

The Origin of Shia Islam

The Shia (or Shi'ites) are those Muslims who follow [after the Prophet Muhammad] Ali ibn Abi Talib Commander of the Believers, and his pure progeny, peace be upon them.ⁱ They constitute more than 500 million people and are spread throughout all the Muslim lands and make up minorities of differing number in most other countries of the world. Their numbers have increased day by day particularly since the crystallization of Islamic thoughts and the opening of the door to dialogue and the rejection of blind partisanship.

They believe in Allah as their Lord, Cherisher and Sustainer, in Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon himⁱⁱ, as their prophet, in Islam as their religion, in the Qur'an as their holy book, in the Kabah in Mecca as their direction of prayer, in the questioning in the grave by the angels Munkar and Nakir, in the accounting on the day of resurrection, in heaven and hell, and in all that Allah's messenger –Muhammad brought from his Lord.

They also establish the daily prayer and pay the tithe and obligatory alms, and they fast the month of Ramadan, and make pilgrimage to the Holy House in Mecca, and they enjoin what is good and they forbid what is bad. They are foremost in good and charitable deeds, and are steadfast in fulfilling extra and recommended acts of worship, and adopting virtues and avoiding unlawful things and vices.

They believe that Islam is a complete religion that was revealed by Allah for the happiness of mankind. Hence, everything in Islam should be implemented in the various areas of life since there is no happiness without implementing the laws of Islam and having no need for the laws of the east or the west.

They also believe that it is obligatory to unite the Muslims under one banner. They also believe that it is necessary to solve the differences that have arisen and caused disunity between Muslims, doing so in the light of the book of Allah and the authentic traditions far from different groupings and hateful and unwarranted partisanship and cliques. They also believe that any law which goes against Islam is unlawful and wrong and should not be acted upon.

The top scholars of the Sunni school of thought have ruled that it is permissible to follow and adopt the Shiite school of thought. They include Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut the former principal of the University of al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt and others.

The Shia are distinguished in that they hold that the door to independent legal judgment remains open; and in that reason is central to the divine law as well as the Qur'an, the traditions and consensus.

They have a glowing history from the dawn of the message of Islam until today. The Shiite element was the most active in establishing Islamic thought and in building

Islamic civilization. They have to their credit innumerable writings.ⁱⁱⁱ They have a tremendous number of schools, institutes, libraries, scholars and preachers in Islamic and non-Islamic lands.

They controlled [throughout history] a number of states in differing lands.¹³

All along the way there was between them and their Sunni brothers brotherhood and friendship and interaction and companionship.

They are found today in most if not all of the countries of the world. However, the main Shia population centers are Iraq, Iran, the Gulf states, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Indonesia. Currently they have educational and cultural institutes and top scholars in Najaf, Karbala, Baghdad, Kadhimiyyah, Samarra, Beirut, Cairo, Qum, Khurasan, Tehran, Karachi, Mumbai, Jakarta, Kuwait, Qatar, Ahsa' and Qatif provinces (Arabia), Aghanistan, Damascus, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, African countries, Europe, America and elsewhere.

The world's Muslims are divided into two groups – the Shia who number more than 500 millions, and the Sunnis who make up the rest of the Muslims.

There is no difference between the two groups regarding the three fundamentals of the religion that are:

1. Belief in monotheism
2. Belief in prophethood
3. Belief in the resurrection

All Muslims believe in the existence of the one deity who is eternal and everlasting, all-knowing and all powerful, ever living and self subsisting, having no partner, and having all the beautiful attributes. Also they all believe that Muhammad ibn Abdullah is the last and final prophet of Allah.

Similarly, all Muslims believe that when a person dies and his/her body perishes his/her soul (or spirit) remains and he/she will be brought back to life on the day of resurrection. Whoever has done good in the earthly life will be of the people of the garden of heaven and bliss, and whoever has done ill in the earthly life will be of the people of punishment and hellfire.

As for divine justice, the Shia believe that Almighty Allah is just and does not wrong anyone and does not act without purpose.

And as for Imamate, the Shia believe also that the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (S) appointed twelve successors and said: 'The successors after me will be twelve.' He (S) also said: 'Whoever dies without knowing the Imam (leader) of his time has died the death of the age of ignorance.'

These twelve successors were named by the messenger of Allah (S) himself and they are, in order:

1. **Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (Amir al-Mo'mineen) (a.s.).**
2. **Imam Hasan ibn Ali (al-Mujtaba) (a.s.).**
3. **Imam Husayn ibn Ali (Sayyid al-Shuhada) (a.s.).**
4. **Imam Ali ibn Husayn (al-Sajjad) (a.s.).**
5. **Imam Muhammad ibn Ali (al-Baqir) (a.s.).**
6. **Imam Jafar ibn Muhammad (al-Sadiq) (a.s.).**
7. **Imam Musa ibn Jafar (al-Kadhim) (a.s.).**
8. **Imam Ali ibn Musa (al-Ridha) (a.s.).**
9. **Imam Muhammad ibn Ali (al-Jawad) (a.s.).**
10. **Imam Ali ibn Muhammad (al-Hadi) (a.s.).**
11. **Imam Hasan ibn Ali (al-Askari) (a.s.).**
12. **Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan (al-Mahdi) (a.j.)**

The last of the successors of these pure people is the Imam who is Muntadhar (the awaited) Mahdi (rightly guided Imam) who is alive in this world but hidden from sight and who will appear at the end of time when Allah grants him permission so that he can fill the earth with justice and equity after it having been filled with wrongdoing and oppression. Then the servants of Allah will unite under his banner in a single Islamic government that will flourish by the will of Allah. There are widespread traditions about him reported from the Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Shia have brought forward proofs and evidences for these two fundamentals of religion— divine justice and Imamate – from both rational and traditional sources.

As for the '*branches*' of Islam meaning the acts of worship and social contracts and all other laws and rulings of Islam, Shia Muslims have stated that the sources for them are four:

1. The Holy Qur'an. This is the book that is in the hands of the Muslims today. It has neither been added to nor subtracted from.
2. The Purified Traditions (the sunnah) reported from the Prophet (S) and his pure family (a.s.).
3. The consensus of the Muslims.
4. Reason.

They have also said that the door to independent legal judgment is open, so whoever derives - according to the proper conditions - a ruling from these four sources may act upon it.

Introducing the Shia

The word 'Shia' is derived from an Arabic word meaning 'following'. The word Shia is applied in the Holy Qur'an to the followers of Noah (a.s.) as Almighty Allah says: "And indeed amongst his followers (Shia) was Abraham"

The Prophet (S) applied the name Shia to the followers of Imam Ali (a.s.) and named them with this name, and it is related by historians and traditionalists of the Shia and the Sunni schools alike in their books that the Prophet (S) said: 'O Ali, you and your Shia (followers) are the ones who will triumph.' Thus the followers of Imam Ali (a.s.) were known by this name from the days of the Messenger of Allah (S) who was the first to apply this name to them. And since the speech of the Messenger (S) is revelation from Almighty Allah who has said in the Holy Qur'an [referring to the Prophet]: "And he does not speak of his own desire, it is naught but revelation revealed to him" it follows that naming the Shia this name is nothing but revelation from Almighty Allah.

The Shia are those Muslims who follow Amir al-Mo'mineen (Commander of the Believers) Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and his pure sons (a.s.) after the Messenger of Allah (S); and this is following the order of the Noble Messenger (S) who said before his death: 'I will be called soon and will answer, and I am leaving with you the two weighty things. As long as you adhere to these two you will never go astray after me ever; the book of Allah and my family; the people of my house.'

The Messenger of Allah (S) also said: Ali is with the truth and the truth is with Ali' He (S) also said: 'There will occur dissension after me. When this happens then align yourselves with Ali for he is the first who will see me and the first who will shake my hand on the day of resurrection and he will be with me in the highest heaven and he is the criterion between truth and falsehood.'²⁵

He (S) also said: 'There will occur dissension after me. When this happens then align yourselves with Ali ibn Abi Talib for he is the criterion between truth and falsehood.'

He (S) also said: 'Amongst the people there will occur schism and difference but this man (Ali) and his companions are in the right.'

The Shia are also named the 'Imamites (imamiyah)' as they believe in the imamate of Ali Amir al-Mo'mineen (Commander of the Believers), and his eleven sons and grandsons (a.s.). They are also named the 'Jafarites (jafariyah)' since they follow the Imams of the people of the prophet's house (the Ahl al-Bayt) in matters of what is lawful and unlawful since these Imams are most knowledgeable of the book of Allah and what the Messenger of Allah (S) said. The sixth of these Imams is Jafar ibn

Muhammad (known as ‘al-Sadiq’, ‘the truthful’). He was able to propagate Islamic teachings –the fundamentals, branches or practices, etiquettes, and ethics in a more comprehensive and complete manner, something which conditions did not permit the rest of the Imams to do in such a complete way. The Shia took from Imam Jafar most of the features of their religion and for this reason they are related to him. The other Imams did not have as much opportunity to do this as they met with troubles as in the time of Ali and his sons Hasan and Husayn (a.s.), or with oppression and terror from the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs. However, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) lived during a period in which the Umayyad dynasty was in decline and the Abbasid dynasty was in ascendance and he took the opportunity to spread the realities of Islam on a wide scale.

The Shia are also named the ‘Twelvers (ithna ashariyah)’ as they believe in the Imamate of the twelve Imams of the Prophet’s house, the prophet having said: ‘The successors after me will be twelve in number.’

The Shiite sect, then, is a practical form of Islam as the Prophet (S) and his pure household put forward. The other Islamic sects are practical forms of Islam as put forward by these particular sects’ leaders.

ⁱ Islamic texts use this respectful phrase after reference to any prophet (other than Muhammad), angel or Imam from the Prophet’s household. It will in future be abbreviated to ‘(a.s.)’.

ⁱⁱ Similarly, this respectful phrase is used when referring to the prophet Muhammad. It will in future be abbreviated to ‘(s)’.