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# **Chapter 3: Doctrines**

Throughout the history of Islam, Muslims in spite of their differences, have had great agreement, not only in many principles of Islam, but also in many of its practices. The Qur'an and the great personality of the Prophet on the one hand, and the sincere love and devotion of all Muslims towards them, have unified Muslims and made out of them a real nation that has its own identity, heritage, aims, objectives and destiny.

The hostility of the enemies of Islam, who have always been trying to uproot Islam as a whole, along with challenges of the age, have also helped to awaken and strengthen the sense of unity and brotherhood among Muslims. The Qur'anic and prophetic call for unity and brotherhood has always been echoed by great leading Islamic personalities of different schools of Islam.

With respect to beliefs, all Muslims share the belief in God and His unity, in the prophets in general and the mission of the Prophet Muhammad in particular which is to deliver the final message of God for human beings, along with the Resurrection, and the just and equal treatment of everybody on the Day of Judgement. These are the most fundamental principles of Islam which are agreed upon by all Muslims. An outside view about the extent of the agreement between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims is expressed in the following passage:

Since the Iranian Revolution everyone knows that Shi'ites are Muslims, like the Sunnis respecting the central dogma of the oneness of God, the same sacred writing (the Koran), the same Prophet Mohammad, the same belief in the resurrection followed by the last Judgement and the same fundamental obligations, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, and jihad (holy war).

These common points are more important than the differences: there is no longer any theoretical objection to a Shi'ite performing his prayers with a Sunni, or vice versa although many difficulties have existed in the past and in practice still remain. (Richard, p. 5; with abbreviation)

In what follows, we will proceed by outlining principles of religion or articles of faith. Some of the characteristic beliefs of the Shi'a will be examined thereafter. 1

# **Principles of religion**

## (1) Unity of God

The Islamic faith is formulated by the declaration of two facts, i.e., that there is no god (i.e., no one worthy of worship) but God (Allah) and that Muhammad is His messenger. (La Ilaha Illallah Muhammadur–Rasululla h). Muslims believe that Allah is one. He has no partner or children. He is the beginning and he is the end. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. The qur'an says that he is closer to man than his jugular vein, but he cannot be seen by eyes or encompassed by human intellect. In a supplication, Imam Ali says:

"Oh God, verily I ask Thee by Thy Name, in the name of Allah, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, O the Possessor of Majesty and Splendour, the Living, the Self-subsistent, the Eternal, there is no God other than Thee."

**Divine justice**: Among Divine attributes the Shi'a put a great emphasis on His justice. Of course, all Muslims believe that God is just (adil), in that God never commits any injustice towards His servants, and He never oppresses any one. This fact is clearly expressed by the Qur'an:

God is not in the least unjust to the servants. (3: 182 & 8:51 & 22: 10)

Your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants. (41:46)

I am not in the least unjust to the servants. (50:29)

Surely God does not do injustice to the weight of an atom. (4:40)

Surely God does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves. (10:44)2

In addition to the importance of Divine justice in itself, the other reason for the emphasis on this doctrine by the Shi'a, is that the Ash'arites, a group of Sunni theologians, believe that there is no objective criteria for morally right or wrong acts. Good is what God acts or whatever is commanded by God. Therefore, whatever God acts or commands is good and just by definition.

They believe that if God had asked us to tell lies telling lies would have become good and if God were to send the pious people to hell that would be just. Of course, they believe that God never does such acts, not because they are wrong in themselves, but because in practice He has said that those acts are wrong. Ash'arites also believe that human beings do not have free–will and it is God who creates their acts without them having any role therein. They are only receptacles of Divine acts.

The Shi'a and some other Sunni theologians, such as the Mu'tazilites, believe that good and bad, or right and wrong are objective, and that there are rational criteria for moral judgements. In other words, they believe in intrinsic goodness and badness. They believe that in reality there is a difference between,

say, justice and oppression and it is not arbitrary that God has commanded us to be just and not to oppress anyone even our enemies.

They also believe that human beings are free and responsible for their acts. Of course, the Mu'tazilites believe in tafwid, i.e. that God has handed over His authority over human voluntary acts to them and they have complete control over their acts. But the Shi'a believe that although determinism (jabr) is wrong and against Divine justice, and that human beings are free, their freedom and power is limited, and God has an overall authority upon their acts. This fact is expressed in the well–known formulation of Imam Ja'far al–Sadig:

"There is no compulsion (jabr), nor is there absolute delegation of power (tafwid), but the real position is between the two extremes."

Due to the ultimate importance of this subject for any value system, the Shi'a have always stressed on the issue of Divine justice and have frequently introduced it along with tawhid (Divine unity), prophethood, Imamate (Divine leadership) and Resurrection as one of the five Principles of the Faith (Usul al–Madhhab) in contrast to tawhid, prophethood and resurrection which count as the three Principles of the Religion (Usul al–Din), which are shared by all Muslims.

This emphasis on the issue of Divine justice has not just had its role in the theoretical aspect of Shi'ism. Indeed, the Shi'a see the issue of justice such as a fundamental aspect of Islam that they have always called for implementation of the principle of justice on a social scale as well. Shi'a movements that have taken place have always been calling for justice.

### (2) Prophethood

#### God has created mankind wisely and purposefully (51:56)

He has given man reason and free-will to find his way towards his perfection and happiness. He has also supplemented the human reason with Divine revelation. Through His wisdom and justice, He has not left any people or corner of the world without guidance; He has sent prophets to all nations to instruct and guide them. (10:47 and 16:36)

The first prophet was Adam and the last was Muhammad, the Seal of prophets (33:40). The Qur'an mentions twenty– five of the prophets and states that there were many more (40:78). Through the indications of hadiths, Muslims believe that there have been 124,000 prophets.

Amongst those mentioned in the Qur'an are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Jonah, Zachariah, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muhammad. Among them, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad had universal mission and brought new codes of law. They are called, "Ulu al-'Azm" meaning those of great determination.

Other than the Qur'an itself, the Qur'an speaks of four Heavenly books: the Book of Abraham (87:19); the Psalms of David (4:163 and 17:55); the Torah of Moses (2:87, 3:3 & 4, 6:91 & 154) and the Gospel of Jesus (5:46).

A Muslim must believe in all the Holy Books (2:4 & 285) and in all the prophets. (4:152). As we will see later, the Shi'a also believe that all the prophets were necessarily infallible and sinless prior to and during their mission.

The Shi'a, like other Muslims, have a great love for the Prophet Muhammad. They see in the Prophet Muhammad the perfect model of entire reliance on God, profound knowledge of God, ultimate devotion to God, sincere obedience to the Divine will, the noblest character, and compassion and mercy for all mankind.

It was not accidental that he was chosen by God to deliver His final and most perfect message for humanity. To be able to receive Divine revelation and be addressed by heaven requires one to possess a very high calibre, and furthermore to be able to receive the most perfect revelation requires indeed the highest calibre.

The Personal character and behaviour of the Prophet contributed greatly to the progress of Islam. He was known to be an honest, trustworthy and pious person from childhood. During his prophethood, he always lived by his principles and values. In the times of ease as well as difficulty, security as well as fear, peace as well as war, victory as well as defeat, he always manifested humility, justice and confidence.

He was so humble that he never admired himself, he never felt superior to others and he never lived a life of luxury. Both when he was alone and powerless as well as when he ruled the Arab peninsula and Muslims were whole-heartedly following him and taking every drop of his ablution water, he behaved the same.

He lived very simply and always with the people, especially the poor. He had no palace or court or guard. When he was sitting with his companions no one could distinguish him from others by considering his seat or clothes. It was only his words and spirituality that distinguished him from others.

He was so just that never ignored the rights of anyone, even his enemies. He exemplified in his life the Qur'anic command, "O you who believe! Be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety". (5:8)

Before battles, he always gave instructions to his soldiers not to harm women, children, old people and those who surrendered themselves, not to destroy farms and gardens, not to chase those who have escaped from the war front, and to be kind to their captives. Just before his death, he announced in the Mosque: "Whoever feels that I am in debt to him or I have not observed his rights, please come forward and claim his right".

Muslims cried, they were reminded of all the services that the Prophet had made for them and the troubles that he had undergone just to guide them. They knew that he never gave any priority to his own needs and never preferred his rest and convenience to others. Therefore, they uttered their statements of deep gratitude and respect to him.

But one man stood up and said: "You owe me something. Before one of the battles you were arranging the soldiers in a row and your stick hit me. Now, I want retaliation." Without any question the Prophet told one of his close companions to go to his home and bring the same stick and asked the man to retaliate and hit him back.

But the man said your stick hit the skin of my stomach. Therefore, the Prophet lifted his shirt so that he could hit the skin, when suddenly the man kissed the body of the prophet. Perhaps, the whole reason for doing this was so that he could kiss him out of respect and love.

Imamah: As mentioned earlier, the Shi'a believe in the institution of Imamah as a continuation of prophethood. In Arabic the term "Imam" literally means "leader". An Imam, in general terminology may be good or bad, and the extent of his leadership may be very broad such as leading a whole nation, or limited such as leading congregations in a mosque. However, in the Shi'i faith the Imam in its narrower sense, is the person who is in charge of all political and religious affairs of the Islamic nation.

More exactly, the Imam is the person who is appointed by God and introduced by the Prophet and then by each preceding Imam by explicit designation (na••) to lead the Muslim community, interpret and protect the religion and the law (shari 'ah), and guide the community in all affairs. The Imam is the Representative of God on earth (khali fat– Allah) and the successor of the Prophet. He must be sinless and possess divine knowledge of both the exoteric and the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an.

The Sunni View: Sunni Muslims use the term Imam as an equivalent to the term "Caliph" (khali fah). In Arabic the term "khalifah" means successor. The term has been used as a title for whoever took the power and ruled the Islamic state after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad.

A Caliph may be elected, or nominated by his predecessor, or selected by a committee, or may even acquire power through military force. A Caliph need not be sinless. Neither does he need to be superior to others in qualities, such as faith or knowledge.

The Twelver Shi'a who constitute the high majority of Shi'a Muslims believe that the Prophet was succeeded by twelve Imams.3 These are:

- 1. Imam Ali b. Abu Talib4 Martyred 40/659
- 2. Imam Hasan b. Ali Martyred 50/669
- 3. Imam Husayn b. Ali Martyred 61/680

- 4. Imam Ali b. Husayn Martyred 95/712
- 5. Imam Muhammad b. Ali Martyred 114/732.
- 6. Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad Martyred 148/765
- 7. Imam Musa b. Ja'far Martyred 183/799
- 8. Imam Ali b. Musa Martyred 203/817
- 9. Imam Muhammad b. Ali Martyred 220/835
- 10. Imam Ali b. Muhammad Martyred 254/868
- 11. Imam Hasan b. Ali Martyred 260/872
- 12. Imam al-Mahdi Born 255/868

The belief in a saviour is shared by most (if not all) religions. In Islam, the idea of a saviour is very deliberately presented in the doctrine of al-Mahdi (the Guided) who will uprise with Divine blessing and fill the earth with justice after having been filled with injustice and oppression. The idea of a saviour or a good end for the world is indicated in many Qur'anic verses and Islamic hadiths. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

We have written in the Psalms following the Reminder: "My honourable servants shall inherit the earth". (21:105)

Yet we wanted to endow those who were considered inferior on earth, and make them into leaders and make them [Our] heirs. (28:5)

The following are only some examples of hadiths on the same idea of the saviour narrated in both Sunni and Shi'a sources:

1. The Prophet said:

Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left(before the day of judgment), God will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of a person from my household who will be called by my name. 5

2. The Prophet also said:

**Al-Mahdi** is one of us, the members of the household (Ahlul-Bayt). God will prepare for him (his affairs) in one night.6

3. Furthermore, the Prophet said:

#### Al-Mahdi will be of my family, of the descendants of Fatimah.7

4. It is also narrated from Jabir b. Abdillah al-Ansari that he heard the Messenger of God saying:

A group of my nation will fight for the truth until near the Day of Judgment when Jesus son of Mary, will descend, and their leader will ask him to lead the prayer, but Jesus will decline, saying: "No, Verily, among you God has made leaders for others in order to honour this nation.8

Thus, al-Mahdi will have a universal mission starting from the Arab world. His name will be the same as the name of the Prophet Muhammad and he will be from the progeny of the Lady Fatimah. The Shi'a believe that he is the son of Imam Hasan al-'Askari. He was born in 255 (A.H). In the year 260 (A.H.) his occultation started.

He is still alive, but protected by God in the state of occultation till the preparations will be made for his reappearance. The same is believed by some Sunni scholars, but some other Sunni scholars believe that he has not yet been born. Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin in his A'yan al-Shi'ah has named thirteen examples of those Sunni scholars who have asserted that al-Mahdi is the son of Imam Hasan and already born, such as Muhammad b. Yousuf al-Kanji al- Shafi'i in his Al-Bayan fi Akhbar Sahib al-Zaman and Kifayat al-Talib fi Manaqib Ali b. Abi Talib; Nur al-Din Ali b. Muhammad al-Maliki in his Al-Fusul al-Muhimmah fi Ma'rifat al-A'immah and Ibn al-Jawzi in his well-known Tadhkirat al-Khawass.

# (3) Resurrection

The world will come to an end on the Day of the Resurrection (Qiyamah), the Day of Judgement. All men will be resurrected and presented before God Who will decide their individual fates according to their beliefs and deeds in this world. There will be rewards for the good, and punishments for the bad. (22:6–9 & 1–2; 3:185; 6:62). God will treat people with justice but the dominant factor in the administration of His Justice will be His Mercy (6:12).

#### Note:

Although all Muslims believe in the above principles of Islam, there is a slight difference in their articulation of beliefs and practices. Shi'a Muslims articulate the above beliefs as principles or roots of the religion (Usul al–Din) and the acts of worship to follow as practices or branches of the religion (Furu al–Din). The reason for such an articulation is that those beliefs are the most fundamental aspect of the religion and the criteria for being considered a Muslim.

However, the mandatory acts of worship are implications of being faithful, since genuine faith manifests itself in practices. Sunni Muslims usually present the declaration of Islam (kalimah) consisting of bearing witness that there is no god but God (Allah) and that Muhammad is His Messenger together with four acts of worship, i.e. the daily prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca and almsgiving as the Five Pillars of Faith.

They consider other acts of worship such as enjoining the good and prohibiting the bad, and struggle as obligatory acts, but not included amongst the Pillars of Faith.

- 1. One of the main's ources of the following disc ussions on the principles and practices of Islam is "An Introduction to Islam" by Bashir Rahim. For an online version of this article, see <a href="https://www.al-islam.org/begin/index.html">www.al-islam.org/begin/index.html</a> [1].
- 2. There are much more verses in the Qur'an affirming Divine justice.
- 3. There is a series of hadiths, in which the prophet mentioned that there would be twelve leaders after him. For example, Bukhari Reports that the Prophet said: "There will be twelve leaders (amir) after me." Then the narrator says that the Prophet said something that he could not hear. He asked his father, who too was present at the time, to tell him what the Prophet had said. His father said that the Prophet had said: "All these twelve leaders will be from the tribe of Quraysh." Muslim also reports this tradition, saying that the narrator of this tradition went with his father to the place where the Prophet was, and the Prophet said: "This religion will not end until there will have been twelve successors (khalifah)". Then the narrator says: "The Prophet said something I did not understand and I asked my father. He said, the Prophet said: 'They are all from Quraysh'."
- 4. As we saw earlier, Imam Ali was the Prophet's cousin and son-in- law (the husband of the Lady Fatimah). He was the first man who embraced Islam.
- 5. Sunan by al–Tirm idhi, Kitab al–Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 2156 & 2157 and Sunan by Abu Dawud, Kitab al–Mahdi, Sakhr serial no. 3733 & 3734. According to Abu Dawud, the hadith had the ending, "He will fill out the earth with justice as it will have been full of injustice and oppression. See also Musnad by Ahmad, Musnad al–'Asharah al–Mubashs harinbi al–Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 734 and Suna n by Ibn Maj ah, Kitab al– Jihad serial no. 2769.
- 6. Sunan by ibn Majah, Kitab al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 4075 and Musnad by Ahmad, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashshar in bi al- Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 610.
- 7. Sunan by Abu Dawud, Kitab al-Mahdi, Sakhr serial no. 3735. See also Sunan by Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 4076.
- 8. Sahih by Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Sakhr serial no. 225 and Musnad by Ahmad, Baqi Musnad al-Mukthirin, Sakhr serial no. 14193 & 14595.

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