

Faith and Ethics: The Vision of the Ismaili Imam by M. Ali Lakhani. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018. 248 pp. £27.50; \$39.95.

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other,
 Having been created of one essence.
 When the calamity of time affects one limb
 The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
 If you have no sympathy for the troubles of others,
 You are unworthy to be called by the name of 'a Human'.
 Sa'di of Shiraz

The '*Bani Adam*' epigraph, taken from Sa'di's *Gulistan*, sets the theme of this book on the ethical vision of the Ismaili Muslims, as expounded by their spiritual leader, His Highness the Aga Khan. It proclaims a 'common humanity', created (as the Holy Qur'an states in a verse that the Aga Khan has described as central to his philosophy) from 'a single soul' (4:1).

Faith and Ethics by M. Ali Lakhani, founder and editor of *Sacred Web*, the leading English journal in the field of traditional metaphysics and its application to modernity, was developed from his essay 'Living the Ethics of One's Faith: The Aga Khan's Integral Vision'. This is the first work of its kind to be published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies of London, and focuses on the thought and work of the Aga Khan primarily through his public statements spanning over sixty years. Though the author is himself an Ismaili Muslim, the book is a work of independent scholarship, presenting an objective interpretation of the Aga Khan's ideas as implemented by his Imam institutions and community. These ideas relate the humane ethics of Ismaili Muslims to metaphysical foundations that are central to Islam, of *tawhīd* or metaphysical oneness, and, in the author's language, the 'ethical imperatives' that flow from this, of integrity and dignity, of harmony and equity. He has stated that 'Islam does not deal in dichotomies but is an all-encompassing unity'. It is this intrinsic harmony and interconnectedness that establishes the ethical and moral foundations of any true society or civilization. He notes:

Islam is all-encompassing in the direction which it gives to man's life
 Islam, therefore, guides man not only in his spiritual relationship with God, it also guides man in his relationship with his fellow men and his relationship with the material world around him.

The examination of the Ismaili ethos in this way provides a corrective to false stereotypes of Islam that have come to dominate much of the Western world, such as are implied within the notion of a 'clash of civilizations' (the contentious thesis of Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis), which the Ismaili leader roundly rejects, preferring instead to see the conflict between the West and Islam as a 'clash of ignorance', in which 'knowledge gaps' lead to 'empathy gaps'.

The book consists of ten chapters: 'The Ismaili Imam and the Imamāt' provides an introductory background to the Aga Khan and his community; 'Ethical Foundations' describes the metaphysical framework of Ismaili values; 'Tradition and Modernity' addresses the ethical tensions created by change in a modernizing world; 'The Ethos of Modernism' addresses the issues resulting from the loss of the sense of the sacred in modernity; 'Pluralism and the Cosmopolitan Ethic' focuses on the problems of diversity; 'Cohesion Within the Umma' analyses the Aga Khan's view of the fragmenting forces within the Muslim world and his approach to healing these tensions; 'Islam and the West' contextualizes the modern West's ignorance of the faith of Islam, its history and diversity within its own traditions and communities of interpretation, and sets out the Aga Khan's response to these; 'Cultivating an Enabling Environment' identifies several factors conducive to building healthy communities; 'Living the Ethics of Islam' describes how the Ismaili ethos is practiced through the AKDN and the *jamāt*; and 'Global Convergence' is both a summary of the book's main themes and an assessment of the Aga Khan's legacy.

The current leader of the Nizari Ismailis, who belong to the Shia branch of Islam, is His Highness Prince Karim al-Hussaini (b. 1936), the fourth Aga Khan. The Ismaili community's leader (Imam) claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through Imam Ali, the first Shia leader and the fourth Caliph of the Sunni Muslims. His role is to guide his followers in spiritual and temporal matters. The Ismailis are diverse and pluralistic in outlook, with large populations in Central and South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and with influential minorities in parts of the Western world, particularly in Canada.

A key to the Imam's approach of balancing the inner (*bāṭin*) with the outer (*zāhir*) is the melding of *dīn* (faith) and *dunyā* (world). 'One of the central elements of the Islamic faith,' he has said, 'is the inseparable nature of faith and world. The two are so deeply intertwined that one cannot imagine their separation. They constitute a "Way of Life".' Balancing faith with worldly life, the Ismaili Imam has worked tirelessly for over six decades to promote an integral view of faith and ethics that is central to Islam and relevant to issues of the modern world. Half a century ago, he founded the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), an international agglomeration of developmental agencies

whose programs are aimed to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged regardless of their religion, race or ethnicity. The AKDN's humanitarian initiatives, which range from healthcare and education to culture and the building of civil society, are based on Islamic principles and values, expressing the social conscience of the Ismailis and of the Imam's ethical responsibility.

The book addresses the Imam's responses to the effects of change in the modern world through the degradation of faith ('rampant materialism', 'unprincipled relativism', 'self-indulgent individualism' and 'resurgent tribalism') and of ethics ('The anchors of moral behaviour appear to have dragged to such depths that they no longer hold firm the ship of life'). His response is to promote a cosmopolitan ethics where 'the unity of the human race becomes an ethical purpose for all faiths', based on balancing 'personal prerogatives and individual rights, with an expanded concern for personal responsibilities and communal goals' such as a 'passion for justice, the quest for equality, a respect for tolerance, a dedication to human dignity'. He regards the ethics as rooted ultimately in faith and states,

A deepening sense of spiritual commitment, and the ethical framework that goes with it, will be a central requirement if we are to find our way through the minefields and the quicksands of modern life.

Cosmopolitanism requires a pluralism which is tolerant, empathetic and respects diversity, qualities he regards as 'essential to the very survival of an interdependent world'. He cautions against the simplistic solution of an imposed uniformity instead of that integral unity which is the true basis of community. His admonition is particularly important in a globalistic era where simplistic solutions can provoke tribalistic responses. So he remarks on 'the danger that globalization will become homogenization' and he also adds, 'Diversification without disintegration, this is the greatest challenge of our time.'

In contrast to the contemporary trend that views religion as the source of the world's ills, the Imam sees religion as the key to transmitting an integral form of ethics—one based on what Lakhani terms the 'ethical imperatives' of harmony and equity, of cosmopolitanism and compassionate humanism. He states, 'The message I will always give is that humanity cannot deal with present day problems without a basis of religion.' He tirelessly debunks the notion that equates Islam with violence, stating that 'violence is not a function of the Islamic faith' and reminding us that 'There is no compulsion in religion' (Qur'ān 2:256).

Faith allows one to plumb the spiritual and metaphysical depths of what it

means to be human, which is synonymous with living a principled life; and it is this vision that informs the Imam's position that wedds faith and ethics to the integral understanding of religion. Faith brings to ethics integrity, which is affirmed in *tawhīd*: the Oneness of reality, and simultaneously a 'common humanity' originating from 'a single soul' which is none other than a reflection of the Divine Unity. This integrated vision allows for ethics to bridge faith (*dīn*) and world (*dunyā*) in order to truly harmonize them and bring peace (*salām*).

In addressing the East–West divide, the Aga Khan promotes the urgent need for educators to fill the 'knowledge gaps' of the contemporary West concerning Islamic civilization in order to counter what he terms a 'historical amnesia'. He examines the historical reasons for rifts in the Umma and between Islam and the West, and he emphasizes the need to understand history (for example, of the Convivencia), politics (the heritage of colonialism), culture (vital contributions of Muslim civilizations), sociology (the effects of Occidentalism on Muslims), and religion (theological colonialism and theocratization of faith).

The Aga Khan upholds the principle that Islam seeks to eliminate all social inequities; and he emphasizes that the need for economic justice and pluralism are two necessary indicators for human survival. He states:

I passionately view the struggle against poverty, and respect for the values of pluralism, as two of the most significant tests of whether the 21st century is to be an era of global peace, stability and progress.

Ultimately what is needed, as the Aga Khan—like his grandfather, the former Imam, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah (Aga Khan III, 1877–1957)—has indicated, is to establish an intellectual elite to lead a civilizational renewal in Muslim thought:

It is through the creation of such a new elite, inspired by, and widely read in everything related to our heritage, that there must come about a revival in Muslim thought. Clearly the intellectual development of the Ummah, is, and should remain, a central goal to be pursued with urgency if we wish the Muslim world to regain its rightful place in world civilization.

This new book by M. Ali Lakhani is a much-needed contribution to Ismaili studies. This pioneering work provides a cogent introduction to, and a wide-ranging survey of, the ideas of the Aga Khan (ranging from faith and ethics to secularism and the issues of modernity, from governance and civil society to development and culture), and the work of the Ismaili community and its Imam institutions. It has justly been described as a 'scholarly and well-

written work' by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.¹ The book will be invaluable to anyone interested in learning about Ismailis and the ideas of the Aga Khan. The values that the Ismaili Imam espouses are universal in their appeal and they exemplify the Muslim spirit while illustrating their relevance to the modern world.

Lakhani is well-versed in traditional metaphysics and this feature shines through his study of the Ismaili community and of its relationship to Islam. He makes the imperative connection between faith and ethics by describing how this link is rooted in underlying universal metaphysical principles emphasized within Islam, as well as in human nature. He illustrates how the Aga Khan's approach is rooted in a spirituality that provides an 'ethical lens' for the Imam's work, exemplifying the Imam's teaching that 'one cannot talk about integrity without also talking about faith'. Like the noble Qur'ān, the Ismaili Imam's timeless ethical message exhorts us to act in the spirit of our common humanity, humanely, and to 'vie with one another in good deeds' (2:148). This message of integral pluralism, and a respect for the sacred and for human dignity, is, as Lakhani underlines, the heart of the Aga Khan's teachings.

With so much wisdom being lost and forgotten in the modern world, the Aga Khan's message of hope and voice of tolerance and compassion beckon to be heard by the world. To quote Professor Nasr, the Ismaili Imam is 'a guiding light not only for his own Ismaili community, and not only for *dār al-islām*, but also for the world at large where there is so much need today for leaders with his knowledge, insight and vision.'²

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The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington by Joanna Moorhead. London: Virago Press, 2017. 296 pp. £20.00.

Leonora Carrington has a claim to be among the greatest British artists of the twentieth century; yet many people, even among those with an interest in art, have never heard of her. In Mexico she is a household name, with a vast mural in Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology and a large playful bronze sculpture, the delight of children, in one of the public parks. She is, indeed, better known in Mexico than Frida Kahlo, to whose house the tourists flock. During the major retrospective exhibition of her work in 2008, the Paseo de

1. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'His Highness the Aga Khan: Reminiscences of over Six Decades', *Sacred Web* 41 (Summer 2018) 77–83: p. 82.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.