

Volume 13

Number 026

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

Lead: After the death of the Prophet Muhammad disputes within and with members of his family created a severe and long lasting division among Muslims. The Sunni and Shi'a split continues to divide that faith into the modern era.

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

Content: The Shi'a revere the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali who claimed the mantle of his kinsman, but who was assassinated in

disputes that firmly established the split between his followers and the vast majority of adherents to Islam known as the Sunni.

Shi'a are scattered throughout Islam but are the majority in Iran and Iraq and recognize Najaf in southern Iraq as its most revered site. Shi'a believe in the infallibility of a line of supreme leaders that they claim began with Muhammad and Ali. Shi'a allow the Muttah, a form of temporary marriage for a fixed term. They are expected to contribute twenty percent of their earnings to the faith. In a vague similarity to Christianity, many Shi'a expect the return of the Twelfth Imam, the last of the line of Muhammad through Ali

who died at the age of four, but is considered to be hiding awaiting the right time to reveal himself and usher in a era when Allah's justice will rule the world. Shi'a pray with their arms hanging down parallel to the torso. Their mosques have a combined function of house of prayer and community center and are often festooned with pictures and flags.

Sunni Muslims are much less enamored with clerical power and infallibility, in fact they elect their clergy democratically. Many Sunni consider the Shi'a to be heretics because of their reverence for the Prophet's bloodline and attachment to pictures of Ali, Hussein and some of the Imam. Sunni consider this

idolatry and therefore blasphemous. In prayer, Sunni pray with an on top of the other midway down the torso. Sunni mosques are austere though many have elaborate non- pictorial and thereby heretical, graphical designs.

Islam is not immune to the all too human tendency to use religion as a thinly disguised excuse for political and social oppression. Where in the majority Sunni and Shi'a have often persecuted and economically and socially ostracized the other sect.

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

Resources

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