

Supplement to Islam Shi'a and Sunni Contrasted

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ADHERENTS

Sunni: Over 1 billion worldwide

Shi'a: Estimated 170 million, primarily in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Bahrain.

SUCCESSION

Sunni: Muhammad's successors (caliphs) should ideally be chosen by consensus/election. No new caliphs since 1924.

Shi'a: Muhammad's successors (imams) should be from his family and descendants (*Ahl al-Bayt*). The first of these was his cousin and son-in-law, Ali (c. AD 600–661), and thereafter all imams were bloodline descendants from Fatimah (Muhammad's daughter and Ali's wife). No new imams since AD 869.

AUTHORITATIVE WRITINGS

Sunni: The Qur'an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to companions of Muhammad such as Abu Bakr, Umar, and Aisha.

Shi'a: The Qur'an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to members of Muhammad's family and their supporters.

MAIN TEACHINGS, PRACTICES

Sunni: 5 Pillars: Profession of Faith, Prayers, Almsgiving, Fasting during Ramadan, Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Shi'a: 10 Central Practices: Profession of Faith, Prayers, Almsgiving, 1/5 Tax, Fasting during Ramadan, Pilgrimage to Mecca, Religious War, Enjoining to Do Good, Exhortation to Desist from Evil, Loving the Ahl al-Bayt and their followers, Disassociation from the Enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt.

Sunni: Six Beliefs: Allah, Prophets/Messengers, Angels, Holy Books, Day of Judgment and Resurrection, Decree (destiny/fate).

Shi'a: Five Principles: Oneness, Justice, Prophethood, Leadership, Day of Resurrection.

MAJOR DIVISIONS

Sunni: Four "schools of law" (Madh'hab)—Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi'i.

Shi'a: Three branches—majority "Twelvers" (Jafari), who believe in a succession of twelve infallible, divinely ordained imams; "Seveners" (Ismaili); and "Fivers" (Zaidi).

ESCHATOLOGY

Sunni: Majority believe that a figure known as the Mahdi ("guided one"), from Muhammad's family, will appear with Jesus before the final judgment.

Shi'a: Majority believe in a series of 12 imams serving as Muhammad's spiritual and political successors. The final one, Muhammad al-Mahdi (b. AD 869), is alive but hidden (in "occultation") since AD 874; at the proper time he will appear with Jesus.