

Introduction to Islam

Islam was founded in the **7th century**. It **shares** some ideas with **Judaism** and **Christianity**. Muslims believe in **one god, Allah**. The **Qur'an** is the Muslim **holy book** — Muslims also follow the prophet **Muhammad's** teaching.

Islam is Divided into Two Main Traditions — Sunni and Shi'a

- 1) About **85-90%** of Muslims are **Sunni** Muslims — most of the rest are **Shi'a** Muslims.
- 2) Muhammad was the **founder** of Islam — Allah revealed the **Qur'an** to him. After Muhammad **died**, Muslims had to choose a **new leader** (caliph). The **next four caliphs** were Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali.
- 3) However, some Muslims had wanted **Ali** to be the **first** caliph, and thought the first **three** caliphs shouldn't have been given the role. Others said Ali **shouldn't** be the caliph at all.
- 4) After Ali died, **two** groups formed — the **Sunnis** and the **Shi'as**. Each group followed a different **line** of caliphs. The Sunnis **accepted** the next caliph after Ali, but the **Shi'as** (Shi'at Ali or Party of Ali) followed **Ali's descendants**. Sunnis and Shi'as have been **separate groups** ever since.

Sunnis and Shi'as have Many Similar Beliefs

Sunnis and Shi'as **share many beliefs**, but have some **different ideas**. Their **basic beliefs** — **articles of faith** — are slightly **different**, but they share beliefs in **Allah**, the **holy books**, **prophets** and a day of **judgement**. These, along with a belief in **angels**, are mentioned in the **Qur'an** (4:136) and other teachings, e.g. **Sahih Muslim 1:4**.

There are **six** articles of faith in **Sunni** Islam:

- 1) belief that Allah is the **one and only god** (Tawhid)
- 2) belief in **angels** (Malaikah)
- 3) belief in the **holy books**
- 4) belief in Allah's **prophets** (Nubuwwah)
- 5) belief in the **Day of Judgement**
- 6) belief that Allah knows and decides everything that's going to happen (**predestination** — **al-Qadr**)

There are **five** articles of faith in **Shi'a** Islam. They're known as the **'Usul ad-Din** — **foundations** of faith:

- 1) belief that Allah is the **one and only god** (Tawhid)
- 2) belief in **divine justice** ('Adl)
- 3) belief in **prophethood** (Nubuwwah)
- 4) belief in the authority of **imams** (Imamah)
- 5) belief in the **Day of Resurrection** (Mi'ad)

Key Sunni Beliefs

- 1) **No one** after Muhammad received **knowledge** from **Allah**. Muslims should **focus** on **Muhammad** and his way of life (**sunnah** — see p.19) rather than paying too much attention to **Ali** and his **sons**.
- 2) Muslims should be guided by the **consensus** (majority view) of the **community**.

Key Shi'a Beliefs

- 1) **Ali** was the first **true** caliph. **Allah** gave him **knowledge** to ensure his teaching and actions were **right**.
- 2) There are **many branches** of Shi'a Islam. They share a common belief in a **line of imams** after **Ali**, who all had the same **knowledge** from Allah as Ali. Shi'a imams are **leaders** and **figureheads** of the religion. They're all **descendants** of Muhammad. In **Sunni** Islam, the word '**imam**' simply means '**prayer leader**'.
- 3) The different **branches** of Shi'a Islam split off from each other after **disagreements** about the **line** of **imams**. The **Twelvers** are the **largest** branch, but there are many others.
- 4) **Twelver** Shi'as believe in a line of **12** imams, the **last** of whom is in **hiding** and will eventually **return**. The Twelvers are led by **religious scholars** while they wait for the last imam's return.
- 5) **Isma'ili** Shi'as (often called '**Sevensers**') thought the **seventh** imam should be **Isma'il**, the **elder brother** of the one chosen by the Twelvers. The biggest group of Isma'ilis today, the **Nizaris**, think each imam can **select** the next and are still led by an imam now, known as the **Aga Khan**.

Sevensers, Twelvers — sounds like maths, not RS...

As a quick task to keep you on your toes — shut this book, grab a piece of paper and see if you can write down the articles of faith for Sunni and Shi'a Islam.

