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ISLAM

THE RELIGION OF MY ANCESTORS

The origins of man's religious aspirations are to be found in what we nowadays call science. Those who have studied mythology and primitive psychology know that magic in various forms started various trains of thought in primitive man by which he achieved what seemed to him to be rational accounts of the natural phenomena around him. It seemed to him rational that these phenomena, these events like the rising and the setting of the sun, the passage of the seasons, the flowering of the bud and the ripening of the fruit, the wind and the rain, were caused and controlled by deities or superior beings. Primitive religious experience and primitive scientific reasoning were linked together in magic, in wizardry. Thus, at one and the same time mankind's experiences in the realm of sensation and his strivings to explain and co-ordinate those experiences in terms of his mind led to the birth of both science and religion. The two remained linked throughout prehistoric and ancient times, and in the life of the early empires of which

we have knowledge. It was difficult to separate what I may call proto-religion from proto-science; they made their journey like two streams, sometimes mingling, sometimes separating, but running side by side.

Such is the background to Greek and Roman thought and culture as well as to ancient Iranian and Hindu philosophy before the beginning of the Christian era. Aristotle, however, gave a more scientific turn to this mingling, introducing categories and concepts which were purely reasonable and shedding those vestiges of religious awe and mystery which are visible even in Plato.

With the decline of the Roman Empire and the breakup of the great and elaborate system of civilization which Roman law and administration had sustained for so many centuries, the Dark Ages enfolded Europe. In the seventh century of the Christian era there was a rapid and brilliant new flowering of humanity's capacity and desire for adventure and discovery in the realms of both spirit and intellect. That flowering began in Arabia; its origin and impetus were given to it by my Holy ancestor, the Prophet Mohammed, and we know it by the name of Islam. From Arabia the tide of its influence flowed swiftly and strongly to North Africa and thence to Spain.

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 recognize 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 on the process of the mind, but directly given to us, which I believe to be religious experience. Naturally, since our brain is material, and its processes and all the consequences of its processes are material, the moment that we put either thought or spiritual experience into words, this material basis of the brain must give a material presentation to even the highest, most transcendent spiritual experience. But men can study objectively the direct and subjective experiences of those who have had spiritual enlightenment without material intervention.

It is said that we live, move and have our being in God. We find this concept expressed often in the Koran, not in those words of course, but just as beautifully and more tersely. But when we realize the meaning of this saying,

we are already preparing ourselves for the gift of the power of direct experience. Roumi and Hafiz, the great Persian poets, have told us, each in his different way, that some men are born with such natural spiritual capacities and possibilities of development that they have direct experience of that great love, that all-embracing, all-consuming love, which direct contact with reality gives to the human soul. Hafiz indeed has said that men like Jesus Christ and Muslim mystics like Mansour and Bayezid and others have possessed that spiritual power of the greater love; that any of us, if the Holy Spirit* ever-present grants us that enlightenment, can, being thus blessed, have the power which Christ had, but that to the overwhelming majority of men this greater love is not a practical possibility. We can, however, make up for its absence from our lives by worldly, human love for individual human beings; and this will give us a measure of enlightenment attainable without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Those who have had the good fortune to know and feel this worldly, human love should respond to it only with gratitude and regard it as a blessing and as, in its own way, a source of pride. I firmly

*** It must be realized that the Muslim concept of the Holy Spirit differs profoundly from the Christian idea of the Third Person of the Trinity.**

believe that the higher experience can to a certain extent be prepared for by absolute devotion in the material world to another human being. Thus from the most worldly point of view and with no comprehension of the higher life of the spirit, the lower, more terrestrial spirit makes us aware that all the treasures of this life, all that fame, wealth and health can bring are nothing beside the happiness which is created and sustained by the love of one human being for another. This great grace we can see in ordinary life as we look about us, among our acquaintances and friends.

But as the joys of human love surpass all that riches and power may bring a man, so does that greater spiritual love and enlightenment, the fruit of that sublime experience of the direct vision of reality which is God's gift and grace, surpass all that the finest, truest human love can offer. For that gift we must ever pray.

Now, I am convinced that through Islam, through the ideal of Allah, as presented by Muslims, man can attain this direct experience which no words can explain but which for him are absolute certainties. I have not discussed experience of this order with non-Muslims, but I have been told that Buddhists, Brahmins, Zoroastrians and Christians—I have not often

heard it of Jews, except perhaps Spinoza—have also attained this direct, mystical vision. I am certain that many Muslims, and I am convinced that I myself, have had moments of enlightenment and of knowledge of a kind which we cannot communicate because it is something given and not something acquired.

To a certain extent I have found that the following verse of the Koran, so long as it is understood in a purely nonphysical sense, has given assistance and understanding to myself and other Muslims. I must, however, warn all who read it not to allow their material critical outlook to break in with literal, verbal explanations of something that is symbolic and allegorical. I appeal to every reader, whether Muslim or not, to accept the spirit of this verse in its entirety:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, and the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as though it were a glittering star; it is lit from a blessed tree, an Olive neither of east nor of the west, the oil of which would well-nigh give light though no fire touched it,—light upon light;—Allah guides to His light whom He pleases; and Allah strikes out parables for men: and Allah all things doth know.

(Chapter XXIV "Light" 35)

From that brief statement of my own personal beliefs, I move on to as concise and as uncontroversial an exposition as I can give of Islam as it is understood and practised today. The present condition of mankind offers surely, with all its dangers and all its challenges, a chance too—a chance of establishing not just material peace among nations but that better peace of God on earth. In that endeavour Islam can play its valuable constructive part, and the Islamic world can be a strong and stabilizing factor provided it is really understood and its spiritual and moral power recognized and respected.

I shall try to give in a small compass a clear survey of the fundamentals of Islam, by which I mean those principles, those articles of faith, and that way of life, all of which are universally accepted among all Muslim sects. First therefore, I shall propound those Islamic tenets which are held in common by the larger community of Sunnis, and by Shias as well. Having thus made as clear as I can the faith which binds us all as Muslims, I shall then give a brief sketch of Shia doctrine and of those special tenets held by that subdivision of the Shias known as the Ismailis, the sect of which I am the Imam.

First it must be understood that, though these

fundamental ideals are universally accepted by Muslims, there does not exist in Islam, and there has never existed any source of absolute authority; we have no Papal Encyclical to propound and sanction a dogma, such as Roman Catholics possess, and no Thirty-nine Articles like those which state the doctrinal position of the Church of England. The Prophet Mohammed had two sources of authority, one religious which was the essential one of his life, and the other secular which, by the circumstances and accidents of his career, became joined to his essential and Divinely inspired authority in religion.

According to the Sunni school—the majority of Muslims—the Prophet's religious authority came to an end at his death, and he appointed no successor to his secular authority. According to Sunni teaching, the faithful, the companions of the Prophet, the believers, elected Abu Bakr as his successor and his Khalif; but Abu Bakr assumed only the civil and secular power. No one had the authority to succeed to the religious supremacy, which depended on direct Divine inspiration, because the Prophet Mohammed and the Koran declared definitely that he was the final messenger of God, the Absolute. Thus, say the Sunnis, it was impossible to constitute

an authority similar to that of the Papacy; it remained for the Faithful to interpret the Koran, the example and the sayings of the Prophet, not only in order to understand Islam but to ensure its development throughout the centuries. Fortunately the Koran has itself made this task easy, for it contains a number of verses which declare that Allah speaks to man in allegory and parable. Thus the Koran leaves the door open for all kinds of possibilities of interpretation so that no one interpreter can accuse another of being non-Muslim. A felicitous effect of this fundamental principle of Islam that the Koran is constantly open to allegorical interpretation, has been that our Holy Book has been able to guide and illuminate the thought of believers, century after century, in accordance with the conditions and limitations of intellectual apperception imposed by external influences in the world. It leads also to a greater charity among Muslims, for since there can be no cut-and-dried interpretation, all schools of thought can unite in the prayer that the Almighty in His infinite mercy may forgive any mistaken interpretation of the Faith whose cause is ignorance or misunderstanding.

I am trying to put before my Western readers, not the doctrine of the Ismaili sect to which I

belong, nor Shia doctrine, nor the teachings of the Sufi school of Islamic mysticism, of men such as Jalaleddin Roumi or Bayazid Bostami, nor even the views of certain modern Sunni interpreters who, not unlike certain Christian sects, look for literal guidance in the Koran as Christians of these sects find it in the Old and New Testaments; but the main and central Sunni stream of thought, whose source is in the ideas of the school founded by al-Ghazali and whose influence and teaching have flowed on from century to century.

First, however, we must ask ourselves why this final and consummate appearance of the Divine Will was granted to mankind, and what were its causes. All Islamic schools of thought accept it as a fundamental principle that for centuries, for thousands of years before the advent of Mohammed, there arose from time to time messengers, illumined by Divine Grace, for and among those races of the earth which had sufficiently advanced intellectually to comprehend such a message. Thus Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the Prophets of Israel are universally accepted by Islam. Muslims indeed know no limitation merely to the Prophets of Israel; they are ready to admit that there were similar Divinely

inspired messengers in other countries—Gautama Buddha, Shri Krishna and Shri Ram in India, Socrates in Greece, the wise men of China and many other sages and saints among peoples and civilizations, trace of which we have lost. Thus man's soul has never been left without a specially inspired messenger from the Soul that sustains, embraces, and is the Universe. Then what need was there for a Divine revelation to Mohammed? The answer of Islam is precise and clear. In spite of its great spiritual strength, Jewish monotheism has retained two characteristics which render it essentially different from Islamic monotheism; God has remained, in spite of all, a national and racial God for the children of Israel, and His personality is entirely separate from its supreme manifestation, the Universe. In far-distant countries such as India and China, the purity of the Faith in the one God had been so vitiated by polytheism, by idolatry and even by a pantheism which was hardly distinguishable from atheism, that these popular and folklore religions bore little resemblance to that which emanated from the true and pure Godhead. Christianity lost its strength and meaning for Muslims in that it saw its great and glorious founder not as a man but as God incarnate in man, as God made Flesh. Thus there was

an absolute need for the Divine Word's revelation, to Mohammed, himself a man like the others, of God's person and of his relations to the Universe which he had created. Once man has thus comprehended the essence of existence, there remains for him the duty, since he knows the absolute value of his own soul, of making for himself a direct path which will constantly lead his individual soul to and bind it with the universal Soul of which the Universe—as much of it as we perceive with our limited vision—is one of the infinite manifestations. Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as mono-realism and not as monotheism. Consider, for example, the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer: **"Allah-o-Akbar."** What does that mean? There can be no doubt that the second word of the declaration likens the character of Allah to a matrix which contains all and gives existence to the infinite, to space, to time, to the Universe, to all active and passive forces imaginable, to life and to the soul. Imam Hassan has explained the Islamic doctrine of God and the Universe by analogy with the sun and its reflection in the pool of a fountain; there is certainly a reflection or image of the sun, but with what poverty and with what little reality, how small and pale is the likeness between this impalpable image

and the immense, blazing, white-hot glory of the celestial sphere itself. Allah is the sun; and the Universe, as we know it in all its magnitude, and time, with its power, are nothing more than the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of the fountain.

There is a fundamental difference between the Jewish idea of creation and that of Islam. The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will. I think that I have sufficiently explained the difference between the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God and, on one side, the theistic ideas founded upon the Old Testament, and on the other, the pantheistic and dualistic ideas of the Indian religion and that of Zoroaster. But having known the real, the Absolute, having understood the Universe as an infinite succession of events, intended by God, we need an ethic, a code of conduct in order to be able to elevate ourselves toward the ideal demanded by God.

Let us then study the duties of man, as the great majority interpret them, according to the verses of the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet. First of all, the relations of man to God: there are no priests and no monks. There is no confession of sins, except directly to God.

A man who does not marry, who refuses to shoulder the responsibilities of fatherhood, of building up a home and raising a family through marriage, is severely condemned. In Islam there are no extreme renunciations, no asceticism, no maceration, above all no flagellations to subjugate the body. The healthy human body is the temple in which the flame of the Holy Spirit burns, and thus it deserves the respect of scrupulous cleanliness and personal hygiene. Prayer is a daily necessity, a direct communication of the spark with the Universal flame. Reasonable fasting for a month in every year, provided a man's health is not impaired thereby, is an essential part of the body's discipline through which the body learns to renounce all impure desires. Adultery, alcoholism, slander, and thinking evil of one's neighbour are specifically and severely condemned. All men, rich and poor, must aid one another materially and personally. The rules vary in detail but they all maintain the principle of universal mutual aid in the Muslim fraternity.

This fraternity is absolute and it comprises men of all colors and all races: black, white, yellow, tawny; all are the sons of Adam in the flesh and all carry in them a spark of the Divine Light. Everyone should strive his best to see that this spark be not extinguished but rather developed to that full "Companionship-on-High" which was the vision expressed in the last words of the Prophet on his deathbed, the vision of that blessed state which he saw clearly awaiting him. In Islam the Faithful believe in Divine justice and are convinced that the solution of the great problem of predestination and free will is to be found in the compromise that God knows what man is going to do, but that man is free to do it or not.

Wars are condemned. Peace ought to be universal. Islam means peace, God's peace with man and the peace of men one to another. Usury is condemned, but free and honest trade and agriculture—in all its forms—are encouraged, since they manifest a Divine service, and the welfare of mankind depends upon the continuation and the intensification of these legitimate labors. Politically a republican form of government seems to be the most rightful; for in Islamic countries, which have witnessed the development of absolute

monarchies with a great concentration of power within them, the election of the monarch has always remained a lifeless formula which has simply legitimized the usurpation of power.

After death Divine justice will take into consideration the faith, the prayers and the deeds of man. For the chosen there is eternal life and the spiritual felicity of the Divine vision. For the condemned, there is hell, where they will be consumed with regret for not having known how to merit the grace and the blessing of Divine mercy.

Islamic doctrine goes further than the other great religions, for it proclaims the presence of the soul, perhaps minute but nevertheless existing in an embryonic state, in all existence—in matter, in animals, trees, and space itself. Every individual, every molecule, every atom has its own spiritual relationship with the All-Powerful Soul of God. But men and women, being more highly developed, are immensely more advanced than the infinite number of other beings known to us. Islam acknowledges the existence of angels, of great souls who have developed themselves to the highest possible planes of the human soul and higher, and who are centers of the forces which are scattered

throughout the Universe. Without going as far as Christianity, Islam recognizes the existence of evil spirits which seek by means of their secret suggestions to us to turn us from good, from that straight way traced by God's finger for the eternal happiness of the humblest as of the greatest—Abraham, Jesus, Mohammed.

Thus far I have described those tenets of Islam which are professed and held in common by all Muslims of any and every sect or subsect. I now come to the divergence of the streams of thought. The Sunnis are the people of the Sonna or tradition. Their Kalama, or profession of faith, is; "There is no god but God and Mohammed is the Apostle of God." To this the Shias add: "And Ali, the companion of Mohammed, is the Vicar of God." Etymologically the word "Shia" means either a stream or a section.

The Prophet died without appointing a Khalif or successor. The Shia school of thought maintains that although direct Divine inspiration ceased at the Prophet's death, the need of Divine guidance continued and this could not be left merely to millions of mortal men, subject to the whims and gusts of passion and material necessity, capable of being momentarily but tragically misled

by greed, by oratory, or by the sudden desire for material advantage. These dangers were manifest in the period immediately following our Holy Prophet's death. Mohammed had been, as I have shown, both a temporal and a spiritual sovereign. The Khalif or successor of the Prophet was to succeed him in both these capacities; he was to be both **Emir-al-Momenin** or "commander of the true believers" and **Imam-al-Muslimin** or "spiritual chief of the devout." Perhaps an analogy from the Latin Western world will make this clear; he would be Supreme Pontiff as well as Imperator or temporal ruler.

Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, the husband of his beloved and only surviving child, Fatima, his first convert, his bold champion in many a war, who the Prophet in his lifetime said would be to him as Aaron was to Moses, his brother and right-hand man, in the veins of whose descendants the Prophet's own blood would flow, appeared destined to be that true successor; and such had been the general expectation of Islam. The Shias have therefore always held that after the Prophet's death, Divine power, guidance and leadership manifested themselves in Hazrat Ali as the first Imam or spiritual chief of the devout. The Sunnis, however, consider him the fourth in the succession

of Khalifs to temporal power.

The Imam is thus the successor of the Prophet in his religious capacity; he is the man who must be obeyed and who dwells among those from whom he commands spiritual obedience. The Sunnis have always held that this authority is merely temporal and secular, and is exerted only in the political sphere; they believe therefore that it appertains to any lawfully constituted political head of a State, to a Governor or to the President of a republic. The Shias say that this authority is all-pervading and is concerned with spiritual matters also, that it is transferred by inherited right to the Prophet's successors of his blood.

How this came about is best described in the words of Mr. Justice Arnold in his judgment delivered in the High Court of Bombay on November 12, 1866, in the great lawsuit brought against my grandfather, to which I later refer.

"The influence of Ayesha, the young and favourite wife of Mohammed, a rancorous enemy of Fatima and of Ali, procured the election of her own father Abu Bakr; to Abu Bakr succeeded Omar, and to him Osman, upon whose death, in the year 655 of the Christian era, Ali was

at last raised to the Khalifat. He was not even then unopposed; aided by Ayesha, Moawiyah of the family of the Ummayad contested the Khalifat with him, and while the strife was still doubtful, in the year A. D. 660, Ali was slain by a Kharegite, or Muslim fanatic, in the mosque of Cufa, at that time the principal Muslim city on the right or west bank of the Euphrates—itself long since a ruin, at no great distance from the ruins of Babylon."

Mr. Justice Arnold's judgment gives a lucid and moving account of the effect on Muslim life and thought of this assassination and of the subsequent murders—nine years and twenty years after their father—of Ali's two sons, Hassan and Hussein, the Prophet's beloved grandchildren whom he himself had publicly hailed as "the foremost among the youths of Paradise;" of the tragic and embittered hostility and misunderstanding that developed between the two main Muslim sects, and all the sorrow and the strife that afflicted succeeding generations.

Of the Shias there are many subdivisions; some of them believe that this spiritual headship, the Imamat which was Hazrat Ali's descended through him in the sixth generation to Ismail from whom I myself claim my descent and my

Imamat. Others believe that the Imamat is to be traced from Zeid, the grandson of Imam Hussein, the Prophet's grandson martyred at Kerbala. Still others, including the vast majority of the people of Persia, and Indian Shias believe that the Imamat is now held by a living Imam, the twelfth from Ali, who has never died, who is alive and has lived thirteen hundred years among us, unseen but seeing; those who profess this doctrine are known as the Asna Asharis. The Ismailis themselves are divided into two parties, a division which stems from the period when my ancestors held the Fatimite Khalifat of Egypt. One party accepts my ancestor, Nizar, as the rightful successor of the Khalif of Egypt Mustansir, whereas the other claims as Imam his other son the Khalif Mustalli.

Thenceforward the story of the Ismailis, of my ancestors and their followers, moves through all the complexities, the ebb and flow, of Islamic history through many centuries. Gibbon, it has been said, abandoned as hopeless the task of clearing up the obscurities of an Asiatic pedigree; there is, however, endless fascination in the study of the web of characters and of events, woven across the ages, which unites us in this present time with all these far-distant glories,

tragedies and mysteries. Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed; at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.

After the loss of the Fatimite Khalifat in Egypt my ancestors moved first to the highlands of Syria and the Lebanon; thence they journeyed eastward to the mountains of Iran. They established a stronghold on the craggy peak of Alamut in the Elburz Mountains, the range which separates from the rest of Persia the provinces lying immediately to the south of the Caspian. Legend and history intertwine here in the strange tale of the Old Man of the Mountains, and of those hereditary Grand Masters of the Order of the Assassins who held Alamut for nearly two hundred years. In this period, the Ismaili faith was well known in Syria, in Iraq, in Arabia itself, and far up into Central Asia. Cities such as Samarkand and Bokhara were then great centres of Muslim learning and thought. A little later in the thirteenth century of the Christian era, Ismaili religious propaganda penetrated into what is now Sinkiang and Chinese Turkestan. There was a time in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when the Ismaili doctrine was the chief and most influential Shi'ite school of thought; but later

with the triumph of the Saffevi Dynasty in Iran (particularly in its northwest province, Azerbaijan) the Asna Ashari, or Twelfth Imam sect established its predominance. Remnants of the Ismaili faith remained firm and are still to be found in many parts of Asia, North Africa and Iran. The historical centres of Ismailism indeed are scattered widely all over the Islamic world. In the mountainous regions of Syria, for example, are to be found the Druzes, in their fastness in the Jebel Druze. They are really Ismailis who did not originally follow my family in their migration out of Egypt but remained with the memory of my ancestor, Al Hakem, the Fatimite Khalif of Egypt, and established their doctrines on lines very similar to those of the Syrian Ismailis, who, in present times, are my followers. Similar Ismaili "islands" exist in southern Egypt, in the Yemen and of course in Iraq. In Iran the centres are around Mahalat, westward toward Hamadan and to the south of Tehran, others are in Khorasan to the north and east around about Yezd, around Kerman and southward along the coast of the Persian Gulf from Bandar Abbas to the borders of Pakistan and Sind, and into Baluchistan. Others are in Afghanistan, in Kabul itself; there are many in Russia and Central Asia, around Yarkand, Kashgar and in many villages and settlements

in Sinkiang. In India certain Hindu tribes were converted by missionaries sent to them by my ancestor, Shah Islam Shah, and took the name of Khojas; a similar process of conversion occurred in Burma as recently as the nineteenth century.

Now that I have brought this brief record of Ismaili origin, vicissitudes and wanderings within sight of the contemporary world, it may be timely to give an account in some detail of the life and deeds of my grandfather, the first to be known as the Aga Khan, who emerged into the light of history early in the nineteenth century of the Christian era. His life was (as Mr. Justice Arnold observed) "adventurous and romantic." He was the hereditary chieftain of the important city of Kerman and the son-in-law of the powerful and able Persian monarch, Fateh Ali Shah, holding considerable territorial possessions in addition to his inherited Imamat of the Ismailis.

In 1838 he was involved in conflict with the then ruling Emperor Mohammed Shah, for reasons of which Mr. Justice Arnold gave the following account: "Hadji Mirza Ahasi, who had been the tutor of Mohammad Shah, was during the whole reign of his royal pupil (from 1834 to 1848) the Prime Minister of Persia. A Persian of very

low origin formerly in the service of the Aga Khan, had become the chief favorite and minion of the all-powerful minister. This person, through his patron, had the impudence to demand in marriage for his son one of the daughters of the Aga Khan, a granddaughter of the late Shah-in-Shah! This, says the Persian historian, was felt by the Aga Khan to be a great insult; and the request, though strongly pressed by the Prime Minister, was indignantly refused. Having thus made the most powerful man in Persia his deadly enemy, the Aga Khan probably felt that his best chance of safety was to assert himself in arms—a course not uncommon with the great feudatories of disorganized Persia. Making Kerman his headquarters, he appears to have kept up the fight with varying fortunes through the years 1838-1839 and part of 1840. In the latter year, overpowered by numbers, he was forced to flight and with difficulty made his escape, attended by a few horsemen, through the deserts of Baluchistan to Sind."

In his wanderings of the next few years my grandfather encountered and rendered stout assistance to the British in their process of military and imperial expansion northward and westward from the Punjab. In Sind he raised and maintained a troop of light horse (the descendants of whose

survivors were so grave an anxiety to me many years later) and during the latter stages of the first Afghan War, in 1841 and 1842, he and his cavalry were of service to General Nott in Kandahar and to General England when he advanced out of Sind to join Nott. For these services and for others which he rendered to Sir Charles Napier in his conquest of Sind in 1843-1844, my grand father received a pension from the British Government.

In 1845 my grandfather reached Bombay where—as Mr. Justice Arnold expressed it— "he was received by the cordial homage of the whole Khoja population of this city and its neighbourhood." For a year or two from 1846 he was in Calcutta as a political prisoner because Mohammed Shah had remonstrated to the British Government about his presence in a part of such ready access to Persia as Bombay. However, in 1848 Mohammed Shah's reign came to an end, and my grandfather settled peaceably in Bombay and there established his Durkhana or headquarters. Not only was this a wise and happy personal decision, but it had an admirable effect on the religious and communal life of the whole Ismaili world. It was as if the heavy load of persecution and fanatical hostility, which they had had to bear for so long, was lifted.

Deputations came to Bombay from places as remote as Kashgar, Bokhara, all parts of Iran, Syria, the Yemen, the African coast and the then narrowly settled hinterland behind it.

Since then there has been no fundamental or violent change in the Ismaili way of life or in the conditions in which my followers can pursue their own religion. At present no deputations come from Russia, but Ismailis in Russia and in Central Asia are not persecuted and are quite free in their religious life; they cannot of course send the tribute, which is merely a token tribute and never has been the sort of mulcting which a few fanatical enemies of the Ismailis have alleged it to be.

With Sinkiang, Kashgar and Yarkand we have no communication at present, since the frontier is closed—no more firmly against Ismailis than against anyone else —but we know that they are free to follow their religion and that they are firm and devoted Ismailis with a great deal of self-confidence and the feeling that they constitute by far the most important Ismaili community in the whole world. From Iran representatives and commissions come and go; from Syria they used to come to India regularly, but now from time to time members of my family

go to Syria, or my Syrian followers come and visit me in Egypt. Not long ago I went to Damascus where a great number of my followers came to pay their respects. In nearly all those countries the greater part of the tribute to the Imam is spent on schools, or prayer houses, and on the administration of various religious and social institutions. A considerable measure of local responsibility prevails; questions of marriage and divorce, for example, are entirely the concern of the local representative of the Imam. At times prosperous communities among the Ismailis help less prosperous ones in respect to similar institutions. I issue general instructions and orders; but the actual day-to-day administrative work of each local community is done by the Imam's representative and local chief. Many of these local headships throughout Central Asia, for example, are hereditary. But we have no general, regular system. Sometimes a son succeeds, sometimes a grandson. Sometimes, he is known as Vazir, or Kamdar (a title which by constant use has degenerated into Kamria). Sometimes he is Rais or Rai. In Syria the Imam's representatives are known as Amirs. In some parts of Central Asia such as Hunza, the word "Amir" has been colloquialized and shortened to Mir.

The headship of a religious community spread over a considerable part of the world surface—from Cape Town to Kashgar, from Syria to Singapore—cannot be sustained in accordance with any cut-and-dried system. Moral conditions, material facilities, national aspirations and outlook and profoundly differing historical backgrounds have to be borne in mind, and the necessary mental adjustments made.

There is therefore great variety and great flexibility of administration. In the British, Portuguese and French colonies of East Africa, in Uganda, Portuguese East Africa, Madagascar, Natal and Cape Colony there is a highly developed and civilized administrative system of councils. Educational administrators, property agents, executive and judicial councils all perform an immense amount of day-to-day administrative work, and under my general orders vast financial administration as well.

In India and Pakistan there is a similar technique of administration but in a less developed and looser form. In Burma and Malaya the organization closely resembles that of the Ismailis in Africa. Syria, Iran and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan are all countries with their strongly

marked individuality, historical background and traditions. These historical variations over centuries, the accessibility, or lack of it, for many of the more isolated communities, and the development of communications between my family and my followers have all had their effect.

In Central Asia the leadership of the Ismailis is by inheritance in the hands of certain families and has been handed down in continuous line through centuries. This is true of my followers in Afghanistan, and in Russia and Chinese Turkestan, where certain families have been, since their conversion to Islam, administrators and representatives of the Imam. The local leadership passes down in a close connection of kinship from one generation to another. Sometimes it is the hereditary chieftain and occasionally—as in the case of Hunza—the secular king, himself an Ismaili, who is the administrator of the religious brotherhood.

The correspondence which I maintain with all these far-scattered communities is affected by local circumstances. In Baghdad I have special representatives who deal with Arabian matters; in Iran I have special representatives in every province who deal with Ismaili affairs, who are

also generally members of families that have as a matter of inheritance supplied local Ismaili leaders for probably as long as these people have been linked with my family. In Syria, one such family of representatives has retained an unbroken connection with my family for more than a thousand years.

Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules; even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained. In some countries—India and Africa for example—the Ismailis have a council system, under which their local councilors are charged with all internal administrative responsibility, and report to me what they have done. In Syria, Central Asia and Iran, leadership, as I have said, is vested in hereditary or recommended leaders and chiefs, who are the Imam's representatives and who look after the administration of the various jamats, or congregations.

From all parts of the Ismaili world with which regular contact is politically possible a constant flow of communications and reports come to

me. Attending to these, answering them, giving my solutions of specific problems presented to me, discharging my duties as hereditary Imam of this far-scattered religious community and association—such is my working life, and so it has been since I was a boy.

Much of the work of the Ismaili councils and of the Imam's representatives nowadays is purely social, and is concerned with the proper contractual arrangement of matters such as marriage and divorce. On this subject I should perhaps say that nowhere in the world where Ismailis are now settled is there any persecution of them or interference with their faith and customs except if and when the general laws of the country are contrary to institutions, such as plurality of wives. It is generally overlooked that among Ismailis no one can take a second wife or divorce his first wife for a whim or—as is sometimes falsely imagined in the West—some frivolous or erratic pretext. There are usually, to our way of thinking, some very good reasons for either action. To beget children is a very proper need and desire in every marriage; if after many years of married life there is still no issue, often a wife herself longs to see her home brightened by the presence of children with all the laughter, hope, joy and deep contentment that they bring

with them. In other instances there is so profound a difference of character that a divorce is found to be the best solution for the happiness of both parties. But in every case—whether a second wife is taken or a divorce is granted—the various councils or (where there are no councils) the representatives of the Imam have an absolute duty to safeguard the interests of the wife; if a second wife is taken, it is a matter of seeing that full financial protection is assured to the first wife, or if there is a divorce, of seeing that there is a generous, adequate and seemly monetary settlement. It is important that it should be realized among non-Muslims that the Islamic view of the institution of marriage—and of all that relates to it, divorce, plurality of wives and so on—is a question solely of contract, of consent, and of definite and mutually accepted responsibilities. The sacramental concept of marriage is not Islam's; therefore except indirectly there is no question of its religious significance at all, and there is no religious ceremony to invest it with the solemnity and the symbolism which appertain to marriage in other religions like Christianity and Hinduism. It is exactly analogous to—in the West—an entirely civil and secular marriage in a registry office or before a judge. Prayers of course can be offered—prayers

for happiness, prosperity and good health—but there can be no religious ritual beyond these, and they, indeed, are solely a matter of personal choice. There is, therefore, no kind of marriage in Islam, or among the Ismailis, except the marriage of mutual consent and mutual understanding. And, as I have indicated, much of the work of the Ismaili councils and of the Imam's representatives in all our Ismaili communities is to see that marriages are properly registered and to ensure that divorce, though not a sin, is so executed that the interests of neither party suffer from it, that as much protection as possible is given to women, and most of all that maintenance of young children is safeguarded.

The past seventy years have witnessed steady, stable progress on the part of the Ismailis wherever they have settled. Under the Ottoman Empire, in the reign of Abdul Hamid, there was a considerable degree of persecution. A minority like several other minorities in his empire, they suffered hardship, and many of their leaders endured imprisonment in the latter years of his despotic rule. With the Young Turk revolution, however, the period of persecution ended. And now, in spite of all the vast political shifts and changes which the world has undergone, I think it may reasonably be claimed that lot of the

Ismailis in general throughout the world is a fairly satisfactory one; wherever they are settled their communities compose a happy, self-respecting, law-abiding and industrious element in society.

What has been my own policy with my followers? Our religion is our religion, you either believe in it or you do not. You can leave a faith but you cannot, if you do not accept its tenets, remain within it and claim to "reform" it. You can abandon those tenets, but you cannot try to change them and still protest that you belong to the particular sect that holds them. Many people have left the Ismaili faith, just as others have joined it throughout the ages. About a score of people out of many millions—a small group in Karachi and in India—pretended to be Ismailis but called themselves "reformers". The true Ismailis immediately excommunicated them. There has never been any question of changing the Ismaili faith; that faith has remained the same and must remain the same. Those who have not believed in it have rightly left it; we bear them no ill-will and respect them for their sincerity.

What about political guidance? It has been the practice of my ancestors, to which I have

strictly adhered, always to advise Ismailis to be absolutely loyal and devoted subjects of the State—whatever its constitution, monarchical or republican—of which they are citizens. Neither my ancestors nor I have ever tried to influence our followers one way or another, but we have told them that the constituted legal authority of any country in which they abide must have their full and absolute loyalty. Similarly if any government approaches me and asks me for my help and my advice to its subjects, this advice is invariably—as was my father's and my grandfather's—that they must be loyal and law-abiding, and if they have any political grievances they must approach their government as legally constituted, and in loyalty and fidelity to it. All my teaching and my guidance for my followers has been in fulfilment of this principle: render unto God the things which are God's and to Caesar those which are Caesar's.

In matters of social reform I have tried to exert my influence and authority sensibly and progressively. I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women. In my grandfather's and my father's time the Ismailis were far ahead of any other Muslim sect in the matter of the abolition of the strict veil,

even in extremely conservative countries. I have absolutely abolished it; nowadays you will never find an Ismaili woman wearing the veil. Everywhere I have encouraged girls' schools, even in regions where otherwise they were completely unknown. I say with pride that my Ismaili followers are, in this matter of social welfare, far in advance of any other Muslim sect. No doubt it is possible to find individuals equally advanced, but I am convinced that our social conditions as a body—education for both boys and girls, marriage and domestic outlook and customs, the control over divorce, the provision for children in the event of divorce, and so forth—are far ahead. We were pioneers in the introduction of midwifery, and long before any other Muslim community in the Middle East, we had trained nurses for childbirth. With the support and help of Lady Dufferin's nursing association in India, I was able—at a time when normal conditions in these matters were terribly insanitary—to introduce a modern outlook on childbirth, with trained midwives, not only in India and Burma but in Africa and (so far as general conditions permitted) in Syria and Iraq.

In Africa, where I have been able to give active help as well as advice, we have put the

finances of individuals and of the various communities on a thoroughly safe basis. We established an insurance company—the Jubilee Insurance—whose shares have greatly increased in value. We also set up what we called an investment trust, which is really a vast association for receiving money and then putting it out on loan, at a low rate of interest, to Ismaili traders and to people who want to buy or build their own houses.

About my own personal wealth a great deal of nonsense has been written. There must be hundreds of people in the United States with a larger capital wealth than mine; and the same is true of Europe. Perhaps not many people, in view of the incidence of taxation, even in the United States, have the control over an income that I exercise; but this control carries with it—as an unwritten law—the upkeep of all the various communal, social and religious institutions of my Ismaili following, and in the end only a small fraction of it—if any—is left for members of my family and myself.

When I read about the "millions of pounds a year" I am supposed to possess, I know only that if I had an income of that size I should be ashamed of myself. There is a great deal

of truth in Andrew Carnegie's remark: "The man who dies rich, dies disgraced." I should add: The man who lives rich, lives disgraced. By "lives rich," I mean the man who lives and spends for his own pleasure at a rate and on a scale of living in excess of that customary among those called nowadays "the upper income group," in the country of which he is a citizen. I am not a communist, nor do I believe that a high standard of private life is a sin and an affront to society. I feel no flicker of shame at owning three or four cars; in India, by the way where a great many people from outside come and go, I always have more cars for their use.

Nor am I ashamed of being the owner of a big racing stable, about which I propose to say something in a later chapter. My family, as I have indicated, have had a long, honourable and affectionate association with horsemanship in all its forms. Had I to contemplate either giving up a considerable number of horses in training or turning the stable into a paying concern, I have no doubt that by selling a considerable proportion of my stock I could turn it into a paying business any day of the week. Neither my grandfather, my father nor I have ever looked

on our racing as simply a money-making matter, but as a sport which, by careful attention and thoughtful administration, could become self-supporting and a permanent source of pleasure not only for ourselves, as owners, but for thousands—indeed for millions—who follow our colors on the turf; and we have considered our studs and our training stables as sources of wealth for the countries in which they are maintained and of practical usefulness from the point of view of preserving and raising the standard of blood-stock.

A specific charge of extravagance against our family related to the period in which some two thousand people a day were living and feeding at our expense. These two thousand were, after all, descendants and dependents of people who had exiled themselves from Iran with my grandfather and had given up their homes and estates, and in the conditions of the time we, as heads of the Ismaili community, were responsible for their welfare and maintenance. As soon as I could, and as thoroughly as I could, I dealt with that problem, so that now their descendants are far happier and far more self-reliant than they were, and I have nothing on my conscience about the way in which I dealt with it.

I would have been a profoundly unhappy man if I had possessed one tenth of the fabulous amount of wealth which people say that I have at my disposal, for then indeed I should have felt all my life that I was carrying a dead weight—useless alike to my family and my friends or, for that matter, to my followers. Beyond a certain point wealth and the material advantages which it brings do more harm than good, to societies as to individuals.

So far as their way of life is concerned, I have tried to vary the advice which I have given to my followers in accordance with the country or state in which they live. Thus in the British colony of East Africa I strongly urge them to make English their first language, to found their family and domestic lives along English lines and in general to adopt British and European customs—except in the matter of alcohol and slavery to tobacco. I am convinced that living as they must in a multiracial society, the kind of social life and its organization which gives them the greatest opportunities to develop their personalities and is the most practically useful is the one which they ought to follow. On the other hand, to those who live in Burma I have given the same sort of advice—but that they

should follow a Burman way of life rather than any other. In Muslim countries like Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran, of course, there are no difficulties at all. My own family's home and social life has always followed an Iranian-Muslim pattern; this has involved no violent or radical readjustment wherever I have lived, so that the European ladies whom I have married, one after the other have in fact easily and happily acquired an Iranian-Muslim outlook and rhythm of life.

In Africa, however, my followers faced a much more acute problem. They arrived there with Asiatic habits and an Asiatic pattern of existence, but they encountered a society in process of development which is, if anything, European-African. To have retained an Asiatic outlook in matters of language, habits, and clothing would have been for them a complication and socially a dead weight of archaism in the Africa of the future. In Pakistan and modern Bharat the Ismailis are likely in the future to assume two totally different patterns of culture. In West Pakistan they will probably speak Urdu or what used to be called Hindustani, and their social habits and customs will be moulded accordingly. In East Pakistan Bengali dress and language will play a major part in Ismaili life. In Bharat the

languages which they will speak will probably be Gujerati and Marathi, and their outlook and way of life similarly will take on a Gujerati-Marathi shape. Yet I am certain that so long as they retain their faith the brotherhood of Islam will unite all these people of varying social outlook and patterns of behavior and will keep them together in spirit.

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