

An Introduction to Islamic Precepts



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A very short introduction to the Islamic Principles of Islam Shi'a Itha-'Asheri and its sources

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Preface

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Seeking Allah's assistance in our endeavor this organization intends, in an attempt to introduce the various dimensions of the Islamic culture to be the most enriching and comprehensive culture and which can definitely pose itself as the sole true savior of mankind, to publish books and pamphlets in a series of connected discussions so that the dear readers would, with careful study, deliberation and contemplation of its contents reach a much deeper understanding of Islam and hopefully solidify their faith through observing them practically.

This is in complete conformity with the common sense and confirmed by the verse of the Holy Qur'an,

which states:

“Therefore give good tidings (O Muhammad) to my bondmen who hear advice and follow the best thereof.” (Surah Al-Zumar, 39: 17)

These series of pamphlets will appear under the general title of ‘The precepts of Islam’.

It is kindly requested from our dear readers, who are interested to follow the discussions to obtain the next issues as they have this copy or to contact,

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Any suggestion to improve our work is most welcomed.

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Introduction

The Islamic teachings are divided into three categories with respect to their goals.

A. Learning: That is the source of knowledge or insight rooted deep in the heart and mind of man which help him gain insightful faith and belief in matters such as: Divine Unity (*tawhid*), prophethood, Imamate and eschatology.

These instructions are called the principles [*usul*], because other Islamic teachings are based upon them. As a rule, when the basis is stable and firm, it follows that what originates from it is firm and stable as well; otherwise, what shoots out of a root will be liable to perish. In consequence, whoever follows the correct religious principles, it is hoped that he will attain salvation. On the other hand, he who adheres to incorrect religious principles, his secondary religious beliefs and prayers will be useless however much he may perform worships day and nightline the most sacred places.

B– Ethics: Which reflect the mental and psychological qualities of human beings, such as Good-naturedness, Forbearance, generosity, etc?

C– Precepts [tenets]: Which relate to the qualities of external human behavior; in other words, they are practical regulations issued by the Shari’a (the sacred Islamic law). In the early years of Islam, the insight into and the skill in these tenets were called Fiqh (the knowledge of religious laws).

The word Fiqh in Arabic literally means “Knowledge acquired through deliberation and ponder” and in the terminology of Fiqhologists it is the knowledge of secondary and practical religious precepts which are understood and induced from detailed reasoning.

The Sources of the Islamic Tenets (Fiqh)

The sources of Fiqh, among the Shia, are four, which are as follows in their order of importance:

A– The Qur'an: The primary and the most important source of the Islamic law is the Qur'an, the sacred Book of the Muslims, which was revealed verse by verse and stage by stage to the Prophet according to daily developments and incidents which occurred in the early days of the Islamic era. The Qur'an has become the most important source of knowledge in Islam and has constituted the mainspring of Islamic sciences and culture.

The Qur'an consists of one hundred and fourteen suras (chapters) which have descended to the Prophet Muhammad during more than twenty-two years. Some of these suras have been revealed in Mecca, some in the battlefields of holy wars and the rest of them in Medina after the Hijra (The flight of the Prophet from Mecca). The Meccan suras are mostly short and those descended in Medina are long and detailed, containing the basic laws of Islam.

The Qur'anic verses are not limited to practical regulations and percepts. Hundreds of subjects have been treated in the Qur'an, but about five hundred verses among the total of 6236 Qur'anic verses, that is, about one thirteenth of the text of the Qur'an concerns tenets and laws. Since the Qur'an is the word of God and contains the divine precepts, which have to be obeyed, its contents are therefore entirely reliable. As a result, all the Islamic codes have to be derived from and in accordance with the Qur'an. They must never be in contradiction with it.

B– The Tradition (Sunna): The word 'Sunna' literally means 'way or method'. Here in this context it means that which has been said, done or confirmed concerning religious matters by the Innocents [Inerrants] (the Prophet and the twelve Imams) and which has come down to us through successive generations.

Although all of what the people in general need to know have been basically said in the Qur'an, but to understand the details of what has been briefly and generally treated in the Qur'an, we should take note of the Prophets words and deeds which in fact interpret the tenets of the Qur'an. For example, the general concepts of the prayers, fasting, zakat and the pilgrimage have been pointed out in the Qur'an, but their details and specifications have been described or performed by the Prophet for the people, clearly, the Prophet's directions and advice are known to be those of God. As the Qur'an says:

“He does not speak out of capriciousness and what he says are those revealed by God” (Al-Najm, 53:3).

It also says:

“Accept whatever the Messenger has brought to you and avoid whatever he has prohibited you from doing.”(Al-Hashr, 59:7).

Again it says:

“Whosoever obeys the Messenger, in fact obeys God”(Al-Nisa, 4: 79).

The shi’as not only believe the prophet’s tradition to be a definitive proof, but also follow the tradition of the innocent Imams, Among the proofs of such a shi’a belief is the verse concerning purification:

“Allah’s wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O’ Folk of the Household, your and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing.” (Al-Ahzab, 33: 33).

Both Sunni and Shi’a scholars believe that this were exclusively addresses the Prophet himself, Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Hossein and indicates to their Innocence. According to a tradition also common to and confirmed by both sects, the Prophet has said: *“I shall entrust you with two valuable things. As long as you will stick to them, you will never go astray. One of them, which are more important, is the Book of God, which is like a rope stretching from the heaven to the earth. The other is my family and offspring. These two will never be separated from one another until they will be present at Kauthar. Then look how you will behave with my descendants.”*

This tradition states clearly that these two requirements will be inseparable. Obviously, the commitment of every action in violation of the Islamic Shari’a whether on purpose or out of error and negligence will be considered a separation from the Qur’an. To detach the Prophet’s family and descendants from the Qur’an and to attribute the probability of making any sins to them will, therefore, be to discredit the words of the Prophet who foretold the inseparability of the Qur’an and his descendants.

The point learned from the tradition about “the two inseparable things” is that to protect oneself from going astray, one should stick both to the Qur’an and to the Prophet’s family and descendants and it would be insufficient to take hold of one of them without clinging to the other. These two constitute a whole and crystallize Islam as a perfect and comprehensive entity. Another point is that a thorough knowledge of the Qur’an requires an in-depth knowledge of all the religious laws and regulations. It is clear to the expert and layman alike that the Prophet’s family and offspring are the sources of divine knowledge, supreme mysteries and religious law.

What the tradition recounts is called ‘khabar’ or ‘Hadith’. Since the time of the prophet the hadiths about what he did or said have been written and compiled. In the time of the Innocent Imams, their pupils and disciples noted down their hadiths. By 330 A.H, more than four thousand books and treatises had been written about the hadiths.

The Books Containing Shi’a Hadiths

The books written by the Imam’s close companions and confidants are called “The early collections”. Since the time of the twelfth Imam of the Shi’as, the early hadiths have been collected by some scholars and researchers in several books. Four of them, which are the most important ones, have since then

become the most authorized reference books for all scholars.

The authors of these four books are three Iranian-born religious scholars and mohaddiths recounters of the Prophet's and Imam's deeds and words). The names of all of them were Mohammad. Each of them had traveled far and wide suffering much pain and trouble in order to be able to collect the Prophet's and the Imam's hadiths as objectively and precisely as possible. Their books have come to be known as the Shi'a Four Books, which are:

1– Alkafi: This book has been written by Mohammad Ebn Ya'ghub Kolaini, who was born in the year in which the twelfth Imam was born.

The book was written at the time of the Four Deputies of the twelve the Imam at the recommendation of theologians to be used by them as a guide. Kolaini embarked upon writing a book to fulfill their needs much enough in this field of religion: Hence the book was named 'Kafi', meaning 'enough'.

Kolaini took much care in compiling hadiths and worked hard for twenty years. The quotations in his book were gathered from reliable sources.

The book is in three parts which are (1) The principles of beliefs; (2) Branches of religious precepts; and (3) Sermons on various ethical problems and views.

2– One Who Has No Access to a Faqih (Man La yahzarehol–Faqih): Written by Mohammad Ebn Ali Ebn Babawaih Ghomi, known as Shaikh Sadoogh, who was born owing to the prayer of the 12th Imam, in which he took pride.

Shaikh Sadoogh once happened to see a book by Shaikh Mohammad Zakaria Razi with the title "One who Has No Access to a Physician", Inspired by this title, he chose for his own book the title "One Who Has No Access to a Faqih", as a self-help manual by which the reader would find the answers to his religious questions without having to refer to an expert in religious matters.

The subject matter concerns only the practical precepts of religion, also including some instructions given by the twelve Imams.

3– Tahzib Al Ahkam "(The clarification of the Tenets)": Mohammad Ebn Hassan Toossi, the author, was for many years a leading religious authority. He also founded Najaf seminary. This book is exclusively about religious precepts.

4– Al Estebsar Fi ma akhtalef men Al Akhbar, (An Inquiry into Disputed Recounts): This book is also written by Mohammad Ebn Hassan Toossi. While compiling "The Clarification of the Tenets", the author noticed seemingly contradictory, paradoxical and self- negating statements in some of the narratives and hadiths. As a result, he wrote a new book and named it "An Inquiry into Disputed Recounts."

These four books have remained Shi'a scholars main source of reference in the field of religious

precepts.

In addition to these four books, many other comprehensive and detailed books have been written on religious precepts by Shi'a scholars and religious jurists. Among them are "The Essentials for the Shi'a" in 20 volumes and "The Seas of lights" in 11 volumes.

C- The Consensus (Ejma'). Here, "Ejma' " means the Muslim scholars or theologians' "general agreement" about, or "collective vote" to a particular judgment.

The Shi'a accept consensus as a clear proof not because it is the collective opinion of the great jurists but owing to the fact that the virtuous and pious scholars' general agreement represents the innocent Saints' words Ejma'. According to Shiites, it is possible only by those theologians who lived at the time of the Prophet of the Imams and the scholars of the following generations only endorse the first consensus and issue their verdicts in accordance with it.

If the collective opinion of the theologians represents the statement of the innocent Saint of his approval, it will undoubtedly be accepted as a definitive proof. One may draw an analogy between this and the fact that if the pupils or disciples reach a general agreement about a particular matter. It follows that their master has reached a similar agreement as well.

D- Reasoning, which is, by analogy, a light with which individuals distinguish between good and evil, In Islam the pursuit of reason has been considered the basis of religion and even humanism. The Qur'an has appealed to all human individuals to act according to knowledge and reason in all religious fields including theology, monotheism and all other religious principles and fundamentals, severely blaming those people who follow blindly their ancestors in practicing the details of their religion without using their own reasoning or judgments. The indisputability of human reason, to the Shi'a sect, means that reason's verifiable and logical verdicts such as the necessity of not committing an act of oppression or molestation as something prohibited, the necessity of giving alms to the poor, or assisting people in need or saving a drowning person is an undisputed verdict.

To the Shi'ites, it is quite foolish to behave merely out of suspicion and illusion, acting in accordance with which, when proved to be so, will be utterly prohibited, especially when the decrees issued and reached to us by Islam's sacred law-maker and his successors are sufficient answers to our questions.

After the occultation of the twelfth Imam, the duty of giving the answers to religious problems was by his order transferred to faqihis and religious scholars and since then the theologians, with the help of the Book, the tradition, the consensus and reason, have as much as possible answered Muslims questions raised in religious affairs. The twelfth Imam has said in a decree: "When new problems or accidents occur, refer to our traditionalists and hadith analysts, who are my undisputed representatives to you, just as I am God's undisputed representative to them" (Bihar-Al-Anwar: The seas of Lights 53, 181).

Imam Sadiq has said: "Whoever among the faqihis and scholars who has self-control and is the

protector of his own religion and fights against his sensual desires and obeys his divine master, has to be followed by common people. This is the case with only a few of the eminent Shi'a scholars." Wassail-Al-shi'a

Thus, Imam Sadiq has explicitly guided people faced with problems to refer to the expert faqihhs who are endowed with a vast religious knowledge and who, in the absence of Imam Mahdi, will understand and explain tenets concerning new problems to people show the right path to them and make distinctions between the things approved or prohibited by God.

In the times and epochs when the outward relations between the Imam and people apparently do not exist, people are bound to get the knowledge about their religion from faqihhs. Such a reference to religious experts is called "imitation of the faqih"

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