

Background article: Expressions, Shi'a obligatory acts

Of the ten obligatory acts in the Shi'a understanding of Islam, six have already been covered in other sections. {See Section Two on Practices: The practices of Islam – Beliefs and practices of Shi'a Islam. See also the separate articles on numbers 1-6.} The remaining four are covered here. Although they are given the status of 'obligatory acts' in the Shi'a system, they are by no means exclusive to the Shi'a. They are shared by all Muslims, but given particular emphasis by the Shi'a.

Encouraging others to do good and discouraging them from doing bad

Islam is not a system of private piety for Muslims or a 'religious system' for those who choose to follow it. Muslims understand the guidance of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad as laying out the best possible way of life for human individuals and society, indeed for all creation. The creation, each man and woman, and the whole of human society will flourish best when it lives according to the divine command and avoids those things that God has forbidden. This is summed up in the phrase from the Qur'an *amr bil maruf wa nahy anil munkar* [Q. 3:104], which is normally translated as "commanding the good and forbidding the evil".

Every human being is called to be the regent of God on earth (*khalifa*), which means that each has the responsibility, not only for their own life and conduct, but also for shaping a society according to the guidance of God. The principal ethic in Islam is justice and therefore everyone should be encouraged to live a just life in a just society. Justice requires that one distinguishes good from bad. In Shi'a understanding, this distinction can be made by all people on the basis of reason. It should be possible to appeal to people's reason and ask them to work out what is good and what is bad. The next step is to make laws in society that promote the good and oppose the bad. These concepts need to become part of the daily lives of human beings so that they can flourish in a just human society. It is not enough that they are expressed as laws; they also need to become part of the habitual conduct of human beings. In this way, Muslims, as the community that bears the guidance of the Qur'an and Muhammad, should share that guidance and promote it in the world, through "encouraging others to do good and discouraging them from doing bad".

Tawalla and Tabarra

Surely every person who believes in God would say that they love God? If one loves God, then it follows that one should love the messengers that God sends to the earth to guide human beings on the right path. If one loves God and the Messenger, and if they have designated the Family of the Messenger to have a special place and responsibility for guiding humankind through this life and to Paradise in the life after death, then surely one would love them too? All Muslims would agree that they love God, and God's messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, and also the Ahl al-Bayt, the Family of the Prophet. Given the particular Shi'a understanding of the spiritual

excellence and exemplary role of the Ahl al-Bayt, this threefold love for God, the Prophet and the Family of the Prophet should be a hallmark of their lives; something in which they should excel within the whole Muslim community. {See Section Three on the importance of the Family of the Prophet.}

Tawalla means to keep close to all those who show this threefold love for God, the Prophet and the Family. If one is to keep close to them, then the opposite follows logically: one should avoid and keep away from those who do not show that threefold love; those who are ungodly, who disrespect the Prophet and are unjust to the Ahl al-Bayt. This opposite pole is *tabarra*.

This twin principle simply stated would be clear and obvious for all Muslims, and indeed open to be appreciated by all people of reason and goodwill. Differences and difficulties arise when some groups of Muslims speak or act in a way that others judge to fall short of the threefold love, respect and honour as they would want it to be expressed.