

The Prophet's Ascension

CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS
WITH
THE ISLAMIC *Mīrāj* TALES

*Edited by
Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby*

Indiana University Press
Bloomington and Indianapolis

Prophetic Ascent and Initiatory Ascent in Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl*

ELIZABETH R. ALEXANDRIN

The image of the Prophet Muḥammad as an exemplar and model of individual practice is especially compelling in the mystical traditions of Islam. Two esteemed scholars of the mystical traditions of Islam, Schimmel and Sells, have examined the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent (*miʿrāj*) as a paradigm for the narration of individual mystical experience.¹ Less scholarly attention, however, has been directed to Ismāʿīlī Shiʿism as one of the mystical traditions of Islam. In this study, we shall see how the medieval Fatimid Ismāʿīlī tradition interpreted the qurʾanic passages concerned with prophetic ascent in order to construct a set of parallel symbolic discourses for narrating mystical and prophetic experiences. Key to understanding the ascension motif in the Ismāʿīlī tradition is that the ascent may take on the meaning of the individual's gradual apprehension of the continuum of exoteric and esoteric knowledge in tandem with the revealed religions and the interpretation of their scriptures. The necessary training (*tarbiyyah*) in the Ismāʿīlī missionary organization itself, the "Calling" (*daʿwah*), leads to the individual's acquisition of exoteric and esoteric knowledge through religious instruction and mystical or initiatory experience. While occasionally providing glimpses into the rich and varied expanse of the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī tradition, this study will draw upon on select passages from Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl* (The Foundation of Allegorical Interpretation) in order to explore the themes of prophetic and initiatory ascent. As shall be seen in what follows, the parameters of the individual practitioner's potential for spiritual perfection *qua* mystical ascent are defined on the basis of a reading of the qurʾanic verses on the prophethood of Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and the Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey (*isrāʾ*) and ascension (*miʿrāj*).

Definitions

Just as there are many different academic approaches for studying diversity in the Islamic tradition, there are many scholarly definitions of what constitutes Islamic

mysticism. At times the terms mysticism and esotericism are conflated, as are such expressions as "mystical knowledge" and "esoteric knowledge." Morris has argued that most definitions of Islamic mysticism have relied exclusively on establishing a set of distinct modes of piety that allude to the interiorization of religious knowledge or individual mystical experience. These definitions, by and large, refer to Western academic perceptions of the historical development of Sufism. Morris's position is that Sufi texts, as a result, have thus frequently been studied in isolation, without much regard for a larger understanding of the spirituality entailed in the Qur'an and Islam's religious tenets. Reconsidering the scope of Islamic mysticism, as Morris has suggested, would provide a means for approaching Shi'ism, and by extension Ismā'ilism, as mystical traditions of Islam.²

Before beginning our discussion of prophetic and initiatory ascent in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, it is important first to present in general terms some of the central concepts of Ismā'ilī thought. Therefore, what follows is a brief presentation of how the medieval Ismā'ilī tradition has approached and interpreted key Islamic practices and religious tenets in the light of the qur'anic text and the layers of meaning incorporated in it as revealed scripture, that is, how it has been interpreted both "literally" and "metaphorically."

Ismā'ilism features two dimensions of prophetic thought. Both dimensions of prophetic thought place particular emphasis on the redemptive strategies available to the individual practitioner through the emulation of the prophetic exemplar of Muḥammad and the Ismā'ilī *imāms* who will take his place after his death. In the Ismā'ilī tradition, the horizontal dimension of history leads to salvation. Sacred history is recapitulated in the Shi'ī concept of *imāmah*, where the *imāms* represent the sole historical, authoritative continuation of prophecy and where they, after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, take on his role as "divine guides" on earth.³ Due to the fact that in the Ismā'ilī tradition the *imāms* transmit to the community of believers the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an (*ta'wīl*), they are also granted the love and obedience that is foremost due to the Prophet Muḥammad. The qur'anic verse "Say: if you love God, follow me and God will love you" (Q 3:29) best exemplifies the love and obedience reserved for the *imāms* in the Ismā'ilī tradition.

Another aspect of the horizontal dimension of history and perhaps even more indicative of some central beliefs in the Ismā'ilī tradition is the concept of the cycles of prophetic history. In the Ismā'ilī tradition, the cycles of prophecy commenced with Adam as the first human being and will draw to a close at an undisclosed point in the future with the advent of a seventh figure, the messianic "Rising One" (*al-Qā'im*).⁴ Of particular importance to understanding Ismā'ilī soteriology is to grasp how the two dimensions of prophetic thought are embodied and represented by the hierarchies of the missionary organization of the Ismā'ilīs, the Calling (*da'wah*), and the ranks of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*). For example, Ismā'ilī authors of the medieval period discuss how gradual perfection takes place on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. This perfection transpires through the indi-

vidual's
religion
aspects
of the h
religion
pearanc

As I
plied in
divine
qur'anic
revelati
qur'anic
platonis
ample,
ward,
descen
lect's p
ascend
the dyn
dynam
teric ir
rectly

Th
proph
phetic
duces
eled in
Fatim
lamic
mysti
meth
mote
Ismā'
Propl
of Ab
tance
role
Ismā'
cerni
Qāḍī
tion
ham

ted, as are such
 rris has argued
 1 establishing a
 eligious knowl-
 large, refer to
 ifism. Morris's
 ed in isolation,
 entailed in the
 nic mysticism,
 hi'ism, and by

ent in Qāḍī al-
 terms some of
 brief presenta-
 nterpreted key
 and the layers
 has been inter-

dimensions of
 gies available to
 ic exemplar of
 s death. In the
 on. Sacred his-
 s represent the
 after the death
 th.³ Due to the
 ity of believers
 d the love and
 nic verse "Say:
 plifies the love

aps even more
 cept of the cy-
 rophecy com-
 e at an undis-
 sianic "Rising
 īlī soteriology
 ied and repre-
 īlīs, the Call-
 e, Ismā'īlī au-
 place on the
 ough the indi-

vidual's acquisition of the esoteric knowledge that the Calling and the ranks of religion provide. In this sense, the Calling provides both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of religion, that is, exoteric revelation and esoteric interpretation. In terms of the horizontal dimension of history, it is the perfecting guidance of the ranks of religion that brings the cycles of prophetic history to a close and ushers in the appearance of the *Qā'im* and the Resurrection (*qiyāmah*) at the end of time.

As for the vertical dimension of prophetic thought, an ascent (*mi'rāj*) is implied in conjunction with allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*), and a descent with the divine assistance (*ta'yīd*) associated with the revelatory experience. In fact, two qur'anic themes, the designation of prophethood and the reception of prophetic revelation, are implied in the arcs of ascent and descent. Parallel to employing qur'anic themes and examples, medieval Ismā'īlī authors often introduced Neoplatonic concepts into their discussions of prophetic and initiatory ascent. For example, just as the Universal Soul may incline toward the natural world, turn downward, and become entrapped in the material domain and the sensate (an arc descending downward), so may the Universal Soul yearn for the Universal Intellect's perfection and ascend upward in order to apprehend pure intelligibles (an arc ascending upward).⁵ In terms of the individual practitioner's gradual perfection, the dynamic of descent and ascent occurs on the microcosmic level. The very same dynamic is most clearly seen in the examples of the divine assistance and the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an that the perfected human being may receive directly from Intellect itself, without any sort of intermediaries.

This chapter is concerned with this second, vertical dimension of Ismā'īlī prophetic thought, and in particular with the themes of initiatory ascent and prophetic ascent as discussed in the medieval Ismā'īlī tradition. This study introduces how in the Fatimid Ismā'īlī tradition, individual initiatory ascent is modeled in part on the ascent of the Prophet Muḥammad. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's (d. 974) Fatimid Ismā'īlī work, *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, forms an early example of the medieval Islamic employment of the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent as a model for individual mystical, or more specifically, initiatory experience. Yet *Asās al-Ta'wīl* reflects the methods of tenth-century Fatimid Ismā'īlī qur'anic interpretation, which promotes the centrality of the "stories of the prophets" (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) to medieval Ismā'īlī thought. As this study will present, the symbolic significance of the Prophet Muḥammad's ascension is intimately intertwined with the qur'anic story of Abraham's prophethood. Muḥammad's ascension maintains its central importance as a core Islamic belief even as the story of Abraham comes to denote the role of the *imāms* throughout the cycles of prophecy. Therefore, the Fatimid Ismā'īlī tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the qur'anic passages concerning prophetic ascent receives attention in what follows in order to show how Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's theory of the cycles of prophecy lends its hand to the elaboration of two parallel ascent narratives in which the Prophet Muḥammad and Abraham figure most prominently.

Qur'anic Exemplars of Obedience and Perfection: The Ascents of Abraham and Muḥammad

As we turn our attention to the medieval Ismā'īlī tradition, it is important to note that the Fatimid Ismā'īlī author Qāḍī al-Nu'mān introduces a certain premise concerning the ranks of religion in his *Asās al-Ta'wīl*. Most notably, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān introduces the pivotal importance of the practice of obedience (*tā'ah*) to the *imām* as exemplified by the prophet Abraham. He correlates the practice of obedience to the function of divine guidance and authority (*walāyah*) in order to hyper-articulate the centrality of the Ismā'īlī Calling throughout sacred history. For Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, as for later Fatimid Ismā'īlī authors, the Calling in each of the prophetic cycles comes to signify the corporeal, physical component of the ranks of religion. 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.⁶

In many respects, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's works on the central tenets of the Islamic tradition came to form the "core curriculum" of the Fatimid Ismā'īlī missionary organization and its associated instructional lectures (*majālis*) in Cairo during the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁷ For this reason, we would like to use the work of a later Fatimid Ismā'īlī author, al-Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. ca. 1078), in order to introduce the themes of initiatory and prophetic ascent in the medieval Ismā'īlī tradition.⁸ In fact, there are two particular passages on the "absolute human being" (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*)⁹ in al-Mu'ayyad's main doctrinal work that address the significance of the parallel ascent narratives of Muḥammad and Abraham in the Fatimid Ismā'īlī tradition. These passages clarify specifically how prophethood and prophetic ascent are linked to the gradual perfection of the human being that takes place initially with the training that the Calling provides in each prophetic cycle. As is the case in *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, the two prophetic ascents of Abraham and Muḥammad run along parallel lines: each ascent narrative commences with initiation into the ranks of religion and culminates in the recognition of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and the attainment of proximity to God.

Al-Mu'ayyad also couches individual ascent in the metaphoric language of human birth, growth, and development. The individual human being, in his/her process of ascent and perfection, emulates both the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect.¹⁰ Spiritual development and perfection occur parallel to human physical growth and maturation, where the individual is "nurtured" and assisted by both the physical and spiritual realms, that is, the "Heavens and Earth" (Q 50:38) of the ranks of religion.¹¹ This is the meaning behind al-Mu'ayyad's metaphor when he states that only the individual who has been properly nurtured through the Calling's upbringing while in this world will enter into the vast and unlimited space of the World of Intellect and Soul, which is "what no eye has seen, and no ear heard, nor has entered the heart of man."¹² Al-Mu'ayyad's account also presents one of the more subtle nar-

ratives on the path through spirituality. Mu'ayyad's conclusions are provided by the

In another *Mu'ayyadiyyah*, he addresses the individual practitioner in the ranks of prophetic revelation, limited to the individual ascent or Night Journey, similarly does not ascend alone. The prophetic mission offers a perspective of the world, with records straight from Mu'ayyad's circle of the Calling of prophethood.

As in al-Mu'ayyad's initiatory program, the reference of the main focus of assistance is the Calling, intelligible to all of divine assistance in the sense of the Journey (Q 50:38) progress and cycles of prophetic revelation, the spiritual as well as the physical. Torah, the Gospel, Jesus (ʿĪsā), prophetic revelation, prophetic ascent.

In Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's prophetic revelation:

Prophetic

ratives on the proximity to God that the absolute human being may potentially attain through spiritual ascent.¹³ An important question, nonetheless, emerges: do al-Mu'ayyad's comments suggest that even prophets must receive the initial training provided by the Calling before receiving prophetic revelation?

In another set of lectures on the "stories of the prophets" from the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah* (The Lectures), al-Mu'ayyad aims to answer this question. He addresses the implications of the paradigm of prophetic ascent for the individual practitioner in terms of the prophet Abraham's initiatory ascent and his reception of prophetic revelation.¹⁴ Al-Mu'ayyad's discussions of prophetic ascent are not limited to the interpretation of the qur'anic narratives on the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent or Night Journey (Q 17:1). As we shall see in what follows, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān similarly does not restrict his discussion of prophetic ascent to Muḥammad's ascension alone. On the one hand, al-Mu'ayyad's treatment of the qur'anic narrative on the prophet Abraham's ascent through the corporeal and celestial ranks of religion offers a parallel commentary on the concept of the human being from the perspective of the soul's ascent and acquisition of divine assistance. On the other hand, with regard to the issue of prophetic inheritance, al-Mu'ayyad sets the record straight that Abraham is a human being, like any other individual. Al-Mu'ayyad does this through the example of Abraham's initial training in the elite circle of the Calling before he could receive prophetic revelation and the designation of prophethood symbolized by his acceptance of the covenant (*mīthāq*).¹⁵

As in al-Mu'ayyad's work, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl* addresses the theme of initiatory ascent through the corporeal and celestial ranks of religion. In allegorical reference to the qur'anic material, the individual soul's ascent serves as one of the main focal points of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's work, because the reception of divine assistance necessarily implies having transcended the limits of the corporeal ranks of the Calling's hierarchy, thereby proceeding from the sensible (*maḥsūs*) to the intelligible (*ma'qūl*) through the means of allegorical interpretation. The reception of divine assistance and the initiatory ascent itself are doubly nuanced as a *mī'rāj*, in the sense that they are modeled on the prophet Muḥammad's *isrā'* or Night Journey (Q 17:1). The Prophet Muḥammad's *mī'rāj* thus represents the spiritual progress and noetic journey of the individual.¹⁶ Stressing the importance of the cycles of prophetic history in conjunction with presenting the pivotal function of the spiritual hierarchy in terms of the training of each prophet, the issue of prophetic revelation is broached in terms of the different modalities of scripture as well as the apprehension of the "vision of God." For example, the scriptures of the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'an, bestowed upon the prophets Moses (Mūsā), Jesus ('Īsā), and Muḥammad respectively, allude to their distinctive and exclusive prophetic experiences. That is to say, each of these scriptures alludes to the prophetic ascent unique to each of these prophets.¹⁷

In Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's presentation of Abraham's ascent and reception of prophetic revelation, the transmission of divine assistance (*ta'yīd*) from God's word (*ka-*

limah) occurs through the ranks of religion, from the upper (*‘ulwiyyah*) or celestial realm, downward to the lower (*sufliyyah*) or terrestrial (*arḍiyyah*) ranks.¹⁸ This too comprises an arc of descent. From within the realm of Ismā‘īlī sacred history, the prophet Abraham’s training, initiatory ascent, and designation of prophetic mission defines the potential range of visionary experience for the individual human being as capable of transcending the senses’ perceptions. It calls attention to the fact that the ascent under discussion is a spiritual ascent of the soul. Abraham’s training and ascent demarcate the ranks embodied in the hierarchy of the Calling and the ranks of religion that exist in each of the prophetic cycles. Additionally, the cycle of Abraham’s prophetic mission marks the epoch in which religious practices, such as prayer, pilgrimage, and monotheistic worship, were first established.¹⁹

Prophetic Ascent in Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Asās al-Ta’wīl*

In order to better understand Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s theory of prophetic ascent, and the Prophet Muḥammad’s ascension in particular, we must turn to his commentary on the story of Abraham (*qiṣṣat Ibrāhīm*) in the *Asās al-Ta’wīl*, which constitutes one chapter of the work. First, however, a few words on the text of the *Asās al-Ta’wīl* are necessary. In sum, the *Asās al-Ta’wīl* reflects some of the central doctrinal interests and exegetical concerns of the tenth-century Fatimid missionary organization in Cairo. The work’s main focus is the “stories of the prophets.” Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān devotes a chapter to the life of each prophet with the Ismā‘īlī doctrine of the “cycles of prophecy” clearly in mind. The reason for this focus is that the history of prophecy commences with Adam and concludes with the appearance of the *Qā’im*. Not only the prophets but the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wah* plays a significant role in the course of prophecy’s dramatic history, foremost by providing the *ta’wīl* of revealed scriptures. The *Asās al-Ta’wīl*’s exegetical approach can be defined in simple terms as moving, verse by verse, phrase by phrase, and word by word, from the literal meaning of the qur’anic text to other deeper readings. Much attention is paid to drawing out through *ta’wīl* the range of meanings connected to each set of qur’anic verses on the pre-Islamic prophets and the Prophet Muḥammad. Through *ta’wīl*, key qur’anic passages and phrases are likewise drawn back to the meaning and significance of Ismā‘īlī doctrines.

In the *Asās al-Ta’wīl*, Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s commentary on the story of Abraham serves a distinct purpose in terms of laying the foundation for the parallel symbolic discourses previously mentioned. In order to define the initiatory experience of the prophetic ascent, Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān employs the examples of the prophets Enoch, Jesus, and Muḥammad to indicate how God “raised” (*raf‘*) individual human beings. He thus marks the prophetic ascent as foremost involving the soul’s spiritual ascent. The ascension narrative of the Prophet Muḥammad first receives attention in the course of Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s commentary on the story of Abraham.

For Qā
begins
on to e
prophe
course
Nu‘mā
this pa
are di
Muḥam
cent.²¹
advanc
prophe
arwāh
ual pr
likewi
the Ni
potent
Th
ception
ogy, th
hierar
the al
Muḥam
Asās a
Muḥam
and m
Allāh)
tioner
legates
Muḥam
cernir
obedie
Bo
As Gi
qur’ar
Schoc
ogy as
This c
Heave
medic
to the
Abral

h) or celestial
ks.¹⁸ This too
d history, the
hetic mission
man being as
e fact that the
ining and as-
l the ranks of
ycle of Abra-
uch as prayer,

c ascent, and
his commen-
which consti-
t of the *Asās*
: central doc-
d missionary
phets.” Qāḍī
ā’īlī doctrine
; that the his-
ppearance of
ificant role in
e *ta’wīl* of re-
ned in simple
ord, from the
1 attention is
to each set of
iad. Through
the meaning

’ of Abraham
parallel sym-
y experience
the prophets
) individual
ing the soul’s
first receives
of Abraham.

For Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, the *isrā’* epitomizes the Prophet Muḥammad’s ascent. He begins his commentary on prophetic ascent by quoting Qur’an 17:1, and then goes on to explain that Muḥammad’s Night Journey, in which he saw the angels, the prophets, and the messengers, alludes to his ascent in the heaven.²⁰ Also in the course of this initial presentation of Muḥammad’s prophetic ascent, Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān cites an example of existing reports on Muḥammad’s Night Journey. In this part of his commentary on the story of Abraham, the author’s brief comments are directed to the widespread discussion concerning the prophetic ascent of Muḥammad in terms of whether it constituted a physical or a solely spiritual ascent.²¹ With implications for an Ismā’īlī theory of initiatory ascent, Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān advances the argument that the prophetic ascent is one in which the souls of the prophets are purified and perfected through their contact with the upper souls (*al-arwāḥ al-‘ulwiyyah*).²² He asserts that, just as God has previously selected individual prophets and “raised” them spiritually, the Prophet Muḥammad’s ascent is likewise an ascent of the soul. Implicit in Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s initial commentary on the Night Journey in the story of Abraham is that individual practitioners may potentially experience spiritual ascent through their training in the *da‘wah*.

The Prophet Muḥammad’s Night Journey also defines the parameters of the reception of prophetic revelation. Situated in the context of Ismā’īlī symbolic cosmology, the focal point of mystical apprehension in the initiatory ascent is, in fact, the hierarchy of the ranks of religion and the Calling in God’s creation. The order and the arrangement of the spiritual hierarchy, as it specifically culminates in Muḥammad’s prophetic mission, is most clearly seen in one particular passage from *Asās al-Ta’wīl*. Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān explains that the true and faithful followers of Muḥammad established his command during his lifetime and continued to uphold and maintain it after his death. Together, his followers form the “rope of God” (*ḥabl Allāh*), establishing the links of a chain that continuously connect individual practitioners, on the lower end of the continuum, to the *imāms*, the *asās* (that is, the direct legatee to the speaking-prophet of the cycle, the *nāṭiq*), and then to the Prophet Muḥammad himself.²³ Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s aim here is to clarify his arguments concerning the superiority of the Prophet Muḥammad while supporting the necessity of obedience to the lower ranks of religion in terms of individual practice.²⁴

But what precisely is the role of the ranks of religion in the process of ascent? As Gilliot has indicated, the *Imāmī* treatise that al-Māturīdī draws upon in his qur’anic commentary bears striking similarities with what is found in the Persian School’s treatment of Q 6:75–79, where the ranks of religion from Ismā’īlī cosmology assist in the prophet Abraham’s ascent and in his reception of prophethood.²⁵ This qur’anic passage is correlated to Abraham’s vision of “the dominion of the Heavens and the Earth” (Q 6:75). Gilliot’s observations hold much relevance to the medieval Ismā’īlī commentaries on the story of Abraham, especially with regard to the question of whether or not the prophets are exempt from error if they, like Abraham, were not originally monotheists and worshipped other gods before the

designation of their respective prophetic missions.²⁶ There exists another dimension to the debate on the gradual reception of prophetic revelation in tandem with the ontological perfection of the individual human being. The medieval Ismā'īlī commentaries on the story of Abraham also focus on the question of Abraham's rejection of the cult of astral bodies as a feature of his development, maturation, and perfection as a human being.²⁷

In the Fatimid Ismā'īlī context, the figure of Abraham comes to signify an alternative modality of receiving prophetic revelation, inasmuch as the defining features of his prophetic mission are specific to his epoch. Abraham is characterized by the qualities of being the friend of God (*khalīl Allāh*) and the faithful one (*wafā'*) in comparison to the other prophets.²⁸ According to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, Abraham's exclusivity as a prophet rests on the fact that "God the Most High mentioned disclosing to Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, because God, may He be praised, does not reveal this except to the one approved of from His creation."²⁹ Implied in this passage is that God selects the most praiseworthy individuals, foremost the prophets and the "friends of God," to witness the glory of His creation. Yet in other passages of his commentary on the story of Abraham, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān notes the gradual progression of Abraham through the Calling and that God "promised to him to establish him as an *imām*."³⁰ Ascending upward through the ranks of religion, from the rank of proof (*hujjah*), "God raised him to the rank (*darajah*) of *imām*-hood (*al-asāsiyyah*) and honored him with prophethood and messengership."³¹ He stresses that even the prophets are not exempt from the necessary training the *da'wah* provides in each cycle of prophetic history.

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān is well known in the Ismā'īlī tradition for his commentaries on the central ritual practices and religious tenets of Islam, and in particular for the following two works: *Kitāb Da'ā'im al-Islām* (The Book of the Pillars of Islam) and *Ta'wīl Da'ā'im al-Islām* (The Allegorical Interpretation of the Pillars of Islam). The *Asās al-Ta'wīl* is therefore informed in part by the author's other "legalistic" works. In the *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, his discussion of the qur'anic verses on Abraham aims to introduce Abraham as a qur'anic exemplar from within the realm of sacred history. Abraham maintains a certain special status as a prophet because he established for the future religious community (*ummah*) of Islam the fundamental religious tenets of prayer and pilgrimage to the Ka'ba (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*).³² Abraham's foundation of the Ka'ba in Mecca forms a substantial focal point in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's commentary on the story of Abraham. In *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, there are levels of reverberation within the narrative concerning how Abraham constructed the Ka'ba. At the outset of his commentary, the author does not posit an exclusively Ismā'īlī interpretation of prophetic history. Further into his commentary, however, he puts forth his allegorical interpretation of Q 2:127 with reference to the cycles of prophecy.³³ The foundations (*qawā'id*) of the Ka'ba (*al-bayt*) represent the four speaking-prophets (*nuṭaqā'*—the prophets who bring scriptures): Moses and Jesus from the lineage of Isaac (Ishāq), and Muḥammad and the Qā'im, from the lineage of Ishmael (Ismā'il).³⁴

In addition, witness the emergence of a strand of the Ismā'īlī mission, the passage that follows the ranking of the speaking-prophet (qur'anic exemplar Ismā'īlī *da'wah*. Q...ence and the two...the speaking-prophet...tee, emulating the manner, first thou...to rely on the speak...of obedience.³⁶ At...ham's training an...prophet himself. T...of prophethood, is...general, and the P...

In *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, Journey from the...(*al-masjid al-aqṣā*) the Holy Mosque...grees embodied in interpretation, the dominion of both knowledge of the...this point in the al...returns to the con...ham, specifically...and the Earth" (C...ascent in fundam...Abraham and the ground of the init...process of ascent.

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān of Abraham and that, as he explai...of "two bow-leng...ing the upper cel...heart."³⁹ Hence, t...are the "signs" m...equivalent to "th...

In addition, while the architectural structure of the Ka'ba takes on the significance of a strand of prophetic history narrated by the Qur'an, it symbolizes the ranks of the Ismā'īlī missionary organization in both ideal and abstract terms. Implied in the passage that follows in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's commentary on the story of Abraham is the ranking of the members in the hierarchy of the Calling: the *imām*, the *hujjah*, the speaking-prophet (*nāṭiq*), and the legatee of the prophet (*asās*). Abraham serves as a qur'anic exemplar of the practice of obedience to the *imām*, and by extension, the Ismā'īlī *da'wah*. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān clarifies that in relation to the meaning of obedience and the two prayers alluded to in the qur'anic verse, Abraham turned toward the speaking-prophet of his time, but only first through the speaking-prophet's legatee, emulating the gradual initiation into the hierarchy of the Calling itself.³⁵ In this manner, first through the means of obedience to the legatee, Abraham was then able to rely on the speaking-prophet of his epoch and to turn toward him in the practice of obedience.³⁶ Attaining to these particular ranks in the Calling indicates Abraham's training and gradual perfection, all of which precede his designation as a prophet himself. The very same paradigm, modeled on Abraham's gradual reception of prophethood, is central to the Fatimid Ismā'īlī treatment of prophetic ascent in general, and the Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey in particular.

In *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, the esoteric interpretation of the Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey from the "Blessed Mosque" (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to the "Furthest Mosque" (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*)—or, as Qāḍī al-Nu'mān elucidates, from the Ka'ba in Mecca to the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem—is correlated to the ranks of the Calling and the degrees embodied in the ranks of religion.³⁷ According to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's allegorical interpretation, the Prophet's ascent to heaven is tantamount to the disclosure of the dominion of both the lower and the celestial degrees, in the same manner that the knowledge of the degrees was revealed and disclosed to the prophet Abraham. At this point in the allegorical interpretation of the Night Journey, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān then returns to the commentary he initially put forth in the section on the story of Abraham, specifically on the qur'anic verse "Abraham saw the dominion of the Heavens and the Earth" (Q 6:75). Reflecting the emphasis of his commentary on prophetic ascent in fundamental ways, the author's correlation between the prophetic ascent of Abraham and the Night Journey of the Prophet Muḥammad indicates the common ground of the initiatory experience, in terms of observing the ranks of religion in the process of ascent.³⁸

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān nevertheless distinguishes between the prophetic experiences of Abraham and Muḥammad. The main point of differentiation lies in the fact that, as he explains, when the Prophet Muḥammad reached the proximity to God of "two bow-lengths" (*qāb qawsayn*) (Q 53:9), he was still only capable of perceiving the upper celestial ranks, but "He saw them purely, clearly, with the eye of his heart."³⁹ Hence, the ranks the Prophet Muḥammad observed in his Night Journey are the "signs" mentioned in Q 17:1. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān treats the sign from Q 17:1 as equivalent to "the dominion of the Heavens and the Earth" from Q 6:75 that Abra-

ham perceived: the celestial degrees or uppermost ranks of religion.⁴⁰ Muḥammad's vision of the ranks during the Night Journey, however, is distinguished from Abraham's initiatory ascent, based on Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's interpretation of the end of the Night Journey verse: "in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is the All-Hearing and All-Seeing" (Q 17:1).⁴¹ The correlation of the ranks of the Calling to the Night Journey provides a visionary topography to Muḥammad's prophetic ascent. In conjunction with Qur'an 48:1, "Verily we have granted you a manifest victory," Qāḍī al-Nu'mān states:

Then God made him ascend to the world of His dominion (*‘ālam malakūtihi*) and disclosed to him the degrees of His Heavens, and He informed him of the knowledge of His unseen (*ghayb*).⁴² By this, He distinguished him over all of His prophets. He drew him near to His presence from the uppermost celestial ranks, and that is the saying of God the Most High, "Glory to the one who took His servant for a journey by night from the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is the All-Hearing and the All-Seeing" (Q 17:1).⁴³

The distinctiveness of the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent assures his superiority over the other prophets. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's commentary also provides further insight into his theory of the prophetic cycles, where Muḥammad is the final and most perfect of the prophets and 'Alī's role as *imām* lends additional weight to the importance of the Ismā'īlī Calling in the last cycle of prophetic history. As noted by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān: "Muḥammad (prayers and peace be upon him) is the most excellent of the Houses (*al-buyūt*) and his Gate (*Bāb*), 'Alī, is the most preferred of the Gates."⁴⁴ He further explains, "'Alī (prayers and peace be upon him) is the most preferred (*afḍal*) Gate of the ranks of God, who are the speaking-prophets, and the wisdom of God is preserved, concealed in His Houses, and the most preferred of his Houses is Muḥammad."⁴⁵ Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's statements on the relationship between the speaking-prophets and their legatees (the *imāms*) speaks to the necessary relationship between the transmission of the exoteric revelation of scripture and its exoteric interpretation to the community of believers. In structural terms, the upper (spiritual) ranks and the lower (corporeal) ranks of religion are the vehicles that transmit the exoteric and esoteric forms of knowledge to individuals. Abraham's initiatory ascent, or his gradual recognition of God's unity, demarcates the lower and upper stages of the ranks of religion. Abraham's obedience to the ranks of religion represents the practice of *ṭā'ah* that individual practitioners owe to the *imām* of the time.

In the example of the story of Abraham, the upper (*‘ulwiyyah*) and lower (*suflīyyah*) ranks parallel each other, but they function with respect to the ascent of the souls of the prophets (that is, the arc of ascent) and the transmission of divine assistance from the celestial realm to the earthly realm (the arc of descent).⁴⁶ As noted previously, in the earthly realm, the corporeal intermediaries, such as the ranks, are of unequivocal importance for the spiritual development of the indi-

n.⁴⁰ Muḥammad's
ished from Abra-
n of the end of the
Our signs: for He
f the ranks of the
to Muḥammad's
ave granted you a

m *malakūtihi*)
ned him of the
over all of His
celestial ranks,
o took His ser-
mosque whose
Our signs: for

res his superiority
les further insight
nal and most per-
to the importance
noted by Qāḍī al-
st excellent of the
of the Gates."⁴⁴ He
t preferred (*afḍal*)
wisdom of God is
of his Houses is
etween the speak-
y relationship be-
its exoteric inter-
: upper (spiritual)
that transmit the
s initiatory ascent,
nd upper stages of
on represents the
he time.
th) and lower (*su-*
t to the ascent of
mission of divine
: of descent).⁴⁶ As
aries, such as the
ment of the indi-

vidual practitioner.⁴⁷ The ascent through the Calling and the ranks of religion does not attenuate the necessity of the corporeal intermediaries, but rather the corporeal intermediaries form an intrinsic part of the prophet Abraham's vision itself. As Qāḍī al-Nu'mān explains:

Likewise Abraham (may God's prayers be upon Him) said when he saw the first of the upper (celestial), divine (*malakūtiyyah*), heavenly ranks of religion (*ḥudūd*), "He said: This is my Lord" (Q 6:78). He likewise said it for the second and the third, for when he saw it, he attained to what was above him and he abandoned the independent utmost limit (*al-mutanahī al-mustaḳill*), and he held fast to the highest one until it came to an end. Then he abandoned it, as it was described by God the most Exalted and Glorious in His book, that he turned himself toward the Creator of Creation (*bāri al-bari'ah*), and the Endower (*Fātir*) of "the Heavens and the Earth" (Q 6: 79), [for] every limit (*ḥadd*) and delimited thing (*maḥdūd*) is beneath him, and he is the one who is elevated (*al-muta'alli*) above the limits (*ḥudūd*) and the ones delimited (*maḥdūdāt*) according to his capacity. This is just as "the dominion of the heavens" (Q 6:75), which God the Exalted and Glorious mentioned that Abraham saw, are the upper limits (*al-ḥudūd al-^culwiyyah*) that transfer the *ta'yid* from them to the lower limits (*al-ḥudūd al-sufliyyah*).⁴⁸

Why are the examples of prophetic ascent through the ranks of religion drawn from *Asās al-Ta'wīl* significant? The visionary aspect of prophetic ascent lays the groundwork for a symbolic and technical lexicon of Ismā'īlī terms, based on qur'anic verses, in such a manner that the qur'anic narratives are drawn back into the realm of the individual practitioner's obedience, the religious duty of *walāyah* entailed in the practice of *tā'ah*. In *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, individual human beings are set apart into groups on the basis of the distinctions of individual soul. Individual human beings possess two types of soul with the potential for mystical and initiatory ascent. The two types of soul the individual possesses echo the ranks of religion in terms of the upper and lower demarcations of God's creation into the realm of the heavens and their dominion, the earth.

God the Most Exalted and Glorious reveals to him the pure, superior souls (*al-arwāḥ al-zakiyyah al-fāḍilah*) who devoted themselves to Him, and commended His obedience (*tā'ah*), and He chose them to praise Him. He selected them, distinguished them, and was pleased with them. Then He discloses to them the dominion of the heavens (*malakūt al-samāwāt*), so they unite with the upper, heavenly souls (*bi al-arwāḥ al-^culwiyyah al-samawiyyah*) without the bodies (*al-ajsād*) that seek refuge in the earthy density (*al-kathīfah al-arḍiyyah*).⁴⁹

With this passage, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān discusses how the individual, as was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, may yearn for Universal Intellect's perfection. He or she may cast aside the material domain and turn upward, emulating the qur'anic exemplars of obedience and perfection, Abraham and Muḥammad, the models for the spiritual ascent of the perfect human being.

Reflecting the richness of the Fatimid Ismā'īlī tradition, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-Ta'wīl* presents a theory of individual mystical or initiatory experience based on two qur'anic exemplars, Abraham and Muḥammad. In ascent, the hierarchies of the *da'wah* and the ranks of religion come to function as external symbolic referents in order to articulate the profoundly initiatory aspect of the very knowledge the human being may attain through God's selection.⁵⁰

This chapter has explained how Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's commentaries on the Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey and the story of Abraham outline a doctrinal position where individual practitioners may potentially experience spiritual ascent through their training in the *da'wah*. Arguably, more research is required in terms of situating medieval Fatimid Ismā'īlī texts within the scope of the medieval mystical traditions of Islam.

NOTES

1. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 1–66; Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 47.

2. J. W. Morris, "Situating Islamic 'Mysticism': Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality," in *Mystics of the Book*, ed. Richard Herrera (New York/Berlin: P. Lang, 1993), 293–334.

3. Shin Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy according to the *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ* by Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934–5)," Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2000, 2–3.

4. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shi'isme originel* (Paris: Verdier, 1992); trans. David Streight, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 19; and Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy," 2–3.

5. One of the most remarkable Neoplatonist authors in the medieval Ismā'īlī tradition is Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 982 CE). Two of his works, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (The Unveiling of the Hidden) and *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* (The Wellsprings of Wisdom), present several theories on the relationship between Universal Intellect and Universal Soul on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels of God's creation. See Sijistānī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, ed. Henri Corbin (Tehran and Paris: Département d'Iranologie de l'Institut francoiranien, 1949); intro. and trans. Hermann Landolt, in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, in *Trilogie ismaélienne*, ed. Henri Corbin (Tehran and Paris: Département d'Iranologie de l'Institut francoiranien, 1961); trans. Paul Walker, *Wellsprings of Wisdom* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

6. For the use of the term *tarbiyyah* in the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, see vol. I and III, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib, Majlis 57, 67; and vol. III (Ghālib edition), 200. In vol. III, four lectures are specifically devoted to Abraham's upbringing (*tarbiyyah*) in the cave (see vol. III, Majlis 367–370, 191–203). The correlation between the gradual training of the prophet Moses and the initiatory ascent of the individual practitioner is notable in *Asās al-Ta'wīl*. See Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, ed. 'Arif Ṭāmir (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1966), 190. God guides His friends (*awliyā'*) on the Straight Path (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*): "Then He entrusted them with souls, and He brought them forth from the wombs as children, not knowing anything, but then He taught them with the assistance of His servants, and in that manner, conveys them in knowledge ('ilm), grade (*darajah*) after grade."

7. On Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and the Fatimid *majlis*, see Heinz Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*

al-*mān's Asās al-*
-ience based on
e hierarchies of
symbolic refer-
very knowledge

ntaries on the
utline a doctri-
ience spiritual
rch is required
pe of the medi-

ill: University of
New York: Paulist

ions and Popular
: P. Lang, 1993),

Kitāb al-Ṣlāḥ by
2-3.
el (Paris: Verdier,
ate University of
," 2-3.

li tradition is Abū
eiling of the Hid-
s on the relation-
icrocosmic levels
d Paris: Départe-
in Landolt, in *An*
zavi (Oxford: Ox-
enri Corbin (Teh-
ans. Paul Walker,

vol.-I and III, ed.
four lectures are
. III, Majlis 367-
oses and the ini-
Qāḍī al-Nu'mān,
ides His friends
n with souls, and
it then He taught
m in knowledge

ire of the Mahdi

(Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); and idem, "The Ismā'īlī Oath of Allegiance ('*ahd*) and the Sessions of Wisdom (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fātimid Times," in *Medieval Ismā'īlī History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91-116.

8. On al-Mu'ayyad's life and career, see Verena Klemm, *Die Mission des fātimidischen Agenten al-Mu'ayyad fī d-Dīn in Sīrāz* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1989). On al-Mu'ayyad's doctrinal thought and his collection of lectures, see Elizabeth Alexandrin, "The 'Sphere of *Walāyah*.' Ismā'īlī *Ta'wīl* in Practice according to al-Mu'ayyad (d. ca. 1078 CE)," Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2006.

9. As originally discussed by Landolt in his seminal article on *walāyah*, and elaborated upon in detail in my Ph.D. dissertation, al-Mu'ayyad introduces into the Fatimid Ismā'īlī technical lexicon an original term for the "absolute human being" (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*), tantamount to the "perfect human being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) frequently discussed in medieval Sufi and Shi'ī literature. According to al-Mu'ayyad, the absolute human being is the representative of the true Adamic form (the Gnostic anthropos, as it were) in each prophetic cycle (*dawr*) and each time-period ('*aṣr/zamān*). In the final cycle of prophetic history, the Prophet Muḥammad (during his life-time) and the *imāms* (after his death) are all the absolute human being. See Hermann Landolt, "Walāyah," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 316-323; Alexandrin, *The "Sphere of Walāyah,"* ch. 4.

10. al-Mu'ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. I, Majlis 8, 36-37, ln. 11-21 and ln. 1-17. Also see Habib Feki, *Les Idées religieuses et philosophiques de l'ismaélisme fatimide* (Algiers: Université de Tunis, 1978), 173-174.

11. *Majālis*, vol. I, Majlis 8, 36-37, ln. 11-21 and ln. 1-17; Feki, *Les Idées religieuses*, 173-174.

12. This is similar to what is alluded to in Qur'an 32:17, but it is in fact a hadith *qudsī* on the authority of Abū Ḥurayrah. Al-Mu'ayyad also refers to this hadith in vol. I, Majlis 59, 290, ln. 8-9.

13. *Majālis*, vol. II (Ḥamīd al-Dīn edition), *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, vol. I & II, ed. Ḥatīm Ḥamīd al-Dīn (Oxford and Bombay: Z. H. Nooruddin/Leaders Press Private Limited, 1395-1407/1975-1986), Majlis 41, 244, ln. 89-94. This is also tantamount to becoming separated from the placenta (*al-mashimah*), after being born, of "this world" (*dār al-dunyā*). See vol. I, Majlis 75, 366-367, ln. 3-20 and ln. 10; vol. II, Majlis 3, 20-21, ln. 81-85; and vol. III, Majlis 19, 57-58, ln. 16-23 and ln. 1-6.

14. Some other material on Abraham may be found in volumes I, II, and V of the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*. See in this connection vol. I, Majlis 15, 21, 51, 56, 67, 74; and vol. II, 6, 94.

15. In *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, the *mithāq* of Abraham, 123-124 (longer passage, in relation to *ḥadd* and *ta'yīd* as well as Ishmael and Isaac), 126. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān uses the term *mithāq* in his commentary on the story of Moses and the story of Muḥammad (see *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, 205, 343). In the context of classical Sufism, Sahl al-Tustarī, al-Ḥallāj, and Junayd employed the term *mithāq* in conjunction with individual mystical ascent (see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* [Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1980], 152-157; and Louis Massignon, "Le 'Jour du covenant' (Yawm al-Mithāq)," *Oriens* 16 [1962]: 86-92). In the early Jewish mystical tradition, the theme of "adjuration" also appears in relation to prophetic ascent and the "vision of God," in which the prophet Moses serves as a "prototype" of the "Merkavah mystic," with a notable initiatory and theurgic aspect (see Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, trans. Alan Pomerance [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 143-161).

16. Gerhard Böwering, "From the Word of God to the Vision of God," in *Le Voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1996), 208-209. Böwering has noted that in both the mystical and classical commentaries, Muḥammad's *isrā'* is combined with his *mi'rāj*. In *Asās al-Ta'wīl* (337-339), the *isrā'* of the Prophet Muḥammad is included in the story of Muḥammad (*qiṣṣat Muḥammad*). Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, however, first comments on the *isrā'* in the introductory section of the story of Abraham (see *ibid.*, 108-109; and Feki, *Les Idées religieuses*, 232, n. 49).

17. *Asās al-Ta'wīl*, 321-326: on how the *Qā'im* will make manifest the *bāṭin* of the religious

law (*sharīʿah*) and its *taʿwil*. Cf. *ibid.*, 332, which contains examples of Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad receiving (respectively) the Torah, Gospels, and Qurʾān.

18. *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 109–113, 338–339. Also see *ibid.*, 192, where Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān puts forth another example of the transmission of *taʿyīd* from the upper to the lower *hudūd* but in the context of the story of Moses (*qiṣṣat Mūsā*). *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 112 in particular discusses the ascent of Abraham. The text on 112–113 is foremost concerned with the *Taʿwil* of Qurʾān 6:76, “When the night covered him over,” offering an interpretation of the term *al-layl* (the night) in correlation with the rising and setting of the sun and moon of the following verses, Qurʾān 6:77–78. In *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 113, as in the *Majālis al-Muʾayyadīyyah*, vol. III, Majlis 72, 207, both authors situate Abraham’s upbringing in the cave as part of the story of Abraham. For the story of Muḥammad, see in particular *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 338–339.

19. *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 107–129.

20. *Ibid.*, 108. A more detailed interpretation of the *isrāʾ* appears in the section on the story of Muḥammad (*ibid.*, 337–338). On 338 in particular, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān presents his *taʿwil* of Muḥammad’s ascent in the heaven.

21. *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 108–109.

22. *Ibid.*, 108–109. In this passage, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān explains that in the context of Muḥammad’s ascent, the soul has two aspects, one that is “heavy” (*thaqīl*) and one that is not. According to Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, though Muḥammad’s Night Journey has been commonly misconstrued as a physical ascent, it is a spiritual ascent. In fact, according to Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, the “heavy” component of the prophetic soul is what ascends and becomes purified in the process of ascent. Feki states that “Qāḍī Nuʿmān gives to *wahy* the meaning of an intimate conversation (*mushāfaha*) of the lower souls with the superior souls” (Feki, *Les Idées religieuses*, 230). In this particular passage from the *Asās al-Taʿwil*, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān uses the terms lower souls (*al-arwāḥ al-sufliyyah*) and upper souls (*al-arwāḥ al-ʿulwiyyah*). On this point, see in particular, Yves Marquet, “L’Ascension spirituelle chez quelques auteurs ismailiens,” in Amir-Moezzi, ed., *Le Voyage initiatique*, 117–126.

23. *Asās al-Taʿwil*, 344–345.

24. *Ibid.*, 345. See, in conjunction with this passage, p. 343.

25. Claude Gilliot, “Abraham eût-il un regard peccamineux?,” in *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret*, ed. Eric Chaumont with the collaboration of Denis Aigle, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, and Pierre Lory (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 40–46.

26. *Ibid.*, 45–46; Hermann Landolt, “Ghazālī and ‘Religionswissenschaft’: Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* for Professor Charles J. Adams,” *Asiatische Studien (Etudes asiatiques)* 45/1(1991), 35–39; Nomoto, “Early Ismāʿīlī Thought on Prophecy,” 229; Dominique Sourdel, *L’Imāmisme vu par le cheikh al-Mufīd* (Paris: Guethner, 1974), 16–17. Sourdel addresses the theory of the impeccability (*ʿiṣmah*) of the *imām* as a “divine distinction” (*tafaḍḍul min Allāh*), as well as the parameters of the *imām*’s knowledge, including his knowledge of the unseen and unknowable (*ghayb*). See also Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ*, ed. ʿArif Ṭāmir (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960), 168–172. Prior to his presentation of the story of Moses, Kirmānī notes the distinctions between the *hudūd*, the *ʿulwiyyah*, and the *sufliyyah*, (from Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī’s no longer extant *Nuṣrah*). Of decidedly more interest with regard to the story of Abraham and his perception of the ranks of religion in the form of the star, the moon, and the sun, Kirmānī (*ibid.*, 168) cites Sijistānī’s comparison of the *sābiq* (the “predecessor,” or Universal Intellect) and the *tālī* (the “follower,” or Universal Soul) to the *nāṭiq* and *asās*, and the *nāṭiq* and the *asās* to the sun (*al-shams*) and the moon (*al-qamar*) in the three realms of the world of origination (*ʿālam al-ibdāʿ*), the world of the body, or the physical domain (*ʿālam al-jism*), and the world of religion (*ʿālam al-dīn*). A matter addressed in further detail in ch. 4 of my Ph.D. dissertation, al-Muʾayyad discusses the roles of the sun (*al-shams*: the prophet), the moon (*al-qamar*: the legatee), and the stars (*al-nujūm*: the *imāms*), which constitute the world of religion (*ʿālam al-dīn*). See *Majālis*, vol. I (Ḥamid al-Dīn edition), Majlis 19–20, 81–84; on the physical composition (*tarkīb*) of the sun, the moon, and the stars, see vol. I (Ghālīb edition), Majlis 50; Majlis 63, 311: how in this world (*dār al-dunyā*), the prophets, the *awṣiyāʾ* and the *imāms* are in the station (*manzilah*) of the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the sun and moon in relation to *walāyah*, see *ibid.*, 24. Also see vol. II, Majlis 208.

ses, Jesus, and

man puts forth
adūd but in the
discusses the as-
of Qur'an 6:76,
layl (the night) in
verses, Qur'an
ilis 72, 207, both
m. For the story

ion on the story
nts his ta'wil of

of Muḥammad's
ccording to Qāḍī
ued as a physical
component of the
. Feki states that
āha) of the lower
passage from the
) and upper souls
ension spirituelle
17-126.

r du regard: Mé-
Mohammad Ali

ome Notes on the
tudes asiatiques)
inique Sourdel,
resses the theory
i Allāh), as well as
and unknowable
(Beirut: Dār al-
ānī notes the dis-
ib al-Sijistānī's no
Abraham and his
n, Kirmānī (ibid.,
llect) and the tālī
isās to the sun (al-
n ('ālam al-ibdā'),
religion ('ālam al-
lu'ayyad discusses
and the stars (al-
iālis, vol. I (Ḥamīd
he sun, the moon,
rld (dār al-dunyā),
the moon, and the
Majlis 208.

27. Abraham's association of other deities to the one God, or polytheism (*shirk*), is addressed in particular in four lectures from the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadīyyah*. See vol. III, Majlis 367-340.

28. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 107; and Henri Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 117. There are six periods of prophetic cycles. The "legislating" prophets, or those who bring scriptures and religious laws, are as follows: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. For additional information on Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's theory of the prophetic cycles, see Henri Corbin, "L'Histoire secrète des prophètes, d'après le Kitab Asas al-Ta'wil de Qazi No'man," in *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, ed. Christian Jambet (Tehran and Paris: Bibliothèque iranienne, 1993), 80-81.

29. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 108.

30. Ibid., 127.

31. Ibid., 126.

32. Ibid., 114-115. On the building of the Ka'ba in Mecca as a place of pilgrimage, see 115 in particular.

33. Qur'an 2:127: "And remember Abraham and Ismā'il raised the foundations of the House."

34. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 116.

35. Ibid., 118.

36. Ibid., 116-117. Also see 117 in particular, where the *sujūd* and *raka'* are equated to the *hudūd* and the *da'wah*.

37. Ibid., 337-338; and Marquet, "L'Ascension spirituelle chez quelques auteurs ismailiens," 120-122.

38. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 337. According to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, the *ta'wil* of the night (*al-layl*) of Muḥammad's Night Journey (Q 17:1) signifies "the veil and concealment in the *bāṭin*, meaning that the Glorious and Exalted made him ascend and progress in the knowledge of the 'hidden' (*'ilm al-bāṭin*)."

39. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 339: "bi 'ayn qalbihi al-ṣafīyyah al-baṣīrah." On the expression "the eye of the heart," see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 48-50.

40. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 338.

41. Ibid., 336-337.

42. A reference to Qur'an 27:65, "Say: none in the heavens or on earth, except God, knows what is hidden."

43. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 337; and Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 47. There are, needless to say, other medieval Ismā'īlī interpretations of Muḥammad's Night Journey and ascension. See, in conjunction with this passage, Marquet, "L'Ascension spirituelle chez quelques auteurs ismailiens," 121. Marquet suggests that the "furthest mosque" is an esoteric reference to the sixth *imām* or the *mutimm*. By way of comparison, see Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy," 223 (citing Rāzī, *Islāh*, f. 58v., ll. 5-13/ f. 57r., l. 16-v., l. 8/120).

44. *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 365.

45. Ibid., 366.

46. In the story of Moses from the *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 192, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān explains that of the three portions (*aqsām*) of *ta'yid* that flow from the upper to the lower *hudūd*, the most preferred portion is the portion of the prophets.

47. See *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 109, for the example of Abraham and the transmission of *ta'yid* by the means of the *hudūd*.

48. Ibid., 109.

49. Ibid., 108.

50. An example of this dynamic at work may be seen in the *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 198. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān states: "This is from the hidden symbols (*al-rumūz al-khaṣīyyah*) whose meaning is not to be found except with the 'friends of God.'" Also, see *Asās al-Ta'wil*, 348-349 (in the story of Muḥammad), on *tanzil* and *ta'wil*. The apparent Calling (*al-da'wah al-zāhirah*) is paired with the hidden Calling (*da'wah al-bāṭinah*) for the purpose of explanation and facilitation (*taysīr*). Another reference to the hidden Calling appears in a passage concerning ranks of religion (ibid., 327).