

## Imamah

Imamah is a difference in Sunni and Shi'a belief. Sunni do not accept Imamah in the way Shi'a present it. The word 'imam' means 'leader' in Arabic.	In Sunni Islam, an Imam leads the prayers at the mosque. He does not have any particular authority over the local Muslim community, and can be removed by the community.
After Muhammad died the Muslim community expanded rapidly until Islam covered huge areas of land. However according to Daniel W. Brown archaeological evidence suggests there was no widespread destruction or forced conversions (Brown, 2009, p. 110-111)	The expansion of early Islam appears to be a bureaucratic or administrative expansion. The Arabs did not require conversion to Islam. They seem to have become political rulers who permitted local religions and customs to continue.
An Imam in Shi'a belief is a successor to Muhammad, divinely inspired, infallible and chosen by God. He is also a member of the al-Bayt, the family and descendants of Muhammad.	In Shi'a belief the prophets, Musa, Isa, Ibrahim, etc, were also Imams. They were chosen by God and were leaders of the <i>ummah</i> . Muhammad is the 'last prophet' so Imams after Muhammad were not prophets.
In a public sermon Muhammad described Ali as 'mawla', meaning both 'friend' and 'authority'. Sunni accept Ali as a 'friend' of the community, Shi'a also perceive Ali's 'authority'.	4 days before Muhammad's death he asked Abu Bakr to lead the prayers. Sunni see this as a sign of Abu Bakr's leadership. Shi'a consider Muhammad to have already indicated Ali's leadership.
Brown notes that '.. the Arabs were inordinately passionate about leadership. Conflicts over the caliphate reveal a deep-rooted and widespread consensus that there could only be one legitimate caliph at a time, and that it as extraordinarily important for the right one to be chosen.' (119)	While Ali was busy with Muhammad's funeral, a group gathered in a tented area known as a <i>saqifa</i> . They appointed Abu Bakr as leader. Sunni present the choosing of Abu Bakr at the <i>saqifa</i> as a practical measure to ensure order. Shi'a see it as undemocratic.
After Muhammad died Abu Bakr was made first 'caliph' or steward, to lead the Muslim community. He was the choice of the groups who would become known as Sunni.	The groups who would become known as Shi'a wanted Ali to take over the Muslim community after Muhammad. He was made the 4 <sup>th</sup> Caliph (steward). Shi's see Ali as the 1 <sup>st</sup> Imam.
Supporters of Abu Bakr saw his leadership as 'sunnah' ('what the prophet intended'), now known as 'Sunni'.	The group who supported Ali's leadership were called the 'Shiat Ali' or 'followers of Ali'. Now known as Shi'a.

**DANIEL W. BROWN (2009) A NEW INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM**