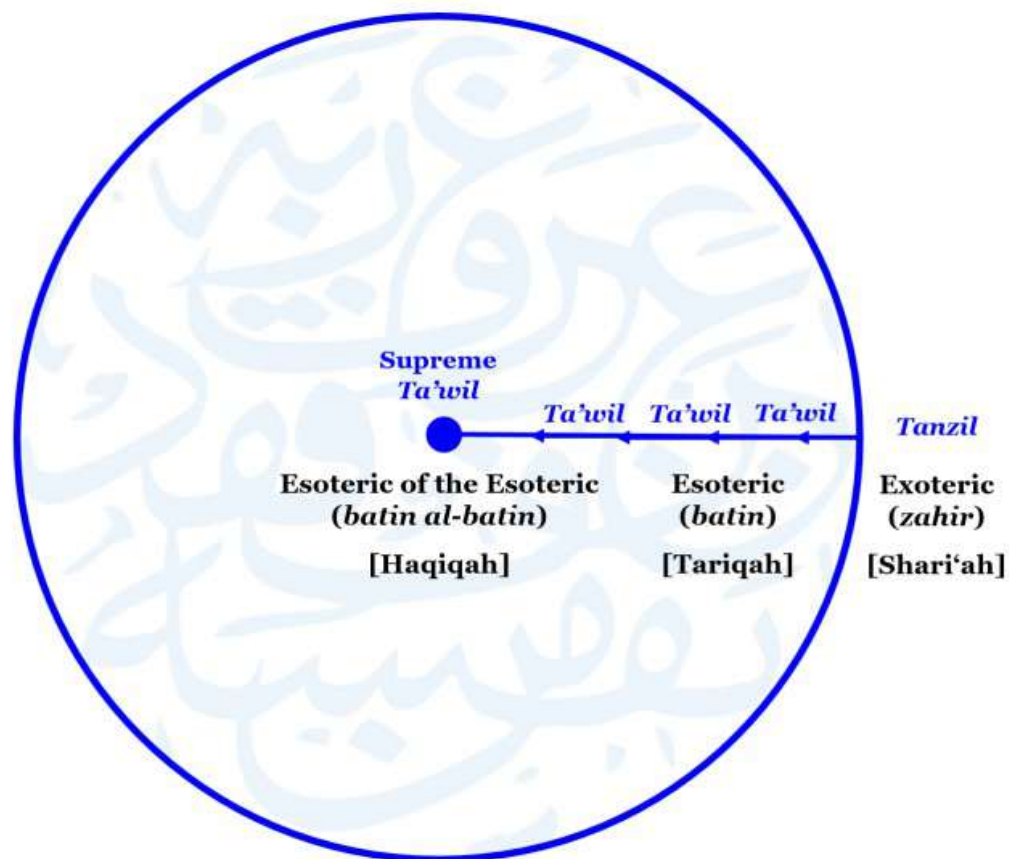
The center of activities among the Chishtis was called the *jama‘at khāna*, literally “the house of gathering.” Unlike the khanqah of Iran and central Asia, which might often be a large establishment supported by endowments, **the Chishti jama‘at khana was essentially the residence of the *shaykh*.** Meals were taken there, people slept there, and the basic teaching activities, interviews, and rituals (including sama‘) also took place in central room of the *jama‘at khana*. Early Chishti masters such as Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkār insisted that this was the normal practice of association for the order...

Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkār’s concept of *jama‘at khana* was that it be hidden from the people, a retreat rather than a showplace. Nizam al-Din Awliya also maintained a simple *jama‘at khāna*, and the same organization was followed by Burhan al-Din Gharib and Zayn al-Din Shirazi. The desire for privacy was probably the reason for the selection of Khuldabad, several miles away from the Daulatabad fort, as the site for Burhan al-Din Gharib’s jama‘at khana.

Carl Ernst, (*Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, 132)

The Sufi private spaces – the *ribat*, *khanaqa*, *zawiya*, etc. – and the Ismaili private space, the *Jamatkhanah*, are different from the institution of the mosque (*masjid*). **A mosque is a nondenominational space that serves Muslims of the exoteric public domain known as the *shari‘ah*.** Sufi and Ismaili prayer spaces are private denominational spaces and serve specific communities who participate in the esoteric

domain of Islam known as *tariqah* – this is why Ismailism and the Sufi brotherhoods are called “*tariqahs*” today. Entrance into a *tariqah* is only by way of the *bay’ah* (as explained above).



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The Circumference of the Circle is the Shari’ah. The Radius is the Tariqah. The Centre is the Haqiqah. Tariqah is higher than Shari’ah, and Haqiqah is higher than Tariqah.

The *Tariqah* or Spiritual Path which is usually known as Tasawwuf or Sufism is the inner and esoteric dimension of Islam and like the *Shari’ah* has its roots in the Quran and prophetic practice. Being the heart of the Islamic message it, like the physical heart, is hidden from external view, although again like the heart it is the inner source of life and the centre which coordinates inwardly the whole religious organism of Islam. The *Tariqah* is the most subtle and difficult aspect of Islam to understand at the same time that its external effect is to be seen in many manifestations of Islamic society and civilisation.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (*Ideals and Realities of Islam*)

Most importantly, Tariqah-Islam is a higher domain of Truth and practice than Shari’ah-Islam. This is because Tariqah-Islam is an [Esoteric Interpretations of the Qur’an: The Foundations of Shia Ismaili Ta’wil](#) that is explorative whereas Shari’ah-Islam is an exoteric legal Islam that is prescriptive – so the

rules, practices, and norms governing each domain are different. **The difference between exoteric legal Islam and esoteric spiritual Islam naturally necessitates separate physical spaces for the people of the Tariqah to practice their forms and levels of Islam.** As renowned scholar of Islam, Shahab Ahmed explains:



Those capable of higher truths should have available for them existential spaces where they can meet to discourse and transact and otherwise explore in terms of higher truth. The logic of Revelation necessitates, in other words, separate physical and social domains of public/Seen physical and social space and private/Unseen physical and social space as differentiated spaces for the social elaboration and operation of spatially-differentiated truths and meanings. **It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that, as a space for discourse, what I am calling “private discursive space” is very much a social space—that is to say, it is a space not of individual secrecy, but rather a restricted collective space in which for people to gather in private society for discourse (and performance) of Truths not appropriate to unrestricted common and public space and society.** As such, it is a sort-of public-private space, or a private-public space. It is, precisely, the communicative space of a more-or-less self-constituting class of persons who mutually recognize the capacity of their peers to entertain and deal with the communication and practice of complex, and often contradictory, exploratory truths. Thus the act of meaning-making is personal in that it is made in the individual self, public in that it is communicated to others, and private in that it is communicated to a limited and qualified public. This mutual recognition requires, of course, that there be something that makes people mutually recognizable. That something is, by and large, a shared education productive of shared attitudes to the nature of Truth. It is, in other words,

“the whole intellectual and spiritual world revealed by education into which an individual is born” that makes the one person recognizable to the other as a partaker in the discourses and practices and meanings... **When discourse and actions remain in the space of the private/high/khāṣṣ they are unaffected by the normative truths and values of ‘āmm/lower/public space—and are in that space governed by the normative truths and values of private/high/khāṣṣ space.**

Shahab Ahmed, (*What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, 2015, 378-385)

The Ismaili *Jamatkhanah* is established by the Imam of the Time as the [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka’bah to the Living Imam](#) for a specific local Ismaili community. The Qur’an lays out a specific protocol for anyone who wishes to enter into the House of the Prophet or the houses of people in general:
O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted.
– Holy Qur’an 33:53

O ye who believe! enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that ye may heed (what is seemly).
– Holy Qur’an 24:27

In conclusion, while the non-denominational *masjids* or mosques are public places for the rituals of the *shari‘ah* such as the [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du‘a’](#), the Ismaili *Jamatkhanah* is a private space reserved for the practices of the Ismaili Tariqah and therefore only accessible to *murids* who have given *bay‘ah* to the Imam.

For many centuries, a prominent feature of the Muslim religious landscape has been the variety of spaces of gathering co-existing harmoniously with the *masjid*, which in itself has accommodated a range of diverse institutional spaces for educational, social and reflective purposes. Historically serving communities of different interpretations and spiritual affiliations, these spaces have retained their cultural nomenclatures and characteristics, from *ribat* and *zawiyya* to *khanaqa* and *jamatkhana*. The congregational space incorporated within the Ismaili Centre belongs to the historic category of *jamatkhana*, an institutional category that also serves a number of sister Sunni and Shia communities, in their respective contexts, in many parts of the world. **Here, it will be space reserved for traditions and practices specific to the Shia Ismaili *tariqah* of Islam.**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Ismaili Centre Foundation Stone Ceremony, Dubai, December 13, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))



What is the difference between Didar, Mulaqat and Darbar?

“Sometimes Jamat in the past months has said to me, Hazar Imam, why do you make these jokes? And I said why shouldn't I make jokes? Darbar is a moment of happiness and I remind them that, in Islam, happiness is a blessing. It is a blessing from Allah. Therefore, if you have smiles, and if you have happy children, and you have friends, and you enjoy the qualities of life, this is also a reason to be thankful for the blessing from Allah.”

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan (Institutional Dinner, Syria, August 2008)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BUhIQAYjmFz/>



In the above photo, the left image is from the Imam's August 1992 Mulaqat in Montreal; the right image is from the Diamond Jubilee Darbar held in Kampala in October 2017. The Montreal Mulaqat was a Didar, but not a Darbar.

The word **Didar** (beatific vision) comes from the Persian word *didan*, “to see”. *Didar* means “vision”, “sight”, or “glimpse”. The word **Mulaqat** comes from the Arabic word *liqa* – which means “face to face meeting”. The word *liqa* appears throughout the Qur’an, referring to the “Day of Meeting” (Qur'an 9:77, 84:6, 29:5, 6:154, 18:110, 32:14, 41:54, 30:8) that takes place when human beings will have the direct vision of God on the Day of Judgment. The Qur’an also says that a preview or foretaste of the Meeting (*liqa*) with God takes place in the physical world when human beings behold the Signs of the Day of Meeting (Qur'an 13:2, 39:71, 10:7, 6:130). In this respect, the Imam is the living Sign of God and the *murid's* vision of the Imam – called *Liqa* or *Didar* – is a foretaste and preview of human soul's eschatological vision (*liqa, didar*) of God to take place in the hereafter.

One kind of Didar of the Imam is to see the Imam physically – **this is called *Zahiri Didar***. The second kind of Didar of the Imam involves seeing the Imam's Soul and Light (*nur*) spiritually with the eyes of the heart – **this is called *Batini Didar***. The centrality of the Didar of the Imam in Ismaili Islam is due to the fact that the seeker of truth can attain to the inner recognition (*ma'rifah*) of God through the *ma'rifah* and Didar of the Imam:

"Seekers of union must thus heed the Imam's words to attain their ultimate goal and must completely submit themselves to his will. The Imam is the only source through whom God can be recognized. It is therefore the highest goal of human existence to attain his beatific vision...The ultimate aim and aspiration of the believers was explicitly to recognize the divine through the beatific vision (didar) of the Imam of their time."

– Shafique N. Virani, (*The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 182)

Whenever Mawlana Hazar Imam meets with the Ismaili Jamat in a Tariqah setting and designates this as a *Didar*, then this gathering is a Mulaqat (face to face meeting) and a *Zahiri Didar* (Exoteric Vision). There are also occasions where the Mulaqat includes non-Ismaili Muslims and people of other faiths – such as in Syria and Tajikistan – in which case the occasion is still a *Zahiri Didar* for the Ismailis. Thus, a Mulaqat is any gathering – designated as such by the Imam – where the *Zahiri Didar* of the Imam takes place.

Sometimes, on special occasions, Mawlana Hazar Imam ordains and declares that a Mulaqat of the *Zahiri Didar* will be a *Darbar*. *Darbar* is the Persian word for the Court of a King, referring to the chamber in which the King's guests gather to have an audience with him. In contemporary times, when Mawlana Hazar Imam declares that a particular Mulaqat will be a *Darbar*, it means that the Mulaqat is an occasion of special happiness and special celebration. On several occasions such as his 1994 *Darbar* in London and his 1998 *Darbar* in Lisbon, Mawlana Hazar Imam explained that he was ordaining that the gathering be a *Darbar* because of a special occasion – such as the announcement about the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon. Throughout the Golden Jubilee Year, almost every Mulaqat of the Imam with the Imam was declared as a Golden Jubilee *Darbar*. During the Golden Jubilee *Darbars*, Mawlana Hazar Imam was in a very jovial mood and often cracked multiple jokes in his *Farmans* to cheers of applause and laughter from the Jamat.

"Sometimes Jamat in the past months has said to me, Hazar Imam, why do you make these jokes? And I said why shouldn't I make jokes? Darbar is a moment of happiness and I remind them that, in Islam, happiness is a blessing. It is a blessing from Allah. Therefore, if you have smiles, and if you have happy children, and you have friends, and you enjoy the qualities of life, this is also a reason to be thankful for the blessing from Allah."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan (Institutional Dinner, Syria, August 2008)

Even the Imam's delivery of jokes is spiritually significant in the context of his *Darbar*; jokes provoke laughter and laughter is form of happiness that is particular to the human intellect. Thus, the Imam's cracking jokes and making the Jamat laugh is one of the ways that the Imam performs his role of awakening and actualizing the intellects of his murids. Thus Nasir-i Khusraw once explained that:

*“Joy is the substance of intellect. Furthermore, out of all the animals only man, who possesses a rational soul, partakes of laughter. The philosopher-sages have posited one definition of 'man' as 'living-laughing', and laughing is a manifestation of happiness. **This particular human trait of laughter stands as proof that ultimate bliss is proper to the intellect.**”*

– Nasir-i Khusraw, (*Between Reason and Revelation*, 112-13)

Every Darbar is a Mulaqat and a Didar; but not every Mulaqat and Didar is a Darbar. One key difference between a normal Mulaqat and a Darbar is that the Imam wears his traditional robe (*jabbo*) and astrakhan cap inside the Darbar. Meanwhile, in non-Darbar Mulaqats, the Imam tends to wear his suit and wears another kind of robe on top of it.

The Ismaili Imams have been granting Darbars to their murids at least since the period of Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah Aga Khan I:

*“Agha Khan I attended the jama‘at-khana in Bombay on special religious occasions, and led the public prayers of the Khojas there. **Every Saturday, when in Bombay, he held durbar (Persian, darbar), giving audience to his followers who received his blessings.**”*

– Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, 474)

In a certain respect, the Fatimid Court and other places where the Ismaili Fatimid Imam-Caliph gave audiences to his subjects could be called a Darbar. In this setting, the Imam sat or rode out in the front and centre of the area; important Fatimid dignitaries would salute the Imam with a special greeting and pay homage to him; Qur’anic verses and other oaths of loyalty were presented before him. The Imam was dressed in a special turban and robes, accompanied by a parasol bearer and other dignitaries. Sometimes the Imam would also grant special robes of honour to certain officers for their services. For example, one source describes how the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Zahir “rode in procession with his troops, wearing a “round” robe of *dabiqi* linen with gold threads and a matching turban, seated under a parasol with gold threads” (Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, 64).

What is the Purpose of Prayer?



*"A man must be at one with God...How we stand this instant and every instant toward Him matters to us more than anything else in the Universe. This is the fundamental question: **Are you in harmony with God? If you are – you are happy.**"*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

("My Personal Life", Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. K.K. Aziz, 866)

According to the classical tradition of Islamic philosophy (al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Tusi, Mulla Sadra, etc), Shia Ismaili theology, Greek thought (Plotinus), and Christianity (Aquinas, Augustine), God is eternal and beyond space, time and change. **God's creative, sustaining and grace-bestowing act is ever-occurring and no favors, blessings, or grace are ever being withheld by Him.** The petitions and requests of created beings cannot cause any change in God's actions – which are eternal and therefore changeless.

"Of the favours of thy Lord We bestow freely on all – These as well as those: The bounties of thy Lord are not withheld."

– Holy Quran 17:20

The purpose of prayer, seeking God's help, petition, personal supplication, etc is to instill humility on the part of the person making the prayer. **Prayer allows the person to become more receptive to the flow of Divine mercy and grace that is already and ever occurring. While prayer cannot change or alter God, prayer changes and alters the one who prays - preparing his soul or consciousness to receive the Divine help that is already being sent to them.** The only reason why people do not seem to experience the Divine favors at every moment is because there are barriers blocking them from receiving them - barriers in the form of vices like pride, ignorance, bad intentions, and the like. If these barriers were removed, then one would always be experiencing God's mercy, help, favors, and blessings. *"Human souls are therefore*

varied and differ with respect to their receptivity to the resplendent lights of the Divine Command, just as material objects are variously receptive to the physical light of the sun. [Consider] stones, for example: one [kind] is pitch black, while others are progressively less dark, and their essences are more receptive to illumination, up to translucent glass which receives light from one side and emits from the other."

– Sayyidna Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, (The Paradise of Submission, tr. S.J. Badakhchani, 109)

In a nutshell, one does not pray to somehow compel God to selectively show special favor to them. The goal of prayer is to rehabilitate the person who prays, by untying the spiritual and psychic knots that block the reception of Divine grace from a person's consciousness. **One prays to bring oneself into spiritual harmony with God – such that one can experience a greater share of the Divine blessings which are always raining down upon us.** Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib tells us that the remembrance of God is what polishes human hearts (souls), allowing them to hear and see after having been deaf and blind to the light of God's blessings.

"Truly, God has made the Remembrance [of God] (al-dhikr) a polish (jila') for the hearts, by which they hear after being deaf, and see after being blind and yield after being resistant."

– Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, (Reza Shah-Kazemi, Justice and Remembrance, 142)

More:

[Ya Ali Madad: The Rationale for Praying to God and Calling upon the Imams in Prayer](#)

Why do Shias ask Ali for help and not Allah?

Shia Muslims pray to Allah in all their obligatory prayers. So this question is untruthful to begin with.

In addition, they ALSO seek the blessings and intercession and prayers of Imam Ali and other Shia Imams in the intercessory prayers. This practice is a continuation of what the Qur'an commands believers to do in relation to Prophet Muhammad. In Qur'an 4:64 and numerous other places, the Qur'an says it is necessary for believers to have Prophet Muhammad pray for them in order for them to find God's forgiveness:

... If only, when they had wronged themselves, they had come to thee [Muhammad], and pleaded for forgiveness from God, and had the Messenger pleaded for forgiveness on their behalf, they would indeed have found God to be clement and merciful (4:64).

The Prophet Muhammad was an intercessor (wasilah) between God and humanity in the Qur'anic vision and the Shia believe Imam Ali and his succeeding descendants occupy the exact same intercessory role. One may legitimately ask why intercession and mediation is necessary – why not just direct all prayers to God Himself and skip the middle man. The answer to this is that praying to God does not actually change anything in God; God is eternal and remains the same whether humans call His name or not. Neither 1 prayer nor 1000 prayers changes anything on God's part. [What is the Purpose of Prayer?](#) Now this is where intercession comes in – the intercessor, whether a Prophet, Imam or Saint (wali), prays FOR the believer and the intercessor's prayers help cause and bring out the inner change or transformation in the seeking believer. In other words, the intercessors prayer compounds with the believer's prayer to have a greater effect on opening up and purifying the soul of that believer. Once again – this still causes no change in God because God is eternal and transcends time and space. But the believer's heart changes – it becomes more receptive through his prayers and the intercessor's prayers. Clear proof of this is the wording in Qur'an 4:64 and Qur'an 9:103.

In 4:64, the Prophet praying for the believers causes them to “find God forgiving and merciful.” This is key – God does not change from not forgiving/merciful to forgiving. The real change is in the believers whom the Prophet prays for – they are now able to “find” (wajadu) God's forgiveness. It is the same in 9:103 where it is explicitly stated that the Prophet Muhammad prays for, cleanses, and purifies people by accepting their repentance offering and this he does on God's behalf. But the Prophet's role as intermediary and purifier is essential – this is why the 9:103 says that Muhammad's prayers bring inner peace to the believers – reassuring their hearts with confidence that God accepts their repentance.

Why Do Ismailis Have 7 Pillars Instead of 5?

Do the Pillars Comprise the Entirety of Faith?

Certain Muslim groups in present times have publicly monopolized and “normalized” an image of Islam where Islam equals the so-called “Five Pillars”: the *Shahadah*, ritual prayer (*salah, namaz*), pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Makkah, alms-giving (*zakah*), and fasting (*sawm*) from dawn to dusk in Ramadan. However, the idea of Islam = Five Pillars is a historical construct and does not go back to the origins of Islam as a faith. The Qur’an never defines Islam as “five pillars” and *hadiths* where the Prophet Muhammad defines Islam as “Five Pillars” only started circulating some 200 years after the Prophet Muhammad’s death. When one sees how Islam has been practiced through 1,400 years of history and continues to be practiced today, the equation of Islam with “five pillars” simply does not hold up to historical reality. In fact, the *Shahadah* is the only “pillar” that binds together all those who identify as Muslims as the scholar Ahmed Karamustafa writes:

The only part of this formula [of the Five Pillars of Islam] that stands up to close scrutiny is the shahada: it would be fair to say that anyone who does not subscribe to it (of course, after interpreting it in his or her own fashion) cannot be considered a Muslim. But the same cannot be said for the other four pillars [prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, alms] since the ways in which these four performative acts factor into the definition of Islam have always been hotly contested, theologically, legally and culturally. Let me cut to the chase and announce the main point directly and clearly: the four ritualistic pillars do NOT form a good and accurate account of being Muslim, historically, sociologically or theologically. To put it in reverse, there have been and continue to be millions of people who wholeheartedly adhere to the shahada but who do NOT perform these four particular ritualistic acts in the manner prescribed in legalistic manuals. Not only that: a good percentage of such Muslims would NOT agree that these four rituals are necessary to be considered. In other words, these “believers” are not just slackers who know perfectly well that they should perform these rituals but fail to do so for a number of reasons.

– Ahmed Karamustafa, (*“Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress”*, in Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2003, 98-110: 108-109)

The Ismaili position on the Pillars of Islam is based on the truth that the Imam of the time, in succession to Prophet Muhammad, has the SOLE authority and discretion to determine how Islam should be practiced by the Community in every time and place. This is based on the fact that the Prophet Muhammad taught and prescribed all Islamic ritual practices during his own lifetime. The Qur’an states that complete obedience is due to the Prophet:

He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God.

– Holy Qur’ān 4:80

So whatever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatever he forbids you, abstain from it

. – Holy Qur’ān 59:7

The above verse indicates that it is indeed the Prophet Muḥammad who determines what is allowed and what is forbidden. Whatever the Prophet gives to the Believers – guidance, prescribed rituals, rules of behavior – must be followed. It is also a fact that Prophet Muhammad continuously commanded, modified, reinterpreted, and reformed the early Community's religious practices throughout his 23 year mission: the fasting practices were changed three times; the *qiblah* direction for prayer was changed two times; the number of prayer times was originally two prayers in Mecca and then changed to three prayers in Madinah to match the Jewish prayer times; the pilgrimage (*hajj*) rituals and procedures were adapted from pre-Islamic practices of pilgrimage. Both the Qur'anic guidance and the Prophetic guidance responded to the changing circumstances and situations of the early Community and their relationship to other communities like the Jewish tribes of Madinah. For example, the change of the *qiblah* direction from Jerusalem to Makkah in the later Madinah years was in direct response to the early Community asserting its independent identity from the Jewish tribes of Madinah and as a test to see which of the Believers were truly loyal to Prophet Muhammad ([Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam](#)).

The Prophet has more authority (awla) over the believers than their own souls.

– Holy Qur'ān 33:6

Since Prophet Muhammad held authority (*awla*) over the Believers (Qur'an 33:6), he was owed complete obedience. Having designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as the *Mawla* (Master) over the Believers after him, it is Imam Ali and thereafter every succeeding Imam in each age who would command and mandate religious ritual praxis, guide, pray for, teach, explain, accept offerings from, and forgive the Believers. The Qur'an also states clearly that one of the duties of the Imams living in the eras before Prophet Muhammad was to establish the prayer-forms and other religious practices:

And We made them Imams guiding by Our command. And We inspired to them the doing of good deeds, to establish the prayer, and giving of zakah; and they were worshippers of Us

– Qur'an 21:73

"By the institution of the Ulu'l-Amr - who can be interpreted as Imam and Caliph - and by placing obedience to the ulu'l-Amr immediately after that to God and Prophet, he ensured that the Faith would ever remain living, extending, developing with science, knowledge, art, and industry."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Foreword to Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, [Read Here](#))

The fourth Ismaili Imam from the authorized line of succeeding hereditary Imams who had the authority (*walayah*) to interpret the faith of Islam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, explained in his own time period that there are not give but seven *Pillars of Islam*:

"Islam is based upon seven pillars: walayah – and this is the most excellent; through it and through the walī (the Imām), the true knowledge of the pillars can be obtained: ṭaharah (purification), [The Esoterics \(Batin\) of Prayer: From Salah to Du'a'](#), [Why Do Ismailis Give Dasond, and is Dasond/Zakat the Same as Charity?](#), [Sawm: The Esoterics \(Bāṭin\) of Fasting](#), [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the](#)

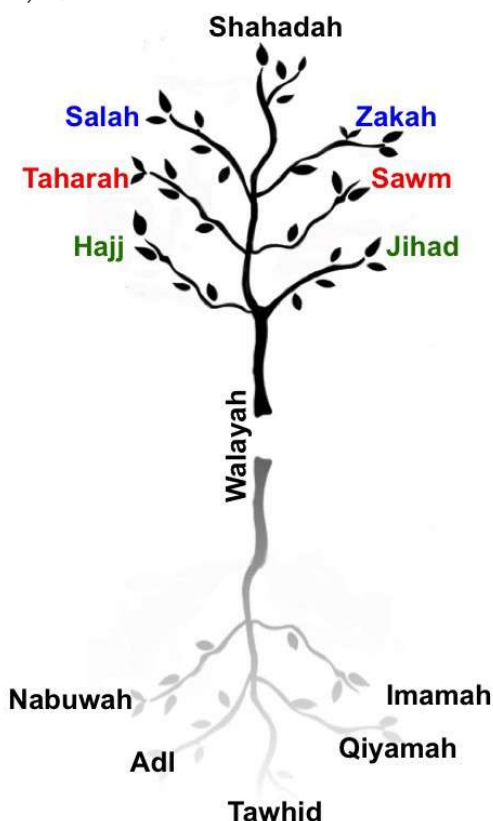
[Living Imam](#), and *jihād* (striving).”

– Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir, (*Qādi al-Nu‘man, Da‘ā’im al-Islām, Prologue, 2*)

The Pillars belong to a grander and more comprehensive religious framework which includes both theological truths and ritual practices. This framework traditionally consists of the Roots of Religion (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*) and the Branches of Religion (*Furū‘ al-Dīn*) and is articulated using the Qur’ānic metaphor of a tree:

“Have you not seen how God sets forth the example of a Good Word like a Good Tree? Its Root firmly set and its Branch in heaven. Giving its fruit in all seasons by the permission of its Lord. And God sets forth examples for mankind so that they may remember.”

– Holy Qur’ān 14:24



The *Furū‘ al-Dīn* are what people today call the “Pillars of Islam”. But the Pillars do not suffice in themselves – they must be accompanied by the knowledge of the *Uṣūl* or theological truths to bring spiritual benefit. The *Uṣūl al-Dīn* consist of the fundamental theological truths of Islam. The word *uṣūl* (singl. *aṣl*) means “roots”. The *Uṣūl al-Dīn* are to religion what the roots are to a tree. The roots originate and sustain the entire tree but they are hidden from plain view. Similarly, most people in a particular religious tradition do not fully comprehend its theological truths. In Shi‘ī Islam, the *Uṣūl al-Dīn* are [“He who is above all else”: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God](#), [Aga Khan Development Network: The “Mahdi-ist” Mission of the Ismaili Imam](#), [Night of Power: How the Qur’an was Revealed in Human Language](#), [Khushali Readings: Validating and Understanding the Ismaili Imam](#), and [Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘īlī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#). The book *Ismaili Tariqah* by Al-Wā‘iẓ Abualy Aziz confirms this schema as based on an earlier book by Imām

Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh called *Uṣul wa Furū'-i Dīn* (Bombay, 1894). The *Uṣūl* are fundamental truths which are changeless although their articulation evolves from generation to generation. The *Furū'*, on the other hand, like branches of a tree, are subject to changes in form and method in order to adapt to the historical and social circumstances. Thus, the *Furū'* evolve in their appearance and may even be abrogated if and when the conditions require it.

In this sense, the Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh has clearly stated the Imam of the time can adjust and modify the ritual practices of Islam based on the changing times and:

“Not only non-Muslims but some Muslims, appalled by the extent and variety of the non-essentials (Furū'āt) have followed the example of the man who in emptying the waste from the tub threw out the baby with it out of the window. They have almost thrown out the Uṣūlāt (essentials). If Islam is ever to fulfill its mission it must have universality not only in space, namely, throughout the earth, but in time, namely, as long as mankind exists on this globe... If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain Ibnu'l-Waqt (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time.”

– Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āgā Khān III, (Foreword to *Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations* by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, [Click Here to Read](#))

See this article: [The Seven Pillars of Islam: The Esoterics of Walāyah](#)

Aga Khan Development Network: The “Mahdi-ist” Mission of the Ismaili Imamat

To the Imamat, the meaning of “quality of life” extends to the entire ethical and social context in which people live, and not only to their material well-being measured over generation after generation. Consequently, the Imamat’s is a holistic vision of development, as is prescribed by the faith of Islam. It is about investing in people, in their pluralism, in their intellectual pursuit, and search for new and useful knowledge, just as much as in material resources. But it is also about investing with a social conscience inspired by the ethics of Islam. It is work that benefits all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality or background. Does the Holy Qur’an not say in one of the most inspiring references to mankind, that Allah has created all mankind from one soul? Today, this vision is implemented by institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Alltex EPX Limited Opening Ceremony, Kenya, December 19,
2003: [Read Here](#))

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies established by the [Who are the Shia Ismaili Muslims: A Primer with Visual Charts](#) over the last 100 years; the Network operates in over 35 countries, employs over 80,000 people and 100,000 volunteers, and spends over \$600 million dollars annually to raise the quality of life of all people in need, regardless of faith, culture or ethnicity. The AKDN accomplishes this through numerous activities in poverty relief, healthcare, economics, education, health services, architecture, agriculture, cultural restoration, tourism, etc. The roots of the AKDN go back to the first Khoja Ismaili school established by [Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III’s Services to the Muslim World](#) in Bombay and the first Aga Khan Schools created in Zanzibar by [Twentieth Century: “The Unity of Islam” – Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III’s Services to the Muslim World](#). **As explained by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the work of AKDN is not mere philanthropy – because philanthropy is voluntary, as a choice. On the contrary, the AKDN’s work is a sacred obligation of the Ismaili Imams based on the very definition of their Imamat stemming directly from the ethics of Islam:**

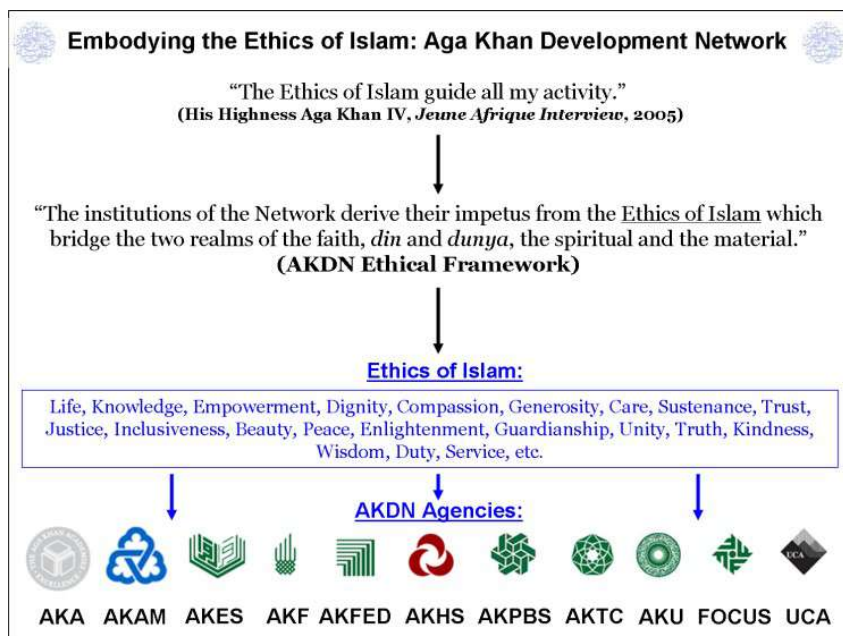
I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world — especially the Western media — try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. *Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often*

describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility — it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

Acceptance Address, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, May 20, 2006: [Read Here](#))

The below diagram illustrates how all of the AKDN's agencies – such as the Aga Khan Foundation, Aga Khan University, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Aga Khan Academies, and Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development – are enactments and translations of Islamic ethics into institutional action.



The ethics of Islam enjoin all believers, individually or through institutions such as the Ismaili Imamat, to assist the poor, the isolated, and the marginalised to improve their current circumstances and future prospects. Through the Imamat, I have tried to respond to this responsibility by creating a group of private, non-denominational agencies the Aga Khan Development Network – to respond to the needs and potential of people living in some of the poorest parts of the world, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or religion.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(World Mountain Forum UNESCO, Paris, France, June 5, 2000)

The foundations of the Ismaili Imam's work being accomplished today through the Aga Khan Development Network were established and prophesied 1400 years ago. Numerous reports (*ahadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad in both Sunni and Shi'a collections describe how [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#) would establish justice in the world and rid the earth of all injustice, oppression and poverty. The Prophet Muhammad refers to his future descendant, in the line of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Hazrat Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter), as a member of his Ahl al-Bayt and describes him as follows:

If only one day of this world remained, God would raise up **a man from my *Ahl al-Bayt* who would fill the earth with justice as it has been filled with oppression.**

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 37, Hadith No. 4270: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/38/5>)

If only one day of this world remained. God would lengthen that day, until He raised up in it **a man who belongs to me or to my *Ahl al-Bayt* whose father's name is the same as my father, who will fill the earth with equity and justice as it has been filled with oppression and tyranny.**

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 37, Hadith 4269: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/38/4>)

The Mahdi is from me and he will have a broad forehead and a prominent nose. **He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny** and he will rule for seven years.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 37, Hadith 4272: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/38/7>)

The Mahdi will be one of the descendants of Fatimah.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36, Hadith 4086: <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/161>)

The Mahdi is among us, the *Ahl al-Bayt*. God will rectify him in a single night.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36, Hadith 4085: <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/160>)

The people of my *Ahl al-Bayt* will face calamity, expulsion and exile after I am gone, until some people will come from the east carrying black banners. They will ask for something good but will not be given it. Then they will fight and will be victorious, then they will be given what they wanted, but they will not accept it and will give **leadership to a man from my *Ahl al-Bayt***. Then they will fill it with justice just as it was filled with injustice. Whoever among you lives to see that, let him go to them even if he has to crawl over snow.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36, Hadith 157: <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/157>)

The Mahdi will be among my community. If he lives for a short period, it will be seven, and if he lives for a long period, it will be nine, during which my nation will enjoy a time of ease such as it has never enjoyed. The land will bring forth its yield and will not hold back anything, and wealth at that time will be piled up. A man will stand up and say: “O Mahdi, give me!” He will say: “Take.”

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36, Hadith 158: <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/158>)

At the end of the time of my community, the Mahdi will appear. God will grant him rain, the earth will bring forth its fruits, he will give a lot of money, cattle will increase and the community will become great.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn*, 4:557-558, No. 8669)

The promised descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who brings justice to the world and relieves it of oppression and injustice is called *al-Mahdi*, meaning, “*the one rightly guided by God*.” Sunni Muslims, Twelver Shi‘as and many Sufis expect this descendant of the Prophet, al-Mahdi, to be a single messianic person who appears in the future shortly before the Day of Judgment and who relieves the entire world of injustice and brings relief to humankind in just a few years (or just one night per some traditions). **Meanwhile, the The Aga Khan’s Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof and Ismaili Muslim thinkers have explained that al-Mahdi is not a single person but actually a function undertaken by some of the The Aga Khan’s Direct Descent from Prophet**

Muhammad: Historical Proof from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. Throughout history, only a certain number of Imams have had the practical means to undertake such a grand mission of establishing justice and equity and removing oppression and injustice from the world because most of the Ismaili Imams have been heavily persecuted. For example, the founder of the Fatimid Caliphate, Imam ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi, and the Fatimid-Imam Caliphs each performed the function or mission of the Mahdi. The Mahdi is therefore a mission carried out by several Shi‘a Ismaili Imams and not a specific individual.

Qadi al Nu‘man reports from the Imam al-Mu‘izz that a certain man came to the first Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mahdi bi’llah and asked: *“Are you really the expected Mahdi, under whose authority God shall gather His servants, making him the king of the earth, and shall the religion of the world become one under you?”*

The Imam al-Mahdi replied: *“The mission of the Mahdi is enormous. I have a considerable share in it, and those who are coming after me shall also share it.”*

The Imam al-Mu‘izz added: *“If it [the mission of the Mahdi] should be the lot of one person only, how could anything from it come to me. [The Imam-Caliph] al-Mahdi was the key which opened the lock of the Divine bounty, mercy, blessing, and happiness. By him God has opened all these to His servants. And this shall continue after him in his successors, until the promise of God which He made to them in His bounty, might, and power, will be fulfilled.”*

(Sayyidna Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man, *Sharh al-Akhbar*, tr. Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 102-103)

Thus, the **3. The Fatimid Period of the Imam-Caliphs:** applied the term *Mahdi* and *Mahdiyyun* to their entire dynasty of Imams. Throughout the public sermons (*khutbahs*) of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, they always refer to themselves as the “Mahdi-ist” (*al-mahdiyyun*) Imams and Caliphs. The term Mahdi therefore applies to multiple Ismaili Imams instead of just one individual. Every Ismaili Imam who has the capacity to carry out the mission of establishing justice and spreading compassion in the world at large is called al-Mahdi because he performs the Mahdi-ist mission.

Al-Mahdī or its plural *al-mahdiyyūn*, moreover, was, to judge from the *khutbas* and other surviving documents, the standard way these early Fatimids referred to themselves. The phrase *khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*, 'the rightly guided mahdī-ist caliphs', was a part of the very first Fatimid *khutba*. Al-Qā'im in 302 asked for God's blessings on *al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*. In al-Manṣūr's first *khutba* he uses the words *ibn al-mahdiyyīn* 'son of the mahdīs' for his grandfather. Later in the same sermon he cites *al-hudāt al-mahdiyyīn*, 'the rightly guided guides'. In a subsequent *khutba* he speaks of al-Mahdī as *wārith faḍl al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn min ābā'ihī al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn*, 'the inheritor of the excellence of the Mahdī-ist imams from his forefathers, the rightly guided caliphs'. In the same sermon he calls al-Mahdī 'the distinguished offspring of the rightly guided imams' (*najīb al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn*). The phrase *al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn* becomes standard in subsequent *khutbas*. And it appears regularly in many contexts—documents and *khutbas*—throughout the Fatimid period.

– Paul E. Walker, (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, Chapter 2, 70-71)

Today, [The Aga Khan's Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof](#), is undertaking the “Mahdi-ist” mission – the functions of the Mahdi – through the work of his institutions in the Aga Khan Development Network. In fact, the *hadith* describing the mission of the Mahdi is very much mirrored in the Aga Khan Development Network mission statement as stated in the AKDN Ethical Framework as follows:



The Aga Khan Development Network is a contemporary endeavor of the Ismaili Imamate to realise the social conscience of Islam through institutional action. It brings together, under one coherent aegis, institutions and programmes **whose combined mandate is to help relieve society of ignorance, disease and deprivation without regards to the faiths or national origins of people whom they serve.**

(The Aga Khan Development Network Mandate in the *AKDN Ethical Framework*: http://www.akdn.org/publications/akdn_ethical_framework.pdf)

If only one day of this world remained. God would lengthen that day, until He raised up in it **a man who belongs to me or to my *Ahl al-Bayt*** whose father's name is the same as my father, who will fill the earth with equity and justice as it has been filled with oppression and tyranny.

– Prophet Muhammad,
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 37, Hadith 4269: <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/38/4>)

This is the impulse that drives the Aga Khan Development Network, the AKDN. To understand this dimension of the religious office I hold, one must appreciate that Islam encompasses both the spiritual and the secular. This unity underpins an unrelenting effort towards an equitable order, where the vulnerable are helped to regain the dignity of self-fulfillment.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,
(Acceptance Address, Die Quadriga 2005 Prize, October 3, 2005: [Read Here](#))

Some Sunni hadiths state that the father of the promised Mahdi will have the same name as the Prophet Muhammad's own father. **It is worth noting that the most prominent forefather or "father" of Prophet Muhammad according to the Qur'an is 1. The Period of the Early Shi'i Imams:** The meaning of the phrase in the hadiths, that the Mahdi's "father" will have the same name as the Prophet's "father", is that **the Imams who carry out the mission of the Mahdi will be especially known by and named after their "father" or ancestor with the same name as the Prophet's forefather, Isma'il.** And this is precisely the case today: the true Imams who fulfill Prophet's prediction and carry out the mission of the Mahdi are the Ismaili Imams; they publicly trace their lineage to the Prophet through Isma'il son of Ja'far al-Sadiq in the same way Prophet Muhammad publicly traced his own descent from Prophet Ibrahim through Isma'il son of Abraham.



Interviewer: And your own descent as head of the Isma‘ilis is from...?

Aga Khan IV: Is from Isma‘il.

Interviewer: And where do you rank?

Aga Khan IV: I am the forty-ninth.

Interviewer: You are the forty-ninth Imam?

Aga Khan IV: Yes, Yes.

(BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton, September 6, 1979: [Read Here](#))

In conclusion, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, as the founder of the Aga Khan Development Network, is today fulfilling the mission of the promised Mahdi foretold 1400 years ago by his own ancestor, Prophet Muhammad. Even though the Ismaili Imams [Ismailis through History: From Persecuted Minority to Pluralist Community](#), the period of persecution has passed and the Imams, as per the Prophet’s own promise, are now engaged in bringing justice and equity to the world through the Aga Khan Development Network. Below is a list of some of the AKDN’s accomplishments to this end, followed by a special AKDN video describing them:



- AKDN has been improving the quality of life of millions of human beings for **over 100 years**;
- AKDN operates in over **35 countries**, employs **80,000 people** and mobilizes over **100,000 volunteers** worldwide;
- AKDN's annual budget is over **\$925 million** and funded in large part by Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV;



Photo Credit: Simerg

- AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development) generates **\$3.5 billion in annual revenue** and **all profits are reinvested** for development; AKDN raised \$1 billion from its own resources and partners for social, economic and cultural development in Afghanistan;
- AKDN through the Aga Khan Trust For Culture (AKTC) has executed **8 projects to restore or create parks, historic sites and gardens** – which attract **5 million people every year** and **43 million visitors** since opening;



- AKDN has created **5 power plants** providing electric power to **10 million people** in Asia and Africa;



- AKDN runs over **200 health centres, hospitals, clinics and community health programs**, allowing over **5 million people** to obtain healthcare every year;



- AKDN has helped **8 million people** achieve greater food security and high income through agricultural and disaster preparedness projects;
- AKDN has plants over **1 million trees every year**; **134 million** trees have been planted in Asia and Africa;



- AKDN provides **17 million people** in Asia and Africa access to financial services through various financial initiatives including micro-finance;
- AKDN has established and runs **200 schools (including IB schools) and 2 universities (AKU, UCA)** with campuses in 9 countries – helping educate 2 million students per year;



- AKDN supports **40,000 civil society organizations** with a membership of over **1.3 million people**;
- AKA (Aga Khan Award for Architecture) gives **\$1 million in prize money** for every award cycle and has a database of 9,000 architectural projects;
- AKDN provides **1.3 million people with safe drinking water**, sanitation and sewage facilities;

Appendix: How the present Ismaili Imam defines the mission of the Aga Khan Development Network

(Courtesy of [NanoWisdoms Archive](#) “Search” Feature)

In Islam, the Holy Quran offers explicit direction to share resources beyond one's requirements, and to care for the poor and those in need. The injunction to service is the ethical underpinning of the work of the Aga Khan Development Network. It drives its efforts to build the intellectual capital and institutions needed to address the problems of our world today. An example is the Global Centre for Pluralism which we have recently founded in partnership with the Government of Canada. The achievements of the AKDN would not be possible without the tireless contributions of the global community of Ismailis that I lead, residing in Central and Southern Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. Our volunteers and contributors also include many thousands of others from multiple cultures and faiths around the world. They are united with us in our mission to help build capacity and dignity for individuals, to enable them to take control of their own development.

(Acceptance Remarks upon Receiving the Carnegie Medal for Philanthropy, October 4, 2005: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7173/>)

I think that the nature of the office of the Imam, whether it's a Shia imam or a Sunni imam, is to have the capacity to achieve results. When my grandfather died in 1957, the Ismaili Imamate did not have the vehicles in the structured manner that it has today to act in these various fields internationally. Today it has that capacity. It is a very big network. It's grown obviously over the years and it's been driven by recognition of need as time has gone by.

(NBC Interview, Richard Engel, December 31, 2010: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9644/>)

As spiritual leader of Ismailis, I have a responsibility to improve the quality of life of our community members, and all who share their lives. The Aga Khan Development Network, or AKDN, work in this direction.

(Le Parsien Interview, Gilles Maarek, June 17, 2002: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10073/>)

I am fascinated and somewhat frustrated when representatives of the Western world — especially the Western media — try to describe the work of our Aga Khan Development Network in fields like education, health, the economy, media, and the building of social infrastructure. Reflecting a certain historical tendency of the West to separate the secular from the religious, they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility — it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities.

(Acceptance Address, Tutzing Evangelical Academy's Tolerance Award, May 20, 2006: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7706/>)

In Islam, the Holy Qur'an offers explicit direction to share resources beyond one's requirements, and to care for the poor and those in need. The injunction to service is the ethical underpinning of the work of the Aga Khan Development Network. It drives its efforts to build the intellectual capital and institutions needed to address the problems of our world today.

(Acceptance Address, Carnegie Medal for Philanthropy, October 4, 2005: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7543/>)

The Aga Khan Development Network has a goal. The goal is to try to make the countries where we work, countries of opportunity for their populations.

That is the goal. What can we do to make each one of these countries a place of a happy and secure future.

(Acceptance Remarks, University of California San Francisco Medal, April 26, 2011: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9897/>)

I am fortunate to lead an international community with a strong social conscience. Bridging North and South, East and West, the Ismailis have a long tradition of philanthropy, self-reliance and voluntary service. Wherever they live, they faithfully abide by the Qur'anic ethic of a common humanity and the dignity of man. They willingly pool knowledge and resources with all those who share our social ethic to help improve the quality of life of less fortunate men, women and children. This is the impulse that drives the Aga Khan Development Network, the AKDN. To understand this dimension of the religious office I hold, one must appreciate that Islam encompasses both the spiritual and the secular. This unity underpins an unrelenting effort towards an equitable order, where the vulnerable are helped to regain the dignity of self-fulfilment.

(Acceptance Address, Die Quadriga 2005 Prize, October 3, 2005: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7539/>)

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) consists of a series of specialised agencies that have been brought into existence over the years since 1957 in response to needs that have been identified in many of the developing countries of Asia and Africa. It is rooted in the ethics of our faith, and it serves all the populations we seek to support, without regard to gender, race or faith.

(‘A Life in the Service of Development’, *Politique Internationale*, 2011-12: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10062/>)

My sense is that people in developing countries want new ways to address the question of their economic and social well-being. What we're saying through the Aga Khan Development Network is that the era of give-a-ways is gone. This is a time to enhance self-reliance, for grassroots groups to generate profits and use money for promoting social good.

(Pranay Gutpe Interview, 1999: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/>)

To the Imam, the meaning of “quality of life” extends to the entire ethical and social context in which people live, and not only to their material well-being measured over generation after generation. Consequently, the Imam’s is a holistic vision of development, as is prescribed by the faith of Islam. It is about investing in people, in their pluralism, in their intellectual pursuit, and search for new and useful knowledge, just as much as in material resources. But it is also about investing with a social conscience inspired by the ethics of Islam. It is work that benefits all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality or background. Does the Holy Qur’an not say in one of the most inspiring references to mankind, that Allah has created all mankind from one soul? Today, this vision is implemented by institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network.

(Alltex EPX Limited Opening Ceremony, Kenya, December 19, 2003: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6843/>)

For those not familiar with our work, I would note that while the Aga Khan Development Network’s activities are rooted in the worldwide Shia Ismaili Muslim Community, its programmes and activities in each setting are open to all without regard to ethnicity, race, gender or religion. As a matter of policy, none of the Network’s educational institutions offer instruction in religion unless required by the national curriculum.

(Association of American universities Centenary Celebration, ‘Making a Difference’, April 22, 2001: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5920/>)

Well I think the nature of the role that I have requires me to look not only at issues of faith but at issues of quality of life and therefore the Aga Khan Development Network was an attempt to create capacity to improve quality of life of the peoples in the countries where we work. And it’s a system of agencies — it’s not one agency — because as time has gone by we’ve found different needs and therefore we’ve tried to be field driven so that we have a network of agencies which can work together in any relationship as is required.

(Syrian TV Interview, Reem Haddad, August 29, 2008: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9004/>)

Since succeeding to this office as the 49th Imam in 1957, I have been concerned with the development of the Ismailis and the broader societies in which they live. The engagement of the Imam in development is guided by Islamic ethics, which bridge faith and society. It is on this premise that I established the Aga Khan Development Network. This network of agencies,

known as the AKDN, has long been active in many areas of Asia and Africa to improve the quality of life of all who live there. These areas are home to some of the poorest and most diverse populations in the world.

(Keynote Address, Governor General's 2004 Canadian Leadership Conference, Gatineau, May 19, 2004: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6977/>)

The challenge of pluralism is particularly important for those who are called upon to lead diversified communities and to act in diversified environments. It is a challenge to which Canadians have responded nobly through the years – and it is also a challenge which has been central to our work through the Aga Khan Development Network, what we call AKDN.

(Address at Opening of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, December 8, 2008: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9151/>)

The general goal of the Aga Khan Development Network, as system of agencies, is to assist in the construction of civil society. Over the past 50 years we have come to the conclusion that the strength and quality of civil society is the greatest guarantor of processes of positive change.

(CNN Interview, John Deferios, Doha, December 10, 2010: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9638/>)

Islamic belief sees the spiritual and material worlds as inextricably connected. Faith should deepen our concern for improving the quality of human life in all of its dimensions. That is the overarching objective of the Aga Khan Development Network.

(88th Stephen A. Ogen, Jr. '60 Memorial Lecture, Brown University, March 10, 2014: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10725/>)

In all interpretations of Islam, Imams, whether they are Shia or Sunni, are required not only to lead in the interpretation of the faith, but equally to contribute to improving the quality of life of the people who refer to them. This dual obligation is often difficult to appreciate from the viewpoint of Christian interpretations of the role which Church leaders are expected to perform. It is on this ethical premise, which bridges faith and society, that I established the Aga Khan Development Network. Its multiple agencies and programmes have long been active in many areas of Africa and Asia that are

home to some of the poorest and most diverse populations in the world, serving people without regard to their ethnicity, gender or faith.

(Keynote Address to the Nobel Institute's Seminar: Democratic Development, Pluralism and Civil Society, Oslo, April 7, 2005: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7255/>)

The engagement of the Imamat in development is guided by the ethics of Islam which bridge faith and society, a premise on which I established the Aga Khan Development Network, known as the AKDN. Its cultural social and economic development agencies seek to improve opportunities and living conditions of the weakest in society, without regard to their origin, gender or faith.

(Keynote Address to the Annual Conference of German Ambassadors, Berlin, September 6, 2004: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7073/>)

In all interpretations of Islam, Imams, whether they are Shia or Sunni, are required not only to lead in the interpretation of the faith, but equally to contribute to improving the quality of life of the people who refer to them. This dual obligation is often difficult to appreciate from the viewpoint of Christian interpretations of the role which Church leaders are expected to perform. It is on this ethical premise, which bridges faith and society, that I established the Aga Khan Development Network. Its multiple agencies and programmes have long been active in many areas of Africa and Asia that are home to some of the poorest and most diverse populations in the world, serving people without regard to their ethnicity, gender or faith.

(Keynote Address to the Nobel Institute's Seminar: Democratic Development, Pluralism and Civil Society, Oslo, April 7, 2005: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7255/>)

Khushali Readings: Validating and Understanding the Ismaili Imam

Ismaili Gnosis conveys Khushali Mubarak on the occasion of Mawlana Hazar Imam's birthday. As December 13 is a time when Ismailis all around the world reflect upon the occasion of the birth of the Imam of the Time, Ismaili Gnosis offers a selection of readings on the intellectual validation and esoteric understanding of the Ismaili Imam.

Readings: Validating and Establishing the Ismaili Imam

The first set of readings presents the intellectual and historical validation of the Ismaili Imam in a step-by-step manner and we recommend reading them in the presented order.

The Prophet Unveiled: The Spiritual Functions of Muhammad in Early Islam
[The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#)

Validating Imam from the Holy Quran: The Qur'anic Basis for the Existence of the Imam
[Towards Validating Manifest Imam From The Qur'an Alone](#)

What is Shia Islam: A Summary of Different Shia Communities
[What is Shia Islam? A Visual Chart of Different Shia Communities](#)

The Shia Imam: A Summary of the Major Schisms in the lineage of Imams
[The Shia Imam: A Timeline of Major Divisions and Developments](#)

The Successor of Imam Jafar Sadiq: Seven Proofs for the Succession of Imam Ismail ibn Ja'far and the Ismaili line of Imams
[Who Succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq? Seven Proofs for the Imam of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar](#)

Readings: Esoteric Understanding of the Ismaili Imam

The second set of readings is dedicated to presenting a deeper and more comprehensive perspective on the Imam, with special focus on the esoteric themes of Imam — as set out in traditional sources — such as the Light (nur) of Imam, the history of the Imams during the ages of the Prophets, and the esoteric significance of the unprecedented historical eras of the 48th and 49th Imams. We also recommend reading the below articles in the presented order.

Light upon Light: The Succession of the Ismaili Imams

[Light upon Light: Glimpses into the Succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams](#)

The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna and Sermons of ‘Ali

[The Eternal Imam: Songs of Krishna – Sermons of ‘Ali](#)

From Adam to Aga Khan: The Universal Imamat

[From Ādam to Āga Khān: The Universal Imāmat](#)

Esoteric Apocalypse: Ismaili Concepts of Qiyamah Part 1

[Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 1\)](#)

Esoteric Apocalypse: Ismaili Concepts of Qiyamah Part 2

[Esoteric Apocalypse \(Qiyamah\): Isma‘ilī Muslim Perspectives on the “End of the World” \(Part 2\)](#)

Ismaili Gnosis is currently running a short survey to determine the sort of topics, subjects and issues most relevant to those wishing to learn more about Ismailism. We would be grateful if you could kindly take a minute to fill out the survey as the information will allow us to better focus our future articles to your needs. The survey is completely anonymous.

What is the meaning of Nandi offered in Jamatkhana?

"The word *nandi* is corrupt form of *nadi*, whose original form is *na'd* in Arabic, meaning *to call*. The word *nida* means *auction*. The word *na'd* is used 29 times in the Koran. Another view suggests that the *nandi* is a Hindi word meaning *blessing*. It is a form of *mehmani*, and entertainment to the Imam. Nandi is an Islamic practice to offer food etc. to the Imam. It is an oblation presented in Ismailism. When asked about "the best part of Islam," the Prophet said, "offering food and extending greeting of peace (*tut'im al-ta'am wa tarqa al-salam*) to those you know and those you do not know" (*Bukhari*, 16:12). Asked about the meaning of a "righteous pilgrimage (*hajj mabrur*), the Prophet replied, "offering food and speaking kindly" (*it'am al-ta'am wa-tib al-kalam*), vide *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (2:16). According to *Daim al-Islam* (p. 330), "When people provide food (*ma'ida*, pl. *mawa'id*) or feasts for the progeny of the Prophet, the angels surround them and glorify the Lord and ask for the pardon of those that partake of the meal." The practice of the Nandi or Na'di seems to have emerged in the Indian Ismaili tradition during post-Alamut period. In those days, when the Pirs, vakils or any visitors travelled in Iran from India, the followers gave them many items to be presented to the Imam, known as nazar or khidmati. It was a symbolic present of any value offered to the Imam with appropriate forms to signify the devotion and love of the person offering it. The value of nazar (offering) ranged from a coconut to that of precious jewels. The practice of nazar became well established among the people of all walks of life in India that the food, fruits, grains, furniture, jewels, etc. were presented. Since it was not possible to take away these items in the long tedious journey, it seems to have been decided to get them disposed off, and its proceeds were remitted to the Imam for earning blessings (nandi). Many items were thus auctioned in those days in the house of an elder person residing close to the Jamakhana."

– Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Aly, *Encyclopedia of Ismailism* ([Online Version](#))

"Nandi is a Sanskrit word which is defined as: 'joy, satisfaction, delight; prosperity and praise of a deity at the commencement of a religious rite or observance,*' (The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary 1976:541). By and large, the Nandi which is brought to Jama"at Khana is prepared by women and is categorized as follows:

- (a) Darbari (food which is placed on the pats of Mukhi/Mukhyani).
- (b) Sufro is especially prepared for ceremonial occasions and mortuary rites.
- (c) Memani, food set aside from the meal prepared for the family.

Exegetical material reveals that Nandi is in essence food offered to the Imam out of love and devotion...We also learn from a Glnan that:

Eji jo ghar hove va'st piyari so nam sahebjike dijiye.

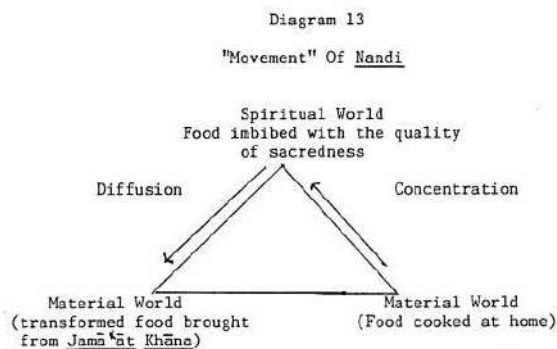
Meaning: Whatever is best liked by you in the house give it to the Imam, (H. Virani 1954:51).

In the Ismaili tradition, it is through the Imam that the soul can return (ma'ad) to its origins. By making food offerings to the Imam, Ismailis are seeking to impart a cosmic dimension to their cooking that is

identification with the homogenous state of *communitas* and the flow experience where the self (ego) becomes irrelevant...

The ceremony of *Nandi* is performed after prayers, when the congregation disperses. At this time, it is assumed that *Memani* offered to the Imam in a spiritual sense has been completed, and that food on the pat has to be distributed. The method used is 'bidding'. A member of the *Jama'at* who performs the ceremony takes each plate from the pat and names a price. The highest bidder gets the dish. As *Nandi* includes a variety of foods ranging from savoury and sweet dishes to fruits and milk, a number of participants are involved in 'purchasing' a dish and taking it home. Once a participant has obtained a dish, it is never replaced on the pat but is kept on the floor. This is significant as *Nandi* once taken from the pat no longer remains part of the context in which it is infused with cosmic significance. In other words, *Nandi* on the pat contains a greater intensity of sacredness compared with the *Nandi* which an individual takes home.

There is yet another context where the diffusion of sacredness is confirmed. If we maintain that social life and ritual life are two different orders of reality, then *Nandi* belongs to both. This is because when *Nandi* is brought to *Jama'at Khana*, it is considered to be sacred. When it is taken from *Jama'at Khana* by individuals, it becomes part of their material and social life. Here, an attempt is made to infuse the flow experience of unity into the mundane structure of everyday life. *Nandi* is never categorized as 'ordinary food'. It maintains its sacred character, the intensity of which varies and can be perceived in the form of 'movement'. The 'movement' of *Nandi* from the material world (most of the cooked *Nandi* is prepared in Ismaili homes) into the spiritual one of *Jama'at Khana* and back into the material world can be illustrated as follows:"



– Dossa, Parin Aziz, *Ritual and daily life : transmission and interpretation of the Ismaili tradition* in Vancouver, 1985 (pg 111-114)

Why Does Joining a Majlis Require a Monetary Offering? Majlises Explained

The Question

Why do certain majlises cost certain amounts in “entrance fees”? How does this relate to the notion of “equality” and “equal opportunity” in our faith? Isn’t this practice discriminatory against those Isma’ilies who cannot afford to join majlises?

The Answer

This question is best answered by going back to the origin and concept of the majlis. The word majlis itself just means gathering or session. In the Ismaili tradition, there are at least **two types** of majlis.

Firstly, in pre-Fatimid and Fatimid times, a majlis was a teaching session actually referred to as a majlis al-hikma. In these, whose level varied according to the knowledge of the murids, the Imam’s da’is instructed the murids on the esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an and ritual practice.

Lessons in the batin, known as the “sessions of wisdom” (majalis al-hikma), on the other hand, were only accessible to initiates. They were held not in the mosque, but within the palace, where admission of the participants was easier to control and where privacy was guaranteed. A special room was reserved for the purpose. [Al-Nu’man \[see his life story here\]](#) held these sessions in person, as he repeatedly points out.

They took place on Fridays, but after the afternoon prayer (‘asr), when the crowds had dispersed and only the “friends of God” (awliya’ Allah), as the Ismaili initiates called themselves, had stayed behind.

– Heinz Halm, (*The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, I.B. Tauris, 1997, p 28)

The teaching sessions for the initiates did not merely serve to instruct them. Our text reports that on these occasions the believers also had to pay certain dues, the najwa and the fitra. The term najwa means “confidential discussion” and probably refers to the Quran (58:12)... So, according to Ismaili doctrine, the The najwa is a charitable gift which the believer makes to show his gratitude for the favour of the instruction.

– Heinz Halm, (*The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, I.B. Tauris, 1997, p 28)

For being part of the majlis, its members made a monetary offering (sadaqah) — called najwa — to the Imam. During the Prophet’s lifetime, believers held private consultations, called najwa, with him and were encouraged in the Qur’an to make offerings for these. These offerings were said to be a means of purification for the believer.

*O ye who have faith! **When you privately consult the Messenger, then present an offering (sadaqah) before your private consultation (najwakum).** That will be best for you, and purer for you. But if you find not (the means), God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*

– Holy Qur’an 58:12

The second form of majlis is one in which Khoja Ismailis partake in today. This form originates after Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah (Aga Khan I) migrated from Persia to India and, after his arrival, some Khoja Ismaili murids wished to offer the Imam services akin to what murids had offered in the past, during the

Fatimid and Alamut periods. Services such as being the Imam's maid, servant, chamberlain, cook, army general, entourage, and so forth. Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah explained that he no longer had physical need for such service due to changed circumstances — he was, by these times, accompanied by a large group of servants. However, the Khoja murids insisted and offered to give an amount equal to the salary of a servant as a **substitute** of doing actual service (which the Imam could not accommodate). The Imam appreciated this devotion and graciously **accepted** their loving offer.

When our Mawlana Imam Aga Shah Hasanali Shah had settled in India, an ardent mureed offered his voluntary service. The Holy Imam explained to him that there were more than enough servants in his service. The mureed offered to pay an amount equivalent to the salary of a servant for a year as a substitute of his service. Appreciating his sentiment the Imam gladly accepted his loving offer.

— Al-Wa'z Abualy A. Aziz, (Ismaili Tariqah, Volume II, 1985, p 106)

In time, Khoja murids made various offerings symbolising 5, 12, and 50 year's of service, which the Imam graciously accepted. Since the average life in those days was about 50 years, 5, 12, and 50 year's of service amounted to roughly 10%, 25% and 100% of a life, the offerings were assigned that percentage of a servant's lifetime's earnings. During the time of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah, murids who had symbolically offered these amounts of service were organized into corresponding formal majlis groups — today known as Panch Bar Saal (5 to 12 year's service), Life Dedication (50 year's service), and so forth — which met monthly. He also issued specific farmans to each. Note, the Qur'an praises those believers who offer their wealth and lives in service to the Prophet and the Imam:

*Lo! those who believed and left their homes and **strove with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah**, and those who took them in and helped them: these are protecting friends one of another.*

— Holy Qur'an 8:72

In thinking about these majlises today, we should remember that, firstly, offering service to the Imam, in any form — actual physical service or symbolically through a majalis — is always a voluntary offering of devotion to the Imam murids choose to make themselves. It is not ordered by the Imam, and volunteering service symbolically, monetarily, **was requested by the murids** and accepted by the Imam. This is different from the Chandraat majlis, which the Imam himself established for his murids and whose attendance is obligatory. Secondly, the actual amount offered is not an entrance fee, but a **symbol** of service, with a different amount symbolically representing a different amount of service — such as 5, 12 or 50 years service — that the murid wishes to offer the Imam. For some 100 years — since the period of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah — **the amount of money representing years of service has not increased with inflation**; so the amount for the various majlises remains quite nominal even today.

Why is the Jamatkhana Restricted to Ismailis During Prayers?

One of the ways in which Ismailis have expressed their identity wherever they have lived is through their places of prayer, known today as the Jamatkhana. Other Muslim communities give their religious buildings different names: from ribat and zawiyya to khanaqa. And, in addition, there are other places where Muslims of all interpretations can come together, such as non-denominational mosques.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Toronto Ismaili Centre Opening Ceremony, Toronto, September 12, 2014, [Read at NanoWisdoms](#))

Bay'ah is the spiritual contract or covenant that every Ismaili Muslim or *murid* has made with the Ismaili Imam of the Time. ***Bay'ah* gives the *murid* the right to access the Imam's teachings, guidance, blessings, and spiritual medicine, and the *Jamatkhanah* is the private space where the Imam makes these available to his *murids*.** The *bay'ah*, a word which means “buying/selling”, is a two-way contract that includes a commitment from the *murid* and a commitment from the Imam. Thus, the *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Imam is a spiritual “transaction” or “contract” in which the *murid* commits his allegiance, devotion, and obedience in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification – in this world and in the afterlife.

You perform bay'ah, but you must first understand it's meaning and then offer bay'ah. When you offer me bay'ah it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise...He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me bay'ah I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter. The trials and tribulations of the Day of Judgment are very frightening and painful. I will keep him away from this.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Manjewadi, October 31, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*)

Since *bay'ah* is a two-way contract involving both the *murid* and the Imam, only those who have given *bay'ah* to the Imam of the time have access to private discursive spaces and private religious practices offered by the Imam in the *Jamatkhanah*, while those who do not give this *bay'ah* are not privy to them. This only makes logical sense because every single Ismaili ritual practice performed in the *Jamatkhanah* is an expression and an enactment of the Imam-*murid* relationship, a relationship that only exists through *bay'ah*. The act of *bay'ah* indicates that a person accepts the Ismaili Imam as his or her spiritual master and guide and accordingly, only after this acceptance does it become appropriate to access the Imam's guidance. It simply makes no sense for someone who has not given *bay'ah* to participate in the *Jamatkhanah* practices. Accessing the *Jamatkhanah* practices without giving *bay'ah* to the Imam is similar to walking into a store and stealing products without paying for them, or trying to access prescription drugs from the pharmacy without having the doctor's prescription.

It is incumbent upon the parents that they should first make their children my murid through the performance of bay'ah...Those who have not offered bay'ah they have not signed to accept our faith. Just

as you sign on an agreement in your business and in other dealings, similarly, through bay'ah, I take signature from your soul.

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,
(Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903)

Bay'ah as a religious practice goes back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an mentions it in numerous verses (48:10, 16:91, 48:18, and 60:12) in which the believers give bay'ah to the Prophet Muhammad when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. The Qur'an stipulates that the Prophet should only provide guidance, blessings, and intercession to people after they give him their bay'ah. The Ismailis have continued this Qur'anic protocol of bay'ah throughout their history:

The custom of meeting in closed sessions, at specially designated places, to learn about and practice their own interpretations of faith, has been part of the Ismaili tradition from pre-Fatimid times. During the Fatimid period, the Ismailis used to participate in majalis al-hikma (sessions of wisdom), which were accessible only to those who had pledged their allegiance to the Imam-of-the-time.

– Karim Jiwani, (Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, [Read at IIS Website](#))

The Sufi private spaces – the *ribat*, *khanaqa*, *zawiya*, etc. – and the Ismaili private space, the *Jamatkhanah*, are different from the institution of the mosque (*masjid*). A mosque is a nondenominational space that serves Muslims of the exoteric public domain known as the *shari'ah*. Sufi and Ismaili prayer spaces are private denominational spaces and serve specific communities who participate in the esoteric domain of Islam known as *tariqah* – this is why Ismailism and the Sufi brotherhoods are called “*tariqahs*” today. Entrance into a *tariqah* is only by way of the bay'ah (as explained above).

The Tarîqah or Spiritual Path which is usually known as Tasawwuf or Sufism is the inner and esoteric dimension of Islam and like the Sharî'ah has its roots in the Quran and prophetic practice. Being the heart of the Islamic message it, like the physical heart, is hidden from external view, although again like the heart it is the inner source of life and the centre which coordinates inwardly the whole religious organism of Islam. The Tarîqah is the most subtle and difficult aspect of Islam to understand at the same time that its external effect is to be seen in many manifestations of Islamic society and civilisation.

– Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (Ideals and Realities of Islam)

Most importantly, Tariqah-Islam is a higher domain of Truth and practice than Shari'ah-Islam. This is because Tariqah-Islam is an esoteric spiritual Islam that is explorative whereas Shari'ah-Islam is an exoteric legal Islam that is prescriptive – so the rules, practices, and norms governing each domain are different. The difference between exoteric legal Islam and esoteric spiritual Islam naturally necessitates separate physical spaces for the people of the Tariqah to practice their forms and levels of Islam. As renowned scholar of Islam, Shahab Ahmed explains:

Those capable of higher truths should have available for them existential spaces where they can meet to discourse and transact and otherwise explore in terms of higher truth. The logic of Revelation necessitates, in other words, separate physical and social domains of public/Seen physical and social space and

private/Unseen physical and social space as differentiated spaces for the social elaboration and operation of spatially-differentiated truths and meanings. It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that, as a space for discourse, what I am calling “private discursive space” is very much a social space—that is to say, it is a space not of individual secrecy, but rather a restricted collective space in which for people to gather in private society for discourse (and performance) of Truths not appropriate to unrestricted common and public space and society. ...When discourse and actions remain in the space of the private/high/khāṣṣ they are unaffected by the normative truths and values of ‘āmm/lower/public space—and are in that space governed by the normative truths and values of private/high/khāṣṣ space.

– Shahab Ahmed, (*What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, 2015, 378-385)

The Ismaili *Jamatkhanah* is established by the Imam of the Time as the “House of the Imam” for a specific local Ismaili community. The Qur’an lays out a specific protocol for anyone who wishes to enter into the House of the Prophet or the houses of people in general:

O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted.

– Holy Qur’an 33:53

O ye who believe! enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that ye may heed (what is seemly).

– Holy Qur’an 24:27

In conclusion, while the non-denominational *masjids* or mosques are public places for the rituals of the *shari’ah* such as the exoteric *namaz (salah)*, the Ismaili *Jamatkhanah* is a private space reserved for the practices of the Ismaili Tariqah and therefore only accessible to *murids* who have given *bay’ah* to the Imam.

For many centuries, a prominent feature of the Muslim religious landscape has been the variety of spaces of gathering co-existing harmoniously with the masjid, which in itself has accommodated a range of diverse institutional spaces for educational, social and reflective purposes. Historically serving communities of different interpretations and spiritual affiliations, these spaces have retained their cultural nomenclatures and characteristics, from ribat and zawiyya to khanaqa and jamatkhana. The congregational space incorporated within the Ismaili Centre belongs to the historic category of jamatkhana, an institutional category that also serves a number of sister Sunni and Shia communities, in their respective contexts, in many parts of the world. Here, it will be space reserved for traditions and practices specific to the Shia Ismaili tariqah of Islam.

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(Ismaili Centre Foundation Stone Ceremony, Dubai, December 13, [Read on NanoWisdoms](#))

What is Awwal Sufro? Are Ismailis Showing Off Their Wealth in This Ritual?



Literal meaning

- Awwal means first
- Sufro comes from Persian Sufra/Sofreh meaning “table spread” (upon which a variety of dishes are presented)

Awwal Sufro is an opportunity for a murid to symbolically present or offer the entire first table spread (sufra) of the Jamati’s mehmani offerings to the Imam of the Time, evoking love, devotion, and honoring the high station of the Imam.

Mehmani is the ritual offering where the Ismaili murid symbolically hosts the Imam at his home and offers the Imam hospitality and a meal (mehman means ‘guest’). The practice of mehmani offered to the Prophet Muhammad is found in various Sunni Muslim hadith:

- A tailor invites the Prophet to a meal of bread and soup that the Prophet enjoyed ([Bukhari, Book 34, Hadith 45; Book 70, Hadith 7, 64 & 67; Muslim, Book 36, 199](#))
- Abu Talha prepared a meal for the Prophet and the Prophet invoked blessings upon it – and then many people ate from the food ([Muslim, Book 36, Hadiths 191,193,194](#))

- Anas b. Malik's mother prepared a gift of a sweet dish for the Prophet ([Bukhari, Book 67, Hadith 98](#))
- A fat man who cannot pray invited the Prophet to his house and fed him a meal; the Prophet accepted it and prayed the Duha prayer in his home ([Bukhari, Book 10, Hadith 64; Book 19, 57; Sunan Abi Dawud Book 2, Hadith 267](#))
- Abu Shu'aib invites the Prophet for a meal prepared by his slave, who was a butcher ([Bukhari, Book 70, Hadith 62; Book 46, Hadith 17, Book 70, Hadith 90; Book 34, Hadith 34](#))

Breakdown of the *Awwal Sufro* ritual:

- The Mukhi, who represents the Imam during jamatkhana ceremonies, gives a volunteer murid standing at the front of the congregation the permission to start the *Awwal Sufro* ritual
- The volunteer murid commences the bidding after announcing that “*Awwal Sufro* is being offered in the Huzur (presence) of Mawlana Hazar Imam”.
- Murids in the congregation bid so they can offer the *Awwal Sufro* on behalf of the entire jamaat
- After a murid has “won” the opportunity to symbolically present the *Awwal Sufro* to the Imam, he goes to the Mukhi to receive blessings.
- In a selfless move, the murid asks that the benefit of his offering be granted to “*Kull Jamaat wa Kull Ruhani*”, meaning the entire jamaat and all departed souls.
- After the *Awwal Sufro* is done, the announcement: “*Man Murad Sufro Khato Khanavadan*” is made to give the opportunity and benefit of *Awwal Sufro* to the rest of the jamaat.

While many non-Ismailis and even some Ismailis think that there is something wrong with this ritual, that it is not Islamic, or that it is just a way for Ismaili murids to show off their wealth, we can look to the Qur'an to see that revelations were made in the time of the Prophet to guide believers to **compete with one another in doing good works**. One has to understand what is implicit here in making these monetary offerings to the Imam. There is no one who could know better how to put to **good** use these offerings than the Divinely Inspired and Divinely Ordained Imam of the Time.

“To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given (each of) you. So compete with one another in good works. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you (of the truth) regarding your differences.”

— Quran 5:48

“And (rather than competing for the things of this world) race with one another to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a Garden the vastness of which is as the vastness of heaven and earth, prepared for those who truly believe in God and His Messengers. That is God's bounty, which He grants to whom He wills. God is of tremendous bounty.”

— Quran 57:21

“Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous.”

— Quran 3:133

*Everyone turns to their own direction (of prayer). **So compete with one another in doing good.** Wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together (for judgment). Surely Allah is Most Capable of everything.*

— Quran 2:148

*Those who do whatever good they do with their hearts fearful, knowing that they will return to their Lord **it is they who race to do good deeds**, always taking the lead.*

— Quran 23:61

From the above verses, it is clear that competing with one another in good works is a patently Qur’anic ideal, and Awwal Sufro is putting that Qur’anic ideal into ritualized form.

It is also important to note that **the Qur’an here is reshaping the idea of competition, especially formally organized ritual competitive games as they existed in that time period, into one where believers compete with one another to perform good works** that will be rewarded in the afterlife instead of competing with one another to gain worldly recognition and reward in this life.

This is made clear in the commentary of verse 5:48 by Qur’anic studies scholar, Thomas Hoffmann:

“The qur’anic concept of an ethical contest of good works (al-khayrat), to be performed by members of the monotheist communities, functioned as an adaptation of the Greco-Roman tradition of the agon, i.e., the ritual-festive competitive games that attracted contestants from the different city-states (e.g., the famous pan-Hellenic periodos, the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean games)....the notion and phenomenon of the agon could resonate well with pre-Islamic Arabia’s egalitarian and competitive ethos with its fairs

and poetic competitions (e.g., the famous fair of Ukaz), as well as its assertive and polemical poetic genres (e.g., *fakhr* and *hija'*). However, **in the qur'anic preaching the pagan agon was re-imagined and re-written as a monotheist ethical contest or race between the Muslim Believers, Jews, and Christians (and possibly also the Zoroastrians)....The outcome of this ethical race is deferred until after death, until the advent of resurrection and judgment brought about by the one who "knows best" (cf. *allahu 'alam*)....the verse Q 5:48 negotiates and proposes an equilibrium between the pagan agonistic ideals and practices of the Greco-Roman/pre-Islamic world and Late Antiquity's promulgation of monotheist truth commitments. In doing this, the verse evokes a new ethico-Islamic agon to be internalized by the Muslim Believers.**"

'So Race with One Another to Do Good: You Will All Return to God and He Will Make Clear to You the Matters You Differed About' (Q 5:48): Fashioning a New Ethico-Islamic Agon in the Qur'an'

Thomas Hoffmann, University of Copenhagen

https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/Congresses_Abstracts.aspx?MeetingId=35

Aside from the Qur'anic context, we can find examples from the Prophet's life which showcase how believers competed with one another to offer food, shelter, and other resources to him. Here is one more example featuring Umar ibn al-Khattab attempting to **compete** with Abu Bakr in offering more wealth to the Prophet:

Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, ordered us to give charity and at the time I had some wealth. I said to myself, "Today I will outdo Abu Bakr, if ever there were a day to outdo him." I went with half of my wealth to the Prophet and he said, "What have you left for your family?" I said, "The same amount." Then, Abu Bakr came with everything he had. The Prophet said, "O Abu Bakr, what have you left for your family?" Abu Bakr said, "Allah and his messenger." I said, "By Allah, I will never do better than Abu Bakr."

— [Sunan al-Tirmidhi 3675](#)

As we can see, prominent followers of Prophet Muhammad competed to perform good works. Prophet Muhammad was also frequently invited to the homes of his followers for meals. **Many narrations mention the Prophet accepting such invitations and participating in meals at his followers' houses. This was not understood as followers of the Prophet showing off their wealth, but an effort to put into practice the Qur'anic ideal of competing with one another in good works.** While it is not possible today for the Imam of the Time to personally attend invitations of meals, considering he has 15-20 million followers in over 35 countries, *Awwal Sufro* and *Mehmani* are a symbolic way for his followers to obtain the same benefit.

Why is the Imam's Photograph Being kept in the Jamatkhana? Isn't this Idolatry?

This question has already been answered by an eminent contemporary Ismaili scholar:

The answer to this question is that [to revere] the blessed picture of the Imam is never idolatry, for the Imam is the living supreme Name of God, which is "al-Hayy al-Qayyum" (the Everliving and the Everlasting).

The picture is a symbol and sign of this supreme Name, just as Allah is the name of God, the letters of which alif, lam, lam and ha are by no means God Himself, but are only symbols and signs through which the name of God is determined and recognized. Therefore, neither the letters nor the word "Allah" is meaningless. Thus, the sense in which the blessed personality of the true Imam is the supreme Name of God, so in the same sense, his picture is the supreme naqsh (the written form) of God.

The obligatory pilgrimage (Hajj) is one of the seven pillars of Islam. If its rites are looked at from the exoteric point of view, many of them seem to be like idolatry. But in reality they are not so, because God and the Prophet have kept numerous ta'wili wisdoms in them.

In the wise Qur'an in verses (2:158; 5:2; 22:32, 36) are mentioned the "symbols of God" (sha'a'iru'llah), the respect and reverence to which is regarded as the righteousness of the heart. It is crystal clear that the personality of the Prophet and the Imam is itself from among the symbols of God. Had it not been so, then the Prophet would not have said: "Whosoever saw me, saw God." Further, the Prophet would not have said: "To look at the countenance of 'Ali is worship ('ibadat)"; "To look at the Qur'an is worship"; and "To look at the Imam is worship." From all these sayings it is evident that the personality of the Prophet and the Imam is from among the symbols of God, and therefore the picture of the Imam of the time is worthy of respect and veneration. – 'Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai, One Hundred Questions, 61.

Additionally, after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet found there to be paintings of Abraham, Mary, and Jesus in the Ka'bah along with the many other paintings and statues of numerous pagan deities. He had all the pagan ones destroyed but protected the ones of Abraham, Mary and Jesus from destruction:

Apart from the icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus, and a painting of an old man, said to be Abraham, the walls inside [Kaaba] had been covered with pictures of pagan deities. Placing his hand protectively over the icon, the Prophet told 'Uthman to see that all other paintings, except that of Abraham, were effaced.

– Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 300 (ref.: al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, 834, and Azraqi, *Akhbar Makkah* vol. 1, p. 107)

Why Do Ismailis Ask Hazir Imam To Forgive Our Sins?

Question: Why do Ismailis ask Hazir Imam to forgive our sins? Is this practice unislamic? Is it not Allah alone who forgives sins? Did Prophet Muhammad ever forgive anyone in his lifetime?

Answer: The Qur'an uses several words in Arabic that have been translated, perhaps inaccurately, into the same English word-- forgiveness.

The relevant Qur'anic terms are *maghfira*, *'afwa*, and *safaha*. The third term does not concern us here, but it is important to pay attention to both *maghfira* and *'afwa*. In Arabic the term *maghfira* literally means to "cover over", "to conceal". When one seeks God's *maghfira*, one is literally asking God to cover over and conceal one's sins, shortcomings, faults, limitations, etc. **In other words, *maghfira* is not only about forgiving sins but has this broader meaning of seeking God's grace and protection over all kinds of creaturely limitations.** In the Qur'an, as far as I am aware, God is the only who grants *maghfira* and we are always told to ask God for His *maghfira*. However, the Quran is very explicit that believers must seek God's *maghfira* through the Prophet Muhammad per 4:64 and other verses. This only applies those who give bay'a to the Prophet. This involves a believer going to the presence of the Prophet, asking God's forgiveness and the Prophet then praying for their forgiveness and only then does the believer find God accepting of their request. **This is clearly in the Quran in 4:64 and also in 9:103-104 where the Prophet Muhammad is the mediator for God's acceptance of atonement offerings and His acceptance of people's repentance.** In Ismailism, the Imam takes over this role--- where the Imam is an intercessor or mediator for the *maghfira* of God. This is practiced in the Ismaili Dua where one seeks forgiveness (*Allahuma maghfir-lana*) through the Imams (*bi-haqqi Mawlana...*).

There is a 2nd Quranic term for forgiveness which is called *'afwa*. The meaning of *'afwa* is more specific than *maghfira* and different from it. *'Afwa* means to nullify, to make something into nothing, to remove. So if *maghfira* is about concealing or covering, *'afwa* is to make something disappear entirely. **According to the Quran, both God and Prophet Muhammad perform *'afwa* and grant forgiveness in the sense of granting *'afwa* toward the believers.** There are clear verses where the Quran tells Muhammad to "forgive them" (3:159) or "hold fast to forgiveness" (7:199) where the word *'afwa* is used. So this means that the Prophet himself used to forgive his followers for any transgressions or sins or broken promises that they committed towards him. This is similar to the general idea we find in Islam that if you sin or wrong any person, you must seek forgiveness from them. Likewise, if someone makes a promise to the Prophet and breaks it, they must seek the Prophet's forgiveness in the sense of *'afwa*. **In Ismailism, this practice continues through the Imams up to the living Imam of the Time. This is why today's Ismaili tasbihs have a line that says "Ya Ali Tu Gat Jamatja Kull Guna Ma'af Kar".** The word *Ma'af* as used in Ismaili prayers is directly from the Arabic word *'afwa*. So again, this means that the Ismailis seek *'afwa* from the Imam and they seek *maghfira* from Allah through the Imam. Once again, these are two different kinds of forgiveness.

Historically, since the Quran tells us that the Prophet Muhammad granted 'afwa, we know that he forgave people's transgressions against him during his lifetime-- otherwise it would not be in the Quran.

Furthermore, in the Sunni Hadith literature which dates to later than the Quran, we find numerous examples of Prophet Muhammad forgiving all kinds of people and the Arabic term is 'afwa.

Again the confusion arises because the Quran and Hadith are using two different Arabic words for Allah's forgiveness called *maghfira* and the Prophet's forgiveness called 'afwa. But they are two different ideas with two different Ismaili practices linked to them. I do not think anyone can make a case that it is inappropriate to ask for the Imam to grant 'afwa because the Quran and Hadith tell us that Prophet Muhammad did precisely that.

Some further reading with references to the verses cited above:

<https://simerg.com/literary-readings/seeking-the-forgiveness-of-the-imam-of-the-time-a-short-explanation/>

<https://simerg.com/literary-readings/seeking-the-forgiveness-of-the-imam-of-the-time-a-short-explanation-ii/>

Why do Ismailis Perform Du'a Karavi or Mubay'ah?



Du'a Karavi is the embodiment of a Qur'anic practice

[The Prophet Unveiled: What the Qur'an says about Muhammad](#) will be very helpful in connecting some of the present day Isma'ili rituals performed in Jamatkhana to the Qur'an. A simple example is this verse of the Qur'an which states:

"O ye who have faith! When you privately consult the Messenger, then present an offering (ṣadaqah) before your private consultation. That will be best for you, and purer for you. But if you find not (the means), God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

- Holy Qur'ān 58:12

If you think about it carefully, our current practice of Du'a Karavi (also called Mubay'ah) - where a murid approaches the Mukhi Sahib at the Paat (who represents the Imam while ceremonies/rituals are ongoing in the Jamatkhana), presents an offering (today it would be in the form of currency), and receive the blessings and prayers of the Imam - can be rooted in the above Qur'anic verse which instructs the believers to submit an offering when they meet with the Prophet Muhammad. Now the Isma'ili community is spread out over many continents and has grown to be in the millions. Therefore the Imam cannot physically be present to accept the offerings of all murids and why representatives (Mukhi/Kamadia Saheb) are there to accept them on behalf of the Imam and convey blessings to the murids on behalf of the Imam. *"If, rightly, the Muslims have kept till now to the forms of prayer and fasting at the time of the Prophet, it should not be forgotten that it is not the forms of prayer and fasting that have been commanded, but the facts, and we are entitled to adjust the forms to the facts of life as circumstances changed. It is the same Prophet who advises his followers ever to remain Ibnu'l-Waqt (i.e. children of the time and period in which they were on earth), and it must be the natural ambition of every Muslim to practice and represent his Faith according to the standard of the Waqt or space-time."*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,

(Foreword to *Muhammad: A Mercy To all the Nations* by Al-Hajji Qassim Jairazbhoy, [Read Here](#))

Mubay'ah is clearly rooted to the concept of Bay'ah which is also rooted in the Qur'an. In Qur'ān 48:10 – referring to the Believer's placing their hands under the Prophet Muḥammad's hands in the act of *bay'ah*, the Qur'ān states that "the Hand of God is upon their hands." This is significant because in physical terms, it was the Prophet Muḥammad's hand which was placed upon the hands of the Believers. But the Qur'ān attributed to entire affair to God.

Do Ismailis observe the Day of Arafat?

for Ismaili Muslims generally, the exoteric Hajj is not of primary importance, nor are the rituals related to it like slaughtering sheep, etc. Therefore, at the Jamati level, fasting on the Day of Arafat is not observed, nor is the Hajj to Makkah undertaken as an obligatory Tariqah activity. Sunni and Twelver Muslims fast on this day to get forgiveness of sins. Ismailis have their own daily and monthly rituals for forgiveness of sins which are more than adequate for the present time.

The esoteric or batini Hajj is paramount for Ismailis -- read more about this at the below links:

short version: [Why Don't Ismailis Perform the Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca?](#)

full article: [Esoteric Hajj: From the Physical Ka'bah to the Living Imam](#)

Why Don't Ismaili Women Wear Hijabs (Veils)?

"The veil for women is a tradition which precedes Islam, and was introduced as a sign of respect of women and not of submission, i.e. against the concept that woman is an object of the society of men."

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,

(His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001, [Corriere della Sera interview with Massimo Nava](#) (Italy) [Translation])

*"The veil was not common in the Muslim empire until late in the 10th century, and was introduced to Muslims through their Persian conquest. In antiquity, only upper class Assyrian women were required by law to wear veils, while slaves and servants were explicitly forbidden from veiling. **Muslims initially adopted the veil to represent social status; only later did the veil symbolize modesty.** While the Islamic injunction to dress modestly has a wide range of interpretations, by the late 16th century, yashmak (veil) had become obligatory in the Ottoman empire."*

– Muhammed Hassanali, ["Veil", International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter, #41 \(Summer 2006\)](#)

It seems that Nizari Ismailis abolished the veil and hijab in the 12th century and the same order was reemphasized in the 20th century by the 48th Ismaili Imam.

"I appeal to you not to plunge people into whimsical matters, denying women human values.... From now on, do not hide and cover women; educate them, do not pressurise them and do not marry except one wife, the same as I have only one."

– Imam Hasan 'ala Dhikrihi al-Salam (Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'i Islam Introduction by S.J. Badakchani, p. 28-29)

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, the 48th Imam of Shia Ismaili Muslims, completely abolished the veil for Ismaili women:

*"I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women. **In my grandfather's and my father's time the Ismailis were far ahead of any other Muslim sect in the matter of the abolition of the strict veil, even in extremely conservative countries. I have absolutely abolished it; nowadays you will never find an Ismaili woman wearing the veil.** Everywhere I have always encouraged girls' schools, even in regions where otherwise they were completely unknown. I say with pride that my Ismaili followers are, in this matter of social welfare, far in advance of any other Muslim sect."*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, ["The Memoirs of Aga Khan -- World Enough and Time", Chapter 2: Islam, The Religion of My Ancestors, 1954](#)

"Question: Your grandfather abolished the veil. Was it a revolutionary step when it did?"

Aga Khan: It was a bold step, but more social than religious. Originally, the veil had nothing to do with Islam and the veil was worn in pre-Islamic Arabia. The veil was, initially, what distinguished a free woman from a slave. The slave woman who was not wearing a veil could be bought or exchanged. The woman wearing the veil was not at the disposal of society. The veil has become no longer a symbol but folklore."

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni
(Erie Magazine Interview, 20 August 1996)

WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM



– Ismaili Gnosis, Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/9f1jgoPNq_/)

In 1905, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah gave guidance to his community in Zanzibar about how the veil of the heart would be better for them than the external burqa (veil).

As early as 1905, in a firman during his second visit to Zanzibar, the Imam [Sultan Muhammad Shah] had stated: "...the external burqa (veil) is not for you, but [better] for you is a veil of the heart [dill], have modesty in your heart, fill your heart with modesty all the time." ...Up until now, whenever possible Nizari Isma'ili Muslim women have indeed displayed their religious and cultural identities through their VISIBILITY and active involvement in economic, educational, social and community activities. NOT WEARING THE VEIL has been one of the MARKERS of their Isma'ili Muslim IDENTITY.

Simonetta Calderini
Islam and the Veil, 56-62

WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM



– Ismaili Gnosis, Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/p/53kbwivNkh/>)

" A second cause of our present apathy is the terrible position of Muslim women... There is absolutely nothing in Islam, or the Qur'an, or the example of the first two centuries, to justify this terrible and cancerous growth that has for nearly a thousand years eaten into the very vitals of Islamic society.... "

"... the Abbassides, borrowing from the practice of the later Persian Sassanian kings, developed the present system ... which means the permanent imprisonment and enslavement of half the nation. How can we expect progress from the children of mothers who have never shared, or even seen, the free social intercourse of modern mankind? This terrible cancer that has grown since the 3rd and 4th century [sic] of the Hijra must either be cut out, or the body of Muslim society will be poisoned to death by the permanent waste of all the women of the nation. But purdah, as now known, itself did not exist till long after the Prophet's death and is no part of Islam. The part played by Muslim women at Kardesiah and Yarmuk the two most momentous battles of Islam next to Badr and Honein, and their splendid nursing of the wounded after those battles, is of itself a proof to any reasonable person that purdah, as now understood, has never been conceived by the companions of the Prophet. That we Muslims should saddle ourselves with this

excretion of Persian custom, borrowed by the Abbassides, is due to that ignorance of early Islam which is one of the most extraordinary of modern conditions."

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, [All India Muhammadan Educational Conference Presidential address, 'Muslim Education in India' 1902, \(Delhi, India\)](#)

However, it should be clarified that even though the contemporary Ismaili Imams have discouraged Ismaili women from wearing the veil and have argued that the veil is no part of Islam, in the spirit of pluralism, they acknowledge and uphold the right of those belonging to other interpretations of Islam to "associate publicly with a faith". However, there should be no compulsion in such a matter:

*"My own sense is that if an individual wishes to associate publicly with a faith, that's the right of that individual to do that, whether he's a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim. That is, to me, something which is important. To go from there to an imposed process by forces in society, to me is unacceptable. **It's got to be the choice of the individual who wishes to associate with his faith or her faith. I have great respect for any individual who wants in the right way to be associated with his own faith. I accept that totally and I would never challenge it.**"*

– Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [2008 Irish Times interview with Alison Healy \(Maynooth, Ireland\)](#)

Also see this post by NanoWisdoms where the contemporary Ismaili Imams explain their views on the matter:

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/nanowisdoms-archive-of-imamat-speeches-interviews-and-writings/excerpts-their-highnesses-the-aga-khans-iii-and-iv-on-the-veil-headscarf-and-pur/479342308750625>

What is the concept of halal & haram in Ismailism?



For Ismaili Muslims, the present Imam is the authoritative interpreter of Islam and he guides the community in every time as to what is halal and haram - just as Prophet Muhammad did so in his lifetime.

Currently, the following are haram for Ismailis based on the Imam's guidance:

- drinking alcohol
- smoking
- drugs
- eating pork
- lying
- cheating
- backbiting
- dressing immodestly
- other unethical activities

The concept of halal is extended to one's spirituality. Practicing virtue regularly leads to a halal life.

Why Don't All Ismailis Eat Only Halal Food?

The recent Imāms have not said anything about halal food. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah said that when you give dasond, your earnings and food become halal.

In fact halal is even debated among modern Sunni scholars because it's not clear what actually makes meat halal.

For example the origins of halal slaughter practice in the Prophet Muhammad's time was to ensure healthy slaughter practice and that the meat wasn't killed in the name of an idol, but no meat is sacrificed to idols today.

The Qur'an explicitly says food prepared by Jews and Christians is lawful for muslims:

This day are (all) good things made lawful for you. The food of those who have received the Scripture is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. And so are the virtuous women of the believers and the virtuous women of those who received the Scripture before you (lawful for you) when ye give them their marriage portions and live with them in honour, not in fornication, nor taking them as secret concubines. Whoso denieth the faith, his work is vain and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.

- Qur'an 5:5

There is also a famous hadith even in Sunni books that it suffices to say bismillah over food — thereby making it halal:

Narrated By 'Aisha: A group of people said to the Prophet , "Some people bring us meat and we do not know whether they have mentioned Allah's Name or not on slaughtering the animal." He said, "Mention Allah's Name on it and eat." Those people had embraced Islam recently.

- Sahih Bukhari Volume 007, Book 067, Hadith Number 415