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Editors: **S. A. Bajwa** and **A. R. Chowdry**

Manager : **Hidayatullah Bhunnoo**

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The "Muslim Herald" is the official organ of the London Mosque, which is open for discussion on topics relating to different religions, on the role of Islam in the modern world, and on the problems facing mankind and their relationship with Islam.

The First Initiation

(Maulana Dost Mohammad Shahid—Rabwah)

*HISTORICAL FACTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE
LATEST RESEARCH*

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

Every Ahmadi is fully aware of the historical importance of the first initiation, and it is an admitted fact that this event—which in later years radically influenced the world of religion as a whole—took place in March, 1889, when Hazrat Maulvi Nur-ud-Din acquired the unique and most enviable position of being the first person to be initiated into the Movement at the blessed hands of the Promised Messiah. Moreover it is unanimously admitted that on that *blessed* day a group of 40 pious and righteous persons joined the fold of Ahmadiyyat at the hands of the Imam of the Age. Naturally the question arises, what, according to the solar and lunar calendars, was the exact date when this auspicious event took place? This is a point which has attracted the attention of some scholars of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat to do a little research work.

Basis of Research

In my opinion the following facts should serve as guide lines to arrive at the right conclusion:—

1. To his devoted admirers, who sought to be initiated as his disciples, the Promised Messiah addressed a handbill dated 4th March, 1889, to the following effect:—

“This humble servant shall stay in Mohalla Jadid, Ludhiana from today, the 4th March, 1889, to the 25th March. Those who wish to come should be here in Ludhiana after the 20th instant.” (Tableegh-i-Risalat, Part I, page 150, footnote edited by Mir Qasim Ali.)

On the other hand, the Promised Messiah sent special instructions to Hazrat Maulvi Nur-ud-Din asking him to:—

“Come on the 22nd instead of the 20th . . . This humble servant intends to pay a visit to Hoshiarpur on the 15th March for two or three days, and in any case, shall return on the 19th March or the 20th March.” (Maktoobat-i-Ahmadiya: book 5, No. 2, page 62: compiled by Sheikh Yacoob Ali Irfani, Editor Al-Hakam.)

From the above quotations it is clear that the Promised Messiah planned to start the initiation after the 22nd March. Otherwise he would not have instructed Hazrat ‘Maulvi Sahib’ to reach Ludhiana on the 22nd. We have to take note of the fact that the Promised Messiah particularly asked him **not to arrive before 22nd March**. At that time Hazrat ‘Maulvi Sahib’ was in Jammu. We must also bear in mind that ‘Maulvi Sahib’ had solicited a special favour from the Promised Messiah that, as and when, the Promised Messiah started the initiation under the Divine command, he (Maulvi Sahib) might be granted the honour and privilege of being the first to be enrolled. This request the Promised Messiah had granted.

2. Maulvi Abdullah of Sannaur was one of the most closely attached companions of the Promised Messiah. He was the eye-witness in the famous vision of the “Red-Ink-Sprinkles”. He accompanied the Promised Messiah to Hoshiarpur in the year 1886 as his personal attendant. He also rendered invaluable services in respect of the printing of the “Bahrahin-i-Ahmadiya”. The Promised Messiah expressing his deep appreciation of his services has incorporated the following remarks in his famous book “Izala-i-Auham”:

“This virtuous young man has been attracted to me through his inherent goodness and I believe that he is of those faithful friends who cannot be shaken by any adversity. He has, at different intervals, stayed with me for two to three months . . . This young man is, of course, extremely zealous in the love of Allah and His Prophet. No doubt Mian Abdullah is an extremely good man and is one of my chosen friends. (Izala-i-Auham: 1st edition: page 796.)

Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri enjoys the distinction of being the fourth on the list of those who were initiated on the first

day. He used to take pride in the fact that during the initiation ceremony, Sheikh Hamid Ali, the private attendant of the Promised Messiah, called out the name of each candidate to enter the room for initiation, but it was the Promised Messiah himself who called out his name for initiation. (Alfazal: 21.10.1927.)

The evidence of this righteous companion and chosen friend of the Promised Messiah runs thus:—

“The first day when he (Promised Messiah) instituted the initiation, it was the 20th of the Rajab, 1306 Hijra—the 23rd March, 1889.” (Seerat-ul-Mahdi: part 1: 2nd edition: page 77, compiled by Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad: 1st edition, 10.12.1923 and 2nd edition, 14.11.1935.)

3. The name of Sheikh Yaqub Ali Turab needs no special introduction. He is known as the first historian and the first journalist of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at. He was not initiated on the first day, but he was present in Ludhiana at that time. He shares with Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri the view that first initiation took place on 20th Rajab—the 23rd March, 1889.” (Hayat-i-Ahmad: part III, page 28.)
4. Hazrat Mirza Mahmud Ahmad, Al-Musleh-ul-Ma'ood, also held the firm and considered opinion that the first initiation took place on the 23rd March, 1889, and for this very reason he fixed the date of 23rd March to observe “THE PROMISED REFORMER'S DAY” at Ludhiana in 1944, a function he personally attended commencing his speech with these historical words:

“In this town of Ludhiana, the Promised Messiah started the First Initiation on March 23rd, 1889.” (Alfazal: 18.2.1959.)

5. Sahibzada Mirza Sharif Ahmad also held the same opinion and wrote:—

“The promised Messiah instituted the First Initiation on the 23rd March, 1889, and the Ahmadiyya Jama'at was thence on its way.” (Alfazal: 18th March, 1959, page 2.)
6. On the memorial plaque of “Dar-ul-Bai't” that stood in place until 1947, the first initiation date was inscribed as 23rd

March, 1889. (Review of Religions Urdu: June-July, 1943, page 26-39.)

7. During the latter period of his stewardship and under the authority and guidance of the Khalifat-ul-Masih II, the date of the First Initiation had been repeatedly announced and published in the gatherings of "The Promised Messiah's Day" as 23rd March, 1889." (Alfazal: 4, Aman/March, 1327 H.S./1958 A.D.; page 1.)
8. Maulana Abdul Rahim Dard, M.A., the well-known editor and research scholar of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat, endorsing this view and in his book, "Life of Ahmad" wrote:—

"The formal initiation began on March 23rd, 1889 (20 Rajab, 1306 A.H.)." (Page 154: printed 1949 A.D.—1328 H.S.)

9. Maulana Abu-ul-Ata, the "KHALID" of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat, wrote a scholarly article on "PAKISTAN DAY" on 23rd March, 1957. He not only supported the above view but also pointed out to us a very convincing and faith-inspiring point in this respect when he wrote:—

"We believe that not even a leaf shakes without the knowledge of the Omnipotent Allah and that every deed, every incident and every event takes place under the Divine knowledge and His infinite wisdom. Is it not a unique co-incidence that the "Reformer-of-the-Present Age" laid the foundation of his spiritual jama'at on this date and in the material world the establishing of the sanctified land (Pakistan) was proclaimed on this very date. In short, the 23rd of March is an important day jubilation for the Ahmadiyya Jamaat." (Alfazal: 28th March, 1957: page 5: coloumn 4.)

The well-considered and deliberate instructions of Hazrat Khalifat-ul-Masih II, "The Promised Reformer"; the eye-witness account of Maulvi Abdullah of Sannaur; the corroborating view of Irfani Sahib; the indisputable evidence of Sahibzada Mirza Shareef Ahmad, Maudvi Abdul Rahim Dard and Maulana Abu-ul-Ata and the Memorial Plaque of "Dar-ul-Bait" together with the concensus of opinion of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat all contribute

to the undeniable conclusion that **20th Rajab, 1306—March 23rd, 1889, is the date when the Ahmadiyya Jamaat was founded.**

The Other Side of the Picture

Let us now look at the other side of the picture and examine the objections that may be, and are, raised against the above irrefutable ruling. In this connection the following two seemingly debatable points are forwarded by those who do not agree with us in this matter:—

1. The entry of date in the original “Registration of Initiation”.
2. Conflict in the solar and lunar dates as stated by Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri.

The first point appears to be strongly in favour of those who hold that the initiation had been instituted on the 21st March, on which date 46 companions from Qadian, Kangra, Chauthgarh, Jammu, Malerkotla, Shahpur, Karyana, Jhanpat and Ludiana, etc., had been initiated into the Jamaat.

The second point undoubtedly causes serious doubts in the minds of those who uphold that the correct date of the First Initiation is March 21st or 22nd, rather than March 23rd, 1889. For according to the calendar “At-Taufeequat-ul-Ilhamia” compiled by the well-known Egyptian scholar Mohammad Mukhtar Pasha, 20th Rajab, 1306 A.H. falls on 22nd March, 1889. The attention of the Jamaat was diverted toward this in March, 1963, when Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmid Sahib said in the ‘Mushawarat’ gathering that, “As a result of further research it has been disclosed that the First Initiation was, in fact, started on the 22nd March, 1889, and not on the 23rd March as according to the lunar calendar 20th Rajab fell on 22nd March.” (Report Majlis-i-Mushawarat, 1362 A.H.—1963 A.D.—page 118.)

A Cursory Glance at the Register of Initiation

The Old Register of Initiation is a very important and a valuable historical document of the earliest period of Ahmadiyah and is now very carefully preserved in the Khilafat Library at Rabwah. This register was started under the direct instructions of the Promised Messiah who named it, “INITIATION OF PENITENCE

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PURIFICATION". Entries in this had been made by different hands. Some of these are in the blessed hand of the Promised Messiah himself and some are in the handwriting of Maulvi Nu-ud-Din Sahib and other notable companions. As the first leaf in this register has been lost, the earliest names, for this reason, cannot be traced. It was in the year 1939 that Sahibzada Miza Bashir Ahmad, for the first time published the first 62 names in his book "Seerat-ul-Mahdi", part III. The first eight names have been given on the evidence of highly dependable witnesses and reports. Against the first entry, the date 19 Rajab 1306 and 21st March, 1889, had been added because against forty-seventh entry in the register the dates 20th Rajab, 1306 A.H., and 22nd March, 1889, had been mentioned.

From the list given in "Seerat-ul-Mahdi" part III, one gets the impression that 19 Rajab, 1306 A.H. and 21st March, 1889, ought to be accepted as the First Initiation Day. Only a short time back we received a letter from a scholarly gentleman from overseas urging that the internal evidence of the register (of initiation) should not be ignored.

No doubt, the Register of Initiations is a genuine, reliable and authentic record of the names of the earliest notable companions of the Promised Messiah and the Ahmadi scholar engaged in research work, however prominent an historian or a man of letters he may be, can ever ignore this important document. But we have still to assess and size up the true worth of this evidence. If evidence is required regarding names, parentage and other particulars of the faithful followers who joined the Movement at its inception, then this register is undoubtedly of the greatest documentary importance. But where true sequence and serious order of names is concerned, and where correct date of initiation is required, then this register is of doubtful value. Reputed scholars like Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad and Sheikh Yakub Ali Irfani also share this view. For, we have no proof that the solar dates and the corresponding lunar dates of individual initiation were actually entered immediately after the commitment. Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad writes in his "Seerat-ul-Mahdi" part III:—

"The Register of Initiation" which has been given to me by Mir Mohammad Ishaq, fails to provide us with the im-

portant evidence that the entries in it were actually made immediately after each initiation or that a number of names were entered in it collectively at some later date. In the later case it is possible that the correct sequence was not observed. In fact, this doubt, after the study of certain entries, becomes a certainty. For, there is a considerable discrepancy between these two entries and the verbal evidence that had been later recorded.” (Page 14.)

A Few Instances of “Considerable Discrepancy”

We quote here a few glaring instances of “considerable discrepancy” mentioned above by Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad:

1. Hazrat Umm-ul-Mominin; the “Promised Reformer”; Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad; Mufti Mohammad Sadiq and many other notable companions are unanimous in the view that only 40 persons were initiated on the first day. (“Seerat-ul-Mahdi”, Part I, page 18; “Seerat Hazrat Masih Mau’ud”, by Khalifat-ul-Mas’h II; “Silsala-i-Ahmadiya”, page 29, by Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad; “Zikr-i-Habib”, page 9, by Mufti Mohammad Sadiq). Contrary to this overwhelming evidence, the “Register of Initiation” mentions 46 names instead of 40 in its opening pages.
2. The 43rd name entered in the “Register” is that of Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sialkot. But on the strength of the statement of Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri, Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad writes, “Although Maulvi Abdul Karim was present on the day of the First Initiation, he was not initiated on that day.” (Seerat-ul-Mahdi”, Part I; Second edition, page 78.)
3. From the statements and life history of Munshi Zafar Ahmad of Kapoorthala, the famous and very devoted companion of the Promised Messiah, we have clear evidence that when the handbills for initiation were sent out by the Promised Messiah, Munshi Aroora Khan, immediately on receiving the same, left for Ludhiana. But Munshi Zafar Ahmad and Mian Mohammad Khan both started out the next day reaching Ludhiana a day later. But all the three worthies were initi-

ated on the first day of the primary initiation. Munshi Aroora Khan was the first of the party from Kapoorthala to be initiated and was followed by Munshi Zafar Ahmad and next by Mian Mohammad Khan. (Ashab-i-Ahmad: Part IV: 1st edition, page 91.) But the entries in the "Register" do not corroborate it. We find there only the name of Munshi Aroora Khan entered in the "Register" on 20th March.

An Important Question and Its Answer

Naturally the question arises, why is there so much discrepancy between the evidence of these highly devoted and virtuous companions of the Promised Messiah and the entries in the "Register" of Initiation? Could these two be reconciled in any manner?

The answer is that a careful study of the position brings to light the undeniable fact that the entries in the "Register" were not made according to actual precedence in initiation. They were made as and when the candidates arrived in Ludhiana after receiving the above-mentioned handbills. This is not a matter of conjecture or guess-work but is based on the internal evidence of the said handbill issued by the Promised Messiah stating the aims and objects of the initiation. This handbill was addressed to those who were anxiously waiting for the call for initiation:—

“O ye brethren-in-faith, may it be known to all those who wish to seek Allah and wish to be initiated at my hand, that under revelation from Allah (who intends to release the Muslims that have become worthless and untruthful through the shackles of discord and divergences and through conflicts and dissensions and mutual enmity and hatred and turn them into ‘Brethren by His Grace’, I have been told that benefits of initiation shall accrue to you and for this arrangements should be made under which your names together with parentage, place a temporary and permanent residence and other particulars be recorded and when these names have reached a sizeable proportion, the list of all those who have been initiated, be prepared and printed, and a copy of this be provided to each initiated member. And when at a later date

the number of the next batch reaches a certain proportion, their names may also be added in the list and published; and this procedure may continue to be observed until the Divine intention is fulfilled . . . But this cannot be accomplished without the co-operation of the initiated members who should send us their particulars written clearly in their own hands. Therefore, all those who with all sincerity and from the core of their hearts wish to be initiated are hereby requested to write to us their names, parentage, addresses and other particulars or may furnish these at the time of their arrival here." ("Tabligh-i-Risalat"; Part I, page 152.)

The above quotation furnishes us with a definite and an undeniable proof that names had been entered in the "Register" even before the commencement of the initiation. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that entries in this "Register" were made, as a rule, at the time of each initiation or immediately after it. Therefore, the dates entered in this "Register" would not necessarily be the actual dates of initiations. But in exceptional cases it would be possible that a certain person reached Ludhiana and was initiated on the same day. It is evident that this could not be accepted as the usual procedure.

The Key to the Controversy:

The above quotation also helps us to solve the problem of the entry of 46 persons instead of the 40 persons who were actually initiated on the first day, and also why the name of Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sialkot was entered on that date, although this is an established fact that he was definitely not initiated on the first day. Similarly it explains the difficulty regarding the three gentlemen from Kapoorthala, who were all initiated, one after the other, on the very first day, yet their names are entered in the "Register" under two different dates, i.e. the 21st and the 23rd March.

In short, all the controversial points in this connection are at once disposed of by the above quotation of the Promised Messiah, and we can with full conviction and without hesitation say that the first few pages of this "register" simply point out that a certain number of persons had written about their intention or

had arrived in Ludhiana for the sake of initiation. This is the only reason why the names of 46 persons, including that of Maulvi Abdul Karim, were entered in the "Register" before 22nd March. And for this very reason we find the name of Munshi Arṣora Khan entered on 21st March immediately after his arrival at Ludhiana while the names of Munishi Zafar Ahmad and Mian Mohammad Khan were entered on 23rd March after they had reached Ludhiana. But there is not the slightest doubt that these three persons were initiated on the first day of initiation.

In short, it is the positive conclusion that the list covering the first few pages of the "Register" were not written according to actual serial order of initiation and, therefore, 19 Rajab, 1306 A.H. or 21st March, 1889, cannot be accepted as the date of the first initiation.

The Enigma of the Solar and Lunar Dates

Now remains the difficulty regarding the reconciliation of the lunar and solar dates. Maulvi Abdullah Sannaury has stated that 20th Rajab, 1306 A.H. corresponded to 23rd March, 1889. But according to "AT-TAUFIQAT-ul-ILHAMIA", 20th Rajab, 1306 A.H., fell on 22nd March, 1889.

I am fully convinced that the date mentioned by Maulvi Abdulla Sannaury are absolutely correct. If there is any error it is without doubt on the part of the Egyptian calendar, "AT-TAUFIQAT-UL-ILHAMIA" in which the month of Rajab in the year 1306 A.H., is shown as a month of 29 days, while, in fact, it extended thirty days in that year. The 1st of Rajab, 1306 A.H. fell on the 4th March, 1889. This view has also the support of the well known calendar named "CALENDAR FOR 125 YEARS" compiled by Mian Meraj-ud-Din Umar who was a notable companion of the Promised Messiah, and was initiated in the year 1891 and died on 28.7.1940. This calendar was published during the lifetime of the Promised Messiah—on 1st September, 1906. On page 217 of this book various versions of March, 1889, according to the Christian, the Islamic, the Fasli (seasonal) and the Bikrami eras are given. This chart is reproduced here.

1889 A.D., 1306 A.H., 1296 FASLI and 1945 BIKRAMI ERAS

Days of the Week	Christian	Islamic	Fasli	Bikrami
	era MARCH	era RAJAB	era PHAGAN	era PHAGAN
Friday	1	28	14	15 Badi
Saturday	2	29	15	1 Sadi
Sunday	3	30	16	2
Monday	4	1 RAJAB	17	3
Tuesday	5	2	18	4
Wednesday	6	3	19	5
Thursday	7	4	20	6
Friday	8	5	21	7
Saturday	9	6	22	8
Sunday	10	7	23	9
Monday	11	8	24	10
Tuesday	12	9	25	11
Wednesday	13	10	26	12
Thursday	14	11	27	13
Friday	15	12	28	14
Saturday	16	13	29	15
Sunday	17	14	30	16
Monday	18	15	1 CHET	1 Badi CHET
Tuesday	19	16	2	2
Wednesday	20	17	3	3
Thursday	21	18	4	4
Friday	22	19	5	6
Saturday	23	20	6	7
Sunday	24	21	7	8
Monday	25	22	8	9
Tuesday	26	23	9	10
Wednesday	27	24	10	11
Thursday	28	25	11	12
Friday	29	26	12	13
Saturday	30	27	13	14
Sunday	31	28	14	15

From the above calendar it becomes crystal clear that 23rd March, 1889, fell on the 20th Rajab, 1306, of the Hijra era. It

is, therefore, certain that there is a complete conformity in the dates as told by Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri and that there is absolutely no contradiction in his statement. Therefore, the question of the difference of opinion regarding 22nd March, 1889, does not arise.

The reader is also recommended to refer to page 183 of the "HUNDRED-YEAR CALENDAR" (1841-1940), compiled by Khwaja Qutbud Din and published in the year 1925 by the "Naami Press", Lucknow. This calendar also supports our stand.

AN UNASSAILABLE RULING:

The Sah'bzada, Mirza Bashir Ahmad says in a note:

"Miam Abdullah Sannauri has stated that the date of the first initiation was 20th Rajab, 1306 or 23rd March, 1889. But according to the "Register of Initiation" it appears that 19 Rajab or 21st March was the date of the first initiation. This means that there is not only the discrepancy in the dates but that there is also conflict in the lunar and solar dates. To verify this I referred to the old calendar and found that the 20th Rajab proved to be the 23rd March, 1889. Therefore, either the entry, having been made at some later date, was wrongly made in the "Register" or that the moon was not seen on the date given in the calendar." ("Seerat-ul-Mahdi" Part III, page 4, printed 3rd February, 1939).

A FURTHER CORROBORATION.

The above ruling of Sahibzada Mirza Bashir is based on facts and sound reasoning. Further evidence in support of our view is obtainable from the contemporary journals and papers of that period. For instance, I have at this moment, lying before me, the old file of the Weekly "Riaz-I-Hind" of Amritsar. The proprietor of this paper, Sheikh Nur Ahmad, was an old companion of the Promised Messiah. Not only that the first three parts of "BARAHIN-I-AHMADIYYA" were printed in his press, but many books written by the Promised Messiah after his claim to the office, were printed in his press and this practice was discontinued only after the establishment of the "Zia-ul-Islam Press" at Qadian. The weekly "RIAZ-I-HIND" can rightly claim the unique distinction of publishing the famous handbill of 20th February,

1886. The accounts of the journeys and the reports of the speeches and other activities of the Promised Mess'ah, used to be published in this paper. And according to the latest research, "Riaz-i-Hind" was the only paper which published the good news of the birth of "the Promised Reformer". On the front page of its issue of 21st January, 1889, it said, "It is a matter of the greatest happiness that a son was born to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib, on 12th January. May he be the promised son to be gifted with long life." This paper used to give the lunar as well as the solar dates on its front page. In March, 1889, it published its four issues with the following dates:

- 4 March 1889—1st Rajab-ul-Murajjab 1306—Monday
- 11 March 1889—8th Rajab-ul-Murajjab 1306—Monday
- 18 March 1889—15th Rajab-ul-Murajjab 1306—Monday
- 25 March 1889—22nd Rajab-ul-Murajjab 1306—Monday

The above dates also give us another irrefutable proof that the Egyptian calendar "At-Taufiqat-ul-Ilhamia" has erred and the 1st day of the Rajab shown to fall on 3rd March, 1889, is undoubtedly incorrect. The correct date is March 4, 1889. Accordingly 20th Rajab, 1306 A.H. as stated by Maulvi Abdullah Sannauri fell on 23rd March, 1889.

IN CONCLUSION:

From whatever angle we may look at this problem, we do find ample evidence, both internal and external, all facts and sound reason, verbal and documentary data point to the undeniable conclusion as clear as the day that the real and correct date of the First Initiation at Ludhiana is undoubtedly the 20th Rajab, 1306, which fell on 23rd March, 1889. And there is not least doubt that this is the First and Sacred Day of the history of Ahmadiyyat which shall remain blessed till the end of days, and shall always serve to remind us of the Divine Command, "Remind them of the Days of Allah." The undermentioned prophecy, given long before the institution of initiation, shall ever continue to find fulfilment:

“(Allah) shall greatly multiply this party and cause thousands of the truthful to enter its fold: He shall Himself water it to make it fruitful and well-nourished, so much so, that their numbers and prosperity shall appear strange to the eyes; and they shall, like a lamp placed on a high pedestal, spread their light all over the world and shall serve as a model of the blessings of Islam.” (Handbill 4th March, 1889 incorporated in “Tabligh-i-Risalat” part I: page 155).

A PRAYER

“O our loved and Omnipotent God, grant that we and our future generations may always remember this historical day: we pray that the soul-inspiring terms of the commitment be deeply engraved in our hearts—the covenant that the Promised Messiah laid on each of us at the time of our initiation.

O Lord God, do make my foot steady at each step
And the day, I break my covenant, may never appear.

And our last call is that all praise is due to Allah, the
Sustainer of the worlds.

(Rendered into English by M. A. K. GHAURI)

