

religion of God.[3] While both Sunni and Shi'a groups believe in the Mahdi, the largest Shi'a group, the Twelvers, believe that the Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who is believed to have gone into occultation since 874 CE.[3]

In the Shi'a view the Twelfth Imam first went into a "Minor Occultation" between 874 and 941 CE where the Hidden Imam still communicated with the community through four official intermediaries. The "Greater Occultation" is then defined from the time when the Hidden Imam ceased to communicate regularly until the time when he returns to restore the world.[4]

Many Shaykhis joined the messianic Babi movement in the 1840s where the Báb proclaimed himself to be the return of the hidden Imam. As the Babi movement spread in Iran, violence broke out between the ruling Shi'a Muslim government and the Babis, and ended when government troops massacred the Babis, and executed the Bab in 1850.[2]

The Bab had spoken of another messianic figure, He whom God shall make manifest. One of the followers of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned by the Iranian government after the Bab's execution and then exiled to Iraq, and then to Constantinople and Adrianople in the Ottoman Empire.[2] In 1863 in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the messianic figure expected by the Bab's writings. Bahá'ís consider the Bahá'í religion to start from Bahá'u'lláh's statements in 1863.

Seal of the Prophets

Main article: Seal of the Prophets

Seal of the Prophets (Arabic: سِيْلُ الرُّسُلِ *Khátim an-Nabiyín*) is a title given to the Islamic prophet Muhammad by a verse in the Qur'an.[5] Muslims traditionally agree upon that Muhammad received the final revelation in the form of the Qur'an for all mankind, for all time.

The Bahá'í Faith regards Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, but does not interpret this term as meaning that no further messengers from God are possible. In particular, Bahá'ís regard the end-times prophecies of Islam (and other faiths) as being symbolic, and see the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as symbolically fulfilling these prophetic expectations. The latter of these is the founder of the Bahá'í religion, which considers Islamic law to have been superseded by its own. Muhammad is seen as ending the Adamic cycle, also known as the Prophetic cycle, which is stated to have begun approximately 6,000 years ago,[6][7] and the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as starting the Bahá'í cycle, or Cycle of Fulfillment, which will last at least five hundred thousand years with numerous Manifestations of God appearing throughout that time.[8][9][10] Bahá'u'lláh gave the Title "King of the Messengers" (*sultán al-rusul*) to the Báb, and the "Sender of the Messengers" (*mursil al-rusul*) to himself. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, he uses the Islamic concept of the oneness of the prophets to show that the term "seal of the prophets" does not apply to Muhammad only, but to all the prophets. He also makes a direct link between Qur'an 33:40,[5] about

the seal of the prophets, and 33:44,[11] about the promise of the "attainment of the divine Presence" on the day of resurrection, which he interprets as the meeting with the Manifestation of God. The day of resurrection is interpreted as the day of the advent of the Qa'im[12][13] or Mahdi. These interpretive and legal differences have caused the Bahá'ís to be seen as heretics and apostates by many Muslims.

Laws

Originally the Bábís adhered to the Islamic laws, but this changed when the Báb wrote a Bábí code of law in the Bayán which replaced Islamic law. However, the Báb's laws were not widely practiced by the Bábís, and instead many Bábís became antinomian; they also marked their new religious identity by deliberately not abiding by Islamic practice.[14] Bahá'u'lláh, as both his initial role as Bábí leader, and then as the one who was messianic figure that the Báb spoke, condemned the antinomian tendencies of the Bábís. In 1873 he eventually, at the request of his followers, wrote a book of laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.[14]

Other

The Greatest Name

Main articles: Names of God in Islam and Bahá'í symbols

The 99 Names of Allah, (Arabic: ????? ???? ?????? (?asma? allah al-husna), are the Names of God (specifically, attributes) by which Muslims regard God and which are described in the Qur'an, and Sunnah, amongst other places.[15]

The 99 names point to the inherent unity of the all-embracing Greatest Name.[16] In Islamic traditions, it is stated "The Greatest Name of Allah is the one which if He [Allah] is called (prayed to) by it, He will Answer." [17]

Bahá'í sources state that the 100th name was revealed as "Bahá'" (an Arabic word ??? meaning "glory, splendor" etc.), which is the root word for Bahá'u'lláh and Bahá'í. They also believe that it is the 'Greatest Name'. [18][19] The Báb wrote a noted pentagram-shaped tablet with 360 derivatives of the word "Bahá'" used in it.[18]

According to Bahá'í scholar 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávári, Baha' ad-Din al-`Amili adopted the pen name (takhallus) 'Baha' after being inspired by words of Shi'a Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (the fifth Imam) and Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (the sixth Imam), who had stated that the Greatest Name of God was included in either Du'ay-i-Sahar or A`amaal Ummi Dawud.[18] In the first verse of the Du'ay-i-Sahar, a dawn prayer for the Ramadan, the name "Bahá" appears four times: "Allahumma inni as 'aluka min Bahá' ika bi Abháh va kulla Bahá' ika Bahí".[20]

Disconnected letters of the Qu'rán

Main article: Muqatta'at

Muqatta'at (Arabic: ??????) are unique letter combinations that begin certain suras (chapters) of the Qur'an. Muqatta'at literally means abbreviated or shortened. Their meanings remain unclear and are considered by most Muslims to be divine secrets.

The Báb, whom Bahá'ís see as the immediate forerunner of their religion, uses Muqatta'at in his *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*.^{[21][22]} He writes in his *Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih* (Seven Proofs) about a hadith from Muhammad al-Baqir (the fifth Shia Imam) where it is stated that the first seven sets of Muqatta'at have a numerical value of 1267, from which the year 1844 AD (the year of the Báb's declaration) can be derived.^[23]

In 1857-58 Bahá'u'lláh wrote his *Commentary on the Isolated Letters* (*Tafsír-i-Hurúfát-i-Muqatta'ih*, also known as *Lawh-i-Áyiy-i-Núr*, *Tablet of the Light Verse*).^{[24][25]} In it, he describes how God created the letters. A black teardrop fell down from the Primordial Pen on the "Perspicuous, Snow-white Tablet", by which the Point was created. The Point then turned into an Alif (vertical stroke), which was again transformed, after which the Muqatta'at appeared. These letters were then differentiated, separated and then again gathered and linked together, appearing as the "names and attributes" of creation. Bahá'u'lláh gives various interpretations of the letters "alif, lam, mim", mostly relating to Allah, trusteeship (*wilaya*) and the prophethood (*nubuwwa*) of Muhammad. He emphasizes the central role of the alif in all the worlds of God.^[24]

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