

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHIA MUSLIMS?

A DIRECT SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON OF THE TWO MAJOR ISLAMIC SECTS, EVERY MAJOR TOPIC AND BELIEF BROKEN DOWN.

BASIC FACTS

	SUNNI	SHIA
Meaning	"party, follower" or "partisans" of Ali	"well-trodden path" or "tradition"
Also known as ...	Sunni, Ehl-e-Sunnah	Shiites, Shia, Shii, Ehl-e-Tash'e
Population worldwide	1.7 billion (2024)	350 million (2024)
Percentage of Muslims	87-90%	10-13%
Primary Locations	Majority in large Islamic countries, Indonesia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Minority spread across the world	Majority in Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, and Dearborn, MI. Minority spread across the world.



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Where did the division between Sunni and Shia Muslims begin?

After Muhammad died in 632 AD, Muslims disagreed on who should be his successor in leading Islam, because he had no son to follow in his footsteps. Muhammad had told his followers before his death that he wanted Ali ibn Abi Talib, his son-in-law, to take his place.

However, some people in Medina voted for Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad's favored wife Aishia, to take Ali's place instead. This is where the conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims began.

Sunnis followed

'Ali ibn Abi Talib, husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatimah

Shia followed

Abu Bakr, father of the Prophet's favored wife, 'A'ishah (elected by people of Medina)

After this division, Sunni and Shia Muslims disagreed about who the legitimate successors were...

Sunnis followed

The Four Rightly Guided Caliphs:

- Abu Bakr
- Umar bin Al Khattab
- Uthman bin Afan
- Ali bin Abi Talib

Muhammad AlMahdi

Both Shia and Sunni Muslims believe the final ruler of Islam before Judgment Day is Muhammad AlMahdi.

Shia Muslims believe he is currently in hiding on earth, leading their people through imams. Sunnis believe AlMahdi is yet to be born.

Shia followed

The 12 Infallible Imams:

- Ali bin Abi Talib
- Hassan
- Hussain
- Ali ZainulAbideen
- Muhammad AlBaqir
- Jaafar AlSaadiq
- Musa AlKaazim
- Ali AlRaza
- Muhammad AlTaqi
- Ali AlNaqi
- Hasan AlAskari
- Muhammad AlMahdi (whom they believe is hidden today)

	SUNNI	SHIA
Current Leader	He is a practicing Muslim chosen by agreement of the authorities of the Muslim populace (ummah)	He is a male from the lineage of Ali from Fatimah.
Groups	<p>Four contributing schools of Law: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, Hanbali</p> <p>Two Schools of Creed Ashari, Maturidi</p> <p>These branches count each other on the right path with different ways of thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ithna Ashariyya ('Twelvers') • Ismailis ('Seveners') • Zaidis ('Fivers') <p>The latter do not agree to the infallibility of Imams or the occultation of the 12th Imaam Mahdi.</p>
Intercessory Prayer	Major groups of Sunnis do not accept intercession. However, the method of prayer at dargahs or ziyarat-gahs (tombs of saints) may be considered close to intercession.	Yes, intercessory prayers can be made to the 14 Infallibles only. The Fourteen Infallibles are Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the Twelve Imams.
Continued revelation from Allah	Authoritative revelation ended with Prophet Muhammad.	Allah continues to partially reveal himself. Imams are considered divinely guided. The purpose of revelation is to explain and safeguard the current faith and its esoteric meaning.

	SUNNI	SHIA
Pillars of Faith	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creed of Faith 2. Prayer 3. Zakat 4. Fasting 5. Pilgrimage 6. Jihad and strife in the way of Allah to promote good and stop bad. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prayer 2. Fasting 3. Pilgrimage 4. Zakat 5. Jihad 6. Promotion of good 7. Dissuasion from bad 8. Re-affirmation 9. Disassociation from the enemies of Islam starting from first Caliph.
Angels	Allah created angels from light. They do not have their own free will and always obey the commandments of Allah.	Angels obey Allah's commandments. They have limited free will and have no drive to sin.
Marriage	A man may marry up to 4 women.	A man may marry up to 4 women.
Temporary Unannounced Marriage	It was practiced in Muhammad's time, but now rejected.	Temporary unannounced marriage is permissible.
Concealing faith for self-protection (taqiya)	Affirmed under certain circumstances	Emphasized

	SUNNI	SHIA
Self Flagellation (Lattum)	Self flagellation (lattum) is a major sin.	Self flagellation is permitted by some scholars. To commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, Shiite groups march in massive parades on the 10th day of the Muharram month. There is self-flagellation i.e. flogging own back, chest with hands, knives, blades or chains.
Hadith translations and religious narrations from teachers	Muatta Maalik Musnad Ahmad Sahih Bukhari Sahih Muslim Sunan Abu Dawood	Nahajul Balagha Kitab al-Kafi Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih Tahdhib al-Ahkam Al-Istibsaar
Holy Cities	Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem	Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Najaf, Karbala
Militant Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim Brotherhood • The Salafis • Al-Shabab in Somalia • Al-Qaeda • Hamas • Fatah groups of Palestine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hezbollah • Alkoumainy regime of Iran • Houthis of Yemen

	SUNNI	SHIA
Holidays	<p>Eid al-Adha: Festival of sacrifice at the end of the Hajj, commemorating Abraham's faith</p> <p>Eid al-Fitr: Festival of breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan</p> <p>Eid-el-Milaad-un-Nabi: the observance of the birthday of Muhammad</p>	<p>Eid al-Adha: Festival of sacrifice at the end of the Hajj, commemorating Abraham's faith</p> <p>Eid al-Fitr: Festival of breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan</p> <p>Ashura: Commemorates the death of Husain [also spelled Hussayn], son of Imam 'Ali and grandson of Muhammad, on the 10th of Muharram, AH 61 [October 10, 680], in Karbala, Iraq. The event led to the split between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam</p> <p>Eid al ghadeer: Celebration of the appointment of Ali ibn Abi Talib by the Islamic prophet Muhammad as his successor.</p>
Place of worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosque • Eidgah: an open-air mosque usually outside the city (or at the outskirts) to perform the Salat al Eid (Eid prayers) for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. It is usually a public place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosque • Imambarah: A building in which the festival of the Muharram is celebrated, and service held in commemoration of the deaths of 'Ali and his sons, al-Hasan and al-Husain. • Ashurkhana: a congregation hall for commemoration ceremonies, especially those associated with the Remembrance of Muharram. • Eidgah: an open-air mosque usually outside the city (or at the outskirts) to perform the Salat al Eid (Eid prayers) for Eid ul-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. It is usually a public place.

Clergy

SUNNI	SHIA
<p>Caliph: Successor to Muhammad</p> <p>Imaam: The one who leads Islamic formal (Fard) prayers, even in locations besides the mosque, whenever prayers are done in a group of two or more with one person leading (imam) and the others following by copying his ritual actions of worship.</p> <p>Mujtahid: the theologian and legal expert who possesses the ijtiḥād (the right of independent interpretation of religious and legal matters). <i>In Sunnism</i>, the mujtahid is the founder and head of the madhabs (schools of Muslim jurisprudence)</p> <p>Allamah is an honorary title carried by only the very highest scholars of Islamic thought, jurisprudence, and philosophy</p> <p>Maulana is a Muslim man respected for his religious knowledge or scholarship.</p>	<p>Imam: Chosen by Allah to be the perfect example for the faithful and to lead all humanity in all aspects of life.</p> <p>Ayatollah: A title in the religious hierarchy achieved by scholars who have demonstrated highly advanced knowledge of Islamic law and religion.</p> <p>Mujtahid: The theologian and legal expert who possesses the ijtiḥād (the right of independent interpretation of religious and legal matters). <i>In Shiism</i>, the mujtahid is a representative of the most influential circles of the upper Shiite clergy (called mojtahed in Persian)</p> <p>Allamah is an honorary title carried by only the very highest scholars of Islamic thought, jurisprudence, and philosophy.</p> <p>Maulana is a Muslim man respected for his religious knowledge or scholarship.</p>