Last summer marked the 55th anniversary of his Imamat. It was an inheritance no one -- himself included -- expected him to receive when the news was announced on July 11, 1957 during a reading of the will of his grandfather His Highness [Sir] Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III. It was the first time in the family's 1,300-year history that a generation -- Karim's father -- had been skipped over. Though historians have written about the events of that day, Prince Karim has rarely publicly commented on his own feelings.

'It was a shock, (he reveals today,) but I don't think anyone in my situation would have been prepared."

He was a junior at Harvard, where his room-mates had included Adlai Stevenson's son John, but in April of that year Prince Karim left abruptly when he received an urgent summons from his ailing 79-year-old grandfather, who was at his villa near Cannes.

He just said, 'Come and see me,' (he recalls)....

In the spring of 1957 the old Aga Khan clearly had his reasons for summoning his elder grandson. The young man remained with his grandfather until his death, in the early-morning hours of July 11, at his residence near Lake Geneva. Later that day, the family gathered in the drawing room to hear the reading of the will, which had been brought in a locked case from Lloyds Bank in London ... Prince Karim, now Aga Khan IV as well as the 49th Imam, announced solemnly:

'My religious responsibilities begin as of today.'
Half a century later, he hints he might not have been as confident as he appeared to be.

'My grandfather had been Imam for 72 years (he says). I was 20 years old.'

Though he embarked on a worldwide tour of his community, he resisted the wishes of the community elders to begin his duties immediately. He returned instead to Harvard to finish his B.A. in Islamic history.

'There was knowledge there that I needed (he says. But once back on campus he was not like the other boys in so many ways:) I was an undergraduate who knew what his work for the rest of his life was going to be (he says, rather quietly).'

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2013 Vanity Fair interview with James Reginato (USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10388/

Interviewer: Your Highness, can I start by taking you back to what I think must have been the most momentous moment of your life, which was on the 12th July last year when you were first told that you had inherited your grandfather’s position. Now what thoughts, truthfully, went through your mind at that moment?

Aga Khan: Well, it is rather hard to go through them all. I think the first one was the enormous responsibility which had come to me. I did not feel prepared for it. It was a very, very heavy burden to take over from a man of such status as my grandfather.

Interviewer: Had you in fact known before that evening that you were going to carry this burden?

Aga Khan: No, I didn't. No, I had no idea about it at all.

Interviewer: I wonder, do you know now, your Highness, whether or how long you grandfather had you in mind, rather than
anybody else in your family?

**Aga Khan:** I don't know. He had sent all the members of the family out to the Middle East. He had sent out Sadru [?]; he had sent out my brother and myself. My father had been out there a lot and so I did not have any more idea than anyone else....

**Interviewer:** Looking back on it all now, are you left with the feeling that your grandfather or your grandfather and your father together were sort of preparing you with special training all your life for this?

**Aga Khan:** No, I don't think so. To be quite frank I don't think so at all. I think that my father very much wanted me to see the community and see the way the community was run and so did my grandfather....

**Interviewer:** Now this succession came, as you told us, as a bolt from the blue -- tremendous, a thing which you hadn't expected. Have there been any moments since you succeeded when you have wished that perhaps this great responsibility hadn't fallen on you?

**Aga Khan:** No, quite frankly no.

**Interviewer:** You have accepted that?

**Aga Khan:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Could you, if you wanted to, hand it over to anybody else?

**Aga Khan:** No.

**Interviewer:** You couldn't?

**Aga Khan:** No.

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*His Highness the Aga Khan's 1958 interview by four members of the UK Press (London, United Kingdom)*

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1095/
**Interviewer:** ... just going off to East Africa to be installed as leader of the Ismailis. What exactly happens at the ceremonies there?

**Aga Khan:** Well the ceremony is a public installation of the Imam. The Ismailis pay homage to the Imam and that is when you are recognised by the world at large as the Imam. Officially as soon as one Imam passes away, his successor takes on from the very minute that the Imam has passed away. But this is a public installation.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1957 interview with an unidentified media outlet 9 days prior to the first Takht Nashini (Enthronement) Ceremony in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (London, United Kingdom?)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10260/

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**Roger Priouret:** Your father did not take the title [of Aga Khan]?

**Aga Khan:** No, my grandfather named me when I was twenty. I was at university then.

I interrupted my studies, therefore, to train for my new function. I found an alarming situation, caused mainly by decolonisation which was obviously going to disrupt so much of the everyday life of Ismailis and their means of existence.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1975 L’Expansion Interview with Roger Priouret (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/

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**LBC:** I will ask you a question, I think hundreds of journalists have asked you this question: Why did you succeed your grandfather Aga Khan III and not your father who was still alive?

**Aga Khan:** I can only tell you what he said. My grandfather had...
been Imam for seventy-two years of his life. So at the age of eight, he was Imam of the Ismailis, up to the age of eighty.

**LBC:** It is possible at the age of eight to become the supreme chief of a community? How does that work? Isn’t there a council, which oversees?

**Aga Khan:** Indeed, indeed! In all religious structures or other, there are structures. My grandfather died after seventy-two years of Imamat and he left in his Will, an explanation and he said: Voila, the world is changing and the world is changing at a rapid pace. And I want to be followed by someone who is much younger than me. Because that someone will have, I hope, the possibility to react to the changing world with a new vision. And that is what happened, because when he died, he was eighty years old and I was twenty. I was still in university.

**LBC:** And how did your father react to this?

**Aga Khan:** He has been of a rigour, of a loyalty absolutely remarkable. Remarkable!

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**Margot Dougherty/Richard B. Stolley:** Was it a problem that your grandfather named you the Aga Khan and skipped over your father?

**Aga Khan:** Very much the contrary. Daddy’s loyalty was absolute, and I think it set a wonderful example for the whole family.

**Margot Dougherty/Richard B. Stolley:** How were you told by your grandfather that you were to be his successor?

**Aga Khan:** It was in his will.
**Margot Dougherty/Richard B. Stolley:** You did not know until after his death?

**Aga Khan:** Nobody knew.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Life Magazine Interview with Margot Dougherty and Richard B. Stolley (New York, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2997/

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**ITV:** One day you were at Harvard and you heard that you were to be the next Imam, the Aga Khan. Can you remember what thoughts went through your mind that day, that moment: shock, disbelief or ...

**Aga Khan:** It was actually in Geneva that I learnt because my grandfather's will was read the day after he died and it was a long will covering many aspects of his life and his family, and the decision came as a shock ...

**ITV:** You had no idea before?

**Aga Khan:** You know, my grandfather was very much a Muslim family head. He did not discuss his decisions as far as I know with the family members and he could have chosen one of four possible successors there was -- he had two sons and he had two grandsons. And that was his decision.

**ITV:** But why did he decide to skip a generation?.

**Aga Khan:** I just don't know. He gave an explanation in his will which I think with the benefit of hindsight, is probably the thing that dominated his thinking. He had become Imam when he was eight and he had been therefore Imam for 72 years. I think he felt that during the 72 years so much had happened that he wanted the institution to be led by a much younger person than may be any of his two sons and I was just 20 years when I inherited the Imamat.

**ITV:** Was there any unhappiness within the family that you become
the Aga Khan?

**Aga Khan:** Not that I am aware of. I think my father’s position was delicate. But he could not have been more loyal, more supportive, more understanding, and his integrity in responding to that decision was genuinely remarkable.

**ITV:** So one day you were a young man in Geneva without a career and suddenly here you have this very important duty in life. Was it a duty?

**Aga Khan:** It was a duty -- it was above all a challenge.

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**Rajiv Mehrotra:** Your Highness, you are the Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. It’s a hereditary title. Have you ever felt burdened by being so, the 49th hereditary Imam? You are the direct descendant from the Prophet; you became the Imam at the age of 20. Did it ever come up for you where you were a reluctant Imam in any way?

**Aga Khan:** You know, a hereditary office is a hereditary office and every member of the family has known that, so that concept of burden isn’t there. The concept of opportunity, yes, and it is a very special opportunity to be able to serve the community, which I would define as an admirable community and widely spread internationally, and succeeding an Imam like my grandfather who was, I think, a unique leader....

**Rajiv Mehrotra:** Are you aware, do you have any recollections of any sort of the elements that made up your own grooming? You did take over at the age of 20. You must have hit the ground running.

**Aga Khan:** You know, in my case, my grandfather made his choice and it was communicated at the time of his death. So my interests
did evolve between the time that I started my education and becoming the Imam. I suspect that will always happen, because being a hereditary office, the succeeding Imam does not know at what age he will inherit, what will be the state of the world in which he will live. Certainly, if he has been exposed to the activities that are there, he will be hopefully in a position to take on the work in an appropriate manner.

I was very fortunate in the sense that I was interested in two areas. As a person I was interested in science and therefore in the world around me, and I was interested in the history of Islam, therefore of my faith, and those were intrinsic to me. They were not passed forward or imposed in anyway by my family.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1989 All India TV and Radio Interview with Rajiv Mehrotra (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4296/

Nicholas Tomalin: Was it your grandfather who made you to go to Harvard?

Aga Khan: Yes, I originally had put down for Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Nicholas Tomalin: When he asked you to change, did you suspect he wanted you to be his successor?

Aga Khan: No the succession is secret until the Imam's Will is read. My grandfather had equally prepared my father (Aly Khan), my uncle (Sadruddin Khan), my brother and myself to succeed. None of us knew who it would be....

Nicholas Tomalin: Not even when you switched from engineering to Islamic History at Harvard?

Aga Khan: No, I did that because there were outstanding Arabists at Harvard at the time. And although my maths was very good for engineering, my physics and chemistry were lagging a bit. I simply
suddenly felt the urge to study Islamic History....

**Nicholas Tomalin:** Do you think if you hadn't become Aga Khan you might have made successful engineer? Or business man?

**Aga Khan:** Who can tell? I'm only 28.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/

Sandeep Unnithan: If you were not the Imam of the Ismailis, what would you be?

**Aga Khan:** (Laughs). I would have to think back to when I was a junior in college. That was a long time ago.

**Sandeep Unnithan:** Would you have been an architect?

**Aga Khan:** I don’t know, I don’t know. I was aiming in doing a doctorate in Islamic studies. I was fascinated by the relationships between the Western world and the Muslim world, particularly in Spain. So that would have been my area of doctoral research, but I never got there, not for my own fault, I didn’t have a choice. So I really don’t know. Generally speaking, when you’re doing a doctorate, you become an academic and I don’t think I could have become an academic (laughs) -- I don’t think so.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2013 India Today Interview with Sandeep Unnithan (Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10653/

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