"I NEED AMMUNITION, NOT A RIDE"

MY FATHER, MY HERO

Aqila LaHaye

Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we were watching the news and amidst the misery and imminent danger, we saw the heroic response by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the United States' offer to evacuate him to safety in which he said, "I need ammunition, not a ride." He was determined to stay and fight with his people. My 24-year-old son Yousuf asked me what I would do in this situation, "Go or stay?", he asked. "Stay", I replied and asked, "What about you?" to which he responded, "Definitely stay."

This is a current event where Russia has invaded Ukraine which is now a sovereign country, but was once a part of the Russian Empire.

This little conversation made me think of the partition of India and Pakistan 75 years ago when Punjab was divided into East and West Punjab. The British empire took control of the politics of the Indian subcontinent when they slowly entered as the British East India company in 1608. In August 1947, as India and Pakistan gained their independence from the British Empire, East Punjab remained a part of India while West Punjab was given to Pakistan, a decision made by the boundary commission. Punjab witnessed bloodshed on a scale never seen before. Around 1 million were killed and over 10 million crossed borders. Muslims were migrating from East to West, while Hindus and Sikhs went from West to East. Such was the level of savagery that there was a near-total cleansing of minorities on both sides. The partition triggered the largest mass migration in human history.

The centre of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamā'at was in Qadian, which was a part of East Punjab. Since it was a Muslim community, Hindus and Sikhs did not want them there. Qadian is the birth and burial place of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamā'at, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad[as], the Promised Messiah. There was a massacre of Muslims happening around Qadian and their plan was to attack Qadian and annihilate its occupants and take control over this piece of land. The leader of our Community at the time, the Second Khalīfa, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad[ra] appealed to his community members all over India and Pakistan to come forward to protect their sacred town, mosques, and the tomb of the Promised Messiah[as]. He needed 313 men between ages 18-55 who were prepared to die in defence of Qadian (only a limited number were allowed to stay there by the government).



Dr. Malik Bashir Ahmad Nasir

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My father, a young man in his early twenties had just returned home to his village in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) after serving in the British Navy during World War II. When the Second Khalīfa[ra] called for action, my father didn't hesitate to volunteer because he had grasped the truth of the Promised Messiah[as].

My father was the only son and his mother had passed away when he was 6 years old. He was raised by his grandparents. His grandmother, herself a very brave woman, gave my father 100 rupees and a dagger and saw him off on this godly mission,

unsure if she would ever see her beloved grandson again.

On the way to Qadian, there were dead bodies strewn on both sides of the road for miles and miles. It was monsoon season with extreme humidity. There was water everywhere, a shortage of food and accommodation, no safety, and no security. My father's duty was to protect the grave of the Promised Messiah[as] and his companions[ra] at *Bahishti Maqbra* (the Heavenly Graveyard). They would patrol day and night in knee-deep water with minimum weapons at hand.

Things slowly started to return to normal, and the 313 men that were defending Qadian began to call Adhan in different mosques located within Qadian. After hearing the Adhan, many Muslim women who were abducted or left behind in the chaos started to come to Qadian for protection or were dropped off by some Sikhs or Christians. These women were sent back to Pakistan safely by Jama'at officials and reunited with their families.

The emergency period was over but the real test of their faith and patience began. There were no jobs, no money, and they were still confined to their own limited territory far from their families; but they did not give up. They were determined to keep the promise they made to their beloved Khalīfa. They were content with their condition, proud of their contribution and firm and sincere in their faith. They had the choice to go back to their families, but they refused and preferred to stay in Qadian until their last breath. They protected this holy land for future generations to come and renew their faith. They were the "Dervishes" of Qadian.

Today, Qadian is a fast-growing town with many new buildings, a hospital, a library, and schools. Ahmadis from all over the world come to visit to this holy town, thanks to the 313 Dervishes who stayed despite very unfavourable circumstances.

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My father received a miraculous opportunity to further his studies and he graduated as an ophthalmologist and was given a gold medal for his achievements. He started his very successful practice which he worked in until his death. Al-Hamdo lillah.

My father, Dr. Malik Bashir Ahmad Nasir, Dervish of Qadian passed away on May 13, 2013, after living a very successful and righteous life. His sacrifices changed him to be a better person. They brought him closer to God and he became a servant of Allah who gave him this opportunity to participate in this mission.

Since the beginning of time, there have been heroes. Some became heroes after their death, some emerge heroes in the most turbulent times of history. Some are recognized, some are remembered, and many are forgotten. My father was my hero. We need to keep the memories of our heroes alive because their blood, sweat and tears are in the roots of our identity.

ADVICE FOR MISSIONARIES

Advice for Missionaries is a brief but comprehensive set of guidelines set out by Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad[ra] for the Missionaries of the Aḥmadiyya Muslim Jamā'at.

But really, this short essay is relevant for anyone interested in their religious, intellectual and personal growth. It explains various spiritual and practical means a person can adopt for self-development.

