Onto The Right Path

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Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi

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It is well known that people in the era of our Prophet (S) were attracted to Islam due to the truthfulness and righteousness of our Prophet (S). Muslims in general are supposed to be missionaries; they are supposed to uphold the best characters, but unfortunately, many nowadays forget that people do not know what the Islamic books teach and that people judge Islam by the actions of its followers. The present text is a collection of life experiences of people who adhered to the Right Path, a booklet full of lessons for those seeking the truth and the ones trying to discover how a Muslim should act.

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Compiler(s):

Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi [5]

Preface

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

Allah is the Guardian of those who believe; He brings them out of the darkness into the light. (***Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:257***)

Blessed are those who diligently search for the truth and find it. They distinguish light from darkness and right from wrong, and once they see the reality they hold fast to it. They do not go clinging to falsehood merely because that was the way of the preceding generations.

When their intention is pure and their search is sincere Allah helps them and "brings them out of the darkness into the light:' Obviously their coming to the right path demands deeper research, stronger will-power and intense love of truth.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had said to 'Ali (a.s.): "O 'Ali! If Allah guides someone through you to the right path, it is better for you than all the world and its riches:'

The best means of guidance is sublime morality: good character, honest dealings and polite behaviour. That is why Allah praises "the Truthful, the Trustworthy" Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in these words:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

And most surely you are on sublime morality. (***Surah Al-Qalam, 68:4***)

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

This is due to mercy from Allah that you are lenient to them; and had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you. (***Surah 'Al 'Imran, 3:159***)

There are methods of education and reasoning: convincing arguments which help remove cobwebs of doubts and frustrations.

It was the sublime morality and polite behaviour of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) which attracted hundreds of people and scores of Arab tribes to Islam. It was that high character of 'Ali (a.s.) which brought Yemenites into the fold of Islam in a very short time. It was honest dealings of Muslim traders which was the sole cause of the conversion of the people of Indonesia and Malaysia. It was the brotherly love of Idris which persuaded the Berbers to enter into Islam.

A reality which unfortunately is now almost forgotten is that in Islam every Muslim is supposed to be a missionary. Be he a trader or physician, a teacher or laborer, a peasant or judge, he has to be a perfect example of Islamic character and manners. People of other faiths usually do not know what the Islamic books teach. They only see how the Muslims behave; and through that observation they form their views about Islam.

Long ago we had published in our magazine, The Light, personal experiences of some brothers who had achieved salvation through Divine Mercy. It was felt that their narratives might prove helpful to other seekers of truth. That reason is as valid today as it was a few decades ago. Therefore, it was decided to collect some of those articles and bring them out in this small booklet.

I have written short notes describing the present situation of the writers.

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Our Lord! Accept from us; Surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing. (***Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:127***)

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi
Chief Missionary
Dar-es-Salaam
2lst Shaban, 1419
11th December, 1998

1. The First Shia of Guyana: Latif Ali

The relationship between me and Latif Ali of Guyana is like that between a father and his son. He has written in these articles how he became Shia. I would like to add here a few more details to complete the picture.

When his conversion to Shi'ism became known, the family of the girl who was betrothed to him, refused to give their daughter to a "kafir". He asked me to find him a practising Shia girl who would be ready to go to and live in Guyana. I requested some friends in Bombay and Gujarat to look for a suitable girl. After a few months he wrote to me that a Hindu girl (who was a teacher in the same school where Latif Ali was teaching) had accepted the true faith. He gave her the name "Zahra" and as usual sent her Declaration Form to me. I saw in the Form that Zahra was un-married. Immediately I wrote to them, suggesting that they should unite in marriage bond. They accepted. I sent authority letters to them to sign and give me authority to recite their nikkah. They sent the papers duly filled and I recited their nikkah formula in India. After receiving my telegram, they were officially married according to the law of the land.

When enough people joined him in the faith, he established The Pioneer Shia Muslim Association of Guyana.

There was a function in the school and Zahra was told to serve liquor to the guests. She refused and was sacked for insubordination. After a few months, Latif Ali was dismissed from service because of his Tablighi activities and travels. I wrote to them that it was a blessing in disguise, because now they were free to devote all their time in propagation of religion.

When my son visited Guyana, Latif Ali introduced him to the audience in these words:

"It is sufficient to say that our spiritual father is Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi father."

Once three active members of the Wahhabi movement in Trinidad were sent to Guyana to argue with Latif Ali. They too became Shia and it was the beginning of the new awakening in the Trinidad and Tobago.

Latif Ali two articles are copied here from a booklet, 'Why I became A Shia', published by late Shaykh Hasan Sa'id (Tehran) and The Right Path of Toronto (Canada) respectively.

Why I Became a Shia' by Latif Ali

Introduction

I was born in the year 1954 at Rose Hall Estate Range, Canje, Berbice in Guyana. I attended Cumberland Methodist School and qualified for free secondary education at Berbice High School.

In secondary school I studied religious knowledge (Christianity) among other subjects. My father went to the Masjid often but being only nine years of age when he died, I have not yet become sure as to his faith in Islam. My teachers were staunch Christians but my profound distaste for Christianity grew with their dogmatic attitude.

I never entertained any doubts about Islam. As a matter of fact, my faith was strengthened when I read John 16:12-15, where Jesus predicted the advent of Muhammad.

I examined other faiths but the retrogressive doctrine of reincarnation repelled me from many. Bahaism and Qadianism are such barefaced forgeries that even a youth like me shouldn't even consider them.

My biggest problem was, however, not the path but the method which I must employ to tread that path.

I wish to dedicate this reflection to the following brothers who have in various ways been instrumental in my selecting the method of Shiaism:

Br. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (Dar es Salaam)
Br. Mortaza Nouri (Iran)
Br. Ahmed Sheriff (Mombasa)
Sr. Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (Georgia)
Br. R.A. Juma (Houston)
Br. Hasan Said (Chehelsotun, Tehran)

Also my mother (Zorina Ali), My Brother (Nazir Ali), sister (Shanaz Santoo) and Neromanie Devi.

Chapter 1: Investigation

"Knowledge and wisdom are the lost properties of a believer. Take them back wherever you find them." (Imam Ali a.s.).

For four years I have served a Sunni association as General Secretary. I was zealous, for to me Sunnism was original Islam. But whenever the topic of Karbala arises our president limits us to the descriptive aspects and excludes the causes.

I checked the Encylopaedia Brittanica and found out that Sunnis fought Shias in the battle of Karbala. Still I was muddled for I had never before heard of "Shia"'. All we heard of was Umar the Great, Abu Bakr and Ayesha. Now I became suspicious about the belittling of the progeny of Muhammad (s.a.w.) by my fellow Sunnis. A Sunni clergyman once told me that Shias are people who claim that Ali should have

been the prophet. A Jesuit priest from India told me that that Sunni is a lie and that I would one day find the Shia faith the best in Islam.

I prayed to Allah for His guidance, for as a believer I am very keen on matters which might entail "*kufr*". It seemed providential, for another Sunni lent me a book called the "*Eternal Miracle*" published by A Group of the Muslim Brothers in Iran. He asked me to avoid correspondence with the said brothers, but he didn't say why. So I did correspond and received "*Islam*" by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi and "*Anecdotes of Pious Men*" together with a very brotherly letter.

I studied these booklets very carefully and the first thing I asked myself was: Why did the Sunnis lie about Shiaism? Do they want to deter our investigation because we may discover facts detrimental to their concoctions? These booklets. this letter, they were the dawn of what was to be a new phase of my life.

Chapter 2: Discovery

وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

"And it is only for us to deliver the Manifest Message:' (***Qur'an, 36:17***)

Brother Mortaza Nouri is a person whose dignity and depth of intellect has created an incredible impact. He wrote to me: "Acceptance of Shi'ite sect – I think, one should not be pressed to accept and follow the Ahlul–Bait of the Prophet. Our duty is only to convey the facts concerning true Islam to those ignorant (uninformed) Muslims. Then whoever likes truth will naturally adhere." Indeed the work carried out by A Group of Muslim Brothers in Tehran (now, World Organization For Islamic Services, WOFIS) in spreading true Islam is highly commendable. I am grateful for their valuable gifts of books.

Sectional Analysis: Islam, by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

I have yet to come upon a mind so keen on logic as Brother Rizvi. But what aspects of this unique booklet made me turn towards Shi'ism?

Justice of Allah

In this section I have been fully convinced of the Shia view as compared to the Sunni view. I was taught by my elders at Cumberland Jamaat that everything we do is done by God's will. Now, any wise thinker will question this concept. I did. It brought me into controversy with my fellow Sunnis. I was never at ease for I knew that ISLAM cannot (God forbid) harbour a wrong notion. The only answer was that the fault lies with the Sunni school of thought and their interpretation. Thus arose my second doubt about Sunnism. I will now quote my esteemed brother Rizvi and the quotation is more than proof and reason why the Shia standpoint is superior. No, not just superior but the "truth". Rizvi writes:

"Imam Musa al-Kazim said: "A man acquires ability when four conditions are fulfilled: (a) When there is nothing to hinder his plans; and his (b) health and (c) faculties (needed for that work) are up to the required standard; (d) God provides him the conditions of that work. When all these conditions are fulfilled a man becomes able to act according to his own free will.' When asked about an example, he said: "Let us suppose that there is a man, without any hindrance, of good health and strength, yet he cannot commit adultery unless he finds a woman. When (the 4th condition is fulfilled, and) he gets a woman, then it is upto him to choose one of the two alternatives - either he controls his evil emotions and saves himself as Joseph did; or, on the other hand, commits adultery. If he protects himself from that sin, it will not be by compulsion of Allah (as some people think), and if he commits the sin, it does not mean that he was above the power of Allah (as others think)."

My beloved teacher Rizvi continues: "According to our point of view, if anyone believes in predestination, he cannot, at the same time, believe in the Day of Judgement, because if Allah decrees every act which is done by our hands, then it would be gross injustice to inflict punishment upon us for those sins and evils which were pre-destined by Allah Himself."

Now I ask my dear non-Shi'ite Muslim readers a humble question: Which view is "truth"?

Chapter 3: The Question of the Caliphate

I am very grateful to the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania whose Chief Missionary, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, once more enlightened me on the subject of the "Imamat" (proper). I also acknowledge with thanks the writers who I will time and again quote.

"The question of the Imamat and Caliphate has ripped the Muslim community asunder and has affected the thinking and philosophy of the different groups so tremendously that even the belief in God and the prophets could not escape from this divergence of views." (Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi).

The popular belief of Sunnis and their splinter factions is that Abu Bakr was *appointed* Caliph or successor to Muhammad. Some grant that he was elected. Now, if we should free ourselves from all sectarian bias and make an analytical journey through history, we shall see how those who usually called themselves the champions of Islam were actually the authors of our present decadence and misfortunes as Muslims.

Rizvi writes:
"Imamat" literally means to 'lead', 'Imam' means 'Leader'.

"In Islamic terminology, 'Imamat' means 'absolute command of Muslims in all religious and secular affairs, in succession to the Prophet:

'Imam' means 'the man who, in succession to the Prophet, has the right to the absolute command of the Muslims in all religious and secular affairs.'

The word 'man' signifies that a woman cannot be Caliph (Imam).
(Quoted from *"Imamat"* by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi).

Shias accept Ali as the first Imam or successor of the Prophet, and their acceptance is not based on personal desire but on compliance with the divine will.

He goes on:
"When one bears in mind the type of position several questions arise in this respect, the most weighty ones are:

(I) Is it upon God to appoint a prophet's successor or is it the duty of the 'Ummah' to appoint whomever they please?

(2) In the latter case, did God or the Prophet place in the hands of the 'Ummah' any systematic code containing rules and procedure for the appointment of a successor, or did the 'Ummah' by their unanimous consent before appointing a caliph, prepare a set of rules to which they adhered (subsequently), or did the 'Ummah' act according to their will (what they thought expedient) at the time and according to the opportunity at their disposal? Had they the right to act as they did?

(3) Does reason and Divine Law demand the existence of any qualifications and conditions for an Imam and Caliph? If so, what are they?

(4) Whether the Prophet of Islam appointed anyone as his Caliph and successor or not? If he did so, who was it? If not, why?

(5) After the Prophet's death, who was recognised to be his Caliph and whether the qualifications necessary for a caliph existed in him or not?" (Quoted from "Imamat").

For knowledgeable readers the questions have already been answered. For some the arguments to come will suffice.

Ponder the following Ayats of the Qur'an:

وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ ۗ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ

"***And Thy Lord creates what He wills and chooses: they have no right to choose:***" (***28:68***)

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

"***Verily, I am about to make a Caliph on earth***." (***2:30***)

يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ

"***O Dawood! Verily, We have made thee Caliph on earth.***" (***38:26***)

قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

"***I am about to make thee an Imam to mankind.***" (***2:124***) (About Hazrat Ibrahim)

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا

"***And We made them Imams who were to guide by Our command***:' (***21:73***)

Question: who appoints? Answer: Certainly Allah!
Now let us look at the Declaration at Ghadeer Khum.

It is reported that on returning from the Hajjat-ul-Wida' (Farewell Pilgrimage) the Prophet stopped at a place called Ghadeer Khum and made a public declaration and reminder. He declared Ali to be his successor. The traditions are so numerous that no doubt can be entertained about its authenticity. Even compilers held in esteem by the Sunnis have mentioned it. Surprisingly Umar and Abu Bakr were very early to congratulate Ali, and yet their ostentatious behavior at a later stage were of fantastic magnitude.

Can we for one moment imagine that a Prophet whom the Qur'an exalts as the "Best Model" would leave his 'Ummah' in doubt as to who should be his successor?

Now let us suppose the 'Ummah' was in doubt; was there anyone fitter than Ali?

Traditions about Ali: (Y.N. Laljee – *"Ali the Magnificent*"),

1. He was of the noblest birth – both mother and father were Hashimites.

2. He was the only person born in Kaaba.

3. He was the only divinely authorised witness and attestor that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (***Surah Raad, Verse 43; Surah Hud, Verse 17; and Surah Saba, Verse 6***).

4. He was the first man to offer prayer ('Namaz') after the Holy Prophet.

5. He was the only one to offer assistance to the Prophet on the occasion of Dawat-e-Asheera.

6. Ali was the only one in the 'Ummah' (after Muhammad) inspired with Divine secrets.

7. He was first to compile and codify the Qur'an.

8. He was called the "brother" of Muhammad.

9. Ali was the only one named to bathe the Prophet's body after his death.

10. He did not flee any battlefield. (All three caliphs did!).

11. When the Prophet was engaged in battle he was the standard bearer; when not, he was always the commander.

12. He was the great warrior who succeeded in killing all his adversaries.

13. It was Ali who caught and conquered pagan Jinns. Many of whom accepted Islam.

14. Ali was designated "Aaron of the second Moses."

15. Ali is the one who (long before the creation of the universe) came into being along with the Holy Prophet, each of them being a fragment of the same 'Noor'; Muhammad having Prophethood and Ali the 'vilayat'.

16. Ali while in the stage of 'Noor' was the Divine teacher of Gabriel.

17. Ali is the head of Ahle-Tariqah and Sufis.

18. Only Ali and the Prophet could enter Masjid under the obligation of a bath.

19. Like the Holy Prophet, Ali was bestowed upon miracles; for example, On two occasions he made the sun come back when it had already set.

20. From Sahnan Gafari's "Shia'ism"

a)If the 'Ummah' wanted one with the highest knowledge the Prophet said: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate."
b)Did they want the most judicious? -- The Prophet said: "The most judicious among you is Ali."
c)Did they want the bravest? -- Who was and is known as Lion of God? (Ali! Ali!).
d)Did they want the nearest one to Muhammad? -- The prophet said "I and Ali are of the same Divine light."

Now, in view of all the facts my Shia brethren have enabled me to enlist, the only argument the Guyanese Sunni erudites can offer me is that Abu Bakr (r.a) was asked to lead prayers in preference to Ali (r.a). But we all know that the Prophet (s.a.w) though ailing, was aided by the sons of Abbas Ibn Abdul Muttalib to perform that prayer. Now, even if Abu Bakr did lead that prayer, did Muhammad (s.a.w.) read behind him?

Now, if in the beginning the caliphate created a rift between the Muslims, we ought to follow only the

justifiable side. The Shias support Ali and his rightful heirs, and so with all these glaring eye openers I whole heartedly accepted the Shia faith. I pray to Allah and hope that people will likewise accept truth when they see it. Remember, I said I was a secretary of a Sunni Association. I may have lost my prestige in worldly affairs, but with Allah, Muhammad (s.a.w.), Ali (r.a.) and the Ahlul Bait I feel an eminence in my entire soul which is enough. Lift our banner high, O Youths of Shiaism! May Imame-Asr make his return soon! Allahomma Ameen!

Chapter 4: Our Past

Our past cannot be neglected because just as our future is and will be the outcome of our present, our present is the outcome of the past. Therefore the men who handled affairs in our past need close scrutiny. According to Islamic history, corruption crept into the Islamic State; our Master and Imam Ali epitomised the situation in the following words: "Thus, the situation was brought to such a pitch that whosoever took up the reins of state was in the unhappy predicament of riding an untrained and refractory she-camel; if desiring to keep the animal under control he pulled the bridle hard, he would inflict a wound on its nostrils, and if he allowed it free run, the beast would dash itself and its rider to destruction and death."

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) had predicted that if the Muslims failed to accept Ali they would disintegrate. Look at what happened to the Muslim Empire. Look how many Muslim states we have and yet while Israel continues to spill Muslim blood they are more involved in internal conflicts. Yet these blind men with good eyes will not see! It is a disgrace to us, to hear what the so-called Muslim leaders do at Mayfair in England.

One might well ask where the champions of Islam were when our beloved Husain (r.a.) lay butchered at Karbala. Yes, they were on the other side. They were bought by the despotic rulers. Once you deviate no one knows how far it may go. How did a debauchee like Yazid became caliph? Where was the Muslim conscience?

Chapter 5: The Man-Made Imams

As a youth I dared not challenge the juristic ability of Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Ibn Hanbal and Malik, but what I ask is how can we be asked to follow these people who lack unanimity and conformity? Each of his had their own interpretations. Which was right? At least all cannot be right. Besides, Abu Hanifa was born in 80 A.H, Imam Shafi'i 150 A.H. Malik 93 A.H. and Ibn Hanbal 164 A.H. Now who were the Muslims following in *fiqh* before 80 A.H? (Note: Abu Hanifa didn't start his *fiqh* on day one of his life.)

Sunnis often tell us that their books were earlier than Shia traditions. Now, apart from this being a lie, their despots used to suppress the Shias, how could they (the Shias) publish? Thus they (the Shias) had their secret manuscripts. They hadn't the privileges like Bukhari, a biased Sheikh with vested interest!

Chapter 6: Application and Conclusion

As a Shia I find that my complete lifestyle has changed. I feel illuminated. I sleep feeling that Imam-e-Asr may return any moment and hence I must be prepared. It is this attitude of preparedness which enables a Shia to be ever spiritually alert.

Now when I read my Namaz-e-Shab and I mention the names of the 'Masoomeen' I feel a tremor in me. I know from these experiences that Shiaism is the only method of approach to Islam. I feel happy to be a Shia and that my former aimless wandering has now become a blissful journey to a promised place - Jannat (Inshallah).

I wish to conclude with the echoing of a Khutba from Nahjul Balagha and a few verses addressed to Muhammad (s.a.w.) and Imam Ali (a.s.).

"O people! Do not feel nervous and do not get disappointed if you find very few people following the path of truth and salvation; because the majority of men are wild after worldly pleasures, a world where after a lengthy and tantalising expectation, little time is allowed for enjoyments, which will then be followed by very long periods of punishments and sufferings.

"However different may be your modes of activities and way of doing things, the basic principles of good and evil gather men under certain categories. You know there was only one man who killed the camel of the Prophet Salih, but the whole nation had to suffer because they all approved of the action."

We are indeed in such a time and I exhort my fellow young Shias who live in Muslim states and can benefit from books in Arabic, to keep our standard up. You are our future hope. You are lucky to have institutions where you may study Islam in your country. We in the West are unfortunate. Never lose faith, my brothers and sisters. The time is coming. Shias will not be pushed around anymore. So long as we board the Ark of Ahlul Bait we will be saved from the deluge of social and moral decadence which is day by day encompassing the earth. Let us all lift our hands and pray for the return of Imam Sahebuz-Zaman:

For My Imam (Ali) And The Last Prophet (Muhammad (S.A.W)):

O man of morals sublime to the distant land we heard your call
The rancorous crusaders tried but failed--
In bid to mar your sacred fame.
For even now in Christendom
In the very heart of Christendom--
A muazin echoes your name.
Thy valiant cousin did the Fort of Khaibar take.
His noble deeds did but history make.
Sher--e-Khuda!

Asad-Ullah!

A thousand years may have gone by
Yet thy faithful Shias with Ya Muhammad, Ya Ali will ever cry.

(From the booklet, *"Why I became A Shia"*, Published by Shaykh Hasan Sa'id, Tehran.)

History of Shi'ism in Guyana

A Special Report by The Pioneer Shia Muslim Association of Guyana.

Before 1972, there was no Shi'a in Guyana or at least no one knew of any. Speculations that there might have been Shi'as among the indentured labourers from northern provinces of India are not dismissed; but it is hard to accept that they might have been assimilated or due to dissimulation not detected. To assume that a detectable Shi'a influence on traditional Sunnis originated here does not negate that it could have occurred even before the Sunnis left India and migrated to this land. Rather this is more likely as this influence is traced to *'azadari* which any Shi'a could tell you what an influence that is.

That a corrupt form of Ta'zia existed in Guyana is undeniable but the persistent trend in Trinidad betrays any semblance to sanctity of origin; it rather smacks of outright mockery by detractors rather than degeneration from the well-meaning.

It is Allah's grace and infinite mercy that what would be developed and established as institutional Shi'ism came to Guyana. No one here claims status but what else can it be but providential that one stumbles upon a booklet and curiosity leads him to further research and hence the gradual unfolding of the School of Truth.

A name every Guyanese Shi'a would remember and bequeath to posterity is the noble son of Truth: 'Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi.

If there is someone who knows the art of conveying the message of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) to those thirsty for truth it is this person. His logical-proof mind set and yet simple expression helped us Shi'as in Guyana realise that we were groping in the dark. He focussed the rays of truth in our direction and the deception which clouded our hearts as the Umayyad legacy in a Sunni milieu vanished.

Latif Ali became Shi'a in 1972 and was immediately fired by the zeal of recognition of truth set out to enlighten all the lanes of darkness which were traditionally fed by the notions of what is Shi'ism. 'Allamah Rizvi the tireless teacher by correspondence, and Latif Ali the disseminator. It is not enough to thank the Sayyid but in du'as here he must always be remembered.

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The Pioneer Shi'a Muslim Association of Guyana (PSMG) established in 1972 is hence the first Shi'a institution in Guyana. It would be very rare to find any Shi'a in Guyana who has not been converted by this institution or by one of its converts.

From its inception, the Pioneer Shi'a Muslim Association established a Madrassa for kids. It also published two newsletters: *an-Naba* for adults, and *al-Qalam* for madrassa children. All the historical and religious occasions (wiladats, wafat/shahadats of the Prophet and the Imams) are commemorated and celebrated accordingly.

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The noble guidance of the martyr, Sayyid Mahdi al-Hakim (the first Secretary General of WABIL) is acknowledged for the support extended by Dr. Khalil Tabatabai and Huijatul Islam Syed Muhammad al-Moosawi. Br. Ghulam Sajan continues to be a source of inspiration.

Among the Sayyids who have visited us, we remember with love, Maulana Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi and Maulana Syed Baqri.

May Allah grant us the cognition that Imam-e-Zaman is watching over us.

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(The Right Path, Toronto (Canada)
April - June, 1997)

2. Hussein Amin Schwartze (Germany)

In 1977, when he first made contact with us, he called himself Omar Amin Szwarc. He joined the Missions Islamic Correspondence Course, and with his proficiency in Arabic and English, in addition to the Polish and German languages, he continued his studies of Islam; until he acquired a deep knowledge of various Islamic subjects. Sometime later he changed his name to Hussein Amin Schwartze.

He is of German origin, and he felt suffocated in the communist Poland which had put insurmountable restrictions on foreign travel. Finally when communism began crumbling in that country, he went to Nuremberg which was former West Germany.

He regularly writes letters to us.

How I Found The Right Path (By Hussein Amin Schwartze)

The following is a combination of Mr. Hussein Amin Schwartze's two letters. The first one was written from Lodz (Poland) in 1977, and the latest one is from Nuremberg (Germany) in October, 1998.

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Before going any further, I would like to introduce myself to you.

My official name is Rajuhold Heuryk Szwarc and my adopted Muslim name is Omar Amin. I am 31 years old (in 1977). I became a Muslim in 1962 when I was only 17 years old. I was brought up a Protestant, but from a very early age I had doubt in the Christian teachings. I regularly attended the church every Sunday. However, the services and ceremonies seemed to be only theatrical acts. I always had a strong faith in God, but I could not find Him in the church. I was thirsty for God, the only Creator and Sustainer of all mankind. I was searching for the truth in other religions such as Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism, yet no one could give me the right direction towards the truth. During those days, fortunately, I came across a book on Islam. I found that only Islam teaches the perfect Unity of God. The Shahada: found in that book exerted a miraculous influence upon my God-searching soul. Since then I was determined to know much more about Islam.

In Lodz, there were a number of Muslim students from Muslim countries. I made contact with them and asked them to tell me about Islam. I am sorry to say that many of them did not prove themselves sincere in practicing their faith after arriving in a nonMuslim country. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to meet some really good Muslims who taught me about Islam and how to say prayers.

Thus, knowing Islam better, I convinced myself that I found the God I was searching for. That is, Allah, the only God, and I also found the truth through His teachings revealed upon His last Messenger, Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w).

At that time I came to know Sheikh Omar Al-Muhtady Schuberth of Germany, who had been at that time the President of the Islamic Community at Hamburg. Although he sent some pamphlets: "Islam" by Maulana S. Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, "The Living Imam': "Muharram': "God of Islam" by Sayed Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, he did not write me that he was a Shia Ithna-'Ashari. Knowing only Sunni Muslim students in Lodz, I became a Sunni.

Around 1976 I came to know a Muslim brother, Mr. Yousuf Safar Abol Muhammad Hasan, a student from Kuwait with whom I had long talks on the teachings of Shia Ithna-asheri. One of the topics had been the question of the succession in leading the Islamic community after the death of the last Messenger of Allah (s.a.w). He explained to me that just as the Messenger of Allah Muhammad (s.a.w) himself had been infallible so must also his successors. And he drew my attention to the words of Allah Taala:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

"***Verily Allah intends to keep from you*** (***every kind of***) ***uncleanness, O you the People of the House, and purify you*** (***with***) ***a thorough purification "*** (***33:33***).

He also quoted the tradition according to which the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) said among other things in the sermon at Ghadir Khum; " ...I feel that I am going to be recalled and I have to return. I am leaving with you two Weighty Things. One of them is greater than the other –– the Book of Allah the Exalted, and my Progeny, who are my Ahl al–Bayt. See how you behave towards them after me. These two will not part from each other till they both reach me at the pool of Kawthar". I had no alternative but to accept these proofs of the Truth of the teachings of Shia Ithna–asheri faith and thus I became Shia Ithna–asheri. Alhamduli–llah.

That brother from Kuwait taught me also how to say prayers in accordance with the Shia way. *Thus, I became the first and the only Shia Muslim in Poland.*

In June, 1974 C.E. I finished Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw from where I obtained my M.A.

From your pamphlet *"Fast"* by Maulana S. Saeed Akhtar Rizvi I learnt that you run Islamic Correspondence Courses for Primary and Secondary levels. I would like to join such Courses Of Islam as propounded by Shia Ithna–'Asheri sect.

(The Light, April, 1977)

3. A Seeker Of Truth Shamim H.M. Rajpar (U.S.A.)

Miss Roberta J. Hartar of the U.S.A was disenchanted with Christian inconsistency of believing in one God, who at the same time is three persons. In her search for truth she was attracted to Islam, because it is not simply a dogma, but a total way of life. In the following article she tells the story of her spiritual journey.

After conversion she took the name 'Shamim', and was married to Mr. Haidarali M. Rajpar. They have settled in the USA.

I Followed The Light Of Allah

Ms. Shamim H.M. Rajpar

Often certain phrases can make such an impression on our minds that they give us the necessary impetus to search for the deeper and greater meaning behind them. I was born in a Christian home where worship was a beautiful matter of love for God, Christ and what were regarded as the teachings of the church. Such love must never be scorned, especially when it serves as the guiding force in holding the family and community together. What better concept could act as the cement for holding such structures together?

Unfortunately, when one looks more closely at this guiding principle it is quickly discovered that much of it is based on emotion and a willingness (through faith) to overlook or accept certain inconsistencies which are inherent in the very basis of that principle. The most glaring of these especially to a Muslim, is the confirmation; on one hand God is one and eternal, then on the other He has divided himself into a trinity the parts of which are to be worshipped as though they were still "One God."

I began at a very early age to need an in-depth study of this concept. Even before much of a semblance of intellectual development had come to me, I began to explore the tenets of one Christian sect after another. None of them satisfied my demands. After many years of searching, I finally came to the conclusion that organized religion was not necessary. All that a man needed was to have faith in God, love Him, and to try to lead a good life. At this point I chose as my "capsule of truth" and guiding principle a quotation I had read somewhere which had left a very deep impression on me:

"A man's daily life is his example and his religion."

Now, I was certain that I was all set with my own "religion". I was even certain that I had gone beyond the pale of agnosticism. I should lead what I thought was a good life. I would love God, love my fellowmen, and try to avoid any harm to them because of my actions.

It was not long before the central weakness of this system of thought became clear to me. How could I have the power to judge what the makeup of a good life would be? Most thinking men before me had tried and many of the great among them had been successful in discovering at least certain requisites of proper living. But none of them, to my way of thinking, had produced a complete code of behaviour which touched on each and every aspect of man's dealings with other men and with his God. Others, who truly believed in their "discoveries" established systems purely based on evil and motivated by their own base desires. The Maruquis de Sade is one notable example.

I realized that I needed some infallible guide to show me the right way and that if it was completely free from injustice and selfish motives, it could not be the sole product of men alone. It must come from an Eternal God who was Justice and Selflessness and who, because of his eternity of knowing past present

and future, would be able to make pronouncements that would stand for all times, peoples, and places.

It was at this point that the study of the development of Islam was introduced into my history program. Admittedly, much of this study was prejudiced in favour of the West and to the detriment of Islam. And as a history course, greatest emphasis was put on political developments with religion being largely reduced to footnotes. But truth has a way of winning and again I was struck by another phrase which led me to search for its deeper meaning:

"Islam is not simply a religion, it is a total way of life."

I distinctly remember being bothered and made restless by these words. Something in the center of my being told me that they must not be ignored and that they demanded full attention. I began to read voraciously but didn't achieve any real understanding or the satisfaction. So I decided to live in a Muslim country and applied for a contract in North Africa where I would have the opportunity of living in a total Muslim atmosphere. Perhaps in the end, it was better for me that I was placed in East Africa where I could experience Islam as a living force in a larger community with other world religions. I was deeply moved when I witnessed the tolerance and respect which my new Muslim brothers accorded to these other groups. Here was a true example of teaching put into practice. My former church had also propounded such principles, but in practice fell far short of their achievement.

But my search for the true faith and the discovery of how God intended us to spend our lives still continued. I watched Muslims in their daily lives but since I believed that a religion must not be judged simply on the practices of its followers but rather on its teachings, I began to read again; this time on the various sects of Islam. I was now convinced that Islam was the proper way of life but sought to understand it fully.

My eventual decision to accept the Shia Ithna–'ashari belief as the true faith and as the right way of life was based primarily on two doctrines to which it ascribes:

The first of these was that God has given us free will. This beautiful yet awesome gift has made it incumbent upon us to accept true responsibility for all our thoughts and deeds. Without this framework of free will and the responsibility that attends it, the attempt to know God's will and to follow it would have little real meaning. I found it difficult to believe that a just God would arbitrarily damn individuals without first having given them a fair chance to prove themselves.

Since my whole search in finding the right faith was motivated by a desire to know better what God's intentions for our lives were, I examined very closely the way different groups had obtained their corpus of law on how we should guide our lives. Again, I turned to the Shia Ithna 'ashari faith as being the one to have arrived at this truth in the proper way. I had long ago decided against the possibility of man alone being capable of erecting a system for himself. My decision that such a system must be built on the guidance of God was not a new one. Even in the question of which men will lead us in religious matters in this world, the final decision must belong to God. It is impossible for us to choose a leader

without considering how he will further our own interests; and it is impossible for us to know that our own interests will not be in serious conflict with those of others.

I accepted the Shia Ithna-'ashari faith because I firmly believe that God has sent us the Holy Prophet to reveal His will to us and that He further sent us our twelve precious Imams so that we should better understand and know His will as revealed in the Holy Qur'an. This is not the province of ordinary men to decide for themselves the agents of God. I accepted the Shia Ithna-'ashari faith so that I might finally begin my real search -- to learn the true way God has intended us to lead our lives.

(The Light, Dec. 1970)

4. Dhikiri U. M. Kiondo Dar-es-Salaam

Mr. Dhikiri Kiondo was born in 1946, at Kwemiinu village (District Lushoto, Tanga Region, Tanzania). His grandfather was the traditional Chief of the Wakilindi clan of the Wasambaa tribe. His father was a farmer and a staunch Muslim of Sunni faith. He did not like to send his only son to any school as he was afraid that his son would be converted to Christianity (as was common in those days). As a result, he started his education late. He was enrolled in a Native Administration School and then was sent to a Quranic school, which he left in 1954 owing to bad health; and then his father died and he could not go back to school.

In 1955, he was enrolled in a Mission school and completed his Primary (in 1958), Middle (in 1962) and Secondary education at various school run by U.M.C.A (in 1966). One of his subjects was Bible knowledge. He was selected for Teachers Training Course at Butimba T.T. College, Mwanza (1967-68).

It was from Butimba that he wrote his first letter to us, asking 24 questions which showed that he was an intelligent youth eager to learn the truth about Islam; and also that he was completely in darkness about Shi'ism. I replied to him and the correspondence continued.

In 1969, he was employed as a teacher in Lushoto District, and at the end of that year I invited him to embrace the Shia faith which he gladly did.

We first met in August 1970, when I went to see him at National Service camp at Oljoro, near Arusha. On the third day he came to Arusha where he was introduced to Haji Ali Mohamed Jaffer Sheriff and Haji Ahmad Hussein Sheriff.

In August 1973, he was sent by the Mission to Iran to study under the patronage of 'Group of Muslim Brothers', Tehran, from where he returned in September 1974. In February 1975, he resigned his teaching post to become the Administrative Secretary of this Mission. He then became Editor of the

Mission bi-monthly Swahili magazine, Sauti Ya Bilal; and translated many of my books into Swahili.

He remained with the Mission for nearly 10 years. During that time he established Tanzania Ithna-'asheri Community (TIC), and held its first meeting in the Mission Husainiyah; with increase in TIC activities, he resigned from the Mission in 1994 and is now engaged in TIC activities.

I Followed the Light Of Allah

Dhikiri Umari Mohammad Kiondo

My acceptance of Shi'ism is wonderful and was due to Allah's Guidance and Mercy. I had never heard of Shi'ism before, although I had been an active Quranic pupil for at least 6 years.

I was schooling in one of the Missionary schools in Tanzania. In a history lesson my teacher (who was very much accustomed to mocking the Muslim pupils in the class) said, "Muslims in East Africa are of two 'divisions', Sunnis and Shias. Dhikiri, did you know this before?"

"No Sir. What I know is that I am a Sunni", I shyly replied!

It was a shame to me. A Muslim who doesn't know important things about Islam. For the first time I had heard the word "Shia." The teacher explained that these people "Shias" oppose the majority of the Muslims. This sentence remained in my thoughts for 8years.

Whenever I asked my religious leaders about it, no clear answer was given. I was just told, "Those people are against the Qur'an. God's Messenger had no heir" which seemed to be their only crammed point of argument to this question.

At last I came to believe that the cause of difference was difficult for me to understand.

Again, another "Force" made me find more about other Muslims sects. It was the question of the responsibility of our actions. I was taught that if a person does something good or evil, it is because Allah guided him to do so. If this is the case then, it means that Allah Himself has created two groups of people: one for paradise and another for hell. It did not seem justice to me.

In February 1968, I came into contact with an African Shia Sheikh. I tried to question him about the question of "Will of God."

From that point, the said Sheikh introduced Shi'ism into my mind.

In March 1968, I sent many questions to the Shia-Ithna-asheri Council of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam. The questions were passed to Maulana S.S. Akhtar Rizvi, who since then has been answering my questions with much care, politeness and humbleness.

Maulana S.S. Akhtar Rizvi opened my eyes. I found that all my doubts were easily removed through the Shia doctrines. I felt that the way to the peace of mind was the way of Shi'ism.

We (my wife and I) gradually were convinced of the truth of Shi'ism. But it was so difficult to go against the ancestral beliefs.

I was not sure whether I was a Muslim, since I still was keeping my eyes closed, in spite of Allah's Guidance. I knew I worshipped none except Him, nor did I associate anything with Him. But I was perturbed because I knew that my persistence in going against Allah's Guidance would ruin me.

At last, my wife and I decided to follow the words and guidance of Allah. We accepted Shi'ism.

I thank Allah for His True Guidance and Mercy.

May He Reward anyone who has given or is giving to give me a helping hand to acquire true Islamic knowledge. May He glorify Islam. May He glorify Shi'ism all over the world. May He give Unity to All Muslims. May He accept our Dua and Tauba. May He bless His Messenger Muhammad (s.a.w.), his Umamah, his friends and his Ahlul Bait, with peace and give them plenty of Heavenly Rewards. Amen.

(The Light, Aug. 1970)

5. Yusuf Ibrahim Chuphi Mackinnon, Kenya

When Chief Joseph N'galaa Chuphi of Mackinnon entered into the fold of Shi'ism, it was entirely because of the good influence which the religiosity and good behaviour of Kassamali Gulamhussein and his brothers, Mohammadhussein and Mohammadali, had on the Chief who was in continuous business contact with them. He describes this aspect in his article. When .finally he decided to become Muslim, a group of the Shia leaders from Mombasa (consisting of Mohsin A.M Jaffer (Hon. Secretary, Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya), Mulla Abdur Rasul H. Khaki, Mohammad Jaffer K. Gulamhussein, Gulamabbas H. Janmohamed and Late Sayyid Mohammad Mahdi Shustari (Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania) went to Mackinnon Road where the Chief with 23 of his family members entered into the true faith. It was on 7th October, 1972.

The Chief name was changed to Yusuf Ibrahim Chuphi.

During coming months, hundreds of the Duruma tribe followed suit.

A mosque, a primary school, a boarding house and a madrasa were built in record time, thanks to the generosity of M/S Kassamali Gulamhussein.

Now the Chief is retired (*Chiefship in Kenya is a government post.*) *Now he is a Councillor for a wider area.*

I Followed The Light Of Allah

Yusuf Ibrahim Chuphi

My original name was Joseph N'galaa Chuphi.

I am the Chief of Samburu district in Kenya (East Africa), known as Mackinnon, about 90 kilometers from Mombasa. The population of this village is about 500 people. We have been followers of Christian religion of Catholic sect.

During the last four or five years, I have been in touch with the family members of M/S. Kassamali Ghulamhusein of Mombasa. I have been in close touch with them since they have been regularly coming to my district on business. I have often seen them disengaging themselves from business work in the afternoons and evenings to say prayers and remember God. I have learnt from them that in Islam, drinking liquor is strictly prohibited; whereas it is permitted in Christianity and even the Christian priests freely enter bars and drink heavily in the name of religion. Moreover, it is a strict practice in our district as well as other areas that meat would be sold and bought only from the cattle slaughtered by the Muslims according to Islamic rituals.

All these things about Islam have deeply impressed me and day by day I became attracted towards this religion. I told my above named friends that I would like to be converted to Islam and accept that faith; but they advised me not to be hasty in this matter. When I was deeply attracted to Islam and fully convinced of its truth, I made my firm decision. Finally on Saturday 7th October, 1972, together with my 23 family members whole heartedly, and without any worldly temptation, we embraced Islam and recited the holy Kalemah, *La Ilaha Illallah, Muhammadur Rasoolullah, Aliyun Waliyullah,* in presence of the religious representatives of Bilal Muslim Mission.

Since then a further forty members of my family and relatives have willingly joined me, and I am confident that many more members of my tribe will join us as they come to know of the truth of this faith.

We are already learning to say our daily prayers and are fasting during this holy month of Ramadhan.

On bearing that I have changed my religion, some of my people came to me to find out the reasons. I explained to them the truth of Islam and they were satisfied. I told them that this worldly life is useless if we do not recognize and follow the right path of God. What is the use of our saying that God will help us if we were faced with any hardship, when we do not understand Him properly and do not remember Him and do not find out what He wants us to do in this world.

As we did not wish to become Muslims in name only, we asked for a teacher. We are grateful to Bilal

Muslim Mission who promptly came to our help by posting a religious teacher in my village. I am hoping to find a suitable piece of land in our village and build a mosque and a school there. I am also confident to convince all my people that Islam is the true religion.

(The Light, Dec, 1972)

6. Mahmud Rashid Kishunga Dar-es-Salaam

Mahmud Rashid Kishunga was a motor mechanic from West Lake Region of Tanzania. In 1965, he was converted to Shi'ism by Sayyid Intizar Husayn who at that time was Imam of Jamaat in Singida. In 1966 he came to Dar es Salaam; where we got him employment in a garage.

In 1967, the discussions mentioned in the accompanied article took place.

I had left Tanzania in 1978. By that time Kishunga had been employed in the JKT (paramilitary wing of the Tanzanian army), When I returned to Tanzania in 1985, I did not see Kishunga anywhere. His friends fold me that during the Tanzania-Uganda war, he was sent to the front. Since then nobody had seen him. Presumably he became a casualty of the war.

Two Interesting Talks

By Mahmud R. Kishunga as related to Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

Mr. Mahmud Rashid Kishunga is a motor mechanic from West Lake region of Tanzania. He became Shia in 1965.

In 1967, he was admitted into Muhimbili Hospital, Dar-es-Salaam. During one of my visits, I gave him a copy of *Kitabu Cha Sala* (Book of Salat), the first publication of the Mission, which had come out of the press that very day.

When I visited him next time, he told me about an interesting discussion he had with a Christian priest. The said priest had come to visit a patient whose bed was next to Kishungas. He saw *Kitabu Cha Sala* and with permission of Kishunga looked at it here and there. He saw the pictures of the prayer, noted the hands which were not folded; and asked Kishunga, which sect of Islam he belonged to, and was told: 'Shia Ithna-'asheriya'.

Then the following discussion took place:

Priest: Do you believe that Prophet Muhammad was most beloved of all prophets in presence of Allah,

and His dearest one?

Mahmud: Yes.

Priest: How many children your Prophet had?

Mahmud: One daughter, Bibi Fatima (a.s.).

Priest: Was she married?

Mahmud: Yes, to Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.).

Priest: How many children did they have?

Mahmud: I know of two sons, Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.).

Priest: Do you know that Prophet Muhammad loved his grandsons?

Mahmud: Yes; he loved them very dearly.

Priest: How did Hasan and Husain die?

Mahmud: I do not know much in detail; but I have been told that Imam Hasan (a.s.) was poisoned and Imam Husain (a.s.), together with his children, relatives and companions, was martyred in Karbala very brutally.

Priest: Well, my friend. doesn't it seem strange to you that the dearest grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (who was, according to your belief, the dearest to Allah) was killed with such unparalleled brutality, and still God did not save him? You will have to accept that either there is no God at all, or if there is one, He is very weak.

Mahmud: Yes, Sir, I agree with you that God is really very weak.

Priest: Why do you say so?

Mahmud: Let us say that you and I are fast friends. Suppose, I have got a son and you have got a grandson. Of course, being your friend, I will love your grandson. But you will agree with me that I can never love your grandson as deeply as my own son.

Priest: Yes, it is but natural.

Mahmud: Now, Sir, will you, please, tell me what you believe about Prophet 'Isa (a.s.)?

Priest: We believe that he is the son of God.

Mahmud: How did he die?

Priest: He was crucified and died on cross.

Mahmud: Well Sir, you see, that it why I told you that although there is a God, He is very weak. He is so weak that He could not save His own son. How can we expect such a weak and powerless God to save the grandson of his friend?

This reply abruptly ended the arguments. The priest said that he must rush to another place, and hurriedly took his leave.

Another incident occurred some two years ago. Mr. Mahmud Kishunga rented a room in a house in Ilala (Dar-es-Salaam) area. There is a mosque nearby, where he went at sunset for Maghrib prayer. He prayed with unfolded hands, as is taught by the Shia shari'ah. When he finished his prayer, a gentleman asked him as which '*madh-hab*' he belonged to. He said that he was an Ithna-'asheriya. The gentleman asked derisively: "Why, you are an African and you are following the 'religion' of the Indians!"

Mahmud said: "Now that you have pointed it out, I realize that I have committed a great mistake. Really, being an African I should not have accepted the '*madh-hab*' of the Indians. Now, dear Sir! please tell me about yourself. Whose religion do you follow?"

The gentleman said that he was a follower of the Shafi'i *madh-hab*.

Mahmud: "Well, this Imam Shafi'i (May god have mercy on him), which country did he belong to?"

Gentleman: He was an Arab.

Mahmud: Then please tell me why do you, a true son of Africa, follow the 'religion' of an Arab?

The gentleman left him with the parting shot: "You are a troublesome man".

(The Light, Oct.74)

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