



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**“The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw”  
Shafique N. Virani**

**The Sabbath and Ta’wil**

*Lo! Your Lord is God Who created the heavens and the earth in six days.  
Then He ascended the Throne... (Qur’an 7:54)*

*And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy... (Genesis 2:3).*

The Abrahamic faiths share a belief in the completion of creation in six days, with the seventh day, or Sabbath, having a hallowed aura of particular veneration and sanctity. Reflecting on this notion, the prominent Ismaili dignitary, al-Mu’ayyad fi’l-Din Shirazi, observes that the exoteric expositors of this doctrine are completely befuddled in their explanations of it. By confounding scriptural statements which, in his view, are clearly symbolic, with crude speculations about the creation of the physical universe in six twenty-four hour periods, they have completely misunderstood the sacred texts. Al-Mu’ayyad reasons that time itself is marked by the movement of the celestial spheres, with the rising and setting of the sun indicating to human beings the passing of the days. Now, if creation had yet to occur, if God had yet to fashion the sun, the earth and the planetary bodies, how then could these verses refer to the passage of time, as it is conventionally understood? The sage is even less impressed by those who claim, citing a Qur’anic verse, that the creation of the heavens and the earth takes God six days, each spanning a thousand years.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, he opines, the Creator, whose power is infinite, is not limited by time in his creation; as He says in the Qur’an, ‘Ours is but a single Command, like the twinkling of an eye’ (54:50).<sup>2</sup> There must therefore be a deeper meaning to the six days of creation, he asserts, and it is the place of *ta’wil*, of esoteric exegesis, to unveil that meaning.<sup>3</sup>

In his masterpiece of *ta’wil*, the *Wajh-i din*, al-Mu’ayyad’s colleague Nasir Khusraw expounds on the ideas behind the spiritual hermeneutics of this tradition as follows:

It is mentioned in the traditions that God, may He be exalted, commenced the creation of the world on Sunday, completed it on Friday and rested on Saturday. The import of this tradition has been hidden from the people since the dawn of time. All have accepted it according to the capacity of their intellects. The Jews revere the Sabbath and do not work on it because God rested on this day. However, they are unaware that

---

<sup>1</sup>The reference here is to Qur’an 32:5, ‘He regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth; then shall it ascend to him in a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count.’ Cf.70:4.

<sup>2</sup>In this regard, Nasir Khusraw is in full agreement with his predecessor, and is equally critical of such interpretations. See *Jami’ al-hikmatayn*, ed. Henry Corbin and Muhammad Mo’in, *Le Livre Réunissant les Deux Sagesse* (Tehran, 1953), pp. 163-164.

<sup>3</sup>Abu Nasr Hibat Allah al-Mu’ayyad fi’l-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Majalis al- Mu’ayyadiyya*, ed. Hatim Hamid al-Din (Bombay, 1975), vol.1, pp. 358-359, *al-Majalis al- Mu’ayyadiyya*, tr. Jawad Muscati and Khan Bahadur A. M. Moulvi, *Life and Lectures of the Grand Missionary al-Mu’ayyad fi’l-Din al-Shirazi* (Karachi, 1950), pp. 123-124.

*The use of materials published on the Institute of Ismaili Studies website indicates an acceptance of the Institute of Ismaili Studies’ Conditions of Use. Each copy of the article must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed by each transmission. For all published work, it is best to assume you should ask both the original authors and the publishers for permission to (re)use information and always credit the authors and source of the information.*



when the Prophets said this, they meant for people to know that, by the Command of God, six Prophets would come to this world to command people to work. When the seventh came, he would not command in this manner. Rather, he would reward them for their labours. They called it the Sabbath and declared it sacred.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, according to the *ta'wil*, these days do not concern the creation of the physical universe. They refer to the creation of a spiritual cosmos, a creation that commenced with Adam, who represented the first day of the week, Sunday, and continued with Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, who represented Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday respectively. Muhammad, who is represented by Friday, brought this creation to its completion.<sup>5</sup> Yet, to come was the last and final day, which would consummate the entire spiritual creation; a day not meant for the commandment of work, but rather for the allocation of reward and retribution. This was the Sabbath, or Lord of the Resurrection (*Qa'im-i qiyamat*).<sup>6</sup>

People await the advent of the Sabbath, for there will he repose on that day for those who have recognised the reality of these days and who laboured in fulfilment of (the Prophets') command and with knowledge. Those who toil physically in this physical world and know the esoteric meaning of this with their souls today, will be rewarded for it tomorrow in the spiritual world.<sup>7</sup>

The days of creation, in Ismaili thought, were considered the great cycles of prophecy. God's meaning in these verses concerned not the dense world of earthly phenomena, but a world of far greater import, that of religion. In the former, the movement of the celestial spheres marks time, while in the latter, it is marked by the coming of God's messengers, the lords of the cycles (*sahiban-i adwar*). The structure of these cycles of prophecy was of tremendous interest to the Ismaili savants. This paper will explore Nasir Khusraw's exposition of these cycles, the days of creation, and their consummation in the advent of the Sabbath.

### **Celestial and earthly Ranks**

To our author, the world of religion is composed of two parts, one spiritual and one physical. The spiritual world, which is beyond time and space, consists of the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul. It precedes this lower, physical world and its temporal cycles. The two great angels of the spiritual world are called into existence from nothing and are absolutely simple.<sup>8</sup> Paralleling these two angels in the physical world are the Natiq and the Asas, the Enunciator (of the divine revelation) and the Foundation (of its esoteric interpretation).<sup>9</sup> The Natiqs, of whom there are six, the Qa'im being the seventh, are the lords of the major cycles, or what may be referred to as the greater days. These days are themselves divided into seven

---

<sup>4</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, ed. Gholam-Reza Aavani (Tehran, 1977), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, p. 163, p. 165. Cf. Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), p. 97. Yves Marquet discusses some of al-Qadi al-Nu'man's views in this regard in his Yves Marquet, 'Le Qadi Nu'man à propos des heptades d'imams,' *Arabica*, XXV (1978), pp. 225-232.

<sup>6</sup>Nasir vividly depicts the centrality of the Qa'im and his identification with the Sabbath in an illustration of concentric circles to be found in his *Khwan al-ikhwan*, ed. Yahya al-Khashshab (Cairo, 1940), p.155.

<sup>7</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Nasir Khusraw, *Gushayish wa Rahayish*, ed. and trans. Hunzai, *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology* (London, 1998), p. 58 (ed.), p. 93 (trans.). Cf. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, p.184.



days, the minor cycles, which are the cycles of the Imams.<sup>10</sup> The periods are sometimes differentiated by referring to the major cycle of the Natiq as *dawr*, while referring to the minor cycle of the Imam as *ruzgar* or *zamana*.<sup>11</sup> Nasir Khusraw's predecessor, Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, traces six Imams between every two Natiqs, but states that in the period of the sixth Natiq, there will be numerous imams until the coming of the lord of the Sabbath, the Qa'im.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, he must have had in mind the well-known prophetic tradition, equally cited by Nasir, 'If there were to remain of time but a single day, God would prolong that day until there would come a man from among my descendants who would fill the earth with equity and justice even as it has been filled with oppression and injustice.'<sup>13</sup> That final day, which is prolonged until the coming of the Qa'im, is the day of Muhammad.

Each of the seven lords of the major cycles is an interface between the spiritual world and the physical world. Their bodies are earthly, but their subtle spirits belong to the celestial realm. It is through their subtle spirits that they accept the bounties of that realm, and through their physical bodies that they convey these bounties to the physical world. However, Nasir reminds us, human speech can never capture the reality of the spiritual world, but can only hint at it.<sup>14</sup>

In the minor cycle, the Imam and his hujjat, or proof, are the parallels of the Natiq and the Asas in the major cycle. Hence, in *ta'wil*, the symbols associated with the Natiq and the Asas in the major cycle are often related equally to the Imam and the hujjat in the minor cycle. Nasir Khusraw's *ta'wil* of the *adhan*, or call to prayer, may be taken as an example. When proclaiming the *adhan*, the muezzin turns his face to the right while announcing 'come to prayer' (*hayya 'ala'l-salat*) and turns his face to the left while announcing 'come to salvation' (*hayya 'ala'l-falah*). According to Nasir the right hand signifies the Natiq and the left, the Asas. Similarly, the right hand signifies the Imam and the left, the hujjat. By saying 'come to prayer' and turning his face to the right, the muezzin indicates, 'you should accept the Natiq and the Imam who are the lords of the *zahir*, the exoteric, by performing the exoteric prayer.' By saying 'come to salvation' and turning his face to the left, the muezzin indicates, 'by listening to the knowledge of reality (*haqiqat*) you should accept the Asas and the hujjat, who are the lords of the *batin*, the esoteric.'<sup>15</sup>

Nasir Khusraw explains that just as the human body is sustained by the four elements, earth,

---

<sup>10</sup>In the cycle of prophethood, the seventh imam, however, rises to the level of Natiq, and so is more commonly known by this title. Similarly, in the cycle of imamate, the seventh Imam rises to the level of Qa'im, and hence is known as such.

<sup>11</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 13, 127, *Khwan al-ikhwan*, ed. Yahya al-Khashshab (Cairo, 1940), p. 86. This terminology, however, is not static. Cf. Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 43, 335. The Asas is often given his own period in these passages, though one would assume that his time coincides with that of the Natiq.

<sup>12</sup>Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, *Ithbat al-nubu'at*, ed. 'Arif Tamir (Beirut, 1966), p. 193.

<sup>13</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Rawshana' i-nama*, ed. Tahsin Yaziji (Tehran, 1373), p. 80, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, ed. and trans. Wladimir Ivanow (Leiden, 1949), p. 39 (ed.), p. 81 (trans.).

<sup>14</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Rawshana' i-nama*, pp. 76-77, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, pp. 37-38 (ed.), pp. 78-80 (trans.).

<sup>15</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 149, cf. pp. 157-158, where the *ta'wil* of *ruku'* (genuflection during ritual prayers) is stated to be recognition of the Asas in the major cycle and recognition of the hujjat in the minor cycle, while that of *sujud* (prostration) is stated to be recognition of the Natiq in the major cycle and recognition of the Imam in the minor cycle. One may even say that the Imam is the Natiq of the minor cycle. Nasir, in fact, states on p. 188 of this work that among the seven ranks of the minor cycle, the imam is the *sukhan-go*, which is Persian for Natiq.



air, fire and water, the human soul is nourished by the four *hadds*, or spiritual dignitaries, the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, the Natiq and the Asas. Two of the four elements, air and fire, are subtle, while two, earth and water, are dense. Similarly, two of these *hadds*, the Intellect and the Soul, are spiritual, while two, the Natiq and the Asas, are physical. With respect to the body these latter two are human beings, but with respect to intellect and soul, they are archangels.<sup>16</sup> As in a day the brightness of the moon succeeds that of the sun, in the major cycle, the Natiq is represented by the sun and the Asas by the moon, while in the minor cycle, the Imam is represented by the sun and the hujjat by the moon.<sup>17</sup>

The Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, *jadd*, *fath* and *khayal*, also known as the Pen, the Tablet, Seraphiel, Michael and Gabriel,<sup>18</sup> are the five spiritual *hadds* who are eternal and unchanging. They are ontologically beyond the world of cycles. Paralleling these five spiritual beings in the physical world are the Natiq, the Asas, the Imam, the Bab (gate)<sup>19</sup> and the hujjat. These are the five physical *hadds*, whose status continues in every cycle, or day.<sup>20</sup> It was in reference to these five spiritual and physical entities that the Prophet said, 'I received it [i.e., the divine message] from the five and conveyed it to the five.'<sup>21</sup> The five earthly *hadds* are the recipients of *ta'yid*, or spiritual inspiration, from the celestial *hadds* (*hudud-i 'ulwi*), while the ranks below them, i.e. the *da'i*, the greater and lesser *ma'dhuns* (the licentiates) and the *mustajibs* (initiates), do not have access to this direct spiritual inspiration and are thus the recipients of *ta'wil*.<sup>22</sup> Every rank acts as the Imam, or guide, of the rank below it. The *ma'dhun* is the imam of the *mustajibs*, the *da'i* is the imam of the *ma'dhuns*, the hujjat is the imam of the *da'is* and so on. It is in this light that Nasir understands the Qur'anic dictum, 'The day when we shall summon all humankind through

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 195.

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Nasir Khusraw, *Khwan al-ikhwan*, pp. 170-171, where Nasir elaborates on these latter three, and Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 232, 258, *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, p. 109, 138, 155, as well as Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, *Kitab al-iftikhar*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala (Beirut, 2000), p. 116 ff. Cf. Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 30, 110, 119 and Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen isma'ilīya: eine Studie über islamischen Gnosis* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 67-74, pp. 206-209, which draws heavily on the *Kitab al-iftikhar*.

<sup>19</sup>The question of the role of the *bab* is itself an interesting one. He is often considered the chief hujjat. Nasir explains that each of the six true Imams (i.e., apparently those prior to the rising of a Natiq) has a *bab* 'who succeeds him in religion and who is unique in accomplishing the command of God in his lifetime,' *Wajh-i din*, p. 148. The question then arises as to whether 'succeeds him in religion' means 'is his successor to the imamate,' in which case the *bab* would have to be from among the Imam's offspring. Of course, this interpretation is not necessarily the case, as the *wasi* is considered the successor or inheritor of the prophet, without succeeding to his position as prophet, or being from among his offspring.

<sup>20</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Khwan al-ikhwan*, p. 174, *Rawshana' i-nama*, pp. 72-73, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 34 (ed.), p.74 (trans.) Cf. Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 126, 198-199. On p.126, the *da'i* seems, unusually, to be referred to as *lahiq*, or adjunct, a term Nasir generally reserves for the hujjat. The term *janah*, or wing, is more commonly used for the *da'i*. It is possible that the word hujjat in this passage is a scribal error, and that the word *bab* should take its place. This would allow the term *lahiq* to retain its more traditional meaning. Cf. Paul E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom* (Salt Lake City, 1994), pp. 19, 177, and Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, p.18.

<sup>21</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Rawshan' i-nama*, p. 73, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 35 (ed.), p. 75 (trans.), *Khwan al-ikhwan*, p. 174.

<sup>22</sup>It may also be possible that the *da'i* receives *ta'yid*, but this is ambiguous. See Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 126, 198-199, which should be compared with *Wajh-i din*, p.247, *Rawshan' i-nama*, p. 73, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 35 (ed.), p. 75 (trans.). It must also be kept in mind that the *da'is* themselves are divided into two groups, the limited *dais* and the absolute *da'is*, and this distinction may be significant in the matter. Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p.255. cf. Sijistani, *Kitab al-iftikhar*, pp. 224-225.



their Imam' (17:71).<sup>23</sup>

Abu Ya'qub Sijistani explains that everything in creation has a quintessence (*maghz*). Among animals, the quintessence is the human being, the rational animal or *Natiq-i zinda*. He is the fruit of all creation; every preceding form having appeared in anticipation of his advent. As reasoned speech is the distinguishing characteristic of humankind, the thoughts enunciated by human beings in the course of a cycle resemble milk that may be churned to produce cream, which is hidden in the milk. The summa of these subtle thoughts is given a form and is bestowed upon a single individual, who can give voice to the cream or quintessence of all human reason. This individual is the one invested with the prophetic mission. The words of the Prophet implant themselves in the hearts of his people, because his words are palatable to them, as they represent the pinnacle of human wisdom.<sup>24</sup> As Nasir Khusraw explains, the Prophet received a complete share of knowledge from the Universal Intellect, so that he would be able to convey to the innate, but incomplete, intellects of human beings that which they lacked, and hence bring them to perfection.<sup>25</sup> Unlike other human beings, the prophet is not dependent on deficient human reason, but is inspired by Gabriel, 'the trusted spirit,' who in turn is inspired by the Universal Intellect.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned above, the lords of the cycles are distinguished by the *ta'yid*, the spiritual inspiration that they receive from the Universal Soul through *Jadd*, *Fath* and *Khayal*. In Nasir Khusraw's *ta'wil*, the evening prayer is a symbol of the Universal Soul. After the *farida* or obligatory portion of this prayer, there are six *sunnat rak'ats*.<sup>27</sup> This signifies that the Universal Soul inspires the six Natiqs under him, so that they may convey his light to the people.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the afternoon prayer is the symbol of the Natiq. In Arabic, it is known as *zuhr*. This is because the Natiq is charged with bringing the *zahir* (a word derived from the triletteral root, *za', ha', ra'*, which is also the root of *zuhr*), the exoteric revelation, to the people. Furthermore, the time of this prayer commences six hours after sunrise; that is, the advent of the current Natiq, Muhammad, comes after the passing away of six Imams from the cycle of Jesus, who was the sun of his cycle.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to each other, the lords of the cycles resemble the days of the week, each succeeding the next, with Adam being the first day and the Qa'im being the Sabbath. However, between every two Natiqs are six imams or lords of *ta'wil*. In relation to the lords

---

<sup>23</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 74, *Six Chapters or Shish fast also called Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 36 (ed.), pp. 76-77 (trans.).

<sup>24</sup>Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, *Kashf al-mahjub*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran, 1949), pp. 69-70. Both Corbin and Landolt read *mim*, *shin*, *kaf*, *lam* in this passage as *mushkil* to arrive at their translations. While this is certainly possible, I have preferred the reading *mushakkal*, which appears to me to suit the context better. See Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, *Kashf al-mahjub: Le Devoilement des Choses Cachées*, trans. Henry Corbin (Lagrasse, 1988), pp. 103-104, "Kashf al-Mahjub: Unveiling of the Hidden," trans. Hermann Landolt in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (Oxford, 2001), vol.2, p. 108

<sup>25</sup>See Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 61.

<sup>26</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Zad al-musafirin*, ed. Muhammad Badhl al-Rahman (Berlin, 1341/ [1923]), p. 27, quoting Qur'an 26:192-195. Compare, however, Nasir Khusraw's assertion that when the Prophet's *nutq* attains its completion upon the achievement of the spiritual *mi'raj*, he recognises the Universal Soul directly, and not through intermediaries; *Wajh-i din*, p. 138.

<sup>27</sup>A *rak'at* is a portion of the Muslim prayer ritual that involves a bending of the torso from an upright position, followed by two prostrations.

<sup>28</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.



of *ta'wil*, the Natiqs were like the Fridays that occur in the cycle of seven days.<sup>30</sup> In Arabic, Friday is known as *yawm al-jumu'a*, the day of assembly or gathering, because on that day all the people of the community assemble in one place. Similarly, the Friday prayer signifies the Natiq, because the Natiq is the seventh imam, who gathers within himself the ranks of his six predecessors.<sup>31</sup> Before reaching his position, the Natiq first passes through the ranks of *mustajib*, *ma'dhun*, *da'i*, *hujjat*, etc., finally attaining the station of a *nabi*, or prophet.<sup>32</sup>

The Natiqs are the lords of the revelation (*tanzil*), who convey the light of the Universal Soul in a physical form, i.e., the parables and symbols of the holy books. But each of the Natiqs has a *wasi*, a legatee, who begets a line of imams. These imams are charged with the *ta'wil*, the spiritual interpretation of these parables and symbols back to their primordial form as pure light. Hence, Nasir Khusraw explains, when God speaks of the Prophets in Qur'an 35:25, he speaks in the plural. This is because the *tanzil*, the exoteric revelation, may take different forms. However, when he speaks in the same verse of the Imams, the lords of *ta'wil*, addressing them as the Luminous Book, he uses the singular. This is because the *meaning* of all the revelations is one, regardless of the variety in their modes of expression.<sup>33</sup> Adam's *wasi* was Seth, Noah's was Shem, Abraham's was Ishmael, Moses' was Aaron, Jesus' was Simon Peter and Muhammad's was Ali.<sup>34</sup>

Every prophet, *wasi* and imam has twelve *hujjats*, who are what are sometimes called the *hujjats* of the day. One among the twelve *hujjats* of the prophet is his *wasi*, one of the *wasi*'s twelve *hujjats* is an imam, and one of the imam's twelve *hujjats* will be his future successor.<sup>35</sup> It is through this lens that our author understands the tradition of the Prophet, 'the Month of Ramadan (*shahr ramadan*) is one of God's names.' As the prophets, and imams of the religious hierarchy are the 'names of God,' i.e., those through whom God is recognised, the month of Ramadan must refer to a hierarch.<sup>36</sup> The word for month, *shahr*, also means renown, so this hierarch is one who is well known to God. The Qur'an states, 'The Month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion [of right and wrong]' (2:185). Accordingly, this hierarch is the one in whom God revealed the Qur'an, and who removes the ambiguity of the Holy Book's parables. He is thus none other than the *Wasi*, 'Ali, the lord of the *ta'wil*. Hence, the *Asas* or *Wasi* holds a position among the twelve *hujjats* parallel to that held by the month of Ramadan among the twelve months.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 64. Note, in line 16, read *imam* for *payghambar*, according to the variant noted from manuscript A.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 186,188

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-187.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 64. Nasir's understanding of the word Imam, described above in relation to his *ta'wil* of Qur'an 17:71, should also be kept in mind in this context. Cf. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 64. Cf. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, p. 184.

<sup>35</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i Din*, pp. 251-252. Ibn Hawshab 'Mansur al-Yaman', in his *Kitab al-rushd wa'l-hidaya*, generally refers to the twelve deputies of the Natiq as the *naqibs*, though acknowledging that the *Wasi* is the *hujjat* of the Prophet. The twelve *naqibs* of the Natiq summon humankind to follow the exoteric teaching of the Prophet, while the twelve *hujjats* of the *mutimm imam* summon humanity to follow his esoteric doctrines. See Ibn Hawshab, *Kitab al-rushd wa'l-hidaya*, trans. W. Ivanow, 2nd revised edition ed., *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism* (Bombay, 1955), pp 33-46. The same text also refers to the succession of the *hujjat* to the rank of Imam. Cf. Nasir Khusraw, *Khwan al-ikhwan* p. 244, in which the term *naqib* is used in a similar manner.

<sup>36</sup>In this connection, see al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din Shirazi, *al-Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, 253-254. Nasir Khusraw furnishes an interesting, though somewhat enigmatic, example of this in his *ta'wil* of the Qur'anic story of Joseph, see Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 184-185, 252. Cf. Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman, *al-'Alim wa'l-ghulam*, ed. and trans. James Winston Morris, *The Master and the*



In his cycle, the Natiq appoints one *hadd*, the Asas, who is the foundation of the esoteric interpretation. The Asas then appoints seven *hadds*, the seven Imams who will be the lords of the minor cycle. Every imam appoints one imam, who will be his successor.<sup>38</sup> The imams succeed each other like the days of the week. Just as the days of the week have twenty-four hours, the imams have twenty-four hujjats. Twelve of these are hujjats of the day, and represent the exoteric or *zahir*, while twelve are hujjats of the night, and represent the esoteric, or *batin*.<sup>39</sup> The Imam dispatches the twelve hujjats of the day to the twelve climes, which are known in Ismaili parlance as the *jaziras*, or islands.<sup>40</sup> It is through these twelve hujjats that the light of *tawhid*, of God's unity, reaches the world.<sup>41</sup> Each of these twelve hujjats has thirty *da'is*, just as each of the twelve months has thirty days.<sup>42</sup> Nasir also distinguishes a special class of four hujjats, who are never separated from the imam. People must go through the mediation of these hujjats to receive a word from the imam, just as pilgrims who wish to reach the holy sanctuary, the Ka'ba, must pass through one of its four *miqats*, or entranceways, and don the *ihram*, the pilgrimage garb, symbolising the assumption of a consecrated state.<sup>43</sup>

### Lord of the Resurrection

Before the advent of the seventh cycle, governed by the Qa'im, comes the lahiq or hujjat of the Qa'im.<sup>44</sup> This is noteworthy, as the hujjat of an Imam is generally his contemporary. The hujjat of the Qa'im, however, is the harbinger of the advent of the Sabbath. The Qur'anic verse, 'The night of power (*laylat al-qadr*) is better than a thousand months' (97:3), is said to refer to him, and indicates that his knowledge is superior to that of a thousand imams, though of course, collectively, their rank is one.<sup>45</sup> It seems that Nasir considers the successors of the *qa'im* to be his *khalifas*, and he assigns a special rank to this function.<sup>46</sup> Thus, he explains that the current cycle of Muhammad is composed of two parts – that of the *awliya'*, or the imams, and that of the *khalifas*.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, he also alludes obliquely to the seventh imam, Muhammad b. Isma'il, having the rank of *qiyamat*, although the name of this imam is

---

*Disciple* (London, 2001), p. 32 (ed.), p. 99 (trans.)

<sup>38</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 225, 252, 259-260.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 229, 275.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 178. Bayard Dodge, 'The Fatimid Hierarchy and Exegesis,' *The Muslim World*, 50 (1960), p. 133, mentions that each hujjat of a *jazira* has thirty *naqibs*, each of whom has twenty-four *da'is* – twelve of the day and twelve of the night. Unfortunately, no location for this information is specified.

<sup>43</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i Din*, p. 264. Ibn Hawshab, too, refers to 'the four sacred luminaries', citing the Qur'anic verse, 'Indeed, the number of months in God's view is twelve-so ordained by him the day he created the heavens and the earth. Of these, four are sacred...' (IX: 36). See Ibn Hawshab, *Kitab al-rushd wal-hidaya*, p. 47. This reference to four *miqats*, rather than the traditional five, is unusual. Al-Qadi al-Nu'man lists the traditional five, on the authority of the Imam al-Sadiq, see al-Qadi Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man b. Muhammad, *Da'a'im al-Islam*, ed. Asaf A.A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951-1961), p.297. al-Qadi Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man b. Muhammad, *Ta'wil ad-Da'a'im*, ed. Muhammad Hasan al-A'zami (Cairo, 1967- 1969), pp. 157-163 does not shed any further light on the issue, as the *ta'wil* offered is different from Nasir's. Cf. A. J. Wensinck, J. Jomier, 'ihram', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. CD-ROM version 1.0 (Leiden, 1999).

<sup>44</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 261.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 176, 261.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 153, 176.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 248, read *khulafa'* in place of *khalqan*, as per the variant noted from manuscript A.



not explicitly mentioned.<sup>48</sup>

The reference to the throne in the well-known Qur'anic verse, 'Lo! Your lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days; then he ascended the Throne...' (7:54) is interpreted by Nasir as symbolic of the *Qa'im*, who is God's throne. God's sitting upon the throne is the fulfilment of his command regarding the *Qa'im-i qiyamat*, who appears after the passing of the six days. It is in this context that God declares, 'Whose is the kingdom today? God's – the One, the Subduer!' (40:16).<sup>49</sup>

According to Nasir Khusraw, the world was generated by the activity of the Universal Soul for the sole purpose of giving birth to a perfect child, the *Qa'im*.<sup>50</sup> The Qur'an describes six stages in the birthing process of human beings:

We created man of an extraction of clay  
then we set him, a drop (of sperm), in a receptacle secure  
then we created of the drop a clot  
then we created of the clot a tissue  
then we created of the tissue bones  
then we clothed the bones in flesh

Then, we produced him as a new creation — blessed by God, the best of creators! (23:12-14).

These six stages are seen as parallel to the six *Natiqs* preceding the arrival of the *Qa'im*, who is 'a new creation', a *Natiq* following upon his predecessors, but one who differs from them in his ushering in of the Great Resurrection.<sup>51</sup> When the muezzin faces the *qibla* to call the *adhan*, it is symbolic of the *Natiq* summoning humankind to the Lord of the Resurrection, who is represented by the *qibla*.<sup>52</sup> The afternoon prayer represents the *Asas*. It commences when the shadows of things equals their height, demonstrating the equality of the exoteric and esoteric (*zahir* and *batin*) in the time of the *Asas*. The waning of the sun at the end of this period represents the weakening of the *zahir* or the *Natiq*, the end of the cycle of the *Asas*, and the coming advent of the *Qa'im*.<sup>53</sup> The *Qa'im* is represented by the *witr* prayer, which occurs in the middle of the night, after the completion of all the other prayers. This symbolises that on the Day of Resurrection, people will dispense with honouring all the physical *hadds*, except the *Qa'im* himself.<sup>54</sup> Interpreting a well-known tradition of the Prophet, 'Goodness is knotted up in the forelocks of horses till the Day of Resurrection,' Nasir Khusraw explains that the *ta'wil* of this is that the *da'wa*, the summoning of humankind, will not be severed from the *hujjats*, symbolised by the horses, and the *da'is*, symbolised by their forelocks, till the time of the *Qa'im*'s manifestation.<sup>55</sup> The *witr* prayer consists of three units or *rak'ats*, indicating that the *Qa'im* has three ranks, those of

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105. Abu Ya'qub Sijistani mentions a similar doctrine in his hitherto unpublished *Kitab al-maqalid*, see Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, p.165.

<sup>50</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 97. See also Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, pp. 99- 100, 113.

<sup>51</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 256. This symbolism is echoed by Abu Ya'qub Sijistani; see Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, p. 141. Cf. Sami Nasib Makarem, *The Political Doctrine of the Ismailis* (Beirut,1972), pp. 31-34.

<sup>52</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i Din*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 172.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 276.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 276.



prophethood (*nubuwwat*), legateeship (*wasayat*) and resurrection (*qiyamat*). The fact that one of the *rak'ats* is recited separately from the other two indicates that the Qa'im holds a rank that neither the Natiq nor the Asas held.<sup>56</sup> Expounding on this difference in rank among the seven days, or lords of the cycles, Nasir Khusraw alludes to the Qur'anic notion of the seven heavens. He explains that the six planets<sup>57</sup> that are visible to the naked eye – Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury and the Moon - are similar in that they have light. However, it is only the seventh, the sun itself, which has both light and heat. Moreover, in the presence of the sun, the other six disappear from view. Such is the place of the Qa'im among the Natiqs.<sup>58</sup>

The Qa'im is represented by the *'Id al-Adha*, the festival of sacrifice<sup>59</sup> as well as by the prayer recited on this occasion.<sup>60</sup> He is the lord of the two worlds, as the inner meaning of the divine scripture is revealed through him and he delivers the believers from the torment of ignorance, extracting symbols from concealment and explaining them. The fact that the expression 'God is Greater' (*Allahu akbar*) is recited five times before the festival prayer indicates that during the cycle of the Qa'im, the believers receive benefit directly from the five spiritual *hadds*, the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, *Jadd*, *Fath* and *Khayal*.<sup>61</sup> The *ta'wil* of reciting *Allahu akbar* before the festival prayer is that the divine unity and grandeur of God will be revealed to the people through the Qa'im.<sup>62</sup>

The Qa'im is from among the descendants of the Asas<sup>63</sup> and represents the pinnacle and purpose of creation. Because of him, the Universal Soul attains completion and reaches the rank of the Universal Intellect, leading to the annihilation of the physical world.<sup>64</sup> This is why, in the sitting prayer after the *witr*, two *rak'ats*, representing the two spiritual *hadds*, are recited as one. This indicates that the Qa'im has linked the two spiritual *hadds* such that there is no separation between them.

In Nasir Khusraw's view, God accomplished the creation of the world of religion in six days, the cycles of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. However, the Sabbath, the seventh day, will be such that the wise will achieve felicity, truth will be eternally established, the darkness of ignorance shall be banished in the light of knowledge, 'and the earth shall shimmer in the light of her Lord' (39:69).<sup>65</sup> However, he points out mindfully, this Qur'anic verse suggests that presently the earth is enveloped in darkness, or else what would be the point of illuminating it in the future? Surely, he declares, the Qur'an refers not to physical light, which is abundant, but to a spiritual light that will engulf the world of religion at the time of the Qa'im's advent. But, as he concludes his discussion of this matter in his *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, 'this is a subtle allusion only for the wise.'<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 176.

<sup>57</sup>The word 'planet', of course, is used here in its traditional sense and not its modern meaning.

<sup>58</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p. 245, *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>59</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, p.192.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 152

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 192-193.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 177, Nasir Khusraw, *Rawshana'i-nama*, p. 81, *Six Chapters or Shish fasl also called Rawshana' i-nama*, p. 40 (ed.), p. 82 (trans.).

<sup>65</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Wajh-i din*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>66</sup>Nasir Khusraw, *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, p. 166

