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The Stone with Sacred Names^{*}

THE STONE WITH SACRED NAMES has a whitish oval section that forms a tablet on which the names are engraved in delicate letters. Even at first glance it becomes obvious that at some point the color of the stone must have been pure white, but it's impossible now to say what other color or colors have since become mixed with it. The stone is nearly translucent and by turning it toward the light and looking at it, a person can make out the names etched on it clearly. Looking through the stone, blurred images of things on the other side can also be seen, although their dimensions appear to be different, and with every slight change in the direction the stone is facing, a corresponding change in the dimensions of these things also occurs. Needless to say, by looking at it in this way the sacred names appear to be written on the things on that other side.

This is our family insignia, but it disappeared for several generations. My illiterate father only knew that our family did have an insignia that was still located somewhere in the house.

I

Several months after the death of my father, I began to routinely rent out the outer sections of my house. These outer sections had rooms built on both sides of the *devrhi*. Each side had six rooms that were quite spacious but had no doors. These were rented out easily and, after attaching doors on them, shopkeepers opened stores. In this way I obtained a stable source of income. After that I turned my attention to the things inside the house.

I had trouble opening the rusty locks with the rusty keys. Some keys even seemed as though they were fashioned from rust and I was afraid that if pressure was applied in order to turn it, the key might break off in the lock and get stuck. However, in the end, somehow all the locks on the

^{*}“Pāk Nāmoñ vālā Patṭhar” from the author’s collection *Ganjifa* (Karachi: Scheherzade, 2008), 121–40.

doors were opened. Behind the doors there were small chambers, rooms and tiny storage areas in which old things were heaped like discarded junk. I looked over these things quickly. There were very few things that I could use. Most of them were wooden, glass, and metal objects for everyday use, and there were also decorative items that had been put away because of some small breakage or because they had simply gotten old.

There were also garments made of silk, which at first sight seemed to be clothes from different time periods. Some of them had been worn very little or not at all, but they were all stuffed into a wooden chest like old tattered clothes, perhaps because they had gone out of fashion or the one who had worn them died.

It took me from the morning until afternoon to finish looking through all this stuff. Every key had opened a lock, but when, covered in dust, I returned to the verandah, I noticed that I had one key left. I couldn't figure out where this key went because, as far as I knew, there were no other doors in the house that were still locked. Nevertheless, I checked the doors one more time. One door along the inner walls of the double verandah, which always remained open, was still closed. It had a big lock with a large hasp dangling from it. Although I was exhausted, after some effort I managed to open it. I used to visit this large chamber in the past. At that time my playthings were stored on a couple of overhead shelves and the rest of the chamber was completely empty, but now there were things sitting on all of the shelves. I gave it a quick glance and was amazed that unlike in the other chambers, here things were arranged nicely and in good order. I saw some things there which I had watched my father make. After looking at these I decided that everything in this chamber had been made by my father. Sometimes, after watching me for a while, he would suddenly start laughing. I remembered his child-like laughter; I actually heard the sound of it in my ears. At that moment I spotted a wooden chest under one of the shelves. It was getting dark inside the chamber and I was already tired, but I hadn't examined the contents of this one chest that still remained, so I lifted up its cover. Inside there were cuttings of colorful fabrics of various sizes, like the pieces left over after sewing clothes. It was damp inside the chest and the cuttings were as cold as ice. I went all the way to the bottom feeling around and checking, but my hand only found cuttings. I closed the cover and went out of the chamber.

That night, before falling asleep, I thought about my father for a while. I felt that I couldn't remember his face clearly. I thought the reason for this was that, except during the days of my childhood when he used to place me on his lap, I never looked at his face closely or for any length of time because usually he was looking at my face and I was in the habit of not

looking at someone if he was looking at me. I tried to remember the face of my father but I didn't succeed, so much so that I almost believed that if he suddenly appeared in front of me at that moment I wouldn't be able to recognize him.

I felt restless so I got out of bed and went out of the double verandah into the courtyard. Then I climbed over the pile of rubble and finally came to the decaying back wall that was left unrepaired. There was a slight crack in the wall through which the wind coming from outside was pelting me across the side of my face. I stood there until midnight recalling the words of my father. Then I remembered my poor old teacher. He looked like a fakir, but when he taught me, his face changed. I remembered that big book with the blank pages on one of which my hand, held in the grasp of my teacher, had written something for the first time. I remembered those very large books which my ancestors had written, but which I hadn't read even though I could read them now. I felt certain that my father wanted me to read them. I thought about my family insignia. My father had told me to search for it, but he hadn't been able to tell me what it was. He had said that this information might also be in these books. I remember the face of my teacher from the last time that he met with me and looked at me as if he expected something from me. Expected what? That I had read those books? That I had looked for that insignia in those books? Then and there, in my dreamy state, I resolved to search for it, even if it took my whole life. Suddenly exhaustion and sleep overwhelmed me. I walked toward the mat lying on the floor of the verandah and perhaps I fell asleep even before I lay down on it.

2

I was awakened by the sound of a knock on the front door. After the death of my father, almost every day without fail someone or other would come to my house. Some came to express their sorrow after hearing the news of his death. Some had come to inquire after him and when they later learned of his death returned to express their sorrow to me. I disliked both types of visits. Even the sound of the knock seemed disagreeable. Nevertheless, I went and opened the door.

The man looked rather shabby and run down. I hadn't ever seen him before, but his face seemed somehow familiar. He solved this puzzle immediately by saying: "I'm the son of your teacher. My name is Shareek."

He took a letter out of his shirt pocket, gave it to me, and then stood to one side with his head bowed. I glanced at the first line of the letter and said: "This isn't addressed to me."

“All the same, it’s meant for you to read,” he replied lifting his head.

The sight of my teacher’s writing brought his face to mind. Shareek’s face resembled his so much. At the moment, Shareek was looking at me too, as though he expected something. I recalled my bad behavior toward my teacher and felt pleased that his son had come.

“I wasn’t with him during his last days,” he said while I was in the middle of reading the letter. “He had banished me from the house.”

I continued reading. The letter was addressed to Shareek. The language was in the old style and I doubted that Shareek understood the exact meaning of it. As I folded the letter and handed it back to him I asked, “What kind of work did you do?”

He seemed lost in thought. I repeated the question and he replied, “Trading in used things. I can also do other work.”

“Why did you quit that work?”

“He had forbidden it.”

“My teacher had? Why?”

“Dishonesty ... he said that I was being dishonest in the trade. Although ... people would give me something from their homes to sell and indicate an approximate price. They would also specify that it should not be sold for less. I sold it at a higher price and handed over to them the amount they stipulated. They gladly gave me my part, but to Abba this seemed dishonest. And he banished me from the house.”

My teacher had written in the letter that if he wants to start over and make a new beginning then I will give him every assistance possible, but on the condition that he not be dishonest in the work.

I told Shareek to come back in two days and after he left I shut myself inside the room with the books.

Among the books there were many written by my ancestors. I separated these, or rather, these were already kept separate. The other books had something to do with my city. There were also social and political histories, and books about arts and crafts, collections of diaries, letters and so on, and a lot of other similar books. Most were handwritten manuscripts from different time periods. After dusting and cleaning them, I sorted them according to their subjects. And while I was doing this, I also kept thinking about Shareek.

Two days later he returned. Today he was wearing proper clothes. There was a very old lamp stand in his hand which wasn’t useable because it was cracked in several places. So my very first question about it was just: “What’s this you’ve got?”

He began to laugh. Then he explained that such a thing can be a good conversation starter because people ask about it. A dealer buys old things even if they're no longer in working condition. This is how interest is aroused, and people let you know about old things they have and that other people have.

"There are many similar things right in this house," I said. "I'm at a loss what to do with them."

"Oh, they can all be sold," Shareek said. "All that's needed is a shop and displaying them properly."

"I wouldn't want to make money selling the stuff from my house. You can take the things I have no use for and do with them what you will."

For his shop, I gave him a large room along the side of the house which opened in the direction of the new bazaar. I also gave him some old things from my house and a sum of cash. And then I completely forgot about him for some time.

After that I spent nearly all of my time in the room with the books. First of all, I looked at the books by my own forefathers. Every one of them had written about their circumstances in great detail. They were among the affluent and influential people of their time, but when I studied the history of my city not even one of them was mentioned in it. One of them seemed to be very learned, but even his name didn't appear in the literary histories of the city. I read a lot about my city, and I read very carefully. There was no mention of my ancestors or anything about them. I suspected that they probably hadn't used their real names, but I saw no reason for that. Then I became convinced that they were well known during their own time—the same way many people are well known in their own time—but people of subsequent times chose to forget them, just as they did many other people. In any case, for me it didn't matter too much whether their names survived or not. I was searching for the insignia which was the emblem of our family, and that couldn't be found anywhere, at least not in those books.

3

One day Shareek came to see me very early in the morning.

"Please come and have a look at your shop."

"It's *your* shop. Heavens, how could it be mine?" I said.

"It's thanks to you," he replied, "and right now most of what it has to offer is your stuff."

I went to see the shop with him and was simply amazed. Shareek had

arranged it very nicely. Most of the things there were definitely from my house. Things that had been piled up like junk at my place were laid out here in an orderly fashion, and even the ones that were broken had been given a pleasing appearance. There were also some things purchased from other places. And there were even some cuttings from fabrics of a bygone era. Shareek explained that such textiles haven't been produced for a long time now and owners of textile factories are on the lookout for such specimens these days.

I remembered that wooden chest.

"I have a lot of similar cuttings. I'll give them to you," I said and left the shop.

The wooden chest wasn't very heavy. I easily brought it out into the courtyard. I took the mat that was lying in the verandah and spread it out in the courtyard where the sun was shining now. I took the cuttings out of the chest and started placing them on the mat. Even now they seemed as cold as ice to me. Outside in the daylight their colors were brilliant and the delicate intricacy of their patterns was apparent. I emptied out the whole chest. At the very bottom there were some rather long cuttings that had been rolled into the shape of a ball. Only when I undid them did I notice that they were wrapped around something. I looked at this thing. It was a very small, oval-shaped, discolored copper box, which I managed to open with some difficulty. This is how the stone with the sacred names came into my possession, but at that time I didn't understand that *this* was the insignia of my family.

However, one day when I was reading a narrative about my paternal great-grandfather in those books, I suspected that this stone was mentioned in regard to a dispute about the division of property—first in a preface to the narrative and then in several other places. It was never spelled out, but only mentioned obliquely or in allusions. And this mention began exactly at the point where the history of our family, as well as the disputes over property, began. During these disputes, several times the proposed method for the division placed the entire estate on one side and the stone with the sacred names on the other. And yet it was the stone that every party wanted to have, and these disputes had even led to bloodshed. It was at this point that I realized this stone must be our insignia. But this mention had ended with the death of my paternal great-grandfather. The family history also didn't endure much beyond this point. It ended with an incomplete sentence just as my father's birth was being recorded. And this was the last book of the series, the very book that had mostly blank pages and my teacher had started my education by having me write something on one of them.

I examined the stone with the sacred names very closely for a very

long time. Except for the fact that it was very old, I didn't notice anything special about it. The stone itself was not very precious, nor did the way the sacred names were inscribed on it seem particularly skillful. I had seen many such stones, usually worn around the neck as a blessing, and there were even two or three in Shareek's shop. I couldn't understand why this was the insignia of our family, but since there was a small metal clasp attached to it, I put a cord through the clasp, placed the stone around my neck, and went to the shop to show it to Shareek.

Shareek was alone at the shop. At that time the shop attracted few customers. That day he had gone out buying. He placed the goods he had purchased on a table. To me it just seemed to be junk. Shareek greeted me warmly and started showing me his purchases. There were some household vessels, mostly cracked or broken, although it seemed as if at some time they might have been very valuable. Even now, their colors were bright and some of the decorations on them were intact. However, among these items there was also half of a small saucer. It was porcelain of a faded turquoise color and had been made rather thick.

I said, "This is no good."

"This is the best thing of all," Shareek claimed. This is a porcelain saucer. If poisoned things were placed on it, the color would change. If the poison was strong, it would break. Such a vessel was essential in every household. At some point it would simply vanish, only to reappear later on its own. I wasn't convinced, but I didn't say anything and picked up the broken armrest from a chair. It was dark wood and a lot of fine workmanship had been done on it. I asked, "Who will buy this?"

"A buyer exists for everything, one only needs to find him." This was Shareek's favorite phrase. "Someone who wants it will pay any price for it, or else it will just remain in the shop. One of my customers goes all over the world collecting the tools used in crimes against corpses.

"Crimes against dead bodies?"

"He has collected items from at least five or six hundred years ago. Tools for opening graves, for severing parts of the corpse, coffins, and God knows what else besides. He's a very wealthy man and will pay any amount for an item he wants, provided that it's genuine, and he recognizes a genuine article in one glance. He can't be deceived. Real connoisseurs of antiques can never be deceived. Now he's looking for something in particular. He has heard that the shroud thieves here used a tool and pulled the shroud off of the corpse while it was inside the grave so there would be no need to dig up the whole grave to get it. A hole was made at the head of the grave and after the work was completed it was closed. No one would have even a clue that the body inside the grave was lying naked."

I had that tool in my possession at one point in my life. During childhood, there was an open field adjoining the second school where I studied. On one side of this field there was a very old tomb with a small grave adjacent to it. One day when I arrived at school I saw a crowd gathered by the grave. Apparently, a corpse had been buried here the previous day. In the middle of the night, someone in a house alongside the field had been woken up by a thief removing the shroud from the corpse and the thief had abandoned his tools and fled. Almost half of the shroud had been taken out of the grave. By the time I arrived, the grave had been opened, the body had been shrouded again, and the grave was already closed. The tool with which the shroud was stripped off was lying on one side. It was a sharp-pointed, iron pole with a hook at the top that, together with the pole, formed a small pincer. The tip was used to make a hole at the head of the grave. Then, after reaching the planks inside the grave, the one on the end was lifted, the tool was inserted down to the corpse and the binding of the shroud was opened. When one end of the shroud was caught in the pincer, it was twirled around three or four times until it was secured. All of this work was done by instinct, and the thief's instinct was correct. He pulled slowly and brought the end out of the grave. The rest of the work was easy. With the end of the shroud in his hand, he pulled on it forcefully. The corpse in the grave would be turned around and around and come out of its shroud. In this same way all the pieces of cloth were taken out, the opening was filled with earth, and the grave was closed. One person in the crowd, who from his looks appeared to be a shroud-thief himself, explained these details. Just then, as people were talking, it suddenly started raining very heavily. Some people rushed inside the vault of the tomb and others scattered here and there. I picked up that pole, ran into the school, and was scaring my friends with it. I don't remember what I did with that pole.

When I told Shareek about this incident he became excited.

"Do you remember the shape of this tool well?"

"I think I remember, but I can't say for sure. Why?"

"Perhaps it could be found at the shops that have old iron. Please draw a picture of it for me."

After that Shareek picked up a piece of greenish-colored stone. This too was part of some broken object.

"Porphyry," he said, "this rock can still be found in a few places, but green porphyry is very rare."

Then I remembered the stone with the sacred names hanging around my neck. I took it off and put it in Shareek's hand. He turned the stone upside down and examined it. He continued looking at it a while and then

he said, "There's nothing special about the stone. These are available even now. They're worn as amulets."

"I know," I said, "but why is it our family insignia?"

Shareek wasn't any help to me on that so I put the stone around my neck again. Shareek was sorting the things he had purchased. Today I looked closely at his face. I recalled the somewhat fakir-like face of my teacher. Shareek had the face of a young man, but his resemblance to my teacher was amazing. I really wanted to talk to him. Up to now I had hardly conversed with him at all and I knew almost nothing about him except that he was the son of my teacher. I asked him, "Where did you learn so much about old things?"

"It developed gradually from working at it over a long period. And ... your teacher was also doing this same work when he was a young man. Then he gave it up."

"Why did he give it up?"

"In the course of buying old goods, he acquired quite a few books from somewhere. Once he started reading those, he was completely taken over by them. I took up his work. He explained a lot to me and later I also learned a lot on my own. Afterwards he threw me out of the house so I started working somewhere else."

"Where?"

He mentioned the name of a large shop that sold curiosities in the city's commercial area.

"Why did you give up the work there?"

"Those people even made new things look old and put them up for sale. They didn't even have any qualms about selling ordinary long-necked flasks and moss-covered earthen goblets."

"But you were saying that people who collect antiques could never be deceived by appearances."

"Real collectors wouldn't be deceived."

Then he explained that many foreign travelers who want to get antiques from here as souvenirs go to this shop. Many of them can't tell the difference. Anything at all that seems somewhat old can be sold to them just by *saying* it's from the old period.

"One day while I was working there I heard my father's voice, 'Even now you're troubling my spirit.' When some old resident of a house dies, his voice can still be heard in that house for some time, only, what he says remains mostly incomprehensible. But every word of my father was so clearly audible that I didn't believe it was coming from a dead person. But, well, starting the very next day, I stopped going to the shop. Then, through your kindness ..."

The desire to see the home of my teacher where the sound of his voice could be heard welled-up inside of me.

“Where is my teacher’s home?”

Shareek explained and I asked, “Did you live there too?”

There was no need for me to ask this. In the letter addressed to Shareek, my teacher had instructed him to come to this home.

“The home, well, it’s just a place to plop down at night, so I didn’t take you there yet.”

“Take me there someday,” I said. “After all it’s the home of my teacher.”

4

The next day I went with Shareek to my teacher’s home. In short, it was a small dark room. My guess is that Shareek’s belongings consisted of only one mat, if even that, because he had me sit down on that mat. I had the feeling that my teacher, who had looked so much like a fakir, was, in truth, much more than that. He had the ocean of knowledge inside of him. I asked Shareek all kinds of questions about him, but Shareek didn’t know very much about his father either, and nothing at all about his last days.

“I heard the news several days after he died.”

“How?”

“From Tahira Bibi.”

“Tahira Bibi ...”

“But Tahira Bibi didn’t know my address. After searching for several days ...”

“Who is Tahira Bibi? She also had the news about my teacher conveyed to me.”

“Abba had taught her. He adopted her as a daughter. She lives nearby. She was looking after him during his last days. I didn’t have the chance to serve my father.”

I stood up. Shareek went out with me. Outside in the bright sunlight, my eyes weren’t working right for some time, but I took Shareek’s hand and started walking. I thought about the death of my teacher and wanted to express my sorrow to Shareek, but this wasn’t an appropriate time so I kept walking without saying anything.

After walking a while he stopped and said, “Tahira Bibi lives in this house. Shall we go visit her?”

We were standing in front of a small house. Without waiting for my answer, Shareek went inside. After some time he returned and took me into the *deurbi* of the house. A chair was placed on this side of the curtain that covered the doorway to the inner apartments and I sat down on it. On

the other side of the curtain I could see the outline of a figure. I greeted her. Immediately after returning my greeting she asked, "I had the keys sent over to you. Were all the doors opened?"

"Yes," I said. "Some locks were very difficult, but they were opened."

"You looked at everything?"

"By myself I might not have been able to look at everything, but because of Shareek ..."

"Shareek? ..."

"He means me." Shareek told her.

"Is your name Shareek?" she asked. "I know the name you're called at home."

"I more or less looked at everything along with Shareek," I said.

"And the books?"

"I read all of them. Some many times..."

"This is all he wanted from you."

"The teacher?"

"And your respected father as well."

"I've read all the books."

Then, after remaining silent for some time she said, "Did you find it?"

I understood what she meant. With much disappointment I said, "Yes, I found it. It's a stone on which sacred names are engraved but there's nothing special about it."

"It's the insignia of your family."

"But why? My father had said blood was spilled over it."

"There must be some reason," Tahira Bibi said.

"But what?"

"Look at the books again."

Then she began recounting the circumstances of my teacher's death. What she said about this was mostly for Shareek's benefit. She reported everything in great detail: his last three or four days, his medical treatment, his death and last rites. Her voice broke several times during her narrative. She was probably crying. Standing next to me, Shareek was crying too. Finally he spoke: "I couldn't even serve him one bit. If you hadn't been there ..."

"Was the body to be left lying there? If I hadn't done it, someone else would have had it carried out."

It seemed necessary for me to say something now. "I didn't find out in time either."

"I sent the girl three times, but your door had a padlock on it."

"I was always out looking for my teacher."

"He did go to see you before he died."

“Right after that. But I didn’t find his home.” I recalled my regrettable treatment of my teacher. “I didn’t treat him well.”

“He would tell me about that and laugh.”

A long silence followed. Eventually I stood up and motioned to Shareek that we should go.

“Okay then Tahira Bibi,” he addressed the dim figure behind the curtain, “we’ll be going now.”

She told us to stay a while longer. A small girl came out from behind the curtain carrying a copper tray with two glasses containing some kind of *sharbat*.

I picked up a glass and said, “There was no need to go to this trouble.”

“Please look at the books again,” she said, and I remembered that the stone with the sacred names was hanging around my neck. I took it off and gave it to the girl and she walked over to the curtain and handed it to Tahira Bibi.

I said, “This is the insignia.”

From the other side of the curtain I heard the sound of the stone being kissed. Then I heard the sacred names being read. The girl returned the stone to me. I was putting it around my neck when Tahira Bibi again said, “Please do look at the books.”

5

That night I awoke from my sleep. My heart was pounding and my body was perspiring heavily. I wanted to get up to have a drink of water, but I couldn’t. I continued lying there. After some time I calmed down and went back to sleep. After getting up the next day, I again lost myself in the books. Once again, I was surprised that there was no mention anywhere of my ancestors, who were counted among the influential people of the city. Once again, I began examining the books, and this time more closely. I found quite a few accounts which I didn’t remember reading before, especially the ones in which the authors had written in an obscure style. I put all the accounts side by side and began reading and comparing them. I found numerous accounts of bloodshed, and an equally large number of deaths, but some were in that obscure style that was difficult to understand. I now realized that in all of them, even in the accounts of bloodshed, the stone with the sacred names was also mentioned, but when making those references the authors of the accounts became even more ambiguous. Eventually I copied all these accounts over neatly in my own hand. Because of the age of the papers and the broken, longhand of the authors, the original accounts had seemed very obtuse, but in my own familiar handwriting they

seemed less ambiguous.

Several days later, most of the night had already passed by the time I finished copying the last account. I thought that I should begin reading what I had written right away, but I was beginning to feel drowsy so, after packing up the papers and putting them aside, I lay down to sleep. That night I again felt restless, I also began to feel pain in my chest. I drank a little water and rubbed my chest for a while. Gradually the pain subsided and for the remainder of the night I slept comfortably.

In the morning I woke up to the sound of knocking. It was Shareek. He looked upset and apologized for staying away for several days. I hadn't even noticed that he hadn't been coming. I also didn't ask the reason for his absence. My mind had been preoccupied with the papers. I was conscious of his moving lips but was hardly listening to his words. When he left for his shop I took out the papers and started reading them.

Everything was very clear. Along with every account of bloodshed and death, it was pointed out that the stone was not with the person at the time of his death. Several people had removed it from their necks at the time an illness worsened. And it had been removed from the necks of several people who were then killed. A few took it off while they were bathing and died during the bath. When the condition of some patients became hopeless, the stone was put on and they became well. The stone was indeed the insignia of our family. I felt that it was also our family's greatest problem because as long as it remained around someone's neck that person didn't die. This was the reason everyone continually sought to claim it and this was also the reason blood flowed for its sake.

Now, since I had discovered its effect, I felt greatly relieved, and I also felt that now my job was finished. It was noon and I walked to the shop. Shareek was there but the shop was closed. When he saw me he said, "I called on some customers. Now I'm going there again."

"Where?" I asked.

"To Tahira Bibi's. I told you this morning."

He repeated that some old illness of Tahira Bibi had returned, and this time it was more severe.

"But that day when I visited her she was perfectly okay," I said.

"Well, the very next day her condition deteriorated."

I had a strong desire to see her, but now she wouldn't have been able to come and stand behind the curtain. I wanted to talk to her about many things. I was sure she knew a lot more about my teacher than I did. In fact, I thought she even knew more about my father than I did. I wanted to know those things too. I was afraid she might die.

I removed the stone from my neck and said, "Please put it around her

neck for me and when she has completely recovered ...”

But it was still in my hand when a boy hurried into the shop. Seeing Shareek, he burst into tears and mumbled something to him through his sobs.

“You go, I’ll be there shortly,” Shareek said as he started closing the doors of the shop.

Outside he told me what I had already surmised. I wanted to say something but he had already gone.

For three days I kept thinking about Tahira Bibi. I remembered her blurry image behind the curtain. She wasn’t very old. At least she was younger than me.

After several days the thought of the stone occurred to me. I had removed it from my neck in order to send it to Tahira Bibi. I couldn’t remember what I had done with it after that. I searched the places where I put important things, but God knows where it had disappeared. I kept searching for several days but didn’t find it.

Then one night the pain started in my chest and while I was rubbing my chest my hand felt the hardness of the stone. Just then I remembered that I had searched everywhere but hadn’t noticed that, as always, it was hanging around my neck. Suddenly the pain became very severe, and just as suddenly, it subsided.

After getting up the next morning, I turned the stone toward the light and looked at it from different angles. I noticed that the things on the other side of the stone would change their dimensions, and also that they all had the sacred names inscribed on them.

Now that I have fulfilled the wish of my father and the expectation of my teacher, I have removed the stone from my neck and placed it among the sacred things that will be buried with me. This was essential, otherwise perhaps blood might again be shed for its sake. □

—*Translated by Jane Shum and Muhammad Umar Memon*