

Islamic Structure, the Shia Perspective

Islam in the view of the Shī'a consists of doctrine (*aqīdah*), law (*sharī'ah*) and system.

1. Shi'a Doctrine

The Shī'a believe in Allāh as their Lord, who is just and who has no partner or associate. They believe in Muḥammad (ṣ) as their Prophet, in Islam as their religion, in the Qur'ān as their holy book, in the Ka'bah in Mecca as their direction of prayer, and that all that Muḥammad brought from his Lord was the truth, and that Allāh will bring back to life those who are in the graves, and that heaven and hell are realities, and that mankind has freedom to choose in this life (without compulsion or delegation) and that if he acts well he will be rewarded for it and if he acts badly he will be punished for it.

The Shī'a also believe that the religion of Islam is complete and lacks nothing, as Allāh revealed it and the Messenger (ṣ) and his pure successors (a.s.) propagated it. It is a complete way of life that addresses the human being in his entirety. Hence it is concerned with nurturing the soul or spirit just as it is concerned with nurturing the body, it deals with values as well as with systems.

The fundamentals or roots of the religion in the view of the Shī'a are five in number:

1. Divine unity.
2. Divine justice.
3. Prophethood.
4. Imamate.
5. Resurrection.

Divine unity means that Allāh is one and has no partner and no equal as Almighty Allāh has said in the Qur'ān: ﴿Say: He is Allāh unique, Allāh the eternal, He begets not nor was He begotten, and there is none like unto Him﴾

Divine justice means that Allāh is just and does not do wrong to anyone or tolerate wrongdoing from anyone.

Prophethood means that Allāh by His grace has sent prophets to mankind to clarify the way of good and bad and to direct them to the good and prevent them from the bad.

Imamate means that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) appointed, by order of Allāh, his twelve successors to come after him and named them one after the other and specified them by name and epithet and fathers' and mothers' names just as every Imam specified the succeeding Imam. Hence it is obligatory to follow them and to take the features of the religion from them.

Resurrection means that Almighty Allāh will revive creation on the day of resurrection and reward those who do good and punish those who do bad. ﴿And whoever does a atoms weight of good will see it and whoever does a atoms weight of bad will see it﴾.

2. Shi'a View of Islamic Law

In the view of the Shī'a, Islamic law or *sharī'ah* consists of:

1. Acts of Worship. These are the acts by which nearness is sought to Allāh and include daily prayers, fasting , tithe, almsgiving, pilgrimage, struggle, purification, spiritual retreat to the Mosque, and enjoining the good and forbidding the bad, etc.
2. Contracts such as selling, renting, endowments and mortgages, etc.
3. Ethics which consist of: virtues which Islam has made either obligatory or recommended such as truthfulness, honesty, bravery, chivalry, activity and the like; and vices which Islam discourages either by forbidding or by considering them reprehensible such as betrayal, lying, cowardice, inactivity, causing corruption etc.
4. Etiquettes which are the actions Islam considers to be courtesies such as the courtesies of sleep, greetings, of marriage, or of gatherings, travel and the like.
5. Laws which comprise obligatory , forbidden, recommended, reprehensible , and neutral . They are also divided into duty bound and statutory such as the laws of marriage and divorce and inheritance, and justice, penal codes and compensations.

The Five Laws

There are five types of laws :

1. Obligatory
2. Forbidden
3. Recommended
4. Reprehensible/Discouraged
5. Neutral

Obligatory acts are those which Islam has made compulsory such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, and struggle in Allah's way.

Forbidden acts are those which Islam prevents such as drinking alcohol, eating pork, gambling, dealing in usury, and adultery.

Recommended acts are those which Islam encourages, while it is permissible to not do them, such as daily optional prayers, recommended charity, and fulfilling other people's needs.

Reprehensible acts are those which Islam discourages without making them forbidden such as divorce.

Neutral acts are those the doing of which or not doing are considered equal in the view of Islam such as the drinking of water.

Sources of Islamic Law

The Shī'a believe that the sources from which Islamic law is derived are four in number and are:

1. The Holy Qur'ān.
2. The Traditions (*sunnah*). These are the sayings, actions and ratifications of the Messenger of Allāh Muḥammad (s)

as well as that of the infallible Imams of his household (Ahl al-Bayt) (a.s.).

3. Consensus of the Muslims including an infallible person.
4. Reason. It is related that ‘Allāh has two proofs [over mankind] – an outward proof which is the prophets, and in inward proof which is reason.’

Therefore, the Shī‘a take their legislation from the Holy Qur’ān and the traditions of the Messenger (ṣ) and his pure household (a.s.) acting upon the tradition of the ‘two weighty things’. They also consider these four to be the source of Islamic legislation and that no individual or group may legislate a law which goes against them as any other legislation is false.

A great deal in the way of Qur’ānic exegesis, jurisprudence, traditions, information about the beginning of creation and the end of time, fundamentals and branches of the religion and other branches of knowledge have been related from the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and his household (a.s.). The scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī collected a large amount of these traditions in over 100 volumes and named the book *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Oceans of Lights). In these traditions there is enough to grant the Muslims, indeed the whole of humanity happiness in this world and the next.

Governance in Islam

The Shī‘a believe that there are two aspects to ruling in the view of Islam:

1. A permanent aspect concerned with the ‘ruler’ and the ‘law.’ Thus the ruler must be male, a believer, of pure

birth (not illegitimate), and a jurist. The law must be derived from the four sources of legislation.

2. A developing aspect concerned with the way in which the Islamic Law is implemented. This aspect is subject to independent legal judgement and it is the responsibility of the jurist-consults/authorities to make their views known in this aspect according to stipulated legal checks and balances.

Power in Islam

The Shī'a also believe that holy struggle (*jihād*) is a common obligation whereas defense is an individual obligation. Hence, it is mandatory for the Islamic state to prepare the requisite number of Muslims by the ways mentioned in Islamic law so that it may have a preventative force which will protect them and their interests wherever they are.

This power is not solely confined to military power but includes intellectual, economic and industrial power.

Sources of Public Wealth

The Shī'a believe that the sources of public wealth are the tithes, obligatory alms, tax paid by non-Muslims living under the protection of the Muslim state, tax paid on certain categories of land, trading, and such like.

This wealth is spent in ensuring the public good and preventing individual hardship so that under the reign of the Islamic government no public good is left neglected and no one suffers from poverty or that his/her essential needs are not met.

The Shī'a also believe that Islam allows private ownership on condition that the wealth is obtained legally and that the owner pays his dues on it. Under no circumstances is the wealth of the people to be usurped.

At the same time, Islam protects the rights of the worker and the farmer as well as those of the employer and landlord so that there is no inflation or no feudal system, and no 'cheap/free labour' or oppression.

Islamic Freedom

The Shī'a believe that freedom is one of the fundamental goals of Islam. The Muslim then has full freedom to express his/her opinion in speech and in writing as well as full freedom in his/her social contracts, to travel, to marry, and to trade.

This wide scale freedom which Islam gives to its people prepares the practical and psychological climate for success in its efforts so that the Islamic society grows and flourishes.

For this Islam, firstly, combats the four causes of backwardness which are:

1. Ignorance. Islam works to make education general by making learning compulsory as in the tradition: 'The seeking of knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman.' Islam also encourages the learning of different sciences as in the tradition: 'If the people knew the benefits of seeking knowledge they would seek it even by crossing the seas and shedding one's blood.' Also amongst many other traditions it is said that: 'The Angels

lower their wings to the seeker of knowledge [in humility before them].’

2. Poverty. Islam prohibits idleness, prevents unemployment, and encourages those who are able to work to do so and makes the State responsible for those who are incapable of work.
3. Illness. In Islamic Law there are many laws which are there to prevent and cure many diseases. Furthermore Islam actively promotes medicine to be widely available.
4. Vice. Islam bases society in a way that no-one is forced to commit vices and puts in place preventative punishments – under stipulated conditions – for those who do.

Secondly, Islam works to promote peace and stability so that there is an environment for the flourishing of industry, trade, agriculture, and construction.

Islam also frees up all powers & energies to take part in encouraging growth: it frees up human potential since it makes marriage easy and prohibits adultery, it strengthens the pillars of the family and encourages a high birth rate so that the Islamic nation may be the largest as well as the most powerful. It also sets free the potentials of land and water for ‘the land belongs to Allāh and whoever develops it’, and water belongs to whoever stakes it off and uses it, and any Muslim can develop or plant what land he/she is able to.

Islam also frees up the potentials of labor since there should be no borders between Islamic lands and all of Islamic lands are a wide area for the use of all Muslims, and any Muslim may travel and work and live anywhere he/she wishes.

All Muslims are also brothers in Islam. Hence there is no sectarianism, tribalism, nationalism, or racism in Islam.

The Shī'a believe that the Islamic system consists of the laws which regulate the life of a person from before birth until after death. They also regulate society and strive to develop the land and advance life and bring about the happiness of mankind in this life and the next. These laws are such as the laws of selling, renting, trade, politics, economics, the army, the State, agriculture, construction, mortgages, travel, residency, security, marriage, divorce, the judiciary system, testaments, reparations, inheritance, etc.