



Eight Questions Answered

Allamah Nasir al-Din Nasir Hunzai

EIGHT
(ATM
By

QUESTIONS
SUWAL

ANSWERED
JAWAB)

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by:

P R E F A C E

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds: and the End belongs to the righteous; and blessing and peace be upon His Messenger and his pure progeny.

For sensible and wise people it is as clear as broad daylight that with regards to knowledge, all subjects are contained in the gnosis or understanding of religion (dīn-shināsī) and in the gnosis or recognition of Imam (imām-shināsī). Hence in Ismā'īlism the gnosis of religion and Imam is extremely necessary, without which no Ismā'īli can attain real satisfaction.

It is through knowledge and gnosis (ilm-u ma'rifat) that problems are solved, doubts and uncertainties are removed, the illumination of faith (imān kī rawshanī) is increased, and the heart and soul attain satisfaction. It is knowledge and gnosis which generate qualities of ambition and high-aspiration in true believers (mu'min). In short, everything is contained in knowledge and gnosis.

When does a question arise? A question arises at a time when there is no mutual acquaintance, when there is no knowledge and understanding (gnosis) of religion and when there is no literature available and no attention is given to understanding the religion.

However, if there are questions, it does not mean that answers to them are not possible. In fact an answer for every question can be availed. But the important thing is that the answer should be based on reality and truthfulness, for otherwise no benefit will be availed from the answer.

Thus an attempt is made within this book to answer eight such questions which were posed by one of our students. Since the student has placed his confidence in us, it is our duty to try and solve them and to ask Allah, the Most High, for success and help in this task.

According to me it is not difficult to reply any question with regard to the truthfulness of Ismā'īlism. In fact it is very easy, to the extent that even if there are thousands of questions it is not a problem, for we can prove and show that whatever questions arise pertaining to Ismā'īlism, they all together take the form of a huge tree; thus by discussing the trunk and

bigger branches of the tree we can reply to all the questions relating to the tree. In the same way, by discussing the fundamentals of Ismā'īlism, we can reply all questions pertaining to Ismā'īlism and show that Ismā'īlism and the Imam of the age are indeed the real truth. That is to say, for those who are able to understand, this fundamental question alone is sufficient to their enquiry: "What proof is there of the Imam being the real truth?" For, all other relevant questions come under this focal question. But have the common people ever kept this in mind? They ask whatever questions they like and whatever question that occurs to their minds.

It is without any doubt that Ismā'īlīs should look to their true Imam; to know what is his implicit guidance (manshā') or what is his explicit guidance, for in establishing this principle (of looking to the true Imam for guidance) religious knowledge can be disseminated.

It should be kept in mind that a question can be answered directly or indirectly, and it is important to reply in the way the question has been asked, for otherwise in some circles of the jamā'at (community) there may spread doubt about their faith and furthermore, this may affect the belief particularly of the new generation. If God will grant us help and success in this task, we will continue our efforts in the future and try to remove doubts (concerning Isma'īlism) in one way or another.

For Knowledge,
The servant of the Jamā'at
Naşir al-Dīn Naşir Hunzai 24 December 1976

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why do women sometimes lead the prayers in jamā'at-khānah, while there is no such precedent in the shari'at (revealed law)?
2. Why is money collected in jamā'at-khānah under the name of different assemblies (majālis) and on different occasions? For since jamā'at-khānah is the house of God, surely only prayers should be performed there.
3. When any other Muslim brother wants to come to jamā'at-khānah, why should he not be allowed to come?
4. How can Shah Karim, the Imam of the Ismā'īlīs in truth be the true Imam, while in Europe he leads a western way of life?
5. Why is your zakāt (religious tax) different from the shar'ī zakāt (religious tax according to shari'at)? Why is it not distributed among the poor and needy directly?
6. To what extent are your religious rites correct and valid? Tell me about nāndī in particular.
7. How far do the Ismā'īlīs follow the ṣalāt (ritual prayer)? What do they mean by salāt?
8. Why do men and women pray together in the jamā'at-khānah?

Note: These questions were posed by an Ismā'īlī student in the month of December 1976.

QUESTIONS REPLIED

1. Women Leading the Prayers

Why do women sometimes lead the prayers in jamā^cat-khānah, while there is no such precedent in the sharī^cat?

(a) Islam is the right path. It has been ordained to lead towards God. When, as according to this example, true religion is likened to a path, then it also has stations which are called sharī^cat, ṭarīqat (Sufic path), haqīqat (truth) and ma^crifat (gnosis or the recognition of God). Just as Sufism is a clear proof of development within Islam from one station to the next, so are the manners and rites of the jamā^cat-khānah a living example of following and spiritually advancing along the same straight path of Islam, and progressing to a higher station. And it is quite clear that in Sufism there are thousands of things which do not exist in sharī^cat, for how can it be possible for such things to be in sharī^cat while they pertain to ṭarīqat? Likewise, the things pertaining to jamā^cat-khānah, i.e. the manners and rites therein belong to haqīqat and to judge them on a criterion other than of haqīqat is nothing but a proof of oversight and ignorance.

(b) Furthermore, if on the level or stage of sharī^cat a woman cannot lead men in shar^ci-namāz (ritual prayer according to sharī^cat, then there is no other apparent reason for this except that this prohibition has a tā'wīl (esoteric interpretation or de-allegorization). Contrary to this, Whatever ^cibādāt-u-bandagī (devotional prayers) is performed in the jamā^cat-khānah has no tā'wīl; in fact, it is itself a tā'wīl. Therefore in jamā^cat-khānah a woman may lead the prayers.

If the question is then asked what the tā'wīl is of not allowing women to lead shar^ci-namāz, then the answer is that in religion the Prophet is in the position of a man and all the individuals within the entire community are in the position of a woman. Like wise, the Imam (may peace of God be upon him) is in the position of a man and all his followers are in the position of a woman, and similarly, the teacher is like a man and the student is like a woman. Thus according to sharī^cat if a woman leads men in shar^ci-namāz then according to tā'wīl it implies that (God forbidding) the Prophet should leave his position and become a follower and the community should take the position of the Prophet and lead him; or, that the Imam should become a follower and the followers should become the Imam, and that the teacher should become the student and vice-versa. So this tā'wīl shows how the fact of a woman leading the men in shar^ci-namāz indicates an impossible matter, i.e. that the Prophet, playing the role of a man, should assume the role of a woman, which is the community; and for this reason women are not allowed to lead men in shar^ci-namāz only on the level of sharī^cat.

c) Islam, in fact, comprises of the teachings and instructions of both the Qur'an and the teacher of the Qur'an, and to travel along the different stages of these teachings and instruction means to walk on the straight path (ṣīrat-i mustaqīm), and to advance from one station to the next station. In the same context, we can also say that Islam, with respect to its stages of knowledge and practice, is like a university which has various progressive degrees of learning. Now it is clear from this example that just as each of the various university degrees has its own criteria, similarly for all these different degrees of knowledge and practice in Islam there are ordained different criteria. Thus we say that to judge Ismā^cīlī rites on a criterion other than the Ismā^cīlī criterion is not logical.

d) If Islam is the straight path, then one has to accept that Muslim sects or groups are like the travelers who are spread on the various stations of the path, on which some travelers are following the others. Further, if the true religion, as the Qur'an says, is the rope of God, the Most High, and this rope is between God and His servants, then it also implies that the servants are each holding the rope in various ascending degrees, one behind the other. Further still, where

ascension towards the heights of gnosis of God (according to 52:3,4) is compared with a staircase, there it can be inferred likewise that the people of different religions are each on different stairs. Just as the manifest religion (dīn-i-mubīn), i.e. Islam, can be likened to a university, where the students of the university are in different grades similarly the believers in Islam with respect to knowledge and practice (ʿilm-u ʿamal) can be seen to be in different stages. The religion of Nature (i.e. Islam) has been compared with human creation and the different stages of life, such as the child in mother's womb, the new-born, the sucking-babe, the tyro, youth, the middle-aged, and the old, and similarly there are different stages in religion. This example shows that Islam is the religion of Nature and it has to reach to its perfection just as a human-being gradually reaches to perfection. In short, the teachings of Islam are in degrees and as such its instructions are also in gradual form. Thus the objection of one against the other is nothing but ignorance of the stages of the Islamic teachings.

2. Material Sacrifice (Mālī Qurbānī) in Jamāʿat-khānah

Why is money collected in Jamāʿat-khānah under the name of different assemblies (majālis) and on different occasions? For since Jamāʿat-khānah is the house of God, surely only prayers should be performed there.

a) It is true that business pertaining to worldly matters cannot be conducted either in the Jamāʿat-khānah or in the mosque. On the other hand, zakāt (religious tax) ṣadaqah (alms), and every other type of material sacrifice, and in addition, many other good deeds, are such that they are more rewarding if they are performed in the house of God. As God says:

"(O Prophet! Remind the people that) when We made the house (of God) a place of reward for mankind and a sanctuary." (2:125)

It is quite obvious that the house of God is a place for all kinds of reward. The house of God is foremost the Kaʿbah, and then the mosque and the Jamāʿat-khānah. Thus since the centre of reward is the house of God then why should most of the deeds not be performed therein? Since these good deeds are performed for the sake of God, they should be done in the house of God; and since these deeds, these material sacrifices and good deeds are included in religious services (ʿibādāt) then why should they not be performed in the house of God?

In this way the doers of the good deeds will benefit from the prayers of all and at the same time this is a kind of practical teaching, for in observing these deeds, the members of the jamāʿat are able to create within themselves the spirit of offering material sacrifices and performing such good deeds. This is the reason why even in the time of the Prophet, most material sacrifices were received in the mosque.

3. Jamāʿat-khānah and Non-Ismaʿīlis

When any other Muslim brother wants to come to Jamāʿat-khānah, why should he not be allowed to come?

a) For a detailed answer to this question see also my article entitled "Islām kī Bunyādī Ḥaqīqatayn (The Fundamental Realities of Islam)" which is going to be published in "Panj Maqalah (Five Articles) No. I." Further, the question arises that will the person who wants to come to Jamāʿat-khānah accept all the conditions, manners and rites of the Jamāʿat-khānah as an Ismaʿīlī does? If it is not possible for him to do so, then there is no benefit in his coming to the Jamāʿat-khānah. So in this case it is better for him not to come to the Jamāʿat-khānah.

b) In Islam there are certain holy buildings which are common among the Muslims, and there are some which are private. Among the holy places or buildings which are common, first comes

the Ka'bah, and then comes the mosque, for these buildings belong to the period when all Muslims were one. However, in some places there are certain mosques, which owing to either different views or different sects are private. Similarly, in fact more stringently, khānqāh, imām bārā, and Jamā'at-khānah are private places, for these places are respected only by those who are basically attached to them in faith and thus no other people may share in these holy places.

c) 'Mosque', which in Arabic is called 'masjid', means the place of prostration or place of worship. Therefore this word invites all the Muslims to go there and bow before God and worship Him. But in the word Jamā'at-khānah, 'l̥bādat or worship, is not apparent, as Jamā'at-khānah, in Persian, means the house of a group, which belongs only to a particular group and not to all. Such is the philosophy intrinsic in the meaning of khānqāh. Khānqāh is the Arabicised form of khāngāh or khānah-gāh, which means the place where Sufis and dervishes live. Here also the meaning 'worship' is kept in secret, for otherwise the Sufis would have chosen a word which would have immediately and openly denoted worship (i.e. would have meant a place of worship). But this was done intentionally for there they had to instruct the teaching of Islam in a specific way. Also, each khānqāh was confined to the disciples of a particular p̥ir or shaykh (spiritual guide). This same example may be applied to the Jamā'at-khānah for the Jamā'at-khānah in the beginning was the khānqāh itself. We come across the Jamā'at-khānah of Bakhtyār-i Kākī in the biographies of the Sufis, and this is later adopted in Ismā'ilism. This historical event is a clear proof of the fact that ṭarīqat comes from the depth (bātin) of shari'at and ḥaqīqat emerges from the depth of ṭarīqat, This whole discussion leads to the conclusion that the Ismā'ilis belong only to the followers of the Hāzīr (or Hāḍīr, i.e. present) Imam.

4. Dwelling Place of the Imam

How can Shah Karim, the Imam of the Ismā'ilis, truly be the true Imam when in Europe he leads a western way of life?

a) This question should be your fundamental question about Ismā'ilism, for through a single answer proving or disproving the right of the Imam the whole discussion can be ended. If it is proved that he is indeed the true Imam, then no one has the right, inspite of accepting him as the true Imam, of raising any objections against him; and if it is proved that he is not the true Imam then there is no need to take the trouble of asking any further questions. But nonetheless, the questions have been repeated here. However, isn't the purport of your question such that if we prove that the residence of the Imam in Europe is permissible and lawful, then you will accept Shah Karim al-Ḥusayni as the true Imam?

b) If according to you the western way of living is un-Islamic, and it is for this reason that you have posed this question, then it is necessary for you to have referred to the Qur'anic ordinance in the light of which you could have justified your asking of this question. We therefore ask you: 'Is there in the Qur'an any such verse which ordains the present-day Islamic society and its requirements in a fixed form?' If there is no such verse, then can anyone prove from the Qur'an that Muslims should eat, dress and live in houses or tents in the manner which Muslims used to during the time of the Holy Prophet? It is obvious that even an ordinary person cannot accept such a notion, let alone to have proven such a notion from the Qur'an.

c) It seems that there is no particular logic underlying your question except that your reasoning is based on the material condition of the Muslims during the time of the Prophet, despite the fact that it was only the beginning of the religion of God; for how would it have been possible to have materialized all the potential economic and social development within Islam of the entire period, i.e: dawr-i Muḥammadi (Muḥammadan Period) in the short time of only twenty-three years? In short, you think that the present-day economical condition of Islam should be the same as it was at the advent of Islam. But alas! this mode of your thought is

opposed first by the Arab Muslims, for their economical condition is far better now than it was previously. Apart from that, the very mode of your thinking is very dangerous, for you do not like the worldly and material progress of Muslims, to the extent that in the present Islamic world none among the emperors, kings, governors, leaders, heads or rich and well-to-do people can escape your objection. Nor do you leave any hope of progress in the future. In any case, let us look at what the holy Qur'an says as regards this matter.

The Qur'an says:

"Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of His providing? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, and purely for them on the Day of Judgement (i.e. the period of qiyāmat)".

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This Qur'anic ordinance clearly shows the fact: that your question is baseless. For Allah, the Most High, has created the good things of adornment and sustenance for His servants, and in the period of qiyāmat these things will be in a special form for the believers. Thus this fact is proved, that our Lord Shah Karim al-Ḥusaynī is the true Imam, for he through his way of living announces the glad tidings that very soon the promise of God mentioned above, which He has made for His faithful servants is going to be fulfilled.

d) Our Lord Shah Karim al-Ḥusaynī is the true Imam, and in proof of this most important fact we have thousands of arguments which no truth-loving person can reject. You should study the subjects regarding the proof of Imamāt in Ismā'īlī literature. In Islam the concept of caliphate is a well-accepted fact. And it is our belief that the vicegerent of: God and His Messenger are ever-existent in this world and during our time that vicegerent of God and His Messenger is our Lord Shah Karim al-Ḥusaynī. If it is possible to refute this fact then one should say: "No! The vicegerent of God is such and such a person from such and such a family, and who is living not in Europe, but in such and such a place." Or he should say that there is no caliphate as such in Islam, or he should say, well in Islam the caliphate was there in the beginning, but later on according to such and such an ordinance God took it back into His own hands or abrogated it. Such a refutation is impossible, however, and therefore one has to accept the fact that Shah Karim is the true Imam.

e) We say that our Lord Shah Karim al-Husayni is the true Imam, for he is the light of guidance from God. If it is possible to refute this fact, then one should say that at present the light of guidance and beacon of divine authority is such and such a person, who for the sake of the spreading and propagation of Islam has chosen the way of poverty and privation and is running away from worldly progress; whose genealogy goes back to the Messenger of God, and whose ancestors were for their times the light of guidance from God. I am sure that such a refutation cannot possibly be made. Hence it is evident that at present, only Shah Karim is the real successor of the chain of Imamāt, and he is the true Imam and no one other than he is in this position.

f) In this world there is no scarcity of people who falsely claim a grand religious position and some even succeed in holding this claim for some time. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that falsehood cannot stand for a long time and vanishes away while the truth stands for ever. As the Qur'an says:

"And say (O Messenger!): Truth has come and falsehood has vanished away and falsehood is ever bound to vanish."

In this verse, in the language of wisdom, it is said that the divine vicegerency (khilā-fat-i ilāhiyyah) and supreme leadership (imamat-i 'āliyah) which the Prophet possessed, was the real truth and therefore it will continue to be in this world for ever.

Similarly the Prophet was the light of guidance from God. Since the light from God is itself the truth (nūr-i ḥāqq hī ḥāqq hay) and the Truth stands for ever, then now where is that Truth (light of guidance) if it is not the true Imam who is Shah Karim al-Ḥusayni (peace be upon him)? It is said therefore that the divine light despite the attempts of the opponents to extinguish it never becomes extinguished; for it is Truth and not falsehood. If it is proved that my Imam is the source of guidance on behalf of God and of His Messenger, then what more illuminating argument than this one is needed in proof of his being the Truth itself; and it is in Islam a truth for such a source and centre of guidance to exist, as it existed in the time of the Prophet and continued to exist after him.

5. Zakāt

Why is your zakat (religious tax) different from the shar'i zakāt? Why is it not distributed among the poor and needy directly?

a) I have argued at the beginning of this booklet in the first answer that there is a difference between sharī^cat, tariqat, ḥaqīqat and ma^crifat, but that their supreme goal (maqṣad-i a^clā) is the same. Thus if a sensible person will observe for a while he will come to know clearly that the spirit and the ultimate purpose of zakāt which should be accomplished in Islam, has continued to exist perfectly in Ismā^cīlīs.

b) I have said that according to our faith (i.e. Isma^cīlism) the way of zakāt is exactly in accordance with the requisite of the Islamic spirit and its ultimate purpose, and none benefit elsewhere as much as the poor and needy and helpless benefit here. The Imam from one aspect takes zakāt and from another aspect he does not take zakāt. Thus the greatest merit of the zakāt system of the Ismā^cīlīs is that it changes according to the changing circumstances of time; that is to say that the system adjusts itself according to the requirements of the time. The best way of providing for the needy the benefit of zakāt is to make an attempt to eradicate the curse of ignorance and poverty entirely and enrich them with the wealth of knowledge and skill forever instead of giving them one meal or giving them a pair of clothes or distributing among them some cash or kind. To achieve this goal the establishment of various institutions of education, health, etc., is a must, and in order to actualize this goal zakāt is collected under the supervision and guidance of the Imam of the age. In this sense I have said that on one aspect the Imam takes zakāt while on the other he does not. That is to say that the Imam takes zakāt from the jamā^cat only in the sense that he supervises the above-mentioned system, gives blessings, and approves and gives guidance regarding the expenses in establishing and running the community institutions.

c) The philosophy of unanimity, harmony and unity is such that the strength of zakāt should be guarded from being scattered. It should be collected in one place and should be used according to the guidance of the true Guide.

In earlier times those virtuous deeds which were preferred were necessary according to that time; for instance, to purchase male and female slaves and set them free, to feed and clothe orphans, the poor, and the needy. Now the greatest reward lies in enriching the needy with the eternal wealth of knowledge and skill and establishing institutions of religious and worldly prosperity and welfare so that it will increase the progress and prosperity of the country and the nation and strengthen and help the universal spirit of Islam. The Imam employs zakāt according to this object of Islam.

6. Religious Rites and Rituals

To what extent are your religious rites correct and valid? Tell me about nāndī in particular.

a) Much can be said in proof of the genuineness and rightness of our religious rites. However, here it will suffice to mention just a few points. Prior to dealing with religious rites, first of all, it is necessary to understand that in both the religious and material worlds most of the real and valuable things are such that their existence and subsistence lie in insignificant things. For instance, the trunk and branches of a tree are protected by the bark. Similarly flowers, fruits and grains have also a husk of their own kind, or a hull in which the main and real thing will remain protected, and if some ignorant person will peel the bark and throw it away considering it to be useless, it is obvious that the tree will dry out very soon. Similarly, there is no doubt that religious rites in the eyes of an ignorant person might seem to be unimportant and ordinary, but a wise man knows how well the tree of beliefs and faith is protected by the bark of religious rites and how important the husk is for the ripeness and protection of the fruits on the tree. This example shows that if there were no religious rites the creed would cease to exist.

b) Our religious rites are perfectly right and true and are based on truth for they all are in accordance with the commands of the Imam of the age or are verified by him, since the Imam is invested with religious authority by God and His Messenger; for he not only executes the commands of God and His Messenger, but also gives guidance, since he himself as ūlu al-amr (the one who is invested with divine authority) is the divine Guide. Hence there is not an iota of doubt that our religious rites are true and right.

c) It is a fact that the basis and foundation of tashrī^c (making shari^cat or law) is the permissible and suitable customs and manners of a country and nation, and thus this very same principle was kept in view when Islamic law was made. That is to say that useful pre-Islamic customs and usages were retained in Islam. And when any change is made in a corner of shari^cat, it is because of a corresponding change in customs and usages.

(See : "Islam - Dīn-i Āsān" awr "Ijti-hādī Masā'il ("Islam-Religion of Simplicity" and "Problems of Individual Interpretation", by Mawlānā Ja^cfar Shāh Phulwārwi).

d) Nāndī (or Munādī) means the proclamation of taking part in a good deed. This custom is exactly in accordance with the concept of contest (musābaqah) in Islam. As it is said in the Qur'an:

"And they hasten (in contest) in good works" (3:114) i. e. they try to excel in goodness. It is also said: "It is these who hasten in good works and they are foremost in them" (23:61)

"So compete in good works" (5:48)

To compete in good works, to demonstrate in altruism and sacrifice, and to induce others to do good through the example of one's own good work, are all among the Qur'anic teachings. Therefore some of these good works are demonstrated in the Jamā^cat-khānah, so that the practical aspect of religion will always be present in the eyes of the Jamā^cat; just as the Prophet quite often used to announce in the mosque that such and such a project needs material sacrifice and the companions (may God be pleased with them) used to take part in that project with zeal and enthusiasm.

7. Salat

How far do the Ismā'īlis follow the ṣalāt?. What do they mean by ṣalāt?

Ṣalāt means namāz (ritual prayer), du'ā (prayers), raḥmat (blessings), and durūd (benediction). However, wherever, the word ṣalāt is used in the sense of du'ā, raḥmāt and durūd, there arises no question as to its sense; but wherever it is used in the sense of namāz it also means the kind of namāz in which there is no rukū' (genuflexion) and sujud (prostration), such as namāz-i-jināzah (funeral prayer - 9:84) and the prayer of the birds (24:41), Thus where ṣalāt means namāz we have established it not only in the past, but also in the present; its practical example, fruit and wisdom of tā'wīl (esoteric interpretation) exist in our faith; and where ṣalāt is used in the sense of dua, this we always recite in the jamācat-khānah. In other words, salat means namāz as well as du'ā, in the same way that the worship and devotion (ʿibadat-u bandagī) which we practise in the Jamā'at-khānah is on the one hand du'ā and on the other hand namāz. For ʿibadat-u bandagī contains the spirit and ultimate purpose of namāz perfectly.

(For further information see Gulistān-i Ḥadīth (The Garden of Traditions)", by Mawlana Ja'far Shāh Phulwārī).

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b) For how long can the spirit and purpose of namāz be maintained? To understand this one should study the Qur'a-nic verse (2:239):

"If you fear, then pray standing (i.e. walking) or riding." Now 'in this form of namāz it is obvious that the originality, reality and purpose of namāz remain the same, albeit almost all the formal manners of namāz are done away with, for in praying standing or riding neither the condition of qiblah (direction of the ka'bah) is fulfilled nor are the conditions of genuflexion and prostration, etc. fulfilled. Yes, indeed there is no doubt that this is namāz-i khawf (prayer of fear), of which it can be said that this is in the case of compulsion. But in fact it is not compulsion, but rather, a form of ease in the practice of religion. Further, it is also a proof of the fact that namāz is of various kinds and the main part in all these kinds is du'ā and dhikr-i ilāhi (remembrance of God), wherein lies the spirit of worship and the essence of the attainment of the goal. This is the reason for which in the namāz-i khawf all those things without which the spirit and purpose of namāz can be maintained, are removed. Now the form of such a namāz is almost just like du'ā, tasbīh (glorification of God) and dhikr-i ilāhī (remembrance of God), and therefore I have said that worship (ʿibādāt) in Jamā'at-khānah is not only du'ā but is also a kind of namāz.

The fact should always be kept in mind that Allah, the Most High, desires for Muslims ease and facility and not hardship and difficulty. As He says: "Allah desires for you ease; He does not desire hardship for you." (2: 185) But then arises the question that if God, the Most High, desires for us ease and facility and does not like any difficulty in religious matters (dīnī aḥkām) then what can hinder the actualization (zu-hur-i fi'1) of His will and power (mashiyat-u qudrat)? And what should His servants do to receive such a great mercy? The answer for this question can also be found in the Qur'an, in this command of God:

"And whosoever fears Allah, He will make his course easy for him." (64:4)

You should not forget, that this guidance was given during the time of prophethood (zamānah-i nubū'at), and there are glad tidings in it that those who in complying with religious commands observe the fear of God will be provided in the future with ease and facility in religion: for the purpose of the difficulty, austerity and hardship which accompanies ʿibādāt (religious, services) and mu'āmalāt (transactions) is nothing but the fear of God (taqwā), and

the fear of God is everything. In connection with the explanation and illustration of this purpose it is said:

"Allah will vouchsafe after hardship, ease." (LXV:7)

That is to say that God will reveal tariqat from the depth (batin) of shari'at, and haqiqat from the depth of tariqat, and He will introduce the wisdom of ta'wil (esoteric interpretation) after tanzil (revelation). For, this is the greatest ease and facility, and proof of this greater facility is those minor facilities which every pious Muslim can experience in his daily life, such as to feel ease after difficulty in fulfillment and regularity of every kind of devotion ('ibadat), austerity (riyadat) by the help of God, and to remain gradually more attentive towards goodness and fear of God and so on.

c) I like most of Mawlana Muhammad Ja'far Shah Phulwarwi's views. In his book, "Gulistan-i Hadith (The Garden of Traditions)," he says, on p. 5 under the caption, 'Chand kalimat-i Namaz (A few words on Namaz),' that:

"We usually understand that namaz is a cut-and-dried (bandhi taki) thing whose words are determined and movements are fixed. There is no doubt that the best way for the performance of namaz is that which the Prophet has taught, but it is not right to say that the other ways are wrong, for not only from Adam until Jesus Christ (peace be upon them) but until Prophet Muhammad (peaces be upon him), all those prophets who used to perform namaz, differed in their ways, but they said the same namaz".

That is to say that the form of the namaz they said was different, but the spirit of all of them was the same, and in fact, the main aim and object of the namaz is the spirit and not the form. When this namaz is performed in a congregational form, then the order and discipline requires necessarily that there should be uniformity in the namaz of all, but if in an individual namaz ecstasy and rapture overcome the usual way (formal way) of the performance of namaz, it is not harmful; in fact, sometimes a minor difference is not harmful even in the congregational namaz.

8. Women in the Congregation

Why do men and women pray together in the jama'at-khanah ?

a) You should either show or recite that Qur'anic verse in which congregational prayers including both men and women are unlawful "or prohibited or disliked. Or you should prove that during the blessed time of the Prophet, Muslim women were not going to the Mosque.

b) The manners and pillars (adab-u arkan) of Islam are not only for men, but apply to women also. Those who want to keep women away from the place of worship on the grounds that because of their presence carnal soul (nafs-i ammarah) becomes more arrogant, then such people should, becoming hermits, abandon society and go to some jungle. For the interruption in prayer is not due only to the presence of women, but there are so many other causes, whose overall remedy is called mujahadah-i nafs (struggle against the carnal soul) and taqwa (fear of God). That means that one should fight against the carnal soul and choose piety and does not mean that one should expel or exclude one or more things from the world and society.

STAGES OR GRADES OF ISLAM

The Religion of Islam is sirat-i mus-taqim i.e. the straight path. It is obvious that there are certain stations in every long path. Thus there are four stations in the path of Islam, viz : shari'at, tanqat, haqiqat, and ma'rifat. We can also conceive of these four stations as four stages. But the principle should always be remembered that in every stage, more or less, parts of the other stages are also included. For instance, the station regarded as haqiqat cannot consist purely of haqiqat; there is 20% shari'at, 25% tanqat, 30% haqiqat, and 25% ma'rifat. This is also the case in the remaining three stages as demonstrated in the following table



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