Aga Khan III

SELECTED SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF
SIR SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH

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A CALL TO THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A Message

London: 14 March 1934

The world of Islam at a turning point – example of the Prophet – raise the position of Muslims – learn secrets of social and intellectual power – the Japanese example – conquest of nature – spiritual debt to the Holy Prophet.

The world of Islam to-day is at a turning point of its history. The middle-ages are over and either Islam must now go forward or be added to the other might-have-beens of History.

The Moslems must now awake, and taking their example from the glorious life and the marvellous teachings of the Holy Prophet build their spiritual and religious faith on Muhammad and work for the development in science, knowledge, and political, and social advance along the lines of the most progressive races of mankind.

Formalism and verbal interpretation of the teaching of the great Arabian are in absolute contradiction with the whole history of the Prophet. We must accept his Divine Message as the channel of our union with the Absolute and the Infinite, and once our spiritual faith is firmly established, fearlessly go forward by self-sacrifice, by courage, and by application to raise the scientific, the economic, the political, and social position of the Moslems to a place of equality with Christian Europe and America.

Our social customs, our daily work, our constant efforts must be tuned up, must be brought into line with the highest form of possible civilisation. At its greatest period Islam was at the head of science, was at the head of knowledge, was in the advanced line of political, philosophic, and literary thought.
To-day we are in our middle-ages. We must get out of it, and begin our new era with strength and will power for the coming development of our people.

The Moslem world can to-day be divided into two general parts. (1) One consists of the vast Moslem population living under European and other non-Moslem rulers. (2) The second part consists of the independent Moslem states of Arabia, of Persia, of Afghanistan, of Egypt, of Turkey.

Now where we are under foreign rule we can, immediately by imitating as the Japanese have done, but also by keeping our own spiritual and our highest intellectual character intact, just as the Japanese have done, learn directly from the races that rule us those secrets of social and intellectual power which have made Europe so strong and so progressive.

Where we are in an independent position we can promote intensive culture, intensive education of the youth, intensive imitation if you like, but always, as in the case of Japan, keeping our highest moral and emotional and spiritual self in our own historical development [sic]. With that we can go forward and carry out reforms, carry out political and economic development, carry out, above all, scientific culture which will place us on the same level as the European races.

In cases like India, in countries like Java, like Morocco, and like North Africa, we can immediately learn from our European fellow-subjects, or rulers if you prefer so to call them, those secrets of power over nature, of scientific and economic, and industrial development, which has made Europe so powerful.

Along these lines, my fellow Moslems, I implore you, I beg of you, to work for the advancement of the whole world of Islam, but never forget our spiritual debt to our Holy Prophet.

With these words I hope that progress will become from now onwards thorough and regular.

Source: Star of India, Calcutta, 15 March 1934.

On 15 August 1934, the Star of India again published this message, but with minor differences. I have not been able to discover why the message was reprinted after an interval of five months. I reproduce here (for the record) the second text:

"The world of Islam to-day is at a turning point of its history. The Middle-Ages are over and either Islam must now go forward or be added to the other might-have-beens of history.

"The Muslims must now awake and taking their example from the glorious life and the marvellous teachings of the Holy Prophet, build their spiritual and religious faith on Mohammed and work for the development in Science,