

Extract from an address by Mowlana Sultan Muhammad Shah

at the Ismailia Association

Mission Conference held at Dar-es-Salaam in July 1945

First of all I must welcome you all gentlemen to the Mission Conference, and Ladies who have also come. It is a great pleasure to see you all here. I hope this is a final break from the past as it has happened in the other Conferences.

The first regrettable thing about all Missionaries and religious activities is that, I am sorry to say, Gentlemen, a person like Dr. Ivanow of Russia knows more about the Ismailia religion and its meaning than most of our Bhagats put together and many of our leading gentlemen. Again a man like Mr. Faisee, a Bohra gentleman of Islamic Research Association, knows more about the Ismailia religion than most people of this faith.

I cannot go further without telling you at once that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Mecklai who has done wonderful work. He has, like anybody else, weaknesses, but he has done a great set of work, work that will remain historical and has made a great name for the Ismailis amongst all learned circles by establishing Islamic Research Association and by getting men like Dr. Ivanoff and Mr. Faisee to look into the ancient documents, and I think we cannot do better than pass a resolution of thanks and appreciation for the work done by Mr. Mecklai.

Here in Africa today we want to start an Ismailia Association on the same lines as the Bombay Association. Once for all to make professional missionaries in Africa, free from India, have a new system of recruiting as well as honorary and voluntary missionaries in Africa. Very little of our religion is generally known; first of all I will give you two or three examples that will show that even most of our people are ignorant of our faith.

Number one is that, as rightly said by one of our missionaries, Mr. Hameer Lakha, that with regard to religion, you must never reason with people who have no religion. This is perfectly true because Islam and Ismailism are built on Iman and Momin. *Iman means faith. Momin is one who has faith. Momin who has true faith, does not mean to be a philosopher, it means one who has got faith. If you have good luck to have faith, then the religion is easy. If you have got no Iman then there is no hope. Iman is a thing that one can get by praying for Iman. There is no other way or short cut to it.*

Number two. In 1905 Juma Bhagat, one of our great missionaries who rendered great services to me, and other very pious Ismailis came to me, that is exactly 40 years ago, that in Dua the word which

refers to "fish" should be withdrawn. I said to him, "Mr. Juma, do you intend to drop one of the foundations of the faith?" and I said to them that when there was nothing but fish on earth, God stood as witness, and they must have no doubt to that kind of witness from above, and of course he understood and dropped it. Then when last in Bombay 8 years ago, many of our people came to me and requested to add just one word in Dua, and then they said, everything is alright. I said what is that one word. They said "Instead of 'Ali Allah' to say 'Ali-un-walli-Allah'. So I said you better drop the whole Dua if you want to alter that word. You are ignorant. It is your ignorance and not that "Ali Allah" is wrong. You read my firmans that I made in Bombay in 1905-6, interpreted by Kamadia Hajee where I explained fully that there is a fundamental difference between Ismailism and Christianity. In Christianity they believe that Jesus the man was God Almighty and during the 33 years of his life on earth he was the Almighty. For the Ismailis, during the 60 years of his life, Ali on earth was the prisoner of the material world, limited by it and suffering constantly. When we think of Ali it is not the man during these 60 years but the eternal that came from God and returned to God direct. Pir Hassan who was very wealthy and had great comfort was told by a Jew that he was enjoying heaven on earth. Pir Hassan turned round to the Jew and said that if he only knew the difference there was between the moment when the angel of death would offer him his rose (message of death) and the worldly advantages which the Jew saw, he would understand that Hassan suffered the limitation of hell in this life.

(Then Hazar Imam referred to the simile of the river and the sea. Hazar Imam quoted the Ayat "Inna Li lahe Wa Inna Ilehe Rajeun") Shariati people do not understand this. These are the things that must be understood, that according to the Ismaili religion Allah is the ocean. Ali during his life on earth was the river separated from the ocean of the Almighty — separated from it and running towards it — over-coming all material resistances and running towards its origin. The Hakikati people should understand the meaning of this Ayat — from the Hakikati point of view his Ayat means more than all the rest of Koran.

Then of course Pir Sadrudeen and others have put forward the doctrine — namely that all Momins are the small streams starting from the earth then joining the ocean with the river. These are the

doctrines of the Ismailis. This is perfectly clear. There is nothing new. The perfect Momin after death and Iman should not be separated, which means it is like a river which flows through the earth, stones, rocks and various other obstacles but reaches the ocean carrying with it all kinds of smaller streams. Now all these have already been made clear by Ismaili writers and thinkers and sifted and made clear and printed in Iran. These are the doctrines, the true heart of the Ismaili religion.

Well, the Mission. Unless the Missionaries themselves — especially honorary missionaries, who have got more wealth and opportunities unless they understood the meanings of these things and are able to teach others, their standard will fall below the standard necessary for the proper explanation of Ismailism. Now I have been talking so far as to the fundamental. You will discuss in your own heart and you will understand more. Also, although he himself was not an Ismaili, he was a Murid of Ismaili. Shamsudeen, Jalalu-din-Rumi has made it very clear when he talks about the branch cut from the tree and going back to become a tree again. These are the fundamental which ought to be understood. *Pir Sadrudeen and the Ginans have done great advantage, that there is a sense of joy, and anybody who understands Ismaili religion, he understands that instead of crying and being sad, it is constant and greatest pleasure that any human being can have. Such joys of the spirit and soul cannot be explained to the people who do not know. Everybody must go in himself and know it. A child of 7 may ask what is the pleasure of sexual union. You cannot explain to him. The child may think it is music, or a toy. You may talk as much as you like but he would not understand. (Hazar Imam gave the Ismaili interpretation of Hindoo mythology). Some part of Hindoo Mythology in our teaching has a great deal of allegorical value and must be kept up. Similarly the mythology of Hazarat Hussein and Ali's supernatural acts should be considered and purely interpreted as allegorical.*

