

Shiites, Shiism, and Islam

الشيعة، التشيع، والإسلام

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One of the most perplexing scenarios to non-Muslims and new Muslims alike is the division they may see between Shiites and Sunni Muslims. Some tend to become confused when they see that each group claims to be following the true Islam. To truly understand this subject to the fullest, one must delve into the early history of Islam and see under what circumstances this division actually began, a study far from possible for most people. Another way, much more in the scope of the average person, is to analyze which group is true to the teachings of Islam, a simple comparison may be done between Sunni and Shiite beliefs and practices in relation to textual evidence, the Quran – the revealed word of God, and the Sunnah – or teachings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.

Many times, people see this division to be a major one, while the fact remains that Shiites only make up a mere 8 percent of the Muslim population, reaching even this figure after taking hold of certain important political regions in history. Not a division, one can confidently say that the Shiites are but one of the various splinter groups which left the pure teachings of traditional Islam. Sunnis, on the other hand, are not a splinter group, but merely name themselves as such to differentiate themselves from the Shiites and other deviant sects.

The word “Sunni” itself comes from the term “Sunnah”, explained earlier to be the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, for they are strict in abiding by these teachings without any introductions, interpolations, or omissions. The word Shiite (Shi’a in Arabic) means a “party”, “sect”, “supporters” or a “group of like minded individuals”. God says in the Quran addressing His Prophet, Muhammad:

“Verily, those who divide their religion and break up into sects (Shi’a), you have no concern in them in the least. Their affair is only with Allah, Who then will tell them what they used to do.” (Quran 6:159)

Although the specific groups called the Shiites is not what is directly intended in this verse, it is inclusive of them.

When one studies a bit of history, they will see that the term Shiite was first used amongst the Muslims in regards to a political issue over which the Muslims varied, 37 years after the death of the Prophet. Although the Shiites claim that their origin lies in that scenario, the actual term Shiite being used to denote this specific sect actually occurred much later in history. In either case, it is clear that the term was unheard of during the time of the Prophet, and thus we can say that the Shiites were a group which appeared



The Shrine of the Zoroastrian, Abu Lu'lu'ah, in Kashan, Iran, venerated by Shiites after the death of the Prophet.

Over the long evolution of Shiite thought, they incorporated many foreign concepts into their faith. Starting as a political

opinion which favored some views of Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, over some other companions, it became a sect purporting strange ideas foreign to Islam. This was due mainly to the fact that this ideology was mainly espoused by people in areas far from the centers of Islamic learning, namely Persia, those who were either new to Islam, had either converted to Islam nominally, and were living in areas where a large percentage of people remained upon their previous religions. Thus the Shiites became fertile soil to the introduction of foreign ideas, which they struggled to incorporate into some aspects and beliefs maintained by Islam, resulting in a sect composed of ideas stemming from Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Islam. Not strange is it then that we see that one of the most important shrines in Shiism visited by many Shiites is that of Abu Lu'lu'ah, a Zoroastrian who died after the Caliphate of Umar, located in the city of Kashan in present day Iran. Muhammad Ali Mu'zi, an Iranian Shiite researcher in France, stated:

“The basic fundamentals of the Zoroastrian religion has entered into Shiaism even in some minute issues. ...And this relationship marked the brotherhood between Shiaism and the ancient Magian Iran.”¹

We will now take a brief look at Shiism from just one aspect, that of beliefs. From these few examples, one will clearly see how different it truly is from the religion of Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad.

There are various articles of faith in Islam, and from them branch other beliefs which must be held by all who attribute themselves to Islam. They are as mentioned in the verse:

“...but piety is that one has firm belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scriptures and the Prophets...” (Quran 2:177)

This is also mentioned in a statement of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him:

¹ The Role of Zoroastrianism in the Development of Shiaism.

“Faith is that you believe in God, the angels, the scriptures, the Prophets, the Last Day...” (Saheeh Muslim)

This short discourse will merely touch on some of these various aspects of faith, and mention just some of the beliefs of the Shiites and how they differ from Islam.

Belief in God

The proper belief about God, or creed is the most important aspect of the religion of Islam. During the first 13 years of Muhammad’s Prophethood, he corrected people’s beliefs about God, warning them against calling to others besides God, whether angels, prophets, saints, martyrs, trees, stones, stars, or idols. He clarified that only God alone, the One who created them was to be worshipped. Very few legislations and acts of worship were revealed for this period. The majority of the Quran itself calls to this belief. God says in the Quran that calling to others besides Him is a sin worthy of eternal damnation in Hellfire:

“Verily, whosoever sets up partners in worship with Allah, then Allah has forbidden Paradise for him, and the Fire will be his abode.” (Quran 5:72)

This is an uncompromising belief in Islam, and is the basis from which one enters the fold of Islam. We find, however, that Shiites believe in the veneration of others besides God. Homage is to be paid to great saints and martyrs, such as Ali, Hussein, Fatimah, their Imams, and they are directly called out to in times of need. They believe that they can answer their calls as well as intervene for them with God, a belief that according to Islam is clear disbelief². God says:

2 Biha’r Al-Anwa’r, Al-Majlisi. An example of such preposterous beliefs can be found in the following statements of one of their Imams, or leaders:

“Is not He (God) Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls Him, and Who removes the evil.” (Quran 27:62)

Another important tenet which Shiism clearly violates is the concept that God Alone administers the affairs of the universe, and it is He alone who knows the Unseen. Shiism attributes these powers to their leaders, called *Imams*, and place them in a position higher than the Prophets and angels. God says:

“Say: ‘None in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen except Allah, nor can they perceive when they shall be resurrected.’” (Quran 27:65)

“And among His Signs is that He shows you the lightning, by way of fear and hope, and He sends down water (rain) from the sky, and therewith revives the earth after its death. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who understand.” (Quran 30:24)

The Shiites give many of these attributes to their Imams. Some of them even attribute lightning to be caused by them³.

In authoritative Shiite texts, its states:

“The Imams have knowledge of whatever occurred in the past and whatever will happen in the future, and nothing is concealed from them.” (Al-Kulaini, Al-Kaafi, p.260)

“When prophet Noah (Peace be upon him) was about to drown in the flooding waters, he invoked God Almighty by our (i.e. the names of the Imams) names. Hence God Almighty came to his rescue. When Prophet Abraham (Peace be upon him) was thrown into the scorching fire, he prayed to God through our names, and God Almighty ordered the fire to be cool and a means of safety for him [Abraham]. When prophet Moses (Peace be upon him) struck the Sea with his rod in quest of a path, he invoked God with respect to our names and God made the sea dry out. Finally when the Jews plotted to kill Jesus (Peace be upon him), he supplicated to God by mentioning our names and was rescued from death. God eventually raised him up.” (Wasa’il As-Sheea, 4/1143)

3 Bihaar al-Anwar, Al-Burhan, and others.

“The Imams have knowledge of all the revealed books, regardless of the languages in which they were revealed” (Ibid, p.227)

“The Imams know when they will die, and they do not die except by their own choice” (Ibid, p.258)

“All of the earth belongs to the Imams.” (Ibid, p.407)

There are many aspects of faith in Shiism that oppose Islam and which render a person out of its fold. Due to this reason, Muslims do not consider Shiism to represent Islam, but rather believe it to contradict the very basics of Islamic teachings.

The Shahaadah

The Shiism even differ with Islam in the first and most important pillar of Islam and faith, called the *Shahaadah*, the testimony one gives upon affirming their faith in Islam, that none deserves worship but God, and that Muhammad is His slave and messenger (*laa ilaaha ill-Allah*). This testimony is the most important aspect of Islam, and the whole religion is built upon it, and embodies this unique and total monotheism and belief in God. So important is it that the Prophet pleaded to his uncle who was on his deathbed to testify:

“O uncle! Say ‘*laa ilaaha ill-Allah*,’ a phrase for which I will plead on your behalf in front of God.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

His uncle did not say this testimony due to his fear of what people would say about changing the religion of his forefathers

upon death. He died, and the Prophet was informed by revelation that he was among the people of Hell.

Point being, this phrase and what it entails is so important that the Prophet made it a means of everlasting life in Paradise. He said:

“No one says ‘*La ilaaha ill-Allah*’ and dies firmly upon it, but he/she will enter Heaven (Paradise).” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Thus is this phrase considered the first pillar of Islam, the very statement that rendered one a believer, gives him an opportunity to enter Paradise!

The Shiites, however, have a different ‘testimony of faith’. They not only negate it meanings, as shown in the previous articles by associating others with God, but they have also added certain principles nowhere to be found in authentic texts. Their *shahaadah* comprises of the statement: “none deserves worship but God, and that Muhammad is His slave and messenger, and Ali is His beloved and chosen one, and successor to the Prophet.”⁴

This is due to the extremism they have in regards to the cousin of Prophet Muhammad, Ali, to whom they claim their origin. The Shiites even claim that the succession of Ali was mentioned in all of the scriptures revealed to the previous prophets⁵. They claim that all will be asked about the succession of Ali on the Day of Judgment⁶, and that if anyone believes differently, they are considered polytheists⁷. Although Ali was known to be one of the most pious of the companions of the Prophet, in no narration can we find that Prophet Muhammad ever mentioned his succession in rule. Actually even when we look at early Shiite works, they themselves attribute this belief to Abdullah ibn Saba’, a renegade

4 Abdul Kareem Mushtaq.

5 Al-Kulaini, Al-Kaafi, 1/437.

6 The Wilayat of ‘Ali ibne Abi Talib (as), Answering Ansar.

7 “Whoever sets up another Imam besides ‘Ali and delays ‘Ali’s caliphate is a polytheist.” (Al-Kafi fil-Usool, vol.10 p.55)

who claimed Islam and plotted against the Caliph Uthman, and also claimed that Ali was God Himself⁸. Thus it is clear that these beliefs are all innovations never preached by Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.

Belief in the Scriptures

God mentions in the Quran that He revealed Scriptures to the Prophets which they taught and recited to their people. Some of these Prophets and Scriptures are mentioned in the Quran:

Say, “We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and to the tribes, and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam).” (Quran 2:136)

“It is He (God) Who has sent down the Book to you with truth, confirming what came before it. And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel.” (Quran 3:3)

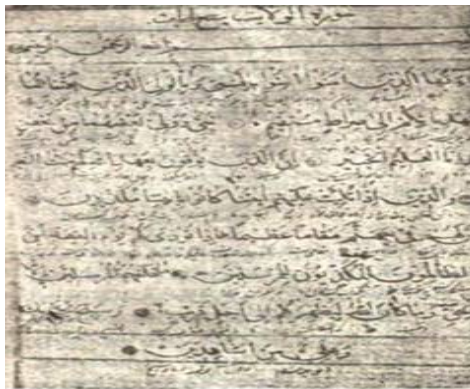
It was the Prophets who received revelation, and due to the fact that Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was the last prophet, there will be no other Scriptures revealed after the revelation of the Quran. The Shiites however, believe that there was a scripture revealed after the Quran before the death of the Prophet, which they call the ‘Tablet of Fatimah’. They claim, that in it were the names of all those who were to be their *Imams* in the future⁹.

They invented these ideas due to the fact that they could not find any verses in the Quran which they could use to defend their views. They did not cease at this, but also went on to directly challenge the authenticity of the Quran by stating that its has not

8 Rijaal al-Kishhi.

9 Al-Kulaini, Al-Kaafi, 1/527-8, and many others.

been preserved¹⁰, and that the Quran today is incomplete, and that the complete version is with their 12th *Imam* who has been in hiding for the past 900 years in ‘the cave’. They believe that when he emerges he will bring forth the complete version¹¹. This, as should be clear to all, is in direct opposition to the teachings of Islam, as God clearly states that the Quran is under the direct protection of God:



سورة الزلزاله في مقبرة بطورانيا من عهد صاحب ايراق
 ومن كونه فيها رجعتا بالارساء

“The Chapter of Succession”. On both sides is a translation in Persian.

“Verily it is We Who have sent down the Reminder and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)” (Quran 15:9)

The Shiites assert that the existing Quran must have been altered, since there is no reference to any of their strayed beliefs in it. One of the first to explicitly state this view was Mirza Hussein Muhammad Taqi al-Noori al-Tabrasi (d. 1320 AH) in his book

10 Usul Kafi 1:228

11 Al-Anwar al-Nu’maniah, 2: 360-2.

*The Final Verdict on the Distortion of the Book of the Lord of Lords*¹².

The Shiites became so extreme in their beliefs, that they even attempted to insert chapters about Ali, may God be pleased with him, in the Quran, since they could not find any clear texts. One of them is what they called “The Chapter of Succession”.

Belief in the Prophets

As mentioned earlier, Islam teaches that the Prophets were the best of humanity, specifically chosen by God due to their excellent qualities specifically to preach the message of God to humanity. God says in the Quran:

“Allah specially chooses Messengers from angels and from humans. Verily, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer.” (Quran 22:75)

The Prophets were the best of humans, living examples to be emulated:

“We sent no messenger except to be obeyed, by Allah’s leave...”(Quran 4:64)

The Shiites, however believe that their *Imams* are better than the prophets¹³, and that some prophets were highly praised only due to their love of the *Imams*¹⁴.

If one was to mention all the beliefs of the Shiites in which they have opposed the teachings of Islam, it would definitely need many volumes to do so. It should be clear, however, from this short discourse that the beliefs purported by Shiism has no basis in any of the teachings of Islam, but rather that it is a conglomeration of foreign beliefs evolved over a period of time, all of which revolve around extremist views concerning the leadership of certain favored candidates, known as their *Imams*. A religion

12 Faslul Khitab Fi Tahreefi-Kitabi Rabbil Arbaab.

13 Wasa’il As-Sheea.

14 Bihaar al-Anwar (26:267).

which teaches the worship of God alone and living a life taught by God's prophets, a message preached by all prophets, has for them become a life and existence solely based upon love of Ali and affirming his and their Imam's claim to leadership, struggling to find ways to fit into Islamic texts by addition, interpolation, or misrepresentation. Creation comes into being, Prophets are sent and Scriptures are revealed, all for the purpose of succession of Ali and the latter *Imams*¹⁵, and even on the Day of Judgment, it will be their *Imams*, not God, who will judge people¹⁶. It is no matter to wonder, then, what the basis of entering Heaven or Hell will be according to Shiism.

A religion based upon a claimed love of the family of Prophet Muhammad has lead them to beliefs contradicting the very essence of the message brought by him, the message of Islam.

15 *I'tiqadaat* (106-7)

16 *Rijaal al-Kishhi* (337)