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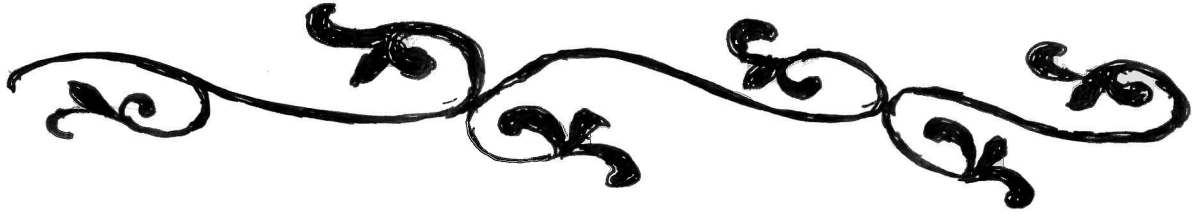
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In the Name of Allah
Most Merciful and Compassionate



P R E F A C E

Sunni Islam represents the belief of the majority of Muslims and is the state religion today of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

Shi'i Islam represents the belief of one-quarter of the Muslim world and has the largest community in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon. In Iran, Twelver Shi'i is the state religion.^a

The purpose of this paper will be trace the History of Islam briefly through certain events that began with the death of the Prophet and led up to the Battle of Siffin which resulted in the Great Schism. The writer will also attempt to show how the principal factors which still separate Sunni Islam and Shi'i Islam, those differences being the question of succession to Muhammad, the nature of the Imamate and the Twelfth Imam, began with the Great Schism at the Battle of Siffin and have continued in some form or another to have impact upon the various sects of Shi'i Islam which evolved out of the Schism itself. Because of the limitation placed upon the length of the paper, Sunnism has not been discussed at this time.

Should be mentioned & explained

The writer begs the patience and pardon of the reader as some of the material has been translated from the French and the meaning may therefore not be what the author intended.

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THE GREAT SCHISM

THE HISTORY OF ISLAM - Before the Great Schism

The history of Islam began to move towards the Great Schism which ultimately took place at the Battle of Siffin with the death of the Prophet in 632 A.D. When Muhammad died it was a moment of confusion for his followers since the question of who the Prophet's successor should be had not been made clear to them. In the minds of the Medinans, they thought that the position should be given to one of them because they had, after all, supported and given victory to Islam. The Muhajirin thought that the role of successor should go to one of them as they were the first people in Islam and therefore had a close relationship to the Prophet.¹

During the funeral preparations for the Prophet at the Saqifa, an ad hoc assembly chose Abu Bakr to be Muhammad's successor. Conspicuously absent at that meeting was Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. There were those who felt strongly that in view of the number of statements made by Muhammad in his lifetime that Ali should surely have occupied the leading position of both Caliph and Imam. Most certainly in his speech to the Medinans, Abu Bakr also supported Ali's claim to the succession. He based his support on Ali's close kinship to the Prophet, his services to Islam and his companionship with Muhammad.² Furthermore, Abu Bakr pointed out that the Arabs would only accept a leadership from a member of the powerful Quraysh tribe to whom Muhammad's ancestral family had belonged and had held a place of importance.

To understand why Ali was considered by Abu Bakr and others to be the rightful successor of Muhammad, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the history of Islam and trace Ali's part in it, his close relationship to the Prophet and to examine some of the Traditions that confirmed his claim.

Ali's Kinship to the Prophet

Ali's father, Abu Talib, had brought Muhammad up in his own house so that from the time Ali was born, the two cousins had been very close. Ali was the first person to acknowledge Muhammad's mission once it had been announced and became a believer after Khadija, the Prophet's wife. At the meeting of the family clans where Muhammad had made the decision to declare what he was doing, he also asked who would be willing to help him in his cause. Ali spoke up and the Prophet put his arm around his neck and called him his brother, his trustee and his successor. Ali was only 13 years old at the time but according to the chronicler Tabari, it seemed as if Muhammad had already picked out his successor.³

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The night flight from Mecca to Medina was another occasion which the Prophet used to refer to the close kinship between himself and Ali. After the exiles had arrived in Medina Muhammad decreed that each should choose another to be his brother. Muhammad singled out Ali to be his brother, following his own decree.⁴

Ali's Services to Islam - The Position of Aaron

During the Medinan period Ali was Muhammad's secretary. He wrote many important documents which included the treaty of Hudaibiyya. He also served in the army and was standard bearer at the battles of both Khaybar and Badr. The implication that Ali was indeed both Muhammad's chief assistant and successor was clearly revealed in the famous Hadith of Manzilat Harun or position of Aaron. According to this Tradition, Muhammad asked Ali, after the latter had voiced his discontent at being left behind on Muhammad's longest expedition to Tabuk, if he was not content to be to the Prophet as Aaron had been to Moses.⁵

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Ali's Companionship with the Prophet

As a close companion to the Prophet, Ali accompanied him many times on expeditions and pilgrimages. Ali's position as successor was once again confirmed during the Farewell Pilgrimage. All of the disciples including Ali had stopped at Ghadir Khumm. In an address

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from an improvised pulpit, Muhammad took Ali's hand and told his followers,

"Of whomsoever I am Mawla then Ali is also his Mawla." 6

It is not recognize by the Sunni.

Episode of the Pen and Paper

The event during the last days of the Prophet which was so controversial and which led to the confusion as to who was to be his successor was the Episode of the Pen and Paper. Muhammad had asked for writing materials so that he could write something down that would help his disciples not to be "led into error."⁷ An argument ensued and Muhammad chased the dissenters from his room as he did not want any quarrelling. Whatever the Prophet had intended to write down was never fulfilled. Some claimed that Muhammad had planned to write down Ali's successorship, others have advanced alternative explanations.⁸ In addition to the above cited instances, there are many Hadith and certain verses of the Qur'an which, according to certain writers and interpretations, allude to Ali as the successor to the Prophet.

The Four Caliphs

For whatever reason, Ali did not lay claim to the succession at the time of the Prophet's death. Abu Bakr became Caliph and his Caliphate lasted only two years. He appointed as his successor, Umar. The succession to Umar was decided by the Council of Six, a small group of members of the Quraysh, after Umar had been assassinated for private revenge.⁹ The Six were locked in a room and were told that they had to make a decision as to Umar's successor before they could leave it. Death was the penalty for not doing so. Uthman's Caliphate was not especially outstanding and he managed to arouse opposition from the sons of the Companions and from the Prophet's wife A'isha with his policy of appointing members of his own clan as provincial governors. Uthman was murdered in 656 A.D.

The death of Uthman led to the first period of civil war in Islamic history. Claimant to the succession left vacant by the murder of Uthman was Ali who faced great opposition. Firstly, the kin of

Uthman were against him and so were others who disputed the validity of his election. These included two prominent companions who were galled at Ali's succession and who realized that they now had no chance for the coveted position. At the Battle of the Camel, Ali had moved the Caliphate to Kufa. The dissidents set themselves up in Basra. Ali defeated them only to be faced with a new challenge from Syria, the governor, Mu'awiya, who was a close kinsman of Uthman and who was marching on Ali to seek revenge for the death of Uthman.

The Battle of Siffin

Historically outstanding to the Battle of Siffin was the great schism that had developed and escalated as a result of the event itself and the various sects which were to evolve from the schism later on.

On the banks of the upper Euphrates the forces of Ali filled with the veteran Companions of the Prophet met the forces of Mu'awiya, a handful of companions to the Prophet and some Arab tribes who had joined Islam late and were in the fight for the promised booty. The two armies came together at a place called Siffin and fought a battle that was prolonged, bloody and inconclusive. The Battle of Siffin finally ended in a call for arbitration.¹⁰

Ali had not wanted to agree to arbitration initially but when he did so, it meant that he had submitted the Will of God to human judgement. In the eyes of some of his followers it meant that he had also compromised his position as Caliph and Imam to Mu'awiya who was just an ordinary military leader and therefore he had also placed the honour of Islam at stake. As a result of the agreement to arbitration, some of his supporters abandoned him. As the months went by, his position grew weaker and Ali was assassinated in his own city of Kufa in 661 A.D.

After the Battle of Siffin many new Islamic sects evolved. Continually expressing themselves in the different sects were the questions of succession, the role or nature of the imamate and later on the Twelfth Imam (Hidden Imam). Under the 5th Imam the role of the Imam changed. Under the 6th Imam the Hanafi and Maliki Schools of Law were founded (Sunni Islam).

THE EARLY SECTS

The Kaisaniya and the Hashimiya

With the death of Muhammad al Hanafiya in 701 A.D. a new form of the Shi'i sect made its appearance called the kaisaniya. The origin of the term is obscure but it is known that al Hanafiya or Mukhtar also carried the name of Kaisan which linked him to Ali. The idea of bada was also assigned to Mukhtar, it was rejected by Sunnism. Two other ideas attributed to the kaisaniya are that of the Mahdi and transmigration.¹¹ The Hashimiya took their name from Hanafiya's son Hashim who had been designated by his father to follow him as imam. Hashim later designated his brother Ali to become Imam in the same way that Hasan had designated his brother Husayn.

The Harbiya

The Harbiya was an extremist sect that believed in hulul and tanasukh. It took its name from its founder Abd Allah ibn Harb al-Kindi, an unknown. Abu Hashim had designated al-Kindi as the successor into which his spirit had passed. Both sunnism and shi'ism reject the notions of incarnation and metempsychosis.¹²

OTHER SECTS OF SHI'I ISLAM

Islam continued to express itself as a result of the great schism through various other sects. Some of these were as follows:

Zaydi- The Zaydi sect was prominent in Northern Yemen. The Zaydis believed that the Imam should be a worthy member of the Prophet's family, willing to oppose illegitimate rulers. They did not recognize the 5th Imam but they do recognize his brother Zayd instead from whom they took their name. They created an imamate in Yemen in the 9th century. Zaydism was a Shi'i movement that ended in the creation of a separate dynasty.¹³

The Kharijis

There were two groups of Kharijis. One of the groups stood against Mu'awiya. The earliest Kharijis had withdrawn their support from Ali when he agreed to arbitration on the day of Siffin. They believed that only a virtuous Muslim should rule as Imam. In this matter both Ali and Uthman had been at fault according to their view. The second group of Kharijis fully supported the claims of the Prophet's family to rule.¹⁴

Where do we find today Kharijis? .../6

The Fatimids

The Fatimids took their name after Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. In 969 they occupied Egypt and extended their rule into Western Arabia and Syria. They used both the titles of Imam and Caliph. As Caliphs they had great power, as Imams they claimed universal authority over all Muslims.¹⁵

The Isma'ilis

The Isma'ilis dominated much of the eastern Arab world in the 10th century. They were a sect of Shi'ism that directly challenged the Abassids. Their origins are not clear but they seemed to have had their beginnings with a secret movement in Iraq, southwest Iran and Syria. Isma'ilis supported the claim of Isma'il to the Imamate as the 6th Imam. They believed that his son Muhammad would return as the mahdi to rule with justice and disclose the inner meaning of the Qur'an.¹⁶

The Idrisids

Towards the end of the 8th century, Idris, a great-grandson of Ali, went to Morocco and founded a dynasty which was to become important in the history of Morocco. The Idrisids who took their name from Idris, built Fez and began a tradition which has lasted until today, that is an independent dynasty to rule Morocco and the justification of that rule through the claim of descent from the Prophet.¹⁷

The Druzes

Lebanon & Israel.

Adherents of another offshoot of Shi'ism were the Druzes, also found in Syria. The faith of the Druzes sprang from the teaching of Hamza ibn Ali. He continued the idea that imams were embodiments of the Intel- ligences which emanated from One God. The final embodiment had been the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (996-1021). Although he had disappeared from human sight he would return.¹⁸

The Alawis

In the 17th century, the Alawis united the whole country of Morocco through their political skill. They acted as opposition to the Ottoman Empire and continue to rule in Morocco today. Known as Nasayris they trace their descent from Muhammad ibn Nusayr. They believe that Ali was the embodiment of the highest hierarchy of beings.

Alawis → in Syria

The Twelver Shi'is

The development of other theories in Shi'i Islam took place through a group known as the Twelver Shi'is. They created their own ideas about what had happened in Islamic history and what should have happened. They supported the claims of Ali and his successors but reviled the first three caliphs. For them the revealed truth was preserved by the Imams. Twelver Shi'is believed that the Imamate started in the 10th century and that God had placed an Imam in the world at all times to teach authoritatively, the truths of religion and to govern mankind with justice. The Imams were descendents of the Prophet and Ali was the first Imam. The 12th Imam disappeared in 874 A.D. The event was known as the "lesser occultation."²⁰ The greater occultation meant that the Hidden Imam would emerge and become the Mahdi. Twelver Shi'ism was prominent in Lebanon, South Iraq and the west coast of the Gulf.

For Shi'is today, the tragedy of Karbala is still the most outstanding event in the history of Islam because it placed the responsibility of Husayn's death on them. After making Husayn their leader, his disciples abandoned him. The impact of the Karbala tragedy was that martyrdom became the essence and the essential characteristic of their faith. That essence is as strong today as it has ever been. It has given the Shi'is a whole ethos of sanctification and permits religious justification for extraordinary political diversity.²¹

What Shiism means?

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³Ibid, page 12.

⁴Ibid, page 12.

⁵Ibid, page 13.

⁶Ibid, page 15.

⁷Ibid, page 16.

⁸Ibid, page 16.

⁹Albert H. Hourani,

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¹⁰Ibid, page 25.

¹¹Henri Laoust,

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¹²Ibid, page 31.

¹³Albert H. Hourani,

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¹⁴Ibid, pages 30,31.

¹⁵Ibid, page 41.

¹⁶Ibid, page 40.

¹⁷Ibid, page 41.

¹⁸Ibid, page 185.

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