



Summoning the Past into the Present
I Wish I'd Been There
Narratives on Ismaili History



A Simerg.Com initiative

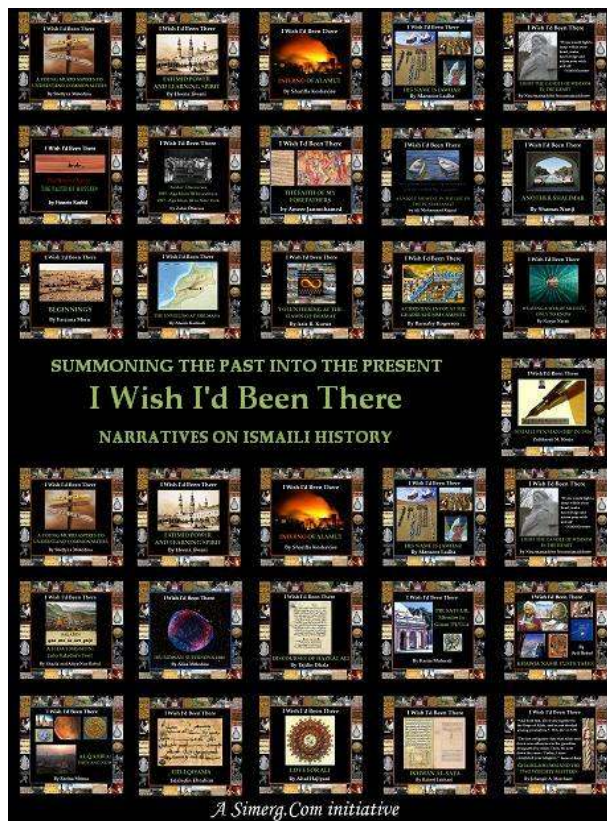
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SUMMONING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

I Wish I'd Been There



NARRATIVES ON ISMAILI HISTORY

2010

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{ Insights from Around the World }

I Wish I'd Been There

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PREFACE

To mark the first anniversary of www.Simerg.Com we invited our readers “to summon the past into the present,” and contribute a narrative based on the question:

“What is the one scene, incident or event in ISMAILI history you would like to have witnessed — and why?”

As stated when the series was first announced earlier this year, we wanted the prospective contributor to assume the role of a fly on the wall at an epochal period in Ismaili history. Our anticipation was that the series “I Wish I’d Been There” would result in a range of narratives that would confirm that historical imagination is unbounded. Thirty one individuals responded with imaginative and inspiring essays from different periods of Ismaili history. These were published on the Web site between April 7 and June 17, 2010.

This present publication in PDF format constitutes their outstanding effort in making knowledge available for *Simerg* readers around the world in this unique format under the theme of “I Wish I’d Been There.” The contributors are from everywhere, and represent all walks of life and age groups – students and youth, professionals in various fields, educators, academicians, scientists and scholars - Ismailis and non-Ismailis - senior members and leaders of the Ismaili Jamat, authors and journalists, as well as individuals who have an abiding interest and enthusiasm for history and literature. How encouraging!

Readers around the world have truly appreciated the gift of knowledge these talented and generous individuals have imparted through their exquisite writings, and I express my deep felt thanks to each of the contributors for their commitment and enthusiasm for “I Wish I’d Been There.” They made the series enriching and highly successful.

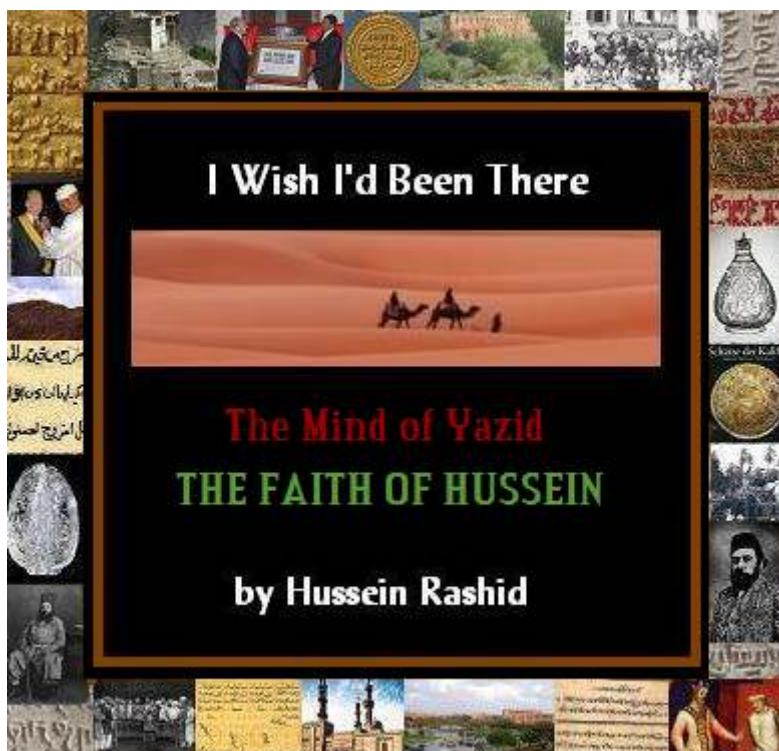
Many wrote complimenting *Simerg* for conceiving the notion of “I Wish I’d Been There.” I hasten to say that the idea originated in my mind in 1984 when *American Heritage* magazine published thirty pieces on American History under the same theme. Subsequently, a book containing twenty essays by eminent American historians was also produced. So in a sense the idea of “I Wish I’d Been There” is not exclusive to *Simerg*. It is a borrowed idea that has been reincarnated as an Ismaili History project some twenty five years later!

I would also like to thank everyone who wrote or submitted feedback on the Web site for the series. As for the Web site, it is receiving wider attention from across the globe and I express my deep felt thanks to the readers and the growing number of subscribers. It is worth noting that there is an immense amount of interest and enthusiasm for material that was published during the earliest days of the Web site, proving that certain forms of literary endeavours can never become outdated.

I thank my artistic daughter, Nurin, for taking the time to craft many of the unique images which appear at the start of each piece in this PDF file, in spite of her Grade 12 exams which she just completed. I also offer my gratitude to everyone in my family, particularly my parents, for their inspiration and example. I sincerely thank my friends for the editorial support that they provide me.

There has been a suggestion from numerous readers that *Simerg* publish a special booklet for the “I Wish I’d Been There” series. This is now being considered. An annual *Simerg* literary journal containing selected readings from the Web site is also being envisaged for publication commencing 2011. While these projects may take some time to materialize, it is my sincere hope you will find benefit from this electronic PDF version of “I Wish I’d Been There.”

Abdulmalik J. Merchant
Editor and Publisher
www.simerg.com
Ottawa, Canada
July 1, 2010.



A scene from a desert

The Mind of Yazid, the Faith of Hussein

By Hussein Rashid

There are so many moments in history that I would love to be a part of. To be near the Prophet (SAWS) when he received the first revelation; at Ghadir-Khumm; at the battle of Siffin; at Karbala; when Imam Jafar (AS) refused to be an Abbasid figurehead; with Hasan-i Sabbah at Alamut; to witness Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's (AS) move to consolidate the community again. I think that eventually these stories will be told better. That is the job of the historian.

I still want to be at some of these moments, but with a different focus. I want to be the close companion of Yazid. What possesses Yazid to kill the Prophet's favourite grandson after torturing the Prophet's family? This thought is something I absolutely cannot understand. I want Yazid to explain to me what evil is in his heart to call himself a Muslim while denying and slaughtering the blessed family of the Prophet.

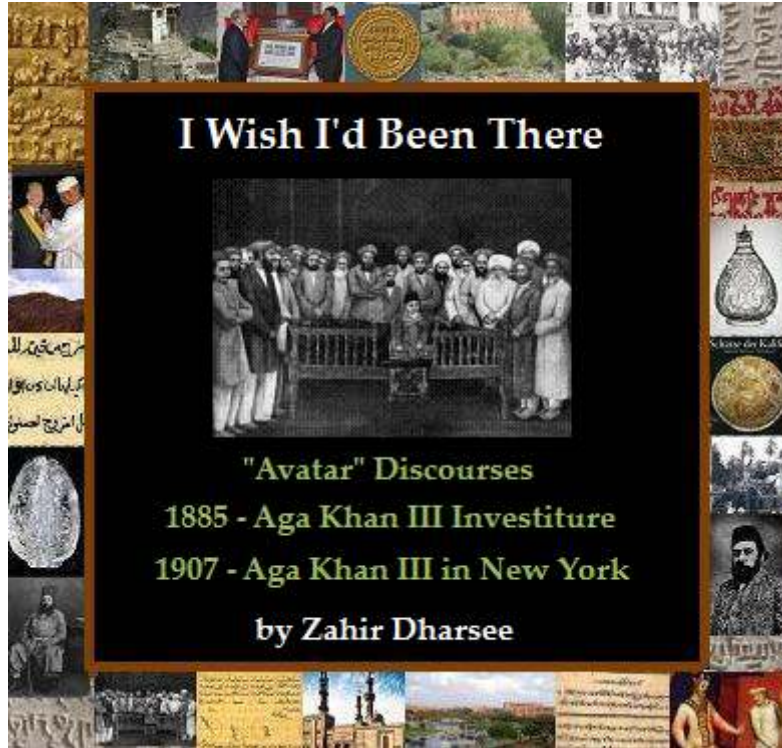
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I want to know how, after God says the Prophet is a beautiful role-model (33:21), that so many of the earliest Muslims turned against his family. To kill the family of the Prophet became a sport from within the community. I wish I had been there to understand that, because no historian will be able to answer the question.

~~~~~





The installation of His Highness the Aga Khan III. He became 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims at the age of 7

13th-14th Century “Avatar” Discourses; 1885 – Aga Khan III Investiture; 1907 – Aga Khan III in New York

by Zahir Dharsee

*I - “Avatar” Discourses*

This word has all of a sudden in 2010, gained significant prominence as a result of it being the title for the Oscar nominated movie directed by James Cameron. The movie has given the word *Avatar* mass recognition similar to that of *Coca-Cola* or *Nike*!

*Avatar* is a Sanskrit word that when loosely translated into English means “the manifestation” or “the appearance”. This in turn can have various exoteric and esoteric interpretations – “Who is your *Avatar*?” – The *AVATAR* question can be brought down to a simple individual’s soul searching spiritual quest or yearning as to the “meaning or purpose of life”.

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In the land of my forefathers, the Kutch Kathiawar district, in the present day State of Gujarat in India, sometime in the 13th and 14th Centuries, the *Avatar* philosophy and its principles, formed the fundamental basis by which the Pirs or Dais (Ismaili preachers) from Iran, provided proof to my ancestors as to the existence of the *Avatar*. They expanded on the belief of the *Das Avatar*. As a result, the word *Avatar* is recited in many of the hymns (ginans) they composed to entice the new believers into the fold by providing the proof of their point – a famous one is “*Eji Anand anand ....diyo ... avatar ne, to jeevaro chute*”. The *Avatar* philosophy gave rise to a new community of believers who were given the title of *Khojas* (honorary converts) and came into the Ismaili fold of the Shia Muslim branch of Islam.

*I Wish I had Been There* to witness the discourses given by the Pirs and Dais to explain the AVATAR philosophy and concept to the new community!!

### ***II - 1885: Aga Khan III is Installed as 48th Imam***



September 1, 1885: The 7-year-old Aga Khan III at his enthronement ceremony as 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims in Bombay. He is surrounded by community elders and seated on the oblong wooden throne of Imamate. Photo:

Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images, Copyright

Toward the end of the 19th Century, in August 1885, a young boy age 7, Sultan Mohamed Shah, assumed the hereditary office of the 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. There is a famous picture taken of this event – the young Imam sitting amongst the leaders of his community. Sir Sultan Mohamed Shah’s Imamate lasted 72 years to

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July 11, 1957. During his Imamate major social, economic and political changes occurred within and outside the Ismaili community and these set the foundation for its prominent position in the global world of today.

*I Wish I'd Been There* to witness the investiture of this young Imam at age 7.

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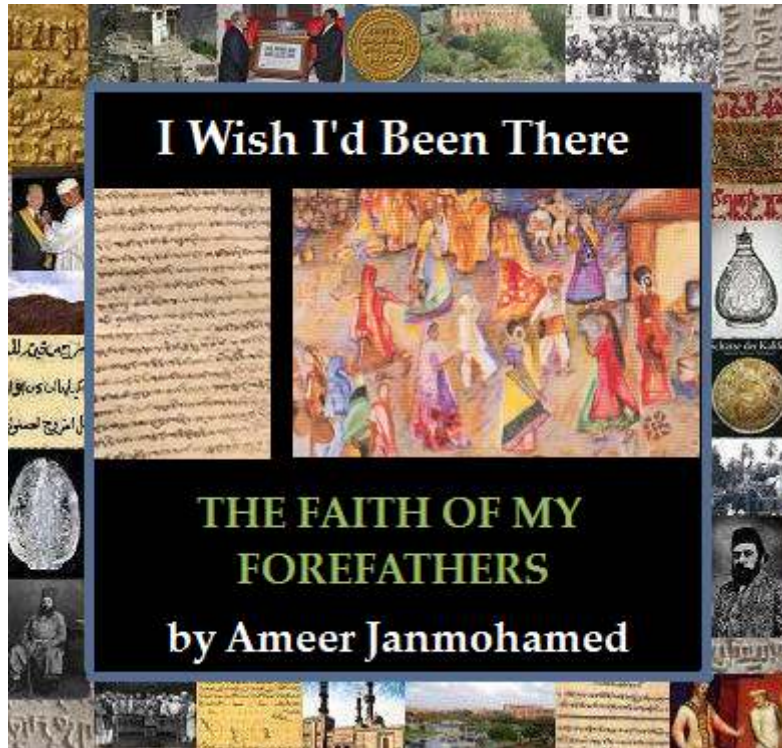
III. 1907: Aga Khan III in St. Regis Hotel, New York

In December 1906, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, arrived in San Francisco and started a two month train journey across the United States. He arrived in New York City in January 1907, and stayed at the St. Regis Hotel. In his *Memoirs*, His Highness gives a vivid description of New York city in the early 1900's – “the motor car was coming into its own, and was no longer the smelly despised toy it was a decade earlier.”

In August 2005, almost 98 years later, I visited New York City and went to see the St Regis hotel and gave the Manager excerpts of the pages from the Memoirs of the Aga Khan where His Highness refers to his New York City visit!!

I Wish I'd Been There when His Highness and his entourage would have checked in at the St Regis hotel!

~~~~~



A folio from a Ginan manuscript (left) and a scene from the front cover of Tazim Kassam's book "Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance"

## The Faith of My Forefathers

by Ameer Kassam Janmohamed

To single out one scene, incident or event in Ismaili History which I would have liked to have witnessed is not easy. Even with a rudimentary knowledge of Ismaili history, I know that its fourteen hundred year span is rich with occasions which may be singled out for celebration.

For me one of the more glorious and epochal periods in Ismaili History is the current era of our 49th Imam, Shah Karim Al-Hussayni Aga Khan. I do not have to *Wish I'd Been There*; for it is my good fortune to be right here and witness the events of this Imamatus unfold in real time.

Our Imam has taken the role of Imamatus to unprecedented heights. Never before has the rest of the world so overtly acknowledged the Imam's vision. We know that world leaders, organizations and decision makers consult with him,

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and make demands on his time. And yet the Imam remains steadfast in his commitment to his followers who are now spread throughout the world, and he has their unstinting fealty and devotion.

It is said that His Highness the Aga Khan, amongst other things, will be remembered by historians as the benign face of Islam who did so much to bridge the gulf between the Muslim world and those who do not comprehend its diversity.

But the object of this particular exercise in this series is to *Summon the Past into the Present*. In this context I would say I would like to have been present in India during that period in the 14th Century when Pir Sadr al-Din and successors introduced the Ismaili faith to my ancestors.

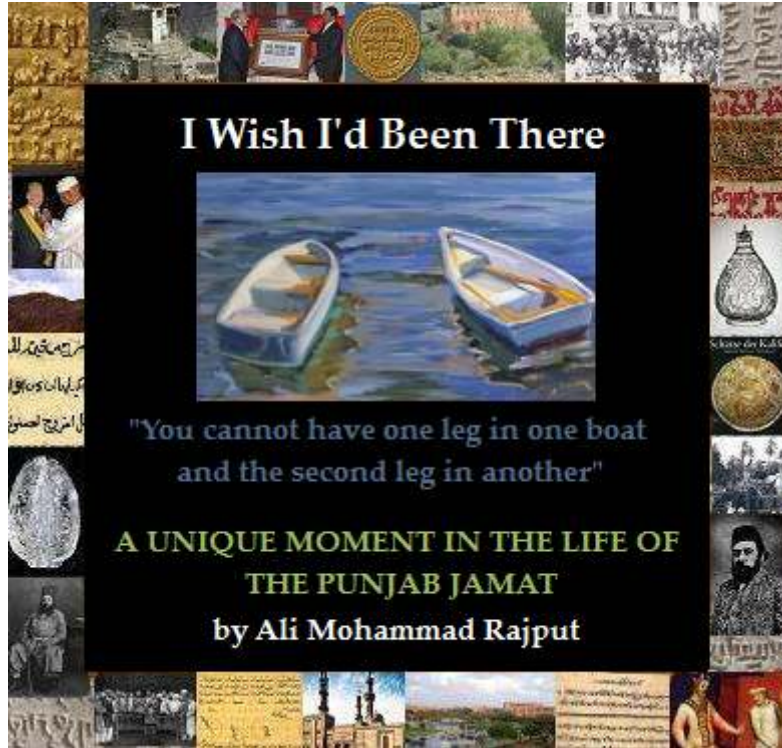
Pir Sadr al-Din, in the time of Imam Kassim Shah (1310/1370), came as a foreigner to a new land. He and successive Pirs mastered Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Punjabi, Cutchi and Khojki to an extent where they could communicate fluently, in prose and verse, with inhabitants of various regions on the sub-continent in their own languages and dialects. They disseminated knowledge or *gnan* in the form of devotional hymns which we call *Ginans*, and astonishingly, for people of non-Indian origin, set many of these Ginans to Indian classical *ragas*. These Ginans in their timelessness have endured, and in their content and musicality, are as valid today as they were when they were first written.

Ginans are my passion. I have recited Ginans in numerous Jamatkhans in 12 different countries of the world. Each time I have experienced this indescribable thrill when members of the Jamat in diverse places have joined in with me in reciting the Ginans, for they have known the words and the *ragas*. From Mumbai to Melbourne, Miami to Mombasa, Karachi to Kampala, Pune to Portimao, from Andheri to Upanga, each time I have had this exalting experience. One is suffused with a feeling of oneness and community each time one is privileged to undergo this experience.

And then one recalls that we all share this common ethos, this Ginan culture. All those who recite Ginans in a like manner are descendants of ancestors who too were introduced to the faith by the Pirs when they came to *Jampoo Deep* back in 14th Century – and later. The Ismaili diaspora has taken us to many and diverse lands. This heritage continues to permeate our lives no matter which country we call home.

Yes indeed, *I wish I'd Been There* when all this began.

~~~~~

Two boats to illustrate Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's guidance to the Punjab Jamat (in quotes)

A Unique Moment in the Life of the Punjab Jamat

by Ali Mohammad Rajput

I want to be taken back in time when my late father, missionary Inayat Ali, played a crucial role in the early conversion of the Punjab Ismaili jamat, in the second decade of the last century. This was when our forefathers left the *gupti dharma* (practicing the faith with restraint and in concealment), and recognized Imam Sultan Mohammad Shah, Aga Khan III, as their 48th Imam.

My father described to me in vivid terms how the Imam of the time had invited the leaders of the Punjab and North West Province Frontier (NWFP) *gupti* jamats to an audience with him at the Imam's private residence in Mumbai. There were only a dozen or so of the *murids* who had been selected to go for this trip on behalf of the Jamat. My father was one of them. The time for the *Mulaqat* was set for midnight, and in total secrecy. The leaders were asked to

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wait in the garden of the campus in total darkness, and were separated and scattered in such a way that two delegates were not allowed to sit together. Complete silence was observed.

At the midnight hour, when the clock struck twelve, the delegates were summoned to rise and quietly proceed to the audience chamber of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah. The experience and feelings that my father described is similar in all respects to the experience of the first *mulaqat* of Nasir-Khusraw or Al-Muyyid fid-Din-Shirazi, who have left their account in the pages of history.

My father narrated to me that the delegates were briefed in advance about the etiquettes and manners they were supposed to observe. Our beloved 48th Imam welcomed the delegates, and spoke for nearly half an hour explaining the fundamentals and virtues of Islam. He explained how, for the past ten years, he had elaborated to the jamats of Panjab and NWFP about the truth and virtues of Islam, the *sirat-ul-mustakim* (straight path) and had allowed these jamats to observe *taqiyya* (practice the faith in concealment). He said there was no compulsion in matters of *Din* (religious matters). The period of probation was now over and that he would not be angry whatever path the murids chose to take and he had decided that he could now not allow the jamat to remain *gupti* (i.e. continue observing the *taqiyya*).

“*You cannot have one leg in one boat and the second leg in another. Now what is your decision?*” the Imam asked.

All the delegates with one voice responded in the affirmative, and the Imam then accepted the *Bayah* (oath of allegiance) of the delegates. When the turn of my father came, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah asked him:

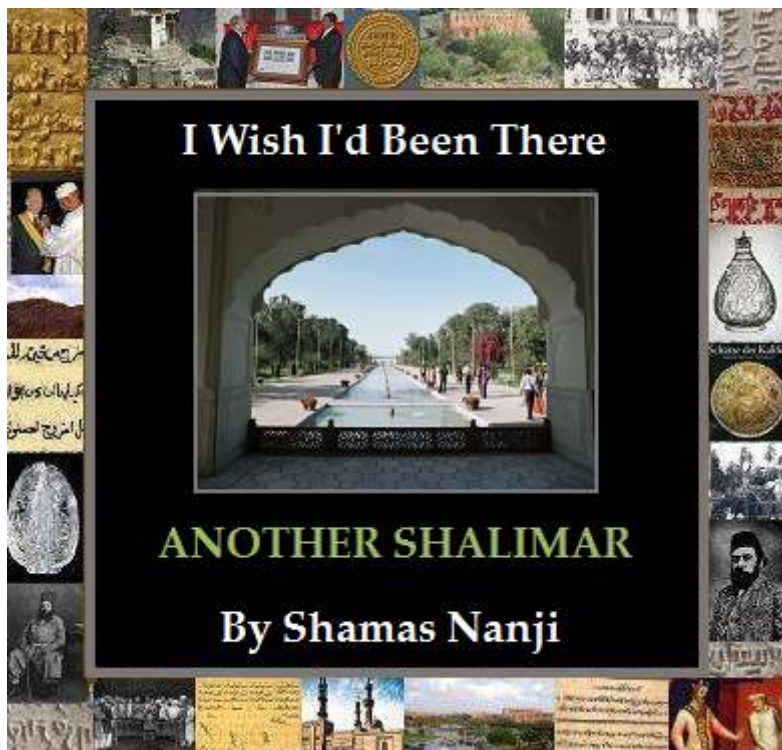
“*What is your name?*”

“*Khudavind, my name is Guran Ditta,*” replied my father.

“*From this day your name is Inayat Ali,*” said our beloved 48th Imam.

This remarkable day in our history was narrated in vivid terms by my father as he was an eye witness. He was an active faithful who always spent three months in a year in *Darkhana* in Bombay. It was an emotional moment for me, when he recounted this incident for me and *I Wish I'd Been There* for this most auspicious day in my father's life as well as the life of the Jamats in Punjab and NWFP.

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Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, Pakistan, where the ceremony of the first Aga Khan Awards for Architecture was held in 1980

## Another Shalimar

By Shamas Nanji

The Aga Khan Awards  
In Shalimar Gardens  
Imagine you're there  
As it actually happens

In timeless allure  
Courtesy of the Mughals  
The gardens resemble  
Visual ghazals

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Keeping the place cool  
For floral and fruit decor  
Were canals, terraces  
And fountains galore

Water for the fountains  
Came from quite far  
Via the merry river  
Made for Shalimar

Imagine, you're seated  
At the ceremony  
It's opening a frontier  
Breaking hegemony

The Awards are  
Bearing a torch  
Giving out light  
Urging a search

You see restorations  
Courtyard homes  
Kampung improvements  
But no domes

Water towers  
A museum  
Medical centre  
But no mausoleum

This is architecture  
For human scale  
Among monoliths  
A brand new trail

Life's being infused  
Into built space  
So its own past  
It can again embrace

With wholesale imports  
And traditions in decay  
The environment's  
Fallen into disarray

Built spaces  
Are in disharmony  
In place of orchestra  
We've got cacophony

Built space is not  
Just architecture  
It's where you'll live  
It's your future

Which is why  
You're here  
At imagination's  
New frontier

The Imam quotes  
Farid al-Din Attar  
Whose thirty birds  
Are his tale's star

Thirty birds  
What diversity!  
Yet, in themselves  
They find unity



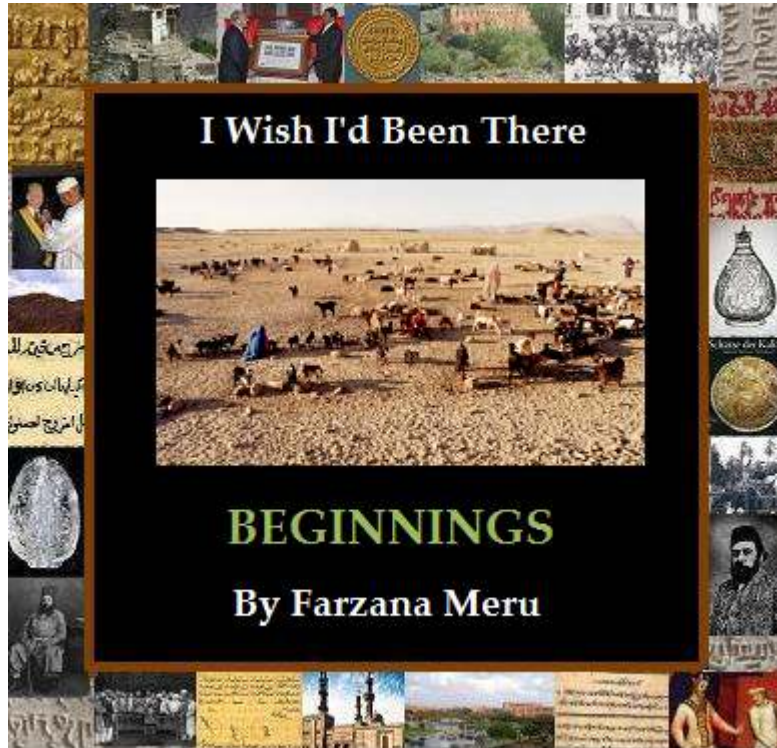
As each built space  
Gets an Award  
Deep in you  
They strike a chord

Unlike the malls  
In your city  
Spaces Muslim  
Are a plurality

Ten Awards  
In thirty years  
You're in a civilization  
That's changing gears

Others will look back  
Centuries from now  
At another "Shalimar"  
And take a bow

~~~~~



A scene from a desert

Beginnings

by Farzana Meru

I am struggling to narrow down all the moments in Ismaili history that I would love to have experienced. As I journey through the modern day trying to understand the past, I often ponder what it would be like to rewind time and experience a number of occasions in Ismaili history. But if I could only choose one of the vast numbers of spectacular incidents, I would go back and experience the beginning of Ismaili history, the key events that sparked the origin of our religion, the dawn of a new era: the time of our Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) in seventh century Arabia.

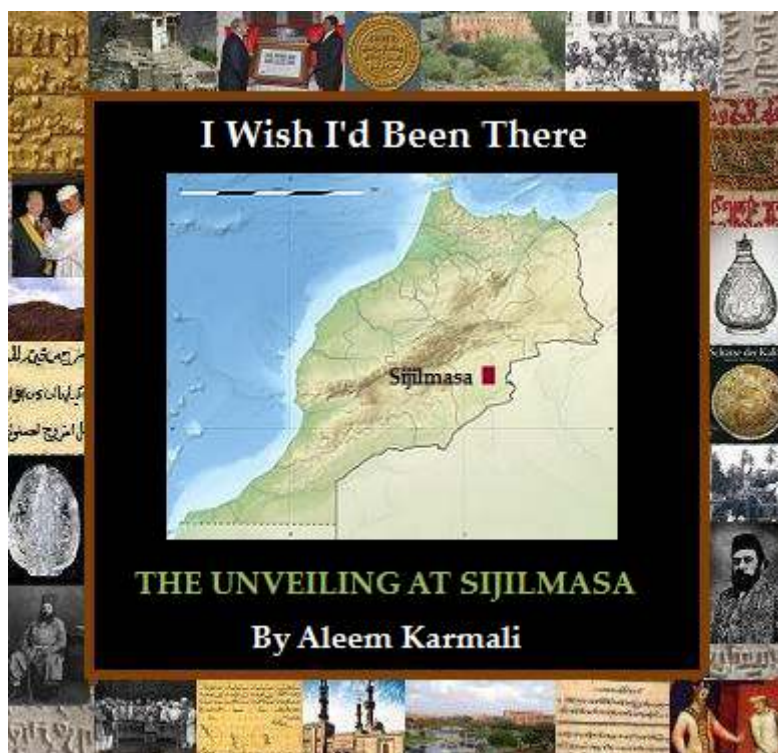
I would love to have experienced first-hand the living conditions and lifestyles of the people in those times. I would want to understand the culture, the tribal systems, and the harsh desert conditions that people had to move through on camels. I would want to see how the Prophet himself dealt with the pressures of leading a community which started off very small but grew rapidly and flourished. I want to understand how people transitioned from the way of

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life in pre-Islamic Arabia into the new times. As a fly on the wall, I could watch the seventh century Arabian world go by, in awe. I would want to experience “where it all began”, an era that would mark the beginning of Ismaili history.

~~~~~



Map of current day Morocco showing the relative location of Sijilmasa where the first Fatimid Caliph, Imam al-Mahdi, revealed himself

## The Unveiling at Sijilmasa

By Aleem Karmali

Standing out in the heat of the desert, a group of conquering Berber tribesmen waited anxiously for their Imam to emerge from the city of Sijilmasa in North Africa. The year was 909 and they had successfully overthrown the Aghlabid rulers at Raqqada. Now was the moment they had longed for – they had come to retrieve their Imam from Sijilmasa, where he had been under arrest, and install him as their new Caliph. They dreamt and prayed that the world would finally achieve peace and justice under the rule of a divinely-guided descendant of the Prophet.

Until that moment, the Ismaili Imams had been in hiding for four generations, so few people could recognize them. In order to identify him at Sijilmasa, it was agreed that if someone rode out into the desert, the tribesmen would dismount from their horses. If that person did not respond by also dismounting, they would know it was their Imam.

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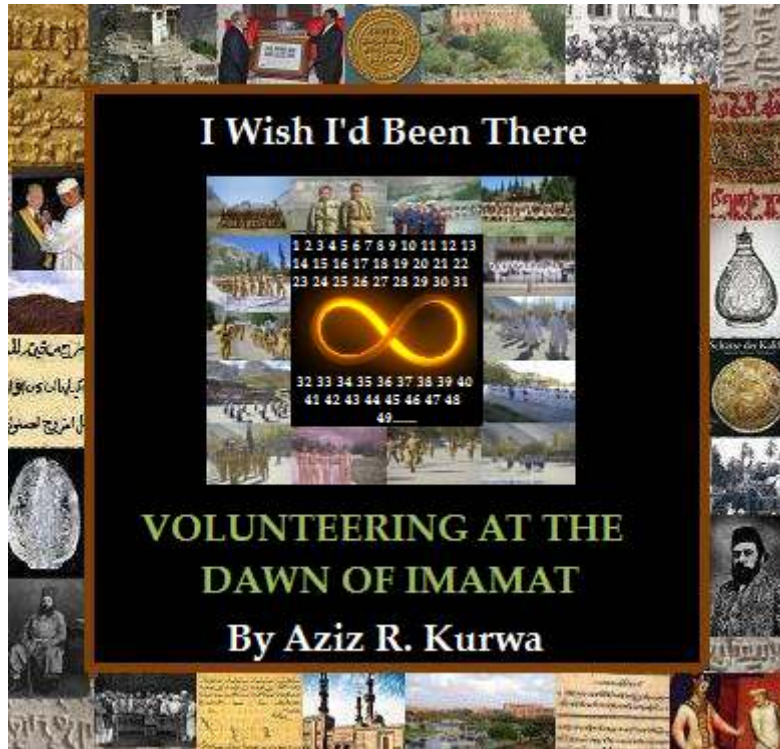
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To witness that moment of unveiling when Imam al-Mahdi rode out to meet his followers stands for me above all the other moments of glory, intrigue and devastation throughout Ismaili history. The image of a long-hidden Imam remaining atop his mount when all his awestruck followers dismounted is among the most powerful symbols of the authority of the Shi'a Imams. In that instant, over a century of hiding and persecution was cast aside, and a new era would begin for the Ismailis. For most, the Imam had long been an idea rather than a living person, but now he was real and right in front of them. He was present and living. And those followers at Sijilmasa fell at his feet in the most sincere devotion to their spiritual guide.

This moment was the culmination of over a century of work by the Imams and the Ismaili da'wa. In the aftermath of the succession dispute following Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's death in 765, there was disarray amongst the Shi'a. But that moment in the desert was proof that they had succeeded in carving from that disarray a distinct Ismaili doctrine and identity.

To use an analogy of the theatre, they had prepared and rehearsed for this play for over a hundred years, and this was the moment when the curtains were drawn on opening night. This was the first unveiling of the Ismailis to the world, and the realization of a dream that became the Fatimid Caliphate.

~~~~~

Present day volunteers; in infinity, the [circles] reflect the two weighty matters and the sign the eternal nature of the Divine Institution of Imam, which is also represented by the numbers 1-49...

Volunteering at the Dawn of the Age of Imam

By Aziz R. Kurwa

I awoke, excited at the prospect of the day ahead. Yesterday a proclamation was made after the Namaz that Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) would be leaving for his farewell pilgrimage today, Saturday 25th Zilkada 10 A.H. (13th February, 632 A.C).

I was to support the volunteers from families of Ansars (Khajraj and Aws tribes) and our friends from Muhajiruns to facilitate the caravan of the pilgrims. We were to ensure the supply of all the favourite foods of Rasul-illah (grains, dry fruits, fresh fruits, honey etc.) and water supply for all pilgrims. We were also to help in putting up the tents, give first aid and any other needs of the pilgrims, particularly the old, infirm and women.

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Just as the sun's golden rays began to shimmer over the horizon, we were welcomed in the mosque of the Prophet by Bilal's melodious recitation of the *adhan* (call to prayer). After the morning prayers we moved towards the Prophet's House. There was a soft breeze fanned by the joyously swinging palm trees as Rasul-illah came out of his house accompanied by Ali ibn Abu Talib, Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman, followed by Bibi Fatima, Aisha, and other members of the family. His face, enveloped in Noorani Radiance, caught us reciting Salawat, and a warm, unbounded feeling of spiritual joy and happiness showed on all faces. Believers had come from many remote places on foot, camels and horses prepared to undertake the arduous journey to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage (*hajj*) at *Bait-Allah* (the House of Allah) also known as Ka'bah.

We reached Mecca on Wednesday 7th Zilhaj 10 A.H. and performed the Pilgrimage.

Rasul-illah delivered an uplifting sermon at the plain of Arafat outlining all the responsibilities of a devout Muslim. The caravan left Mecca on 14th Dhi-l-Hijjah A.H. 10 and reached a little town (al-Jahfa) 3 days North-West of Mecca. This town is at a junction from where the routes for Medina, Egypt, Syria and Iraq radiate in different directions. In the afternoon on 18th Dhi-l-Hijjah the caravan reached Ghadir Khumm, a vast plain endowed with trees and bushes. Under the shade of two trees Salman Faras was instructed to erect a pulpit with stones, saddles of camels and horses. The volunteers were given the opportunity to help and had the privilege of sitting nearby.

Rasul-illah mounted the pulpit and placed Ali on his right. He then delivered a sermon, thanking Allah for His bounty and stated that he felt he would soon depart from this world. He related that he had received a Divine revelation:

“O apostle! Deliver what has been revealed upon you from your Lord, and if you do not, you have not delivered His message and surely Allah will protect you from people.” (5: 67)

Taking Hazrat Ali by the hand, he asked of his faithful followers whether he, Muhammad, was not closer (*awla*) to the believers than they were to themselves; the crowd cried out: *“It is so, O Apostle of Allah!”*, and he then declared:



This stamp, issued by Iran in 1990, includes the famous Prophetic hadith in favour of Hazrat Ali

“He of whom I am Mawla (the Lord, The Master), of him Ali is also the Mawla (‘Mun Koontu Mawla fahaza Aliyun Mawla’)

He then prayed, *“O Allah, be the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy.”* He added that he was leaving behind two weighty things; these being the Holy Qur’an and his *Ahl-al-Bait*. The two were inseparable until the Day of Judgment. If we held fast to both, we would never go astray.

Then led by Omar, who congratulated Ali and pledged his allegiance (*baiyah*), everyone present at this momentous event also felicitated Ali and pledged their allegiance to him (Ali).

Soon afterwards a final Message was revealed, that said:

“This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favours upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.”

Dusk had fallen and the party broke up in small groups to enjoy the rest of the evening preparing for the next day to go to their respective homes.

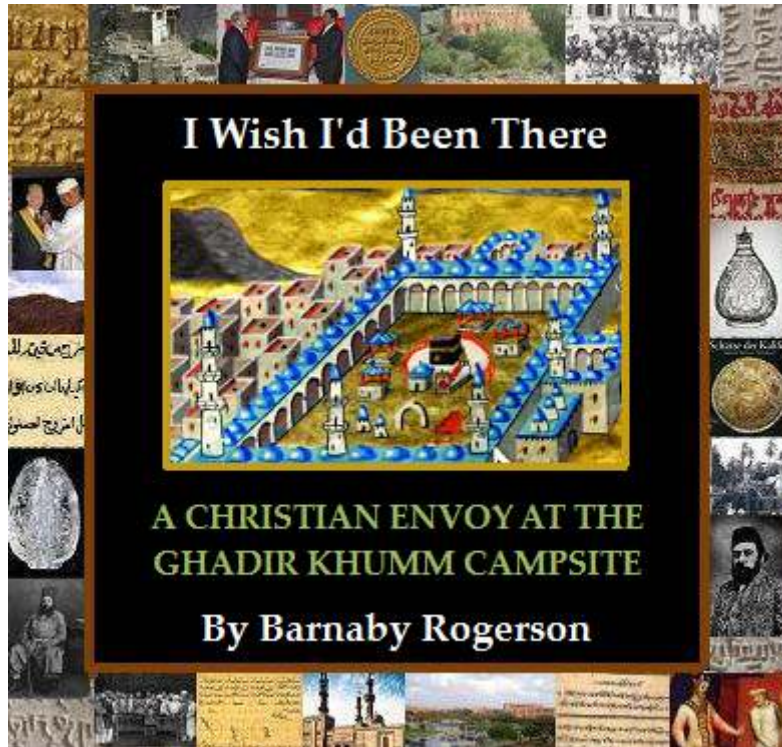
The volunteers cleared everything and then we sat around campfires in groups. In my group the conversations was buzzing over the historical and momentous events of the day. Some raised the question *“what is the meaning of Mawla.”* Some said Ali was to be the Imam to follow the Prophet and guide the Ummah with his knowledge of the Qur’an and the Divine Guidance as a result of Nass designated from Rasul-illah. Others said Ali was to consult the companions and would lead the Ummah by the Qur’an, Hadith and Sunna of the Prophet. Whatever the discussions, everyone was in raptures about the unique enlightenment from Rasul-illah.

As he had foretold, soon after returning to Medina, Rasul-illah fell ill and passed away on 13th Rab’iul Awwal 11 A.H. (8th June, 632 A.C).

Ali and Abbas took care of the funeral preparation in Rasul-illah’s house. Ali asked that his cousin al-Fadl be called to assist him. He acceded to the request from the people of Madina to be present during the preparation. As the leading volunteer, I, Aws ibn Khawali, had the honour to join in the procedures on behalf of the people of Medina. I carried a jug of fresh well water. With a heavy heart and silent recitation of Salwat, I entered an environment of solemn sadness. The fragrance of incense elevated my senses as I joined in meditation and Qur’anic recitation with others.

The age of Imamatus had commenced.

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The Kaaba and surrounding as depicted on the cover of an European edition of a Barnaby Rogerson book

## A Christian Envoy at the Ghadir Khumm Campsite

By Barnaby Rogerson

*What an offer!* To travel back in time and return as a true witness to the history that I have so often thought and dreamed about. Perhaps I could travel in the habit of a Christian envoy from some Celtic island monastery off the west coast of the British Isles, sent east to seek advice from the wise holy man of whom we had heard, far off in Arabia. For in my homeland the light of civilization seems on the point of extinction, as Barbarian invaders appear like devils from out of the German sea.

I would arrive in the oasis of Medina at a time of peace, when all of Arabia was sending delegations to seek peace and instruction. Here, in my imagination, I would be befriended by Ali and taken back to his home, where I would witness how this battle-scarred warrior was also content in his role as a young father, playing with his boys Hussein and Hassan on the reed mats in his humble hut amongst the palm groves.

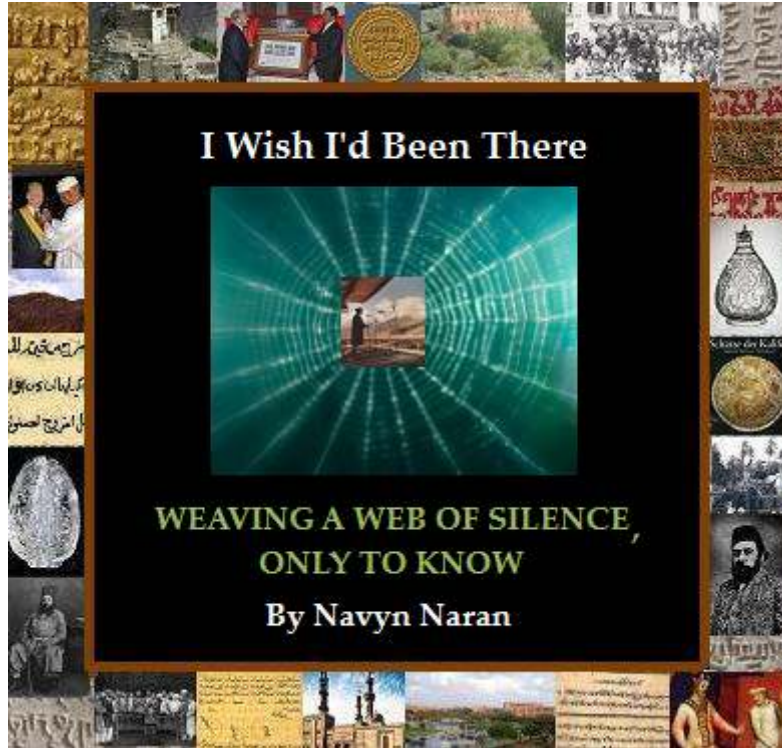
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Then, in a flurry of energy, I receive a last-minute invitation to join the Prophet's Last Pilgrimage to the holy shrine at Mecca. Although I am not permitted to approach the shrine itself and am left at a campsite just outside the pilgrimage city, I make certain to record the events as told by the eyewitnesses I travelled with.

On the journey back, I bear witness to the exact succession of events at the Ghadir Khumm campsite: the blessings, the sermon and the ritual actions of the Prophet ordaining Ali as his successor. These I faithfully record in the pages of my journal, before hurriedly departing and returning to my homeland. There, the account of my travels is neatly copied out onto vellum and placed in the monastery library. Years later, the monastery is sacked by raiders coming out of the sea, who in their fury destroyed even the walls of this holy place. But this was fortunate in a way, for the domed roof of the library collapsed preserving all the books, which lie there still...

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A 'spider' web to reflect an incident from the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Medina, and an inset photo showing the Aga Khan speaking to his Shia Ismaili followers in Badakhshan

Weaving a Web of Silence, Only to Know

By Navyn Naran

wish i'd been there,
weaving my web over the cave,
Mount Thaur wherein
The Great Witness takes refuge.
Rasoullillah quiet, receiving;
Abu Bakr, his companion resting,
under crystal stars, night darkening.

Angels. not a stir i sense,
and i weaving my lace piece
working my threads dense
as Allah Commands.

why, o pigeon,
why so hurriedly you nest?
your eggs lay, you brood
nothing disturbed,
endearments cooed,
resting under your wings,
here, as if our home for days.

in the peace of this night
there is greed and distrust
a bed Blessed, and a sight -
horses run, in desert's dust,
see! Ali, the Master of believers
vanquished, His nafs -
while their eyes for Nabi intensely lust.
'Ali ibn Talib! the prophet's cousin?
Ali! ' aghast those Qurayshi
perturbed
in the house of the Prophet...

i am spinning at that cave,
from sweaty, snorting horses they dismount
searching where they cannot see,
though my filigree, they cannot doubt.
for the goodness therein
i am drawn, and entranced
in three days we shall leave
in the footsteps, i will dance.

i wish i'd been there,
under His feet,
as leathery sandals,
cushion for streets,
the steps of glory
of a Purpose
a rope unending,
in His every footstep,
not to touch the earth,
only to pretend.
after all, there is air below me,
i am wings gliding
in these sand dunes of gold
or stones or gravel;
in time, tile or rug
sandals
so His feet may not touch.

i wish i'd been there,
laying the carpets in
God's Majestic garden
this Shangri la,
the murids of Tajikistan in awe
amidst the awe
of "the mountains, and rivers,
and flowers and trees"
as Allah's majesty
unfolds for our Mawla.
a thousand years of Knowing,
longing, believing, waiting.
laying the carpets, gathering the roses,
Ya Ali Ya Ali
shaking in our veins, we are just bodies (if)
without His Blessing.

i wish i'd been there...
wishing to be near,
shukran, for being here

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***A brief note about the poem***

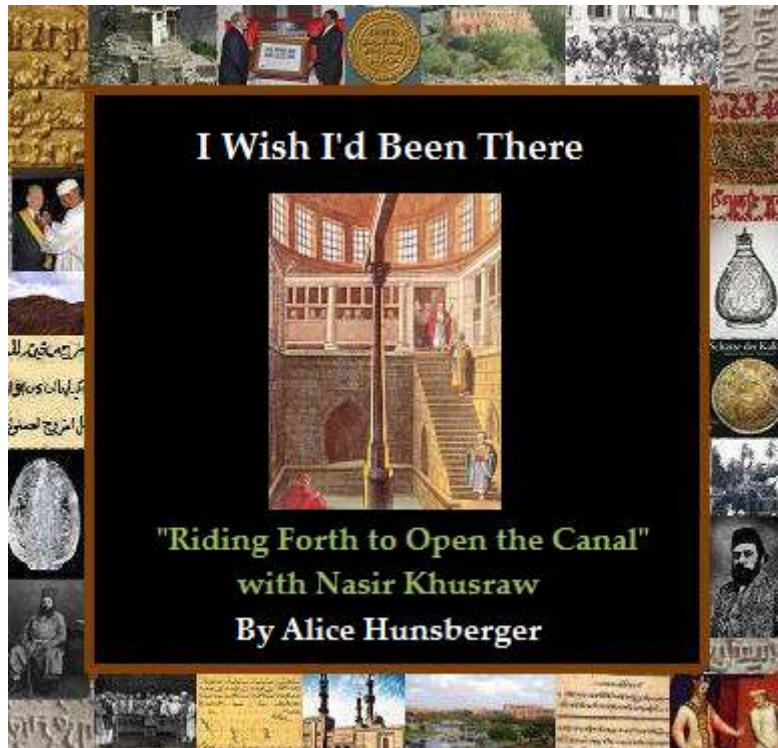
The poem by Navyn Naran is in reference to the story of the Hegira (migration) of the Prophet from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) when, in 622 AC, he was warned of a plot to assassinate him. *“And the (unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah.”* Holy Qur’an (3:53)

When the messenger of Allah took leave, his house was besieged by young men drawn from the Quraish tribe. The place of the Prophet on his bed was taken by Hazrat Ali to confuse the men and to act as witness of their actions. *“And among men is he who sells his Nafs (self) in exchange for the pleasure of Allah.”* (2:207). By sleeping in Muhammad’s bed as masquerade, Ali gambled his own life to obstruct an assassination plot, so that his cousin could retreat in safety. Ali survived the conspiracy, but risked his life again; he stayed in Mecca to carry out Muhammad’s directions: this was to return to their owners all the assets they had relegated to Muhammad for guardianship.

The enemies were aghast that the Prophet had escaped them, and pursued the Prophet until they arrived at the cave at Mount Thaur, en route to Medina, where the Prophet was hiding with Abu Bakr. *“And God helped His Apostle when the unbelievers banished him. And when they were in the cave, he said to the second of the two: ‘do not be grief-stricken. God is with us.’ And God bestowed His peace upon him (upon His Apostle).”* (9:40)

The cave, as stories relate, was covered with a spider’s web, misleading the enemies into thinking that it had long been abandoned. The Prophet remained in the cave for three days, and then continued his journey to Medina where he was received as a hero. This migration has a special significance in the history of Islam. It ended the period of ignominy and anguish in Mecca and began the era of progress. In this poem, Navyn lovingly and in utmost humility expresses the wish to be the spider that spun the web over the cave’s entrance, and the sandals which carried the Prophet on his arduous and dangerous journey. The sandals and terrain later represent the same wish for every Imam in time. In an expression of continuity in her journey she wishes she had been present when the Imam Blessed his Ismaili Murids of Badakhshan in the natural beauty and splendour of nature.

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A vintage print illustrating the Nilometer in Cairo

“Riding Forth to Open the Canal” with Nasir Khusraw

By Alice C. Hunsberger

I wish I had been in Cairo, Egypt, in 1048, to witness the Sultan’s *“Opening of the Canal”* ceremony, the annual breaking of the earthen dike holding back the Nile, letting the pent up river gush through the main royal canal and then rush off into hundreds of smaller channels throughout the countryside, drenching the thirsty earth with life-giving, nutrient-rich, silt-laden flood water. And I wish my guide for the day had been the poet from eastern Persia, Nasir Khusraw, whose travel memoirs have left us some of the richest descriptions of that ceremony, *“one of the biggest holidays of the year.”*

My guide Nasir explains that the importance of the ceremony is linked to Egypt’s absolute dependence on the flooding. “When the sun enters Cancer,” he writes, the Nile starts its rise, and every day the Egyptian officials take measurements. Less than eighteen cubits rise is a disaster, and the Sultan will not levy taxes on the peasants. More

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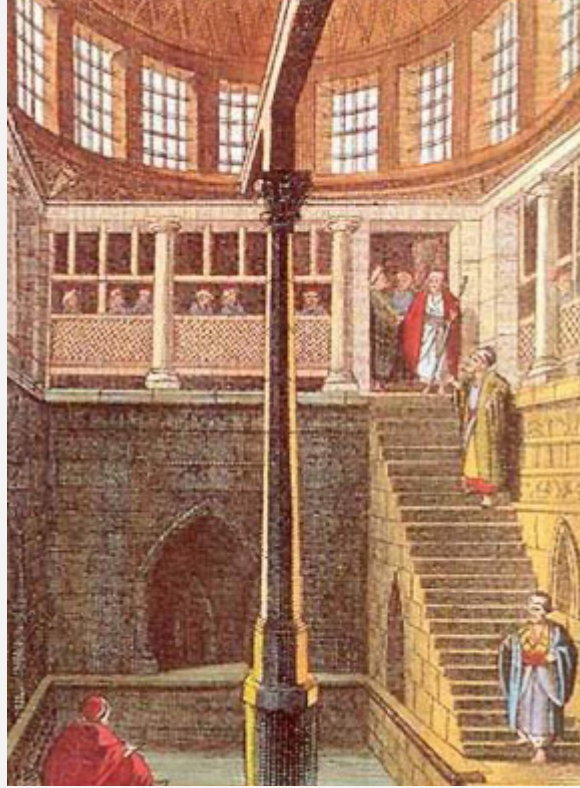
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than eighteen brings rejoicing and happiness, and harvests sufficient to store for lean years. The normal pattern, Nasir recounts, is forty days of rising, then forty days of stable settling, and then another forty days decreasing. As the Nile retreats, leaving a new layer of natural fertilizer all over the land, the people quickly plant new crops, following the speed and course of the river's path. Canals and dikes are built all over the country, with so many waterwheels "*it would be difficult to count them.*" The Sultan's canal is a grand piece of engineering, linking Old Cairo, founded by the Arab conquerors in the 7th century around the army town of Fustat, with New Cairo (al-Qahira), founded by the Fatimid conquerors in the 10th century.

Speaking Arabic and Persian, Nasir and I would have heightened awareness that the word "*opening*" itself (*fath*) carries other layers of meaning, such as conquests and victories, but perhaps more importantly, is the name of a *Surah* in the Quran, whose opening verses relate victory as the sign of God's pardon for the Prophet Muhammad's sins. But today, we are going to watch the opening of the canal by the Fatimid Sultan, Imam Mustansir billah.

Actually, I wish that three days earlier I had accompanied Nasir to see the hoopla of preparations in the Sultan's stables. To hear drummers and trumpeters making as much noise as they could to prepare thousands of horses for the enormous din of the parade. What a din it would be! But even with such preparation and even with riders to calm them, Nasir points out that over ten thousand horses each had a man hired to hold the reins and walk the horse.

When all riders and marchers are ready, Sultan Mustansir mounts his camel, with the plainest saddle and bridle, with no gold or silver ornamentation. I would see, as Nasir does, that the Sultan is a "*well-built, clean-shaven youth with cropped hair,*" and his pure white Arab-style shirt is tucked into a cummerbund of the costliest fabric, with a turban to match. No one rides next to the Sultan except the parasol-bearer, who, in contrast, wears extremely ornate dress with a bejewelled, gold turban, and carries the royal gem-studded parasol, a sign of royalty, like a crown. I would have liked to study the intricacies of the embroidery and marvel at the jewel-studded ornamentation. I would have liked to be able to add more description of the stately procession.



Because of its importance in determining the prosperity Egypt would experience during the following year, the Nilometer shown as a lithograph in the above illustration was a departure point of the greatest of Cairo's celebrations throughout the medieval period. This was the Fath al-Khalij, the "Riding Forth to Open the Canal." Image: TourEgypt.net

In my wish, Nasir Khusraw and I will march with the contingent of intellectuals, scholars, poets, literati, and experts on law and jurisprudence (all of us on fixed stipends, he is proud to say about Mustansir's policies). But we are far behind the ranks of soldiers and political dignitaries and contingents of princes and their mothers from far and wide. When it is finally time to start, the trumpets, clarions and drums lead off and continue sounding down the whole route from Harem Gate to the head of the canal. Next come those horses by the hundreds, thousands it seems, each with a rider and walker. Nasir records ten thousand. These show-stoppers bedecked with gold saddles and bridles and jewel-studded reins, wear saddle-cloths of Byzantine brocade which shimmers iridescent with gold threads, with gold-embroidered inscriptions on the borders. From the golden pommels, hang weapons like spears, coats of mail, axes, swords, helmets and shields. The horses are followed by other mounts, hundreds of camels tall and lanky, and mules strong and focused, carrying curtained howdahs and other seats for ladies and children. I would have liked to see them all and hear the horses whinnying and blowing air, shaking their jewelled bridles and clopping their hooves on the stony road. I would have liked to see the Arabian horses' eyes, with long lashes, their flanks twitching at the flies and sweat, their dramatic tails flicking around. I would have liked to see the shining fabrics (handiwork from the now

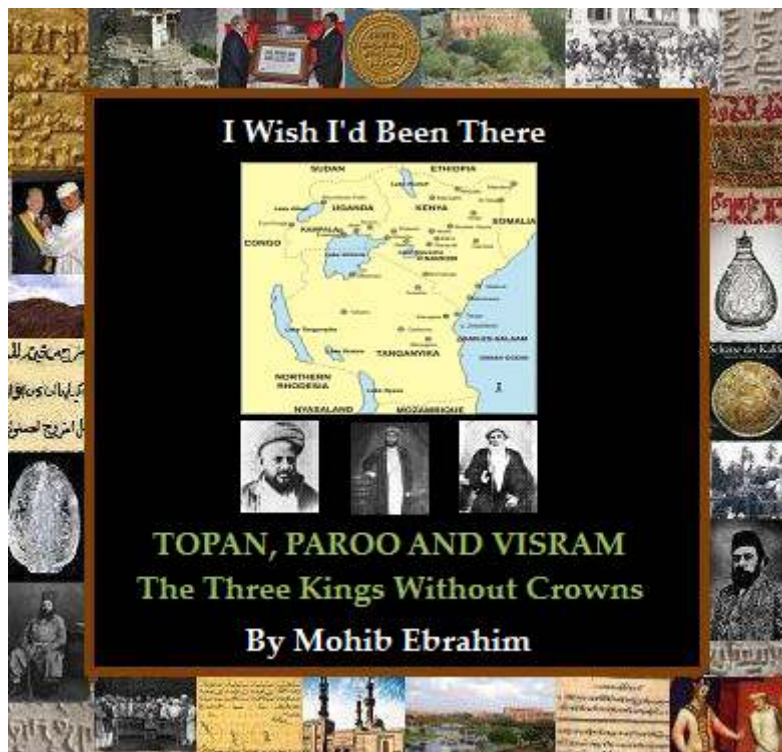
lost island of Tinnis) glittering in the sun, reflecting off the gold and silver ornaments on humans, animals and everything else.

But that was just the beginning. Then would come thousands of soldiers, from every part of the Fatimid realm: they told us twenty-thousand horsemen from Kairouan, North Africa; fifteen thousand Batili horsemen from Morocco; twenty thousand Masmudi infantry; ten thousand “*powerfully built*” Turks and Persians (most born in Egypt); fifty thousand Bedouin from Arabia, with spears; thirty thousand slaves who had been purchased; foot soldiers from all over the world (Nasir counted ten thousand), as well as thirty thousand black Zanjis who fight with swords. Who can say for sure how many marched that day, filling the sky with dust and clamour? I wish I had been there, to tell you for sure.

And when we all arrived at the great tent set up at the head of the canal, and everyone assembled round, I would have liked to see the young Sultan Mustansir accept the spear and look around at the crowd, and we would nod, and he would throw the spear into the dike, and then, hundreds of workers would rush to dig away a hole in the dike. And when the water came rushing over filling the royal canal, I would have liked to hear the crowd raise up a roar, now grateful this year’s harvest was secure.

I wish I had been there, back in a time of respect for the river’s life-giving essence, not just its power. Back when the fertile flow flowed, and yes, was harnessed and used, but rejoiced in and welcomed, not stopped up and dammed to a trickle. This was my wish: To see how the great Nile River’s annual flooding, much hoped for, prayed for, and scientifically monitored, was gathered up into one day which brought peasant and Sultan together, with every rank in between, men and women, Egyptian and foreign. A day so full of life and significance that Nasir Khusraw apologizes, saying “*If I were to give a full description of that Day of the Canal, my words would go on and on, far too long.*”

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A colonial map of East Africa, and images of Topan, Paroo and Visram

## The Three Kings Without Crowns

By Mohib Ebrahim

In his August 2007 speech at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy (Kampala, Uganda), His Highness the Aga Khan said today that what is required is an educational approach “that nurtures the spirit of anticipation and agility, adaptability and adventure.” As entrepreneurs, three East African Ismailis of the 1850s, Sir Tharia Topan, Sewa Haji Paroo, and Alidina Visram, were living embodiments of these characteristics, and *I Wish I'd Been There* to appreciate their spirit of adventure and courage.

As members of famine stricken Indian families, 12 year old Topan arrived in Zanzibar in 1835, Paroo was born in Zanzibar in 1851 a year after his father arrived, and Visram, also 12, landed in 1863. Each rose from worker-to-retailer-to-wholesaler-to-caravan trader, and established giant East African empires importing cloth, beads, copper wire, and brass pots to exchange for ivory, rhino horns, hippo teeth, hides, and rubber.

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Trusted by imams, advisors to sultans, knighted by queens, confidants of governors, friends of explorers David Livingstone and Henry Stanley, all were generous—donating schools and hospitals open to every race, and helping Ismaili and other migrants become established. They were known as the “*Three Kings without Crowns.*”

### I - Tharia Topan

(Adapted from Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, “101 Ismaili Heroes”)



Sir Tharia Topan Photo: Akber Hussein Collection, Nairobi

Born the son of a small vegetable seller in Kutch, Tharia Topan left for Zanzibar in 1835 at the age of 12, penniless and illiterate. An accountant working with the prominent Indian firm of Jairam Shivji knew Topan’s father, and secured Topan the job of garden sweeper at six rupees a month. By the time he was 22; his honesty had earned him charge of the credit department and had made him wealthy.

Topan returned to India and married, but his wife died two years later in Zanzibar. He remarried and assisted a large number of Ismailis – many at his own expense and employed in his business – migrate to Zanzibar. Besides financing trade caravans, Topan equipped European explorers with porters, supplies, and imported goods for their expeditions inland from Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. He was described by Stanley as “one of the richest merchants in town.”

Topan had the “distinction of entertaining Livingstone as a personal guest at his Zanzibar home, today named Livingstone House. About his expedition to Ujiji, Livingstone writes: ‘I felt as if I was dying on my feet, at almost every step I was in pain, my appetite failed, and a little bit of meat caused violent diarrhoea, whilst the mind, sorely depressed, reacted with the body.’ He reached Ujiji on October 23, 1871, a living skeleton, when Sir Tharia Topan met him and brought him to his residence”. Stanley, who had set out to find Livingstone, did so a few weeks later on November 10, 1871 in Ujiji, greeting him with the now famous, “*Dr. Livingstone, I presume?*”

On his return, Stanley, too, met with difficulties, and again it was Topan who helped, sending his faithful Zanzibari Arab partner Tipu Tip, retired ruler of lands west of Lake Tanganyika. Stanley, who also stayed at Topan’s home, wrote in his book *How I found Livingstone*:

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“One of the most honest men among all individuals, white or black, red or yellow, is a Mahometan Hindi called Tarya Topan. Among the Europeans at Zanzibar he had become a proverb for honesty and strict business integrity. He is enormously wealthy, owns several ships and dhows, and is a prominent man in the councils of Seyyid Burgash.”



"The Old Dispensary" gained its name because it long housed a dispensary on the ground floor, with a pharmacy and resident doctor. Its construction was originally commissioned by Sir Tharia Topan, who in his prime had dominated commerce in Zanzibar. The foundation stone of the 'Tharia Topan Jubilee Hospital' was laid on 8th July 1885. Photo: Zanzibar.net

In 1870, Sultan Syed Bargash appointed Topan Honorary Prime Minister, and from 1875 to 1880, Chief of Customs: a key position not held by any other Ismaili between 1835 and 1886. “Since customs were the principal source of revenue, Topan became the Sultan’s confidant and right-hand, in daily contact with European officials who sought him on business and consular matters. It was by Topan’s efforts that Sultan Bargash was able to conclude an accord with the British in 1873 to end Zanzibar’s slave trade. His services were recognised by Queen Victoria, who conferred knighthood on him in 1875 in Africa and again in 1890 in India. He was the first Indian to earn such a distinction.”

Topan was munificent. In 1881, he donated 200,000 rupees to a school established by the British in Zanzibar, and in 1887 built the Sir Tharia Topan Jubilee Hospital at a cost of £30,000 (US\$140,000) to commemorate Queen Victoria’s 50th anniversary.

Known as the *uncrowned King of Bagamoyo*, Tharia Topan died in 1891 in Bombay at the age of 68. Tharia Street in Zanzibar is named after him.

## II - Sewa Haji Paroo

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Sewa Haji Paroo Photo: Akber Hussein Collection, Nairobi

Sewa Haji Paroo was born in Zanzibar in 1851; a year after his father left Bhuj, Kutchh. One of four children, Paroo worked for his father in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo, assuming charge of the family business after two of his brothers died in 1869. During the 1860s, the firm began supplying caravans, and by “1891 had opened stores as far as Tabora, Ujiji, Mwanza and elsewhere in the Lake region.” Paroo held a “near-monopoly over the caravan trade in the interior of German East Africa,” and his caravans were the most important in the country. “Just one branch at Bukumbi was, in 1891, stocked with goods worth about £18,150 (\$84,255.32), an enormous sum, including 30,000 lbs. of Manchester satin, 30,000 lbs. of Bombay grey Merikani, 10,000 lbs. of gunpowder, 2,000 lbs. of white beads, and 150,000 gun caps.”

Though wealthy, Paroo was religious, and “known for exceptional generosity towards the sick and poor - whether Indian, Arab or Swahili.” During outbreaks of cholera and famine in Bagamoyo, he donated many wells and large tracts of land (reportedly over 50,000 acres) to the local Catholic Mission. In 1892, he donated a three-storey building for a multi-racial school, and later established a hospital, a hospice for caravan porters and a home for lepers. In Dar es Salaam, he funded its biggest hospital, the *Sewa Haji Hospital*, now annexed to Princess Margaret Hospital. “In Mombasa, he donated a large and valuable property to the Ismaili community for a cemetery that is still in use today.” In 1895, he was conferred the title of *Alijah* by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah for his generosity and influence.

Sewa Haji Paroo died in February 1897 at the age of 46. In his tribute to Paroo, the Governor of Tanganyika said: “[H]is kind generosity must have relieved the suffering of tens of thousands of people” and that he “played an important, but largely forgotten part in the history and development of East Africa.”

### III - Alidina Visram



Alidina Visram Photo: Akber Hussein Collection, Nairobi

Alidina Visram landed in Zanzibar from Kutch in 1863 at the age of 12. “It is believed that in the same year he went to Bagamoyo to work as an assistant for Sewa Haji Paroo.” He later began to organize his own caravans between Bagamoyo and Ujiji. Upon Paroo’s death in 1897, Visram took over his caravan trade, and expanded caravan routes north from Mwanza into Uganda and Kisumu, Kenya.

Though Visram was one of the wealthiest Ismaili traders, eventually known as the *uncrowned King of Uganda*, with over 3,000 workers, he was also a philanthropist. In 1905, he donated a large sum for the first Jamatkhana in Kisumu. It was then Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah asked him to help the indigent Ismailis of Kathiawar settle in Kenya and Uganda, which he did with the assistance of Mukhi Valji Hirji and Mukhi Varas Hashim Jamal, helping immigrants find accommodation and employment, and obtain trade goods on credit.

“In 1914, seated next to the Imam during didar in Nairobi, Visram saw tears in the Imam’s eyes and was so moved, he also wept. When he mustered the courage to enquire, the Imam replied: ‘My followers in the world are so visible in my sight as the lines in your palm. I am now looking at my followers of Kutch, who are the impoverished peasants. I am ruffled to see their deplorable conditions.’ Varas asked, ‘May I do something for them?’ The Imam said, ‘You can do everything for them. You arrange to bring them and allot 10 acres land to each of them. I will send them to Africa on my expenses.’ It is said that the 90% of the Ismailis who attained their prosperity in Kenya and Uganda owe their settlement to Visram. For his services, Visram was bestowed the title of *Varas*, the first person to hold it in Kenya and Uganda.”

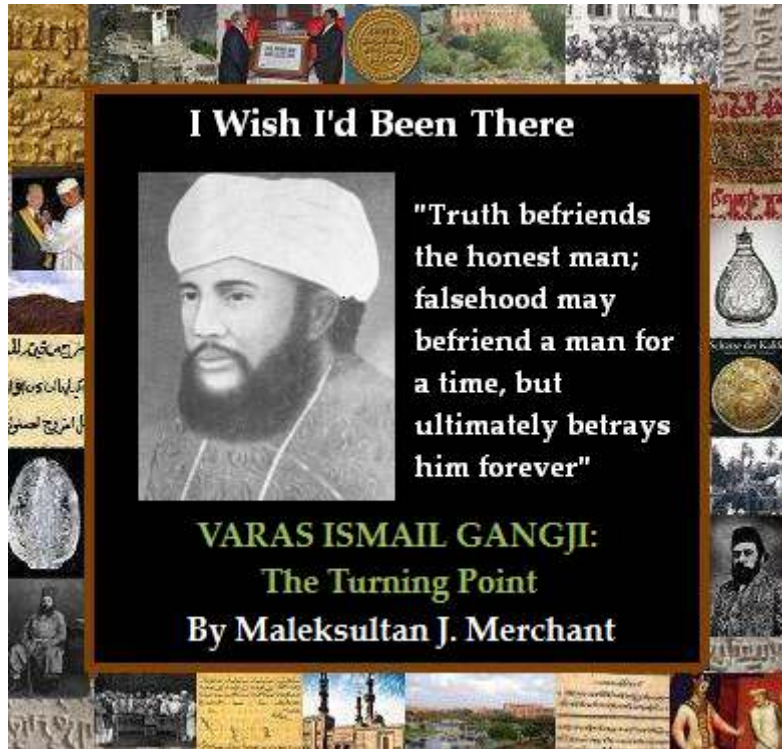
Cyril Ehrlich writes that Visram was “perhaps the most important individual in the early history in East Africa [and] was responsible for laying the firm foundation not only of trade in Uganda but of such industries as cotton, sugar, rubber, tea and various other agricultural products as well as of shipping across Lake Victoria.”



Sir Frederick Jackson, the Governor of Uganda, described him as “a charming old gentleman, respected by everyone in the country, high and low, white or black.” Mangat writes, “[P]erhaps the most important factor for the success of Alidina Visram’s pioneering ventures, were the peaceful nature of his penetration of the country unaided by arms.” Alidina Visram died in Mombasa on June 30, 1916.

For me, these three East African Ismaili entrepreneurs embodied a spirit of adventure and courage sorely missed today.

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A portrait of Varas Gangji. The quote is of his mother.

Varas Ismail Gangji: The Turning Point

By Maleksultan J. Merchant

During the course of my career, I have had the immense happiness of teaching and explaining Ginans to my students and members of the Jamat alike. With zeal, enthusiasm and conviction we acknowledged the profound ethical and spiritual truths contained in Ginans, which provide guidance and inspiration in our daily lives.

I would like to share one incident that I have narrated frequently during the course of my career and which *I Wish I'd Been There* to witness in the late 19th century. It was an evening that became a turning point in the life of Varas* Ismailbhai Gangji.

The Ginan "*Eji Sheth kahey tamey sanmbharo vanotar, vanaj rudo kari lavajo ji...*" composed by our revered Pir Sadr al-Din, is being recited melodiously and in a state of total contemplation at Batwa Jamatkhana, Saurashtra,

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India. The recitation of verses 9 and 10, quoted and roughly translated hereunder, will affect Ismailbhai poignantly enough for him to change his ethic, and to turn to a life espousing noble values: this depicts the value of our Ginans, *Our Wonderful Tradition*, on those who reflect upon them deeply.

Transliteration:

Eji Khota tara trajwa-ne dandi-ma kanetar: Katla khota tara bhariji... (9)

Translation:

False is thy scale with a fault in the beam: Faulty your weighing and measuring

Transliteration:

Eji Ochoo didhu aney ad keru lidhu: Jivda-ni chinta na kidhi... (10)

Translation:

Less you gave in weight and (dishonestly) took more: not caring a wee bit for your soul

As each verse echoes deeper into the hearts of the Jamat, Ismailbhai is particularly overcome with emotions. He listens to each and every word with rapt attention, and just as the Ginan finishes, he feels a call for an awakening. He gazes at Imam-e-Zaman's picture in the fullness of his heart and piteous repenting eyes. A firm resolve has silently been born within, and he vows to implement his lesson instantly.

He rises up and proceeds straight to Mukhi Rai Rahimtulla of the Jamat. With palms joined in humble supplication, he stands in silence before Mukhisaheb.

"What ails you?" inquires the Mukhi. From a middle class family, Ismailbhai earns his living as a salesman of cotton, travelling from town to town with his bag of commodities slung over his shoulder. But only he knows how he has asked for an increased price, and what tactic he has contrived to do so.

In reply to Mukhisaheb's question, he replies gently:

"Mukhisaheb, I must have erred a number of times in the course of my vocation for the livelihood of the family and myself. Today's Ginan has inspired a new life in me; forgive me and I vow that from this day forward that I shall live a new life treading always the path of righteousness."

Mukhisaheb gazes steadily at Ismailbhai. He can feel true sincerity and repentance flowing from Ismail's heart and grants the pardon that he is seeking. A heavy load is lifted off Ismail's heart as he hastens home. Standing before his mother he says: "From this day on I will no more engage in my present occupation."

"Why Ismail! what has happened?" she inquires.

"In the sort of calling I pursue," the son answers, "there are times when one has to take refuge in falsehood and deceit. I have firmly resolved, therefore, not to follow my present vocation any longer, and what is more, I have already made my confession and expressed my resolve to the Jamat."

"I now ask of you, Mother," he continues, "to invoke your blessings upon me that your son may no longer deviate from the path of virtue." A flood of tears courses down his face as he speaks.

"Bravo, my son!" says his mother, "this day you have, indeed, proved to me what a worthy son I have. Have no misgivings as to how we are going to find our livelihood now; one who walks the path of truth never comes to grief. Truth befriends the honest man; falsehood may befriend man for a time, but ultimately betrays him forever. So, treading the path of Truth you will always be happy."

Watching his transformation with conviction, especially through the understanding of the concepts embedded in our golden treasure of Ginans, is why *I Wish I'd Been There* on that extraordinary day.

After this epiphany, Ismailbhai's life and new career in the *Treasury Department* of the State of Junagadh advanced from success to success that he was appointed head of the Public Treasury. He remained humble to the core and always attributed his progress to the Grace of his Imam.

Imam Shah Aga Hassanali Shah soon after visited Ahmedabad. Ismailis converged into the city from all over and Ismailbhai placed himself at the disposal of the Holy Imam and the Jamat. For the first three days of the visit, however, he sensed that the Imam did not appear to be pleased with the service he was rendering. These hours and days seemed like forever for Ismailbhai as he underwent untold suffering in his heart wondering why the Imam appeared to be displeased with him. He supplicated in his heart, "forgive me Imam-e-Zaman, and cast but one kindly look upon me!"

On the fourth day, the Imam summoned him for an audience. He stood meekly before his Mawla, gazing steadily at his holy face refulgent with Divine Light, while a myriad of feelings rose and sank in his heart. But this apprehension was soon to be over. "Ismail," said the Imam graciously, "we confer upon you the title of Varas." Ismailbhai (now Varas) was startled at the abruptness of this.

The Imam continued: “We lay upon you the responsibility of the organisation of the whole of Kathiawad.” The Imam added, “We have noticed in the past three days how patiently you can bear all things, and it is with this quality of patience and forbearance that we know you can take care of the Jamat. It is in virtue of this that we appoint you Varas for all Kathiawad.”

Varas Ismail then most humbly submitted: “Khudavind’s spiritual gift and bounty this day have been boundless. But the great onus that Khudavind places upon me is too heavy for an insignificant creature such as I am. I do not possess the merit to undertake such a great responsibility.”

Imam-e-Zaman rejoined in affectionate tones: “Varas put your mind at rest on that score. We shall inspire you with the spirit that will carry you to a successful end in the cause of what is enjoined upon you. The inspiration will be ours, but the renown yours.”

“Amen!” said the Varas with not a word more.

Varas Ismail dedicated his time to bringing peace and harmony in the Jamat. He developed higher understanding of himself through special prayers. He became an example to others by his actions, manners and habits. Varas Ismail Gangji’s life is replete with many other incidents of service, faith and obedience.

When he passed away in 1883, the entire Junagadh came to his burial service. “A noble personality of Saurashtra illuminated the soil of Saurashtra and has this day departed from us. He has taken his flight to the very pinnacle of spiritual life,” was a remark made by Chief Officer of the State during the funeral service.

This is a remarkable incident: from the moment the Ginan commences to its completion, we see its impact in Vazir Ismail’s approach to life.

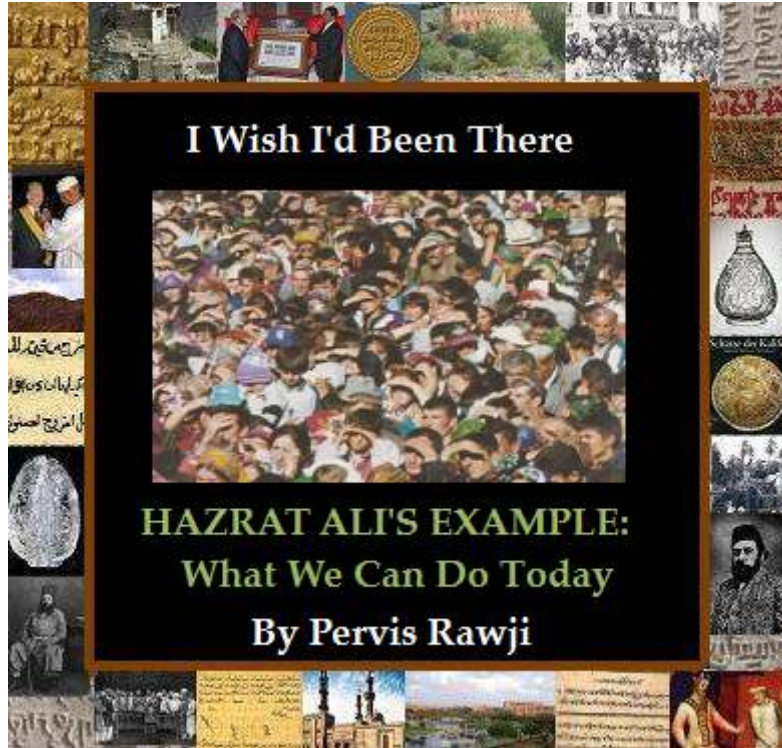
In hearing the rendition, whether due to the voice which recited it, or that particular time, Ismail’s mind that day, was open. “When the student is ready, the teacher arrives” as the adage goes, and, at this particular event, Ismail was ready. It must have been a profound release of his conscience. To extricate oneself from the chains of unethical practice must have required peace and conviction. Then freedom was a sweet victory to savour. *I Wish I’d Been There* for this opportune moment that Ismailbhai seized to transform his life.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to be overtly rewarded for one’s ethical stance as Ismailbhai later was. He was conferred the title of Varas by the Imam of the Time after a true test of patience and forbearance. In this way, Varas Ismail’s life and example were a source of inspiration for me and formed the basis for my own service to the Jamat and the Imam of the Time.

Finally, in these current times of economic turmoil that we watched unfold, we might be reminded of other Ginans that speak to the struggle of choice: profiting at another's expense is absolutely the antithesis of what the Imam also continues to stress: to remain ethical in our relationships, personal, professional, business, transactional, even jamati, to be transparent and not to be forgetful. Indeed whereas the Ginans are in the Indian languages, especially now in the context of the global jamat, we need to have the appropriate translations from which to reflect, which Varas Ismail did over 125 years ago.

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A gathering of Shia Ismailis in Badakhshan as they listen to their 49th Imam, His Highness the Aga Khan

## Hazrat Ali's Example: What We Can Do Today

By Pervis Rawji

This is a story I have been telling my children, nieces and nephews for the past several years.

It is the story of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). When he first received his calling from Allah via Angel Gabriel in the cave of Mount Hira, he came home shaking and was comforted by his beloved wife Khadija, who validated his experience, and sought out her cousin Waraka, who believed in one God. Now, with Khadija's support, the Prophet of Islam had to convey Allah's message to the people of Mecca. He invited the important men of Mecca, including those of his prominent Quraish tribe. The guests came and ate the meal and were expecting an announcement, as was customary. None came from *al-Amin*, so they duly departed for their homes.

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The Holy Prophet's nerves, knowing the revolutionary nature of the idea about to be unleashed upon Meccan society, had at the last minute failed him. Next day, at the urging and support of his wife, Prophet Muhammad again invited the same men over for another feast. After the meal, the men waited expectantly again. This time The Prophet did speak. He spoke of his vision, the message and the mission he wanted to convey to the people: that of one God. He then he asked:

*“And who among you will champion my cause and work by my side?”*

None answered. People put their heads down and avoided eye contact.

Prophet Muhammad asked again, *“Who is willing to help shoulder my burden and to work by my side and to be my champ?”*

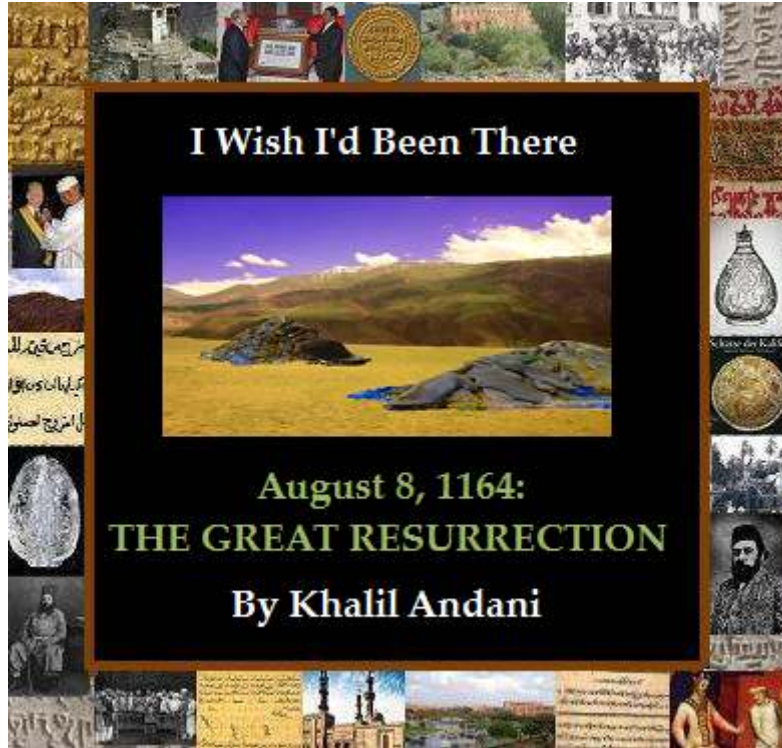
Foreseeing the magnitude of such an undertaking, none answered. Then, from the midst of the crowd, an 11 year old boy jumped up. He was Hazrat Ali (as), the Prophet's young cousin and future son-in-law. *“I will champion your cause, O Muhammad! I shall work by your side,”* spoke up Ali.

At this there was a wave of derisive laughter from the crowd of wealthy and influential Meccans as they contemplated the outcome and struggles of this 'visionary' with his little sidekick. But Prophet Muhammad's face broke into a smile as he opened his arms and hugged the boy, his brother, really, for had they not both been raised by the same Abu Talib and Fatima binti Asad?

This expression of endearment and confidence in Hazrat Ali is one incident *I Wish I'd Been There* to witness.

I link this story to Mawlana Hazar Imam's 1992 visit to Vancouver, when he addressed the jamat and, smiling from ear to ear, he gestured with his hand and said, "I think of you as working by my side." He was asking us to champion him in his cause against poverty in this troubled world. His vision is to include us, his *lashkar* of men and women, in this endeavour.

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A modern day painting depicting the Alamut castle and the valley

The Great Resurrection

By Khalil Andani

It happened on August 8, 1164, CE (*17 Ramadan 559 AH*).

This is the day I would have wanted to witness.

On this day Isma'ilis from all over Persia gathered outside the fort 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, the Imam of the time, Mawlana Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salaam, adorned in a white garment and wearing a white turban, descended from the castle and ascended the pulpit.

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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:

“O’ inhabitants of the worlds – jinn, men, and angels. Know that Mawlana, the Lord of Resurrection (*qa’im al-qiyamat*) is the lord of everything in existence. He is the lord who is the absolute being (*wujud-i mutlaq*). He excludes all existential determinations, for he transcends them all; he opens up the threshold of his Mercy, and through the light of his Knowledge he causes all beings to see, hear and speak for all eternity [1]

“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’a* and has brought you to the *qiyamah* (the resurrection).” [2]



The ruins of the Fort of Alamut today, in the Alamut Valley

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 *‘Idd 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. They were invited to experience the spiritual Paradise on earth and be blessed with the Imam’s luminous vision (*nurani didar*).

In the exoteric understanding, the term Resurrection (*qiyamah* in Islam) refers to events that occur at the end of the world and the last judgment. In Isma'ili thought, the Resurrection or *qiyamah* is a continuous event that brings change, spiritual elevation and retribution. Both creation and *qiyamah* occur continuously and in every moment. Qiyamah also takes place in the realm of history; not the material history of the physical world (*'alam al-dunya*) but the sacred history of the World of Faith (*'alam al-din*).

Isma'ili philosophers understood the history of the World of Faith as comprising of seven periods or cycles – each lasting hundreds of years. The first six of these cycles were marked by the appearance of the six major Prophets (*natiqs*) – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. In these six cycles, spiritual truths (*haqa'iq*) are hidden in exoteric revelations and the religious law (*shari'a*) according to which humanity is ordered to work and perform actions. But still to come was the seventh cycle – which would be a cycle of the manifestation of these esoteric truths when human souls would be rewarded for their work and the religious law (*shari'ah*) would be abrogated. This period is called the Cycle of Resurrection (*dawr al-qiyamah*) and its appearance is marked by the advent of a great figure referred to as the Lord of Resurrection (*qa'im al-qiyamah*).

Was the *qiyamah* of 1164 the same as the great *qiyamah* that had been foretold by the Isma'ili philosophers? Isma'ili thinkers of Alamut such as Nasir al-Din Tusi understood the 1164 *qiyamah* as a rehearsal or a foretaste of the final *qiyamah* – which was still to come when the sixth cycle of Prophet Muhammad would be completed by the *parousia* of the Lord of Resurrection.

But will the final *qiyamah* be recognized when it arrives? The Bible says that the 'Day of the Lord' comes as a thief in the night [3], that is, when people are unable to see. The Holy Qur'an states that the Hour of Resurrection will come secretly and the majority of people will not be aware [4].

“Do they only wait for the Hour – that it should come on them all of a sudden (baghtatan), while they are not aware (la yash'auroona)?” - Holy Qur'an 43:6

I Wish I'd Been There.

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Notes:

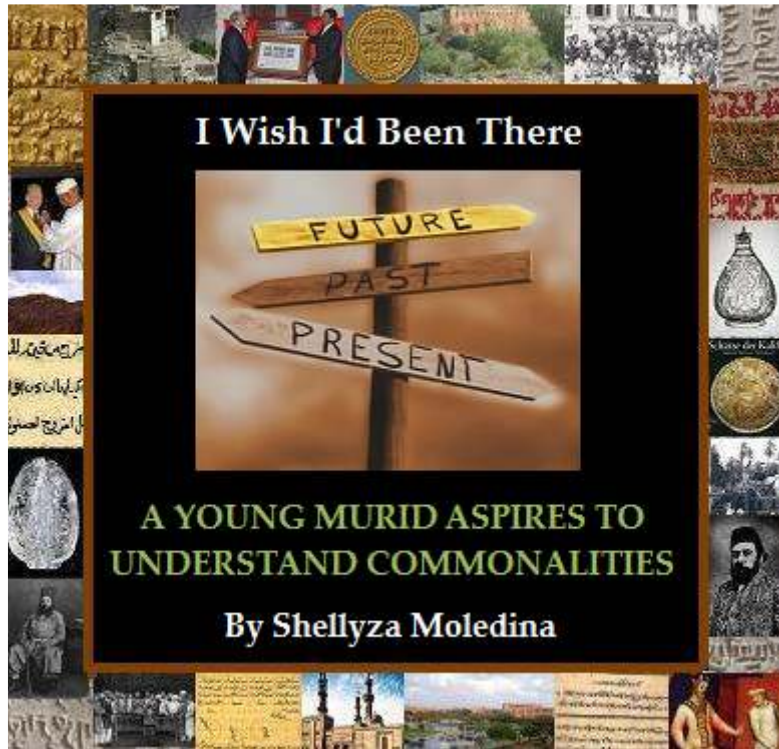
1. *Abu Ishaq Quhistani, Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*, transl. Ivanow, Bombay 1959, p. 41 and Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 99.

2. Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, Second Edition, p. 359.

3. See 2 Peter 3:10 and Thessalonians 5:2.

4. The word *baghtatan* means ‘unconsciously’ or ‘hiddenly’ and is used in the Qur’an (6:47) in contrast to the word *jahratan* which means ‘openly’ or ‘publicly’. That is to say, the event of the great *qiyamah* and the advent of the Lord of Resurrection (*qa'im*) will be hidden to most people. The Isma'ili philosopher Abu Yaquub al-Sijistani also writes that people will be heedless of the appearance of the Lord of Resurrection: “Man will be heedless of what confronts him of the grandeur of that Day, being oblivious to its overwhelming importance.” (*Kitab al-Yanabi* transl. Paul Walker, “The Wellsprings of Wisdom”, p. 102).

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A sign for all times

A Young Murid Aspires to Understand Commonalities Between Past and Present

by Shellyza Moledina

When I look at the Muslim Ummah today, I am always in awe and confusion at the immense pluralism at hand. At the basis of our religion, each Qur'anic ayat has not only a multitude of interpretations – but also multiple types of interpretations. For example, there are the literal fundamentalist interpretations, the theological ones, the mystical Sufi ones, the philosophical ones, the feminist ones, the modern ones, the historical ones based on social contexts, etc.

Although as academics, one can admire and accept this beauty of diverse opinions, an inner spiritual core yearns for a 'path' based on a set of non-contradicting interpretations, which in turn correlates to a subjective 'validity of interpretations'. I call this validity subjective, as this validity differs in content for various *tariqahs* of Islam and for individual Muslims.

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Ismailis establish this validity and path through their Imam, the Aga Khan, who guides the community according to the current Imam's interpretations of the text.

If I were to go back in time, I would witness the entire 23 years at which the Qur'anic ayats were revealed, and also observe how the Prophet himself understood and carried out these revealed concepts.

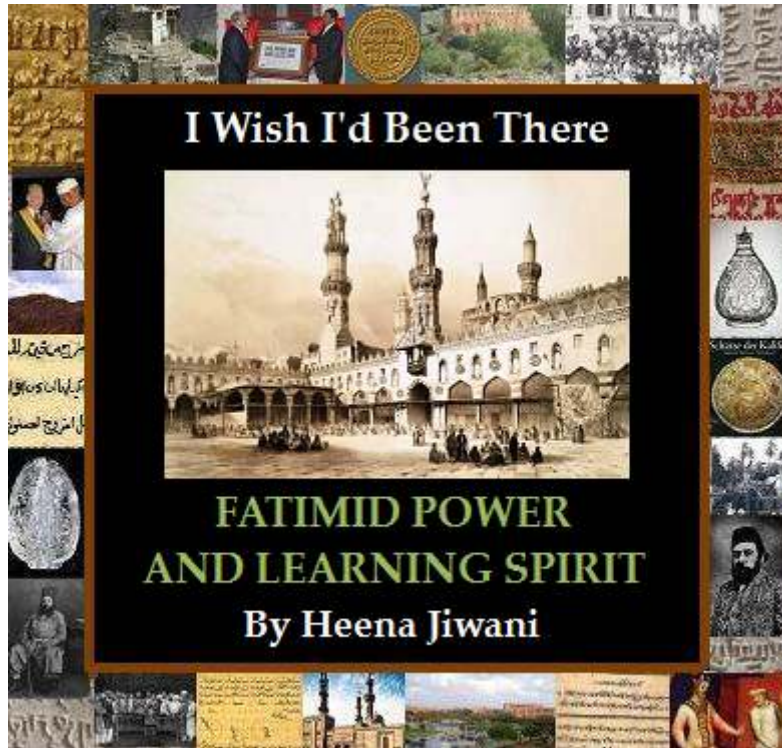
By doing so, I believe that one could better understand the concept of the 'Rope of Imam' – a rope which not only extends for the future, but also stems firmly from the past.

As a young Mu'rid, I have never witnessed the times of another Imam. By establishing an understanding of how the past relates to the present, I could further understand how I could apply my present concepts to the generations of the future.

Going to the Prophet's time would thus allow me to understand Imam as a continuous flowing rope in various social contexts, instead of understanding Imam as several blocks of history, with various awe- inspiring yet certainly different spiritual figures.

As Ismailis, we are lucky to have spiritual guidance within the community, which has aided us to have strength and survive in the world. However, more strength and intellect to further understand how we are to live in the future could be obtained by comparing and understanding the continuous commonalities between the past and present: between the guidance of the Prophet, of Imam Ali, and of our current *Mawla Bapa*.

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A vintage print of Cairo's Al-Azhar university, founded by the Fatimids

## Fatimid Power and Learning Spirit

By Heena Jiwani

The founders of Cairo and its economic, cultural, and academic progress, the Fatimids are considered to be the inclusive and pluralistic empire under which the lands under its dominion flourished. The economic transformation the Fatimids made from barter trading to monetary reliance shaped the trade system not only in the Muslim world, but influenced also that of the Crusaders, who imitated the gold *dinars* of the Fatimids. The Fatimids allowed for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, to live under one empire on one land. The cultural tolerance they showed to the medieval world was one to be modeled after: regardless of religion and culture, individuals were encouraged to express opinions, develop innovations, and help mankind. The divide between different cultures was bridged by the well encouraged idea of individual interpretation and thinking.

The focus this empire had on education and its preservation from antiquity brought about libraries and schools that the Muslim world had never seen before. Teachings on religion, mathematics, sciences, grammar, and history were

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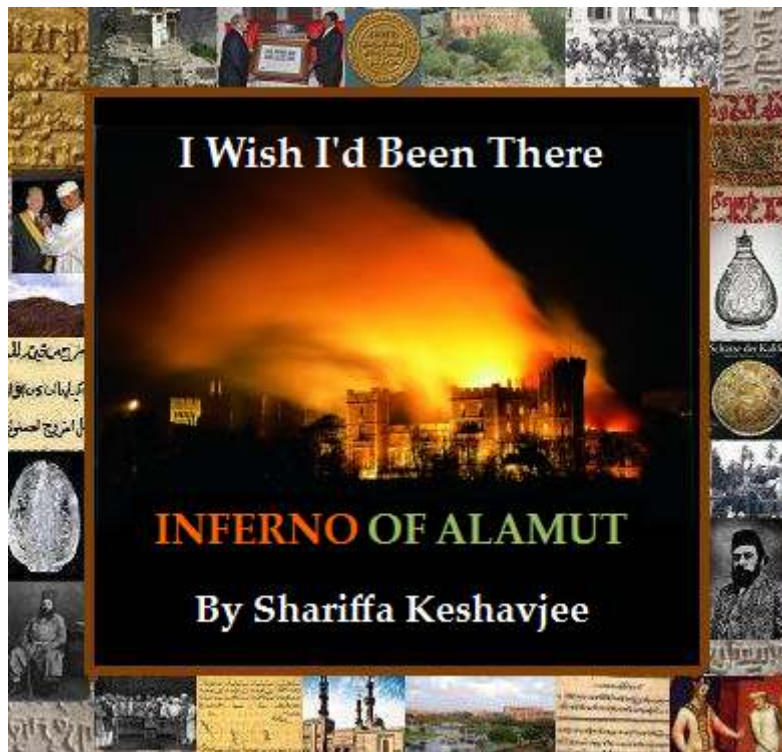
seen together in these libraries and the first ever university, Al-Azhar University. This university was first founded as a mosque under Caliph-Imam Mui'iz and later, when Caliph-Imam 'Aziz saw the need for an intellectual space, converted into a university.

*I Wish I'd Been There* when Al-Azhar University was under Fatimid rule. The teachings of academia, religion, and life to both genders, male and female, would have been a sight to see in the Islamic world. I would have had so much school spirit, learning from what is now one of the oldest universities in the world. To have been there when the main focus of a school was intellectual teachings, and not of jurisprudence or religious ordeals would be so contradictory to what it is known for today. Though the university has come a long way since its time, as solely a madrasa after its transformation under the rule of the Ayyubids, it still has defied what to me was the purpose of the initial Al-Azhar University. And even today, the area is surrounded by men, with few women to be spotted; ironic, seeing as how the university most likely received its name from the Prophet's daughter, Fatima az-Zahra, as she is sometimes referred to.

We are blessed to have the Fatimid Empire be a part of our 1400 year long history, and its ideas and methods that were encouraged throughout the Muslim world. As an Isma'ili student, I am reminded everyday of the contributions our Imams have made towards education. Even today, our Imam reminds us of the importance of education and the role of the intellect in Shia Islam from the time of Hazrat Ali (as). He also tells us to strive for a balance between the spiritual (*din*) and the material (*duniya*). It is our responsibility to bring the Isma'ili reputation back to its peak as was during the Fatimid times by continuing to seek out the best education possible.

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EIGHTEEN



A modern day castle on fire. Alamut burnt for seven days

Inferno of Alamut

By Shariffa Keshavjee

I often go back in my mind
To a time when giant forts dwarfed
Our human form
But great minds soared
Soared about the forts of Alamut
Where great minds thought
The scribes told wonders
Of the worlds of new continent
New passages in the oceans
Of search for truth.

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I often go back in my mind
To the pain of persecution
The fear of the self
Above all the anguish
The anguish of lost knowledge
Beautifully bound skilfully crafted
Books of great knowledge
Of mathematics and cartography
Of mystical passion for the divine
The deep yearning

I often go back in my mind to the
Night the books were burnt
The pages curled in fires of doom
The ink evaporates
Loving thoughts of seers up in smoke
Parchments and tomes flung into
Feeding the bonfire of lost knowledge
What the mind perceived
What the pen had scribed
Was gone for ever

The smoke rises over
Over the fort
The charred air rises
The effort to stop in vain
The scream of anguish
Stuck in the throat
As the gaze falls upon
The lost knowledge of Alamut
The human form dwarfed
Dwarfed

Gagged

In its inability to act.

This however is renaissance
Where time and knowledge
Laid at the feet of the Master
Not sepulchered in the fort
But given birth by the vision
No longer subjugated
Free to search into cyberspace
Following vision without boundaries
Reaching over mountains across seas
Reaching heights
Unthought of in the sojourn in Alamut.

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*The context of the poem (two non-Ismaili narratives):*

1. Writes Amin Maloof in his novel, *Samarkand*:

“He [the Mongol officer] was carrying a torch in his hand and to show [the historian - Juvayni] just how much in a hurry he was, he placed it next to a pile of dusty scrolls. The historian gave in and gathered into his hands and upto his armpits as many [manuscripts] as he could grab and when a manuscript entitled *Eternal Secrets of Stars and Numbers* fell to the ground, he did not bend over to pick it up again.

“Thus it was that the Assassins’ library burnt for seven days and seven nights causing the loss of innumerable works, of which there was no copy remaining, and which are supposed to contain the best guarded secrets of the universe.”

2. Notes *Iran.com* on its Web site:

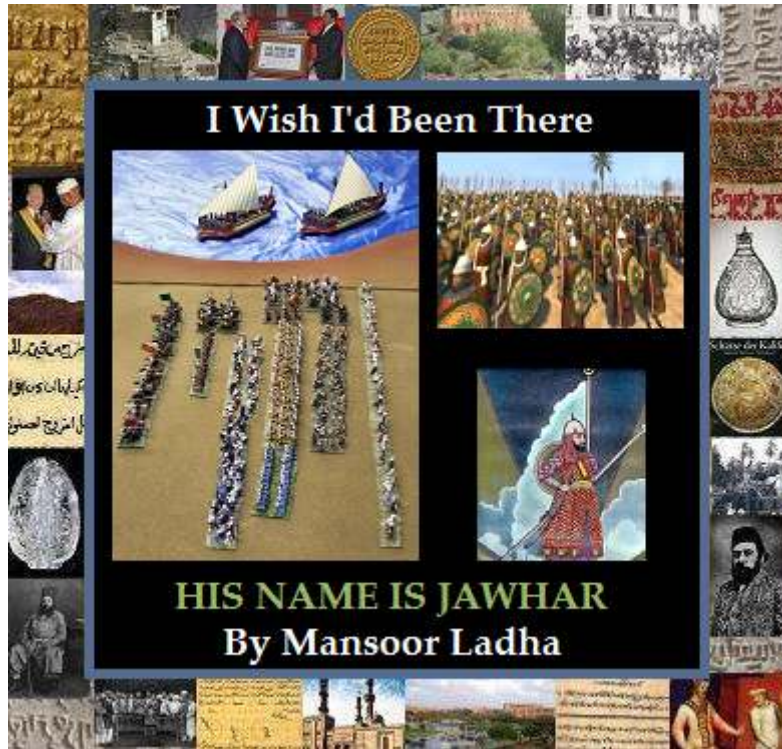
“The Mongol leader (Hulagu) journeyed himself to the citadel in 1256 and ordered everything to be destroyed, including the famous library. Among the precious writings that disappeared were the works of Hasan himself and the complete history of the Assassins and their doctrines. But just before the burning he allowed his historian Juvainy (who was writing a biography of the Mongol prince) to enter the library and bring out a few of the books, enough as would fit into a small wheelbarrow. No time was allowed to consider the matter.

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“Juvainy hurriedly saved a few Qurans, a chronicle of Alamut and a biography of Hasan Sabbah. Everything else perished in the flames. The vast library filled with tens hundreds of thousands of manuscripts burned for seven days and seven nights bringing to an end the history of the Ismailis of Alamut. Over the years, knowledge of the Ismailis degenerated into misunderstandings, romances and other fanciful nonsense such as those popularised by the explorer Marco Polo.”

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Contemporary paintings of Fatimid army and armor based on available descriptions. A portrait of Jawhar

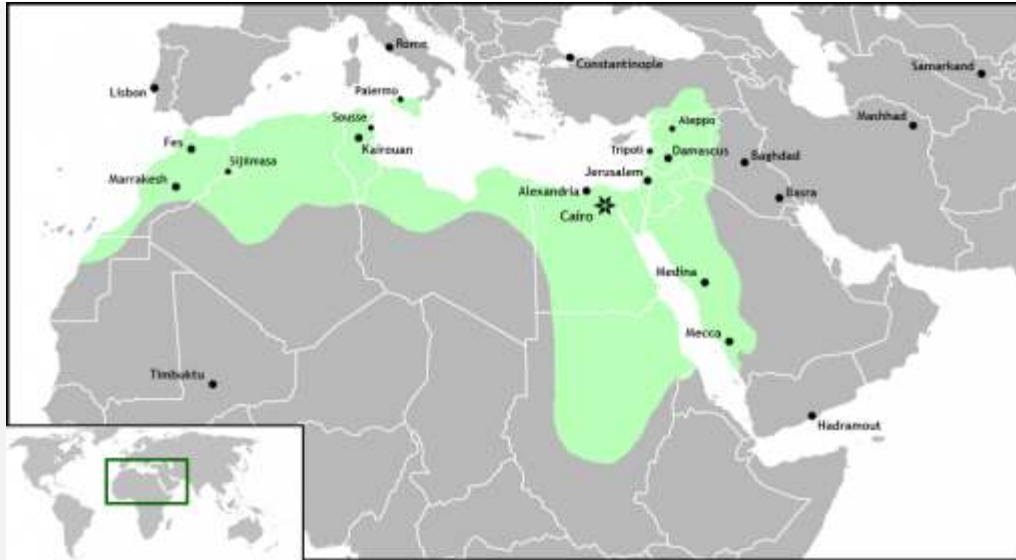
His Name is Jawhar

By Mansoor Ladha

As a journalist, a writer and an author, what better time to be than reporting milestones and significant events during the Fatimid Period or the “Golden Age” of Ismailism, when Ismaili Imams ruled over a vast empire and when Ismaili literature, philosophy and law flourished. It was during the Fatimid Period that the Ismaili scholars and authors produced what were to become the classic texts of Ismaili literature dealing with a multitude of exoteric and esoteric subjects. I think I might have made Ismaili *fiqh* (jurisprudence) my area of specialization, because it had not existed during the pre-Fatimid period. It was codified and became catalogued during the early Fatimid period. It was during the Fatimid period that Ismailis made their important contributions to Islamic theology and philosophy in general and to Shia thought in particular. Modern recovery of Ismaili literature clearly attests to the richness and diversity of the literary and intellectual traditions of the Ismailis.

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Egypt became the center of the Fatimid Empire that included at its peak N.Africa, Sicily, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, the Red Sea coast of Africa, Yemen and the Hejaz. Egypt flourished as the Fatimids developed an extensive trade and diplomatic network

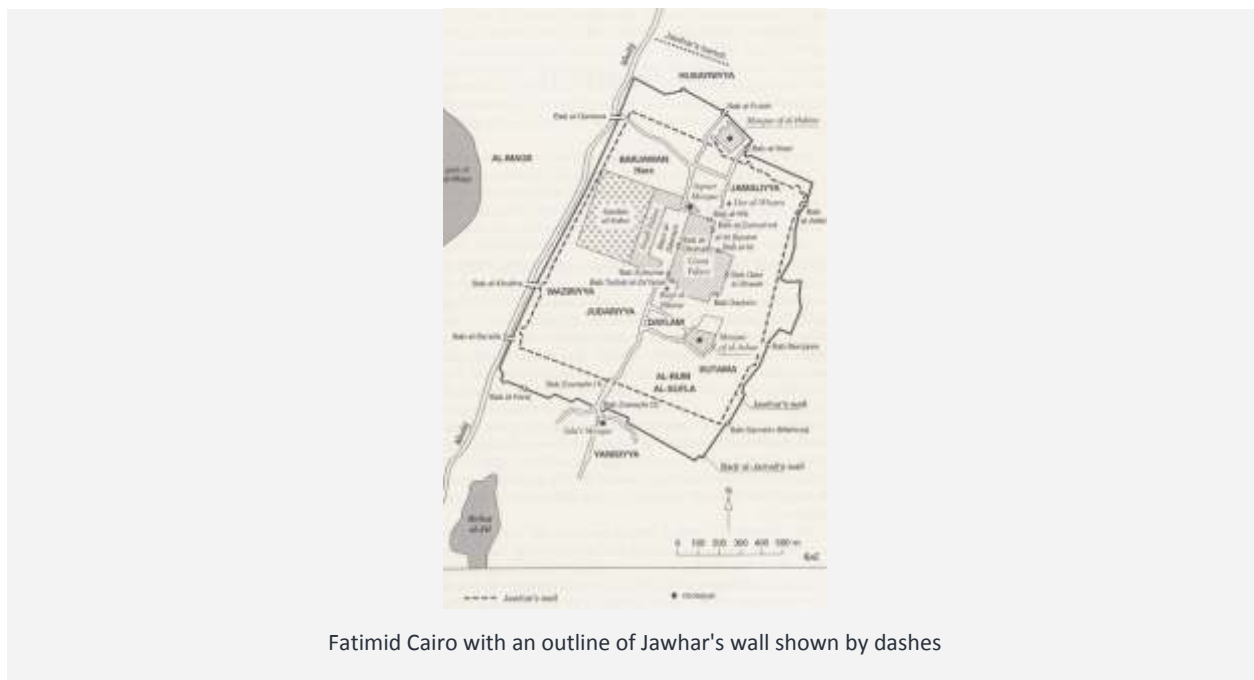
But, I think, for me of all the events that I would have reported, there are a number of related incidents that stand out, and which I would have liked to witness in the company of Imam Muizz's trusted commander, Jawhar al-Siqilli. He was of Sicilian descent.

He had been entrusted by the Imam to conquer Egypt. With a 100,000 men assembled and equipped at a cost of 24 million dinars, he set out for Egypt on February 5th, 969.

Embedded I would be, like the modern journalists in this vast army, alongside my hero! The road to Egypt had been well ascertained, forts had been built through the route at specific places. Jawhar was carrying with him a thousand caskets filled with silver. Camels carried gold ingots in plain sight, cast in the shape of millstones, to impress the crowds and the local peoples through which the army passed. Then four months later, in June of the same year, I would arrive with Jawhar in Egypt, and hardly witness any resistance!

As the first measures after the conquest, I see him issue a proclamation promising financial reforms and an end to injustice. He reached out to Sunnis, Jews and Christians and offered them protection.

Then I had been with him as he crossed the Nile, and on July 6 of the same year, he marched through Fustat, and established himself north of the city in the plain that would become his new capital - a capital that Imam Muizz had expressed a wish would rule the world.



This site was empty except for a monastery and a castle. On the very night of Jawhar's arrival in this empty spot, I would have seen the Sicilian mark the perimeter of the city with wooden stakes strung together with belled ropes. A crow would land on the rope and set the bells jingling. The ground breaking work would commence at that spot for what would eventually become known as *al-Qahira* ("The Triumphant"). I would see the birth of what is now modern Cairo!

But the epochal incident, the *Grand Darbar*, would come four years later. During this interim time I would see Jawhar establish the new capital, pacify the provinces, institute financial reform, defeat the Qarmats in December 971, and introduce new religious observances in conformity with the Shia Ismaili faith. This would include a call to prayers containing the Shiite invitation to "come to the best prayer."

Now that all had been done, no further time would be spent. There was nothing left to do but to invite Imam al-Muizz.

In 973, the Imam leaves the Maghreb on his way to Egypt with his sons and relatives with him, along with coffins of his ancestors. One of his stops is Alexandria, where the Imam resolves to dedicate his life in the exercise of good works. He then preaches to them in a manner which draws tears from many who are present. He departs after spending three days in Alexandria, and on June 6, 973, he reaches a place known as Mina. Jawhar is there to receive him. I see him go forth to meet his master and I witness him drawing near the Imam, dismounting from his horse and kissing the ground before the Imam in a show of loyalty, humility and submission to the *Amirul Muminin*. This is

affection and love for the Imam I see at the highest and deepest level. It is a profound experience and a joy to behold, which I would report.

The Imam would then cross the Nile on the Rawdah bridge, bypass Fustat, and proceed straight to Cairo and take possession of the palace or fort that Jawhar had constructed for the Imam.

It is Ramadhan – year AH 362. The feast marking its end is underway. I'd see Imam Muizz conduct his prayers at the new mosque in Cairo, and then ascend the pulpit to give his sermon, with Jawhar on the steps of the pulpit. I would feel the emotions as the crowds weep and sob at hearing the Imam's sermon.

Outside, the Imam would then mount his horse surrounded by his four armoured and helmeted sons, while two elephants led the procession. Destination – the fort, and I on my heels to get there for the *Darbar!*

Then, at the fort, all the citizens eagerly await to pay their allegiance to the new Caliph. Jawhar would be within my sight, and very close to the Imam, to his right.

I would witness the Imam majestically seated on his golden throne as he received all the nobles, Qadis, Vazirs and Ulemas of his city. They would present the Imam with their beautiful gifts as well as a robe made from a rare yarn that is known to grow only in Tunis. The material has a special shine and is gilded with gold and silver. The Imam would then be presented a Turban of a similar material and he would adorn the robe and the Turban. A resplendent *Darbar* for me to record and report as a journalist!

My friend, Jawhar, would get his turn. I would see him present the Imam, al-Muizz, with the best breed of 150 horses gilded with saddles and bridles of gold and diamonds as well as camels and ponies, saddled with boxes filled with all rare items in Egypt.

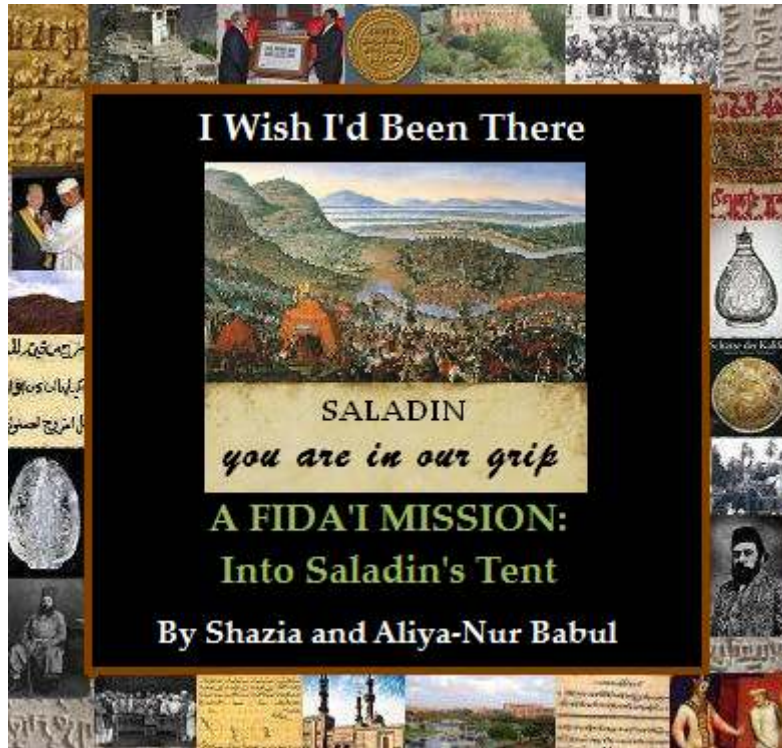
Then the Imam Muizz in a remarkable gesture of magnanimity and forgiveness would announce the release of about 1000 of his prisoners and present robes and *Khalat* to all his nobles and officers.

Would Jawhar be forgotten in the sight of the Imam? No. I would be exuberant to see my beloved Imam's immense love for someone responsible for conquering Egypt some four years earlier. Jawhar would be honoured as he is presented with a golden *Khalat* and a turban. Imam Muizz then would tie a sword on Jawhar's waist and present him with 20 horses with golden saddles, 50 thousand dinars and 200,000 dirhams.

With this *Darbar*, Egypt and Cairo enter a new era that would last almost two centuries and constitute one of the most brilliant periods in Ismaili history and Islamic Civilization.

Indeed a monumental and epochal event to witness and report! What a story and *I Wish I'd Been There* with Jawhar.

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A medieval scene of an army and tents in a mountain valley

## A Fida'i Mission: Into Saladin's Tent

By Shazia'Ayn and Aliya-Nur Babul

My sister and I have always been captivated by stories of the Ismaili *fidai's* who lived in strongholds in Syria. Different groups were always trying to persecute the Ismailis, and in the struggle to survive they trained *fidai's* to sneak into enemy camps to frighten enemies and ensure that they retreated without attacking. These stories of great bravery, love and sacrifice for the Imam have captivated my sister and myself and sent our imagination whirring with ideas and stories.

I watch the camp from afar, the fires flicker and I can hear loud and confident laughter. I have been given a mission, my first mission as a *fidai'i*, and now all I have to do is wait. Saladin has put the Ismaili fortress under siege, and he will attack in the morning. The future of all the Ismailis that are in our castle depends on me. From my watch, I can see the fires slowly winking out as the soldiers go to sleep. The last orange glow goes out and it is time to go. But I can't move. Fear unfurls itself in my chest spreading like fire throughout my body.

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Two key Ismaili leaders in post Fatimid Nizari Ismaili history; Hassan-i Sabbah of Alamut, Iran, shown at left and Rashid al-Din Sinan of Syria. The obedience of the Ismaili fidais to these and other leaders working under the authority of the Imam played a crucial role in safeguarding the lives of the Jamat for many decades.

I have to move, otherwise all the Ismailis will die; Saladin won't spare them. This is the only way! Questions swirl through my mind. What will happen if a soldier sees me? What if I get caught? What will they do to me? Fear engulfs me but my love for my Imam keeps me from turning back.

I freeze as I hear two soldiers coming up the hill for a walk.

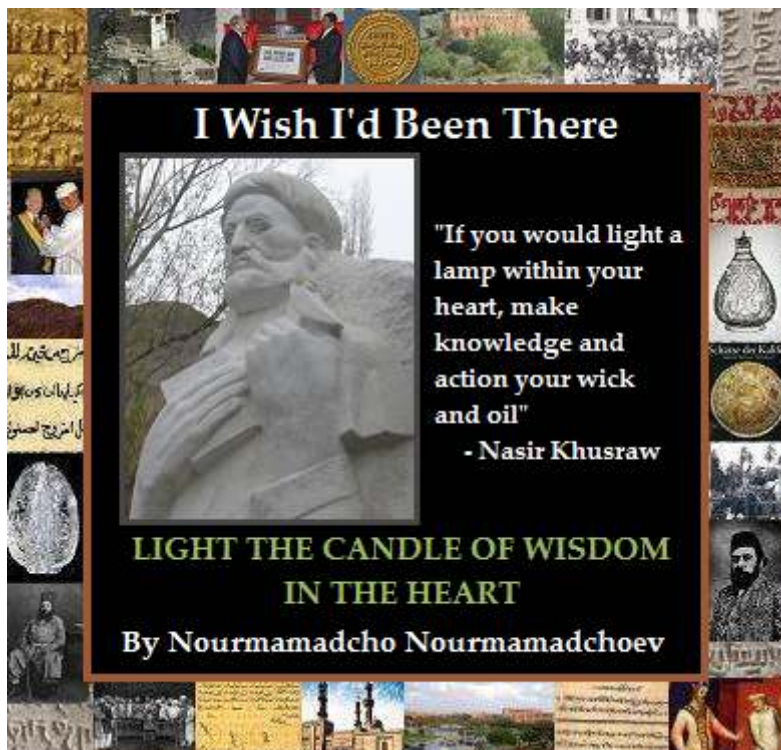
"We'll beat them so easily! They have no way to defend against our army. This is our first real battle. I wonder what it will be like? Maybe we will go home as heroes!" I hear them say as they pass me.

I realize what I have to do. This is the only way to stop the attack, and not hurt anyone. I sneak down from my cave, run into the camp, around the tents and into the biggest tent of all. Here Saladin sleeps. I creep into the tent, my heart pounding, and I rest a letter beside his head which simply says: "YOU ARE IN OUR GRIP"

I secure the letter into the cushion. In the morning, Saladin will find the letter. He will be so scared that he will retreat.

The mission is complete.





A statue of Nasir Khusraw in Badakhshan

## Light the Candle of Wisdom in the Heart

Light the candle of wisdom within your heart,  
And hurry, heart aglow, to the worlds of light.  
If you would light a lamp within your heart,  
Make knowledge and action your wick and oil.

- *Nasir Khusraw* [1]

**By Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev**

Nasir Khusraw woke from a dream that incited a gnawing curiosity within; the beginning of a long journey in the year 1045 CE. He travelled to the court of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir in Cairo, Egypt where he studied for seven years. Here he was invited to the Imam's palace, where the Imam commissioned him to spread the Fatimid teaching:

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“Shāh Nāḳir,” said Imam al-Mustansir, “you should set off towards Khurasan, Badakhshan and Balkh for the sake of calling people to the *Summons of the Truth*. I have appointed you as my *Hujjat* (Proof) in this region.” [2]

I wish I’d been in his company when he received this invitation.

The arrival of Nasir Khusraw in Badakhshan heralded a new change and implementation of novel rituals: he arranged gatherings of people (*majlis*) called *majlis-e-dawat* in the villages, later to unfold into *majlis-e-Charagh Rawshan* and *madda-khani*. These two religious rituals are prevalent and an important facet of the rituals among the Ismaili communities in Badakhshan and its neighbouring regions.



*Charagh rawshan* is a *majlis* or a *daḳwat* – a gathering of believers, where a lamp is lit and Qur’anic verses recited for the eternal peace of a departed soul. The recitation of the Quranic verses is followed by *madda khani* till dawn – a time when the text of *Charagh Nama* (consisting of selected *Qasidas*) is recited. When the *khalifa* reads the text of *Charagh Nama* the participants chant in unison a praise to God, the Prophet Muhammad and Imams from his *ahl al-bayt*.

Local stories narrate that the tradition of *Charagh rawshan* and *madda-khani* arrived in the region with the missionary activity of Nasir Khusraw. According to local tradition, the first person who started to sing *madda* was a local ruler Malik Jahan Shah, who even renounced his throne in order to serve the *Hujjat* of al-Mustansir. [3]

I wish I’d been present in a congregation where Nasir gave a *rubab* (musical instrument) to Malik Jahan Shah and asked him to recite didactic poetry – a *madda*. The very first ode – *qasida* - Malik Jahan Shah sang was a marvellous poem in praise of Imam Ali, which reads:

My tongue utters praise to ‘Ali,  
My two lips unceasingly utter Ya Ali.  
My head prostrates in worship to the Lord,  
My thirty two teeth invoke Ya Ali. [4]



Pamiri Rubabs

Thus, these local traditions that were preserved among the Ismailis of Badakhshan have been imparted from one generation to the next, thus linking past with the present. It is evident from the daily life of the local population that Pir Nasir Khusraw's intellectual foresight combined with philosophical tradition still exerts a great influence among the Nizari Ismaili communities in Badakhshan and its adjacent regions. Although, the local narrative story is traditional in nature, it still brings forward certain important historical issues related to the figure of Nasir Khusraw and his missionary activities in the region as well as the tradition of *Charagh rawshan* and *madda-khani*, which were set up as part of religious assemblies.

The incontrovertible historical fact of Nasir Khusraw visiting the region remains alive in the tradition founded a thousand years ago by him. This tradition connects the destiny of the Ismailis of the region with their *'Present and Living Imam'* Shah Karim al-Hussayni – His Highness the Aga Khan.

The invocation from the Charagh rawshan: “allahuma sali ‘ala sayyidana Muhammadin wa ‘ala ali ‘Aliyan va Muhammad salawat bar Muhammad va ‘Ali,” [5] which was, is and always will be reiterated by youngsters and elderly of these small mountainous communities in Badakhshan, is a testament to this belief and fact.

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Notes:

[1] Hunsberger, A. *Nāsir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, p.

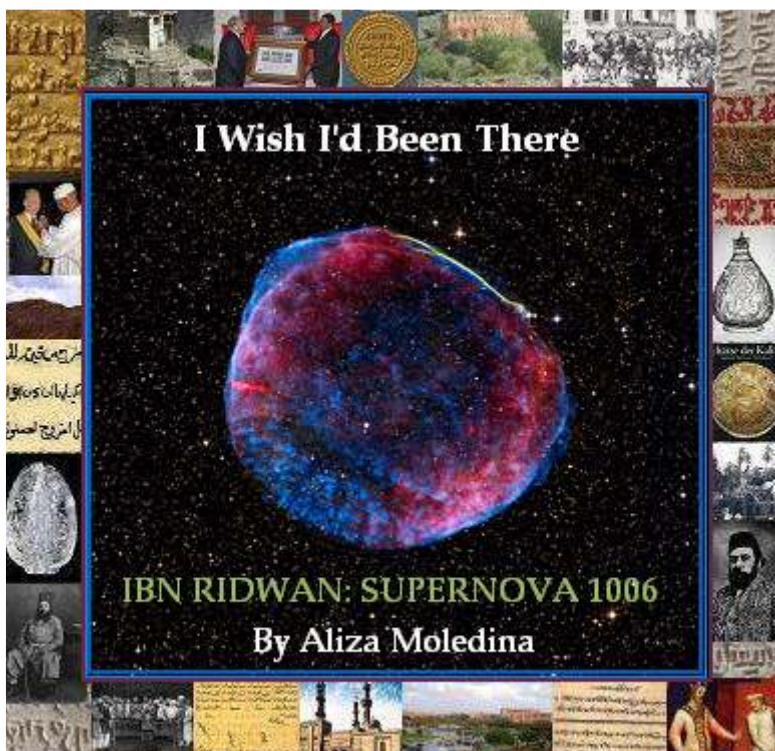
[2] Fidāi Khurāsānī, Muhammad Zayn al-‘Ābiddīn. *Ta’rīkh-i Ismā‘īliya yā Hidāyat al-Mu’minīn al-Tālibīn*, Tehran, 1373, p. 79

[3] This story is drawn from a local narrative history called *Bahr al-Akhar*, a short treatise on the life and activity of Nasir Khusraw in Badakhshan, which is ascribed to the pen of a certain Sayyid Jalal-i Badakhshi. Local tradition narrates that upon joining the da’wat of Nasir Khusraw, Malik Jahan Shah became known as Baba ‘Umari Yamgi. See: Sayyid Jalal-i Badakhshi. *Bahr al-Akhar*, Edited by: Rahmonqulov, R, Khorugh: Pamir, 1992

[4] Tavakkalov, H. S. *Janri Madhiya dar Folklori Badakhshan*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Dushanbe, 2005, p. 18.

[5] This particular text of *salwat* used to be chanted in chorus by the people who participate in the *da’wat-i Nasir*. The current text of *Charagh Nama* has a short form of the *salwat*, which is *Allahumma Sali ‘ala Muhammadin wa Ali Muhammad*.

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Just over a thousand years ago, the stellar explosion known as Supernova SN 1006 was observed and recorded by Fatimid astronomer Ibn Ridwan. This composite view includes x-ray data in blue from Chandra observatory, optical data in yellowish hues and radio image data in red.

## Ibn Ridwan and Supernova 1006

By Aliza Moledina

It was the year 1006: the time of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Al-Hakim. Ibn Ridwan, a mere boy of eighteen observed an unexplainable yet striking phenomenon that would be studied by western scientists more than a thousand years later: it was determined by these modern scientists to be the brightest supernova or explosion of a star in known history. Ibn Ridwan's detailed observations and records of the intensity and pattern of the star were the basis of scientific discovery countless years later. Ibn Ridwan's astronomical observations provide another example of the importance of Fatimid scholars to today's world of science and discovery, creating an inspiring intellectual bond between modern and Fatimid science.

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This ‘*new star*’ or rather the death of an old star, known today as SN1006, appeared on April 30, 1006. Ibn Ridwan made the following observations:

“the sun on that day was 15 degrees in Taurus and the spectacle in the 15th degree of Scorpio. This spectacle was a large circular body, two and a half to three times as large as Venus. The sky was shining because of its light. The intensity of light was a little more than a quarter of that of moonlight. It remained where it was and it moved daily with its zodiacal sign until the sun was in sextile with it in Virgo, when it disappeared once.” [From Bernard R Goldstein’s translation]

Ibn Ridwan then also precisely detailed the positions of the sun, moon and other planets.



You are looking at the remnant of a stellar explosion that occurred more than 1,000 years ago. The red stripe, called the SN 1006 Supernova Remnant, is actually a ribbon of gas that floats in our galaxy as captured by NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope.

The brightest supernova ever recorded on Earth, this spectacular light show was documented by Fatimid astronomer, Ibn Ridwan. Aliza Moledina, a passionate science student, wishes she’d been there to witness this event with Ridwan. Photo:

Hubblesite.org

It was Ibn Ridwan’s descriptions that prompted scientists more than a thousand years later to calculate the brightness of SN1006. His comparison of the brightness of the historic supernova to both Venus and the moon gave scientists a better idea of the characteristics and nature of SN1006. Using the logarithmic scale of brightness, scientists, particularly Middlebury College astrophysicist Frank Winkler, were able to label SN1006 as the brightest supernova in recorded history. Winkler stated that SN1006 was about a “hundred times brighter than Jupiter ever gets,” or “250



times brighter than Sirius,” the brightest star in the sky. The angle that it appeared in the atmosphere would also have contributed to its magnificent luminosity.

The astrophysicists used Ibn Ridwan’s data to isolate the location of the star, and detect it within space. Winkler estimated SN1006 to be approximately 7000 light years from Earth.

It is interesting to note that although Ibn Ridwan believed strongly in the significance of astronomy, he chose to pursue medicine as a career. In fact, in his autobiography he noted that “the astronomical omens at my birth indicated that medicine should be my profession.” Indeed, he did pursue medicine, becoming so renowned that he was appointed chief physician to Imam al-Hakim.

As a student currently studying science in university, *I Wish I'd Been There* to have personally witnessed this spectacular phenomenon. It would have truly been an unforgettable experience to witness Ibn Ridwan recording his observations. Though Ibn Ridwan was only eighteen at the time, his detailed tracking of SN1006 paved the road for future discoveries. His observations connect generations of individuals and provide a unique and significant bond between ancient and modern science.

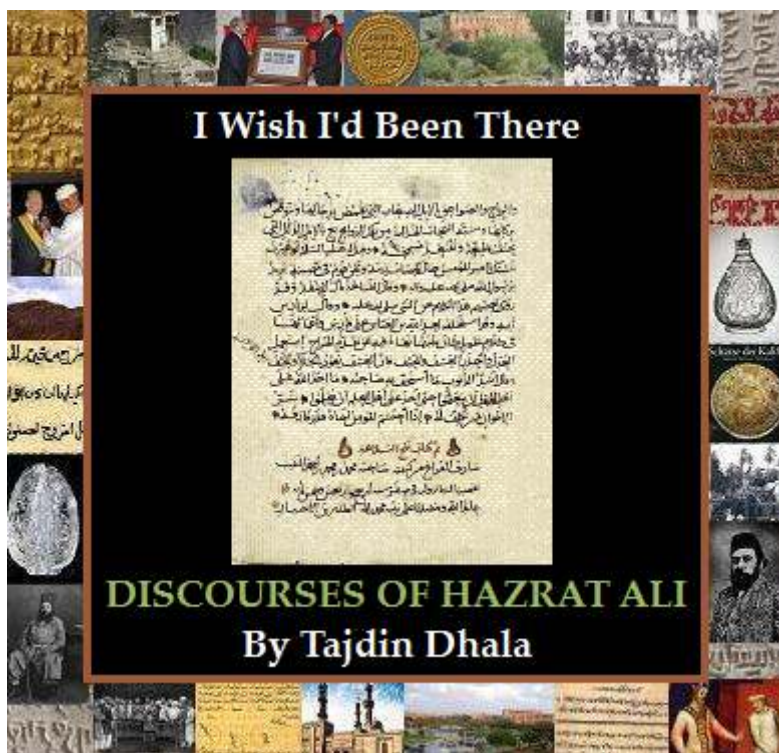
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References

1. *The Scholars Supernova* by Margaret Donsbach, Saudi Aramco World, July/August 2006 (Volume 57, Number 4)
2. *Lost History: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers and Artists* by Michael H. Morgan, National Geographic Books, 2007

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A Folio from Hazrat Ali's Nahj al-Balagha (Peaks of Eloquence)

## Discourses of Hazrat Ali

By Tajdin Dhala

From the very day of Hazrat Ali (AS) being designated as the Mawla by the famous prophetic proclamation at Ghadir-Khumm - "He of whom I am Mawla of him Ali is also the Mawla" - till his demise, a span of twenty four years, the Imam delivered sermons and discourses to the faithful.

"I am the city of knowledge and Ali is the gate; so whoever desires knowledge, let him enter the gate" so had the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) addressed the community. Hazrat Ali's discourses are valued not because he was the first Imam or the fourth of the *rightly guided caliphs* but because of their *'intrinsic worth, their intellectual profundity and spiritual fecundity.'*

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Referring to relationship to the Prophet, Imam Ali in a sermon said:

“When I was but a child he took me under his wing....I would follow him as a baby camel follows the footsteps of its 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 (the mountain of) Hira. I saw him and nobody else saw him. At that time no household was brought together for the religion of Islam, except (that comprising) 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 the prophecy.”

In regard to the most formidable battles, ‘*al-jihad al-akbar*’ of the soul, the inner struggle, Imam Ali prescribed the following solutions:

“Struggling against the *nafs* through knowledge – such is the mark of the intellect”

“The strongest people are those who are strongest against their own *nafs* (self, desires)”

“Truly, one who fights his own *nafs*, in obedience to God and does not sin against him, has the rank of the righteous martyr in God’s eyes”

“The ultimate battle is that of a man against his own *nafs*”

“He knows his own *nafs* fights it”

“No jihad is more excellent than the jihad of the *nafs*”

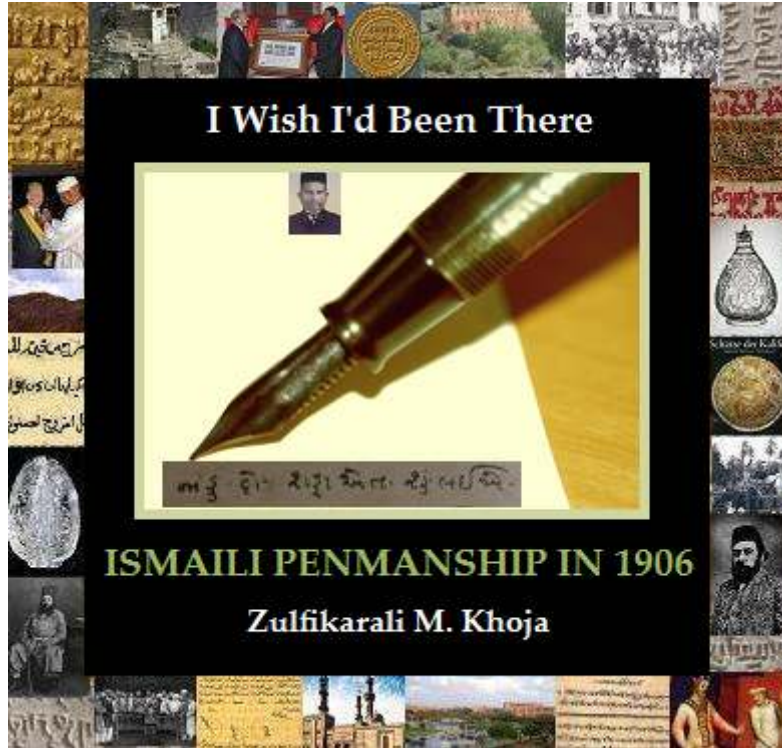
During the caliphate, Ali appointed one Malik al-Ashtar as his governor of Egypt and sent him a letter. From the historical point of view the letter has been a source of inspiration down through the centuries, being read as an ideal contribution for the Islamic governance, complementing – through its relatively detailed description of the duties and rights of the ruler and the various functionaries of the state and main classes of society – the more general framework of principles enshrined in the famous *Constitution of Medina* dictated by the Prophet.

Numerous sayings of Imam Ali appear in *Khutbatu ‘l-Bayan* as follows:

“I am the proof (*hujjat*) of Allah against those who are in the heavens and on the earth.”

“I am the interpreter of the revelation of Allah; I am protected (from committing errors) by Allah.”

*I Wish I’d Been There* to participate at Imam Ali’s sermons and discourses for twenty four years.



An antique pen, a thumbnail photo of Ali Velji and a line from his Gujarati notebook

## Ismaili Penmanship in 1906

By Zulfikarali M. Khoja

My grandfather, Ali Velji, packed in a lot of living in his short 43 years of life. He was born in India in 1873. Very little is known of his early life. Sometime at the turn of the century he migrated to Tanganyika or German East Africa. Did the people of the time celebrate the turn of the century? Was this of any significance to them? Did Ali Velji use this as an excuse to migrate to improve the quality of his life and other family members? And, what about the two rare notebooks that he penned in 1906 that I now have in my possession?

He had two brothers, Rhemtulla Velji and Jinah Velji.

Ali settled in Dar-es-Salaam where he married into the family of Jiwa Daya. It can only be assumed that this was an arranged marriage. Soon after the marriage his wife died, name unknown. Living relatives do not remember her name, age nor can they remember the cause of death.

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His spirit of adventure then took him to Mozambique and he settled in Lourenco Marques-Delgoa Bay (Maputo) in 1905. Original documents show his residence permit in Portuguese. Did he learn to speak Portuguese? How did he get around and get into business with his partner, Devji Damji? This partnership lasted only two years!

In 1907, my grandfather moved to South Africa at the age of 33 (height 5'6" with a scar on his left hand). The cost of the immigration fee was 25 pounds.

In Pretoria, South Africa, he re-married, this time to the daughter of the Ismaili pioneer, Jeevan Keshavjee. The document dated 22 March, 1909 indicates the name of his wife Hirbai. He probably moved back to Lourenco Marques with his wife where my father was born August 25, 1912. They then moved back to Pretoria in 1913, documented!



Ali Velji - packed a lot of living in his short life

During World War I, Ali Velji died in 1916 at the age of 43, when my father was only four years old!

The trials and tribulations of Hirbai, a single mother, bringing up her son through two world wars and during two Imams is another story.

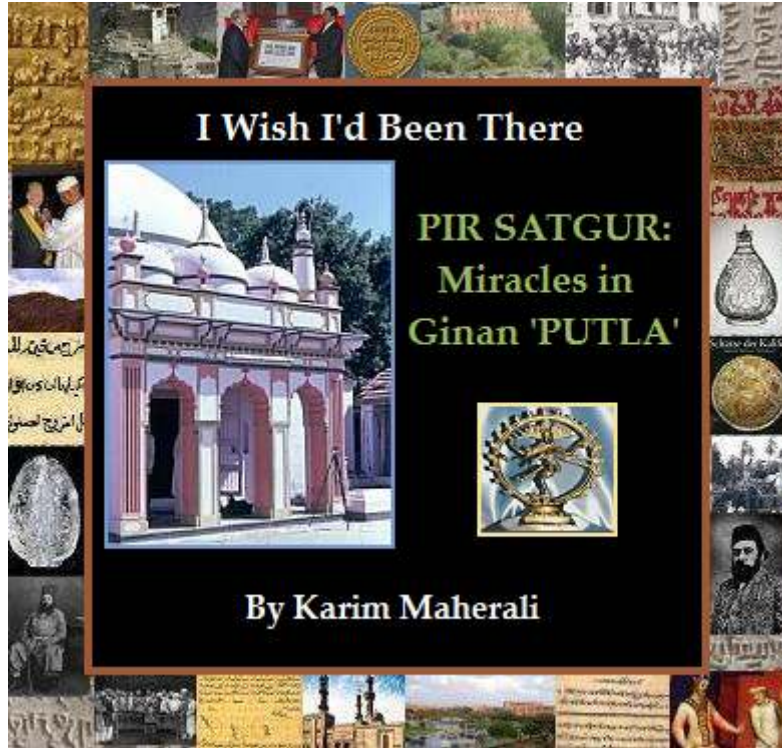
These stories of Ismaili settlers in Africa contribute to understanding our rich history of migration and settlement. Yes, *I Wish I'd been There* as a nametag on my grandfather's suitcases to follow his spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship in those early days when Africa was unknown to much of the world.



One very interesting discovery I made in the books inherited from my father are prized possessions of Ali Velji: Two note books. These contain in his own fine handwriting, dated 1906, the ginan *Buj Niranjan*, other ginans and very rare firmans of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah as well as other information which I have yet to decipher. At the back cover he humbly requests that if the books are lost, they kindly be returned to Ali Velji of Delgoa Bay. Where and when did he learn to write in such fine style? Was it his schooling in India?

These antiques in my possession are designated for the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, thus contributing to the legacy of Ismaili literature. Being a nametag on his suitcase would have enabled me to learn so much more about my remarkable grandfather.

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The Mausoleum of Pir Satgur Nur in Navsari, Gujarat, India, and an image of a *putlo* (an idol)

Pir Satgur Nur: Miracles in Ginan ‘Putla’

By Karim Maherali

This is indeed an interesting and reflective series about our illustrious history with all its glories and tragedies. There are many moments in our history that have had profound impact in terms of transformations of societies. The revelation brought down by Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) heralded a new phase in our eternal history and made the institution of Imamatus apparent to the world at large, and provided the basis of major social cultural transformations throughout the Muslim World. The glorious Fatimid period enabled our Imams to directly influence the time through their governance, which brought about major social and cultural changes. The Nizari-Musta’li schism and the initiation of Nizari period at Alamut resulted in the proclamation of ‘*qiyama*’ or resurrection by Imam Hasan ‘ala dhikrihi’l-salaam that elaborated a highly developed and complex teaching in response to the newly changed circumstances.

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To me, however, the establishment of the *Satpanth* tradition in the Indian Subcontinent is of particular personal significance because it provided the basis and context for the promulgation of the Ginanic tradition which is particularly in my heart. The Ginans have contributed greatly to my understanding of the principles and ethics of our faith and provide ongoing inspiration and sustenance of faith. Hazrat Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah once gave an analogy of the Satpanth mission as a plantation. In that context Pir Satgur Nur cleared the land. Pir Shams ploughed it, Pir Sadr al-Din watered it and Pir Hasan Kabirdin bore the fruit. From this perspective, *I Wish I'd Been There* when Pir Satgur Nur arrived in India and spread the faith through not only meaningful discourses but also by the demonstration of supernatural powers.

An elaborate discourse and a series of remarkable miracles that Pir Satgur Nur performed are to be found in the Pir's composition known as *Putla* (idols). The transliteration (accents omitted) and translation of the Ginan are as follow:

PUTLA (THE IDOLS)

VERSE 1

aad gur bhiramaa nur sat-gur naam, ja(n)pudeep maa(n) gure keedho mukaam.... 1

The name of the Primal Divine Guide is Nur Satgur, who made his abode in India.

VERSE 2

setar-deep delam des ho jaann, teea(n) nur sat-gur betthaa ho aann....2

Know that there is a country in the land of the West called Dailam (Northern Iran). It was there that Nur Satgur dwelt.

VERSE 3

delam des thee peere(n) keea ho aann, teea(n) aaveaa nagaree bheeladdee ho jaann....3

From the land of Dailam came the Pir. He came to the city of the Bheels [Bhils]

VERSE 4

bheeladdee nagaree thee tarat aaveaa ho dev, taare hee(n)dusataan maa(n)he aaveaa tat khev....4

From the city of the Bheels the divine lord quickly proceeded. Then he entered Hindustan.

VERSE 5

kha(n)dd gujaraat jaanno aann, maa(n)he paattann nagaree ut-tam jaann....5

Know that in the realm of Gujarat, the city of Patan [medieval capital of Gujarat] is supreme.

VERSE 6

teeaa(n) raaj kare jesa(n)gh ho raae, teeaa(n) pun paveetr dharamaj thaae....6

There King Jai Singh ruled. Good deeds and pure righteousness only prevailed there.

VERSE 7

sat-dharam tannee pireet kare apaar, maahaagunnava(n)taa aaveaa dayaal....7

They had boundless love for the true faith. And then the most virtuous and merciful lord came there.

VERSE 8

taare raajaae deraa kholaaveaa duaar, ubho rahe pujaaro tenne tthaar....8

The king ordered the gates of the temple to be opened. A priest used to stay standing in that place.

VERSE 9

teeaa(n) dev kee pujaa pujaaro re kare, teeaa(n) nur sat-gur aavee sa(n)chare....9

There, as the priest was worshipping the god, Nur Satgur came and approached.

VERSE 10

taare deraa maa(n)he peer betthaa ho jaae, eesavar nee pi(n)ddee upar meleaa ho paa(n)e....10

Then the Pir sat resting in the temple, with his legs stretched, in front of the idol.

VERSE 11

taare pujaaro aaveo tenne re tthaam, jue to deraa maa(n)he peere(n) keedho mukaam.....11

The priest then came to that place. He looked and saw that the Pir had made his abode in the temple.

VERSE 12

taare musalamaanee teea(n) deettho rup, ehevo gure keedho sarup.....12

Then he saw that he had the appearance of a Muslim, for this was the form that the Guide had adopted.

VERSE 13

taare ubho pujaaro gur ke paas, sunno ho saaheb hamaaree aradaas....13

The priest stood beside the Guide. 'Listen, sir, to my request.'

VERSE 14

pujaaro kahe dev nee murat upar kem raakheo paa(n)e, e murat puje chhe jesa(n)gh raae.....14

The priest said: 'How can you stretch your feet in front of the image of the god? This image is worshipped by King Jai Singh.'

VERSE 15

taare nur sat-gur boleaa vikheeyaata, sunno pujaaraa hamaaree vaat.....15

Then Nur Satgur uttered these well-known words: "Listen, priest, to what I have to say."

VERSE 16

jo e dev tamaaraa hove sahee, to tam saathe kaa(n)e ku(n) bole nahee....16

"If these gods of yours are real, why do they not speak to you?"

VERSE 17

taare pujaare peer su(n) vaataj kahee, e pathar kee murat peer bole nahee.....17

Then this is what the priest said to the Pir: “These images are of stone, O Pir! and so they do not speak.”

VERSE 18

parabat naa je aanneaa pakhaann, ghaddee putalaa ne maa(n)ddeaa ma(n)ddaann.....18

“Stones were brought from the mountains, then the idols were fashioned and set in place.”

VERSE 19

maannase ghaddeaa putalaa ne maa(n)ddeaa ma(n)ddaann, te kem peer bole ho jaann.....19

“Men fashioned the idols and set them in place. So how, O Pir! can they speak?”

VERSE 20

nur sat-gur pujaare su(n) vaataj kahee, ke hamaare hukam su(n) e bole sahee.....20

Then this is what Nur Satgur said to the priest: “At my command they will surely speak.”

VERSE 21

taare nur sat-gur vaa(n)chaa ochare, te naache putalaa ne nirataj kare....21

Then Nur Satgur uttered the words. The idols danced and frolicked merrily.

VERSE 22

vaajee(n)tr vaaje bahu chitraamann tannaa, vajaavaa laagaa peer ke pharamaane ghannaa.....22

Instruments of many kinds played. Many of them began to play at the command of the Pir.

VERSE 23

vaaje vaajaa pathar tannaa taadd maddada(n)g a(n)tee ghannaa....23

Stone instruments played, with many cymbals and drums.

VERSE 24

venn vaa(n)salee vaaje bahu bula(n)d, teaaa(n) deval maa(n)he bahu huo aana(n)d....24

Many flutes and pipes played loudly. There was much merrymaking in the temple.

VERSE 25

tab pujaaro laago peer ke paa(n)e, pachhe raajaa paase doddeo jaae.....25

Then the priest fell at the Pir's feet. Afterwards he went running to the King.

The verses which then follow describe what happened when the King came to know of the incident. Amazed by the news, the King set out to verify the facts provided by the priest and meet with the Pir. The King arrived at the temple with his entourage, amongst whom was his great priestly monk *Kanipa*.

The Pir placed his hand upon the King's head and said: "I value your commitment to truth." As the King had gone out of his way to witness the incident, it was the desire of the Pir to show him the true path. The King prostrated himself before the Pir. This aroused the anger of the monk *Kanipa* who made a challenge to perform a feat. The Pir accepted the challenge cheerfully and ordered an idol to fetch water from a nearby lake. The idol heeded by taking along with him a jug, filling it with water and in the process emptying the entire lake of water. This caused all the aquatic life to perish due to lack of water and aroused great concern amongst the people. The monk *Kanipa* was overwhelmed.

The Pir then asked the monk to order the idol to empty the contents of the jug into the lake. As the monk was helpless in this regard, the Pir himself ordered the idol. The lake filled up and all the aquatic life was restored.

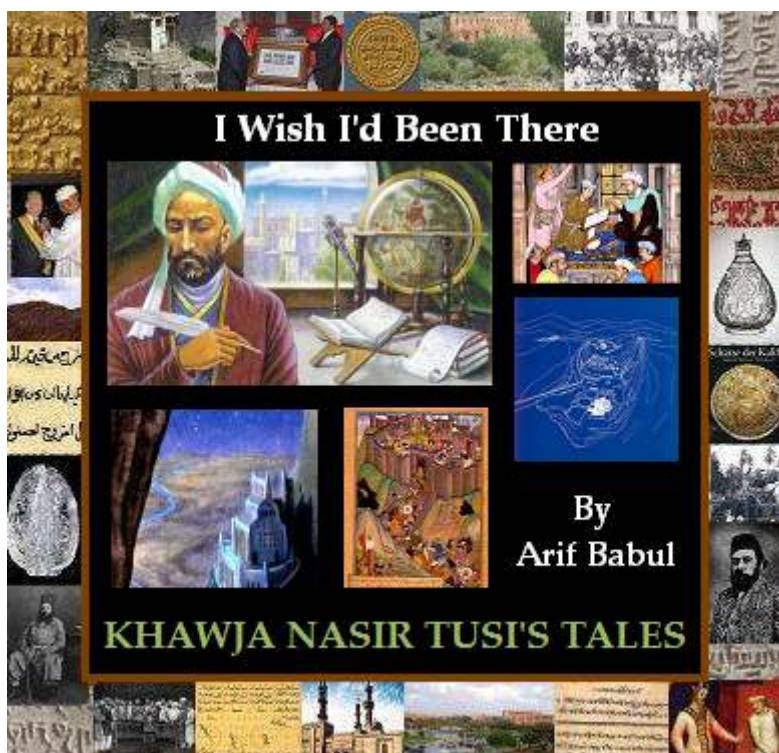
Having been defeated, the monk tried a new challenge. He sent his wand high up in the sky through his latent powers and asked the Pir to bring it down. The Pir took off one of his sandals and ordered it to bring down the wand. The sandal flew with lightning speed and brought down the wand. Those who watched the feat were spellbound. Many such miracles were performed.

Having seen these wonders, the King, the Queen and many other persons including the monk embraced the *Satpanth* tradition. *I Wish I'd Been There* to see their acceptance of the path of *Satpanth* (True Path or *Sirat al-Mustaqim*) at the hands of our revered Pir, and to have listened to the entire discourse that the Pir had with the *pujari* (priest). Fortunately the Pir's composition, *Putla*, has captured these moments remarkably well. To this day, many individuals of all backgrounds visit the tomb of Pir Satgur Nur and pay homage to it. According to *Tawarikh-e-Navsari*, he was considered as the Chief Pir among all the Ismaili Pirs of the Indo-Pak subcontinent.

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*Author's note:* The translation has been adapted from *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* by Zawahir Moir and Christopher Shackle, 258 pages, hardback, published by Routledge (2nd revised edition, 2000).

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Clockwise from top left: cropped image from an Azerbaijan stamp celebrating Tusi's 800th Anniversary, Tusi with students, Maragha Observatory, the Mongol siege at Alamut, modern art depicting the Alamut castle and valley

Khawja Nasir Tusi's Tales

By Arif Babul

“Oh, how weary I am. My life is ebbing away. *Ya Rahman!* Gently usher me into your abode of peace. I pray bring this painful existence to an end.”

I drag myself across the Maragha Observatory's common room. Here, in the world's first institute exclusively built and dedicated to astronomical research, Khawja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's young research students sit at a desk reviewing well-worn copies of *Risalah-I Mu'inniya* and its sequel *Hall-i-muskhillat Mu'inniya*, both originally penned some twenty years ago, and copying out highlighted proofs and arguments on a fresh manuscript that will be Khawja's final word, memoirs if you will, on the configuration of the planets and other heavenly bodies.

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“Look at this! Pure genius,” whispered one of the scholars. “Hard to imagine that he came up with such elegant proofs. Now all he does is sit out there blistering under the burning sun, as if punishing himself, staring into emptiness, muttering to himself ‘*Once I beheld Paradise; now there’s only darkness*’. From what seeds has such melancholy sprung?”

I look out across the courtyard at Khawja, sitting on a rock by the entrance, fingering a tasbih, staring away at the horizon. Like me, the *jinns* that torment him so have been his steady companion these past ten years. In the beginning, he was able to hold them at bay but over time, they have grown stronger, become bolder.

As far as I can reckon, all of this can be traced back to that faithful year, 1256 I think it was. We were at the citadel of Maymundiz. *Nauroz* was approaching. Khudhavand Rukn al-Din Khurshah had been declared lord and master not so long ago, following the assassination of his father, Khudhavand Ala al-Din Muhammad. For a few months now, the citadel had been a frenzy of activity; the walls were being reinforced; emissaries coming and going, carrying messages to distance provinces; food and water stores were being readied. The deadly horde from the East was approaching. The Mongols! They were hell bent on eradicating the Ismailis from the very face of this world. Their leader had charged his generals thus: “None of that people should be spared, not even the babe in its cradle.” What had engendered such hatred, I do not know. Perhaps in twisted fashion, this was a complement, an acknowledgment that these people were a force to be reckoned with.

During the age of the former Khudavind, Khawja had enjoyed a highly creative scholarly life. For one, he lived in the Alamut and had the run of its truly remarkable library. He was treated with respect and awe. He was given special dispensation to wander the ramparts in the dead of night unhindered, pointing strange instruments at the stars and scratching down seemingly cryptic notes in a codex that never left his side. What he enjoyed the most, however, was the solitude. He was only rarely interrupted, and then only by the lord himself who would invite Khawja to accompany him on his strolls through the hills and mountain meadows. Khawja looked forward to these meetings. The two would stroll off together, trailing behind the shepherds striking out to round up the sheep before nightfall, engaged in animated discussions. Sometimes, Khurshah, the future Khudavind, would join them as well. Khawja always returned from these strolls excited, rushing to his room to pen his thoughts. This was how many of his treatises were born. I know. I was there.

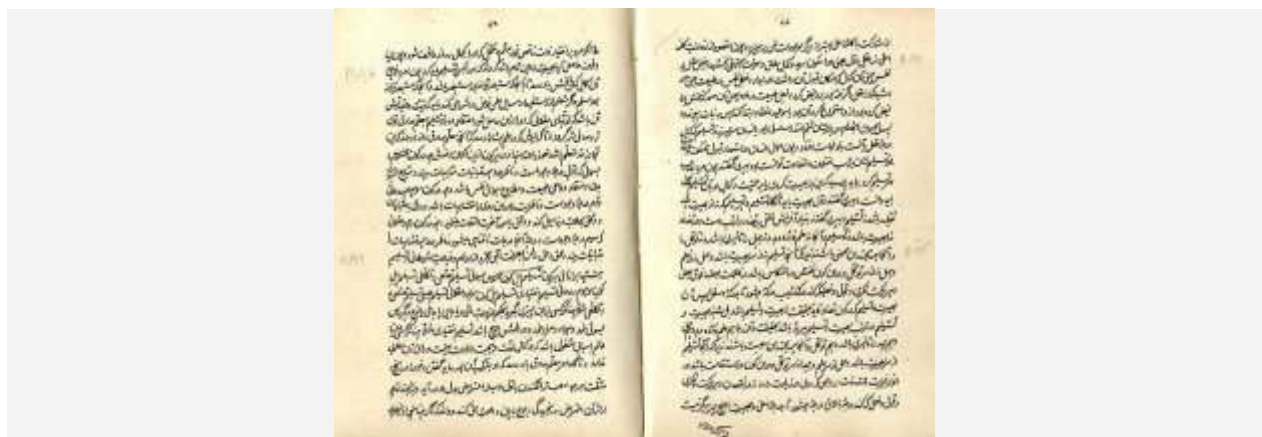


The Alamut Fortress was perched at an elevation of 2,100 meters on a rocky crest. It had a magnificent library that Khawja Nasir made use of. He wrote many Ismaili treatises, working closely with the Imams. The fortress was destroyed on December 15, 1256 by Hulagu Khan as part of the Mongol offensive, and its famous library burned except for a few non-Ismaili works.

Out of these sessions came the clearest statement of a fundamental Ismaili concept of *firman bardari*, that it is not the command (*firman*) that the momins should attach their hearts to but the one who issues the command (*firmandih*). Khawja wrote several pages mining this simple statement. But of all of his philosophical writings, the one particular set of writings that Khudavind would come back to often were the principles of *satr*, *qiyama* and *taqiyya* that Khawja was trying to formulate. Khudavind seemed particularly anxious that Khawja complete the formulation of the concept of *satr*. He repeatedly encouraged Khawja to develop his arguments more fully and complete his manuscript.

The end result was astonishing to say the least. The manuscripts triggered much discussion and debate among the other scholars. Khawja had redefined the meaning of *satr*. Traditionally, it referred to times during which the Imam physically concealed himself, was generally accessible to his community only through his trusted officers, and never to the outsiders. Khawja, however, argued that *satr* describes any period during which the true spiritual reality of the Imam is veiled, regardless of whether the Imam is physically visible or not. Indeed, he asserted that the Fatimid period was time of *satr*. Going further, Khawja argued that at any time – but especially during the time of *satr* – it is only the foolish who, casting aside discretion, gathered to venerate or otherwise draw attention to the Imam without

his consent and permission. It is easy to see why the writings were controversial; the latter especially did not go over well with the rank and file. Khudavind, however, was most happy and made it known so.



Rawdat al-taslim, by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Persian manuscript, dated 1353/1935. Divided into twenty-eight chapters or representations (tasawwurat), this is a comprehensive treatise expounding Ismaili doctrines of the Alamut period. Photo: The Institute of Ismaili Studies

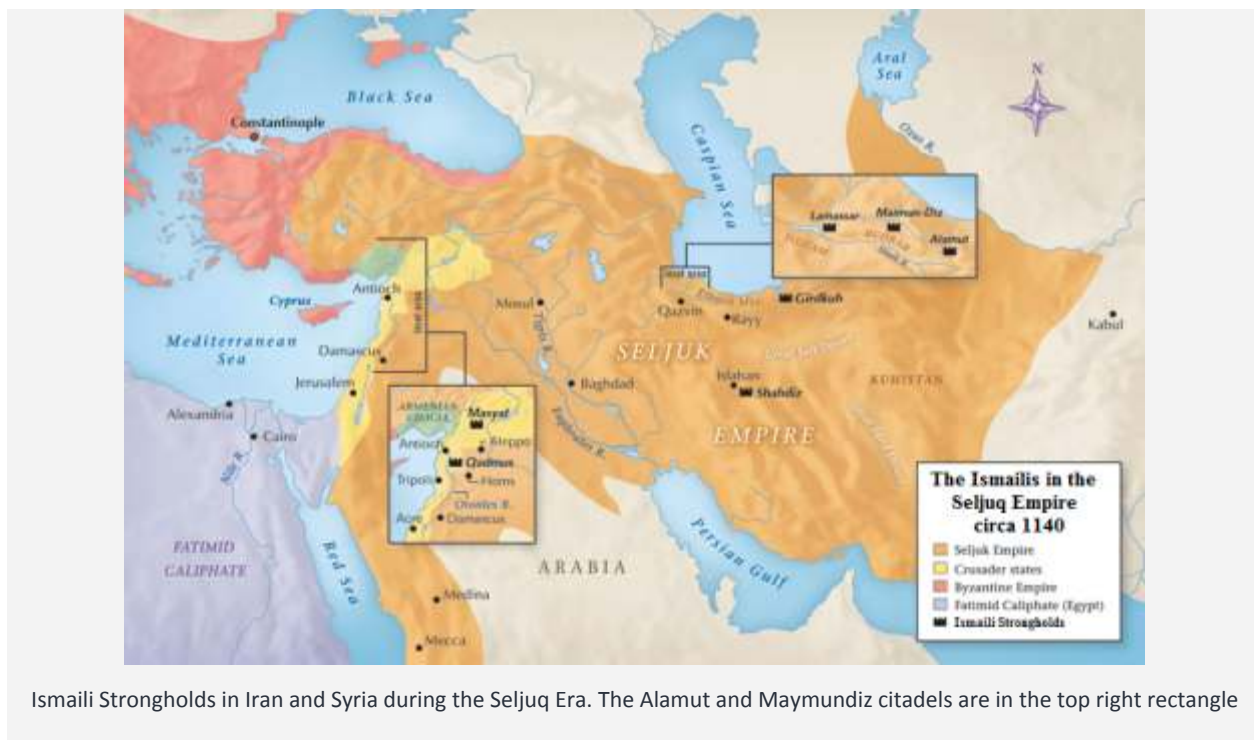
The day before he was murdered, Khudavind Ala al-Din Muhammad had called Khawja to him. Placing his hand on Khawja’s shoulder, he invoked the Almighty to bless Khawja with a long and successful life. He whispered for some time in Khawja’s ear. I was too far away to hear. I wish I had scampered closer. Eventually, Khudavind stood back and said, “Nasir, even the brightest day must give way to twilight and the dark of night. The words that you have penned are the foundation on which my jamat will stand in light or darkness. Even if all else turns to ashes, you must ensure that these words live on.”

Not long after the ascension of Khudavind Khurshah, Khawja was forcibly evicted from his quiet scholarly life and thrust into the limelight. Hulegu’s force was steadily marching towards the Maymundiz. Many, many formidable fortresses across Khursan had been swept away by the evil tide that was flowing out of the East. The new Khudavind wanted Khawja by his side on the war council. “You have seen witnessed firsthand the battle art of the Mongols. You know of their tactics and of their ethics. We need your counsel.”

Now he – Nasir – found himself wrestling with hot-headed soldiers who regarded him as a foreigner, an intruder. And when they heard him speak of the futility of resistance, and of the death and destruction that the Mongols visited upon those that resisted, they whispered that he was weak, that his loyalty was like fat that melted in the heat. At least, there was unanimity on one subject: Shams al-Din Muhammad, Khurshah’s eldest son, the recipient of Khudavind’s *nass*, would need to be spirited away. And so he was – just – mere days before the horde converged on Maymundiz.

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Ismaili Strongholds in Iran and Syria during the Seljuq Era. The Alamut and Maymundiz citadels are in the top right rectangle

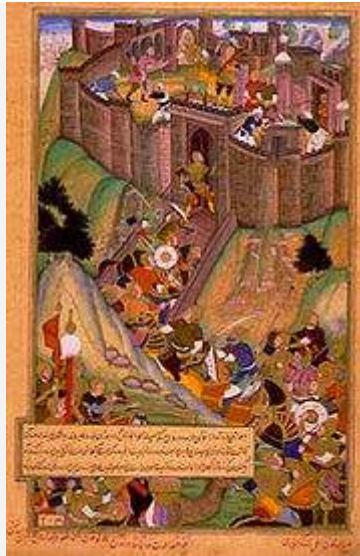
For weeks, the war council met deep in the bowels of Maymundiz (see map), in a room that no one dared breach, not even I. I often scurried by, catching odd angry outbursts: “How dare you suggest that! We will never surrender. We will fight to our very last.”

At other times, only Khudavind Khurshah and Khawja met. On one such occasion, I was scampering by the door and was startled to hear Khudavind shout in anger, “You will, Nasir! By my command, you will!” Even the guards were taken aback. What in the world was going on? I feel like I am trapped in a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma, and the key is to be found inside that forbidden room. How I wish I could be privy to all the secrets that these walls hold!

As days wore on, Khawja grew increasingly irritable and troubled. Whereas he normally had treated me with kindness, now he shouted at me and stamped in my direction. As the Mongols began to gather, Khawja’s behaviour became increasingly erratic. I spied him whispering to some fellow in the shadows.

Meanwhile, Khudavind Khurshah remained resolute to the very end. He tried this and that. He exchanged messages with the Mongol leader asking for such and such terms, and then changing tack. Anything to buy a bit more time. There was so much that needed to be done. All the same, something was not quite right. Khudavind and Khawja avoided each other. Everyone noticed.

On that fateful day, a full week into November, Hulegu began his siege of Maymundiz. The first few victories went to the Nizaris but then, Hulegu called out forth a Chinese ballista and began to hurl heavy rocks and fireballs over the walls. The resulting death and destruction caught the defenders off guard. Khudavind sued for a ceasefire. He indicated that he was ready to consider surrendering. The bombardment stopped but Hulegu threatened to start up again unless Khudavind ordered his warriors to surrender unconditionally. The fida'is urged Khudavind to refuse outright. Khawja, however, stayed noticeably silent. He simply stood there, detached. Khudavind sent Hulegu a series of messages.



A miniature depicting the siege of Alamut

I assume that Hulegu must have finally become frustrated; he must have realized that Khurshah was merely playing for time. The bombardment resumed, with much greater ferocity. For two days and two nights, it continued on and on. Khudavind Khurshah sought Khawja out and after some quick words – was that anger flashing in his eyes? – ordered his soldiers to stop fighting and signal “unconditional surrender”. He ordered his officers and family members who had remained with him – one of his sons and a brother – to go forth and submit themselves to Hulegu. Father, brother, son, nephew drew together in a tender embrace. Every eye welled up with tears but not Khawja’s. His face was masked by a hard, steely look.

Khurshah then convened his final *darbar* at Maymundiz. He lauded the *fidai’s* for their valor and loyalty. He acknowledged all of their sacrifices, called upon the Almighty to bless them all with endless bounty, and promised them that no matter what happens, he would always be by their side. He gathered the dignitaries who had remained with him, including Khawja, and rode down to the Mongol encampment. The place was rife with rumour that Khudavind had given up only because “the foreigner” has convinced him.

Tellingly, he did not explicitly order the *fidai's* to give themselves up and as soon as party had left the castle, these warriors took up the fight once again. Hulegu was furious and demanded that Khurshah command his men to stand down. The messages, however, were ignored. I suspect that the *fidai's* had decided that the Imam had issued the orders under duress and that they did not reflect his true wishes. It was only after three days of fierce hand-to-hand combat that the Mongols finally managed to take Maymundiz. This, however, was not unexpected.

The real shock came when Khudavind and his entourage were finally brought before Hulegu. Hulegu's secretary and scribe – Juwayni – upon being introduced to Khawja, drew him aside. Juwayni introduced Khawja to Hulegu, declaring him to be an eminent scholar and a remarkable astrologer who was not an Ismaili but an Ithna Ashari who had been kidnapped and forced to serve Khurshah. Hulegu welcomed Khawja and invited him into his service. Without so much as a glance at Khurshah, Khawja walked away with Hulegu, the two discussing the treasures in the library at Alamut and Khawja volunteering to help Juwayni identify all the important books and instruments. Of course, Khawja's own books – all of them – featured prominently on this list.

In due course, Khurshah and all of his family members in Mongol custody were murdered. Khawja knows this. How could he do what he did? After calling himself an Ismaili for decades? After earning Khudavind's trust? Even after all these years, I still haven't managed to come to terms with turn of events on that faithful day! At the time, even the non-Ismaili scholars who had been at Maymundiz and who had accompanied Khurshah from the castle were aghast. "What irony that this double-dyed traitor should be the author of a Persian magnum opus on Ethics," they whispered to each other.

An act of betrayal? Khawja, an opportunist? Everything suggests so. It all seems to fit. But then, why this nagging feeling? After all, I never once heard Khawja speak of Khurshah's son Muhammad's escape to Azerbaijan, not even when Hulegu and his generals boasted of having put an end to the line of Ismaili Imams. Indeed, he knew that even the Ismailis themselves continued to survive – in hiding, for sure, practicing *taqiyya* and passing themselves off as Ithna Asharis. After all, he had outlined the very doctrines in practise during this period of *satr* and had been by Khurshah's side when the *da'is* left Maymundiz with the Imam's instructions. And over the years, he had indeed worked hard to shield the Ithna Asharis from the caprice of the Mongol rulers. Is it possible that all that has transpired is merely an elaborate veil?

So here we are in the courtyard of the Maragha Observatory. There sits Khawja, suffering under a blistering sun, staring off into the horizon, muttering to himself. May God grant him peace!

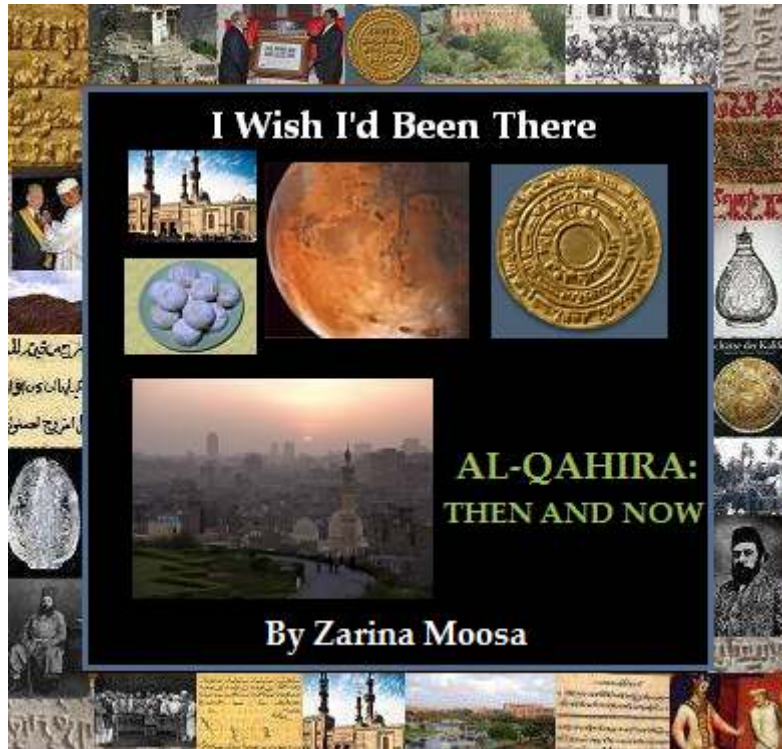
And who am I – just an old, weary brown mouse who has spent most of his life riding Khawja's coat-tails.

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*Editor's Note:* The lack of any clear understanding of Tusi's character and his actions prior to and following the Fall of the Alamut is one of many mysterious gaps in Ismaili history. Tusi held positions of honour in courts of Ismaili rulers as well as at the Alamut and Maymundiz from 1227 to 1256, during which time he produced his remarkable treatises on astronomy and ethics. It is widely accepted that he embraced Ismailism during this period and made major contributions to the development of Nizari Ismaili thought. Yet, when the Mongols laid siege to Maymundiz, historians note that Tusi was influential in convincing the Imam to surrender. He then renounced his Ismaili past and joined the services of Mongols as a trusted adviser to Hulegu himself. Why? Was Tusi an opportunist? Or was he, as some have suggested, under *taqiyya*. The debate rages on and our author, Arif Babul, wishes he was there to see all and hear all. The recall is a historical fiction, incorporating known facts supporting both sides of the debate, to imagine a possible storyline without intending to predispose the reading.

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Al-Azhar university founded by the Fatimids, a plate of Egyptian pastry kakhk, planet Mars, a Fatimid gold dinar from the time of Imam al-Mui'zz, and a view of Cairo from the Al-Azhar park which was conceived by the Aga Khan, the 49th and current Imam of the Shia Imami Ismailis

Al-Qahirah: Then and Now

By Zarina Moosa

Al-Qahirah, the victorious one is now known as Cairo, the city of a thousand minarets. I am atop the hillside kiosk at the Al-Azhar Park.

Today, Cairo is basking in the spring sunshine. It's May 2010. I see the outlines of the various Fatimid and other Islamic monuments, and as I reminisce about *al-Qahirah* of ten centuries ago, I go on a flight of fancy and take an *avatar* to land myself in the court of Imam-Caliph al-Mui'zz, and spend several years there.

On arrival, I learn that some years earlier, Jawhar, the Fatimid commander had entered Fustat in 969 and laid the foundation stone of the city of *al-Qahirah*, named after the red gold planet Mars which was in ascendant at that time.

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Several gates leading in and out of the city were also built as well as the *Jamia Al Azhar* and the *Qasara-Muizziya* – the castle for Imam al-Mui'zz.

Today is the 5th of *Ramadhan*. I have just attended the first *darbar* of Imam al-Mui'zz, a most historic and a moving occasion, where the citizens of *al-Qahirah* had gathered to pay their allegiance to their Imam in an elaborate ceremony.

After the *darbar*, there are celebrations and festivities, however, my travel through time and the emotions experienced at the *darbar* have made me a little tired and so I go and seek help from Muhammad bin Ibn Said Al Tamimi, the most famous physician and therapist who now lives and practices in *al-Qahirah*. He prepares for me some medicinal concoctions which revive me.

Wherever I look there are fascinating events happening in this land that my Imam is ruling. I take the time to go and see and admire the most famous wall hanging depicting the map of the world, “a magnificent work on a fine piece of blue silk; it represents the continents with all the cities and mountains, seas and rivers, and underneath it is written ‘*Made on the command of al-Mui'zz li-Din Allah*.’”

Spending time with Musa bin Ali'azar al-Israili, the author of a book on culinary art of that time, is a treat. He instructs me in how to make the sweet pastry, *Kahk* that is distributed by Imam al-Mui'zz among his subjects at the end of *Ramadhan* to celebrate *Eid*. The ingredients of this iconic pastry are flour, pistachios, walnuts, hazelnuts, dates, raisins, honey, sesame oil, sesame seeds, aniseeds, saffron, and sugar and spice. His book called *Kitab al-Muizzi* is dedicated to Imam Al-Mui'zz. Indeed, this delicious pastry is so popular that one of the successors of Imam al-Mui'zz allocates 20,000 dinars to bake the *kahk* at feast time. During the reign of Imam al-Aziz, at feast time, he designates a table of several hundred metres long bearing some sixty different varieties of *kahk* and butter cookies topped with nuts known as *ghurayiba*. Imam al-Aziz's also establishes a bakery devoted specifically to the making of *kahk*, called *dar al-fitra*, where a piece of *kahk* is the size of a loaf of bread.

By 975 AC, in the reign of Imam al-Mui'zz studies have begun at Al-Azhar. Spending some time studying at the University is a great privilege; my life revolves around lectures, seminars and readings as well as the great library which is the envy of scholars from far and wide. The library has a rare collection of books ranging from art, architecture, philosophy, medicine and astronomy. Most of all I enjoy studying the stars, the planets, the constellations and the star positions; the drawings and charts of what to view and when.

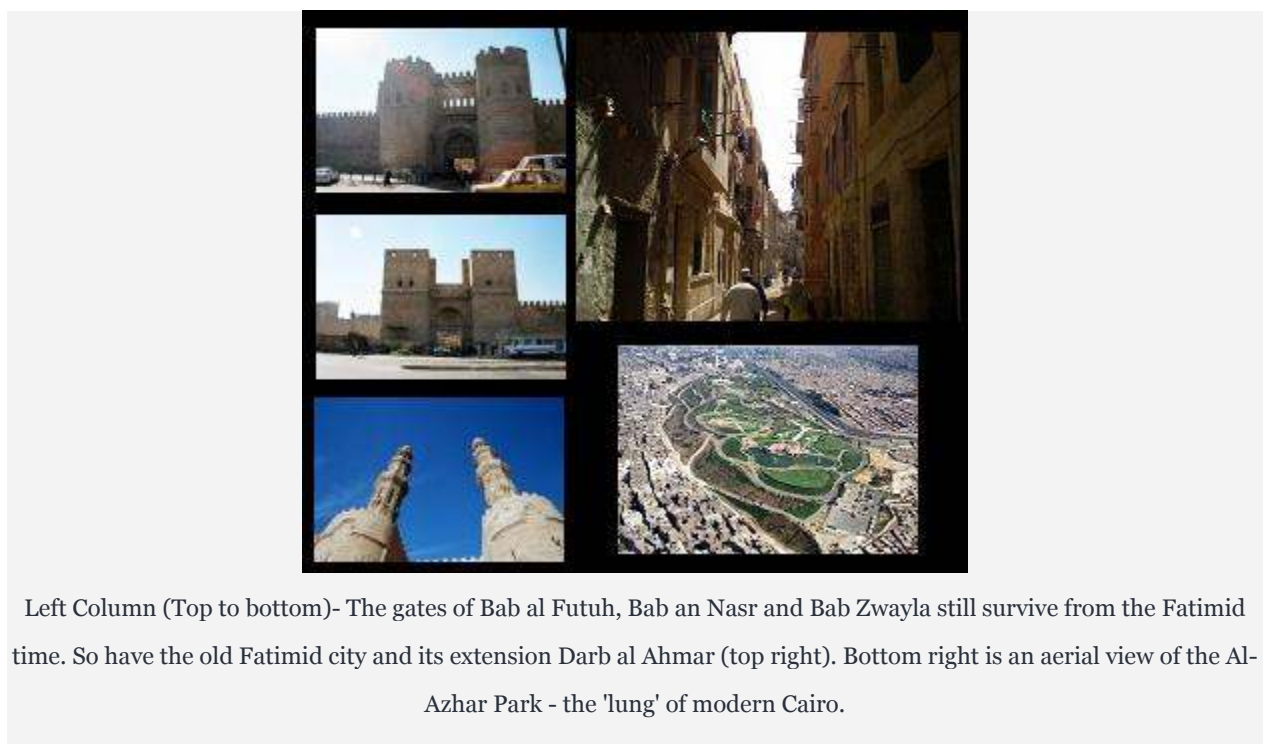
The librarian tells me an amazing story of how Imam al-Mui'zz one day came to the library and when the book he was looking for could not be located the Imam himself decided to take a look for himself, though it was already past nightfall. He set himself in front of one of the cabinets, where he thought the book may have been, and pulled a

volume off the shelf. As he leafed through it, he became fascinated by certain passages and began to read more closely. Before he knew it, he was reaching for another volume, and then another, and another. In the Imam's own words: "I completely forgot why I was there and didn't even think of sitting down. It wasn't until I felt a shooting pain in my legs from standing so long that I even realized where I was!"

The *soirees* in honour of the artists and the musicians are always packed. My prized collection includes gold dinars of the highest quality that were minted during the reign of Imam al-Mui'zz.

I wish I'd been there to witness, celebrate and participate in some of these most historic and splendid events.

Fast forward to now May 2010.



Today, Cairo is by far the largest city in Egypt. With a dense population, the city suffers from high levels of pollution and traffic. Yet, this thousand year old city still retains many of the same streets and buildings. The gates of *Bab al Futuh* and *Bab an Nasr* to the north, *Bab Zwayla* to the south, still survive from the Fatimid time. So have the old Fatimid city and its extension *Darb al Ahmar* together with the mosques, *madrassa* and mausoleum. To the south are Sultan Hassan Mosque and the Ayyubid Citadel.

Al-Azhar University still remains the chief centre of Muslim intellectual life. It has even admitted women a few years ago.

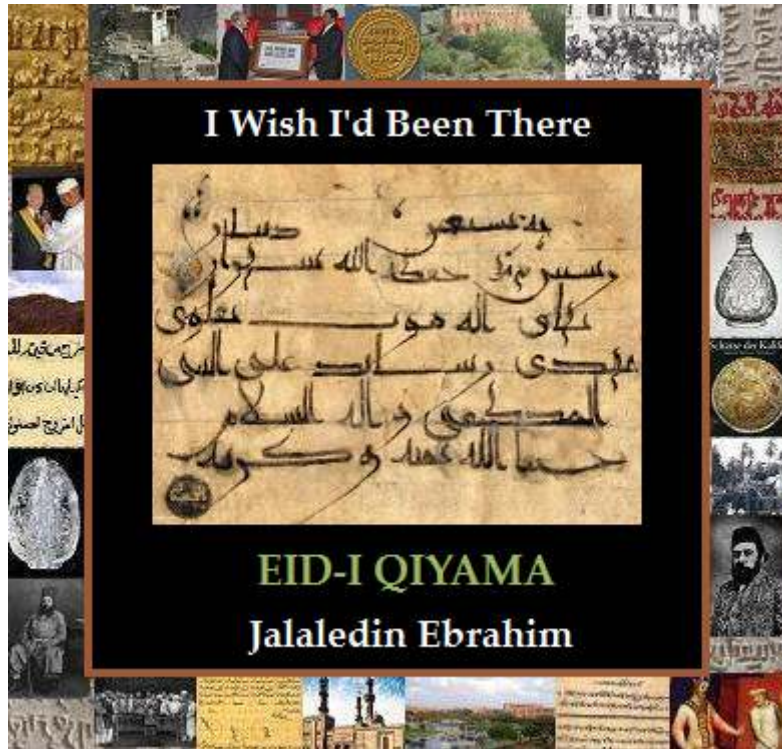
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Amid all the noise, the traffic and the hubbub of Cairo, there is one piece of heaven on earth, and that is the *Al Azhar Park* donated to the citizens of Cairo by Hazar Imam, a much needed lung for Cairo where people can escape and find respite from Cairo's city life.

I descend the hilltop kiosk towards the lush gardens and the fountains, and as the sun sets and the night falls, there, towards the west rises the moon and the planet Mars (*Al Qahirah*) to the moon's upper right. Mars is again in ascendant over the city of Cairo and will remain so over the next few months.

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Hasan-i Sabbah acquired the fortress of Alamut from a certain individual named Mahdi, and gave a draft of 3,000 gold dinars as the price of the castle. The vellum document in the centre of the image is deemed to be a later copy of this draft. Photo: The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

## The Eid-i Qiyama!

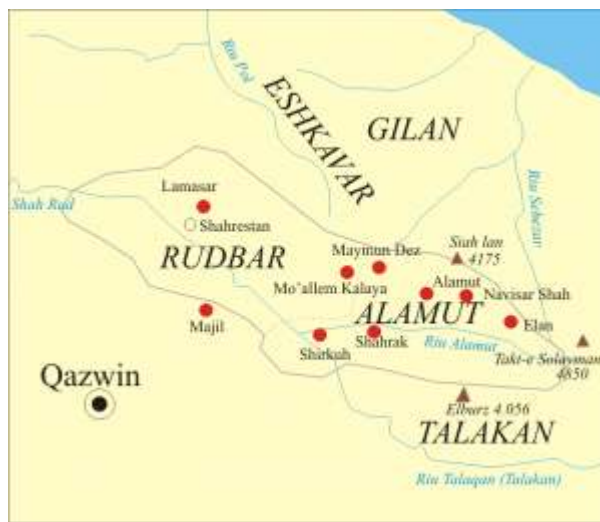
By Jalaledin Ebrahim

A solemn ceremony on August 8, 1164 AC, was organized at the foot of the castle of Alamut, set deep in the Alborz mountains. It was the 17th day of Ramadan in the noon day sun. There was not a single solitary cloud in the sky and the mountain air was fresh and pure.

Those of us in the volunteer corps were apprehensive that day because we were asked to prepare for some announcement that might alter the course of history. I, for one, was aware of my limitations of not having strictly observed self-discipline and purity that were called for during the month of Ramadan. I felt the least I could do was to

make myself available to support those guests who had traveled great distances on foot to gather for this extraordinary event.

The royal trumpets sounded to silence the whispers and fleeting conversations amongst the delegates and traders who had not seen each other in years because travel had been restricted due to severe security concerns. People had sometimes disappeared without a trace as they traveled incognito between settlements and in the surrounding areas. Quiet! Listen!



A beaming representative of the Imam, dressed in a ceremonial robe, slowly ascended the special pulpit erected on the public prayer ground for this momentous and auspicious occasion. He was sent here to deliver an announcement on behalf of the fourth Lord of Alamut. It was a declaration of new instructions for the Jamat. The murids began to recite the salwat which washed over this sacred venue like powerful sonic waves. *Allahumma salli alla....* A hush came over the gathering as the Imam's Da'i and Hujja, Hasan, sword in hand, began to project the Imam's instructions in a loud voice. Fortunately the acoustics of the mountain fastness made it possible for all to hear the Imam's words admonishing the Jamat to follow Hasan, obey his commands in all spiritual and temporal matters, and treat his words as that of the Imam. He announced that the Imam had relieved all of those gathered there of the burdens of the shari'a and that the Imam had brought all who had been steadfast murids to the *Qiyama*, a special day of resurrection.

It felt as if the ground beneath us began to tremor for just a moment, and I could have sworn that celestial music came wafting through on a sweet and gentle breeze. There was a spiritual fragrance in the air that reminded me of rose, jasmine and sandalwood. I felt like I had been reborn, that some overpowering force had wrenched my soul out of my breast and washed it clean. I felt light headed and a little dizzy. I almost dropped the silver tray I was holding. The stress and tension I had been holding seemed to vanish in the mountain air.

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A *khutba* was then delivered by Hasan in Arabic with a simultaneous translation in Farsi for all the Persian-speaking delegates. After completing his address, the Da'i performed two *rak'ats* reserved for festive occasions and declared that this *Eid-i Qiyama* was to be a festive occasion. Something mystifying and incomprehensible had just occurred. Murids had been speechless during the pronouncements but the weariness of travel and fasting seemed to disappear as some of the murids joined in heartily breaking their fasts. But there were some who could not bring themselves to physically eat or drink because their hearts were weeping, and their tears were flowing through glistening, light-struck eyes. Theirs was an internal celebration that moved me to my core. They too were eating and drinking but *their* food and drink was *not* what I could serve up on a platter.

As we volunteers scurried around offering our services, I could over hear many speaking in hushed tones of the profound significance of what had just happened. Some even declared that the Da'i was no other than the twenty-third Imam himself. How was this event possible? What did that say about the nature and authority of the Imam?

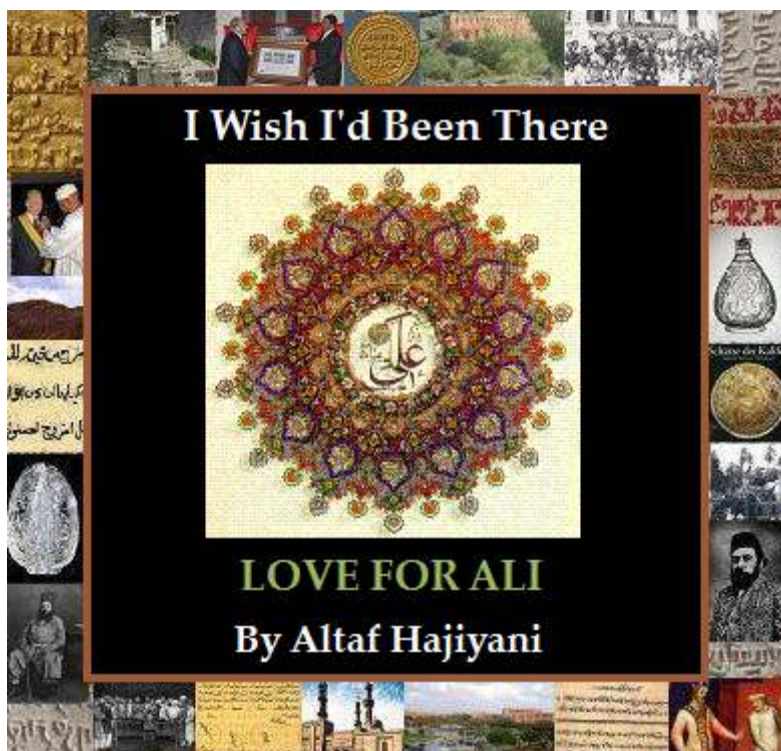
There were heartfelt expressions of rejoicing and *al-Hamdullilah* could be heard at every turn. Yet there was also a collective feeling of spiritual peace and uplift that was palpable, surreal, mysterious and regrettably quite impossible to capture in poetry or prose. You had to be there.

Was this the beginning of a new day or the end of an epoch? How will it be remembered?

Ya Allah, Ya Muhammad, Ya Ali, *I Wish I'd Been There* that day!

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Note: In this contribution, Jalaledin has used his imagination for the setting of the event.



A modern computer-aided Shi'ite calligraphic design with the name of Ali in the centre. Calligraphy has the prophet's words "*dhikr Ali ibada*" (remembrance of Ali is an act of worship). Source: al-islam.org

Love for Ali

By Altaf Hajiyani

Hazrat Ali (AS) the first cousin, son-in-law, first male convert and the champion of Islam is revered, loved, and respected by all communities in Islam. However, this affection is at different levels for different Tariqah's within Islam. For Shia Muslims he is at the center of their spiritual guidance and the very first Imam and rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). The Sunnis regard him as one of the four rightly guided caliphs.

The affection that Shias and Sufis as well as other Muslims hold for Ali is not unusual as it was the Prophet himself who showed his profound feeling for Hazrat Ali right from the time he was born in the House of God, the *Kaaba*. Indeed, it is said that when Hazrat Ali was born he did not open his eyes, nor his mouth till the time Prophet Muhammad took him in his hands.

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Ali is the one who climbed Muhammad’s shoulders to bring down the idols in *Kaaba*. He defended and fought valiantly for the glory of Islam in major battles including those of Badr, Uhad, Khandak and Khyber. At Khyber, which is regarded as the climax of all the battles, the Holy Prophet entrusted the command to Ali – “the beloved of Allah” – after a series of unsuccessful attempts to defeat the enemy. Wasn’t it Hazrat Ali who put his own life in danger when Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina?



This panel praises Hazrat Ali and his famous double-edged sword with the topmost statement executed in black ink: "There is no victory except 'Ali and there is no sword except Dhu al-Fiqar (la fath ila 'Ali, la sayf ila Dhu al-Fiqar). Image: Wikipaedia

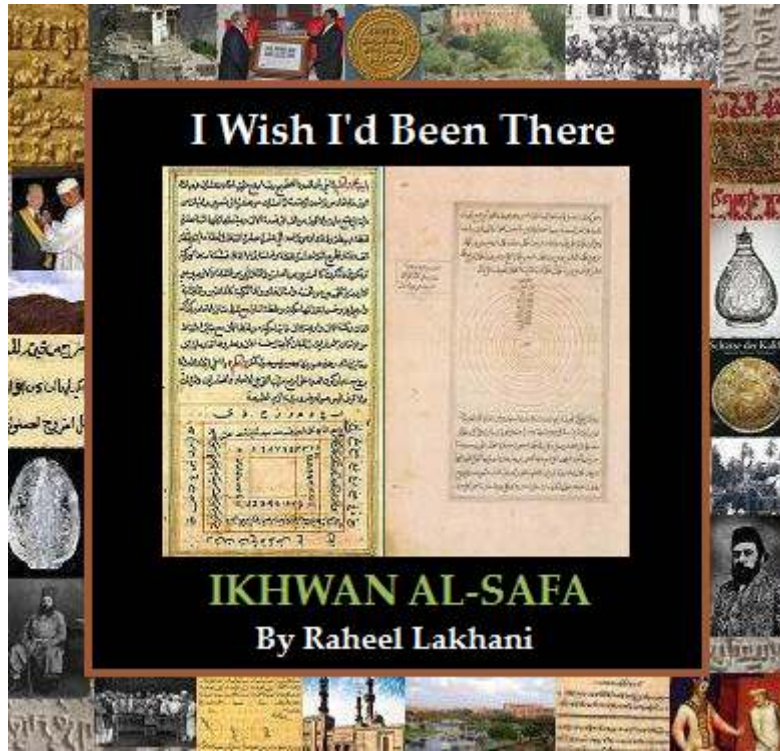
Commons

Hazrat Ali was not only the Prophet’s cousin, son-in-law, or the first convert to Islam, but he was the one who bore the same light as the Holy Prophet. According to a number of well known *hadiths*, the Prophet had proclaimed that “Ali and I are from same light” and “People are from various trees, but Ali and I are from the same Tree.” Hazrat Ali was married to Hazrat Bibi Fatima, the daughter of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. With their two sons Hussain and Hasan, the five together are known as the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

The Prophet had said that Ali was to him as Aaron was to Moses, except that there would no prophet after him. In one specific incident in the presence of some of the closest companions of the Prophet, Hazrat Ali had said “Ask, ask what you want to know about the Qur’an and I shall inform you about it.” Thus the reference to Hazrat Ali and his descendants as *al-Qur’anu ‘n-Natiq*.

For all Shia Muslims, the love for Hazrat Ali and his descendants is of the utmost importance and priority. He was divinely ordained as the Prophet’s successor. Ali is also one of the 99 most beautiful names of Allah. According to a famous Shia tradition Ali had said, “*Ana nukhtatan Ba*” (i.e. I am the dot under the *Ba* of *Bismillah*).

I Wish I'd Been There to witness some of incidents which occurred during the life of Hazrat Ali, showing him as Islam’s defender and champion as well as to observe the mutual love between him and the Prophet Muhammad.



At left, the earliest manuscript of the *Rasa'il* in the Institute of Ismaili Studies collection probably originates from Syria and was copied in the mid-thirteenth century; other manuscripts in the collection were copied between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in Persia and India.

Ikhwan al-Safa

By Raheel Lakhani

During the second and third centuries of Islam, an era of philosophy emerged in Muslim civilizations where both *Mutazalites* and *Asharites* held debates on issues of free will, God's attributes and the nature of scripture. The former adhered to rationality for acquiring truth, while the latter believed in a more traditional interpretation.

Later, in the fourth century, a group known as *Ikhwan al-Safa* (or the Brethren of Purity) emerged in Basra.

Being multi-disciplinary in today's age is considered to be a great asset. The same fundamental pillar radiated in the works of the *Ikhwan*. The beauty in their teachings was that there was no fragmentation of knowledge. The *Ikhwan* sought to show the compatibility of the Islamic faith with other religions and intellectual traditions, and drew on a wide variety of sources for their ideas – a vision lacking today in many parts of the world.

The group believed in pluralistic insight of philosophical and religious discourse where man's chief clue to the knowledge of the world must be the knowledge of himself.

I Wish I'd Been There to experience the broad vision of inclusiveness and pluralism that the *Ikhwan* imparted in one of the earliest phases of Islamic intellectual thought.

THE PARABLE

In this parable, "Man is an Epitome of the Preserved Tablet" (*al-lawh al Mahfuz*), the *Ikhwan* explain their philosophy of acquiring knowledge for betterment in this world and the next.)

There was once a wise and great king, who wished to educate and train his beloved children so that he could bring them to his Court. He therefore built a palace and assigned to each one of his sons a separate chamber in it. Then on every wall of each chamber he illustrated and portrayed all the sciences in which he wished to educate them. He also gave to each of his sons servants to look after all their needs. Then he said to them, "Consider what I have portrayed for you in the chamber, study it deeply, think carefully on its meaning. Then, when you have mastered everything, I shall bring you to my court where you will always be with me and I with you."

In each of the chambers he had shown the following sciences:

- (1) On the ceiling he had drawn the planets and spheres of the Universe and the stars and explained how they moved and how their movements were regulated.
- (2) In the courtyard he had portrayed the geography of the earth, the division into various regions, the mountain ranges, oceans and rivers. He had also explained what the boundaries of the various countries were and the existence of trade routes between them.
- (3) On the wall in the forefront of the chamber he had written about the Science of Medicine and the Natural Sciences, explaining the differences between the various species of Animals and Vegetation, their uses and their futility.
- (4) On another wall of the chamber he had explained the field of Industry and Trade and dealt with the rules of business and the marketing of goods.

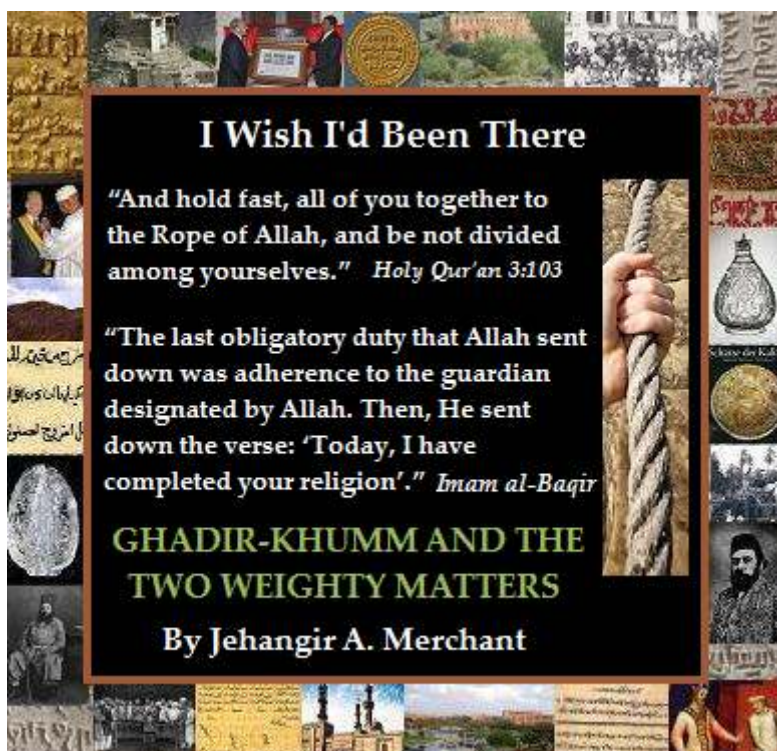
(5) On the third wall he had explained about Religious Beliefs, the principles of Law of what is *halal* and *haram*.

(6) On the last wall he had written about Politics and the ways of government in different countries, the army and similar institutions and how these were to be organized for the welfare and protection of its citizens.

This, then are the six fields of knowledge that the King wished his sons to be educated in – but this is only a metaphor struck by Wise Men. In reality the King stands for Almighty Allah, the palace represents the Universe, the sons represent humanity and the chamber is the human body. The illustrations on the walls exemplify the beautiful and wonderful workings of the human body and each science represents a faculty and capacity of the human soul and its knowledge.

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An image of an individual holding tightly to a rope, symbolizing the Qur'anic verse, and a saying attributed to the Shia Imam al-Baqir.

## Ghadir-Khumm and the Two Weighty Matters

By Jehangir A. Merchant

A huge caravan of around 100,000 Muslim pilgrims, spread over many miles of the desert, is returning to Medina after completing the Hajj in Mecca. As it reaches Ghadir-Khumm, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) is commanded by Allah to deliver one of the last verses of the Holy Qur'an:

“O Messenger of Allah, make known what has been revealed to you from your Lord, for if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message. Allah will protect you from mankind.” (Holy Qur'an, 5 : 67)

The date is March 16, 632 C.E. A camp is then decreed at this valley, and the caravan gathers together in a vast open space. A platform is constructed from which the Prophet would speak.

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The revelation of the verse renders this as one of the most unique messages in the Prophet's entire mission. It is crucial and failing to deliver the message will make his prophetic mission incomplete. The Prophet mounts the rudimentary platform with Hazrat Ali (AS) by his side. The murmuring in the crowd turns to a silence.

As the Prophet begins his speech, he pronounces the verse he has received from Allah. He then seeks a confirmation from the pilgrims as to whether he has indeed proclaimed all of God's commands. They affirm this with a resounding voice. Looking up into the desert sky, the Prophet says, "O God! You be our witness to this day."

"What could this be all about, with Ali on the stage beside the Prophet? A revelation of twenty three years nullified and judged incomplete without the announcement he is about to make!" I might have pondered, had I been there.

The Holy Prophet's subsequent actions and words provide the context of Hazrat Ali's presence on the stage. The Prophet takes Hazrat Ali by his hand and raising it pronounces in his high, clear and firm tone:

"He of whom I am the Mawla, Ali is also the Mawla. O Allah! Be the friend of him who is his friend and the enemy of him who is his enemy. O Allah! Help the one who helps Ali and forsake the one who forsakes Ali!"

This singularly important Message from Allah, and the words of the Prophet find further clarity as he adds the following pronouncement:

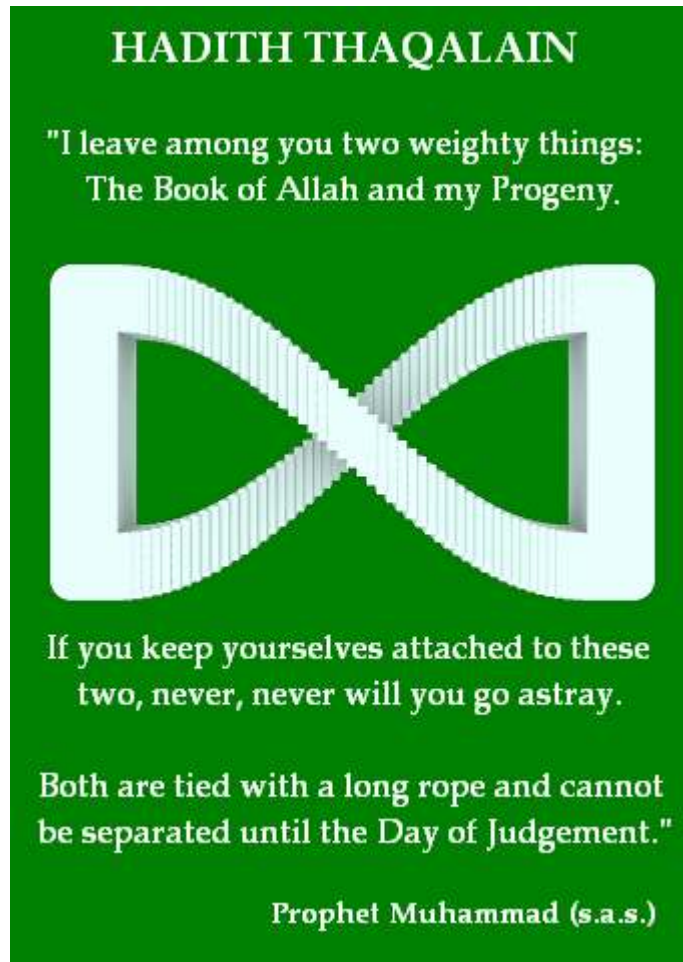
"I am leaving amongst you two weighty things after me, the Qur'an and my Progeny (*ahl al-bayt*). Verily, if you hold fast to them both you will never go astray. Both are tied with a long rope and cannot be separated till the Day of Judgement." (*Muslim, Vol. II, pg. 279*)

With these pronouncements, the Prophet lays the foundation for a new Divine Order. The two *weighty* matters (*thaqalain*) – Allah's final Book and the Holy Prophet's progeny through Hazrat Ali – are new partners till the *Day of Judgement*.

Before descending from the pulpit, the Holy Prophet commands every one of the returning pilgrims to offer their *baiyah* (oath of allegiance) to Mawla Ali. Omar ibne Khuttab, who later became the second Caliph, was the first to congratulate and offer his *baiyah* to Mawla Ali saying:

"Congratulations! Congratulations! O son of Abu Taleb, you have now become my *Mawla* (Master) and *Mawla* of every faithful man and every faithful woman." (*Ghazzali, Sirrul-Alameen*)





Hearing the words of felicitations offered by Omar to Ali, our Holy Prophet asks him to address Ali not as 'son of Abu Taleb' but as *Amirul-Mu'mineen* (the Lord Commander of the faithful).

Thereafter, the pilgrims present offer their *baiyah*. The Prophet also commands them that on their return they ask those not present to acknowledge Ali as their *Amirul-Mu'mineen*.

This momentous event at Ghadir-Khumm, almost at the end of Prophet Muhammad's successful mission as the Last and Final Prophet of Allah, culminates thousands of years of Divine Revelations through God's appointed Messengers. And thus, the revelation:

"This day have I perfected your religion for you and have completed My favours upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (*Holy Qur'an, 5:3*)

Thus, Ali becomes the guardian (*Wali*) and the master (*Mawla*) of all believing men and women, and the Prophet's successor. Allah's favours upon mankind are completed, and Islam becomes the perfect religion in His sight.

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A bilateral Guardianship (*al-Walaya*) between Hazrat Ali and the Muslim community is established. *Al-Walaya* is so crucial that many generations later, the 4th Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir (AS) says:

“The last obligatory duty that Allah sent down was *al-Walaya* (adherence to the guardian designated by Allah). Then, He sent down the verse: “Today, I have completed your religion ....” (*Holy Qur’an, 5:3*).

The oath of allegiance offered to Hazrat Ali at Ghadir-Khumm as well as the Qur’anic verse (48:10) concerning the *bayah* is too important to be ignored, and some five centuries later a thinking Nasir Khusraw, who is not yet an Ismaili, demands answers for questions that bother him:

“Why should later believers be deprived of this reward (*of bayah*)? What fault was it of theirs that they were not born in the time of the Prophet? Why should God allow that hand to disappear? There has to be someone at whose hand the oath to Allah can be pledged.”

Nasir Khusraw does not despair. His resolve and quest take him to Cairo where the hand of the Fatimid Imam al-Mustansir bi Allah (AS) awaits him.

The complete event at Ghadir-Khumm – the caravan halt arising for the revelation 5:67, the gathering at one location of widely dispersed pilgrims, the construction of a rudimentary platform, Allah’s Message revealed by our Holy Prophet Muhammad giving Hazrat Ali the parity with himself by ascribing him the attribute of *Mawla* as well as instructing Muslims to hold fast to both the Holy Qur’an and his progeny, the raising by the Holy Prophet of Hazrat Ali’s hand followed by the *bayah* to Hazrat Ali – make this a singular event for me and *I Wish I’d Been There*.

But, at the same time, my mind wonders about the events that followed soon after the spirit of our Holy Prophet took flight to the Blessed Companionship on High. About eighty days had passed since the event at Ghadir-Khumm, when our Holy Prophet had made Allah a witness to his call and had seen the *bayah* pledged to Hazrat Ali. Why now was there a doubt and unwillingness to accept Ali as their *Mawla*? And why did Omar, who was the first to offer bayah to Mawla Ali, declare his support for Abu-Bakr as the Caliph at *Saqa-e-fae-bani Saa’ada*?

Nonetheless, the Divine Plan of continual Guidance established at this epoch-making incident has continued to flourish uninterruptedly under Divine Protection for over 1400 years. This principle of direct hereditary descent of the Imam from the Prophet was championed centuries later by the Ismaili poet Nizar Quhistani, often with the support of the following Quranic verse:

“Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all people – offspring, one of the other, and Allah knows and hears all things.” (*Holy Qur’an, 3:33-34*)

Quhistani explained:

“We search for a union with the family of the Chosen (Prophet Muhammad). We search for the truth of son after son. We are totally obedient to his offspring, one of the other. There is no other thing we can add to this but itself. We endeavour in our faith so that we do not turn out to be faithless.”

Thus millions of murids over time have been beneficiaries of the Imams’ guardianship and today we feel this intimate loving care from our 49th Imam, Noor Mawlana Shah Karim al-Hussaini Hazar Imam.

*I Wish I'd Been There* for that epochal event of March 16, 632, when our beloved Prophet Muhammad laid the foundation for the Institution of Imamate which will stay with Mankind forever as affirmed by the *Hadith Thaqaalain* and the Qur’anic verses mentioned above. To conclude, Allah declares in the Holy Qur’an:

“Their intention is to extinguish God’s Light (by blowing) with their mouths; But God has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness however hateful this may be to all who deny the Truth.” (*Holy Qur’an, 61:8*).

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END

PROFILES OF CONTRIBUTORS

Hussein Rashid (*The Mind of Yazid, the Faith of Hussein*) is Professor of Religious Studies at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, where he gives courses on a wide range of subjects including Law and Politics, Sufism, and Music of the Muslim World. He is a regular contributor to religiondispatches.org, which is one of the largest internet publications dealing with religion and culture.

Zahir Dharsee (*Avatar Discourses; Aga Khan III Investiture; Aga Khan at the Ritz in NYC*) grew up in East Africa. He spent some of his childhood years in Tanzania and then moved to Nairobi, Kenya, where he completed his high school education. He is a CGA and lives in Toronto, Canada, where he works in the accounting field. He is a keen reader, and takes interest in history.

Ameer Kassam Janmohamed (*The Faith of My Forefathers*) is the author of "A Regal Romance and Other Memories" published in London in 2008 by Society Books. This highly acclaimed book is a rich tapestry of vividly told personal and family vignettes from 19th century onwards as well as insights of life in Kenya before and after independence. Mr. Janmohamed has been actively engaged with the Rotary Club since the 1950's. Within the Ismaili community he has held numerous positions including serving as a Governor of the Institute of Ismaili Studies and being a director of the Zamana Gallery, both in London.

Ali Mohammad Rajput (*A Unique Moment in the Life of the Punjab Jamat*) has devoted much of his life to a better understanding of his Muslim faith and serving the Ismaili community, after retiring from his university teaching career in Mathematical Statistics in Birmingham. In 1991, following his visit to His Highness the Aga Khan's secretariat in France, he was assigned to go on a mission to Tajikistan. Ever since that time he has been in the service of the people of Badakhshan, where he works as a professor Emeritus at the University of Khorog.

Shamas Nanji (*Another Shalimar*) is a poet and writer living in Edmonton, Alberta. Shamas holds post-graduate degrees from London and McGill. In 2008, he published his third volume of poetry entitled *Meditations on Abraham*. In verse and in prose, Shamas is doing his bit to ameliorate the knowledge deficit in Canada about Muslim civilizations as well as about the Canadian past. Both trajectories endeavour to add to the Canadian imagination, one that has served the land admirably but now needs to enlarge considerably.

Farzana Meru (*Beginnings*) is an Astrophysicist carrying out research into the theory of planet formation. She performs computer simulations to try and understand how giant planets, such as Jupiter, may have formed. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the University of Exeter, UK. Prior to this, she did her undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge, UK, where she studied Natural Sciences, specialising in Astrophysics.

Aleem Karmali (*The Unveiling of Imam al-Mahdi at Sijilmasa*) is a documentary filmmaker and founder of Crescent Productions, which specializes in making creative, balanced and intelligent films about Islam and Muslim societies. His latest films are “Transmission: A portrait of an Ismaili Muslim family in Tajik Badakhshan” and “Home Away From Home: The Return of Ismaili Muslims to Uganda.” Karmali completed a Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London and has an MA in Visual Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Aziz Rajabali Kurwa (*Volunteering at the Dawn of the Age of Imam*) is a dermatologist and operated a clinic in London's famous Harley Street medical district before his retirement. In the UK, he served in the Ismaili community in a number of high profile positions including being the President of the Ismailia Association for the United Kingdom where he developed the concept of Baitul Ilm. He was also chosen by His Highness the Aga Khan to be one of the resident governors of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, which he proudly served in London until 1995. Currently, Dr. Kurwa is an Executive Committee member of *The Association For The Study Of Ginans*, a private initiative.

Barnaby Rogerson (*A Christian Envoy at Ghadir-Khumm*) was born in Dunfermline, Scotland. As travel was a vital aspect of his childhood, he began writing guidebooks on Africa and the Middle East after completing a degree in history at St. Andrew's University. He has also written a string of delightful historical narratives including *A History of North Africa*, *The Prophet Muhammad - A Biography*, and *The Heirs of the Prophet*, in which Rogerson transports the reader back to the 7th-century in a gripping tale surrounding the division of Islam into Shia and Sunni factions. His latest work is *The Last Crusaders*, a story of the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Last Crusader Kings of Christendom.

Navyn Naran (*Weaving a Web of Silence, Only to Know*) was born in Dar-es-Salaam and after beginning her high school in the UK, her family immigrated to the USA where she has lived since. Navyn went to medical school at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, MA. She currently works in Paediatric Critical Care in New York State. She has been an active volunteer in various organizations. Amongst her other endeavours, Navyn enjoys her spare time in nature and in literary and creative pursuits such as writing poetry, from which she finds a certain contentment and inner happiness.

Alice C. Hunsberger (*"Riding Forth to Open the Canal" with Nasir Khusraw*) has spent two decades studying the works of Nasir Khusraw. Her forthcoming book, *Rhyme and Reason: The Philosophical Poetry of Nasir Khusraw* (I.B. Tauris Press, IIS Publications), are edited proceedings from the 2005 international conference she organized. *Rhyme and Reason* will be the first extended study of Nasir Khusraw's poetry both from the point of view of poetic art and philosophical meaning. Her highly acclaimed first book, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan* has been translated into Persian, Tajik, Russian and Arabic. Dr. Hunsberger was a 1999-2001 Research Fellow at the IIS in London, and currently teaches Islamic Studies at Hunter College in New York.

Mohib Ebrahim (*The Three Kings Without Crowns*) is an honours graduate of Simon Fraser University in Computer Science and Mathematics. He has been involved in software development and the IT industry since the 1980s. His current IT project, MasterFile is a state-of-the-art evidence system for academic researchers, investigators and litigators. A keen amateur astronomer for over 30 years, Mohib also enjoys kite flying and studying the relationship between faith and reason. At present he is assembling a comprehensive database of the His Highness the Aga Khan's speeches and interviews. He recently set up *Nanowisdoms* on Twitter.

Maleksultan J. Merchant (*Varas Ismail Gangji: The Turning Point*) began her career as a religious education teacher in 1954 in Lourenco Marques after graduating from India's first Waezin Program in 1951-52. From 1962 onwards she served the Ismailia Association for Tanzania as a religious education teacher and Honorary Alwaezin. In 1974-75 she and her husband, Jehangir, undertook an extensive wae'z tour of East Africa, Europe, U.K, U.S.A. and Canada on behalf of the Ismaili Supreme Council under late Sir Eboo Pirbhai's leadership. She assumed professional teaching and Waezin positions with the Ismailia Association for the U.K in 1975 where she implemented a nationwide Religious Education System. Alwaeza now resides in Vancouver, Canada, where she continues to deliver Waezes, and conducts Ginan classes.

Khalil Andani (*The Great Resurrection*) is an aspiring contemporary Isma'ili thinker and studies Islamic esoterism, Isma'ili history and thought and comparative religious thought such as the perennial philosophy. He is a graduate from the University of Waterloo with Bachelor of Math (BMath) and Master of Accounting Degrees (MAcc) and recently completed his Chartered Accounting (CA) designation. Khalil regularly authors articles and presentations on subjects from Isma'ili philosophy and intellectual thought and their connection to contemporary Isma'ili doctrine and practice.

Pervis Rawji (*Hazrat Ali's Example: What We Can Do Today*) went to Aga Khan Nursery and Primary schools in Uganda before immigrating to Canada. She did her BA and Teacher Training at Simon Fraser University. Pervis taught elementary school in greater Vancouver. She also has a Montessori diploma as well as an MSc in International Policy from the University of Bristol, UK. Pervis has taught English to Ismailis in Iran, India and Syria, and has worked one autumn at the Roshan Clinic in Kabul. Her hobbies are skiing, logic puzzles, badminton and gardening.

Shellyza Moledina (*A Young Murid Aspires to Understand Commonalities*) has just completed a Pharmacy degree in the UK. She enjoys reading history and theology, writing poetry regularly, and debating about current events. She also likes singing and is also a song-writer.

Her poetry is featured in Simerg and she has a blog, <http://shellyza.wordpress.com>.

Shariffa Keshavjee (*Inferno of Alamut*) is a philanthropist and an entrepreneur with an objective to help women empower themselves. Raised in Kisumu, she considers herself a “paka” Kenyan. She is now based in the nation’s capital, Nairobi. Her extensive training and experience in education in Kenya and the UK have benefited her to pursue her work in the women’s development area. She is also known for her team leadership and is an Honorary Associate in London, UK’s World Association of Girl Guide and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) of which she has been a member since 1999. Her other interest is in visual arts where she delights in painting on wood, silk and porcelain using water colours, oils and acrylics. She also likes writing, especially for children, and bird watching.

Heena Jiwani (*Fatimid Power and Learning Spirit*) is currently a 3rd year student at Goizueta Business School of Emory University double majoring in Religious Studies, and minor in Arabic. She resides in Dallas, Texas, and loves to travel around the world and get a feel of different cultures.

Mansoor Ladha (*His Name is Jawhar*) is an award-winning journalist based in Calgary, Canada. He has held several senior editorial positions with daily and weekly newspapers in Canada, Kenya and Tanzania, which included the *Edmonton Journal*, *Morinville Mirror*, *Redwater Tribune* (all Canada), *Daily Nation* (Kenya), and *Daily News* (Tanzania). Currently he freelances for the *Calgary Herald*, the *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Calgary Senior* newspapers and travel magazines. He has also published a book entitled *A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan’s Shia Ismaili Muslims* and is currently working on memoirs on his life in East Africa and in Canada. Last year he was one of the several writers, scholars and journalists invited to contribute a chapter in the book called, *The Story That Brought Me Here*. He has served on several public and voluntary bodies in Canada. He is one of the very few Ismaili journalists who has interviewed His Highness the Aga Khan.

Shazia’Ayn and **Aliya-Nur Babul** (*A Fida’i Mission: Into Saladin’s Tent*) are two sisters who live in Vancouver. Shazia, the younger sibling, is 12 years and currently attends Chartwell Elementary School where she is in grade 6. Aliya-Nur is 14 years old and is a student at Sentinel Secondary School. Aliya-Nur and Shazia both love to write and have previously been published in various magazines. One of their stories published on Simerg concerns the rescue of certain important books from the Alamut castle before the Mongols torched the library.

Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev (*Light the Candle of Wisdom in the Heart*) is originally from Badakhshan. In 1997, he obtained his BA degree from Khorog State University in Arabic and Persian languages and literature. In 2001 he was enrolled into Khorog English Programme sponsored by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS). After completing this programme he was selected to continue his studies at the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS. In 2004, he was enrolled into one year MPhil course in Middle East and Islamic Studies, Cambridge University, which he completed in August 2005. He is now doing a PhD in History at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Aliza Moledina (*Ibn Ridwan and Supernova 1006*) is a first year student currently pursuing a dual degree in Medical Sciences and Honours Business Administration from the University of Western Ontario. Over the past few years, her passion for science led her to produce several science fair projects. For example, in her last project “Heart Race: the Electrocardiogram,” she built an ECG to measure the heart’s electrical impulses. This project won her second place in Biotechnology at the Ottawa Regional Science Fair. In her free time, Aliza loves to read and write as well as perform several forms of dance.

Tajdin Dhala (*Discourses of Hazrat Ali*) completed his secondary school education at the Aga Khan High School in Mombasa, Kenya, and then set sail for the UK in 1948 for higher education, where he obtained a degree in commerce at the Regent Street Polytechnic. Upon returning to Mombasa, he began serving in various capacities in Aga Khan Schools and the Aga Khan Education Board. He became a member in charge for a school for the handicapped. He was recruited by Serena Group, Nairobi, and then the Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi to work in the Material Managements sector. After his retirement in 1998, Mr. Dhala he lived in London, where he provided support in Baitul Ilm. He is currently in Malaysia.

Zulfikarali M.A. Velji Khoja (*Ismaili Penmanship in 1906*) born in Pretoria, South Africa, is a skilled trainer, facilitator, educational consultant and mediator. His experience and training is diverse: with a post-graduate degree in Radio Chemistry from Carleton University, Ottawa, and professional designations from the Universities of Birmingham, Queens, Ottawa, Windsor and the London School of Economics, he has been worldwide on many consulting assignments as a Mediator. As an administrator, educator and trainer, Zul has worked at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and was a headmaster, educator and trainer (Professional Development) to The Aga Khan Development Network, both in Bangladesh and Kenya. He presently serves as the Convener for Donor Services for the Aga Khan Foundation committee in Ottawa, where he resides with his wife, Khairunissa.

Karim Maherali (*Pir Satgur Nur: Miracles in Ginan 'Putla'*) is a 1987 graduate of the Waezin and Teacher Training Program from the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, UK. He is currently employed as an IT professional at the City of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. His academic credentials include a BSc (Honours) in Actuarial Sciences and a Diploma and MA in Education. He is a frequent contributor on Islamic issues on various blogs, Web sites and newsgroups.

Arif Babul (*Khawja Nasir Tusi's Tales*) is Professor and Director of Canadian Computational Cosmology Collaboration, in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, where he researches on how our universe evolved from an extremely smooth state into a rich network of galaxies. He describes poetically the texture of the universe, comparing it to a bejewelled necklace, a spider's web with delicate filaments, or frothy bath.

Zarina Moosa (*Al-Qahirah: Then and Now*) was a teacher, and has served in various capacities in the institutions of the Ismaili community including the Ismaili Council for Kenya. She was a member of the organizing committee of the U.N. Decade Conference for Women held in Nairobi. She dedicates her spare time to voluntary service. She has taught English to new immigrant women and has also helped out at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto for a number of years. Recently, she completed a course in *Star Gazing* at the Ontario Science Centre.

Jalaledin Ebrahim (*The Eid-I Qiyama!*) is a doctoral candidate in Depth Psychotherapy. He has a graduate degree in Counselling Psychology and has worked as a mental health clinician with at risk youth for 9 years. He is currently preparing for state licensure in Santa Barbara, CA as a psychotherapist. Jalaledin is a certified life coach. He blogs on his dissertation research topic "*Towards an Integral Psychology of Islam*" at Jalaledin BlogSpot and on life coaching at Jalaledin Lifecoach.

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