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INTELLECTUAL INTERACTIONS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

THE ISMAILI THREAD



EDITED BY
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Spring's Equinox: Nawrūz in Ismaili Thought^{*}

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God is the One who sends forth the winds to stir up the clouds; then we drive them toward barren lands, giving life to the earth after its death. Thus is the Resurrection.

Qur'an 35:9

Introduction: The Equinox from Earthly Spectacle to Heavenly Knot

For some five thousand years, the Great Sphinx of Giza has fascinated people. Fashioned by the ancient Egyptians to be one of the largest single-stone statues on earth, it is certainly no accident that due to its exact positioning, on the day of the vernal equinox, the first day of spring, the majestic colossus gazes directly toward the rising sun.¹ For a thousand years the setting sun of the equinox casts a dramatic spectacle of undulating light and shadow on the northern stairway of the Mayan architectural and scientific marvel, the Temple of Kukulcan in Chichén Itzá, Mexico.² In his most famous work, *Phaenomena*, the ancient Greek poet-astronomer Aratus celebrated the 'beautiful and

^{*} This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Alwaez Rai Shamsuddin Bandali Haji.

¹ Manfred Bietak et al., 'Ägypten', *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 32 (1985), pp. 128–184.

² Anthony F. Aveni, Susan Milbrath, and Carlos Peraza Lope, 'Chichén Itzá's Legacy in the Astronomically Oriented Architecture of Mayapán', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 45 (2004), pp. 123–143.

great star' Alpha Piscium as the singular 'Knot of the Heavens', a tribute to its shining where the equator, the ecliptic, and the equinoctial colure intersect, revealing the precise point of the vernal equinox in the firmament.³ Similarly, the Japanese have long welcomed the arrival of spring with the ceremony of Higan-e, symbolising spiritual enlightenment.⁴

At the exact moment of the equinox, the sun crosses the celestial equator, marking in the northern hemisphere when day begins to gain ascendancy over night, and light over darkness. The moment has had tremendous symbolic significance throughout history in the art, architecture, ritual and literature of many cultures across the globe.

To the ancient Iranians, the return of spring was an annual symbol of the victory of light, which likely led Zoroaster (fl. perhaps ca. 1000 BCE) to remind his disciples:

Our 'limited time' will be succeeded by the 'Time of Long Dominion' (virtually eternity), with the world and all that is in it restored to the perfect state in which it was created by Ahura Mazdā . . . [The spring festival] could thus be renamed the '(festival of the) New Day' which will eventually bring everlasting bliss; and so this observance could aid faith and deepen understanding of doctrine.⁵

Similarly, both the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter are festivals that occur during spring, and the date of the celebration is calculated with relation to the equinox.⁶ In Christianity, the coming of

³ Godefroid De Callatay, 'The Knot of the Heavens', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 59 (1996), pp. 1–13.

⁴ Masao Fujii, 'Maintenance and Change in Japanese Traditional Funerals and Death-Related Behavior', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 10, 1 (1983), p. 46; Masakazu Watabe, 'Elijah's Promise: An Oriental View', *Brigham Young University Studies*, 44, 2 (2005), p. 156.

⁵ Mary Boyce, 'Nowruz i. In the Pre-Islamic Period', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-i>.

⁶ On the calculation of the dates of these festivals and their relationship to the equinox, see Werner Bergmann, 'Easter and the Calendar: The Mathematics of Determining a Formula for the Easter Festival to Medieval Computing', *Journal for General Philosophy of Science/Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 22, 1 (1991), pp. 15–41; J.B. Segal, 'Intercalation and the Hebrew Calendar', *Vetus Testamentum*, 7, 3 (1957), pp. 250–307.

spring is thus intimately connected with the concept of resurrection, a concept shared with the passage from the Qur'an quoted above. Indeed, one of the most common names for Easter in Arabic is *'id al-qiyaama*, feast of the resurrection.

Nawrūz in Muslim Cultures: From the Day of the Covenant to the Day of the Resurrection

Spring is a time of renewed life. The Qur'an thus compared the signs of spring, such as the revivification of barren lands by the life-giving rain clouds, to the Day of Resurrection. Given its natural as well as scriptural symbolism, and its importance in pre-existing religious traditions, the image of spring's arrival also played a powerful role in Islamic cultures and literatures. In addition to festivities common in other celebrations, others more symbolic of the coming of spring or specific to Nawrūz (the Arabic pronunciation of the more classical Nō Rōz) were ubiquitous in many Muslim lands, such as decorating eggs, lighting candles, bonfires, or other types of illumination, growing various grains, sprinkling water or rose essence, and distributing sugar crystals.

To Muslim rulers, the ancient associations of Nawrūz with the glory and sacred power of the royal courts were particularly attractive, and so encouraging its commemoration affirmed their splendour and prestige. While most rulers were not the focal point of strictly religious festivals, a secularised Nawrūz could certainly be harnessed for imperial ends.⁷ The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs celebrated Nawrūz with appropriate pomp and pageantry, as did the Fatimids and indeed

⁷ Alireza Shapur Shahbazi, 'Nowruz ii. In the Islamic Period', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-ii>. Shapur Shahbazi's bibliography and references have been particularly useful for this piece. It is important to remember that it is only since the time of the calendar reform under Sultan Malik-Shāh (d. 485/1092) that Nawrūz has regularly marked the vernal equinox. With regard to these shifts, see Simone Cristoforetti, 'Nowruz iii. In the Iranian Calendar', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-iii>; Antonio Panaino, Reza Abdollahy, and Daniel Balland, 'Calendars', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/calendars>.

numerous other Muslim dynasties.⁸ That merry-makers sometimes went beyond the bounds of what was deemed acceptable behaviour is evidenced by the fact that at various times both the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs had to rein in their subjects, and to restrict the kindling of bonfires and sprinkling of water traditionally associated with the festival.⁹ Certain Muslims, like al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), frowned upon the prominence of Nawrūz customs, worried about their pre-Islamic origins.¹⁰ Others, however, cited supportive traditions. For example, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) connects the celebration of Nawrūz to the Prophet Abraham's miraculous escape when the idolators threw him into a blazing fire (see Qur'an 21:68–69). The confrontation between the Prophet Moses and Pharaoh's magicians is also said to have taken place on this day (20:59), and it is equally claimed that the ring of Solomon was recovered on Nawrūz.¹¹ In *al-Āthār al-bāqīya* ('Vestiges of the Past') and *al-Maḥāsin wa'l-aqdād* ('Book of Beauties and Contraries'), after discussing the Prophet's positive opinion of giving gifts that sow love in the hearts of people, al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) records:

It is reported that the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī (upon whom be peace) was approached by a group of Persian chieftains, who presented him with gifts of silver bowls filled with sweets. He asked, 'What are these for?' They replied, 'Today is Nawrūz.' He replied, 'May all of our days be Nawrūz!' They ate the sweets, which he served his sitting companions, dividing the bowls among the Muslims.¹²

⁸ Shapur Shahbazi, 'Nowruz ii. In the Islamic Period'.

⁹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, et al. as *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (Leiden, 1879–1901), vol. 13, p. 2144; tr. Franz Rosenthal as *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad; the Caliphates of al-Mu'taḍid, al-Muktafi and al-Muqtadir, A.D. 892–915/A.H. 279–302*, vol. 38 (Albany, 1985), p. 20.

¹⁰ Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Kimīyā-yi sa'ādat*, ed. Ḥusayn Khidīw-jam (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), vol. 1, p. 522.

¹¹ Cited in Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 40–41, who also notes additional sources and references to the 'Biblical' history of Nawrūz.

¹² Jāḥiẓ (pseud., attrib.), Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī, *al-Maḥāsin wa'l-aqdād*, ed. Muḥammad Amin al-Khānījī al-Kutubī (Cairo, 1324/1906),

Perhaps the most striking interpretation tying Nawrūz directly to Muslim religious heritage is one found in Twelver Shi'i works such as al-Majlisī's (d. 1110/1699) *Biḥār al-anwār* ('Oceans of Lights'), which intimately connects the festival with significant events in the history and eschatology of the Abrahamic tradition and particularly episodes of importance to the Shi'is. Addressing Mu'allā b. Khanīs, Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) is reported to have said:

O Mu'allā, the day of Nawrūz is the day God accepted the covenants of his servants to worship Him and not to associate anything with Him and to believe in His Prophets and Proofs and to believe in the imams. It is the first day upon which the sun rose and the winds blew and the splendour of the world was created. It is the day Noah's ark grounded upon Mount Ararat. It is the day God resurrected the thousands who had gone forth from their homes in fear of death: God said to them, 'Die!' then brought them back to life.¹³ It is the day on which Gabriel came down to the Messenger of God. It is the day on which the Messenger of God bore the Commander of the Faithful 'Alī upon his shoulder so that he could throw down and destroy the idols of the Quraysh from atop the Sacred House, and likewise Abraham. It is the day on which the Prophet ordered his companions to pledge allegiance to 'Alī as Commander of the Faithful. It is the day on which the Prophet turned 'Alī towards the valley of the jinn to take their pledge of allegiance. It is the day on which the Commander of the Faithful received the second pledge of allegiance. It is the day on which he triumphed over the people of Nahrawān and slew Dhu'l-Thadya. It is the day on which our Resurrector (Qā'im) shall appear with his deputies. It is the day on which our Resurrector (Qā'im) shall triumph over

pp. 237–238. The narrative in Bīrūnī's work is incomplete, due to a lacuna in the manuscript, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiyah 'an al-qurūn al-khāliyah*, *Chronologie orientalischer Völker: von Albērūnī* (Leipzig, 1878), p. 215; *ibid.*, trans. by Eduard Sachau as *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English Version of the Arabic Text; Or, "Vestiges of The Past"* (London, 1879), p. 199. See also Ḥasan Taqīzāda, *Gāh-shumārī dar Īrān-i qadīm* (Tehran, 1316 Sh./1933), pp. 153–154.

¹³ A reference to Qur'an 2:243.

the Antichrist (Dajjāl) and crucify him at the rubbish-heap of Kufa.¹⁴

Sentiments similar to those found in Twelver Shi'i texts are equally present in Nuṣayrī texts, such as the *Majmū' al-a'yād* ('Book of Festivals') by Abū Sa'īd Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 424/1033), which associates Nawrūz with the theophanic appearance of 'al-Mawlā', i.e., 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, through the ages.¹⁵ Thus, in both these 'Alid traditions, from the pre-eternal day of the covenant through to the end of times, Nawrūz is inextricably woven into the fabric of trans-historical religious consciousness.

Nawrūz in Ismaili Literature

The symbolism of spring in general, and of Nawrūz in particular, can be found in Ismaili literature spanning virtually every major historical period and is present in the literary heritage of the three principal linguistic groupings: the Arabic of the Islamic heartlands, the Persian of Iranian and Central Asian traditions, and the various South Asian languages of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Intellectual interactions with the regional environment are readily apparent in the literatures, whether the timing of the festival in the Arab world, the vivid imagery and vocabulary of South Asian traditions that draw from the symbolism of wider mystical currents in the Subcontinent, or the metres and metaphors that permeate the Persian works, indelibly rooting them to the birthplace of Nawrūz, and the conventions that sprung from it.

Two prominent uniting themes permeate the three broad traditions, regardless of time period or language: vernal phenomena as metaphors for the blessing of the imam of the time, and the sacralisation of the earth's springtide finery by sublimating these symbols to convey knowledge of a

¹⁴ The translation, slightly modified, is from John Walbridge, 'A Persian Gulf in the Sea of Lights: The Chapter on Naw-Rūz in the *Bihār al-Anwār*', *Iran*, 35 (1997), pp. 88–89.

¹⁵ Abū Sa'īd Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, '*Sabīl rāḥat al-arwāḥ wa-dalīl al-surūr wa'l-afrah ilā fāliq al-aṣbāḥ* (*Majmū' al-a'yād*)', ed. Rudolf Strothmann, *Der Islam*, 27 (1946); Meir Michael Bar-Asher, 'The Iranian Component of the Nuṣayrī Religion', *Iran*, 41 (2003), pp. 217–218.

spiritual world beyond sensory experience. The latter parallels in some ways the symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) so central to Ismaili thought.

***Ta'wīl* (Symbolic Interpretation) and the Literature of Spring**

The writings of Fatimid intellectuals, including such figures as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) and Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070), emphasise the importance of understanding the world and faith by maintaining a proper balance between their exterior, physical, literal and apparent forms (their *ẓāhir*) and their esoteric, spiritual, symbolic and intellectual realities (their *bāṭin*). The process of evincing the latter from the former is known as *ta'wīl*, or symbolic interpretation. Muslims, whether Shi'i or Sunni, who championed the role of intellect in understanding faith, advocated the use of symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Those who defended an exclusively literal understanding of the Qur'an castigated them, often charging them with unbelief (*kufṛ*). They did not hesitate to respond in kind. For example, the Mu'tazilis, who referred to themselves as the People of Divine Unity and Justice (*ahl al-tawḥīd wa'l-'adl*), insisted that scriptural references to such things as God's hand and face must be understood allegorically, using *ta'wīl* to interpret what to them was clearly symbolic. They mocked the Ḥanbalis for refusing to use the divine gift of intellect to understand anthropomorphic descriptions of God, contemptuously calling them *hashwiyya*, 'pillow stuffers' or 'dimwits'.¹⁶

Elucidating the connection between outward forms and inner meanings, the Ismaili savant Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw said that by revelation or *tanzīl*, literally 'descent,' intellectual matters are expressed in a perceptible form.¹⁷ Meanwhile, by the process of symbolic

¹⁶ Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School* (Durham, 1994), p. 14; Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Batta, traditionniste et jurisconsulte musulman d'école hanbalite, mort en Irak à 'Ukbarā en 387/997* (Damascus, 1958), pp. 11–12; Editor, 'Hashwiyya', *EI2*.

¹⁷ Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, ed. Ismā'il 'Imādi Ḥā'iri and Muḥammad 'Imādi Ḥā'iri (Tehran, 2005), p. 368.

interpretation, or *ta'wīl*, the perceptible forms are taken back to their original intellectual state.¹⁸ In verse, he exhorted his audience not to be content with exoteric forms, but to seek out those who can reveal the original spiritual meaning of the revelation:

God's Word is the Ocean of Words,
Brimful with precious, lustrous pearls.

Its revelation (*tanzīl*) is like the ocean's brackish waters,
While its symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is like pearls for the wise.

As the pearls lie scattered in the ocean's depths
Why do you scamper along its shores? Seek a diver!¹⁹

While many Muslim exponents of *ta'wīl* employed it primarily to understand the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'an, the Ismailis believed it was also to be applied to the canonical law (*sharī'a*), to sacred history, and to the creation itself.²⁰ None of the literature surveyed in this piece falls under the genre of *ta'wīl* or designates itself by this title, but it is clear that the ethos of seeking a deeper meaning behind the exoteric phenomena of spring permeates the examples explored.

¹⁸ Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā (Gholam Reza) A'wānī (Aavani) (Tehran, 1397/1977), p. 147.

¹⁹ Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. Muḥtabā Mīnuwī and Mahdī (Mehdi) Muḥaqqiq (Mohaghegh) (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), vol. 1, p. 5; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī: Mushtamil ast bar Rawshanā'ī-nāma, Sa'adat-nāma, qasā'id wa muqaṭṭa'āt*, ed. Naṣr Allāh Taqawī and Muḥtabā Mīnuwī (Tehran, 1304–1307 Sh./1925–1928), p. 3. See also Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Gushāyish ū rahāyish*, ed. and trans. by Faquir M. Hunzai as *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology; A New Edition and English Translation of the Gushāyish wa Rahāyish* (London, 1998), p. 65.

²⁰ An analysis of the symbolic interpretation of creation may be found in my 'The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw', in Sarfaroz Niyozov and Ramazan Nazarev (ed.), *Nasir Khusraw: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Khujand, 2005), pp. 74–83, and of sacred history in my 'Hierohistory in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Foundation of Symbolic Interpretation (*Asās al-ta'wīl*): The Birth of Jesus', in Charles Fletcher and Sami G. Massoud (ed.), *Studies in Islamic Historiography* (forthcoming).

Resplendent by Your Light: An Arabic Ode

We know from numerous Egyptian accounts, including those of al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), that in Fatimid times Nawrūz, most probably observed with the annual flooding of the Nile and the beginning of the agricultural new year, was greeted with tremendous jubilation. Celebrants arrayed themselves in their finery and made merry, gifts were exchanged, charity was distributed to the poor, and poets waxed eloquent.²¹ However, Prince Tamīm (d. 374/984), a talented poet and the eldest son of the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Muʿizz (d. 365/975), envisioned a spiritual meaning in the signs of nature, seeing the source of their physical blessings in the imam's generosity, bounteous munificence and spiritual light:

In composing an ode in praise of you
Beautiful words spring to mind

But in praising someone other than you
My tongue falters, the words lie

For you are inherently gracious, exalted
Such gifts are innate to your very nature

Your right hand scatters blessed rain upon the creation
Your forehead is dawn itself, your face a glittering star

You are the illustrious one through whose light we are illuminated
Our beloved, for whom we would give our lives

Indeed, if the festival of Nawrūz is to be filled with joy
It is only through your light that it becomes resplendent

God's blessings upon you, O son of the Prophet
For indeed you are a time-tested sword to fight life's sorrows²²

²¹ Narratives from the primary sources are provided in Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Muʿaṭṭī al-Ṣayyād, *al-Nawrūz wa-atharuh fi'l-adab al-ʿArabī* (Beirut, 1972), pp. 115–126. Regarding the timing of the observation, see Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, pp. 42, 45; Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, NY, 1994), p. 83.

²² Al-Amir Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz, *Diwān* (Riyadh, 1982), pp. 51–52. This translation benefits from Faquir M. Hunzai, *Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismaili Poetry* (London, 1996), p. 41.

Words of Gnosis: Spring in South Asia

The *gināns* constitute a significant literary legacy of South Asian Ismailism.²³ The most prolific author to whom these compositions are attributed is Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn (fl. eighth/fourteenth century), a contemporary of Imam Islām-shāh. In consonance with Ismaili literature in both Arabic and Persian, the imam, and particularly his arrival, are compared to the coming of spring, or *vasant*, one of the six seasons of the Indian calendar. This imagery is blended with that of the rich mystical traditions specific to South Asia. In a Sindhi *ginān*, for example, the imam, described as eternal spring, is depicted as the bridegroom whom every pure soul longs to wed:

The lord is the groom for every maiden soul
Spring eternal is the imam
The sovereign king of all²⁴

In a Gujarati *ginān*, the imam's arrival from the west is lauded, an image juxtaposed with that of the rising sun, destroying the darkness of night. The metaphor echoes the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad, often quoted in Fatimid literature, which says that the sun's rising in the west signals the coming of the rightly guided one, the Mahdī.²⁵ The imam's arrival is again celebrated as the coming of spring:

²³ On the *gināns*, see the following work, and the items listed in its bibliography, Shafique N. Virani, 'Symphony of Gnosis: A Self-Definition of the Ismaili Ginān Literature', in Todd Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought* (London, 2005), pp. 503–521. Please note, the transliteration of Indic scripts in this article is based on the guidelines developed jointly by the Policy and Standards Division at the Library of Congress and the Cataloging and Classification Section of the American Library Association, commonly referred to as the ALA-LC Romanization Guidelines.

²⁴ Pīr Sadaradīn, 'Yārā anat kiroḍīe vadhāiūṃ', *101 Ginānanī chopāḍī: Chogaḍiā sārjanā (5) savāranā chogaḍiā (24) ghaṭapātanā beṭhā ginān (5) ghaṭapātanā ubhā ginān (10) venatinā ginān (5) tathā bijā ginānavārī chopāḍī* (Mumbai, 1988 VS/1932), vol. 4, no. 29, 43, v. 12.

²⁵ See, for example, the poetry quoted in al-Qaḍī Abū Ḥanifa b. Muḥammad al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa wa-ibtidā' al-dawla*, trans. by Hamid Haji as *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire; An Annotated English translation of*

From the Western Land has arrived the lord
Vested in him are countless hopes

Shattered is the night, the sun has risen!
The imam's coming is the advent of spring

Flowers have blossomed, the season has bloomed²⁶

Another Sindhi *ginān* speaks in greater depth about the imam's arrival, once again, with an emphasis on his coming from the west as the bridegroom of souls. He is described as the lord of twelve splendours, a specifically South Asian solar allusion. The imagery of spring and flowers blossoming takes an interesting turn in this composition, for the *Pīr* specifies that he is not speaking of vegetation, but of the believers bursting into bloom and becoming perfumed with the presence of the imam.

The imam's herald travels throughout the world. In rapturous welcome, the believers shower the imam and *Pīr* with petals. The imam has appeared in the fortress of Alamūt. Brother, we are perpetually blissful, wed to the lord. By God, he has arrived; the community enjoys its fortune. Hail the advent of the Lord 'Alī from the west. Recognise the supreme man, lord of light. Friends, know the *Pīr* to be he who has led you to the recognition of the lord of twelve splendours.²⁷ Serve none other than that very lord, my brother. Friend, never doubt in this. Hail the advent of the lord, as glorious as the risen sun! The imam has arrived, friends, as the spring, and flowers have burst into bloom. By God, the believers blossom, redolent with fragrance.²⁸

al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Iftitāḥ al-Da'wa (London, 2006), p. 68: 'The sun of God will rise from the west.'

²⁶ *Pīr Sadaradīn*, 'Pāchham desathī parabhu padhāreyā', 101 *Ginānanī chopāḍī: Chogaḍiā sāñjanā* (5) *savāranā chogaḍiā* (24) *ghaṭapāṭanā beṭhā ginān* (5) *ghaṭapāṭanā ubhā ginān* (10) *venatīnā ginān* (5) *tathā bijā ginānavārī chopāḍī*, no. 41, 66–67, vv. 1–3.

²⁷ The twelve splendours or digits (*bār kalā*) refer to the sun, which represents the imam. It is contrasted with the moon of sixteen splendours or digits (*soḷ kalā*), which represents the *Pīr*.

²⁸ *Pīr Sadaradīn*, 'Jugame phire shāhājī munerī', 101 *Ginānanī chopāḍī: Chogaḍiā sāñjanā* (5) *savāranā chogaḍiā* (24) *ghaṭapāṭanā beṭhā ginān* (5) *ghaṭapāṭanā ubhā ginān* (10) *venatīnā ginān* (5) *tathā bijā ginānavārī chopāḍī*, no. 3, 5, vv. 1–5.

A *ginān* with both Khāḍī Bolī and Gujarati features continues this symbolism. The composer begins by impressing upon the listeners matters of great import, the centrality of the Guide in the spiritual search, and the gravity of thinking of one's soul. Here, it is the word of the Guide that illuminates the soul, and the adoption of this word in the heart heralds the advent of spring. However, it is a spring in which not water, but divine light showers from the heavens:

Right now, at this very moment, comprehend this mystery
This mystery that lies within
On those who fathomed it, dawned the light of morn
Those on whom it dawned, tread upon the path
Without the Guide, how will you cross to the other shore?

A wondrous love we've found
Aches our heart, fretting about our soul
Day and night, contemplate the soul

The soul ponders the one
In whose devotion we are rapt
Those who seek in this world
The Guide they shall find
For thus is the command divine

With vigilance exult in the word of the Guide
For this is what illumines the pure soul
As when spring arrives and flowers burst into bloom
In the heart are showers of divine light²⁹

The imagery of spring in the earlier *gināns* sets the stage for a composition by Sayyid Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh Shamsī (d. after 1206/1792) specifically about Nawrūz, which is recited annually by the South Asian Ismailis at the time of the festival. The *Pīr* describes his encounter with Imam Shāh Khalīl Allāh (d. 1232/1817) on the day of the festival. In the first verse, the imam is tellingly described as lord of the resurrection.

²⁹ Pīr Sadaradīn, 'Abhī abhī antar buj bujantar', *100 Ginānānī Chopaḍī: Sat Venatī moṭī mahar karo tathā Sat vachan ne Sataguranuranā vīvānuṃ nānuṃ ginān tathā bījā ginānovālī* (Mumbai, 1990 VS/1934), vol. 1, no. 41, 77–78, vv. 1–3.

Considering the association of Nawrūz and spring with the revival of souls at the end of time, this epithet carries intriguing symbolic value, and is already a subtle indication of the sublimation of meaning that occurs throughout the composition. Saddened to learn that the imam had gone hunting in the woods, and overwhelmed by feelings of love, in search of his imam he too entered the forest, and it was there that he encountered Shāh Khalīl Allāh. While the occasion for the composition of the poem is clearly a physical encounter, it is evident that the author wishes, at the same time, to convey something of a profound spiritual experience. Symbols of transformation abound, including that of the coming of spring. The author is dyed in the eternal colour of the master, his life-breath blossoms like a flower and the empty caskets are filled with pearls, which are a symbol of supreme knowledge in the Indian poetic imagination. Most importantly, the author's ultimate desire is fulfilled when he is blessed with a vision of the lord in the form of pure light.

On the glorious day of Nawrūz
The most luminous imam, lord of the resurrection, had gone
hunting
This humble servant's heart was filled with longing
His very life-breath remained at the feet of the imam

I was bound to my lord in rapture by love
Being dyed in the master's eternal colour
Such was the absorption of my thoughts in the lord of the
resurrection
That the treasuries of truth overflowed with pearls

I strolled merrily with the lord
Obtaining the troves of both matter and spirit
The souls shall be saved
Of those who listen wholeheartedly to these words of gnosis
When a soul attains the mystic way
Its life-breath blossoms like a flower
Love envelops it in the fragrance of aloes and sandalwood
Pure as a swan, it lovingly glides along the lake

Shāh Khalīl Allāh was hunting near the citadel at the ring of
 fortresses
 And graciously called for Fath ‘Alī
 My untold hopes were realised
 The lord appeared eternally as light

Faithful brethren, venerate the lord with all your heart
 Listen, O saints, such is the teaching of Sayyid Shamsī
 Those who forget not the lord’s bounties
 Shall never be touched by sorrow³⁰

The *gināns* helped to galvanise the production of an abundance of other devotional poetry in the community. In modern times, the poet Hasanali Ramal (d. 1990) of Karachi was known for composing in an idiom inspired by nature. His penname was ‘Suman,’ a flower similar to a jasmine, an appropriate sobriquet for a poet so taken by gardens, birds, scents and seasons. He wrote in his native Sindhi, in Hindi, and most prolifically, in Gujarati. Widely respected as a playwright and poet both within and beyond the Ismaili community, he wrote for the Shri Shaṅkar Vijay Sangīt Samāj and the external service of Radio Pakistan, among others.³¹

The following piece takes as its starting point not the season of *vasant*, or spring, but rather of *varṣā*, the monsoon season. Like the Persian spring, which breaks the hegemony of winter, the monsoon delivers the land from the oppressive heat of the summer (*unāḷo* or *grīṣm*), when the searing dry winds known as *lū* can be fatal. The poet

³⁰ Sayyid Fateh-ali [Shāh] Shamasī (pseud.), ‘Navarojanā dīn sohāmaṇā’, in *101 Ginānanī chopadī: Chogaḍiā sāñjanā (5) savāranā chogaḍiā (24) ghaṭapāṭanā beṭhā ginān (5) ghaṭapāṭanā ubhā ginān (10) venatīnā ginān (5) tathā bijā ginānavārī chopadī* (Mumbai, 1988 VS/1932), vol. 4, no. 38, 56–57, vv. 1–2, 4–8.

³¹ Many of Suman’s Ismaili themed compositions are collected in his *Suman saṅgrah* (Karachi, [1969]). The poem that follows was written in the 1980s, and so is not included in this collection. I believe I have in my possession a later, second edition of the collection, which may record the poem, but it was not available to me at the time of this writing. My access to the poem was through a copy I have of Hasanali Ramal’s handwritten manuscript of his compositions, kindly provided to me by his son, Anwar Rammal of Karachi, Pakistan.

refers not to clouds (*vādal*), but to 'cloudlings' (*vādaḷī*), bursting with colour, which shower the gentlest of rains. It is only in the last lines that the poet introduces spring in his prayer that it may grace the lives of the believers. In the context of allusions to spring in South Asian Ismaili literature, the intimation of the advent of the imam and his blessings is taken for granted. The word used for spring in this line, though, is not the *vasant* of the vernacular tradition, but the Persian *bahār*. So naturalised had the Persianate vocabulary become that this skilful blending of contrasting seasonal images seems quite appropriate.

There are several other noteworthy aspects of the composition, many drawn from the interactions with sister traditions of Subcontinental verse forms. The male poet writes in the voice of a female, addressing his audience as *sakhī*, translated here as sister, but literally a female friend. The feminine voice was used by several poets, both male and female, to great effect. The occasion for the poem was the celebration of the Silver Jubilee marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Prince Karim Aga Khan as imam of the Ismaili community. The word 'Jubilee' in the poem is personified, as if Jubilee were the personal name of a sprightly girl who arrives in the courtyard joyfully dancing, with jingling little bells (*ghūṅgaru*) on her anklets. All of this is conveyed by a single onomatopoeic word, *rhūmajhūmtī*, the sound made by the little bells. The onomatopoeia, internal rhyme, and alliteration in the verses is stunning. The rains *jharamar*, the streams *khaḍakhad*, the brooks *kalakal* and the birds *valaval*. Most notably, as in the other Ismaili poetry rendered here, it is abundantly clear that these verses are not simply about the coming of the rains or the longing for spring, but have deep spiritual symbolism. The poet writes, 'This is not just any rain, my sister. Swung open have the gates of blessings!'

Sister, arrived have the cloudlings
Bursting with colours
The monsoon cloudlings are here
Gently it rains, pitter-patter

Harken, sister, the thunder rumbles, rumbles
Sparkles, sparkles the lightning
Gently it rains, pitter-patter

Splashing streams, burbling brooks
 Chirruping, chirruping
 Birds without end
 Sister, rippling ponds, moistened earth
 The world has donned its finery
 This is not just any rain, my sister
 Swung open have the gates of blessings!
 Gently it rains, pitter-patter

Sister, jingling and frolicking
 Jubilee graced our courtyard
 The joy in our hearts can't be contained
 Scatter flowers to welcome
 Beloved Karim Shah, our refuge
 Sister, rejoice, rejoice
 With love in your heart
 Gently it rains, pitter-patter

Lush, lush in every place
 The garden bursting, bursting
 Bloomed, blossomed
 Have succulent Suman flowers
 Sister, may there be joyous colours of the rains
 And the society of the sisters
 May spring grace our lives
 May there be sweet waves, sister
 For each and every body sways
 Gently it rains, pitter-patter
 Gently it rains, pitter-patter

The Spiritual Resurrection: Adorning a Persian Assembly

While spring-related imagery is prevalent in literature across much of the Muslim world, it should not come as a surprise that it is particularly pronounced in Persian-influenced areas, where the pageantry of the Nawrūz festival was fertile ground for the imaginations of creative souls. The same is also true of Persian Ismaili literature, in which images of spring in general, and Nawrūz in particular, abound. The

Qur'anic juxtaposition of spring and the coming Resurrection inspired many poets. In Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd's (d. 645/1246) *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt* ('Poems of the Resurrection'), written at Alamūt after Imam Ḥasan 'alā dhikrih al-salām's (d. 561/1166) declaration of the *qiyāma* or Resurrection about a hundred years earlier, he compares the imam's advent to the arrival of Nawrūz:

Like nature's Nawrūz, like the world of bounties, thus came Ḥasan
Like hidden fortune, like the *qibla* of faith, thus came Ḥasan

Like the source of adornment of that currency of the world
Like grace, like gaze, like the dawn of bounties, thus came Ḥasan

Like the nightingale of God's unity, sweetly singing notes of
every tune

Upon the rosebush in the garden, thus came Ḥasan. . . .

In the pre-eternal land, kingmaker was he
Ruler in the post-eternal realm, thus came Ḥasan. . . .

Source of the light of guidance from a lord most great, sublime
Glory be! O glory be! O glory, thus came Ḥasan³²

In another composition, the poet is tempted to entrust to the wind a letter to convey to his beloved. He speaks of how the beauty of her face ushers spring into the soul's garden. However, he jealously desists from entrusting the missive, lest the breeze stroke the recipient's musky tresses while delivering it. Instead, he sets out himself to meet the beloved, but try as he might, his strength fails him. He recalls that the physician administers *mufarriḥ* for weak hearts, that vivifying medicine containing rubies. Why then, he wonders, does thinking of his beloved's ruby lips sap all his heart's strength?

As the poem recounts the poet's longing, we learn that the true beloved is none other than the successor of Ḥasan 'alā dhikrih al-salām, Imam A'la Muḥammad (d. 607/1210), also known as Nūr al-Dīn, 'the light of faith'. The poet takes advantage of this name when he

³² Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt*, ed. Seyyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, *Poems of the Resurrection* (Tehran, 1395 Sh./2016), no. 50, 152–153, lns. 1523–1526, 1531, 1546. The ode is in a popular *hazaj* metre, - - - | - - -
~ | - - - ~ | - - - .

introduces the beloved, whose light (*nūr*) ennobles his devotees while his fire (*nār*) torments his foes. In common with other Shi'i writers, for whom the prophets and imams represent the face of God (*wajh Allāh*), i.e., those by whom God is recognised, Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd avers that the world abides by the existence of God's representative, recalling the Prophetic declaration, 'If the earth were bereft of an Imam for even a moment, it would be convulsed with its inhabitants' (*law khalat al-arḍ min imām sā'a la-māddat bi-ahlihā*).³³ Time wonders when the imam shall take his rightful place on the throne of the world, to which Intellect responds that this will occur 'when the winds of spring's triumph convey in the mist the fragrance of victory at the end of times.'

Who shall bear to the beloved, the missive of this tearful soul?
To that portrait of loveliness, who shall bear my thousand tales?

The people of the world advised, 'Entrust your missive to the wind
That it may bear your grief to one, who liberates from woe and
pain'

But bear this I could not, to entrust it to the wind
What if when conveying it, the wind caress her musky tress?

Set out I did to see that one, of rosy cheeks, stately cypress
Whose visage to soul's garden, brings splendid, glorious spring

News was heard, that lovely moon, brings to vernal charm
Violets and hyacinth, to the tulip garden

³³ This is a well-known tradition, reported in slightly different wordings in, for example, Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ṭūsī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm (Taṣawwūrāt)*, ed. and trans. Seyyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought; A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (London, 2005), Persian p. 148, English p. 120; Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* (Beirut, 1428/2007), vol. 1, p. 104. For further references, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shī'isme originel: Aux sources de l'ésotérisme en Islam*, trans. by David Streight as *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany, 1994), pp. 43, 125, 229 n. 673–675. It is the most quoted tradition in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib's *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt* (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011). This observation, and additional Twelver sources for the tradition can be found in Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'i Kadkanī, '*Qā'imīyyāt wa jāyghāh-i ān dar sh'ir wa adab-i Fārsī*', *ibid.*, p. 30.

Longingly my soul set out, pursuing perilous path
Enduring all it could, sacrificing all its strength. . . .

If doctors dispense ruby tonic, to heal a heart that's frail
Why do the beloved's ruby lips, sap all strength of my heart?

Yearning breached my heart, like a thief with lamp in hand
Gathered all chattels of self-control, and absconded in the
night. . . .

A mountain is my grief, and I an ant
Which ant can bear such a load? Such a burden mountainous? . . .

The world abides by God's face, by his generosity
The gold of its existence, is assayed pure for all times

Sovereign of time and terre, Muhammad from whom
Their portion of light and fire, his friend and foe receive

Time asked of Intellect, 'When shall fortune of the spheres
Snatch from the adversary's head, his stolen, borrowed crown?'

Responded did Intellect, 'When the winds of spring's triumph,
Convey in the mist the fragrance, of the victory at the end of times'

'Then in glory shall he mount his throne, this 'Alī of the time
Taking in his holy hand, the sword of Dhu'l-faḡār'³⁴

The most thorough treatment of Nawrūz in extant Ismaili literature in any language probably occurs in the magnum opus of the learned Husayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century), scion of a family of Ismaili dignitaries. His hitherto unpublished *Tazyīn al-majālis* ('Adornment of Assemblies'), a blend of both prose and poetry, explores the spiritual dimension of commemorations such as Nawrūz, including

³⁴ Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt*, no. 40, pp. 131–133, bayts 1212–1217, 1219–1221, 1223, 1230–1234. The composition is in the *mujtass* metre, ˘ - - - - | ˘ - - - - | - - - - | ˘ - - -, one of the favourite rhythms of Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1390) and especially Sa'dī (d. 691/1292), who composed more than half his odes in it, see Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody: With Chapters on Urdu, Karakhanidic and Ottoman Prosody* (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 146–147. It is clear in this poem that the victory of the imam is not merely symbolic, but given the political rivalries in this period, was very much conceived in material terms as well.

‘īd al-ḥajj and ‘īd al-aḍḥā.³⁵ With the Safavids then in power, the formation of an Iranian nation-state further buttressed existing celebrations of the festival.³⁶

The proliferation of manuscripts of the *Tazyin al-majālis* in both Iran and Central Asia testifies to its popularity, and the fact that most copies only record sections dedicated to one or another of the festivals rather than the complete work suggests that these must have been in common use on those occasions, and were likely recited at religious gatherings for these festivals. The ode that initiates the piece on Nawrūz is written in a rather unusual form of the *hazaj* metre which, while somewhat rare, lends itself to singing, - - ∪ | ∪ - - - | - - ∪ | ∪ - - -.³⁷

Auspicious Nawrūz has arrived, O lord, may blessings abound
Mirth pervades all around, O lord, may blessings abound. . . .

Abloom is jubilation’s garden, brimful is the heart’s chalice
Atwitter is the soul’s nightingale, O lord, may blessings abound

By the bounty of mercy divine, has passed all sorrow and suffering
Resplendent the world has become, O lord, may blessings abound

Flourish and bloom does the rose garden, filled with light and
purity is the house

Wax eloquent does the lily’s tongue, O lord, may blessings abound

The goblet increases good cheer, the ambergris exudes perfume
For fragrance there is incense, O lord, may blessings abound. . . .

Winter’s severity has been snapped, tidings of spring reach the
heart

Every moment, say a hundred times: O lord, may blessings
abound

³⁵ For this author, see Ḥusayn b. Ya‘qūb Shāh b. Šūfi, ‘The Adornment of Assemblies by Ḥusayn b. Ya‘qūb Shāh b. Šūfi’, chap. 4, trans. Shafique N. Virani in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi‘i Vision of Islam*, ed. Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh, and Kutub Kassam (London, 2008), pp. 296–297; Maryam Mu‘izzī, ‘Risāla-yi Ḥusayn bin Ya‘qūb Shāh’, *Faṣḥnāma-yi muṭālī‘āt-i ta’rikhī*, 3, 3–4 (1370 Sh./1991–1992), pp. 403–425. I am currently preparing a critical edition and translation of the *Tazyin al-majālis*, from which the translations that follow are drawn.

³⁶ Shapur Shahbazi, ‘Nowruz ii. In the Islamic Period’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

³⁷ One of only a handful of other poets to use this metre was Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, see Thiesen, *Classical Persian Prosody*, p. 143.

It soon becomes clear in the work, however, that Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb's purpose is not solely to celebrate the festival with eloquent verse. Throughout his treatise, he exhorts the believers to observe these occasions as opportunities for transformation. His treatise is addressed to 'the people of insight, whose hearts are fragrant with perfume, and the people of virtue, whose minds are the treasuries of spiritual gnosis.' Therefore, beyond simply celebrating the joyous advent of spring, in a manner typical of Ismaili luminaries, he wishes to explain subtleties of much more profound import. He informs the readers that Nawrūz is not simply when the sun enters into the constellation of Aries, signalling the moment of the equinox and the transformation of the physical world with the arrival of spring. For the believers, the true Nawrūz occurs when their actions, deeds and very existence are transformed such that their iniquities are exchanged for virtues, and their misdeeds for noble actions. While the people of exterior forms take Nawrūz to be the time when fields are to be sown, the people of interior meaning realise that this world is the sowing ground for the next world, and act accordingly. Nawrūz is hence a time for abandoning the darkness of blind following (*taqlīd*) for the light of true spiritual search and realisation (*taḥqīq*). The former pleases only the creatures, while the latter pleases the Creator. His 'Admonition for this Blessed Time [of Nawrūz]' is divided into sixteen parts, each buttressed by an Arabic quotation or two from the Qur'an, the Prophet, the imams, or wisdom literature, which is then explained in Persian, after which the author provides a line or two of sage counsel, before concluding the point with rhymed couplets (a *mathnawī*). His verse and the structure of his exordia clearly demonstrate the influence of the aforementioned *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt* ('Poems of the Resurrection'), written in the Alamūt era, while other portions of his writing seem to mirror the *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī* ('Muhtashamian Ethics') by Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtasham (d. 655/1257) and Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274).³⁸ In many senses, the tenor of this section of the *Tazyīn al-majālis* reflects an incident related from the time of Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661):

³⁸ Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Abī Maṣṣūr Muḥtasham and Naṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī* (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1960).

‘Alī (may God be pleased with him) saw a group dressed in finery. ‘What is going on?’ he asked. He was told, ‘This day is one of their festivals.’ He replied, ‘For us, a festival is a day on which we commit no sins.’³⁹

These points are illustrated in the following selected passages from this portion of the *Tazyīn al-majālis*:

It should be as self-evident as the sun and luminous as the moon to the redolent hearts of the people of insight, the spirits of the pious laden with treasures of gnosis, and the dispositions of the supplicants before this purest companion of support, that those blessed with the good fortune of recognising the essence of our exalted lord, Ḥaḍrat-i Mawlānā (may his mercy encompass all!), must conduct themselves in a manner distinct and distinguished in every manner from the demeanour and lifestyle of negligent fools and the ignorant who have not realised the truth. Were the conduct of these two groups to be embroidered as cloth of the same weave, in no way would one be ennobled and preferred to the other. It has been said of the seekers of the world: *al-dunyā jīfa wa-ṭālibuhā kilāb*, ‘The world is a corpse and those who seek it are dogs,’ while of the faithful and seekers of God it has been said, *al-mu’min ḥayy fī’l-dārayn wa-‘azīz ‘inda khāliq al-‘ālamayn*, ‘The faithful are alive in both realms and are dear to the Creator of both worlds’. So how can the two bear any resemblance in their intimacy with the divine? According to sound traditions and limpid Qur’anic verses, proximity and glory are the lot of the faithful, while perfidy and depravity that of the hypocrites.

Rhymed couplets:

Those who seek the world are like dogs
How can such vileness be worthy of mercy?

Seekers of the world are more despicable than dogs
Seekers of the faith are intimates of the Just

I have penned these testaments to explain that the true Nawrūz
is not the apparent one, marked by the Cusp of Aries. For

³⁹ Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Kimīyā-yi sa’ādat*, ed. Ḥusayn Khidwījam, p. 566.

the faithful, the actual New Day (*rūz-i naw*) is the day they mend their ways, transforming their behaviour and their very existence. In other words, a new day will dawn upon them when they exchange their iniquities and sins for virtues and noble deeds.

First: They must transform their heedlessness into consummate struggle, for a tradition states, *al-dunyā mazraʿat al-ākhirā*, 'this world is the sowing ground for the next world'. Those who don't strive, who don't sow the seeds of goodness, and instead while away their time in heedlessness, will be bereft of provisions and supplies for their journey.

Rhymed couplets:

Of faith's root, struggle is the branch
So strive that from your goal you achieve your ambition

Whiling their time away, the heedless
For the road gathered no provisions of worship

Second: They must replace worldly attachments with love for Mawlānā, for it is narrated in a tradition, *ḥubb al-dunyā ra's kull khaṭi'a*, 'attachment to the world is the root of all evil'. In another place it is said, *ṭālib al-māl fi'l-dunyā ka'l-dūdat al-qazz. Ẓannat an sutratahā ta'īnahā wa'l-ladhī ẓannat ardāhā*, 'Those who seek the wealth of this world (thinking it will protect them) are like silkworms that suppose their cocoons will help them. But that very delusion is the cause of their destruction.' Thus, seekers of this world have no portion of the riches of the next.

Rhymed couplets:

Be of faith's folk, not a world-worshipper
For loving the world is the root of evil

Destroys faith does worldly wealth
Reducing acts of worship to dust. . .

Sixth: They should supplant gossip with speaking well of others, for a tradition relates, *al-ghība ashadd min al-zinā*, 'gossip is more loathsome than adultery'. Elsewhere the Qur'an enjoins, *wa-lā yaḡṭab ba'dukum ba'dan ayuḥibbu aḥadakum an yakula laḥm*

akhīh maytan, 'Nor gossip against one another. Would one of you relish eating the flesh of his dead brother?' (49:12). Hence the gossip has no hope for divine mercy.

Rhymed couplets:

Train your tongue to speak well of others
That you may rejoice in the company of gnosis
Those who wag their tongues in gossip
Shall have no refuge from the wrath of the Wrathful. . . .

Ninth: They must exchange arrogance for submissiveness and humility, for a tradition states, *aktharu ahl al-nār al-mutakabbirūn*, 'The arrogant form the majority of hell's denizens.' In addition, Mawlānā 'Alī (may there be prostration and glorification at his mention!) declares, *man takabbur 'alā'l-nās dhal*, 'Those who arrogantly consider themselves greater than others will be abased (in the next world).' Thus, the arrogant are not admitted to the sanctuary of divine splendour.

Rhymed couplets:

For the arrogant, honour is proscribed
Lost they shall be in the desert of abasement
Be humble with both great and small
That from divine wrath you may be saved

Tenth: They must trade miserliness for charity, for the Holy Prophet has said, *al-sakhī fī jiwār Allāh wa-anā raḥīqūh, wa'l-bakhīl fī'l-nār wa-raḥīqūh Iblīs* ('*alayh al-la'na*), 'The charitable shall be neighbours of God and I will be their companion, while misers will be in the Fire and the devil (upon whom be curses) will be their companion.' Hence, the misers are also captive in shackles of wretchedness, with no hope of liberation.

Rhymed couplets:

Charity characterises people of the way
While upon misers is the Chosen Prophet's curse
Misers despair of blessings
While the All-Merciful showers mercy upon the charitable. . . .

Thirteenth: They must forsake despair for hope, as the divine word proclaims, 'Who are those who despair of the mercy of their Lord save those who have lost the way and the unbelievers?' (Qur'an 15:56). To despair of His threshold is naught but complete infidelity.

Rhymed couplets:

He who despairs of the favours of the Beloved
 Tarries at the shore of mercy's ocean
 Infidelity it is to despair of the Generous
 Take hope, while also fearing God. . . .

Fifteenth: They must forsake blind imitation (*taqlīd*) for verification (*tahqīq*) and testifying to divine unity (*tawhīd*). Mawlānā 'Alī (may there be prostration and glorification at his mention!) says, *al-taqlīd riḍā al-khalq wa'l-tawhīd riḍā al-khāliq*, 'Blind imitation earns the pleasure of the creatures while (verification of) divine unity delivers one to the pleasure of the Creator.' So long as God's pleasure has yet to be sought, subservience to the pleasures of the creatures is infidelity.

Rhymed couplets:

How long will you give credence to blind imitation?
 Upon your head, place the crown of divine unity
 Come, join those who verify the truth, be not a blind
 imitator
 Sprinkle not the dust of abasement on the head of honour

Sixteenth: They must exchange existence for non-existence, so that the gates of joy and forgiveness may be opened for them. This secret is the unspeakable mystery. It has been alluded to in the Qur'an and traditions in hidden narratives and silent tongues, and none can deny these words.

Rhymed couplets:

In the fire of unity, burn the ego of 'I' and 'we'
 Unleashing the arrow of *lā*, of 'no (god but God),' pierce the eye
 of multiplicity

From the whims of your existence, no escape is there
Cease to exist, that you may light your candle with faith

In short, were we to continue to expound along these lines to one hundred thousand such points, nothing additional would be gained, for prolixity wearies the souls and dispositions of both the writer and the reader. The essence of this elaboration is that by acting contrary to the inclinations of your ephemeral nature and the desires of your carnal whims and lusts, you must transform your existence. In so doing, by divine mercy, you may discover Nawrūz, a new day. For indeed, how can all variety of dazzle and glitter, and wearing all manner of bright and colourful garments and ornaments bring about a new day (*rūz-i naw*)?

Poem:

The physical Nawrūz is brought about by a change of the year
The spiritual Nawrūz occurs but with the transformation of life
itself

The Nawrūz of the people of verity lies in changing their
actions

The Nawrūz of the people of falsehood lies in changing their
clothes

Nawrūz is not something set to fade
Nawrūz is something safe from ever fading

These [worldly] types of Nawrūz become worn-out, to be replaced by new ones that follow in their footsteps. However, the mercy of the Sustainer is a Nawrūz that never ages and a lamp that is never extinguished by the bitter winds of renewal and degeneration. However, action and supplication are necessary to avail of His mercy (may He be exalted!). No affliction is averted without a prayer, for a tradition relates, *lā yaraddu al-balā illā al-du‘ā*, ‘Naught averts affliction save prayer.’ So long as the supplicants seek not to change their lives in the manner related, their souls will never attain the proximity of union.

Dear friends, you have girt the belt of sincerity round the waist of belief and turned from the path of self-worship and

self-seeing to undertake a journey to the destinations in the lands of affliction and God's pleasure. Despair not of His mercy (may He be exalted!). Make your day new by His eternal grace, forsake the worn instincts of your former deeds, shun wicked acts, and with the hand of hope and courage reach out to gain proximity to the Lord, until Mawlānā (may he be exalted) by his immense grace and universal generosity exalts and ennobles you.

How long can you continue gazing at the face of your hopes in this worn mirror, sullied by the rust of darkness? How long can you keep building the edifice of these foundationless walls with the mud and straw plaster of desire? Now, while you have some manner of control, burnish your hearts with the polishing rays of the righteous teacher's guidance in hand so that they shine with the light of gnosis; take up residence in the remaining stations of submission and worship, safeguarded and preserved from the misfortunes of defects and lapses; let not your feet become shackled in the fetters of pride and vanity, for divine wrath requires but the slightest cause, lest Nawrūz give way to mourning, revelry to grief, and the noble star's zenith to its nadir.

Rhymed couplets:

Penned I a few verses from the word of God
For the folk at the Beginning, as a lesson

That by this they may find the road to the Return
And rejoice in what flows from my nature

If they learn, they shall become folk of spiritual states
Into union their separation shall be transformed

If they learn not, behold, blameless am I!
Sealed I have the treatise and the book I have closed

May Mawlānā make our sustenance the felicity of Nawrūz and deliver us all from this decrepit well of darkness and misguidance. Amen, O Lord of the Worlds, and peace be upon the folk of peace!

Afterword: The Glory of the Creation and the Glory of the Creator

In its resolution A/RES/64/253 of 2010, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 21 March as 'International Nowruz Day'.⁴⁰ In adopting the resolution, the UN noted that Nawrūz is celebrated as a New Year's Day by over 300 million people across the globe, and has been observed for over three millennia in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions. Its resolution cited the importance of cultural diversity, the awareness of the unity of humankind, the development of international exchanges, recognition of the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and the relevance of living in harmony with nature. It noted that 'the foundations of the traditions and rituals of Nowruz reflect features of the cultural and ancient customs of the civilisations of East and West, which influenced those civilisations through the interchange of human values.'

The study of Ismaili literature related with spring in general, and Nawrūz in particular, reveals that it was very much enriched by the diversity of cultures and customs in which it developed, drawing upon a wide-ranging panoply of languages, symbols and customs. At the same time, a common, uniting ethos also permeated much of the literature, one attuned to seeking spiritual meaning from earthly phenomena. This Ismaili sentiment was shared with others, and is well-illustrated in a story about the famous mystic, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, related in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* ('Memorial of Saints') by Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221), about whom almost nothing is known, but who was later claimed by both Sufi and Ismaili authors. It is an appropriate narrative with which to conclude, as it succinctly expresses many of the sentiments in the Ismaili literature examined in this study.

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 23 February 2010: 64/253. International Day of Nowruz', New York: United Nations, May 10, 2010: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/253 (accessed 5 September 2017).

It was a glorious spring day and Rābi'a was in her quarters. Her attendant outside was so overwhelmed by the vernal beauty that she cried out, 'Mistress, come outside, come outside! Behold the glory of creation!' To which Rābi'a replied, 'My dear, for once, come within, come within! Behold the glory of the Creator!'⁴¹

⁴¹ Paraphrased from Farid al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Muḥammad Isti'lāmī (Tehran, 2535 Shāhinshāhi/1355 Sh./1976).