

“Those who spend their property by night and day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Holy Koran, 2:274)

NAZRANA

By Mumtaz Ali Tajddin S. Al

mumtaztajddin@yahoo.com

The Arabic word *nazar* (pl. *nuzur*) means an *offering*, *gift* or *present*, occurring six times in the Koran (2:35, 2:270, 14:26, 41:13, 46:21 and 78:40). The Persian noun word *nazrana* means a special gift offered especially to a prince to pay respect. *Nazrana* is an oblation or special gift presented to the Imam mostly during the *mehmani*, any other occasion or historical period to earn best blessings. It is presented individually on behalf of the family as well as collectively on behalf of a *jamat* or all *jamats* of a country.

The Arabic word *hibah* (pl. *hibat*) means *gift*. He who makes the gift is called *wahib* (one who presents); the things given, *mauhub*, and the person to whom it is presented is *mauhub lahu*. Two kinds of gift-giving occur in the Koran: (1) God gives gift (*ata*) to humans is mentioned five times in the Koran. (2) People giving or exchanging, presents (*nihla*, *hadiyya*). The only case that involves gift-giving in a narrative context in the Koran is the Queen of Sheba's sending gift (*hadiyya*) to Solomon to test whether he was noble prophet or a worldly king (27:35-6). In his **Tafsir** (9th vol., p. 515), Tabari writes that the Queen's presents are said to have consisted of bricks of gold and silver, slave boys and girls, horses and jewellery.

The tradition of presenting *nazrana* to God also sounds in the Torah or Old Testament: “Cain (son of Adam) brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel (another son of Adam), he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.” (Genesis, Ch. 4:v: 3, 4). The offering to God was turned into money, then the cash was deposited at a place selected by God. “God spoke to Moses to tell the followers that an half shakel shall be the offering of the Lord”(Exodus, 30:12-16). “And the Lord called unto Moses: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: If any man of you brings an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock” (Levi, 1:1-2).

According to the Koran, “Who gives away his wealth, purifying himself.” (92:18). Apart from specific obligations, a Muslim is suggested to spend, out of sheer love of God, from his wealth (22:37). If a Muslim spends out of love for God, he is repaid manifold (22:245). The Holy Prophet prohibited *sadaqah* (alms) and *zakat*(charity) to himself and his progeny, but he allowed gifts (58:12).

The Koran says, “The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is as the parable of a grain of corn growing seven ears, in every ear containing a hundred grains. And God multiplies (further) for whom He pleases. And God is Ample-giving, Knowing” (2:261). It is noteworthy that while the Koran represents the increase to be seven-hundredfold, even multiples of it, Jesus Christ, in a similar parable – the parable of the sower – promises thirty, sixty or a hundredfold increase (Matt. 13:23, Mark 4:8)

Koran further says, “And the parable of those who spend their wealth to seek God’s pleasure and for the strengthening of their souls is as the parable of a garden on elevated ground, upon which heavy rain falls, so it brings forth its fruit twofold; but if heavy rain falls not on it, light rain (suffices). And God is Seer of what you do.” (2:265)

Abdul Mutalib had taken a vow to give one of his ten sons as a *nazrana* to God if he got ten sons. He eventually got ten sons, and then to fulfill his vow, he wrote the names of his ten sons on ten separate chits to draw the name of the one chosen by God. The name of his most beloved son, Abdullah (father of the Holy Prophet) was drawn up. It shocked Abdul Mutalib. He then wrote name of Abdullah on a chit and ten camels in another chit and prayed to God to spare Abdullah and accept ten camels, which he would sacrifice and distribute among the destitute class. But the name of Abdullah appeared once again. Hence Abdul Mutalib increased number of camels to twenty and prayed for God’s acceptance. This time again name of Abdullah appeared. Abdul Mutalib kept on increasing number of camels from twenty to thirty, forty and so on until he wrote hundred camels. In the last time, the name of Abdullah did not appear, but the hundred camels. At last God heard his petition and spared his most beloved son, Abdullah. Abdul Mutalib jumped in jubilation and slaughtered hundred camels as an accepted token of his *nazrana*. (**Tabaqat**, 1:65)

Qurtubi (d. 1273) writes in **Al Jami li-Ahkam al-Koran** (13th vol., p. 132) that, “The Prophet of Islam and all the prophets accepted and encouraged the exchange of gifts on account of their beneficial effect on human relations.” Thus, “the Prophet also accepted the gifts” (**Bukhari**, 51:11).

The presence of the *nazrana* to the Prophet was in vogue in Medina. Abdullah b. Bushr relates: My sister used to send presents with me to the Prophet and he accepted them (**Tabaqat**, 2:458). Once a tiffin made of clarified butter, honey and wheat presented, the Prophet ate it and said, “How good it is?” He also liked to have gourd among curries, vinegar condiment, dried dates among dates. Anas bin Malik relates that once he chased and caught a hare in the forest of Marruz-Zahran. Abu Talha slaughtered it and sent both of its hind-legs (between knee and the trunk) to the Prophet as a gift. The Prophet gladly accepted it. Besides, Umm-i Malik Behzia, Umm-i Aws Bahzia, Umm-i Salim and Umm-i Sharik were noted for sending ghee in leathern bottles to the Prophet.

Once Sa’d bin Mu’adh told the Prophet, “Why should I not build a cottage for you to take rest? I also wish to offer a conveyance for you.” The Prophet praised and prayed for him and accepted the gifts (**al-Bidayah**, 3rd vol., p. 268).

Anas b. Malik also narrates that the ruler of Rome presented a cloak of serenest to the Prophet (Ibid., 2:571). Tabari (1st vol., p. 1528) writes that a man of the clan of Najjar presented a stronghold to the Prophet. Abdullah b. Buraydah relates that the ruler of

Abyssinia presented to the Prophet two simple boots which he wore (**Tabaqat**, 2nd vol., p. 573). The ruler of Yamen presented a precious robe to the Prophet, whose value was equal to the price of thirty camels (**Abu Daud**, 2:203). A white mule was presented by a Syrian chief, another mule received from the ruler of Egypt and Aila (**Bukhari**, 24:54). A chieftain had sent him a pair of stockings.

The legacy of the *nazrana* was prevalent in the *Dawr-i Satr* (concealment period) of the Ismaili history. When the animosity of the enemies reached to its extreme, the Imams had to hide themselves to elude discovery. Once, when the contact of the Ismaili *dais* was broken with Imam Wafi Ahmad (d. 828), *dai* Hurmuz and his son Mahdi, *dai* Surhaf bin Rustam and his son Imran came forward to institute a search of the Imam. They collected over four thousand dinars from the Ismailis as a *nazrana* for the Imam. After a struggle of one year, they succeeded to find the Imam in the district of Hims in Syria and presented the *nazrana*.

Qaid Jawhar (911-992), the Commander-in-Chief of the Fatimid forces conquered Egypt in 969. In 970, he sent a special gift (*nazrana*) to Imam Muizz in Maghrib. The gift, according to Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468) in **Uyun'l Akbar** consisted of 21 domes loaded on she-camels, which included five domes and the camel covering decorated with gold, one studded with jewels and the rest were silk and brocade; 50 horses, saddled and bridled, 50 decorated she-camels and more than 50 camels. These she-camels and camels had wrapped loads, tied cages, rarities and birds. Jafar, the son of Qaid Jawhar set out with this gift to al-Mansuria in Maghrib accompanied with a galaxy of dignitaries.

In 973, Imam al-Muizz entered Cairo, which was placarded with Imam's name and the praises of Ali. He was acclaimed by the people, who crowded to his first public audience. He was presented precious *nazrana* by the prominent noblemen, in which the *nazrana* of Jawhar was splendid. Stanley Lane Poole writes in **History of Egypt** (London, 1914, p. 98) that, "It includes 500 horses with saddles and bridles encrusted with gold, amber and precious stones; tents of silk and cloth of gold, borne on Bactrian camels; dromedaries, mules, and camels of burden; filigree coffers full of gold and silver vessels; gold-mounted swords; caskets of chased silver containing precious stones; a turban set with jewels, and 900 boxes filled with samples of all the goods that Egypt produced."

According to **Daim al-Islam** (p. 330), "When people provide food (*ma'ida*, pl. *mawa'id*) or feasts for the progeny of the Prophet, the angels surround them and glorify the Lord and ask for the pardon of those that partake of the meal"

We have many examples of the affluent class, who presented their choicest *nazrana* to the Imams through the *Dais*, *Pirs* or *Vakils*. Dr. Mustapha Ghaleb writes in **Alam al-Ismailia** (Beirut, 1964) that the Syrian Ismailis used to send their *nuzur* (*nazrana*) to the Imams from time to time during the Fatimid and Alamut periods.

During the post-Alamut period, the *Pirs*, *vakils* or any visitors when travelled in Iran from India, the followers gave them few items to be presented to the Imam, known as *nazar* (*nazrana*) or *khidmati*. The value of *nazrana* ranged from a coconut to that of precious jewels, established among the people of all walks of life. The food, fruits, grains,

furniture, jewels, etc. were not possible to take away during the long tedious journey. It seems to have been decided to get them disposed off in the house of an elder person, and its proceeds were sent to the Imams as a *nazrana* of so and so members of the *jamat*.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah visited Burma between January 20, 1951 and January 26, 1951, which was his last visit in Burma. Vazir U Kan Gyi (1870-1960) of Burma had reverently offered the Imam to let him bear his whole expenses as a *nazrana* from Europe to Burma with return expenses. The Imam said, "Well I accept your *nazrana* provided you bear only my expenses with return from Bombay to Burma and I will consider it your *nazrana* being the expenses from Europe to Burma with return." Vazir U Kan Gyi gladly accepted it.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah resided in his Walkeshwar bungalow in Bombay between 1885 and 1907. During these 22 years, six to seven rich persons sent fruits to the Imam. When Imam began to reside in London after 1907, these persons could not send fruits in Imam's bungalow. During Imam's next visit to Bombay, these persons asked how they could present the fruits. The Imam formed a *majalis*, known as *Walkeshwar'ni Majalis*, wherein they brought fruits as a *nazrana*. Most of the members of these *majalis* migrated towards Pakistan between 1947 and 1950 and settled in Karachi. In 1951, the Imam gave them an audience in Hotel Metropole, Karachi. They asked to start the similar *majalis* in Karachi. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah allowed them, but gave its name as *Metropole Fruits Brotherhood and Sisterhood Majalis* with limited members. In short, the *Walkeshwar'ni Majalis* and *Metropole Fruits Brotherhood and Sisterhood Majalis* are also the best illustrations of the *nazrana* in the form of the fruits to the Imam.

Donning the mantle of Imamate in 1885, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah had completed 50 years of his spiritual leadership in August, 1935. His devoted followers, long looking forward to the auspicious day, got feverishly busy to pay a memorable tribute to their Imam, who had so happily guided their destinies through all these years, knitted them in to a progressive community, and taken them to enviable heights of moral and material glory. Hence, the Ismailis decided that the Golden Jubilee of their beloved Imam should be fitly celebrated by weighing him against gold and making a *nazrana* of it, as a mark of their love and gratitude. For this grand program, an All-India Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee had been formed. Its working committee assigned Pir Sabzali (d. 1938) to generate necessary *nazrana* through out India. The funds raising campaign started on October 23, 1935 from Kathiawar. He succeeded to collect a sum of five lac rupees in India being the *nazrana* to the Imam. Finally, the Imam's Golden Jubilee was celebrated at Bombay, India on 19th January, 1936.

The African Ismailis also expressed their desire to hold a similar Golden Jubilee in their homeland. Thus, the next Golden Jubilee celebrated at Nairobi, Kenya on March 1, 1937. The All African Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee collected 7 lacs Shillings. Once again the gold was presented as a *nazrana* to the Imam by the followers as a token of love, and once more the Imam returned this special gift for the welfare of the Ismaili community.

Sixty years of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's benevolent rule gave the followers a chance to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee by weighing him against diamonds. It was performed in Bombay on 10th March, 1946. The value of the diamonds was 640,000 British pounds, which was a humble *nazrana* to the Imam.

The second Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in Dar-es-Salaam on 10th August, 1946. This time the value of the diamonds was 684,000 British pounds. The sum value of the diamonds at each place was presented as an absolute *nazrana* to the Imam from his jubilant followers.

To mark the completion of his seventy years of Imamate, the Ismailis decided to weigh the Imam in platinum. The Platinum Jubilee was celebrated in Karachi on 3rd February, 1954. The *nazrana* gifted to the Imam was returned to the followers to set up Finance and Investment Corporation.

In Africa, its commemoration was restricted to a token ceremony in Cairo on 20th February, 1955. It was performed in the Cleopatra Hall of Hotel Semiramis in presence of 62 delegates. It was a solemn spectacle of 20 minutes. The Ismaili leaders presented 70 gold coins to the Imam as a *nazrana*, which was graciously accepted. The Imam presented the same gold coins to the delegates.

Under the glorious leadership of Mawlana Hazar Imam, the Ismailis have accelerated their economy to great extent, which paved a way for a large number of social projects more than expectation, and for its materialization, it was not required to the Imam to be weighed against the precious materials during his Silver Jubilee in 1982. Hence, the silver jubilee of Hazar Imam was marked with implementation of mass projects of health, education and other social projects in the world by generous *nazrana* of the followers.

Sunday, July 11, 1982 was one such day that will remain forever in the memories of those who came from far and wide: from the remotest areas of the globe to Aiglemont, to convey the felicitations and express the happiness of millions of the Ismailis to their Imam.

The scene was picturesque, the atmosphere was charged and the exuberance and boundless. Dewan Sir Eboo Pirbhai (1905-1990), Chairman of the World Leaders' Forum had an honour to address on behalf of the world *jamats*. Referring to the future, the Imam said, "We must continue to build and on solid foundations. Let us strengthen today's fabric of institutions and programs so as to have them contribute the full impact of their potential on our quality of life." Hazar Imam referred to issues which will have to be addressed in the future and said this should be done with "faith and courage, guided by the true spirit and meaning of Islam – to the precepts of which we should demonstrate our attachment in every facet of our lives."

In another occasion, the Imam also said, "President Ashiqali announced a donation by the *jamat* of Pakistan of a Chair, at the Aga Khan University, and I want to express to you all, the whole of my *jamat* of Pakistan, my deepest gratitude to this magnificent *nazrana*." (Karachi, 13th November, 1985)

In the message to the Canadian *jamat* on 24th June, 1997, the Imam said, “On the occasion of Milad an-Nabi, I am happy to inform my *jamat* of the decisions that I have taken for the utilisation of the most generous *nazrana* which my *jamat* offered me in commemoration of the 40th year of my Imam in 1997.”

The 11th July, 2007 historically marked an inauguration of the Golden Jubilee of Mawlana Hazar Imam. This was the glorious historical era when the Ismailis were scattered all over the world, not confined to East Africa and British India. The splendor, magnificence and the fidelity with which the Ismaili world celebrates the Golden Jubilee of their beloved 49th Hazar Imam was unparalleled.

***Eji Sami maro evo chh’e, jey kenu na rakh’e bhar,
Ek va’r sami’ne a’ali’e, to sami a’alay so’so va’r.*** (ginan)

“My Lord is such that he does not keep anyone’s load (upon him). Once you give (anything) to the Lord, he will recompense (its) hundred hundredfold (rewards).”

Pir Sadruddin exhorted that whatever is offered to the Imam, the giver (*wahib*) will get its rewards, which does not mean *dasond*, donation or charity, otherwise its reward would have been described in terms of *sava lakh*. Here reward is *so’so var* referring to the special gift or *Nazrana*. We present our *Nazrana* to the Imam, who channalizes it for the economical and social upliftments of the Third World countries, and that is why the Imam reckoned our *nazrana* also as a generosity.

The World Leaders Form has urged Mawlana Hazar Imam for the collection of the *nazrana* in the *jamats* during the Diamond Jubilee Year. The Imam has graciously accorded kind permission. Thus, on 21st March, 2017, the campaign of receiving *nazrana* has been launched in the world Ismaili *jamat*. Necessary announcement was made in all the global *jamat* by the National Councils.

It is enjoined upon us to participate in this noble cause as more as we can. Remember pointedly, it is a volunteerily oblation – a deal of heart, not compulsory. A penny or more than it must at least be our share in the *nazrana* during the Diamond Jubilee Year of our Beloved Hazar Imam.

According to the Koran, “You help God, so that he may help you.” (67:20). Helping God does not mean to fulfil His need! It refers to invest the money for noble cause and earn its rewards here and hereafter. Be minded, God is not greedy of our wealth, not at all!

Mat janno’re gur lobhi dhan, evi vastu ma darjo m’n (ginan)

“Dont consider the Lord greedy of wealth, and dont bring such thing in the mind.”

Jay mang’e te a’al sami’ne, pa’chhu ma ra’khish kai (ginan)

“Give the Lord whatever is asked, and do not retain anything behind.”

The sum total of the global *jamat's nazrana* inclusive of our contributions will be invested in the mega projects for the upliftment of mankind. May Mawla bless us not to miss this glorious chance, amen.

Time and Knowledge *Nazrana*

According to the Koran, “You will never come to piety unless you spend out of what you love.” (3:91)

Nothing will buy redemption for a person if he has wasted his best opportunity here, and to hunt the best of that opportunity, a person must spend here what he loves most, which are nothing but his wealth, knowledge and time.

Imam Mustansir billah II said, “O’believers, be all in love with the pure religion of the Imam! Be ready to comprehend the meaning of his word and knowledge.” (**Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi**, p. 34)

- 1) “Ibn Shariq daily sat in the mosque at evening in Medina to guide the visitors the routes of their destinations and the weather condition of desert as well.” (**Ibn Hisham**, 2nd vol., p.66).

“The Prophet assigned Suhail bin Harith to watch at the entrance of the mosque to drive away the dogs coming inside during prayer time. He voluntarily rendered his service for 18 months and died. The Prophet prayed for him.” (**Ibn Sa’d**, 4th vol., p.157).

[These are early Islamic examples relating to **NAZRANA OF TIME**]

- 2) “Harith bin Uthman offered Holy Prophet that he would give few time daily to teach Arabic to the girls of the clan of Najjar in Medina, which was accepted.” (**Tabari**, 3rd vol., p. 233).

“Sa’d bin Talha knew many languages spoken in Arab and non-Arab territories. He served as the interpreter between the Holy Prophet and foreign guests for two years.” (**Ibn Khaldun**, 4th vol., p. 114)

[These are early Islamic examples relating to **NAZRANA OF KNOWLEDGE**]

God has gifted us talent, the area in which we are skilled. Suppose, we are the doctors, engineers, or architects, God has given us these skills, so we should return a part of our knowledge to Him. We must commit and look for creative way to use it for the good of others. On the other hand, time is the rarest and most precious factor. God gives us 168 hours each week, asking to use it wisely and generously. Do we surrender our time for highest purpose?

Millions of Ismailis around the world pledged a *nazrana* of Time and Knowledge (TKN) to their beloved Shah Karim al-Husayni Hazar Imam during the glorious celebration of his Golden Jubilee on 11th July, 2007. Numerous Ismaili individuals have since dedicated their precious time and knowledge for the institutional service and humanity at large absolutely voluntarily.

Qurtubi writes (op.cit., 10th vol., p. 48) that after conquest of Mecca, Qarath bin Rabiah was among the pagan Meccans who embraced Islam. He offered the Holy Prophet for a special gift (*nazrana*). Instead, the Prophet advised him to put a new wooden door in Kaba, which would be reckoned his special gift. Later, it was learnt that the door could not be installed. When asked, he told the Prophet that the door was costly and beyond his capacity. The Prophet told, “You purchase it and I will tell the seller that you will pay its price in instalments. Are you ready and happy?” He accepted and the new door was fixed in Kaba. The seller also agreed to take its amount in pieces. The Prophet pray Qarath bin Rabiah for his generous gift (*nazrana*) and also the seller for his co-operation.

The above cited concession reveals that we can also share our *nazrana* as per our circumstances in instalments, which is effective from 21st March, 2017 to 11th July, 2023.

Speaking importance of TKN, Mawlana Hazar Imam said, “Thanked for *Nazrana* both of Time and Knowledge and of material *Nazrana*. Why is this important? Democracy is fragile in parts of the world, economic conditions may be bad, natural hazards which causes loss of life and its assets. It is difficult time in the world and by the end of the Jubilee Year, we can use this *Nazrana* to address these issues.” (California, 15th April, 2008)

In his address to the Parliament of Canada on 27th February, 2014 at Ottawa, Mawlana Hazar Imam said about the Time and Knowledge *Nazrana* (TKN) that, “During my Golden Jubilee – and this is important – six years ago, Ismailis from around the world volunteered their gifts, not only of wealth, but most notably of Time and Knowledge, in support of our work. We established a Time and Knowledge framework, a structural process for engaging an immense pool of expertise involving tens of thousands of volunteers.”



Karachi: April, 2017