

The top corners of the cover are decorated with a complex, repeating geometric pattern in a teal color. This pattern consists of interlocking stars and lines, creating a lattice-like effect. The pattern is set against a dark blue background. The overall design is symmetrical and elegant, typical of Islamic art.

Faith

In the Light of Living Guidance

Part One

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**(These articles were written by Al-wa`iza
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Importance of Mushkil Asaan Prayers

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made a Farman in Karachi on 29th November 1964, in which he said: "Qur'an says: '*Khalaqakum min nafsin wahidatin*'. This means that God says to you, He is addressing men and women, and He says: He has made you out of one soul." Additionally, since we have all given **bay`ah** to Imam-i Zaman, we are spiritual brothers and sisters. This spiritual fraternity encourages us to pray in unity to alleviate the physical and spiritual challenges faced by all Ismailis globally.

In our Tariqah, prayers are offered individually as well as collectively. The **Satada** week is a time when, through regular attendance and participation in the additional **giryah-u zari**, we become more aware of the power of collective prayer. It is similar to an example in nature - one stick when lit gives a little bit of light and heat, but a huge pile of sticks can produce a great quantity of light and heat.

Our faith teaches us that difficulties, sorrows, trials and pain are part of our lives on earth. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) says: "My thoughts night and day are with you and though in this world, pain and sorrow can never end and everybody will have his own fair share of pain and sorrow, yet it is my prayer that you may have lesser weight and every happiness, due to faith, iman and love of your Spiritual Father."

Mawlana Shah Karim, in a speech in New York in 1986, said: "I think it would be foolish to believe that there are no problems - life is made of problems. They occur every day to just about everyone around the world, and I think that it is important that we should simply accept that that is life, and we must live it fully and courageously."

It is important for us to realise that some of our difficulties and problems stem from our own misdeeds, negligence of our duties and responsibilities, and disobedience to the farmans.

In the Ginan "Sahebjitun more man bhavē", Sayyid Muhammad Shah says: Why should we blame Merciful Allah for what happens to us, since some of our troubles are a result of our own actions, that is, we reap what we sow. He also states that a group or community with a spiritual guide in the form of the living Imam should never refer to themselves as "unhappy" or "distressed." Sayyid Muhammad Shah ends the Ginan by beseeching Mawla to shelter the mu'mins under his care, because Hazir Imam is our only source of help and comfort.

Our Holy Book, the Qur'an, explains that some of our difficulties are a test from Allah. In Surah 2, ayat 155-157, it says:

"And surely We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the steadfast; Who say, when a misfortune strikes them: Lo! we are Allah's and lo! unto Him we are returning. Such are they on whom are blessings

from their Lord, and mercy. Such are the rightly guided.”

Why does Allah test us when He is the most Merciful, the most Compassionate? What is the wisdom in this? We are invited to reflect on the Qur’an, the guidance of our Imams and the teachings of our **da`is**. Such trials are to purify us spiritually by inspiring us to show forbearance and patience and to demonstrate our faith in Allah. For mu’mins, such trials are an opportunity to put into practice the ethics of Islam, such as patience, courage, staunch faith in the face of adversity and trust in Allah. They turn to Allah through additional prayers and **giryah-u zari** and seek help to overcome their difficulties. Such mu'mins cease to regard them as difficulties and consider them as opportunities to gain spiritual strength and reward. We are reminded of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah’s words: “Struggle is the meaning of life. Victory and defeat are in the hands of God, but to struggle is man’s duty and should be his joy.” Further, such mu’mins, according to the Qur’anic ayats quoted above, are rewarded with blessings, mercy and guidance.

Importance of Meanings of Prayers

Our Tariqah places great emphasis on understanding the deep meanings of our prayers. Below, we will discuss some meanings of the first TWO parts of our Du^ʿa:

The first part starts with the Suratu'l-Fatihah, which is the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an. Suratu'l-Fatihah is also known as Suratu'l-Hamd. The seven verses of this Surah, when understood in their entirety, contain the essence and essential message of the whole of the Qur'an-i Sharif.

Suratu'l-Fatihah begins with the attributes of Allah, such as His Mercy, Compassion, His being the Sustainer of the worlds and the Lord of the Day of Judgement. In “iy-yakana^ʿbudu wa iy-yaka nasta^ʿin” It is important to understand that worshipping Allah comes first, followed by seeking His help. In verses 5 to 7, Allah teaches believers to pray for guidance on the Straight or Right Path, which is the path of those upon whom He has bestowed favours.

It would be most beneficial to pause and reflect on the two statements that:

1. Suratu'l-Fatihah contains the essence of the Qur'an, which means that whatever is mentioned in it succinctly is elaborated and extended in the rest of the Qur'an. In other words, the remaining 113 chapters of the Qur'an also describe Allah's attributes and talk about Divine guidance.

2. In it, Allah Himself teaches us to pray for guidance on Sirat al-Mustaqim, which shows, beyond a shadow of doubt, how important and necessary guidance is for humankind.

In this context, it is evident that guidance is the most important subject of the Qur'an and that we must sincerely pray for it. In the first part of the Du^ca, we recite the Salawat and recognise that Prophet Muhammad was Chosen by Allah to guide us. Acting on Divine Command, the Holy Prophet designated Hazrat Ali, and then every previous Imam designated the succeeding Imam to continue to guide humanity on the Straight Path. Thus, the greatest Divine blessing is the personality of Hazir Imam, who guides us according to the time.

The second part of the Du^ca begins with two short ayats. In the first one, believers are enjoined to "Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and the **ulil amri minkum**, that is, the holders of authority or Command from amongst you." Allah uses the word "**Amr**", which means "Command" in this and other ayats which relate to the Imams because they possess Allah's Command and are spiritual guides. This ayat helps us to understand that it is only through obedience to Hazir Imam, who is **ulul-amr** today, and the Holy Prophet that we obey Allah.

Let us make a connection here with the use of the phrase "**hujjati'l-amr**" used to describe Imam-i Zaman in the last paragraph of the first part. "**Hujjati'l amr**" means the proof or

witness of the Divine Authority or Command, which has to be present in every age and time.

Why does the Imam have such an exalted position of being the holder of Divine Command? Ayat 12 from Surah Ya-Sin tells us why. It is “**wa kulla shay'in ahsaynahu fi Imamim-mubin**”, which means Allah has vested the knowledge and authority of everything in the Manifest Imam - an Imam who is present, and who gives the **ta'wil** of the Qur'an for the worldly and spiritual progress of his murids.

The rest of the second part is a deeply inspiring prayer for peace, which is so clearly related to obedience to Allah through His Prophet and the Imam. This is followed by the **Kalimah** or **Shahadah**, which reiterates our belief in the Oneness of God, Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger and Hazrat Ali and the Imams from his progeny as the successors of the Prophet in the position of Amiru'l-mu'minin or the Commander of the believers.

Pir Sadardin's love and devotion for the Imam of his time radiate from his poetry and touch the hearts of murids several hundred years later. In the Ginan “**EjiTu(n)hi gur tu(n)hi nar tu(n)hi abhiaasha - Sreva tamari ham kije ho samiji**,” he says:

Eji Ek feekar munivar tamari chhe umne
Maanas roope Saheb jano ho bhaiji

Pir Sadardin makes a very significant point in this Ginan. He says that he is worried on one count that the followers may

make the error of regarding the Imam as only a man like themselves. He ends by saying that he remembers Allah much through zikr, and he expresses his gratitude for having found the care and guidance of the Imam.

The debate about why Prophets and Imams are human beings has occupied the thoughts, writings and conversations of human beings from the time of Hazrat Adam until today. Many have gone astray because they have been unable to understand why Allah sends Divine guidance through Prophets and Imams, who are in human form. In the Holy Qur'an, in Surah 25, ayat 20, Allah Himself says:

“We never sent before you (Muhammad) any messengers, but lo! they ate food and walked in the markets. And We have appointed some of you as a test for others: Will you be steadfast? And your Lord is All-Seeing.”

Mawlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi, the famous thirteenth-century Sufi poet, has described this constant test for humankind about the human aspect of Prophets and Imams in his renowned ***Mathnawi***, in his wonderful style of poetry, which uses stories to convey important messages. Mawlana Rumi says:

Once there was a green-grocer who had a very sweet-voiced parrot, whose chatter attracted many customers into the shop. One day, the parrot flew carelessly in the shop and broke some bottles of expensive rose oil. The green-grocer was extremely annoyed and, in his anger, struck the parrot hard on his head, causing all his feathers to fall off and making him bald. The

parrot was much upset by this and stopped talking. The green grocer tried very hard, but the parrot refused to talk until one day a bald dervish, i.e., a wandering holy man, passed by the shop. The dervish was also totally bald. On catching sight of him, the parrot broke his silence of many days and screeched: "Hey fellow! How did you become bald? Did you also spill some bottles of oil?"

Mawlana Rumi continues:

"The bystanders laughed at the parrot's inference, because it deemed the holy man to be like itself. Do not measure the actions of holy men by the analogy of yourself, though *sher* (lion) and *shir* (milk) are similar in writing. On this account, the whole world is gone astray: scarcely anyone recognises God's representatives. They set up (a claim of) equality with the Prophets; they supposed the saints to be like themselves. "Behold", they said, "we are men, they are men; both we and they are in bondage to sleep and food." In (their) blindness, they did not perceive that there is an infinite difference between them. Both species of *zanbur* ate and drank from the (same) place, but from that one, the wasp, came a sting, and from this other, the bee, honey. Both reeds drank from the same water source, but this one is empty, and that one full of sugar. Consider hundreds of thousands of such likenesses and observe that the distance between the two is as great as a seventy-year journey. This one eats, and filth is discharged from him; that one eats, and becomes entirely the light of God. This one eats, and of him is born nothing but avarice and envy; that one eats, and of him is born nothing but love of the One God. If

both resemble each other in aspect, it may well be so: bitter water and sweet water have the same clearness. Who knows the difference except a man possessed of spiritual taste? Find him, he knows the sweet water from the brine.”

What Mawlana Rumi says in his ***Mathnawi*** is also echoed in the Ginans of our Pirs. All our Ginans describe the position of the Imam and our relationship to him as his spiritual children and murids. In this context, we were reminded by Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) in his farman in Moscow in January, 1995 that the fundamental principle is the recognition of the Imam of the time for all murids no matter where they come from.

The theme of understanding our holy Du^ca continues with a reflection on some of the meanings of the THIRD and FOURTH parts:

The third part of the Du^ca begins with Surah 5, ayat 67, in which Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to complete his mission of preaching Islam. Prophet Muhammad carried out the Divine Command at Ghadir-i Khumm on his return from his final pilgrimage by publicly declaring the appointment of Hazrat Ali as his successor. In the sermon preceding the appointment of Hazrat Ali, the Holy Prophet said that he was leaving two things for the guidance of the believers: the Book, that is, the Holy Qur'an, and his progeny, that is, the Imams. When the announcement was made designating Hazrat Ali as the Mawla of the Muslims, all those present in their thousands gave **Bay`ah** to Hazrat Ali.

The fourth part of the Du^ca begins with ayat 10 from Surah 48, which is about giving **Bay`ah** to the Holy Prophet. We believe that after the Prophet, the **Bay`ah** should be given to his successor, who is always living and present as the Imam of the time. We give **Bay`ah** or a promise to the Imam of the time and say that we will obey his Farmans to benefit both materially and spiritually. Hazir Imam accepts our allegiance as a testimony of the permanent spiritual bond between ourselves and him.

In the Ginan "*Eji venati karunchun Saheb mora ne*", Sayyid Abdu'n-Nabi urges Mawla to be gracious to his murids. He addresses Mawla as the Sovereign of our souls and says that our honour and well-being are in his protection. Sayyid Abdu'n-Nabi beseeches Mawla for forgiveness, because through disobedience of his Farmans, we often commit sins and harm our own souls (Surah 4, ayat 64). Fully aware of being blameworthy, he supplicates to Mawla to keep his promise to guide, protect and give us refuge. He ends on a joyous note that Mawla, in his mercy, has heard his humble prayer and kept us in his service as his murids, age after age, to guide us through the trials and difficulties of all the ages, by giving us Farmans according to our time.

Inshallah, understanding the clear and common messages of our Du^ca and Ginans will strengthen our resolve to remain steadfast in our **Bay`ah** to the Imam. However, when, as human beings, we make mistakes, there is the daily seeking of forgiveness in Du`a Karaw-wi and an opportunity to strengthen

our resolve to honour the permanent spiritual bond between ourselves and Mawla.

In Surah 5, ayat 15 of the Holy Qur'an, Allah says: "Now has come unto you a Light and a manifest Book." It is clear from this whole ayat and many other verses of the Holy Qur'an that Allah has always sent a Light and a Book for the guidance of humankind.

Earlier, we read that Prophet Muhammad, similar to God in Surah 5, ayat 15, also designated two things for the future guidance of Muslims: a Book - the Holy Qur'an and the Light in the personality of Hazrat Ali and his progeny, the holy Imams. This action of Prophet Muhammad was completely in keeping with the tradition or custom of Allah throughout the history of human beings from Hazrat Adam to the present day.

The concept of Divine Light in the personality of the Imam of the time is fundamental and central in the Ismaili Tariqah. We believe that the allegorical language of the Qur'an can only be understood in the illumination of the Light of Imamah.

The symbol of light is used very often in the Qur'an, in the sayings of our Imams and in the devotional poetry of our Pirs. In ***Da'aimu'l-Islam***, a famous Ismaili book by Sayyidna Qadi Nu'man, a well-known prayer of Mawlana Ja'far as-Sadiq (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) is quoted. It was Mawla's custom to recite it every day after the obligatory prayer of the morning. He used to recite:

“O Allah! make for me a light in my heart, and a light in my ear, and a light in my eye, and a light in my tongue, and a light in my hair, and a light in my skin, and a light in my flesh, and a light in my blood, and a light in my bones, and a light in my nerves, and a light in front of me, and a light behind me, and a light on my right side, and a light on my left side, and a light above me and a light below me.”

This prayer of our fifth Imam, Mawlana Jafar as-Sadiq, leaves no doubt about the importance of light for a mu'min. We understand that Divine Light is necessary for all parts of our body, and Mawla finally asks to be surrounded by light on all sides. There is much barakah and wisdom in this prayer for us.

In the *GINAN* we are about to recite, “***Eji hun re pyasi piya tere darashanki***”, Mira Sayyid Khan's moving words of supplication reach the inner core of our hearts. He declares his thirst for *Didar* and begs Mawla not to turn away from him. He compares his suffering with the death pangs of a fish, which has been lifted out of water, which is its original abode.

He uses another very appropriate simile of the true love of a moth for light, which it acquires by flinging itself into the flame of the lamp. Mira Sayyid Khan applauds the moth's zeal for sacrifice to merge with the light and uses it to encourage mu'mins to be ready to make sacrifices to attain Divine Light and *Didar*. He says that we are sinners, but we repent and urge Mawla to convert our faults into virtues, because everything is

possible through Mawla's mercy. He also ends the Ginan on a note of hope and light and says that Mawla has forgiven his sins and listened to his supplications, so that all his miseries and sorrows have been put to flight.

Now, to continue to reflect on some of the meanings of parts FIVE and SIX of our Holy Du'a. Part five begins with ayat 27 from Surah 8 of the Holy Qur'an, in which Allah cautions the believers not to betray Him and the Prophet. The Qur'an and Imam are the trusts of Allah and His Prophet. Thus, the believers should accept that the real meaning of the Qur'an is known to Allah, the Prophet and the one whom Allah and His Prophet have appointed, that is, Hazrat Ali and the line of Imams from his progeny. They should not seek the meanings of the Qur'an from any other source, because this would amount to betraying the trusts of Allah and His Prophet.

A very famous Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad is: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate, whoever wants knowledge should come through the gate." Thus, to uphold the trusts of Allah and His Prophet, it is important to recognise the Imam of the time and obey him, so that the true knowledge can be acquired from him.

The sixth and the last part of the Du'a begins with a complete, short Surah known as the Suratu'l-Ikhlās. It is Surah 112 of the Qur'an, and is also known as Suratu't-Tawhid or the Surah of Unity. This Surah is about the Oneness of Allah or the concept of Monoreality, which Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) has explained in his Memoirs.

How can we understand the concept of Monoreality? The example of an ocean can help us. The ocean has many big and small waves, tides, movements and innumerable things are immersed in it, but they are all part and parcel of it. In the same way, everything is a manifestation of Allah, and in reality, there is only Allah or the Monoreality. Within this Monoreality, human beings are blessed by Allah with a capacity not to simply know this reality at a superficial or theoretical level, but to experience it as the Prophet Muhammad did on his **miʿraj**. In other words, the special mercy which Allah has shown human beings is described by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) in the penultimate paragraph of his Memoirs. He says:

“The way to personal fulfilment, to individual reconciliation with the Universe that is about us, is comparatively easy for anyone who firmly and sincerely believes, as I do, that Divine Grace has given man in his own heart the possibilities of illumination and of union with Reality.”

The genealogy of our Imams from the line of Mawlana Ali is also recited in this part. This continuing Rope of Imamat, which in Qur'anic terminology is described as “Light upon light”, is also Allah's Grace to guide us to the Ultimate Reality.

In some verses of “**Anant Akhado**” composed by Pir Hasan Kabirdin, he says that all souls, big and small, belong to Mawla and beseeches Mawla to guide us. In moving words, Pir Hasan Kabirdin supplicates and, in a state of ecstasy, declares that we are nothing and the Imam is everything, and only through

remembering and serving him can our souls attain salvation. In the last two verses, Pir Hasan Kabirdin makes an extremely significant point, which is a necessary part of any effective supplication. He addresses Mawla and states that we do not look to him for justice since we are very sinful, but we plead and throw ourselves on his mercy. Only his mercy can forgive our weaknesses and shortcomings and keep us on the path of guidance.

Reflecting on the cumulative messages of the above articles, it is important to make an intellectual note of the importance of the Light of Imam, because in the context of understanding the significance of the Light of the Imam of the time, the following can be appreciated:

- the light of regular practice of our faith
- the light of **giryah-u zari** or supplication
- the light of additional prayers
- the light of ethical and righteous behaviour and actions
- the light of service and voluntary work
- the light of generosity and sacrifice
- the light of patience and steadfastness
- the light of knowledge and
- the light of reflection.

The essence of Light is summarised by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) in his mubarak Farman in Zanzibar on 14th September, 1899. He said:

“Ismaili faith is like light. You should become light, do not be like fire. Mu'mins should not have enmity towards anyone.”

The Ethics of Islam

Unity

In the following series of short articles, we will discuss and reflect upon the theme of Unity, which is one of the most significant concepts of our faith and practice.

In the *Ginan* “***Eji Sami tamari vadi manhe Nabi Muhammad sinchanhaar***” by Pir Shams from the Indo-Pak Tradition, he begins by using the easy-to-understand example of gardening. He says that Mawla’s garden was irrigated by Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) himself. In other words, Allah sent the Holy Prophet to complete the mission and message of Islam in this world, which Pir Shams describes as the “nine continents or nav khand”. In the second verse, we hear that Prophet Muhammad carried out his mission without any discrimination - his invitation to Islam was extended equally to all human beings regardless of their tribe, ethnicity, nationality or race. This idea is conveyed by Pir Shams through continuing the same imagery of irrigating from one lake or one source of water. However, Pir warns that despite this grace of receiving the initial water, some trees have dried up because it is only possible for faith to flourish if there is continued Divine guidance to keep mu’mins on the path of truth.

In the third verse, Pir Shams urges mu’mins to come together for the sake of our souls, that is, to pray and do good deeds together. He advises listeners to acquire knowledge and

perform good deeds, which he compares to pearls and warns against the five human weaknesses of lust, anger, worldly attachment, arrogance and greed. In the final verse, Pir Shams urges us to subdue all our worldly desires and instead to struggle to acquire spiritual knowledge from the Imam through absolute conviction and obedience of his farmans.

Pir Shams' poetic imagery of the single source of water and irrigating in order to make the faith of Islam flourish and prosper is based on a fundamental belief of Islam, which is that God is one and that all human beings carry within them a Divine spark. To put it another way, we are all created from a Single Soul. It is important to understand this notion of unity because Satada is a Tariqah practice which is founded on the effectiveness of collective prayer, where large numbers of mu'mins gather together in Jamatkhana to offer special, intensive prayer for seven consecutive days. All of us have at some time or other felt and benefited from the power and spiritual energy of prayer offered by mu'mins with like minds and united hearts.

The importance of unity in Islam is affirmed by our natural environment. Another name of Islam is **Din-i Fitrati** or the Religion of Nature, because Islam encourages us to reflect on nature, which is described as another book of Allah. Quite a cursory reflection on nature shows that everything in God's creation is integrated and united, and wherever human beings, through ignorance or arrogance, have tried to interfere in the natural order, there have been serious repercussions. Thus, as true Muslims and mu'mins, we must try to learn lessons from

nature and particularly reflect its unity and integrity in all our communal activities, especially in our prayers, to release positivity and creativity that lead to peace and happiness both physically and spiritually.

Many of our Tariqah practices also reiterate and reinforce the idea of unity. In the Jamatkhana we sit side by side and pray together, making the same gestures of raising our hands in supplication and prostrating or standing up all together to offer **giryah-u zari** tasbih. The **shah jo didar** with which we end our daily du`as, when we look deeply and see ourselves mirrored in the eyes of spiritual brothers and sisters sitting on either side, is an important demonstration of feelings of fellowship and unity. On Fridays, all festival days and during the Satadas, the establishment of **ghat paat** and the partaking of **niyaz** from the same **kumbh** is another strong display of the concept of unity. Before we drink the **niyaz** we pray for all mu'mins everywhere and then for ourselves. Such an understanding of our practices and the concepts on which they are based helps us to draw tremendous satisfaction and strength from the practice of our faith.

Today we live in a time when, due to great changes in our world, we are more and more aware of and in contact with a very diverse global Ismaili Jamat. We know that although Ismaili brothers and sisters in distant parts of the world are different in the sense of culture, ethnicity, language, tradition and history, we love them and pray for them and wish to share with them, because we are all united by our faith in, and

allegiance to the Imam of the time. This reminds us of Allah's words in the Holy Qur'an in Surah 3, ayat 103:

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. And remember Allah's favour to you: how you were enemies and He united your hearts with love and thus you became brothers by His grace; and you were on the brink of hell-fire and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear His signs to you so that you may be guided.”

As Ismailis we are fortunate to recognise the rope of Allah, the Imam of the time and through obedience to his farmans, we promote unity, peace and harmony, not only within our local community, but also our global Jamat, the wider society we live in and humanity at large by participating in the humanitarian institutions of Imamatus.

Patience

Now let us reflect on the concept of “patience”, which is one of the most important ethics of Islam, a recurrent subject in the Holy Qur'an mentioned in 110 different verses and a theme mentioned very often in our devotional poetry. It is a particularly topical theme for discussion during Satada because as part of our practices during this week, we offer special tasbeeh for mushkil asaan, that is, we pray that our physical and spiritual difficulties be lightened or eased.

As Muslims, we believe that our physical life is a gift and a challenge which requires effort and struggle, because the physical nature of our life on earth is bound to bring sickness, death, calamity and difficulty. Referring to this, Allah says in Surah 2, ayats 155 to 157:

“And surely We shall try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to those who are patient; who say when a misfortune strikes them: Lo! we are from Allah and to Him is our return. Such are they on whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. Such are the rightly guided.”

The whole emphasis of the Qur'an is to be patient and steadfast in the face of misfortunes and difficulties and to turn to God in prayer for strength to overcome them. This teaching is prominent in the Qur'anic story of Hazrat Ayyub or Prophet Job as he is known in English. Prophet Ayyub was afflicted with all kinds of physical, mental and spiritual distress. He lost his family, his home and his possessions, and he suffered from a loathsome sickness where his entire body was covered with sores. Despite being troubled to such an extreme, he did not lose faith and turned to Allah for forgiveness and strength. He practically demonstrated the daily supplication in our Du'a: "Iyyaka na`budu wa iyyaka nasta'in", that is, "O Allah, You alone we worship and from You alone we seek help." And Allah eased his difficulties. The story of Hazrat Ayyub is so well-known in other monotheistic traditions too that it has given rise to a saying in the English language, namely: "As patient as Job".

However, as we see in our daily lives around us, the ethical quality of patience is becoming less evident in a world dominated by technology and mechanisation, where human beings are losing the ability to conduct normal human relationships. In recent times, a new phrase, “road rage”, has been coined to describe the lack of patience and the resulting loss of self-control, which has led to the killing of people on the roads of Britain. As a Jamat, we must be aware of our context, so that we can guard against any erosion of the ethics of our faith.

For us as Muslims, patience is a sign of strong faith and submission to God’s will. In Surah 3, ayat 146 of the Qur’an, it is stated: “Indeed Allah loves those who have patience.” The patient mu’min loves God greatly, remembers Him all the time and during his times of trial feels the Divine presence, because the Lord is his friend. This too is expressed very tersely in the Qur’an in Surah 8, ayat 46 as: “Be patient, indeed Allah is with the patient ones.”

Let us remind ourselves to strengthen our understanding of the concept of patience or **Sabr**. It is of fundamental importance in the practice of our faith, in our ability to lead lives of dignity and to pass into the eternal life of the spirit. It is essential to remember constantly the mubarak words of Mawlana Shah Karim in the Talika he sent the Jamat on his fortieth Imam Day: “Wherever you are in time and place, strive to live always by the ethics of Islam ...”

Love and Devotion for the Imam

This article reflects on the most important principle of our Tariqah, namely, love and devotion for the Imam of the Time. This principle is considered the foremost of the seven pillars of Shiah Islam known as WALAYAT, which means love, friendship, devotion and submission to the authority of the Imam. The importance of this principle is reflected in the most significant event in our history when Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) publicly designated Hazrat Ali (*alayhi salam*) as his successor and our first Imam. Then the Holy Prophet prayed to Allah and said: “O Allah! love those who love Ali and help those who help Ali.” This prayer of the Holy Prophet is based on the Qur’an, where in Surah 42, ayat 23, Allah commands him:

“Say (O Muhammad to humankind) I do not ask any reward of you for this (that is, the bringing of Islam to you) except love for my family.”

Love and devotion for the Imam is the foundation of the faith of mu’mins. It is a grace which makes everything possible and easy. For example, the significance of unity, patience, sacrifice and farman bardari are discussed in this series of articles. All of these are possible, easy and indeed a joy, if there is pure love and devotion for Imam-i zaman.

The theme of deep love and sincere devotion is in every Ginan and Qasidah in our diverse Ismaili traditions. We are well acquainted with the powerful imagery in the Ginanic tradition, where our Pirs compare the love and devotion of a mu’min to

the yearning of a fish, which is separated from water or the attraction of a burning flame for a moth. In the Arabic poetry tradition of our Syrian Jamat, a contemporary poet called Adnan has composed a Qasidah called “The True Imam” in which he expresses his immeasurable feelings of love and devotion. He says that he is completely enslaved to his Imam, who alone guides and directs him.

These same profound feelings are echoed strongly in the selected verses of the Ginan “***Sahebji tun more man bhave***” by Sayyid Muhammad Shah. He says that his heart does not love or accept any other than the Imam. Imam-i zaman is such a unique personality that no other can be equal to him. He has wandered and searched through many ages and innumerable cycles, but has never found any other to compare with the Imam.

Further, he says that the Imam is that holy, luminous personality without remembering whom and being conscious of whose **nurani** presence, even a second would be unbearable. Sayyid Muhammad Shah says that those mu’mins who have such conviction in, and love and devotion for the Imam, will never consider themselves troubled or unhappy. In other words, the love for the Imam is like an elixir, which transforms all misfortunes and difficulties into positive challenges and fortifies mu’mins with great spiritual courage and inner happiness. Love and devotion for the Imam are a panacea for all weaknesses and shortcomings. In the final verse, Sayyid Muhammad Shah says that we have all reached the caring

protection of the Imam, and we will never leave the door of his protection for the sake of any other.

The inspiring words of our Ginans and Qasidahs are a mirror of the feelings of all spiritual children for their spiritual father, the Imam of the Time. It is this love and devotion which is at the heart of the unity, affection, dynamism and progress of our global Jamat. It is the same love and devotion which brings us together in Jamatkhanas to pray and supplicate to Imam-i zaman to ease the difficulties of all mu'mins everywhere.

Let us remember the mubarak farman of our 48th Imam, Hazrat Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*): "You will have no fear in this world if you love the descendants of Muhammad and Ali. This one hint includes all the beauties of prayer and religion."

Farman Bardari

Farman bardari or the obedience of Imam-i zaman's farmans, is fundamental for all those who have given **bay`ah** to him. Every day in the second part of our Du'a, we recite a part of ayat 59 from Surah 4 of the Holy Qur'an: "Ya ayyuhalladhina amanu ati ullahi wa ati `ur-rasul wa ulil `amri minkum", that is, "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and obey the Ulil Amr from amongst you". It is evident from this injunction of the Qur'an that only when we obey the Imam or Ulil Amr who has been appointed by the Prophet, can we say that we have obeyed the Holy Prophet. Further, the obedience of Allah is

only possible through the obedience of the Prophet and the Imam of the time.

This obedience of the farmans of the Imam is a fundamental practice of our Tariqah. It is in the context of this that Pir Shams devotes many verses of his composition ***Saloko Moto*** to the subject of Farman Bardari. He urges mu'mins to understand the true status of the Imam and to respect and obey his farmans, because it is this only which can protect mu'mins from committing sins. He describes the status of obedient mu'mins in very moving words and imagery. He says those who obey the farmans remain so near to the Imam that they can be likened to a necklace around his neck. A necklace rests on the chest, close to the heart; thus, such mu'mins experience everlasting happiness, as Imam says: "You are always in my heart, in my thoughts and in my prayers." Pir Shams says that faith should be based on conviction, which is based on farman bardari, which earns the status of becoming part of the Imam's soul; that is, mu'mins become his true spiritual children. Why does Pir Shams give such high priority to farman bardari?

To answer this question, let us reflect on the relationship between the Imam and his spiritual children. Imam is "wa kulla shay'in ahsaynahu fi Imamim-mubin", that is, he is the possessor of all Divine knowledge, power and authority. In other words, his is the perfect intellect. The murids, on the other hand, have a partial intellect. Is this partial intellect sufficient for personal search and self-realisation leading to the recognition of God?

The very foundation of religion is that the human partial intellect requires the guidance of the Divine intellect. Our great **da`is**, such as Sayyidna al-Mu`ayyad have described the relationship of the partial and the perfect intellect by giving the example of the human eye and a source of external light. Both are necessary - the eye cannot function without the light, and neither is the light useful without the eye. In the poem entitled “The Light of Intellect” in the anthology of Ismaili poetry called “**Shimmering Light**”, Sayyidna al-Mu`ayyad says:

“The eye is of no avail if it does not receive light from the sun or the moon or from a burning torch. Similarly, the intellect during reflection by itself remains in the throes of doubt and bewilderment.”

This shows that our intellect is like an eye which can only function in the light of the Imam’s guidance. Thus, when Mawlana Hazir Imam emphasises the role of intellect in our faith, it means that we must use our intellect in the light of his farmans. The purpose and benefit of farman bardari is to develop our individual intellect to attain perfection, rather than “remain in the throes of doubt and bewilderment”, as Sayyidna al-Mu`ayyad says in his poem.

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) guided us to build strong futures not only for ourselves, but for future generations of our Jamat through a sense of unity, a sense of direction, discipline and a sense of organisation. He tells us that we can make the best use of opportunities in the European Union, countries of Africa and elsewhere through brotherhood and

unity. His advice is “to build strength across Jamats”, and he says: “I have mentioned working in international dimensions, rather than individual dimensions.”

He reminded us once again how competition would increase more and more in society in the decades ahead and how this will require all of us to educate ourselves throughout our lives. He recommended that even our leisure time should be used for personal enhancement. Simultaneously, he specifically warned against wasting time generally, during education and in damaging social habits. He also guided us to maintain a balance in our lives by paying particular attention to our spiritual lives. In Daressalaam he said that “success in batini life is very very important.” This requires us also to be aware that all our activities, worldly and Jamati, “should always be encircled by the sound principles of our faith, of integrity, of generosity, of courtesy, of consideration, of caring for others.”

He said how these same principles “bind the Jamat across countries, across frontiers, across languages. It is that which keeps the Jamat as one body of murids, whether they are in Central Asia, in S.E. Asia, in Africa or North America.”

To conclude this article, let us reflect on the Holy Qur’an, in the words of Prophet Abraham, which emphasises and encourages obedience. In surah 14, ayat 36, he says: “... So whoever obeys me he is surely of me, ...”.

Sacrifice

In this piece, let us raise our awareness of another very significant and, according to Qur'anic teachings, an essential ethic of Islam, that is, sacrifice or **qurbani**. The word "**qurbani**" means that which brings nearness or closeness. We are familiar with one derivative of the word "**qurbani**" because in our Du'a everyday, in the fourth part we recite "bi haqqi rusulikal muqarrabin" which means "through Your closest Messengers or Prophets". This helps to understand why, in Islam, sacrifice is encouraged to such a great extent. It is a means of attaining nearness to God, which is the ultimate aim of our faith. It is a means of joining the exalted rank of Prophets who are "rusulikal muqarrabin", that is, they are very close to God.

The Ginan composed by Pir Hassan Kabirdin "***Dur desh thi aayo vanjaro***" contains a verse which urges mu'mins to sacrifice their most loved possessions for the sake of their faith. This idea is founded on ayat 92 of Surah Al-i Imran, in which Allah says very clearly and concisely:

"You shall not attain to righteousness until you
spend (in the way of Allah) of what you love;
and whatsoever you spend, verily Allah knows
it."

The six verses of the Ginan "***Dur desh thi aayo vanjaro***" remind us of the purpose of our life here. Pir Hassan Kabirdin compares our mission with a businessman who travels to far distant countries to trade and make a profit. In the same way, the human soul has come from the spiritual world to the material

world to earn good deeds and the knowledge of truth. On this journey, our constant companion should be the remembrance of Allah, as Mawlana Shah Karim in many farmans has advised us to remember Allah whenever we can by taking the names of Ya Allah, Ya Muhammad, Ya Ali or the names of any Imams. In addition to constant **zikr** or remembrance, Pir gives us the concept of sacrifice and says that whatever we spend in the way of Allah will be returned manifold to us. We will experience **barakah** not only in a material sense, but also in a spiritual sense of having peace, happiness and confidence through gradually becoming conscious of Allah's presence in our daily lives, which is a sure sign of our drawing closer to His Light. In the last two verses, Pir Hassan Kabirdin uses another Qur'anic analogy of the Balance. He says Mawla will measure our good and bad deeds with perfect justice, and he assures us that Mawla accepts the good deeds and sacrifices of the true mu'mins.

The Holy Qur'an and our Ginans are very precise about the importance of sacrificing what we value most for the cause of faith and the progress of our soul. Let us see how this concept and its benefits are to be seen in nature around us, because Allah tells us in numerous verses of the Qur'an to reflect on nature to understand our faith better.

We see that when soil sacrifices its very existence to plants by being absorbed in them, it attains a higher form of life in vegetation. Similarly, plants sacrifice themselves to animals and animals to human beings. In every case, the lower life sacrifices its very existence on the one hand and, on the other, attains a

higher form of life. Mawlana Rumi, the great Sufi poet, describes this chain of sacrifice in nature very beautifully. He says:

“I died to the mineral and became a plant. I died to the plant and became an animal. I died to the animal and became a human being. I shall die to a human being and become an angel. I will not be satisfied with this until I attain union with God. When did I ever become less by dying?”

Mawlana Rumi’s poetry leaves no doubt in our minds about the significance of sacrifice, of how it brings transformation in nature towards a higher form of life. Spiritual progress or the transformation of the human soul into an angelic soul and higher also depends on sacrifice and total submission, and this is why it is a fundamental ethic of Islam.

As Ismailis, we also know that the benefits of sacrifice are not simply limited to spiritual progress. In the light of the guidance of our Imams, we have always practised the concept of sacrifice. Our blessing is that it is second nature for us to give generously of our time, skills, knowledge, physical energy and material resources towards the institutions of our Jamat, both for the progress of our spiritual brothers and sisters, but also for the betterment of large numbers of humanity worldwide.

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) in the mubarak Talika on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his Imam Day referred to this when he said:

“It is gratifying today to be able to build more strength into this network through the harnessing of outstanding Jamati human resources and the material capacity that should ensure to the Jamat and the people amongst whom it lives, new dimensions of institutional effectiveness and personal progress on the eve of the new century.”

The institutional effectiveness and personal progress he refers to here are based on Islamic teachings, that there is no separation or dichotomy between the material and spiritual dimensions of our lives. We are enjoined to work hard and earn well, always within the ethics of our faith. Further, we are guided to give generously of the fruits of our hard work, be it skill, know-how, or material means, for the sake of the progress of the community and society. The benefits of such actions are both material and spiritual, and prove that Islam is a dynamic and an intellectual faith, which promotes creativity for oneself as well as creating conditions to release the creativity of others.

Science and Religion

The following articles will focus on the subject of Science and Religion. It has been chosen for several reasons. We live in a period of human history of unprecedented scientific and technological advancement, and it is but natural to reflect on the relationship between Religion and Science. However, the greater impetus for choosing this topic is that our faith Islam, has a particular notion of science. Furthermore, the Ismaili Tariqah of Islam, being an esoteric approach, has a unique understanding of the relationship between Science and Religion.

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) explained this relationship in his speech of 1985 at the inauguration of the Aga Khan University's faculty of Health Sciences and the Hospital. Talking about the importance of the human intellect, he said: **"It is this intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dictated by the faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given him and that he should know himself."** Our faith requires us to study Allah's creation, that is, the physical universe around us. Hence, the duty of all Muslims to acquire knowledge has been the emphatic and consistent teaching from the time of the holy Prophet Muhammad through Hazrat Ali and all our Imams to our present Imam. We are all familiar with Hazir Imam's insistence that all of us should obtain a quality education and engage in lifelong learning. However, as we have heard in the quotation from the Aga Khan University speech, our endeavour does not stop at learning only about the external universe. We are

motivated and urged to “know ourselves”. That is, as the followers of an esoteric Tariqah, we are encouraged to undertake a personal search of our inner selves. This is the purport of the Qur’anic teaching in Surah 41, ayat 53, in which Allah says: **“We shall show them Our signs in the external world (*afaaq*) and within themselves (*anfus*), until it will be manifest to them that He is the Truth.”**

This indeed is the unique beauty of Ismaili teachings. Our Imams’ teachings have saved us from a dichotomous and thus fragmented view of knowledge. They have blessed us with ***haqiqati*** teachings, which give us an integrated view of knowledge. We have been taught that knowledge of the universe or the external creation is not only compatible with the knowledge of self, but that the two should go hand in hand to experience the Truth.

In the context of such a world-view, Ismailis welcome scientific discoveries without undervaluing or neglecting the second aim dictated by our Faith, which is to know ourselves. Let us reflect on the mubarak farman made by Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) in Nairobi in October, 1982:

“There are certain societies, certain peoples in this world, who find it difficult to live in the 20th century and to practise their faith. They find a division between faith and science – a valley, a gulf, which they find difficult to bridge. We are fortunate that we are Muslims. Islam is an eternal faith, and Allah’s presence is everywhere. Not only in the past, not only in the present, but Islam is a faith of the future. And if Allah is

eternal, and His presence is everywhere, then all that science does is to tell us how great is Allah's creation. All that science does is to remind us how humble we are, how little we know, and how much more there is for science to tell us. So, we can be confident, absolutely confident in our faith. We need not run away from the 20th or the 21st or 22nd century. We can participate fully in all aspects of life and human endeavour, and that is why I have said to you so often to hold strong to the Rope and be strong and steady on the course of Sirat al-Mustaqim."

Knowledge is two-fold in Islam

In the first article, we discussed the parallel importance of physical knowledge and spiritual knowledge in our Tariqah. Let us explore this concept further. In September, 1979, when Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made his first speech about Islamic Architecture at the Asia Society in New York, he said: "Islam does not deal in dichotomies, but in all-encompassing Unity. Spirit and body are one, man and nature are one."

How do we understand that spirit and body are one, and man and nature are one? Islam teaches that the universe, or "as much of it as we perceive with our limited vision, is one of the infinite manifestations of the Universal Soul". Further, "every individual, every molecule, every atom has its own relationship with the All-powerful Soul of God." In other words, body, spirit, nature and human beings are all part of a whole. To put it another way, they are an integrated and interconnected matrix,

which in Ismailism, according to the teachings of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) is called Monoreality. Everything in creation is a dimension or mode of the Monoreal. This teaching of our faith is so powerful that it provides answers to many questions and solves many conflicts.

In the light of this, it is easy to understand the link between material scientific knowledge and spiritual or experiential knowledge of religion. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) discusses this in the 8th Chapter of his Memoirs. He says: "Ibn Rushd, the great Muslim philosopher, known to Europe as Averroes, established clearly the great distinction between two kinds of apprehensible human experience: on the one hand our experience of nature as we recognise it through our senses, whence comes our capacity to measure and to count (and with that capacity all that it brought in the way of new events and new explanations), and, on the other hand, our immediate and immanent experience of something more real, less dependent on thought or the processes of the mind, but directly given to us, which I believe to be religious experience."

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*), in his speech at the Aga Khan University in 1983, explained the same concept. He complimented the University's effort in engendering true Muslim values, in particular the maintenance of a balance between the spiritual and the material in all matters. He said, "In Islamic belief, knowledge is twofold. There is that revealed through the holy Prophet and that which man discovers by virtue of his own intellect. Nor do these two involve any

contradiction, provided man remembers that his own mind is itself the creation of God.”

Material knowledge is acquired by using our God given senses and faculties. Experiential spiritual knowledge is that which is revealed or given to those whose struggle and prayers draw the grace of the *Ruhu'l-Qudus* or Holy Spirit. The link between the two is a constant theme in the teachings of our Imams throughout history and in the writings of our great **Da`is** and philosophers, such as Sayyidna Sijistani, Sayyidna Kirmani and Sayyidna al-Mu`ayyad. Ismaili teachings specify that acquiring the knowledge of the physical external world is a process which leads to spiritual enlightenment. A terse statement in Ismaili literature is that the sensibles, that is, knowledge acquired through the senses, are a ladder to the intelligibles, knowledge acquired by the intellect and spiritual enlightenment. In other words, we have to progress from the dense physical to the subtle spiritual, from the lower levels to the higher, from the temporal human existence to the level of angels. And in this is embedded the certainty that material or acquired knowledge is temporary, whereas experiential religious knowledge or spiritual enlightenment is eternal. Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made a mubarak farman in Islamabad in 1983, in which he said:

“... when human beings ask themselves what is the meaning of science, Islam’s answer is simple: it says that science is one small additional proof of the existence of Allah, of His all-powerfulness and of His being eternal. And therefore, you can look to the future in confidence and in trust. But practise

regularly our faith. Do not stray from our faith and understand that it is a faith of the past, it is a faith of today, and it is a faith of the future.”

Eternity of Allah

Let us today reflect on the concept of eternity, which Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) highlights in all his farmans regarding the relationship of science and faith. During his Silver Jubilee visit to Toronto, he said:

“Islam tells us that Allah is eternal and His creation knows no limits in form, in time or in place; and therefore, when our children and grand-children grow up in an increasingly technological society, there is no reason for that type of society to create concern or questions because Allah’s creation is eternal and part of His creation is man’s own mind. ... And remember that because that creation is eternal, and it knows no limits in time, Allah may create today, He may create tomorrow, and therefore, it is quite possible that what is not discoverable today may become discoverable tomorrow.”

It is essential for us to understand the concept of eternity because, according to Islam, Allah is eternal and His creation is eternal. Moreover, we are constantly reminded in farmans that the human soul is eternal. In one farman he has told us that the physical life is “but a short passage in eternity”. The best way to understand this sublime concept is to examine the mathematical form of a circle. A circle has no beginning and no

end, it is continuous and ongoing. As Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) explains in his Memoirs: **“The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time, but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. ... Allah alone wishes; the Universe exists, and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.”**

To further understand this difficult but key concept, let us reflect as the Qur'an tells us, on the signs of Allah in the external world (**afaq**) and within ourselves (**anfus**). What do we find? Not only are the planets round or spherical, their movements are circular or elliptical. There are further circles or cycles in the passing of day into night, and similarly in the changing of seasons. Water is a cycle, as are nitrogen, carbon dioxide, etc. There are cycles in the world of vegetation: a seed transforms into a full-blown tree, which again produces seeds. In the human personality, too, there are numerous circular movements – our breathing, blood circulation, even the opening and shutting of our eyelids.

All these are not coincidences. They are the signs which indicate the concept of the eternity of Allah's creation, including the eternity of our soul. Thus, the holy Qur'an says in Surah 21, ayat 33: “It is Allah who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon. Everything rotates on a circle.”

A clear understanding of the eternity of Allah and His creation gives us humility in the presence of His infinite creative power.

It can help us to respond to scientific discovery and technological advancement with gratitude to Allah for His mercy. As Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) said in Nairobi in 1982:

“One should understand that Islam is the meaning, is the sense, the totality of Allah’s presence at all times, and we need not live in that conflict, in that concern, in that apprehension that there is a dichotomy between the world and the life of everyday and the practice of our faith.”

Being conscious of Allah’s presence and the significance and perpetuity of our soul, we can maintain a correct balance in our lives. We can certainly avoid the mistake of forsaking that which is eternal. All these are the blessings of Islam, as explained to us in each time by the living and manifest Imam. Thus, Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) also said in Nairobi in 1982:

“I say this today because 25 years have gone by, and some of you have referred to me as the Imam of the atomic age. But I am the 49th Imam and there will be Imams in the future, and the age will not be atomic, it may be the space age, and maybe it will be further than the space age – but all that means is that Allah’s presence is everywhere, all the time.”

The Islamic View of the Scientific Revolution of the Last Century

In the last three articles, we have reflected on some fundamental teachings of Islam. We have noted the encouragement which our faith has always given to the acquisition of knowledge. It is Allah's mercy that He has given us our physical senses and intellect. We can engage with and reflect on our natural environment to acquire physical knowledge. Further, as Ismailis, our Imams have urged us not to remain content with knowledge at the material level, but to strive for spiritual knowledge or enlightenment. We have discussed, too, the concept of eternity – that Allah is eternal, His creation is eternal, and our soul is eternal. This understanding gives us the humility and gratitude necessary for the true practice of our faith. It also reminds us of the greater importance of acquiring spiritual knowledge, which is the lasting aspect of our lives.

From the vantage point of the 21st century, let us today look back at the last hundred years to appreciate how swift scientific discovery has been in the recent period of human history. We can best appreciate this by reference to what Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) relates in the Prologue of his Memoirs, published in 1954. He says:

“In my youth the internal combustion engine was in its early, experimental phase, and the first motor-cars were objects of ridicule; now we all take supersonic jet propulsion for granted, and interplanetary travel is far more seriously discussed today than was even the smallest flying venture at a time when I was quite grown up and had already lived a full and active life. I had the great honour of knowing Lord Kelvin,

in his time the greatest physicist in the world; he assured me solemnly and deliberately that flying was a physical impossibility for human beings and quite unattainable. Even H. G. Wells in his early book, “Anticipations” put off the conquest of the air and the discovery of atomic power for two or three centuries. Yet these and much more have come to pass in a brief half century.”

We consider Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah’s 72-year-long Imamatus as the most significant in terms of the scientific revolution which took place during his time. From candle light to atomic power and fear and ridicule of the motor-car to the invention of supersonic travel and space exploration, the last century from a Muslim perspective is fresh proof of Allah’s creative power and His mercy in enabling human beings to make unprecedented scientific discoveries. It is salutary to reflect that even the greatest physicist of his time, Lord Kelvin, had rejected the idea of aeroplanes. As Muslims, our notions are very different. It is worth reiterating the farman Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi ‘alayhi*) made in Toronto in 1983:

“And remember that because creation is eternal, and it knows no limits in time, Allah may create today, He may create tomorrow, and therefore it is quite possible that what is not discoverable today may become discoverable tomorrow.”

To have such a religious understanding is indeed our great good fortune. At the same time, we must always guard against an imbalance, such as indicated by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah in his Platinum Jubilee message of 1953, where he says:

“In these 70 years of my Imamatus, men’s material condition has totally changed. There has been an immense increase in power over nature, but, as we see, with strifes everywhere spiritual power has not increased.” Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) continued by saying that he hoped the Ismailis would set an example to the rest of the world by our **“higher enlightenment and helpful co-operative movements”**.

Thus, we can conclude that for us as Ismaili Muslims, scientific discoveries which are likely to accelerate in the present and future, will be regarded as the grace of Allah and not as destabilising factors. Further, with the enormous increase in technology around us, we will not allow ourselves to be deflected from maintaining a balance in our lives. Inshallah, we will continue to progress on the Sirat al-Mustaqim by acquiring more and more spiritual knowledge.

The Importance of Humility

Throughout this series of articles, the Islamic ethic of humility has been mentioned more than once concerning the rapid advancement of science and technology. In the 1983 speech on the occasion of receiving the Charter of the Aga Khan University, Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) spoke about the Islamic belief that knowledge is twofold. He said: **“There is that revealed through the holy Prophet and that which man discovers by virtue of his own intellect. Nor do these two involve any contradiction, provided man remembers that his own mind is itself the creation of God.**

Without this humility, no balance is possible. With it, there are no barriers. Indeed, one strength of Islam has always lain in its belief that creation is not static but continuous, that through scientific and other endeavour, God has opened and continues to open new windows for us to see the marvels of His creation.”

Humility is integral to the belief in and practice of Islam. The word “Islam” itself means to submit to the will of Allah through obedience to His chosen Prophet and designated Imam. This is the teaching of the holy Qur’an in Surah 4, ayat 59, which we recite in our daily Du’a: **“Ati `ullaha wa `ati `ur-Rasul wa ‘ulil amri minkum**, that is, Obey Allah and the Prophet and those who are holders of the command.” Thus, submission and humility are the prerequisites for, and hallmark of, the faith of Islam.

Therefore, during his many visits to the world-wide Jamat in the period 1982 to 1983, to commemorate his Silver Jubilee, Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) emphasised the importance of remaining humble in the face of scientific discoveries and in the context of being surrounded by technology. In Dodoma in 1982, he said:

“And to be proud and vain about the discoveries of science or space programmes is childish.” In Dacca in 1983, he said: **“Everything man discovers in his scientific endeavours is a reflection of Allah’s greatness, of His creation and it is human vanity, silly human vanity to think that what one has discovered is something which the human mind has invented.**

The human mind has been allowed by Allah to perceive something that it hadn't perceived before, that is all." In Mwanza, in 1982, he said: "... when people ask the question: 'Where are the limits of modern science?' the answer is very simple, there are no limits to modern science, because Allah is the Creator and when scientists get blown-up heads and they think that they have discovered something extraordinary, they have really discovered nothing else than one other indicator of the total power of Allah's creation." In Vancouver, in 1983, he warned against viewing "science as a method of perceiving man's dominance of his surroundings. Man does not control his surroundings, and the more man learns and understands his surroundings, the more the Islamic perception of life becomes important and comprehensible."

This is extremely important for us who live in an age where almost every week we see reports of new discoveries in the media. In the excitement of the news, we tend to forget or ignore that such new discoveries are part of an ongoing process. We do not hear about the many failures or revisions of theories and hypotheses which have taken place unbeknownst to the general public. Further, whatever is discovered today is simply a stepping stone to more findings tomorrow. Also, as Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) pointed out, despite such revolutionary discoveries, human beings are far from being able to control many of the natural forces around us. Above all, there is a real danger of losing the balance between the material and the spiritual, which is the central message of Islam.

Thus, in Singapore in 1983, Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) said: “... **the development of man’s knowledge, the development of man’s mind, is simply further demonstration of the power of creation of Allah. And I think when you reflect over the discovery of space, you will recollect that practically every individual, who has actually been into space, came back, whether he was Christian or otherwise, with one comment: the unity of man and the eternity of what he had experienced, that is the cosmos in which we live. Those two messages are fundamental to Islam.**”

Without humility, the practice of the faith of Islam becomes hollow. Humility is central to our esoteric rites and practices. Humility is all-important in our personal search for spiritual enlightenment and Didar.

The Macrocosm and the Microcosm

The previous article highlighted the significance of humility in Islam. It is necessary in our perception of the relationship between science and faith. It is indispensable in the practice of our faith. However, it is also important to understand that submission, obedience and self-effacement, which are aspects of humility, do not undermine the dignity or existence of a human being. On the contrary. Our esoteric Tariqah teaches that pride and vanity are obstructions to spiritual progress. Humility purifies the human spirit of impediments and prepares it to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit or *Ruhu'l-Qudus*, which encompasses all Divine blessings.

Our first Imam, Mawlana Murtaza Ali (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*), amongst many of his unique attributes, was also a poet. In his collection of poetry, called a Diwan, he addresses human beings and says:

*“Do you think that you are a small body; Whilst
the great cosmos is contained within you? You
are the speaking Book, By whose letters the
hidden is revealed.”*

This verse assures us of the real worth of a human being according to our esoteric teachings. In the Ismaili understanding, each human being is a microcosm which contains everything of the macrocosm. From the time of Hazrat Ali to the present, all our Imams have given us the sublime **ta`lim** that we human beings are the highest creation of Allah. As such, we can develop ourselves “to the highest possible planes of the human soul and higher”. Thus, another well-known lesson taught by Hazrat Ali was: He/she who recognises his/her own soul, recognises Allah.” The guidance of our Imams has always directed us towards the ultimate goal of self-recognition and actualisation, that is, to experience the macrocosm within the microcosm.

How does this process of spiritual development take place? The holy Qur'an in Surah 51, ayat 20-21 says: “And in the earth there are signs for those whose faith is certain (*muqiniin*). And also in your own souls; will you not then see?” This *ayat* refers to the signs of Allah in the earth or the physical creation. It also clearly states that there are Divine signs within the souls of

human beings or their spiritual creation. The *ayat* also talks about the *muqiniin*, that is, mu'mins whose faith is based on *yaqin* or conviction. According to Ismaili teachings *yaqin* or certainty has three ranks. In other words, certainty develops from the first level of the knowledge of certainty to the second stage, which is the eye of certainty. Finally, it culminates at the level of the Truth of certainty. Let us take a simple example from physical science to understand this process.

In the beginning, students accept the formula H^2O from a qualified teacher. This is the level of *'ilmu'l-yaqin* or knowledge of certainty. Next, when the students experiment with mixing two parts of hydrogen with one part of oxygen in a laboratory, they will actually see the water. This is called the eye of certainty or *'aynu'l-yaqin*. In the final stage, when the water is drunk, it becomes part and parcel of the students' existence. This is the highest level of experience. It is called *Haqqu'l-yaqin* or the Truth of certainty.

According to the holy Qur'an and its **ta'wil** by our Imams, mu'mins can progress in their spirituality. We see around us proof of how Allah enables and empowers human beings to advance in the field of physical sciences. Why should it not be the same in the field of spiritual science? This is the meaning of the *ayat* under discussion, that there are signs in the earth for those whose faith is certain and in their own souls too. But we can only see and appreciate this when we submit to the teachings of Imam-i zaman and absolutely obey his farmans. The Imam of the time is "wa kulla shay'in ahsaynahu fi Imamim-mubin", that is, the knowledge of everything is

encompassed in the manifest Imam. It is the particular and greatest blessing of Ismailis to receive guidance directly from the fountainhead of all knowledge, therefore, there are no bars in the path of our spiritual progress. And this is the evidence of Ismaili history. Great mu'mins like Salman-i Farsi, Pir Sadardin, Pir Nasir-i Khisraw, Pir Hassan Kabirdin and many other luminaries are proof of what is possible in the light of Imam-i zaman's guidance.

Physical Science and Spiritual Science

In the first article, we learnt that the theme of Religion and Science was chosen not merely because we live in a period of accelerating scientific discoveries. More specifically, it was selected because Islam has a distinctive notion of science, and within it, our esoteric Tariqah possesses a unique understanding of the relationship between science and religion. Our comprehension, based on our Imams' **ta`lim**, is quite specific. Allah displays His signs or miracles in both the external world (**afaq**) and the inner world of the soul (**anfus**). The study of external creation constitutes physical science, and all discoveries within it are a blessing from Allah. The effort to progress spiritually represents the spiritual science of recognising and understanding the inner world of the soul or the microcosm. The two are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are profoundly interlinked. As we saw in the quotation from Mawlana Ali's poem above, a human being is a microcosm, containing everything in the universe or macrocosm, awaiting discovery and actualisation in the light of the Imam's guidance. Thus, for us, there exists a balanced

approach to both material and spiritual science. There is no apprehension or fear regarding the technological and scientific revolution surrounding us. Neither do we abandon the dimension of spiritual enlightenment, which is the eternal aspect of our lives.

In this last article, let us analyse another very significant verse of the holy Qur'an. In Surah 31, ayat 20 it says: **"Do you not see how Allah has subjugated to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and He has completed on you His favours physically (*zahiratan*) and spiritually (*batinatan*)? Yet among human beings, there is such a one who disputes concerning God, without knowledge or guidance, or an illuminating Book."** Once again, we note that Allah's favours are present for us both in the external physical world (***zahir***) and our inner spiritual world (***batin***). Our faith teaches us that it is important for us to actualise both the physical and spiritual blessings of Allah. This was explained by Mawlana Shah Karim (salawatu'llahi `alayhi) in Chicago in 1983:

"... the conflict between science and faith which certain people perceive around the world does not exist in Islam, but equally it is important to remember that what you perceive is not of your own mind and it is not of your creation and it is foolish to become vain and proud as a consequence of scientific discovery, but on the contrary, scientific discovery if understood in the correct context is a continuing lesson in humility and I want this to be clearly understood by the younger generation of my Jamat, so that in their work, in their endeavour, they have a correct perception of what their

minds, their education, their intellects will make known to them in the years ahead ...”

In the outstanding periods of Muslim history, we can see that the discoveries in material science were balanced by knowledge of faith or spiritual science. The brilliant stars of Muslim history, such as Ibn Sina, Al-Biruni and Ibn Haytham, did not just shine in their scientific research of the physical world. They are also known for their knowledge of the faith, and they were all outstanding philosophers.

As far as our Tariqah is concerned, the balance between material intellectualism and spiritual enlightenment is a consistent teaching of our Imams. As Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) said in his Platinum Jubilee speech of 1955: **“But, as I have explained in my Memoirs for the whole world to understand, there are two worlds: the world of material intelligence and the world of spiritual enlightenment. The world of spiritual enlightenment is fundamentally different from the world of material intellectualism and it is the pride of Ismailis that we firmly believe that the world of spiritual enlightenment has come as a truth from the inception of Islam to this day with the Imam and carries with it as one of its necessary consequences love, tenderness, kindness and gentleness towards first, our brother and sister Muslims of all sects, and secondly, to those who live in righteousness, conscience and justice towards their fellow men. These religious principles of Ismailism are well known to you; for you have heard them from me and through your fathers and grandfathers and from**

my father and grandfathers, until I fear that by long familiarity with these teachings some of you forget the necessity of re-examination of your heart and religious experience.”

Satadas and other Tariqah rites and practices give us the impetus to carry out this re-examination of our heart and religious experience. Inshallah, we have a good understanding of the relationship between science and faith; the eternity of Allah and His creation, including our soul; the importance of humility and submission to the teachings of our Imams; and the importance of maintaining a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of our lives. We have appreciated too, that the discoveries in the physical world should give us added impetus to strive for spiritual progress. We have remarkable examples in the lives of many great Ismailis who are role models of such a balance. Pir Sadardin and Pir Nasir-i Khisraw were extremely well versed in various physical sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, music, etc. Simultaneously, they had achieved the level of ***Haqqu'l-yaqin*** or the certainty of Truth, as witnessed by the marvellous literary legacy they have left for future generations.

Material science is one means of perceiving Allah's eternal creation. Spiritual science is a means of recognising our soul to recognise our Lord. Both are important because Islam does not deal in dichotomies.

Teachings in Ismaili Devotional Poetry

“You are the Light, and every other light is darkness”

The title of this article is a line from the Arabic poetry of Ibn Hani al-Andalusi, an Ismaili from Spain, who served as the court poet of the Fatimid Caliph, Mawlana Imam al-Mu`izz (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*). Ibn Hani and the other Ismaili poets, many of whom were **da`is** as well, composed poetry which was personal and devotional. However, the devotion was always based on a sure knowledge of the holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*).

Arabic is the language of the holy Prophet and of the revelation sent to him, namely the glorious Qur'an. The earliest Ismaili devotional poetry is written in the Arabic language for historical reasons, as our Imams, from Mawlana Ali to Mawlana Mustansirbillah I, were based first in Makka and Medina, then in Syria and North Africa, and finally extended to Egypt, which was the seat of the Fatimid Empire. It is well-known that Arabic, as a language, lends itself to poetic expression. Pre-Islamic Arabia was famous for its qasidahs, and Arabs were known for their prowess in being able to recite long poems from memory. The tradition of composing devotional poetry in Arabic continues in our Syrian Jamat, where on special festival days such as Imam Day, poetry competitions are held and members of the Jamat are encouraged to express their devotion to the Imam of the time.

As mentioned earlier, Ismaili devotional poetry is based on a thorough understanding of the foundational beliefs of our Tariqah as expressed in the Qur'an and the Traditions or **Ahadith** of the holy Prophet. For instance, in a poem entitled ***"The Proof of God"***, Ibn Hani, addressing the Imam of his time, says: ***"You run with the light of God among His servants so that you may illumine their hearts and shine therein as His proof."*** This verse resonates with ayat 28 of Surah 57, in which Allah says:

"O believers, fear Allah, and believe in His Messenger, and He will give you a twofold portion of His mercy, and He will appoint for you a light whereby you shall walk, and forgive you. Allah is All-forgiving, All-compassionate." In another poem, Ibn Hani says: ***"If you were not present here, the pillars of civilisation would collapse and human habitation crumble to dust."*** This sentiment is related directly to a Hadith of the holy Prophet Muhammad in which he stated: ***"Had the world been devoid of the Imam for a moment, it would have been ruined with all its people"***.

The central position and significance of Imamah are prominent in Ismaili devotional poetry. It is no surprise, therefore, if the Ismaili poets urge the readers and listeners to obey the Imam. Ibn Hani says: ***"I saw the Imam, who is the foundation of faith; obedience to him is success and disobedience loss."*** Sayyidna al-Mu'ayyad fi'd-Din Shirazi who was a writer, poet, theologian, political and military organiser and one of the leading figures of the Fatimid government under Imam al-Mustansirbillah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) says in his poem entitled ***"The Light of***

Intellect: “*The eye is of no avail if it does not receive light from the sun or the moon, or from a burning torch. Similarly, the intellect, during reflection by itself, remains in the throes of doubt and bewilderment.*” This verse resonates the ayat 28 of Surah 57, in which we heard how Allah’s mercy manifests in the appointment of a Light whereby believers can walk on the path of true religion, through obedience and devotion. Such poetry is not only a source of inspiration but a motivation to understand the reality of the Light of Imamate and an encouragement to lead our lives in the light of Divine guidance.

“The Supreme Name (ism-i a`zam) is the Imam of the Time”

Persian poetry by Mawlana Rumi, Hafiz, Fariduddin Attar, Pir Nasir Khusraw and many more is part of the cultural heritage of humankind. Mawlana Rumi was brought to the notice of the English-speaking world when Reynold Nicholson, Professor of Arabic and Persian Literature at Cambridge University, completed a translation of his Mathnawi in 1925. Fascination with the mystical poetry of Rumi continues with his growing popularity, particularly in North America, where presently he is the most-read poet. The Ismaili Jamat in Iran regards all Persian poetry as part of its national culture and poets such as Rumi, Hafiz and Attar as well as others, who are non-Ismaili, are regularly recited in the Jamatkhanas of Iran.

There is also a remarkable corpus of Ismaili poetry in Persian. This is because after the fall of the Fatimid Empire, the Imams moved their seat first to Alamut in Northwestern Iran and then, according to the exigencies of time, to various centres in Iran.

Twenty-seven of our forty-nine Imams lived in Iran. Or to put it another way, Iran became the backdrop to Ismaili history for over six centuries. Ismaili devotional poetry in Farsi or Persian is likely to become even more important in the future, because since the emergence of the Central Asian Ismailis, Persian is the language most spoken in our global Ismaili Jamat.

The title of this article is part of a famous verse of Pir Nasir Khisraw in which he speaks about his conversion to the Ismaili Tariqah. He says: ***“When the light of the Imam shone upon my soul, even though I was black as night, I became the shining sun. The Supreme Name is the Imam of the time; through him, Venus-like, I ascended from the earth to the heavens.”*** The spiritual and intellectual transformation of Pir Nasir is echoed in the poetry of Nizari Quhistani, who writes: ***“Finally, the Noah of the time led me to the ark of guidance and I found myself saved from the billowing deluge”***. This verse shows that Ismaili poets, writers and thinkers regarded the Imam of their time as the continuing light of the Prophets. Nizari is further referring to a famous, unanimously accepted Hadith of the holy Prophet in which he declared: ***“Verily, the parable of my Ahl al-bayt among you is like the parable of Noah’s ark. He who embarks on it is saved, and he who lags behind is drowned.”***

The individual spiritual relationship, which each spiritual child of the Imam has with him, is beautifully expressed in the poem ***“If you have Mawla’s Love”*** by Fida’i Khurasani. He says: ***“If you have Mawla’s love in your heart, you are a soul, otherwise, be sure that there is no real life in you. Except for Ali’s friendship, nothing is profitable to you, except for Ali’s***

love, you are neither alive nor dead.” These touching words reflect the central theme of the holy Qur’an, where in surah 8, ayat 24, Allah says: **“O you who believe! Respond to Allah and the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life ...”**. As Ismailis, we believe that it is not enough to possess animal life and a partial intellect. The main aim of religion and the presence of the Light of Allah in the chain of Prophets and Imams is to give the believers a higher life of faith, conviction and progress to spiritual enlightenment and a perfect intellect. A pre-requisite for this progress is love for the Prophet and the Imams from his progeny, a fact that is emphasised by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) in a mubarak farman in Daressalaam in 1937, where he said: **“You will have no fear in this world if you love the descendants of Muhammad and Ali. This one hint includes all the beauties of prayers and religion.”**

“The words of the Master (Imam) are the words of Light”

With words such as these and others, full of wisdom and conviction, our great Pirs converted thousands to the Ismaili Tariqah of Islam in the Indian sub-continent. History tells us that **Da`is**, such as Pir Satgur Nur had been sent to Sindh during an earlier period to invite people to the Ismaili Tariqah. However, the main and prolonged thrust of **da`wat** activity took place from the time of Mawlana Islamshah (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*), who sent Pirs from Iran to various parts of Hind and Sindh. Our great Pirs, such as Pir Sadruddin, Pir Hasan Kabiruddin and Pir Shams, were Persian speaking, yet not only did they compose Ginans in various languages of the Indian

sub-continent, they did so using the notes and melodies of Indian music, a complex and highly developed feature of Indian civilisation.

Pirs have bequeathed a glorious legacy of devotional poetry, or Ginans, to us. This heritage comprises a vast corpus of Ginans running into hundreds, consisting of short and long compositions. The languages the Pirs used are a remarkable example and proof of how diversity enriches and enhances the unity of the message. Ginans are composed in various languages that originate from Sanskrit. Gujarati, Punjabi, Sindhi, Siraiki and what later became modern Hindi and Urdu are used. Further, because the Pirs' own mother tongue was Farsi and they were well versed in Arabic, Ginans also contain many Arabic and Persian words. Ginans proved very effective in fulfilling the mission of the Pirs, not only because they were in languages understood by the local people, but also because the Pirs contextualised the message by cross-fertilisation with Sufi and Bhakti movements, which were strong at the time. In other words, our great Pirs built on the diversity present in the sub-continent and used it as a strength to build the unity of the Ismaili Jamat, the benefits of which have lasted through the centuries to the present day. As we know, Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) highlights the importance of Ginans. In a mubarak farman made at Karachi in 1964, he said:

“Many times I have recommended to my spiritual children that they should remember Ginans, that they should understand the meaning of these Ginans and that they should carry these meanings in their hearts. It is most important that

my spiritual children from wherever they may come, should, through the ages and from generation to generation, hold to this tradition, which is so special, so unique and so important to my Jamat."

The word Ginan is from Sanskrit and means "knowledge". Thus, the Ginans are full of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. They carry a strong message about the recognition of the Imam of the time. In the same Ginan from which the title of this write-up comes, Pir Sadruddin exhorts the listeners to recognise the Imam, **"then your faith will be genuine"**. Pir Gulmalishah in the popular Ginan **"Mal khajina bahotaj bhariya"** ends with these words: **"Draw the light into your innermost depths; without the Gur or Imam it is like a pitch dark night."**

Sayyid Muhammad Shah in **"Sahebji tun more man bhave"** referring to the Hindu belief of the four ages, says: **"I wandered through the four ages, searching hard, but I found none to match you, my Lord."** At the beginning of this particular Ginan, he declares that he can think of none other than the Imam, no other can ever please him. In the signature verse, he supplicates and says that he can never turn to any other Guide except Imam-i zaman. Another moving theme of Ginans is the closeness of the Imam-murid relationship. Sayyid Imamshah says that the Imam is present in every cell of our being, and we should remember him with this conviction. Pir Sadruddin uses the analogies of the flower and its scent or milk and the butter within it to show how closely linked we are to the Imam's light. The unity of the message contained in our diverse Ginans is indeed a blessing for us.

“Follow the guidance of the light because the lamp is lit and manifest”

Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*), during his 1992 visit to India, referring to the emerging Central Asian jamats, made the following farman:

“And remember that these murids come from the same interpretation, but often with a different historical context, and that historical context, the context of Nasir Khusraw, is very important and must not be forgotten.”

The contemporary Ismaili global Jamat predominantly consists of two historical traditions, the tradition of Pir Sadruddin and the tradition of Pir Nasir Khusraw. It was due to the struggle and sacrifices of Pir Nasir and the **da'is** he trained that the Ismaili Tariqah spread from eastern Iran to Afghanistan, present-day Tajikistan, Chitral and the Northern Areas of Pakistan to the western region of China. When the Ismaili **da'wat** reached Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza, Yasin, Puniyal, Ishkoman, Ghizr and western China, the **da'is** from Badakhshan brought with them the tradition of qasidahs and maduhs in Persian, which were usually recited to the accompaniment of daf and rabab.

In the middle of the last century, a new creative thrust began when `Allama Nasir Hunzai composed for the first time qasidahs in Burushaski, one of the four main languages of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The title of this write-up is from one of his devotional poems in **“The Shimmering Light”**,

entitled ***“Secrets of the Heart”***. In this poem, he urges the listeners to: ***“Become an angel of the time and bow yourself before Adam if you are able to understand the secret of the image of the merciful.”*** This is a reference to the Qur’anic account of the completion and perfection of Hazrat Adam, when Allah breathed the Divine Spirit or Nur into him and then commanded the angels to prostrate to him. In this verse, the author conveys the fundamental principle of the Shia Ismaili interpretation of Islam, that the Divine Spirit or Nur must always be present among humankind for their spiritual and intellectual development and progress. Elsewhere in his remarkable corpus of devotional poetry, which is recited in Jamatkhana throughout the Northern Areas, `Allama Nasir uses the Qur’anic analogy of the lamp. He asks how is it possible for the Lamp of Allah to be blown out, when Allah Himself declares in the holy Qur’an that nobody can blow out His Nur? The clear and unambiguous message in his devotional poetry is the ever presence of the Divine Guide. His poetry inspires love, devotion and obedience to the Imam of the time, which, as he says, are the characteristics of angels.

`Allama Nasir Hunzai has also written devotional poetry in Chinese Turkish, when in 1949 during the time of our 48th Imam, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*), he went to China on a mission to work with the Jamat there. In the Turkish poem entitled ***“The Slave of Mawla `Ali”***, he urges to hold fast to the Light of Imam. He says: ***“The allusion to ‘rope of God’ is to the firm handle of `Ali; the owner and guardian of paradise is none other than `Ali.”*** This is a reference to Surah 2, ayat 256 in which the “firm handle” of

Allah is mentioned. According to Ismaili belief, the Imam of the time is the rope of Allah, the firm handle of Allah, the lamp of Allah, the light of Allah and the hand of Allah. The Imam is unique and peerless.

One characteristic of the Central Asian Jamat in common with the Syrian Jamat is that the tradition of composing devotional poetry is continuing. In the Northern Areas of Pakistan, the diversity is also evident in the fact that there are several Ismaili poets and writers who are composing devotional poetry in the varied languages of the area, such as Wakhi, Shina, Burushaski and Khuwar.

“I have none other than you, so torment not a lover who comes running to you with a breathless heart”

These moving words by a Syrian murid, Ismai`il Adra, writing in the last century, remind us that **giryah-u zari** or entreaty is not only a strong component of the Jamati Satada, but part of the daily practice of our faith.

We have seen in the previous articles an affirmation of the Shia Ismaili interpretation of Islam, that the Imam of the time is the **Khalifah** of God on earth, the direct descendant of the holy Prophet Muhammad and the authoritative interpreter of Allah’s final message, the holy Qur’an, who is always manifest amongst humankind. Together with this sublime status of the Imam, the murids or spiritual children of the Imam are inexpressibly blessed to have a very personal, individual spiritual relationship with him through the act of **bay`ah**. Ismaili Pirs and poets from

all historical traditions and diverse languages convey this personal bond in the most touching and heart-wrenching words.

Pir Hasan Kabiruddin, in his long plea called *“Anat Akhado”*, implores the Imam and says: *“Ham kuch nahi tame so sarve”* meaning *“O our Mawla, we are absolutely nothing and you are everything.”* Such words inspire mu’mins to reach the state of complete humility and self-effacement, which is essential for spiritual transformation. Continuing in this vein, Pir Hasan Kabiruddin begs Mawla to always guide his slaves, so that the true religion may prevail.

The depth of Pir Hasan Kabiruddin’s words in the Indian languages is echoed by the emotion expressed in an Arabic poem by Amir Tamim al-Fatimi. He says: *“O Mu`izz! O Mu`izz! Until the tears which stream from my eyes become fertile with blood: Let someone other than me taste this life, because without you, there’s no merit in it.”* Although several centuries separate these two great personalities, the sentiments conveyed by them carry the same strength of love for and conviction in the reality of the Imam.

Sayyida Imam Begum, one of the few lady poets in our history, beseeches Mawla for his didar or vision. She prays not for a short-lived experience, but that Mawla should be present with her in every breath. In the final verse of her Ginan, she conveys our understanding that the **bay`ah** of the Imam is not only for the time we are physically alive on this earth. She says: *“On that day, (that is, the Day of Judgement), my Lord, summon*

me by your side. Be sure, my Lord, to take my hand in yours. Says Imam Begum: Listen, my Lord, this much, just this much do I ask of you, my Lord." Several centuries earlier, Sayyidna Hasan-i Sabbah expressed the Imam-murid relationship in the following words: ***"For me there is no path other than yours, no court other than yours. O Lord, by your grace, cast me not from your noble presence! Do not drive away your dog when he comes to your door!"*** These remarkable words of indigence and submission are all the more powerful for the fact that they are written by a personality who is famous in Ismaili history as the awe-inspiring leader of the **fidais** of Alamut and a great military General.

Giryah-u zari is an effective way of seeking forgiveness for our shortcomings and disobedience of the farmans of Imam-i zaman. It conveys the yearning in our hearts for the presence of his light and the immense blessing of didar. It relieves our hearts of the pain of suffering during trials and ensures that success does not cause us to deviate from the sirat al-mustaqim. It reminds us of the ultimate purpose of our lives. In a poem entitled ***"Felicity of Grace"***, `Abd Allah Ansari petitions the Imam and says: ***"O my Mawla, we have not sown a single grain in this world for the sake of the next world, even as time keeps slipping by."*** Through prayers which beseech, and devotional poetry, which implores and entreats, we can progress on the path of self-effacement and achieve spiritual and intellectual progress. Thus, Ismaili devotional poetry, irrespective of when it was composed or in what language or historic tradition, carries a strong supplicatory message.

“How can the sun that has reached the zenith be hidden?”

The central theme of all Ismaili devotional literature, which is so tersely and beautifully summed up in the title of this article, is the presence of the manifest Imam. He is the axis around which the Ismaili global Jamat rotates. He is the **Mazhar** of Divine Light that acts as the centripetal force to unite and bind a Jamat, which is very diverse in terms of ethnicity, historical traditions, language and culture.

The diversity and unity of the global Ismaili Jamat should be understood in the wider context of our contemporary world. Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made a speech at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference in South Africa in 1996. Analysing current trends, he said: **“Yet even as the waves of globalisation unfurl so powerfully across our planet, so does a deep and vigorous countertide. In every corner of the world, one can also sense these days a renewal of cultural particularism, a new emphasis on ethnic and religious and national identity. What some have called a “new tribalism” is shaping the world as profoundly on one level as the “new globalism” is shaping it on another. ... Surely, one of the great questions of our time is whether we can learn to live creatively with both the global and the tribal impulse, embracing the adventure of a broader internationalism even as we drink more deeply from the well springs of a particular heritage.”**

The question mooted by the Imam is highly relevant for us as a Jamat that is made up of many diverse elements. In the Ismaili

Jamat, the presence and dynamic guidance of the Imam of the time always maintains a balance between the universality and the particularity of Ismailis. In other words, as we have seen, our global Jamat may consist of many traditions and languages, but the message of this plurality is always the unity of our belief in Imam-i mubin. Our concept of religious and spiritual brother and sisterhood enables us to transcend our physical differences, which in other cases around us, every day, is the cause of tension and conflict. We not only tolerate our differences, we celebrate them. The exchange of Imam-i zaman's murids from one country to another is witness to this fact. Ismailis everywhere do not hesitate to go to another Ismaili area to work and help. Publications such as "***The Shimmering Light***" are also a witness to this celebration. The Imamat and its global institutions are the cement that binds the edifice of the global Ismaili Jamat. We are indeed very fortunate to recognise and obey the Imam of the time. Not only is this fundamental for our material and spiritual progress, but in a world torn by strife and intolerance, our Jamat can be a role model for others to follow. This indeed is our Imam's expectation of us.

The Imam of the time, as head of the global Ismaili community, motivates us all to use our differences in a creative and not a destructive way, so that our whole community can progress and achieve the best results. In doing so, we also set an example for others to follow of respect for the diversity and plurality of all human beings. This is very important for us, because the ultimate teaching of the holy Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) is encapsulated in a hadith, which

states: **“People are God’s household, and the most beloved to God is the one who helps His household and makes them happy.”** We cannot fail to see that Mawlana Shah Karim, the 49th direct descendant of the holy Prophet, had worked tirelessly to actualise this very teaching.

Meanings of what we recite are important in the Faith of Intellect

The Shahadah is an Expression of our Foundational Beliefs

Jamati Satada brings the barakat of praying together as one soul for the global Jamat and for our individual souls. They also provide an opportunity to learn more about and understand the spiritual dimensions of our Tariqah. Hence, in the following articles, we will focus on one aspect of our practices. Each article will discuss one of our prayers so that we may attain greater intellectual satisfaction and spiritual benefit from our practices.

Today, we shall reflect on the ***Shahadah*** or the ***Kalimah***. It consists of three statements:

- ***Ash-hadu al-la Ilaha Illallah***
- ***Wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasulullah***
- ***Wa ash-hadu anna `Aliyyan Amiral-mu'mininah*
*`Aliyyullah***

These summarise the principles of Shiah Imami Ismaili Islam. In the first statement, we bear witness to the Oneness of Allah, in the second, we bear witness that Hazrat Nabi Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah, and in the third sentence, we confirm the continuity of Divine guidance by witnessing that Hazrat Mawlana Ali is from Allah. In other words, every time we recite

the ***Shahadah***, we reaffirm the three foundational beliefs of our faith, that is:

- ***Tawhid*** or Oneness of God,
- ***Nubuwwat*** or ***Prophethood*** and
- ***Imamat***.

The ***Shahadah*** is very significant for us, and thus we can understand that all our formal prayers end with it. For instance, on any day in the Jamatkhana, it is recited at the end of the first and second Du`as, at the end of the giryah-u zari tasbih, and finally after the Jamatkhana ceremonies. Additionally, we recite it in the last paragraph of the second part of our Du`a. It is also important to note that at the beginning of the same part of the Du`a, we recite part of the ayat 59 of Surah 4 of the holy Qur`an. We recite: “***Ya ayyuhalladhina amanu ati`ullaha wa ati`ur-rasula wa ulil-amri minkum***, that is, O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and obey the possessors of the authority from amongst you.” This ayat is known as the “Ayat of Obedience”, and it is, in fact, a way of understanding the ***Shahadah***. We are, in the words of the Qur`an, affirming the importance of obeying the Imam of the time, the ***ulil-amr***, because through his obedience we obey the holy Prophet. When we obey the Imam and the Prophet, it is only then that we can truly claim to have obeyed Allah.

To conclude, we Ismailis recite the ***Shahadah*** many times during the day as part of our daily practice of faith. If we understand that each of its three statements affirms our

foundational principles of **Tawhid**, **Nubuwwat** and **Imamat**, it will give deep meaning to our prayers.

Salawat represents the Eternal Circle of Blessings

The **Salawat**: “**Allahumma salli `ala Muhammadiw wa aali Muhammad**, that is, O Allah, send blessings upon Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad” is not only of necessity a repeated prayer in our Jamat, but it is also a much favoured tasbih recited by Ismailis everywhere.

What is the Qur’anic basis for the **Salawat**? In Surah 33 of the holy Qur’an there are two separate ayats, which particularly deserve to be studied carefully. Ayat 43 says: “He, Allah, it is Who blesses you and His angels bless you, so that He may bring you out of darkness into the light; and Allah is merciful to the believers.” In other words, Allah “**yusalli**” or sends **Salawat** or blessings on the believers and His angels too, to remove the darkness of evil, ignorance, disbelief, etc. and to bring us to the light of guidance, belief and good.

Later on in ayat 56, it is stated: “Indeed, Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe! Ask blessings on him and submit to him as ought to be submitted.” These two ayats show that Allah and His angels send blessings, “**yusalluuna**”, on the Prophet and the believers and they in turn are asked to send blessings, “**sallu**”, on the holy Prophet.

The intellectual challenge posed by these ayats is to reflect on the rank of the blessings sent by Allah and His angels and those

sent by the believers or mu'mins on the Prophet. It is obvious that the **Salawat** sent by Allah and His angels on the Prophet is in the form of the exalted mission of the holy Prophet to lead people out of the darkness of disbelief, ignorance and evil to the light of guidance and belief. On the other hand, when believers are asked to send **Salawat** on the Prophet, it is in the form of accepting and submitting to the light of guidance and showing gratitude or **shukr** for it. Thus, the recitation of **Salawat** becomes an eternal circle of blessings for mu'mins in that they are sure that Allah always answers their prayer for light and guidance in the presence of the progeny of the holy Prophet.

Salawat is such an important prayer for us that it is recited every time we say the holy names of the Prophet or our Imams. It is recited at the beginning and end of the recitation of farmans. It is recited during the Chaandraat majlis every month. Our 48th Imam, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) recommended the Jamat to come together to pray on the night of Chaandraat and to specially recite more **Salawat**. We recite many **Salawat** tasbihs during our funeral ceremonies. Every day, three times a day in the last paragraph of the first part of our Du'a we recite the **Salawat** in all its detail: "**Allahumma salli `ala Muhammadinil-Mustafa wa `ala `Aliyyinil-Murtaza wa `alal-a'immatil athar, wa `ala hujjatil-amri Sahibiz-zamani wa'l `asri Imaminil haziril-mawjud, Mawlana Shah Rahim'il-Husayni**, that is, O Allah, send blessings on Muhammad, the Chosen, on Ali, the Favourite, on the Imams, the Pure and on the Proof of Your Command, the Lord of the time and age, the present Imam,

Mawlana Shah Rahim al-Husayni.” We say this with the understanding that we are beseeching Allah to help us to remain the obedient followers of the Prophet and his descendants, the Imams, and to never deviate from this path.

The Return of the Soul to its Origin

The Ismaili Tariqah teaches that all human beings are born with both positive and negative energies. Further, we have the option or the free will to use either of them. The Imam of the time guides us to use our intellect and develop the good in ourselves. However, we may still disobey his guidance and commit wrongdoings or behave in an unethical manner. Our Tariqah also teaches that such behaviour not only affects others adversely, but deeply impacts our own souls too. Thus, one of the practices of our Tariqah is to provide us with an opportunity to repent and to ask for forgiveness for our shortcomings.

In the holy Qur'an, in Surah 4, ayat 64, Allah says: ***“We sent no Messenger except that he should be obeyed by Allah’s leave. And if, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come to you and asked forgiveness of Allah, and the Messenger too, had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Forgiving, Merciful.”*** In keeping with the spirit of this ayat, we have the du`a karaw-vi, the chhanta ceremony and the tasbih of ***“Astaghfirullah Rabbi wa atubu ilayhi”*** in our Tariqah practices. During the du`a karaw-vi and the chhanta ceremony, we present ourselves humbly to the representatives appointed by the Imam of the time and ask for forgiveness, exactly as described in the ayat mentioned above.

In the Ismaili tradition from the Indo-Pak sub-continent, we recite ***“Tobo tobo Ya Shah bando gunegar, Gat bakshe Shah Pir bakshe”***, which is a variation on the theme of ***“Astaghfirullah Rabbi wa atubu ilayhi”***.

“Tobo tobo” is derived from the same root as ***“atubu”*** which means “I return”, and ***“atubu ilayhi”*** means “I return to Him (Allah)”. Thus, the complete statement means “I seek forgiveness from Allah, my Lord, and I return unto Him”. The tasbih of ***“Astaghfirullah”*** resonates a short ayat of the holy Qur’an, ***“Inna li’llahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un***, that is, “Indeed We are from Allah and unto Him is our return”. Our Imams have given great importance to the meaning of this ayat in our esoteric interpretation of Islam. We believe that we “live, move and have our being in God”. We feel alienated or a sense of separation from Allah only when we go against the guidance of Imam-i zaman and neglect our spiritual duties. When we feel remorse for our shortcomings and with sincere intention and strong resolve, act according to the farmans of the Imam of the time, our souls are purified and are able to return to the origin. In this way, we fulfil the mission of our life, which is that we live in the physical world, but remain untainted by its impurities.

“Astaghfirullah Rabbi wa atubu ilayhi” is a constant reminder of our origin, Allah, and our mission to return to Him. Indeed, as we heard in Surah 4, ayat 64 at the beginning of this write-up, the means of return to Allah is the Prophet or his progeny, the Imam of the time and his guidance.

Walayat of Hazrat Ali is the Walayat of the Imam of the Time

We will analyse the tasbih of **Nadi `Aliyyan** in this short article. This is directly linked to the Tariqah practice of chhanta and the related utterance for it. **Nadi `Aliyyan** is recited three times by the representatives of Imam-i zaman over the water that is used in the chhanta ceremony. It is therefore important for us to understand the meanings of its words as well as its underlying concept.

The tasbih is: “**Nadi `Aliyyan mazhar al `aja’ibi, tajidhu `awnan laka fi’n-nawa’ibi, kullu hammin wa ghammin sayanjali bi-walayatika Ya `Ali, Ya `Ali, Ya `Ali**, which means: Call Ali, who is the manifestation of divine wonders, you will find him helpful in all calamities. Every sorrow and grief will be removed through your **walayāt** O Ali, O Ali, O Ali.”

The concept of the **walayāt** of Hazrat Ali, that is central to **Nadi `Aliyyan**, was reiterated by Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) on many occasions during his lifetime. We, as Shi`ah Ismaili Muslims, believe that he confirmed it at Ghadir Khumm when he pronounced: “He whose **Mawla** I am, Ali is his **Mawla**”. The word “**Mawla**” has the same root as “**wali**” and “**walayāt**”. Thus, all Shi`ah Muslims believe that Hazrat Ali, as the Imam, was the Prophet’s successor and, as such, he was the Guardian or **Mawla** of all the believers, who accepted his authority and pledged their devotion and obedience to him. We are, therefore, convinced that by the recitation of **Nadi `Aliyyan** we seek the spiritual help of the Imam of the time, who is also the Nur of Hazrat Ali.

It is for this reason that this tasbih is recited in the preparation of the chhanta water, as well as by many mu'mins on many different occasions.

This central concept of **Walayat** particularly resonates with an ayat in the holy Qur'an. It is ayat 55 of Surah 5, in which Allah tells the believers that their guardians or **Walis** are He Himself, His Prophet and those who believe, establish prayer and give the zakat while they are in the position of bowing (**ruku`**). This ayat is a direct reference to a famous incident when Hazrat Ali, without disturbing his prayer, extended his finger to a beggar so that he could remove his ring. Thus, Allah is the **Wali** or Guardian, the holy Prophet is the **Wali** or Guardian, and Mawlana Ali and the Imams from his progeny are also the **Walis** or Guardians of the mu'mins. As such, love and devotion for them and submission to their authority are incumbent upon the mu'mins. This is similar to the meanings and concepts of the **Shahadah** and the Ayat of Obedience as discussed in the preceding articles.

In other words, whether we recite the **Shahadah** or the Ayat of Obedience or **Nadi `Aliyyan**, we are remembering the fundamental principles of our Tariqah and invoking the names of Allah, the Prophet and his pure descendants, the Imams. This becomes an act of remembrance and a practice of the faith, as guided by the Imam of the time in his farmans. Such practice promotes great spiritual courage and confidence in our daily lives, where we have our share of trials and tribulations.

Hazrat Bibi Fatimat-uz-Zahra's Tasbih is recited by all Muslims

Now let us reflect on the precious heritage of Bibi Fatimah's tasbih. Hazrat Fatimah (*`alayha's-salam*) was the beloved daughter of the holy Prophet, the honoured wife of Mawlana Ali and the gracious mother of Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husayn. She was thus part of the Five Holy Personalities or ***Panj Tan Paak***. In Qur'anic terminology, ***Panj Tan Paak*** is also renowned as the ***Ahl al-Bayt***, that is, the People of the House (of the holy Prophet). The honour given to Hazrat Fatimah in our history is testified by the fact that one of the most important periods of our history, when our Imams were both temporal rulers and spiritual leaders, is known as the Fatimid period.

However, Hazrat Fatimah is remembered more universally because her name is linked to a tasbih revered and recited by all Muslims. A very thought-provoking tradition is related to this particular tasbih. It is said that Hazrat Fatimah was overburdened by the responsibilities of a home and young family when she was of tender years herself. Additionally, as the Prophet's daughter and a role model, she worked harder and made greater sacrifices for the sake of the Muslim community, which was often under attack by its enemies. One day, she approached her father, Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) and requested him to give her a servant to assist her in her innumerable duties and chores. The holy Prophet listened to his daughter's appeal with his usual love for her. He then asked her whether he should fulfil her request for a servant or whether he should bestow on her

something much higher and better? Without hesitation, Hazrat Fatimah responded that she would wish to receive from her beloved father that which was superior.

The holy Prophet then taught her the tasbih that bears her name. He said that she should recite “**Allahu Akbar**”, “**Subhana’Ilah**” and “**Al-Hamduli’Ilah**” thirty-three times each, finishing with “**La ilaha illa’Ilah**”. He explained to her that if she remembered these names with conviction and concentration, she would acquire so much spiritual strength and courage that no worldly problems would remain insurmountable for her. Hazrat Fatimah is an exemplar of how to remember Allah, and it is not without wisdom that she has the title “**az-Zahra**” which means the “radiant”.

Ismaili Muslims demonstrate the significance of Bibi Fatimah’s tasbih by reciting it during the Chaandraat majlis, after the Salawat tasbih and also during the Baitu’l- Khayal Satadas. The three components of the tasbih carry significant spiritual meanings for us. “**Allahu Akbar**” means “Allah is Greater”. The explanation given by Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) in his Memoirs is a blessing for us to reflect on. He says: ***“There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul.”*** Once we understand the depth of **Allahu Akbar**, it becomes easy to understand why in **Subhana’Ilah**, we declare “Allah is above all attributes” and in **Al-Hamduli’Ilah** “The praise is due to Allah”.

Mu'mins start their day with the tasbih of Subh-i Sadiq

Our Tariqah has always emphasised the intellectual and the spiritual dimensions of Islam. Thus, we are very aware of the holy Qur'an's teachings through Imam-i zaman's mubarak farmans, that we pray to and remember Allah, not only at prescribed times of the day, but all the time, through our thoughts, speech and actions. The Qur'anic injunction to remember Allah "standing, sitting or lying on your sides" is explained to us in the terminology of today by Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*), who repeatedly urged us to remember Allah even when we have a split second. In 1994, in London at the Darbar, he said:

"It is not because you live in a Western society that you are any more dispensed of practising regularly the faith. And if you are unable to attend Jamatkhana regularly, at least, at least, have thoughts upon your faith, and if you have a moment, take a tasbih, call "Ya Muhammad", call "Ya Ali", call "Ya Allah", because, as I have said before, every second you devote to your faith, is a search and a blessing. And that time you can find in the Western world, in the Eastern world, in the North, and in the South."

Islam also encourages and motivates us to pray individually, as well as in congregation. We remember Allah in all states and conditions, in times of trouble as well as happy times.

Nevertheless, there are Jamati conventions, which are full of wisdom and barakat. One such practice strongly relates to our history. It is said that the migration of Ismailis from India to Africa had already started during the time of our 46th Imam, Mawlana Hasan Ali Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*), who had established his Darkhana in Bombay in the second half of the nineteenth century. The few murids of the Imam who had mustered all their courage to uproot themselves from the country of their birth to venture to an unknown continent were very anxious and worried about what their fate would be. The Imam of the time blessed them with the tasbih of ***subh-i sadiq***, which literally means the “true dawn” and was to be recited after the Du`a of the early morning. It would act as spiritual protection for them and give them the courage to face any trials and tribulations in the land of their settlement.

The tasbih consists of four names: ***Ya Allah, Ya Wahhab, Ya Ali*** and ***Allahu's-Samad***, which are recited by the Jamat every morning after the Du`a. This tasbih should also be recited by those who are not fortunate enough to reach Jamatkhana in the early morning. The four names and their profound meanings act as a spiritual armour for mu'mins throughout the day against material temptations and dangers. ***Ya Allah*** or O Allah is followed by ***Ya Wahhab***, which is an emphatic form and means “the One Who bestows abundantly”. In other words, this remembrance gives comfort and is a prayer for both physical and spiritual barakat in our daily lives. ***Ya Ali*** is a reminder that the Divine power and blessings come to the mu'mins through the Imam of the time. We have already heard in the earlier articles that Allah's greatest mercy is that He has

always provided a “means” to His mercy and forgiveness through the holy Prophet and the Imams from his progeny. **Allahu’s-Samad** means that Allah is Absolute, Independent. This tasbih arouses tremendous humility, because we know that there would be no existence without Allah. We are convinced that we are dependent on His mercy and grace. It reminds us of the Suratu’l-Ikhlās which we recite at the beginning of the sixth part of our Du`a.

To recite this tasbih every morning after our Du`a, with meaning and conviction, is to ensure that our families and we are surrounded and guided by the light of the Imam at every moment of our day. It is to be God conscious in the truest sense. It is to be protected from all evil and negative influences and to contribute to creating a positive environment for others around us.

Comprehensive Prayer and Spontaneous Prayer

By the grace of Imam-i zaman we have been able to reflect on some dimensions of the spiritual wealth contained in the teachings of our Tariqah. By his mercy, our understanding of some of our practices and utterances has deepened.

In this article, the meaning of “**Khanavadan**” which is a blessing that the Imam of the time showers on us in his farmans and taliqas will be discussed briefly. We hear the same blessing many times in the context of the Jamatkhana from our Mukhi and Kamadia Sahebs and Mukhiani and Kamadiani Sahebas. “**Khanavadan**” is a Persian compound word. “**Khana**” means

“place, house” and “**vadan**” is a variation of “**abadan**”, which means “prosperous”. Thus, “**Khanavadan**” means “may your household be prosperous”. It is one of the most comprehensive prayers and an all-inclusive blessing. It includes all the individuals living in a place or house and prays for their complete material, spiritual and intellectual well-being. Once this blessing has been uttered, nothing more remains to be added. However, it does depend on the level of receptivity of the mu’min to whom this prayer is addressed. As Mawlana Rumi would say: Allah’s bounties and mercies are like a deep, unfathomable ocean, but it depends on the size of our receptacles how much of His mercy we can carry away!

Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) during his 1998 visit to the Jamat of Tajikistan used the Tajiki version of this blessing – “**Khonoabad**”. Our global Jamat is very diverse and yet totally united as one in receiving the unbounded mercy and blessings of the Imam of the time.

In the second part of this final article, let us also look at the importance of spontaneous prayer. With all the tasbihs we have reflected upon in this series of articles, we have barely scratched the surface of the spiritual and intellectual treasure of the Ismaili Tariqah. May Mawla bless us with the motivation to learn more and search deeper. Apart from the set and prescribed tasbihs and all the beautiful names of Allah, great significance is also given to the prayer which rises directly from a mu’min’s soul and finds expression in the words and phrases of his or her language. This importance is enshrined in the famous story of Prophet Musa and the shepherd.

On one occasion, on his way to Mount Sinai, Prophet Musa passed a shepherd, who was completely absorbed in communicating with his Creator. He was expressing himself in his language, which he used in his social context. The shepherd said that he would press God's feet, feed him freshly drawn goat's milk and kill his lice, and so on. This crude and familiar language disturbed Prophet Musa, and in no uncertain terms, he put the shepherd right and continued on his way. In the words of Mawlana Rumi:

**"A revelation came to Moses from God - You
have parted My servant from Me.
Did I not send you as a Prophet to unite people
to Me?"**

Prophet Musa was utterly repentant and understood the significance of the spontaneous communication that a true lover of God has with his Beloved. Once again, to continue in Mawlana Rumi's words, God tells Prophet Musa:

***"I am not sanctified by their glorification of Me;
it is they that become sanctified and pearl-scattering.
I look not at the tongue and the speech;
I look at the inward spirit and the state of feeling.
I gaze into the heart to see whether it be lowly,
though the words uttered may not be lowly."***

Importance of the Intellect and of Acquiring Knowledge in our Tariqah

Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made the following farman at the Darkhana Jamatkhana in Karachi on 27th October, 2000. He said:

We trust in intellect because it is what makes man and woman different from everything else on earth. Allah says that man is His greatest creation. What makes the greatest creation different from the others? What is it? The intellect. Nothing else. ... Use knowledge for good purpose. Also, keep the balance in your lives, between the material and the spiritual. Be careful not to give up this balance by accident or worse. Do not give it up. Practice your faith regularly. Think of your faith. Make it part of your life, every day, so that it is part of your existence, your material, human existence.

This quotation reminds us that we, as Ismaili Muslims, do not separate the acquisition of secular, worldly knowledge from the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. Our teachings emphasise the importance of acquiring both because that is the reason why Allah gave us the intellect and distinguished us from the rest of His creatures. Further, good quality secular education helps to appreciate and understand spiritual knowledge. The Imam's **ta`lim** also directs us to "use knowledge for good purpose" and to maintain a balance in our lives by making faith a part of our everyday lives. He advises us to "think of your faith".

Islam means “submission to the will of Allah through His chosen Prophets and designated Imams”. The holy Qur’an is quite clear and explicit that Guidance, Teaching, Allegiance and Obedience, Forgiveness, Purification and Love for God are all through a “**Wasilah**” or intermediary, that is the Prophet or Imam. This can be seen in two ayats of the holy Qur’an which we recite in our daily Du’a, three times a day. In the second part of our Du’a we recite part of ayat 59 of Surah 4, which says that to obey Allah, we have to obey the Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) and to obey the holy Prophet we need to obey the **ulul amr**, who are the designated Imams from his progeny. In the fourth part of our Du’a we recite the ayat of **Bay`ah** from Surah 48, ayat 10. We recite that those who give their **bay`ah** or allegiance to the Prophet give it to Allah Himself. These are just two of a number of ayats in the holy Qur’an in which Allah teaches that we need an intermediary between Him and us.

We will reflect on some more of our rites and utterances to understand the significance of the Concept of Wasilah according to the teachings of Islam. Inshallah, through such reflection, we will be able to appreciate how our rites and ceremonies are an expression of our fundamental beliefs. This will deepen our understanding of our Tariqah, which Mawlana Shah Karim (*salawatu’llahi `alayhi*) described as having “unique characteristics” during his visit in 1994 to the United Kingdom.

Note: The following articles on rites and ceremonies describe them in general terms. It is essential to note that there are regional and national differences.

Jamatkhana represents the House of Nur in our Tariqah

The holy Qur'an states in Surah 5, ayat 15 that Allah has sent us Nur and a clear Book. Our Book of Revelation further categorically states in Surah 9, ayat 32 that the Nur of Allah cannot be extinguished. Ismaili teachings based on these and many other ayats of the holy Qur'an maintain that the Imam of the time, from the progeny of the Holy Prophet, is the Nur of Allah, that is, His **Mazhar** or the place of manifestation of His Nur. Thus, the Jamatkhana designated by the Imam for us to pray in represents the house of Nur in the Ismaili Tariqah. It is the place where the Nur of Allah, that is the Nur of the Imam, is present in **batin**. Let us remind ourselves of a farman which Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made in Dar-es-salaam on 11th October, 1988. He said as he was taking leave of the Jamat:

“And remember that although I leave you physically, I am with you all the time, in every Jamatkhana, all the time.”

In the context of this we can now appreciate the meaning and significance of reciting **“Hayy-u Zinda”** when we enter the Jamatkhana. It means that we affirm the presence of the Imam's ever-living Nur in the Jamatkhana.

Hayy-u Zinda is a compound word, in which **Hayy** is Arabic and **Zinda** is Persian. However, both mean the same, that is, “**Ever-Living**”. The response given to it by those already present in the Jamatkhana is “**Qayyum-u Paya**”. “**Qayyum-u Paya**” is similarly a compound word consisting of **Qayyum** in Arabic and **Payinda** in Persian, both of which again have the same meaning, that is, “**Everlasting or Eternal**”. Through usage in the Gujarati-speaking Jamat, we say **Paya** instead of **Payinda**. The meaning of these utterances is grounded in our belief that the Light of Allah is present and living in His **Mazhar**, the Imam of the time. Further, according to the holy Qur’an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) this Light is Eternal and ever present to guide human beings on the Sirata’l-mustaqim.

The great importance of “**Al-Hayyul-Qayyum**” is evident from the fact that these are considered the two supreme names of Allah and are in the Ayat al-Kursi (Surah 2, ayat 255). We recite these names in the third part of our Du’a as: “**La Ilaha Illallahul Hayyul Qayyum**”. Hayy-u zinda and Qayyum-u paya are recited not only at the moment of entering the Jamatkhana, but also at the end of various recitations, as well as when we receive juras and sukreet and in zikr tasbih as “**Ya Hayy-u Ya Qayyum**”. Each time we utter the words, we remind ourselves that we are in the House of Nur. Our Pirs have explained in the Ginans that the sacred space in Jamatkhana is like an ocean of Nur in which the souls of mu’mins are completely immersed. If we can retain this understanding in our daily practice, the Jamatkhana can become the place where we can absorb the Nur and recharge our spiritual batteries. We can maintain a balance in our lives

between the material and the spiritual. Through concentration and intellectual engagement with the rites and ceremonies in Jamatkhana, we become revived by the **batini** presence of the Imam's Nur. We can then return to our physical lives, being spiritually and ethically stronger. In this way, we can experience the power of the practice of faith in our daily lives, within our Jamat, our families and our business and other relationships.

Du`a Karaw-vi is a Re-affirmation of our Bay`ah

In the article above, we heard that Prophets and Imams are the “**Wasilah**” or intermediary between Allah and the mu'mins or believers. Qur'anic teachings emphasise the status and significance of Allah's **Wasilah**. There are many synonyms in the Qur'an for this intermediary between Allah and us, such as **Khalifah** or Vicegerent, **Ulu'l amr** or Holders of the Command, **Nur** or Light, **Hadi** or Guide, etc.

Qur'anic teachings emphasise the status and significance of Allah's **Wasilah**. The story of Hazrat Adam (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) in the Qur'an is well known. In Surahs 15 and 38, we learn that Allah chose him to be His **Khalifah** on the earth. The description tells us that Allah breathed His Spirit into Hazrat Adam and then commanded the angels to prostrate to him. Thus, according to our holy book, prostration to Allah is through His **Khalifah**, who is the Prophet or the Imam. Similarly, **Bay`ah** or allegiance to Allah is also through the Prophet or the Imam.

In the fourth part of our daily Du`a we recite ayat 10 of Surah 48, in which Allah says that those who give **Bay`ah** to the Holy Prophet, indeed give **Bay`ah** to Him and Allah's Hand is on their hands. In other words, Allah gives the Prophet the status of being His own hand, which accepts the **Bay`ah** of the murids in the physical world. This clear and unambiguous ayat of the holy Qur'an was responsible for the conversion of Hakim Pir Nasir-i Khisraw to the Ismaili tariqah and his subsequent service of spreading the Ismaili tariqah to Afghanistan, Badakhshan, other parts of Central Asia as far east as China. He writes in his poetry: ***"One day I read the Ayat of Bay`ah in the Qur'an, in which God declares that His hand is above their hands; What has happened to that hand? Where can I find it? Why was I not born in the time of the Holy Prophet?"*** Such questioning lead to his personal search to find and recognise the Imam from the progeny of the Holy Prophet. He gave **bay`ah** to Imam Mustansirbillah I (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) in Cairo in the Fatimid times.

We perform Du`a Karaw-vi every time we attend Jamatkhana. It is usually done before the recitation of the first Du`a, or after Kamadia saheb announces "Khato Thal Sufro Hazir Imamji mehmani". During Du`a Karaw-vi we ask for forgiveness of our shortcomings and disobediences and we resolve not to repeat our mistakes. This is to remind ourselves of the **Bay`ah** we have given to the Imam of the time, that we will obey his farmans. The Ayat of **Bay`ah** teaches that those who obey the **Khalifah** of Allah, the Prophet or Imam, will receive **"ajran azima"** or great reward, whereas those who disobey will do great injustice and disservice to their own souls and suffer

tremendous spiritual loss. Ayat of **Bay`ah** is a mirror reflection of the Ayat of Obedience which we recite in the second part of our Du`a, where we repeat the Qur`anic injunction from Surah 4, ayat 59: ***“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and the Uli’l amri minkum (those who hold the command from amongst you)”***.

We can now appreciate that in our Tariqah our rites and utterances are closely intertwined with our fundamental beliefs. In fact, we can say that whatever we do in Jamatkhana is an expression of what we believe about the Oneness of Allah, His mercy in sending us Prophets and Imams to guide us in our spiritual and physical lives and the importance of our soul, which is the only eternal part of our existence. The regular attendance of Jamatkhana and the performance of our rites and ceremonies with understanding and meaning ensures that the practice of our faith is both with our hearts and our minds. What we believe is practically enacted in our daily Jamatkhana practices, which nurtures us spiritually and intellectually. We are able to integrate our spiritual lives with our physical lives. In other words, the practice of our faith positively impacts all our relationships and dealings with other human beings around us. It becomes very easy for us to put all the ethics of Islam, such as generosity, unity, forgiveness, sharing and serving others into daily practice.

Giryaḥ-u Zari Tasbih is a Prayer for the Global Jamat

In our tariqah the daily congregational prayers in the Jamatkhana are concise and follow a set routine. One

important feature is the giryah-u zari tasbih which we recite between the two Du`as. This tasbih is offered in a standing position. It has some similar supplications and words as the tasbihs recited by the Mukhi Kamadia Sahebs at the end of the two Du`as. However, the Giryah-u zari tasbih fulfils a particular need and purpose. This is indicated by its name as well as the standing position in which it is offered.

Giryah-u zari comes from two Persian words: **girstan**, which means to weep and **zaridan**, which means to consider oneself weak and feeble. Thus, this tasbih is recited with the utmost humility and a strong feeling of indigence or need. According to the holy Qur`an, such prayer was the tradition of the Prophets. In Surah 19, ayat 58, Allah speaks about the Prophets and says: **“Whenever the revelations of Ar-Rahman were recited to them, they fell down prostrating and weeping.”** We believe that Prophets are role models and therefore we follow their way of prayer and supplication. In this as well as other tasbihs, we pray particularly for zahiri and batini nurani Didar. Mawlana Mustansirbillah II (salawatu`llahi `alayhi) narrates a very moving story about the giryah-u zari of Prophet Yahya or John the Baptist in the book **“Pir Pandyate Jawanmardi”**. Prophet Yahya used to weep much during his supplications, so one day Allah sent Hazrat Jibrail to ask him why he was crying so much. Was he yearning for Paradise or was he frightened of the fire of Hell? Hazrat Yahya replied that neither greed for Paradise nor the fear of Hell motivated him. He simply and purely yearned for Didar. Hazrat Jibrail returned and said **“O Yahya, Allah says that if you are crying for Didar, then never stop!”** This narration demonstrates that to achieve nurani Didar requires total

humility, complete purification of soul and absolute self-effacement. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) in his farman of 1899 at Dares-es-salam, also said that a mu'min should cry for Didar just like a child separated from its mother.

Giryah-u zari is a prayer that is recited standing up because we are supplicating for our physical and spiritual needs through the mediation of the Imam of the time. In classical times when a subject needed a favour from a king he would stand in his court and make a humble request. In our case, as spiritual children, who need Divine favours, we too, need to stand respectfully and with raised hands ask in a humble manner.

Giryah-u zari tasbih also includes mushkil asaan tasbih everyday and sometimes satada bakshamani and occasionally satada sthapna tasbih. These various tasbihs are requested by members of the Jamat who face difficulties. Mushkil asaan tasbih is for everyday problems, whereas the satada bakshamani and sthapna are usually for more serious problems. The common denominator is the importance attached to congregational prayer on behalf of any mu'min who is undergoing difficulties. In Islam collective prayer is very effective and gives great succour and strength to spiritual brothers or sisters in their trials.

Another important feature of the giryah-u zari tasbih is that every Jamat around the world recites it every morning and evening. Since we all live in different time zones, it means that throughout the twenty-four-hour span, there is a Jamat

somewhere, which is offering prayers for the sake of the global spiritual brother and sisterhood. This should give us a sense of tremendous confidence and comforting security, as well as a strong confirmation that we are indeed created from a Single Soul and are truly a spiritual family of brothers and sisters.

The Ghat Paat Ceremony Encompasses our Fundamental Beliefs

The Ghat Paat ceremony is so special that it is established on every Friday, on days when we receive Mubarak Taliqas, on Chaandraat and other important festival days, as well as every morning after Baitu'l-Khayal. It becomes the highlight of the Jamatkhana ceremonies, which culminate with the recitation of the second Du`a. In days gone by, a special Du`a composed by Pir Sadardin for the Jamat in the Indian sub-continent was recited for Ghat Paat.

The Ghat Paat ceremony is very comprehensive and highly symbolic and requires us to reflect on its multiple meanings, which unfold with time and sincere practice. Three main symbols in it are a lamp, water and **sukreet**. The lamp is a universal symbol of light. It is switched on when the Ghat Paat is established at the beginning of the Giryah-u zari tasbih and is only switched off when the ceremony is complete. The light of the lamp is a reminder of the Light of Allah, which continues in His chosen Prophets and designated Imams from the progeny of the Final Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*). This belief is based on the teachings of the holy

Qur'an, which states in its famous Verse of Light, Ayatu'n-Nur, that is Surah 24, ayat 35: **"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His Light is as a niche in which there is a Lamp"**. In another chapter of the Qur'an, Surah 33, ayat 46, the Holy Prophet Muhammad is described as **"sirajam-munira"** or the **"Luminous Lamp"**.

Water is the second main symbol of the Ghat Paat ceremony. During the fifth part of the second Du'a, the reciter pours a small amount of **Ab-i shifa** into the kumbh whilst saying "farman" to which the whole Jamat unitedly replies "Ya Ali Ya Muhammad". **Ab-i shifa** is a Persian-Arabic compound word that literally means "The water of Healing". This definition invites us to reflect on what kind of healing is meant here. The opening chapter of the Qur'an which we recite at the very beginning of our Du'a is also known as the Suratu'sh-Shifa or the Chapter of Healing, which is repeated at the time of establishing the Ghat Paat. As we know there is no dichotomy or separation in Islam between the material and spiritual aspects of our faith. Thus, we pray for physical, spiritual and intellectual healing. This type of healing is only possible through sincere and consistent obedience of the farmans of the Imam of the time. The third symbol, **sukreet**, which is a Sanskrit word meaning "good deeds", reinforces the first two symbols. Together they mean that if we follow the living Light of Allah, that is, Imam-i zaman, who is the Nur of Prophethood and Imamah in this time, and live a life of ethics and do good deeds, we will be cured of all ideological, ethical, spiritual and intellectual diseases. The utterances during this ceremony, which are "Farman" and the reply "Ya Ali Ya Muhammad" and

“Hayy-u zinda” at the time of receiving **sukreet** and the reply “Qayyum-u paya” all substantiate the profound meanings of the Ghat Paat ceremony.

The combination of the symbols of light and water is significant. In the physical world around us we see that all life on our planet is due to the light of the physical sun and the water on the surface of the earth. In the Ghat Paat ceremony these two ingredients represent the continuing light and guidance of the Imam of the time, without which there can be no spiritual or intellectual life and growth. Further, the evidence of such spiritual and intellectual growth is in the way mu'mins can transform society around them through good deeds and service to humanity according to the teachings of the Imam of the time. Ghat Paat ceremony is worthy of our constant reflection. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) asks a question to the Jamat in a farman. He says that Jamats have been partaking of **Ab-i Shifa** for hundreds of years, but have we really understood its meaning?

Is Religion other than Love?

Is Religion other than love? This was a question asked by our fifth Imam, Mawlana Ja'far as-Sadiq (*salawatullahi `alayhi*). It is a very appropriate question to start with, in order to understand two ceremonies conducted in our Jamatkhana practices. One of these, **mehmani** is part of our daily practice and the other **awwal sufro**, is done on special occasions, such

as festival days, when we receive Taliqa Mubarak and in our various majalis.

Mehmani is a Persian word that means “hospitality to guests”. In all traditions, but particularly in the Islamic way of life, guests are offered the very best in one’s possession. In our Tariqah practices, **mehmani** means an offering of food to Mawlana Hazir Imam, usually a portion taken out of our home cooking before we partake of any of it. It is then brought to Jamatkhana daily and remains on the paats until the second Du`a is recited. Subsequently, the **mehmani** is auctioned as **nandi**, because it would be impractical for Jamats across the world to physically send the food to Imam-i zaman every day. What underlies this practice? **Mehmani** is a daily expression of the pure love and devotion that members of the Jamat have for the Imam of the time. It signifies that no murid feels comfortable to eat his or her meal without apportioning a part of it first to Mawla. It is a symbolic practice in which the spiritual children of the Imam consider him to be present with them at their mealtimes. Ismaili children everywhere grow up with this daily reminder of the **nurani batini** presence of the Imam in their family environment and they know that the heads of the families will apportion the best parts to the Imam. Love for the Imam is thus expressed in a daily practice and is a reminder of the close and permanent spiritual bond we have with Imam-i zaman.

When the **mehmani** is converted into **nandi**, it also fulfils some very important social needs in the Jamat. Many elderly members living on their own, working women, students and others benefit greatly from this practice. Further, all of us are

aware that whatever money is collected through this daily process is used by the Imam to help hundreds of thousands of people in the developing world through his renowned family of institutions known as the Aga Khan Development Network.

Awwal sufro, on the other hand, is offered by one individual in the Jamat who symbolically covers the expense of the entire **mehmani** present in the Jamatkhana on that particular special occasion. The benefit of such a gesture is shared with the Jamat present and the **kull ruhani**, that is, all the members of the Jamat who have passed into the spiritual world. Once again, this practice is based on pure love for and devotion to the Imam of the time.

Love, devotion and friendship are the mainstay of the religion of Islam and our Tariqah. In the holy Qur'an in Surah 3, ayat 92, Allah says: **"You shall not attain to righteousness until you spend (in the way of Allah) of what you love; and whatsoever you spend, verily, Allah knows it."** This teaching is also echoed in the Ginans. Pir Hassan Shah in the Ginan ***"Dur desh thi aayo vanjaro"*** says: ***"Offer that which is best in your homes and dedicate it to the name of your Lord"***.

Devotion and love for the Imam is the first pillar of Shia Islam known as **"Walayat"**. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu `alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*) has said in a Hadith: "Love for Ali burns sins like fire burns wood". The importance of love and devotion for the Imam of the time from the direct descendants of Hazrat Mawlana Ali (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) underpins all our

rites and ceremonies. Fida'i Khurasani, a great Ismaili da'i and poet of Iran, says in a poem in **"The Shimmering Light"**:

**"If you have Mawla's love in your heart, you are rich,
Otherwise be sure that you are less than a beggar.
Except for Ali's friendship, nothing is profitable to you,
Except for Ali's love, you are neither alive nor dead."**

"Spiritual Power of the Greater Love"

The title of the final article **"Spiritual power of the greater love"** encapsulates the purpose and goal of all the rites and ceremonies we have reflected on in the above articles. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) uses these words in that comprehensive chapter of his Memoirs, which is essential reading for all Ismailis.

As we have read consistently in the above articles, every utterance and every rite in the Jamatkhanah is related to the Light of Allah, which is ever-living and ever-present in His **Mazhar**, the Imam of the time. To love this Light or Nur is the highest teaching of our Tariqah, because it is the key to "the spiritual power of the greater love". Two ayats of the holy Qur'an are extremely significant in this context. In Surah 3, ayat 31, Allah commands the Holy Prophet to: **"Say, (O Muhammad to humankind) if you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."** This ayat leaves no doubt about the Concept of **Wasilah** that we have also discussed earlier. To love Allah, mu'mins or believers have to obey or follow the commands of the Holy Prophet. It is

only when this condition is fulfilled that Allah will love the believers and forgive them and purify them, so that they can return to their Origin.

In another chapter, in Surah 42, ayat 23, which qualifies the ayat we have just read, Allah once again commands: **“Say, (O Muhammad to humankind), I ask no recompense from you, except love for my relatives.”** In other words, after the Holy Prophet, believers have to accord the same love, respect and reverence to the **Ahl al-Bayt** or **Panj Tan Paak** and their descendants, the Imams. In the context of this, it becomes easy for us to understand and internalise this farman mubarak of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad (*salawatullahi `alayhi*) made at Dar-es-salaam on 3rd February, 1937:

“For your religious progress, I tell you one thing which includes everything. The most important thing is that you keep a strong and solid faith in the successor of Muhammad and Ali; it should be even more than in your mother, father, wealth and health. You will have no fear in this world if you love the descendants of Muhammad and Ali. This one hint includes all the beauties of prayers and religion.”

A study of the holy Qur’an can help us to understand this farman. We have already heard in the earlier write ups that the Prophet or his successor, the Imam is the **Khalifah** of Allah; he is **Yadu’llah**, the Hand of God on earth through whom **Bay`ah** is given to Allah; it is through them that Allah is prostrated to and obeyed; love for Allah is channelled through the Prophet and Imam. These are only some of the examples from the teachings

of the Qur'an. Additionally, in Surah 32, ayat 24 Allah says: **"And We made, from among them, Imams to guide (people) by Our command ..."**. Thus, Divine guidance reaches humankind through Prophets and Imams. In Surah 4, ayat 64 Allah says that when people wrong themselves, if they had come to the Prophet and asked for Allah's forgiveness and the Prophet too, had asked forgiveness for them, then surely they would have found Allah most forgiving. In Surah 9, ayat 103 Allah commands the Prophet to take zakat from the believers in order to purify them and instructs him to pray for them, because there is peace for them in his prayers.

All these examples convey the utmost significance of the status of the **Wasilah** that is, the Prophet and the Imam of the time. Thus, love for Imam-i zaman is the means to the **"spiritual power of the greater love"**. This is best explained by our Pirs in the Ginans in the example of the moth, which is so intoxicated with the love of light that it throws itself on the light, merges with it and becomes light. The goal of all our practices is to become one with the Light of Allah through His **Mazhar**, the Imam of the time.