

# THE MEANING OF IMAMAT

TO the Shia Imami Ismailis no day, no occasion could be greater, more festive, or more sacred than this day of days, this occasion of occasions, the Imam Day.

This weekend they are celebrating the fifth happy anniversary of the Imam Day of their Holy Imam, Shah Karim Al-Husainy His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th in direct line of succession from Hazarat Ali Al-Murtaza, the son-in-law of our last and final Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.S.).

'Imam' means a Spiritual Leader; and so, 'Imamat' means Spiritual Leadership. Now, what constitutes this Imamat, this Spiritual Leadership?

The answer is 'The Divine Light' of the Imam — orstration be to His mention — The Manifest Light, as the Holy Quran has it, that has 'come down unto you' (Ch. V: 17 and IV, 174). It is God's Own Light that has come down (Ch. IX: 32; LXI: 8). 'And Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth (Ch. XXIV: 35).

## Its essence

Thus the Divine Substance or the Divine Light is the Imamat of the Imam, and the Imam is the Highest Visible Manifestation of that Light. The Imam in essence is the Divine Light itself.

Space is the mother of plurality. But the Divine Light is beyond space where all is One. Hence, the indivisibility and unitary nature of the Divine Light and the Oneness of all the Imams.

Again, being beyond space, the 'coming down' of the Light becomes inconceivable, since all movement must take place within space.

Therefore, the 'coming down' is interpretable as the Light's appearance or Visible Manifestation 'down' here in our world of phenomena. It is the Light's passing, so to speak, from its realm of Absoluteness to the realm of Relativity by Visible Manifestation in it.



This 'embodiment' or Visible Manifestation of the Light of God does not, by any manner of means, imply Its becoming subject to the limitations of the physical body of the Imam for the simple reason that It is transcendental, and so, of indivisible and unitary nature.

For the Divine Light 'extension' is as unthinkable as quantity is inconceivable.

Those who can only person- alize the Imam, who can think of Him only as the human or physical entity immersed in Time and passing away physi- cally, cannot understand and do not know Him as He really is as the Light that has 'come down unto you'.

## The Divinity.

It is not to be supposed that the 'coming down' of the Divine Light amounts to the Incarnation of God in the sense of 'God made flesh', that is, 'God become flesh'. That

would spell gross anthropomor- phism.

The Ismaili Doctrine of Imamat categorically denies both agnosticism, on the one hand, and anthropomorphism pure and simple, on the other. It denies also that the Visible Manifestation of the Divine Light or Imamat is in any sense the Second Person in the Godhead in the Christian Trinity: It is God Himself viewed from a particular aspect.

The Imamat of the Imam is no other than the Divinity It- self, just as an ornament of gold is no other than gold it- self, and just as wind is not different from the air itself.

The Theory of Incarnation in the Light of the Doctrine of Imamat has nothing in com- mon with the orthodox inter- pretation of the concept of in- carnation.

The Indian word, to which the common approach in Eng- lish is 'incarnation', is 'avatar'. Now, 'avatar' is derived from Sanskrit 'avatra' meaning 'descent' from 'ava' down plus 'tar' pass over.

Thus 'avatar' means 'com- ing down' referred to, as we have stated before, in the Holy Quran in connection with the Manifest Light. The Doctrine of Imamat, therefore, rules out the Theory of Incarnation as understood by the common run of the people, or by the ortho- dox theologians as involving the idea of 'God made flesh', or the Second Person in the Christian Trinity for that matter.

## Reality

The Ismailia Doctrine of Imamat asserts only this: that 'avatar', with 'incarnation' for its nearest equivalent in Eng- lish, is pure and simple the 'coming down' of the Perfect and the Highest Visible Mani- festation of the Light of God in our Realm of Relativity from His Realm of Absolute- ness or Unity.

In Its metaphysical aspect Imamat is Reality of Realities; in Its mystical aspect Imamat is the Reality of the Imam Himself; in Its human aspect Imamat is the Perfect or Cos- mical Man.

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Naturally, all the three are identical and one, as a man remains the same irrespective of whether we consider him as a spiritual, biological, social, or any other entity. The Imam carries within Himself the archetypes of all that comes into existence, and this being so, He is the Universal Soul.

This is what is implied in 'The Imam is the Centre of Creation', without Whose pre- sence in the world, therefore, even for a moment, according to our Holy Prophet Muham- mad's Hadith, the universe with all in it would perish. The Imam is, then, the sum-total of all His aspects.

The Divine Substance or Light in all the Imams being One and the Same every Imam is Hazarat Ali Himself 'con- tinued' in His Successor- Imams. Hence while Ali, the Man was born, was active, and passed away physically, Ali the Divine Light, or Ali the Universal Soul, exists in all eternity.

This being so, Ali or the Imam, has always existed in the past, nay, even before the Creation, is with us here to- day, and will continue — Nur- en-ala-Nur — Light upon Light of the Holy Quran — without a break, to be with us to the Day of Judgement on earth, though there be those in this world, again as the Holy Quran has it, who 'would fain extinguish that Light with their mouths.'

## No comparison

In his Tasawwurat or Raw- datut Taslim, Nasir-ud-Din Tusi, the celebrated Persian philosopher, astronomer and theologian of the 13th century says that 'the Imam is beyond human thought and imagina- tion, and above all definitions positive and negative'. Hence, indeed, the Imam is beyond ALL comparison.

It will be seen from the fore- going that the 'pesh' imam, who is chosen by the people and leads prayers, is not an Imam in the Shia Imami Ismailia sense of the word. The Imam of the Fatimid Ismailis is the Imam Musta- qarr, i.e. the True Imam, Who is the Lord of Truth (Khuda- wand-i Haqq), occupying His proper place in the chain of suc- cession, as opposed to the mustawda Imam, i.e. one to whom (something is) entrusted, or deputy imam, who is usually appointed from amongst the closest relatives of the True Imam.

This is the Shia Imami Ismaili Doctrine of Imamat, then, in a nut-shell. And it is this Imamat the Ismailis are glorifying this week-end while they are filling their cups of rejoicings to the very full in commemoration of the Glori- ous Day when their Holy Imam, Shah Karim Al-Husainy His Highness The Aga Khan ascended the Spiritual Throne of Imamat on 11th July, 1957.

On this most auspicious occasion, once again, as al- ways, our best of wishes for joy, prosperity, peace and hap- piness go out to all the world in general, and our brethren in Islam in particular:

HAI ZINDA!  
HAZAR IMAM ZINDABAD!  
IMAMAT ZINDABAD!

