

July 2009



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The Sunni Sect and Shi'a Sect in Islam :

Their Main Similarities and Differences

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If a person looks at the social life of people, that person will find that most people follow a specific religion. This religion affects their culture noticeably. One of the common religions at the present time is Islam. The two largest denominations of Islam are Sunni and Shi'a. Sunni is the majority in the Islamic world. In the past, many Sunni thought that all Muslims are Sunni and there were no other Islamic denominations because they do not connect with other denominations or hear about them.

Question 1:

What are the main things people do not know about Islam?

Shi'a is considered the second largest denomination in Islam. It is considered the majority in some countries such as Iran and Iraq. Shi'a recognizes that there are other denominations, especially Sunni, because they live with them; their beliefs depend on understanding the other denominations. After the success of Khomeini's revolution, he got rid of the Shah of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) and implemented Islamic rules into the new government in 1979. Many people, both non-Muslim and some Sunnis, asked a question: what are the differences between Sunni and Shi'a? This question was asked again in the American war against Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. To understand the



Iran celebrates the 28th Anniversary of Islamic Revolution- Tehrān- 2007

differences between Sunni and Shi'a, a person should study Islam, its beliefs and its history.

Question 2:

What is the difference between Islam and other religions?

Islam is like a culture; it has several systems: ideological, political, economic, ethical, and criminal. Muslims differ in interpretation of these systems. However, while there are differences in the Islamic systems, Muslim sects have many similarities.

Question 3:

Why do Muslims believe in Allah?

One of these ideological issues for Muslims is believing in God (Allah). Allah, who created everything in this universe, is The Ever Forgiving, The Utterly Just, The True and Ultimate King, The Eternally Besought, The Raiser of The Dead, The Powerful, and The Most Merciful in Essence. Allah says about Himself in the Holy Qur'an: "(1) Say: He is Allah, the One! (2) Allah, the eternally Besought of all! (3) He begetteth not nor was begotten. (4) And there is none comparable unto Him." ¹ Allah is Sovereign Lord, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, and the Compeller. All Muslims believe that Allah sent many messengers and prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (Peace be upon them). The purposes of sending

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The Main Goals of
Sending Prophets.
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¹ Surah Ikhlas (The Holy Qur'an 112:1-4) Translation by: Muhammad M. Pickthall.



Jerusalem plays an important role in the three monotheistic religions.

prophets to people are to teach them about their God, how to thank Him for His blessings, how a person can be good in this life, and how to prepare for the Day of Resurrection. Muslims believe that Judaism was the right religion in a certain period of time. Then, Christianity came to replace Judaism. After that, Islam came to replace all past Monotheistic religions because the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings unlimited be upon him, his family - PBUHF) was the final prophet and the Seal of the Prophets.

Question 4:

Why do Muslims believe Islam is the true religion?

History says that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) proved his prophecy by many miracles, like other messengers and prophets. One of these miracles is the eloquent Holy Qur'an. In addition, the Holy Qur'an predicts many modern explorations in different sciences and it tells of previous and future incidents. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) had high moral standards, unlike what Islam enemies said about him. If he had bad behavior, his enemies would have talked about that behavior, but history recorded that his enemies, the idolaters, actually praised Mohammed's etiquette. They called him truthful and trustworthy

Question 5:

Was Muhammad a Prophet or not? Why?

before his prophecy. However, these people did not believe his prophecy, but they trusted Mohammed in everything.

Question 6:

Did Muhammad have high moral standards? Why?

The Importance of
an Infallible
Muhammad

Some stories defame the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) in Muslim history books. These stories should check their research by studying the personal life of who said them, and compare their content with Islamic principles. The main reason is to justify some acts of Muslim rulers. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) is infallible because he is an ideal person for them. His every word, every action, and his approval become part of Islamic beliefs.

Question 7:

What are the differences between prayer and Doa'h for the Muslims?



Ramadan Prayers.
By: Mekaeel- 2006

Muslims must pray five times at: daybreak, noon, afternoon, sundown, and night time. The Muslims prayer is a duty and it is a group of acts and glorification, but there are other things called Doa'h that are not a duty. Doa'h, talking with God, is an invocation and supplication to God. Muslims must fast one moon month (29-30 days) every year; this is called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims cannot eat, drink, or etc from daybreak until sundown. They should be good in their behavior. Some of the monthly goals are feeling the hunger of poor people, self-training in patience, and obeying God. In addition, Muslims have



The Day of Arafa.
By: Deeeemz - 2009

to do almsgiving to a needy person. Every Muslim should make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) once in his or her life, if she or he can do it. Hajj shows that people are not categorized by race or wealth, but are distinguished by the level of their godliness or religiousness.

Question 8:

Will all Muslims go to Jannah?

All Muslims believe on the Day of Resurrection, Allah will prosecute all people according to their acts in the present life. Allah will send a person to Jannah (Paradise) or Jahannam (Hell). Not all Muslims will go to Jannah; but some of them will be put in Jahannam according to the size and amounts of their sins in this life: polytheism, murder, rape, and extortion are examples of big sins.

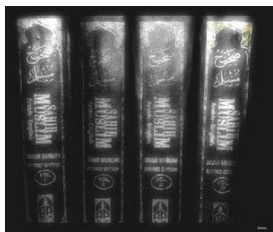
Question 9:

Why do you think the Sharia says to kill an unjust killer?

In the Islamic community, Islam judgment rules- Sharia- should apply to all social classes; there are no differences between the son of a king and the son of a poor person, this applies as well to how criminals are treated under Islam. For instance, regardless of who commits a murder, in Islam, a murderer should be executed. In addition, the punishment for fornication is whipping. Also, parts of Islamic principles are virtues such as forgiveness,

helping the needy, and fairness. On the other hand, Islam rejects disadvantage such as terrorism and backbiting.

The Important
Sources in Islam.



Al-Hadith.

By: Samkhan - 2007

All Muslims believe that important sources of their beliefs and Sharia are the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. Islamic sects differ in understanding these resources. All Muslims believe the Holy Qur'an is the saying of Allah and it has never been distorted through years. Sunnah is the sayings of the prophet (Hadith) and a report about something he did. They believe some of the Sunnah has distortions and are not true, because it was not written during the life of prophet Muhammad (PBUHF). Sunnis have many books of Hadith in the Sunnah.

Sunnis believe that the two books are true; they are Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. In addition, Sunnis take Sharia from some stories of the Companions of the Prophet, because they contain most of the known Islamic law, and Sunnis think that these companions are the best Muslims in Islamic history. However, Shi'a and some Islamic sects differ with Sunni about trusting all these companions. These sects trust only some of the companions because they expressed different opinions in Sharia. Shias believe that some of the companions are hypocritical (like

Question 10:

**Are Sunni and Shi'a
different in Sharia?
Why?**

Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy) and others forged the right Sharia (like Umar ibn al-Khattab and Muawiyah I), so Muslims differ in their level of loving and hating the companions.

Muslims are taught to love the Prophet Muhammad's family. However, Shi'a added to the Hadith sayings of their twelve rightful successors to Muhammad (Imam) and the sayings of a daughter of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (Fatimah- AS). They believe that these Imams are infallible and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) was instituted as guardian because God chose them to keep Islam from distortion. These Imams are from grandchildren of the Prophet. They were the best scholars in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHF) because people asked difficult questions; their answers were logical and scientific.

Islamic history recorded any story that they learned from someone else other than themselves. Imams are highly respected by most Muslims for their religious knowledge and Islamic scholarship, but Muslims differ in the level of loving them. Shias believed that some companions of the Prophet were forced to Islamic leadership from Imams (like Abu Bakr with Imam Ali). Imams were more deserving of these companions in all fields



Shi'a Clock.
By: Shnpm - 2009



Our prophet and Our Imam.
By: Proama - 2008

(knowledge, strength in wars, close of relationship with the Prophet, the level of religiousness, etc).

Question 11:

What do you think who the first Caliph of the Islamic nation should be? Why?

Sunni believe that the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and advisor, Abu Bakr, is the first Caliph of the Islamic nation, but the Shias believe that following the Prophet Muhammad's death, the leadership should have passed directly to his cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali (AS).

Ijtihad



Ali al-Sistani.
By: Ebrahiim - 2006

The Shi'a use Ijtihad to understand the Sharia and Islamic jurisprudence. Ijtihad is the scientific process of making a lawful decision by independent explanation of the lawful sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Shias believe they should imitate one of the most scholarly, pious, ascetic Mujtahids, who has high moral values, modesty and spirituality, unlike what Shias' enemies said about Shi'ah Mujtahid. Mujtahid, is a person who practices Ijtihad, and is a religious authority. Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei (1899 –1992), and Ali al-Sistani (1930-present) are examples of Shias' mujtahids in this century. The Sunni school of jurisprudence was put on hold at the end of the third century and no scholar could ever qualify again as a Mujtahid.

In addition, Sunni and Shi'a differ in their opinions of political issues such as using revolution to change a government. If a Muslim president is unjust, Sunnis believe that they still have to obey that president, but Shias believe they should revolt on an unjust president. If a person looks at the American war against the Dictator Saddam Hussein's government, that person will understand why most Sunnis disagreed with the war; but most Shias in the world agreed with this war. Since Shi'a accepts revolt against unjust dictators, they memorialize the Battle of Karbala yearly. Karbala is now a city in Iraq. The battle happened in 680 A.D. The main cause was Yazid's persistence that Imam Husayn (626 A.D - 680A.D) (the grandson of the Islamic prophet and one of the fourteen Infallibles of Shi'a) should accept him (i.e. Yazid) as the righteous and undoubted ruler. Yazid was tyrannical and did not apply Islamic law, and stole Islamic authority from Imam Husayn (AS). Imam Husayn (AS) was accompanied in battle by some of the women and children from his family and his companions' families. In this battle, Imam Husayn (AS), all adult males in his family (the family of the Prophet) except Imam Alī ibn Husayn (659 AD – 712 AD), all of

Question 12:

Who is Imam Husayn? What did he do for Islam?



Ashora II,
By: Ashara - 2008

his companions, some children and women were killed, and their organs unsightly cut out of their bodies. The battle didn't include any humaneness and mercy for Imam Husayn's people, including the children and women. During Imam Husayn's anniversary, Shi'a studies how Imam Husayn kept the right Islam, how he revolted against the dictator Yazid, and his nobility of character against his enemies in battle.

Jihad

All Muslims differ in Jihad (striving in the way of Allah) and what it means when they have to do it. Some Muslims (like Al-Qaeda which is a fundamentalist Sunni movement) misunderstand what Jihad is. In their misunderstanding, Al-Qaeda kills many innocent people, including children and women (Muslims and non-Muslims). Since certain Islamic sects believe they are the only true Muslims, they look to eliminate all others. Their acts defame the noble principles of Islam.



Imam Mahdi.
By: Islamic Shia -
2008

Shi'a and Sunni believe that Mahdi is a descendant of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Mahdi will relieve humans of error, injustice, tyranny, and revive the faith and peace, and will arrive with Jesus before the Day of the Resurrection. Shi'a believes that Mahdi is Muhammad Mahdi, the final Imam of the Twelve

Question 13:

Who is Mahdi? What will he do for the world?

Imams. He was born in 869 AD and did not die, but rather was hidden by God. Their belief takes into account the Islamic historical and philosophical events. The Sunni believe that Mahdi has not yet been born; he will be born in the future.

The Sunni and Shi'a are the two major sects of Islam. They have many similarities in their beliefs: the believing in God, Muhammad's prophecy, fasting during Ramadan, and going on the pilgrimage. On the other hand, they have differences in some Islamic issues, such as interpretation of Islamic law, who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and the level of love for Muhammad's family and his friends. There are other differences in some of the books they use. If a person studies about the Sunni and Shi'a, that person would read what the Sunnis and Shias wrote about themselves in order to tell the truth and to expel rumors about their religion.