

Foreword by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

Body and soul are the two components of human beings; one is the husk and the outer shell while the other is the kernel and an inner spirit. Both dimensions need nourishment as well as protection. Almighty God says, “[I swear] by the soul and Him who shaped it [perfectly], and then inspired it [the innate ability to understand] what is right and wrong for it! Indeed successful is he who purifies it and indeed failure is he who corrupts it.” (91:7–10) Each human being has the potential of soaring to the level higher than that of the angels and that top place in the pyramid of God’s creation can only be reached by developing one’s spiritual dimension.

Islam guides humans on both planes of their being: the ritual as well as the spiritual. The Prophet Muhammad instructed the people on simple matters of hygiene, such as cleanliness, *wudu'* and *ghusl*, as well as on loftier matters of spiritual ascension; he urged his followers to be physically strong to defend themselves in battlefields, and also charted for them the heavenly path of spiritual wayfaring.

After the death of the Prophet, regrettably the majority of Muslims were unable to combine the ritual and the spiritual dimensions in their religious life. They experimented with their faith in different ways: from the absolute freewill theory of Mu'tazilah to the disguised predetermination [*kasb* or *iktisab*, lit. “acquisition”] of Ash'arī, from literalism or “fundamentalism” of the Ḥanafīyah to the esoteric explanations of the extremists, from indiscriminate adherence to *sadūth* by the Mālikis to the personal opinions [*qiyyūs*] of Abū Ḥanīfah. Eventually, the Sunnī Muslims settled with the Ash'arī theology and the jurisprudence of their Four Imāms. However, the lack of spirituality in this strand of Islam gave rise to Sufism among the Sunnīs.

All along there was a minority which maintained, preserved, and spread the wholeness of Islamic teachings, and that was the Shī'ah strand of Islam headed by the Imāms from the family of the Prophet, the *ahl al-bayt*. **Shī'ism emerged as the natural product of Islam which combined within itself its ritual as well as the spiritual dimensions. It is a path whose theology, jurisprudence, and spirituality flow from the same spring, the *ahl al-bayt*.** And, therefore, you will observe that the Shī'ah very rarely felt the need to form distinct spiritual fraternities like the Ṣūfīs among the Sunnīs.

You will indeed find ‘*uraf*’ [scholars who specialize in gnosis] among the Shā‘ah but not *murshid* [spiritual masters] as found among the *shaykhs*.

A Shā‘ah Muslim refers for all his religious guidance--from theology to jurisprudence, from ritual or spiritual--to the *ahl al-bayt*. Even if he just follows the rituals with understanding and comprehension, he will be led to the spiritual path. For example, a simple recitation of the Du‘ā Kumayl, taught by Imām ‘Alī, elevates a Shā‘ah from the basic level of worshiping God out of fear [*khawf*] to the level of worshiping God out of love [*ubb*]. And so there is no wonder when we see that almost all the *shaykhs* fraternities trace their chain of masters back to one or the other Imām of *ahl al-bayt*.

In this background, it was indeed a pleasure to read and review the English translation of Professor Luis Alberto Vittor’s *Shiite Islam: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy* translated by Dr. John Andrew Morrow. The book has excellently captured the exoteric as well as the esoteric dimensions of Imāmate. I am sure that readers will come to realize that while Sunnism is more a legalistic aspect of Islam and *Shaykhsim* is more a spiritual, mystical dimension, **Shaykhsim is the true legacy of the complete Islam of the Prophet Muhammad** (peace be upon him and his progeny).

May Almighty Allāh bless the writer as well as the translator and commentator for their worthwhile contribution towards the understanding of Shā‘ah Islam!

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