

Core Curriculum

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8 Islamic Relationships, Sects and Conflicts

8.1

Misconceptions about Shi'ism

Question : Do Shias believe that the Qur'an has been changed?

Answer : No, most major Shia scholars in history believed that the Qur'an we have today is the exact Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet (s) with nothing added or taken out or changed in any way.

Question : Do Shias worship stones in their prayer?

Answer : No, they use a turba (piece of baked clay) for their prostration as they cannot pray on things one can wear or eat - among other things.

Question : Do Shias believe Imam Ali (as) was God?

Answer : No, they believe that he was a servant of God. Anyone who believes that Imam Ali (as) was God is not a Muslim according to Shia Islam.

Question : Do Shias believe that Imam Mahdi (aj) is living in a cave?

Answer : No Shia scholar has ever been recorded to have believed in this.

Question : Do Shias consider Sunnis as non-Muslims?

Answer : Shias believe Sunnis are fully Muslim.

8.2

Major Sects of Islam

Question : What are the two major sects or denominations of Islam?

Answer : Twelver (Imami) Shi'ism and Sunnism

Question : Does Shi'ism have subsects?

Answer : Yes, in addition to Twelver Shi'ism, there is Ismailism, Zaydism and other branches.

Question : How do we know what the right sect or denomination is in Islam?

Answer : The Qur'an teaches us that on the Day of Judgment, people will be resurrected with their Imams or Leaders. This means that by following the right leader, one can follow the right sect. The Prophet taught us that these leaders are the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Question : Who are the right Imams or Leaders one should follow according to Islam? Are they the companions of the Prophet (s) ?

Answer : The Prophet (s) taught us in Hadith al-Thaqalayn as well as in the hadith of Ghadeer that his Ahl al-Bayt (as) (Prophet's Holy Household) were the right leaders of guidance.

Question : How many rightful sects can we have?

Answer : As truth is one, there can be one truthful sect.

Question : Is it possible that there are no right sects in Islam? That is, they are all deviant?

Answer : No, as the inevitable result of this would be a crisis in divine providence. If Islam is the last religion, and there are no right sects, then this means that the earth will be locked out of access to the truth. However, the teachings of the Prophet (s) tell us otherwise as he explicitly taught that the earth will always have a guide until the Day of Judgment.

8.3

Islam and Religious Conflicts

Question : What is the reason behind religious conflicts?

Answer : There is no one reason, there are multiple reasons and they differ from situation to situation.

Question : What are some of the major reasons for religious conflicts?

Answer : The quest for political power, economic gain, or deviant religious views. These are some reasons out of many.

Question : How can we stop religious conflicts?

Answer : Conflicts are part of human civilizational nature, they will end when the human race ends its life in this world.

8.4

Islam and Rights

Question : What is haqq in Islam?

Answer : Haqq means truth, but it can also mean rights and responsibilities.

Question : How are rights understood in Islam?

Answer : Rights are understood in relationship with responsibilities in Islam and hence why the word haqq can mean both. Every right comes with a responsibility in Islam, and every responsibility comes with a right.

Question : Do we have rights and responsibilities to ourselves in Islam?

Answer : Yes, for example, our bodies have the right to be fed and hence we have the responsibility to feed ourselves.

Question : Are there inalienable rights in Islam?

Answer : Yes, for example, a free person can never make himself or herself a slave in Islam.

Question : Do men and women have the same rights in Islam?

Answer : No because they have different responsibilities.

8.5

Sunnism and Shi'ism, beginnings and historical developments.

Question : When did Shi'ism turn into an independent and self-contained school?

Answer : In the 7th-8th centuries under Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as)

Question : When did Sunnism as we know it today officially begin?

Answer : 11th century during the Seljuq Dynasty

Question : When did the initial split between Shia and Sunni begin?

Answer : After the death of the Prophet (s) and the usurpation of Imam Ali's (as) caliphate

Question : What are the founding text books of Sunnism?

Answer : Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

Question : How and why is it that Sunnism as we know it today was created in the 11th century? What are the reasons?

Answer : Sunnism was established as a unifying body of people by the Seljuq Dynasty in response to threats from Ismaili Shias. They believed unity was the only way they could win the war that they themselves had begun against the Ismailis.

Question : How do you define Sunnism today?

Answer : The belief in the legitimacy of the Four Righteous Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Imam Ali), the righteousness of the Prophet's wives and the eternal nature of God's words in the Qur'an.