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**Sunni and Shi'a Muslims: Differences
in Degree I**

Lead: One of the great religious divisions in world history has sundered Islam. Originating almost at the beginning, the divide between Sunni and Shi'a encompasses gaps that are ethnic, political and religious.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In day to day religious practice the differences between the two great Muslim sects, Sunni and Shi'a, are negligible. Yet, in reality, this unity of devotion to Allah masks

powerful religious and political variance within Islam and even within two great traditions themselves.

The divide originated in the earliest days after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. He designated no successor and devised no universally accepted means of choosing one. Following Muhammad, the first leader or Caliph, which means Viceroy of God, was Abu Bakr, the prophet's friend and devoted follower. The majority of Muslims felt and feel to this day that this was an appropriate choice and were convinced that leadership of the community should be based on religious devotion and disconnected from the prophet's family. This group

included at least some members of the prophet's family.

Others of Muhammad's family believed that succession should be determined by blood, or family inheritance. They focused their commitment on Ali, a cousin of the Prophet who married Muhammad's daughter. Ali became the third Caliph, but even that was opposed by Muhammad's wife who also happened to be Abu Bakr daughter. In-fighting between the various factions continued through Ali's assassination and the death of his successor and son, Hussein, on Ashura, October 10, 680. He was killed in battle by the troops of Ummayyad, the new Caliph. The death

of Hussein marked the true beginning of the division between Sunni and Shi'a.

Next time: the split deepens.

Research assistance by Timothy Litzenberg, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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