

the armies of `Ali and Mu`awiyah resulted in a stalemate and an agreement to submit the dispute to arbitration. `Ali's problems then intensified when a part of his army repudiated him for having submitted to arbitration. These seceders, the Khawarij, were defeated at the Battle of Nahrawan, but one of them avenged this defeat by assassinating `Ali at the Mosque of Kufih in 661.

`Ali's elder son, Hasan, succeeded to the Caliphate but was soon forced to abdicate in favor of Mu`awiyah, who became the first of the Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs. Thus the Caliphate passed out of the hands of the descendants of `Ali. But there was a small group of people who continued to believe that leadership in Islam belonged by right to the family of `Ali. After Hasan's death in 669, these gathered around the latter's brother, Husayn.

After Mu`awiyah's death and the accession of his son Yazid to the Caliphate, Husayn was persuaded to leave Medina and set out for Kufih, where he had been promised support for his claim to leadership. But Yazid acted quickly in arresting Husayn's emissary in Kufih, intimidating the Kufans, and intercepting Husayn on his way. Husayn was surrounded at a place called Karbala and there killed, together with all of his companions, in 680.

The martyrdom of Husayn became the rallying point of the party of `Ali (Shi`at `Ali), and continues to this day to be the most important commemoration in the Shi`i calendar. After this event, there was some disagreement

among the Shi`is over the identity of their spiritual leader, the Imam, for the next few generations. Modern Twelver Shi`is regard the eldest son of the each Imam to have succeeded to the Imamate. But in the lifetime of Husayn's son, `Ali Zaynu'l-`Abidin, the majority of the Shi`is of the time, under the leadership of Mukhtar ath-Thaqafi, gave their allegiance to the third son of `Ali, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya (whose mother was not Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet). Again, after Zaynu'l-`Abidin's death in about 713, the next Imam is considered by modern Shi`is to have been the latter's son, Muhammad al-Baqir. But many Shi`is supported al-Baqir's half-brother, Zayd, who rebelled against the Umayyads in 740. The modern Shi`i sect of the Zaydis are named after this man. They are to be found in north Yemen. The Zaydi Imam in the Yemen was overthrown in the revolution of 1962.

In the time of Muhammad al-Baqir's son and successor, Ja`far as-Sadiq, who inherited the Imamate in about 735, the descendants of Muhammad's uncle, al-`Abbas, rose in rebellion against the Umayyads and succeeded in gaining the Caliphate to form the Abbasid dynasty. Some Shi`is considered that their objective, which was to see someone from the family of Muhammad leading the Islamic world, had been achieved. But many Shi`is did not consider this situation satisfactory, and the Abbasids reciprocated by persecuting the descendants of `Ali. As-Sadiq himself was a highly respected figure in the Islamic world until his death in 765.

After as-Sadiq's death there was a further split among the Shi'is because his eldest son, Isma'il, had died before him. Some held that since as-Sadiq had first appointed Isma'il as his heir, the rightful inheritor of the Imamate was Isma'il's son. This split is the origin of the Isma'ili sect of Shi'ism, which is itself divided into a number of sects: the Musta'lis who are in turn divided into Sulaymani and Da'udi factions and are mainly found in the Yemen and India, where they are called Bohras; and the Nizaris, who are led by the Aga Khan and are to be found in India, Syria, Iran, Central Asia, and East Africa. The Druse are a faction that broke away from the Isma'ilis.

The Twelver Shi'is maintain, however, that after Isma'il's death, as-Sadiq appointed his next son, Musa al-Kazim to the Imamate. On al-Kazim's death in 799, the Imamate passed to his son `Ali ar-Rida. For a time there was the hope of a rapprochement between the Shi'is and the Abbasids on the basis of ar-Rida's appointment as the heir to the Caliphate. But ar-Rida died prematurely (by poisoning, the Shi'i historians maintain) in 818 in northeast Iran, and nothing came of this.

The next three Imams were kept under close surveillance by the Abbasids. They were: Muhammad at-Taqi (died 835); `Ali al-Hadi (died 868), and Hasan al-`Askari. After the death of Hasan al-`Askari in A.H. 260/A.D. 874, some said that Hasan's son, Muhammad, who was but a child, had gone into occultation (hiding) in order to escape from his enemies and that his life has been miraculously prolonged until the time is right for his return as the Imam Mahdi (the Qa'im). But Ja`far, the brother of Hasan al-`Askari, refuted this whole story, claiming that his brother had had no children at all. Some asserted that the Imam Qa'im had not yet been born but would be born in the Last Days and would bring justice to the world. It is difficult to know what proportion of the Shi'is of that time followed each of the various factions that arose.

Those Shi'is who held to the occultation of Hasan's son--i.e. what was to become the official Twelver position--asserted that the Hidden Imam had appointed a series of four intermediaries between himself and the Shi'is, called the four Babs (gates) or Safirs (ambassadors). This situation came to be called the Lesser Occultation and lasted until 329/941. There were then no further intermediaries, and the Shi'is entered into what is called the Greater Occultation.

This then was the main course of Shi'i history as related in the traditional histories. At the succession of each Imam, these histories record numerous factions and sects splitting off; only the main ones have been mentioned above. Modern Western scholars question this traditional account. The neat pattern of the succession of Imams with branching dissident factions at each generation seems to have been a retrospective recasting of history in order to satisfy theoretical considerations current in the third Islamic century (see Momen 61-75).

b. History in medieval times. By the middle of the fourth century A.H. (tenth century C.E.), the Shi'is had made great strides politically.

Large parts of the Muslim world were under the control of Shi`i dynasties of one sort or another. In Iran and Iraq the Shi`i Iranian dynasty of Buyids held sway, even controlling the Caliph in Baghdad. The Shi`i Hamdanid dynasty ruled Syria. The Fatimids who held Egypt and much of North Africa were Isma`ili Shi`is; in north-west Africa, the Idrisids were inclined to Shi`ism; while Shi`is of the Zaydi sect controlled parts of northern Iran and the Yemen. But despite this political dominance, the Shi`is were unable to sway the religious affiliations of the urban masses in the Islamic heartlands; and when the Shi`i dynasties fell towards the end of the tenth century, Sunni dominance re-established itself.

In the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, Shi`ism began to influence the Sunni world again, through the medium of Sufism. The latter became a major movement in Islam after the Mongol invasions. Sufism had many inter-connections with Shi`ism. Many of the leading Sufi shaykhs of this period had Shi`i leanings in their teachings. In the fifteenth century, a number of minor Shi`i states were set up in Khurasan and Mazandaran, and Shi`ism also spread into India.

c. Shi`ism in modern times. The sixteenth century saw the establishment of a Shi`i state in Iran (see below) and a number of small Shi`i states in central India. Later in the eighteenth century, the rulers of Oudh (Awadh) in northeast India created an important center for Shi`ism there.

Today, the majority (88%) of Iranians are Shi`is as are the majority of the populations of Iraq (57%), Bahrain (54%), and the Republic of Azerbaijan (66%). Shi`is are the largest religious community in the Lebanon (30%). There are also important Shi`i communities in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

2. Shi`ism in Iran. Shi`ism had

had a following in Iran from the earliest period. The first Shi`is were, of course, Arab residents of Medina who favored `Ali's claim to the Caliphate. But even among these, one of the most prominent was the Iranian Salman. Later, as the Arab armies advanced and the newly-conquered and converted peoples were given an inferior position in the Islamic polity, Mukhtar ath-Thaqafi (see above) is credited with being the first to attract Iranians to the Shi`i cause on the base of full equality.

When `Ali ar-Rida was elevated to the position of heir to the throne, his sister, Fatimah al-Ma`suma, set out to visit him in Khurasan. On the way she died and was buried in the town of Qum. Around this shrine an important Shi`i community arose. There were also Shi`i communities

between Qum and the Caspian coast to the north. In Khurasan around the shrine of `Ali ar-Rida near Tus (now Mashhad) and in other towns of east Khurasan there were important Shi`i communities. In western Iran, there were communities of Ahl-i-Haqq, a Shi`i sect that is considered extremist by orthodox Shi`is (because it is considered to elevate `Ali to a station equal to or above that of Muhammad). But the rest of Iran was almost completely

Sunni in orientation.

The situation remained thus until the dawn of the sixteenth century when the leader of the Sufi order of the Safavids conquered the whole of Iran and made Twelver Shi`ism the state religion. Over the next two centuries, the people of Iran were gradually converted to Shi`ism until it became the majority religion. Although Iran came under Sunni rulers after the fall of the Safavids, the Shi`ism of the people did not waver, and Shi`i rule was reestablished under the Zand and Qajar dynasties in the eighteenth century.

3. Doctrines and practices of Twelver Shi`ism.

a. Fundamentals of the religion. Twelver Shi`is hold that the Qur'anic verses that forbid blind imitation (taqlid) in matters of religion refer to the fundamentals of the religion (usul ad-din). The five fundamentals of the religion (usul ad-din) are: Divine Unity (tawhid); Prophethood; the Resurrection; the Imamate; and Divine Justice. They consider it obligatory that each Shi`i who has not undertaken the necessary study should imitate (taqlid) a scholar who is an authority on the application of religious law (furu` ad-din).

b. The Imamate. For Sunnis, the leader of the Muslims after the death of Muhammad was a temporal leader chosen by consensus, although hereditary succession became the norm. For Shi`is, leadership belonged to the successor designated by Muhammad and subsequent designated successors. The authority of each successor derived from this designation, which made him entitled to both spiritual and temporal leadership. Whether the holder of this station actually exercised temporal power made no difference to his station. The Imam was the Guide (hadi) for mankind and the Proof (hujjat) of God. In their mystical dimensions, Muhammad, Fatimah, and the Twelve Imams ("the Fourteen Pure Ones") were a light that God created before the creation of the material world. This light then became the cause and instrument of the rest of creation and descended upon each of the Prophets until it became embodied in the Fourteen Pure Ones.

The Imams are, in Shi`i doctrine, the authorized interpreters of the Qur'an as well as the supreme arbiters of the Holy Law. Thus it is necessary for the people of each age to recognize the Imam of the Age in order to receive correct guidance on these matters. Indeed, in one Tradition,

Husayn is reported to have said that "God created mankind in order that they might know Him". When asked "What is knowing God?", he replied, "It is that the people of each age know their Imam." (Momen 158). The Qur'an contains no direct reference to the Imamate. But the Imams have interpreted a large number of verses of the Qur'an as referring to themselves (see Momen 151-153).

c. Eschatology. The Shi`is, along with other Muslims, believe in a Day of Judgment and a physical resurrection at the end of

the world. Shi`is also believe that just before the end of the world the Hidden Twelfth Imam will appear and fill the earth with justice when it had been filled with injustice.

There are numerous prophecies about the signs of the coming of the Hidden Imam recorded in the books of Shi`i tradition. One of the events that will occur is the return (q.v., raj`a) of Muhammad, the Imams, and the prophets of old, together with all those who have either supported Muhammad and the Imams or opposed them. The first to return after the appearance of the Mahdi will be the Imam Husayn and Jesus Christ. There will then be a great battle between the forces of the Imam and those of his opponents, thus eliminating all injustice from the world.

d. Ritual elements and laws. The ritual elements in Shi`ism are very similar to Sunni Islam. They are traditionally divided into eight: obligatory prayer (salat or namaz); fasting (siyam or sawm); obligatory alms (zakat); the one-fifth tax (khums), which is not practiced by Sunnis; pilgrimage (hajj); religious war (jihad); enjoining others to do good (amr bi'l-ma`ruf); exhorting others to desist from evil (nahy `an al-munkar).

e. Shi`i practices. In addition there are a number of characteristically Shi`i practices:

- i. Visitation (ziyarat)--visiting the shrines of the Imams and the family of the Imams.
- ii. Temporary marriage (mut`a)--temporary marriage for a pre-determined period and for an agreed fee.
- iii. Religious dissimulation (taqiyya)--dissimulation of one's religious beliefs while maintaining mental reservation in times of danger to life or property.
- iv. Recitals of the sufferings of the Imams and in particular the martyrdom of Husayn (rawdih-khani, majlis, qirayah).

These are very emotional events at which there is much wailing and beating or flailing of chests and backs. There are also a number of other commemorations

of the sufferings of the Imams including the performance of passion-plays (ta`ziyah), though the exact practices vary between countries.

4. Shi`i law and the `ulama. The principal intellectual discipline in religion in the Islamic and Shi`i world is not theology as in Christianity but rather the application of the Holy Law. Thus the religious professionals in the Islamic world--the "learned," `ulama'--are mainly concerned with applying the Holy Law to the situations of everyday life. Shi`i law differs only in minor ways from the law of other Muslim groups. Shi`is accept the authority of traditions attributed to the Imams and reject traditions transmitted by non-Shi`is. The `ulama are trained in Islamic religious law (fiqh) and the principles for applying it to everyday life (usul al-fiqh).

This training is done at religious colleges called madrasas, where the full course can last for as long as fifteen years. The most important of these colleges in the Shi`i world are at Qum and Mashhad in Iran and at Najaf and Karbala in Iraq.

At the end of training, the student is certified as being able to perform ijihad, the process of deriving judgments on points of religious law through the processes of usul al-fiqh. Such a person is called a

mujtahid, a rank which relatively few Shi`i `ulama reach.

In Shi`i theory, although taqlid in relation to the fundamentals of religion is forbidden (see 3.a above), it is necessary and obligatory that each Shi`i who has not undertaken the necessary training to become a mujtahid must follow (taqlid) the judgment of someone who has in matters of the application of religious law (furu` ad-din).

A mujtahid whose legal guidance is followed by a significant number of believers becomes a marja` at-taqlid (reference point for imitation) or, more commonly today, Ayatu'llah (sign of God).

5. Schools and sects of Twelver Shi`ism.

Although various other Shi`i sects have been described above, Twelver Shi`ism is itself divided into a number of schools:

a. Usuli. This school is the one to which the majority of Twelver Shi`is today belong. It is founded on certain principles (usul) of jurisprudence that allow the `ulama to deliver judgments on almost any question that comes before them. This school was revived in the 18th century by Wahid Bihbihani (1706-1792), but its current practices are based on the legal norms evolved by Shaykh Murtada Ansari (1799-1864).

b. Akhbari. This school holds that legal rulings can only be given by the `ulama in cases where there are clear precedents established by the Traditions (akhbar) of the Imams. It was revived by Mulla Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1623) as a reaction to the great freedom given to jurists by the Usuli school. During the 17th and early 18th centuries, it became the predominant school in most parts of the Shi`i world but was then driven back by the resurgent Usulis under Bihbihani.

c. Shaykhi. Whereas the Usuli majority and the Akhbaris disagree about jurisprudence, the Usulis and the Shaykhis disagree about doctrine. The Shaykhis assert that many of the doctrines that in orthodox circles are understood literally--for example, the concepts of Heaven, Hell, Resurrection, and the return of the Twelfth Imam--are all concepts that are to be fulfilled at the level of spiritual imagery (see "Shaykhism.2.c" and "Return.2").

6. The Bahá'í Faith and Shi`ism.

a. Shi`i interactions with the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths.

From the earliest days, the Shi`i `ulama have opposed the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths. Apart from the obvious challenge to the authority of the `ulama

posed by the new religion, there were a number of doctrinal disagreements (see "Islam.3"). Shoghi Effendi condemns the Shi'`i `ulama strongly and predicts their downfall (PDC 8-95). He refers to Bahá'u'lláh's statement that were it not for them, the Babi Faith would have triumphed in Iran in two years (PDC 85).

b. Bahá'í teachings concerning Shi'ism. The Babi and Bahá'í scriptures support the Shi'`i interpretation of the events of early Islamic history by upholding `Ali's claim to the position of religious and temporal leadership after Muhammad, as well as the succession of Imams among the descendants of `Ali. `Abdu'l-Bahá, for example (in *Lawh-i-Hizar-Bayti*), writes that the words of `Umar, the second Caliph: "The Book of God is enough for us" (said in refutation of `Ali's claim), undermined the very foundations of Islam and brought bloodshed and discord to the Muslim world. They became, metaphorically, the weapon that killed the Imam `Ali; they caused the death of the Imam Husayn at Karbala; and they even became the bullets that pierced the breast of the Bab, the chains around the neck of Bahá'u'lláh, and the cause of his exile.

One major point of disagreement is the Twelfth Imam. Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá considered the story of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam to have been a pious fraud conceived by a number of the leading Shi'`is in order to maintain the coherence and continuity of the Shi'`i movement after the death of Hasan al-`Askari (See MAS 1:7, 2:50-52; 4:90-91).

c. Shi'ism as a background for the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Faith was born into a Shi'`i environment in Iran and almost all of the early converts were from Shi'`i Islam. Thus, in the same way that a number of Jewish institutions were grown up within Christianity, some of the institutions of Shi'ism were carried forward into the Bahá'í Faith. Some of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are also to be found in embryonic form in Shi'`i Islam. There is no need to mention in detail the more obvious parallels such as the daily obligatory prayer, the fast, religious taxes, and the pilgrimage since these institutions are also to be found in Sunni Islam and indeed in other religions. However, the Shi'`i practice of visiting the shrines of the Imams and the family of the Imams, together with the reading of Tablets of Visitation, finds parallels with the Bahá'í "pilgrimage"

to Haifa and the reading of Tablets of Visitation at the shrines there (see "Pilgrimage and Visitation" and "Visitation, Tablets of"). Bahá'ís also visit the graves of prominent Bahá'ís and locations associated with Bahá'í history.

The Bahá'í teaching of the independent investigation of truth is to be found in embryonic form in the Shi'`i prohibition of taqlid, blind imitation, in matters of the principles of religion. Based on certain passages from the Qur'an (5:104-5; 17:36; 21:52-4), Shi'`is maintain that each person has the obligation to investigate the fundamentals of religious truth (see 3.a above) for himself or herself. An embryonic form of the Bahá'í teaching of the harmony of religion and science can be seen in the

Shi`i insistence that all theological statements should be compatible with rationality as well as with revealed truth (Shii theology was much influenced by the rationalist Mu`tazili theology). Even in areas such as the equality of men and women, the Shi`i legal code allows women more rights in such matters as inheritance, than Sunni law (this being probably related to the important position of Fatimah through whom the line of Imams was descended from the Prophet).

Some Shi`i concepts have been taken and radically re-interpreted in the Bahá'í scripture. For example, the Bab in the Persian Bayan (q.v.) and Bahá'u'lláh in the Book of Certitude (q.v.) re-interpret the concept of raj`a, return (see above), to refer to a typological or archetypal return of the Imam Mahdi, Imam Husayn, and the others as the key persons in Babi and Bahá'í history (see "Return").

One last important area in which the Bahá'í Faith has a significant precedent in Shi`ism is in the concept of the Covenant (q.v.). Each Imam was considered to have appointed his successor by verbal designation. This process is called in the Shi`i sources the formation of a "Covenant" (ahd, mithaq).

d. Shi`i prophecy and the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths. A great deal has been written by both the central figures of the Babi and Bahá'í Faith and by their followers seeking to establish that the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh fulfill the Shi`i prophecies relating to the appearance of the Hidden Twelfth Imam and the return of the Imam Husayn. These prophecies are held to have predicted the time, place, and manner of the coming of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, as well as their names, the opposition that they would encounter, and some of the events that would occur in that time. (Some of these prophecies are translated in Momen 166-170).

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