

## **Additional notes to “*Evolution and re-evaluation of the Ismaili Du’ā* following the Declaration of the Great Resurrection in Alamut.”<sup>i</sup>”**

### **The Vision of the Imam:**

The Declaration of Alamut introduced into the Original Ismaili Dua, which was composed eight hundred years ago, the concept of Recognition of the Vision of the Imam<sup>ii</sup>. Throughout its iterations, the Du'a has always maintained that its central aim was the "Shah jo Didār. The abolition of the previous forms of prayer and the inception of a purely spiritual faith, grounded in the significance of the Qā'im al-Qiyāmat, was specifically incorporated into the Asal Du'ā with the phrase "Qā'im al-Qiyāmat Sahebi jomo Kali Pati<sup>iii</sup>" which means “the Resurrector of the Resurrection, Lord of the Age, Master of the Kali Yug era”. Additionally, the concept of the divinity of the Imam above all else and the continuity of Imamate became foundational pillars of the Ismaili faith over centuries through the *Asal Du’ā* and affirmed symbolically by the *Panja of Shah jo Didar*.

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This is an epilogue that should never have been necessary. It arises from the modifications imposed on Ismaili ceremonies, particularly the Dua and the *Gat Pāt ji Du’ā*, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the *Talika* sent by the 49th Imam on December 10, 1986<sup>iv</sup> upon the ordainment of the 1986 Ismaili Constitution, the Imam wrote “The Ismaili Constitution recognizes and addresses many of the Jamat's present and future needs, but it is to be expected that some adjustment will need to be made in the practical application of the Constitution to meet local circumstances. Article 2.2 of the “Rules and Regulations<sup>v</sup> under Ismaili Constitution, precise that the law of the land prevails. During the Covid-19 crisis and in response to recommendations by the World Health Organization, many countries implemented regulations that temporarily altered not only the daily lives of their citizens but also their spiritual rites and rituals including those of the Ismaili communities<sup>vi</sup>”.

These alterations, intended to be temporary, affected various practices, traditions, and rituals. The Ismaili Jamatkhana was not exempt from such changes, even in matters of fundamental importance.

Among these changes were adjustments to the way the three times Dua and the *Gat Pāt Du’ā* ceremonies<sup>vii</sup> were conducted in Jamatkhana worldwide. The introduction of the Du’ā, following the abolition of Namaz on August 8, 1164, was contingent upon the recognition of the Imam, particularly for those who understood the importance of the "Vision of the Imam" or *Shah jo Didar*, which is central to the recitation of the Du’ā. The concept of *Shah jo Didar* was affirmed at the conclusion of the Du’ā 's final chapter.

## ***Panjā* in Ismaili Rituals**

The concept of *Shah jo Didar* was historically sealed with a handshake (*Panjā*) among the followers—a ritual that was suspended during COVID-19<sup>viii</sup>. The Ginan of Seyyed Nar Muhammad Shah titled *Satveni ji Vel* offers deep insights into the *Panjā*'s spiritual significance and on the concept of the *Panjā* of Shah jo Didār and how this concept is of underlying importance for the Day of Qiyamat: In one such verse in page 24<sup>th</sup> of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of *Satveni ji Vel*: “Gat-me vakhat du’ā-ke milo, gat-kun panjā didāri ālo”,<sup>ix</sup> the Seyyed declares “Meet in-Gat at the time of Dua and give the “*Panjā*” of the Vision (Didar) to the Gat [community]. Mumtaz Ali Tajddin points to an appropriate chapter<sup>x</sup> of 8 verses of *Satveni ji Vel* in Khojki. The title of that chapter is *Du’ā ki Prāpti* and it emphasizes several verses dedicated to the *Panjā*. The chapter define the reason of the *Panjā* as the mean to be face to face with the Vision of the Imam and that the *Panjā* is witnessed by both *Firashtā* (Angels) sitting on our shoulders.

From oral tradition, we know that the vision of the Imam comes through the *Panjā* on the Day of *Qiyāmāh* when each believer will receive the divine Noor (Light) with the hand he used to give *Panjā*. In the early morning and in some levels of initiation, there is a meditation period (Bandagi) that is said to bring the Light, the Noor of the Imam in the soul of the believer. Just before starting the meditation, the Mukhi, who officiate in Jamatkhanas as representative of the spiritual power of the Imam, even today, says the age old sentence “give the *Panjā* and sit in meditation, may the grace of God be with you” (Panjo dahiné, Jamat bandagi me shamil thaé Allah mehria) . This instruction was historically followed, but during and after COVID-19, though the Mukhis continues to give this command as spiritual representative of Imam, the congregation has been directed by administrators not to perform the *Panjā* gesture, signaling a departure from tradition.

## **Abe Safa and the Symbol of Noor:**

Abe Safa<sup>xi</sup> (Holy Water) is traditionally shared among community members as a ritual of sacred transformation in the *Du’ā* of *Gat Pāt* ceremonies, and it is transfigured as Noor (Light) when consumed. This ceremony is conducted during the special prayers of *Gat Pāt* from a shared cup, which has been replaced by disposable paper cups. *Gat Pāt* ceremony of the prayer of Holy Water is conducted everyday before dawn following the completion of the hour-long meditation period. It is also conducted on Fridays, on important day such as when a *Talika* is received, and in some higher levels of initiation. It is a sacred and transformative ceremony where the holy water is transfigured as Noor (Light) and is drunk as Noor by the believers. A standing ginan often recited during that ceremony, particularly in the early morning, includes Pir Sadardin’s words: “Noor vellā Noor piyo, kariyo man ānandji”<sup>xii</sup> (At the time of enlightenment, drink the Light and make your soul joyful). with the chorus, "rayann viyānniyāji" (the night is over), evoking the arrival of the Qā'im al-Qiyāmat whose Divine Light dispels spiritual darkness.

The tradition of drinking Abe Safa from a shared cup symbolizes a divine connection through Noor and is reinforced by historical references in gīnānic literature. Gīnāns detail different eras through which recipients of Abe Safa evolved, representing in the first era, Kerta Yug, the recipients made of "Sonā" (Gold); in the second era, Tretā Yug, of "Chandi" (Silver); in the third era called Duāpur Yug, of "Trāmbā" (Bronze); and in the present fourth era, Kal-Yug, made of "Māti" (earth/porcelain)<sup>xiii</sup>. The Gīnān<sup>xiv</sup> of Pir Sadardin (AD 1290 - 1380) with these verses is recited during the ceremony within the Ismaili Community and also by its offshoot, the Imamshahis/Satpanthis, still today as witnessed recently in Bhavnagar, India. During COVID-19, to meet health guidelines, the shared porcelain cup was replaced by disposable paper cups, which, along with any remaining *Abe Safa* therein, were discarded into nearby dustbins, disrupting the traditional symbolism.

Any Change in the Du'ā of *Gat Pāt* and surrounding ceremonies is surprising as the Abe Safa is one of the symbols of the Divine Noor (Light). Among its various name, one is Amrat<sup>xv</sup> (Water of Immortality<sup>xvi</sup>) and for centuries is has been called Noor. Pir Shams Sabzwari (AD 1244-1356) said "Eji kumbh jal jot thi nipāni, ane upāy nuraj ay" which means: the Water from the vessel is consecrated from Light and begets Light. In a Farman made on 20 January 1902, the 48<sup>th</sup> Imam, Mowlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (Aga Khan III) said: "the Believer always drink Abe Safa, which means he eternally drinks from the cup of Noor". The concept of drinking Noor is also recited in Syed Imamshah's gīnān "*Eji Sat na ghatt viraa sreviye*" which says in verse 3: "*ejee neermal thaine nur peejee-e*", (drink the Light with purity)<sup>xvii</sup> – During the act of consuming the Abe Safa, the congregants recite a time-honored aphorism that has endured for centuries: "You (God) have instituted it, You have established it, You have given it to us, and we have accepted it from You. We have partaken of it, acknowledging it as the Noor."

### **Conclusion:**

During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary changes to these sacred rituals introduced new practices and disruptions to Ismaili ceremonies. These changes were intended as temporary, with the expectation in the community that the profound symbolism embedded in the Du'ā rituals would eventually be restored with the corresponding rituals.

Indeed, at the end of the pandemic, a *Talika* (written communication) from the Imam was read in all Jamatkhānas on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022<sup>xviii</sup>, the day of Navroz announcing the phased return to normal day-to-day functioning, including the return of ceremonies altered during the pandemic: "in view of the improving conditions, I have asked the concerned jamati institutions to proceed with a phased approach to restore the normal day-to-day functioning of our Jamatkhānas, within the ambit of their respective government guidelines and protocols. I have also decided that several of the Jamatkhāna-specific observances and ceremonies that had been altered to comply with pandemic-imposed health and safety requirements should be reinstated gradually." However, as of the date of this epilogue (November 2024), the Imam's directives have not been

implemented, and many of the altered ceremonies, if not most of them, have not returned to their pre-COVID forms as instructed in that *Talika*.

Simultaneously, a trend to de-emphasize esoteric symbols within the Du'ā has emerged, along with discussions about reverting to some form of Namaz. That trend started in 1947 during Partition and has continued since. In a *Talika* sent to the All-India Religious Conference on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1964, the Imam warned that: "I am sure you will never forget that our faith is based on thousands of years of history and that we should learn from history and not think our past is of no use now and that it can therefore be rejected, abbreviated or altered.". These instructions have been forgotten over time.

An Ismaili version of Namāz was composed many years ago as a supplement for recitation in communities living under "sensitive conditions."

During his Golden Jubilee, the Imam said in his Farman: "Throughout the Jamat's history, including during the Fatimid times, a consistent feature of the Ismaili Tariqah has been the complementarity between practices that are specific to our Tariqah, and those that are part of the Sharia, common to all Muslims, albeit with denominational specificities. Examples of these are the historic co-existence between Namaz and Du'ā ". He further mentioned plans for a formal, uniform text of the Shia Imami Ismaili Namaz: "It is also in this context that I have instructed my institutions to make available to the Jamat globally, within the next year or so, a formal, uniform text of the Shia Imami Ismaili Namaz that I will have approved. This text, which is fully aligned with most forms of Namaz practised historically within the Jamat, and in many other schools of Islam, will reflect the centrality of the hereditary Imam in our Tariqah."(Dec, 13th 2008)

Today, the prerequisites, under which Namāz was abolished by the Declaration of Alamut in 1164 and Du'ā was instituted, are no longer upheld. Today, within the Ismaili community their divinely ordained covenant of *Shah jo Didār*, along with the longstanding symbolic ceremonies of *Panjā* and sanctity of *Abe Safa* faces both community-wide de-emphasis and potential changes. This, along with a possible return to Namaz and of the broader Sharia, may signal a departure from the historical memory of the Du'ā's origin and evolution. While change is inevitable, according to the Imam, "it is the Imam-of-the-Time and only the Imam-of-the-Time who has the authority to give directions in the Tariqah matters"<sup>xix</sup> Paradoxically, while the material aspects of exoteric Ismailism have reached new heights with its ethics of generosity, care, pluralism, health, education and work of development replicated throughout the world, a void in esoteric spiritual knowledge appears to be growing within the community.

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END NOTES - ONLINE LINKS:

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358088488> Evolution and re-evaluation of the Du'a Prayer of the Nizari Ismailis in the subcontinent following the Declaration of the Great Resurrection in Alamut

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.ismaili.net/source/1164-08-08-alamut-declaration-eng.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://library.ismaili.net/books/hs0322-pic-0130-right>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=50401#p50401>

<sup>v</sup> <https://ismaili.net/source/legal-documents/1998-ismaili-rules-and-regulation-europe.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=75286&hilit=Covid#p75286>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/23137>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=75763#p75763>

<sup>ix</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/30461>

<sup>x</sup> Chapter on Du'ā ki Prāpti [see next page]

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<sup>xi</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/38644>

<sup>xii</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/4066>

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/3881>

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/3881>

<sup>xv</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/3800>

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=562#p562>

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://heritage.ismaili.net/node/23137>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=74745#p74745>

<sup>xix</sup> Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 6 October 1988, quoted in "Kalam-e Imam-e-Zaman, Golden Edition, Farmans p.782