

What Is "Shiism" and Who Is a Shi'a?

A Report on the Characteristics of Shi'as, From Shaykh al-Saduq (D. 381 A.H./ 1002 A.D.)

Abstract: *One of the books by Shaykh Al-Saduq is his "Amal" (wishes). A collection of his lectures and "Ahadis" (traditions and quotations of Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and the Infallible Imams, which he orated in about 100 sittings among students and a written collection of it is now in our hands.*

The 93rd session of this book included a brief report on the Salient Features of Shiism, which cover the important characteristics of a Shi'a person in the fields of principles of Faith, religious edicts, personal character and social behavior.

Since Shaykh Al-Saduq was top scholar of Shiism, therefore, all the passages in the report are based reliable traditions (Ahadith).

In his speech, some of the religious edicts have been discussed in detail; but for brevity's sake, only a selected few of them have been reproduced here. The readers may refer to other books for more information. But the portions relating to articles of faith and character have been translated in full; so that the respected readers may try to emulate them in practical life, and reinforce the salient features of Shiism in themselves.

Key words: *Saum, Ascension*

On Friday, 12 Shaban 368 A.H. (Lunar)/990 A.D. a group of Shi'as gathered around Shaykh Al-Saduq (Abu Jafar Binali Ibn Babawayh Qumi), and requested him to describe the Shi'a faith in the briefest possible manner for them. Shaykh Al-Saduq replied as following:

A. Beliefs

Shi'a Faith

1. Affirmation of unity (Oneness) of the Almighty God,¹ and denial of any resemblance to him, ² and his Immaculate purity and total Immunity from any thing that not worthy of him.³

2. Affirmation of all prophets and messengers of God, and all reasons and proof of divinity, and angels and Holy Books and heavenly scriptures.

3. Affirmation of the fact that Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the leader of all Holy Prophets and messengers, and superior to all of them and all the exalted angels.

4. And that Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the last of the Holy Prophets⁴ and that after him, till the Day of Judgment there will not be any other prophet or messenger of God.⁵

5. All holy prophets and messengers and Imams are superior to Angels.⁶

¹ . Tohaf- Al - Uqool: 18 :Tafsir- ul - Imam: 59

² . Sifat - Al - Shia: 50

³ . Al - Tauheed : 193; Sifat - Al - Shia: 50

⁴ . Al- Tauheed:81; Sefat Al-Shia:48

⁵ . Kamal - Uddin: 379; 2; Al - Amal Al Sudooq:338

⁶ . Elal al-Shara'e 1:5

6. They are all innocent and immune from all evils; they never desire to commit a major or minor transgression or commit any evil act.

7. They are a protection for all dwellers of earth, similar to stars that protect all beings in the skies.¹

8. Organs on which Islam is based, comprise of five pillars:

Prayers (Salat), fasting (Saum), pilgrimage (Hajj), payment of religious tax; trusteeship of the Holy Prophet² and Imams after him (who are 12 Imams): the first of them is Amir- ul - Mominin Ali Ibn .E. Abi - Taleb, and after him in serial order: Hasan Bin Ali; Husain Bin Ali; Ali Bin - Al - Husain; Muhammad Bin Ali "Bagher"; Jafar Bin Muhammad "Sadiq"; Mousa Bin Jafar "Kazem"; Ali Bin Mousa "Al- Reza"; Muhammad Bin Ali "Al - Jawwad"; Ali Bin Muhammad "Al - Hadi"; Hasan Bin Ali "Askari"; HAUJJAT Bin - Al - Hasan, May God's blessing be on all of them.³

9. Affirmation of the belief that these Imams are the same "Ulul Amr" (authorities) whose obedience has been ordained by Almighty God (upon all), as per Holy Qur'an verse:

*"Obey God and obey Holy Prophet and those among you who have been put in authority over you."*⁴

¹ . Elal al-Sharae'e 1:123; Kamal al-Din 1:207

² . Al-Faghih 2:74; Fazaal al-Ashahr:112

³ .al-Khesal 2:480; Ma'ani al-Akhbar: 126

⁴ . Kamal al-Din 1:253

⁵ . Kamal al-Din 2:379; al-Tohid:81

10. And that following them is like following orders of God, and a sin against them is like sinning against God. Their friend is God's friend, and their enemy is an enemy of God.¹

11. Love of the progeny of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.), (if they remain true to the faith and actions of their revered ancestors) is incumbent on all God's creatures till the dooms day. And this is the compensation for prophet hood, on the divine authority, as mentioned in Holy Qur'an's verse:

"Say, I do not ask you for any compensation except sincere love of my near and dear ones." (Qur'an, 42:23)

12. Affirmation of Islam is the two witnesses². That is belief in the Oneness of God, and the prophet hood of the holy Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), whereas good faith is, an addition to verbal affirmation, a commitment by heart, and action of the body parts as well³. Good faith is not true without this qualification. Yet, whoever affirms the two testimonies, his life and possessions are respected immune and safe. Except he(she) commits a crimes or felony deserving punishment. Of course, his account ability rests with God Almighty.

13. Affirmation of belief in questioning of the (dead) corpse in his (her) grave, when, at the time of burial of the dead, the two angels question the dead, belief in the divine retribution in the grave.

¹ . Bahar al-Anvar 65:291

² Bahar al-Anvar 66:73

³. al-Khesal 2:608

14. Affirmation of creation of heaven and hell, which the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself saw them during his "Ascension" - an ascent that was with body and soul in truth and reality and not as a vision in dream¹.

15. The "ascension" was only for exaltation of the status of the Holy Prophet, so that God Almighty may show Him His Kingdom, just as the earthly kingdom was to Him (p.b.u.h.), and that. He (p.b.u.h.) could witness the grandeur of God Almighty with his (p.b.u.h.) own eyes, and convey to his followers the grand signs that he (p.b.u.h.) saw. It is not that God Almighty is confined to any place in particular, as he is far above and needless of having a particular abode².

16. Affirmation of belief in the pond (Hauz - e. Kauthar) intercession on behaves of sinners, the straight and narrow passage (Sirat), and of reckoning, the balance (justice), the holy tablet, the pen, the celestial abode and the divine throne³.

B. Edicts

17. Affirmation that prayer (Salat) is the pillar of true faith, and is the first action that will form the basis of weighing on the Day of Judgment; and after the belief in God, is the first thing for which human will be

¹. al-Touhid :175

². Ma'ani al-Akhbar: 306; al-Khesal 2:481

³. Elal al-Sharae'e 2:359

questioned. If accepted, other actions will also be accepted, and if rejected all other acts will be rejected¹.

18. The obligatory prayers during a day and night are five, aggregating 17 units, i.e: Zohr (midday) Asr (afternoon) and Isha (night) are 4 units each, while Maghreb (sunset) is 3 units and Fajr (dawn) 2 units.

Recommended prayers are a total of 34 units during a day and night: 8 units before Zohr, 8 units before Asr, 4 units after Maghreb, 2 units sitting after Isha, which is a substitute for Vitru (an odd prayer) for someone who does not perform "Vitru" at night. Except for night prayers of 8 units, every 2 units are with one Salam (salutation), the "Shafa" prayers 2 units, with one Salam, Vitru prayer one unit, and recommended Morning Prayer, 2 units².

Therefore total obligatory and recommended prayers during one day and night come to 81 units.

19. The minimum limit of a voyage, which requires prayers to be reduced (broken) and fasting, to be prematurely ended is 48 kilometers. But if the voyage is sinful, one must keep fast and offer prayers in full³.

Any one whose voyage is not sinful, but keeps his fast and offers full prayers his deeds will not be accepted.

20. One whose travel is a necessary part of his regular duties, like a driver, postman, fisherman, etc., must offer regular "(normal) prayers and keep fast while traveling⁴.

¹ . al-Khesal 2:603

² . al-Faghih 1: 436

³ . al-Khesal 1: 302

⁴ . al-Khesal 2: 421; Oyoun Akhbar 2: 127; Ma'ani al-Akhbar:154

21. Prayers are not valid without prior ritual ablution (Vuzoo). But anybody who does not have access to water for ablutions must undertake "Tayammum"—ablution with clean earth or sand, as God Almighty has ordained. ("Tayammum" is rubbing clean soil on hands and face in the prescribed manner.)

22. If some one did not get water, and offered prayers with "Tayammum", but found water afterwards, is not required to recite prayers once again.

23. Obligatory Alms (Zakat) and payment of one - fifth of surplus of one's annual income tithes (Khoms) to the poor, as prescribed in the Islamic (jurisprudence or divine law) is compulsory.

24. Keeping Fast during the holy month of Ramazan is obligatory. The advent of the holy month of Ramazan is incumbent on sight of the crescent moon, and not on guesswork or calculation alone.¹

25. During nights of the holy month of Ramazan, other prayers, besides the normal supererogatory prayers during course of the year) are also commended.

26. During the 21st and 23rd nights of the month of Ramazan, when the probability of night of Destiny occurrence is strong, it is recommended that a person spend the night in devotional acts of worship and performs prayers prescribed for the occasion. However, if someone spends these two nights in dissemination of religious knowledge, that is far better².

¹. Fazaal al-Shahr:137

². al-Khesal 2:605

27. Payment of Fitrah the alms payable on the day of Eid Fitr after the end of holy month of Ramazan, but before offering congregational Eid prayer, is obligatory.

28. "Hajj" (pilgrim to the House of God-holy Mosque- in Mecca) is obligatory for all who can afford it¹.

29. The details can be reviewed in ceremonial books.²

30. Marriage of a virgin daughter is not allowed, without her father's (or guardian's) permission. For a widow's (remarriage) the father's permission is not necessary.

31. Divorce is allowed only according to Holy Book and the practice of the holy leaders (Sunnah). Divorce by swearing, on oath is not valid.

32. Spend of one's property, after his(her) death, according to the will is only valid up to a third of the inheritance. The balance is to be distributed among the legal heirs according to Islamic laws³.

33. It is highly recommended that a Muslim person, advises his legatees through his (her) will regarding a third of the legacy, to be paid to those who have no right to his(her) property. Anyone who fails to make that declaration has left the last goodness⁴.

¹. al-Faghih 2: 226; al-Khesal 1:147

². al-Faghih 3:395

³. al-Faghih 2:317; al-Khesal 2:605

⁴. al-Faghih 4: 182

C. Ethics

Among the Shi'a morality qualities faith are following conditions¹:

Trust in the Almighty God,
Sincerity;
Contentedness;
Acceptance God's will;
Submission to Divine Decisions;
Abstinence;
Trying actively for good deeds;
Reluctance to world wealth;
Worship and pray;
Truth;
Loyalty;
Return of articles held in trust to their rightful owners. (Good or bad characters)
Kindness and respect to parents;
Compassion;
Chivalry;
Patience;
Bravery;
Keeping aloof from forbidden acts;
Careless to what other people have;
Calling people to good deeds' and preventing evil;
Struggle in the way of God with life and belongings (under its own special conditions);
Kindness and generosity with the members of his(her) own community;

¹ . Sefat al-Shia: 11

Returning in kind for other peoples' kindness;
gratitude for generosity;
Praise and appreciation for benefactors;
Contentedness;
Keeping bonds with all relatives;
Regards and compassion for all elders;
Humane treatment toward neighbors;
Justice and fairness;
Sacrifice (overlooking one's own rights);
Keeping good society;
Avoiding evil- doers;
Having good and commendable relations with
people;
Saluting all people (with the belief that God's
blessings do not reach the transgressors);
Being respectful to elders and kind to juniors;
Being respectful to the leaders of all nations;
Modesty;
Humbleness;
Remembering God at all times;
Recitation of the Holy Qur'an;
Prayer;
Ignoring other's mistakes and faults;
Justification of dubious behavior of others
with correctness;
Tolerance;
Dissimulation (Hiding one's beliefs) at
dangerous time;
Keeping good company;
Controlling one's anger;

Charitability and generosity with the needy and the poor and sharing with them one's own living;

Fearing God, overt or covert;

Good behavior toward all ladies (wife specially);

Holding one's tongue except for the good;

Optimism for God Almighty's blessings;

Repentance for sins;

Magnanimity (forgiveness at the request of the petitioners);

Charitability (forgiving or bestowing before the petition of the needy);

Confession of mistakes and sins;

The award for all good and magnanimous behavior in this world and the next.

And also the following characteristics are part of the Shi'a faith and discipline:

Abstention from all evil deeds – large or small, especially:

Fury; anger over others; prejudice; haughtiness, haughtiness; looking down people as inferior; boasting; being enamored of one's own good deeds; foulmouthedness; crimes; transgression on other people's rights; cutting off relations with family; envy; greed; avarice; ignorance; wickedness; falsehood; treachery; debauchery; licentiousness; taking false oath; suppressing or denial of truth; bearing witness for unlawful acts; back - biting; false accusation; slander; curse; sarcasm; guile; deceit; perfidy; cruelty; stone- heartedness; oppression;

duplicity; hypocrisy; adultery; sodomy; usury; absconding from a battle front of a righteous War; return to an oppressive environment after migration to an open society; disowning parents; cunningness with people; usurping orphans' belongings; slandering pious women."

At the end of this speech, Shaykh Al-Saduq adds: "I mentioned the above points and principles from the Shi'a faith to you in a hurry. If the Almighty God afforded me an opportunity to return to you, I will describe all these points to you in detail, and explain them." "All the might and power rests with none but God Almighty alone".