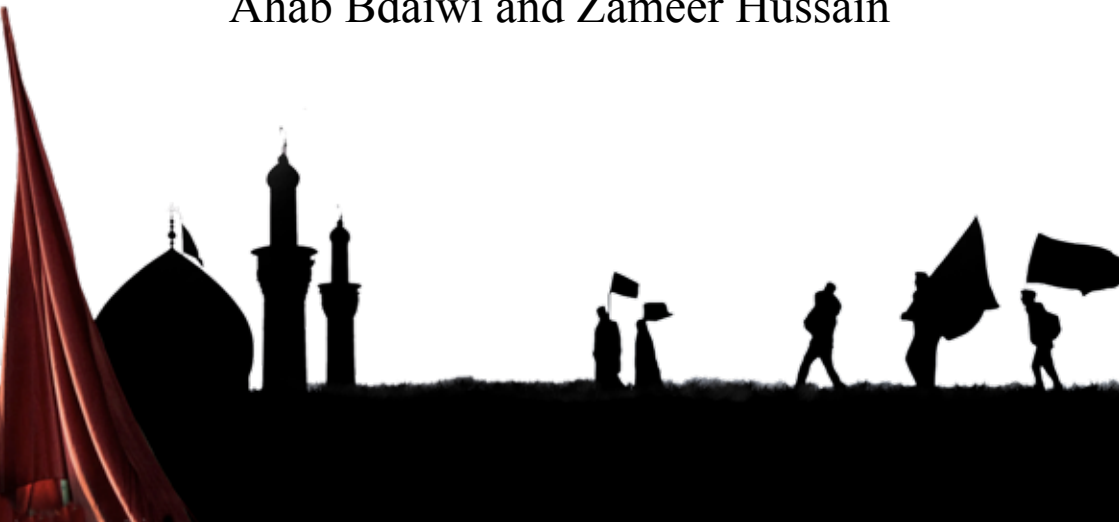


GCSE Religious Studies

**Shi'a Islam:
Beliefs and Practices**

Teacher's Edition

Ahab Bdaiwi and Zameer Hussain



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Introduction

The 2016 reforms in GCSE Religious Studies demand that students can show knowledge and understanding of diversity within religion. In Islam, this is centred on the diversity between the Sunni and Shi'a traditions. This booklet was created to give GCSE Religious Studies teachers the tailored subject knowledge in Shi'a Islam to deliver their lessons with confidence. For students, understanding the richness of the diversity within Islam will enhance their understanding of Islam more widely and, consequently, improve their exam performance.

The booklet will discuss the key beliefs and practices of Shi'a Islam, covering all the aspects that the Department for Education outlines in its document *Religious Studies: GCSE Subject Content (2015)*. This will ensure that the booklet sufficiently covers the subject knowledge demands of all the GCSE specifications that various exam boards have set. This booklet introduces:

• The Shi'a perspective of Islamic beliefs and teachings.

• How these beliefs and teachings influence the lives of Shi'a Muslims.

• Areas where Shi'a Islam significantly differs from Sunni Islam.

Shi'a Islam – A Brief Context

In history and at present Shi'a Islam was and remains the second largest religious tradition in the Islamic world. It has been estimated that Shi'a Muslims make up at least 10-15% of the global Muslim population.

In its literal form, the word *Shi'a* translates to ‘supporter of’ or ‘partisan of’. The Qur’an mentions that “**Abraham was amongst his (Noah’s) Shi’a**” (Qur’an 37:83), and Moses finding “**two men fighting, one being his Shi’a, the other his enemy**” (Qur’an 28:15). Hence, the word can generally be used as a prefix to imply the support or partisanship of a person.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D., the issue of who would lead the Muslims arose. Shi’a Muslims hold to the view that only Allah chooses a leader, and no one else has the right to do so. This divinely appointed leadership was to continue in the lineage of Prophet Muhammad under the *Imams* - the first of them being Ali. This is the foundational difference with Sunni Islam. Shi’a Muslims argue, therefore, that since Muhammad chose Ali ibn Abu Talib – his cousin and son in law - to continue the leadership of Islam, Allah had chosen Ali as the rightful successor.

Hence, in the current world, the word *Shi'a* is in reference to the Shi’a of Ali; those who hold to Ali being the rightful successor of Prophet Muhammad.

Disclaimer

Some Arabic terms used in the booklet have been amended to match the transliterations used by the examination boards.

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1. Beliefs & Teachings

The foundations of Shi'a Islam are five articles of belief, known as the '*Usul ad-Din* (the roots of the religion). The religion of Islam, in the Shi'a view, is built on these beliefs, and the practices of Shi'a Muslims are an expression of these core beliefs. It is stressed within the tradition that Shi'a Muslims must come to the conclusion of the '*Usul ad-Din* being the foundation of Islam through their own research and intellect. They cannot emulate or follow someone in this regard.

1.1 Tawhid (Oneness of Allah)

The first '*Usul ad-Din* is the belief in *Tawhid* (Oneness of Allah), which includes the belief of Him as an eternal, all-knowing and all-powerful being who is the originator of all of creation. In the view of Muslim scholars, it is the heart of Islam. Islam can therefore be seen as the religion of emphatically asserted monotheism.

Allah as One

The foundation of *Tawhid* is stressed several times in the Qur'an: **"Say, 'He is Allah, the One. Allah is the All-embracing. He neither begat, nor was begotten, nor has He any equal.'"** (Qur'an 112:1-4)



This Qur'anic chapter itself is called *Tawhid*. The message contained in the chapter is fivefold: one, that there is only one God; two, that He is self-sustaining and does not need to be supported by others; three, that He does not have offspring or children; four, that He is not the child of

someone else; and five, that He is unique and nothing in the universe compares to His uniqueness. Hence, Allah being One should not be seen only in terms of number since a number can be divided and multiplied; such an attribute is not applied to Allah. Allah is One in the sense that no other being shares His divinity as He is unique. In the spirit of the belief that Allah is unique and beyond all human comparisons with other beings, Muslims regularly utter the phrase *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest).

Allah as Unique

When looking at the nature of Allah, the Qur'an is very clear in highlighting Allah's unique nature as a part of His Oneness:

“Nothing is like Him.” (Qur'an 42:11)

Shi'a theologians hold the belief that Allah cannot be seen, be it in this life or the afterlife, since this would reduce the uniqueness of Allah and limit Him to the human eye. If one cannot look directly at the sun, Shi'as argue, then how can one see Allah, the creator of the sun? Hence, any scriptural references to physical descriptions of Allah or of humans 'seeing' Him are to be taken metaphorically. In this regard, Shi'a Muslims reject some other Muslim views that hold on to the notion that Allah will be visible to human sight in the afterlife, though the eyes do not perceive Him in this world.

Allah as Transcendent, Immanent and Omnipotent

Although Allah's uniqueness clearly demonstrates His transcendence, Allah is also immanent. He is still involved in the universe too through sustaining the world and answering prayers:

“When My servants ask you about Me, (tell them that) I am indeed near.” (Qur'an 2:186)

The nature of Allah also shows that He is all-powerful. The Qur'an states: ***“Do they not see that Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and (who) was not exhausted by their creation, is able to revive the dead? Yes, indeed He has power over all things.”*** (Qur'an 46:33)

This verse also reaffirms *Tawhid*. Allah is unique in His power and only He has the power to revive the dead.

Allah as Merciful

Another aspect of the nature of Allah is Him as *Al-Rahman* (the all-Merciful). Muslims hold to the view that nothing good is possible without the mercy of Allah and this is something we take for granted. Hence remembrance of Allah's mercy, and sustenance, is imperative. Every *Surah* (chapter) in the Qur'an (except one) begins with the words "***In the Name of Allah, the all-Beneficent, the all-Merciful***". This indicates the extent of Allah's Mercy and some have referred to this as the 'signature of Allah' since it is everywhere in the Qur'an and emphasises how important this attribute of Allah is.

Shirk

The opposite of *Tawhid* is *Shirk* (ascribing partners to Allah), and such doctrine or belief is fiercely opposed in all Islamic traditions:

"Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice." (Qur'an 31:13)

Muslims argue that beliefs and acts of polytheism place worship where it does not belong. A person who commits *Shirk* instead of worshipping Allah alone has placed worship where it does not belong. That is why Allah calls it an injustice since injustice is to place something where it does not belong. *Shirk* commonly has three key aspects:

1

Shirk in lordship where one associates a partner with Allah in His Lordship;

2

Shirk in names and attributes where one believes that created beings independently possess Allah's attributes, thereby elevating them to the status of Allah;

3

Shirk in worship where one worships another entity besides Allah.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Belief in Tawhid has a huge impact on my life. To be aware of the presence of Allah helps me through difficult times and makes me thank Him in good times, since everything good comes from Him and I am aware He is watching. The eleventh Imam, Imam Hasan al-Askari, said:

“Allah is the One to Whom every creature resorts when he is in need or in hardship, when there is no hope in anyone but Him.” (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

Everything I do is directed towards pleasing just Allah since I came from Him and I will eventually return to Him when I die. Tawhid also influences me as it makes me careful not to commit Shirk. Shirk isn't just worshipping someone other than Allah but it is putting anything before Allah and prioritising something above Allah. I must always ensure Allah is the focus of my life and trust in His will. This is true Tawhid; it is something that is a common thread through every aspect of my life as a Muslim.

1.2 Adalat (Divine Justice)

The second *'Usul ad-Din* is *Adalat* (Divine Justice). One of the common 99 Beautiful Names of Allah is *Al-Adl* (the Just). He gives justice and through Him justice is defined and understood since He is the perfection of justice. Numerous verses in the Qur'an underscore the belief in *Adalat*. For instance:

“Say: ‘My Lord has enjoined justice’” (Qur'an 7:29)

Linked to *Tawhid*, belief in *Adalat* is to believe that Allah does not reward or punish human beings unfairly. Good actions are rewarded and evil doings are punished justly.

According to Shi'a Islam, justice is the framework within which Allah acts, and so Allah does not act in an unjust manner. This is because it is completely against His nature to be unjust. To be unjust is to oppress

and Allah does not oppress His creation. He says in the Qur'an that He **“does not wrong anyone”** (Qur'an 18:49). Therefore, Allah also does not reward or punish human beings for something they did not do since that is also unjust. Similarly, Allah does not force people to act rightly or wrongly. Human beings are free to select their own actions (see **1.6.3 Al-Qadr**). If Allah acted on a whim and judged people without any concept of justice, then human beings would never know how to live according to Allah's guidance and do what is right. Hence it is considered rational when Allah acts according to those principles.

Allah has made His laws clear in the Qur'an, and through the teachings of His messengers, what constitutes good and bad actions. He has taught humans the principles of justice, both through the revelations that He has sent to humankind and through our ability to think. Hence, humans are free to act according to those principles of justice or to oppose them and act unjustly.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Belief in Adalat influences me greatly. It gives me a peace of mind that I know Allah will treat me and every other human being fairly, in this life and in the hereafter. However, I must also try to be fair towards other human beings if I want Allah to treat me fairly. The Qur'an says:

“O you who have faith! Be maintainers of justice and witnesses for the sake of Allah, even if it should be against yourselves or [your] parents and near relatives, and whether it be [someone] rich or poor, for Allah has a greater right over them.” (Qur'an 4:135)

The Qur'an is clear that Muslims must be fair in every walk of life, even if it means speaking up against my own family or friends. Everyone has the right to be treated fairly.

1.3 Nubuwwah (Prophethood)

The third *'Usul ad-Din* is *Nubuwwah* (Prophethood). The Qur'an says: ***“Certainly We raised an apostle in every nation (to preach:) ‘Worship Allah, and keep away from the Rebels (false gods).’”*** (Qur'an 16:36)

This verse states that Allah never stopped sending guidance. This directly links to the idea of *Adalat* (Divine Justice) since the sending of prophets is an act of justice. Allah will not hold human beings accountable for their deeds unless the nature of their deeds and actions, and their consequences, are adequately explained. Such a belief in the message of these prophets is an essential feature of Muslim life. It is through this message that the will of Allah is revealed to humans and has been done since the beginning of time.

Shi'a Muslims argue that an immaculate person is one who, owing to their high spiritual state and special connection to Allah, does not commit evil or fall into sin. This is because it is inconceivable that a divinely just Allah rewards and punishes human beings unless the reward and punishment is deserved. Moreover, humans cannot hope to find the path of truth and escape the path of falsehood unless both paths are made known to them clearly and in a manner that leaves no doubt. Otherwise, the just nature of Allah is doubtful, for how does Allah expect human beings to do right and avoid wrong unless right and wrong are pointed out to them? And when right and wrong are pointed out to them, it follows that the one who points out right and wrong must be immaculate too. The prophet must deliver the message containing right and wrong without distorting and/or changing it. The Qur'an says:

“Do not obey any sinner or ingrate among them...” (Qur'an 76:24)

Allah always calls to obey His prophets and also says not to obey those who disobey Him. Hence, Shi'a Muslims argue that prophets cannot be people who sin since Allah does not call humans to obey people who sin. It is important to point out, however, that there are instances in the Qur'an where prophets perform an action that may appear sinful but Shi'a Muslims believe that prophets are infallible and therefore cannot commit a sin.

For example, the Qur'an mentions Musa (Moses) accidentally killing someone and asking for forgiveness:

“(One day) he entered the city at a time when its people dwelt in distraction. He found there two men fighting, this one from among his followers, and that one from his enemies. The one who was from his followers sought his help against him who was from his enemies. So Moses hit him with his fist, whereupon he expired. He said, ‘This is of Satan’s doing. Indeed he is an enemy, manifestly misguiding.’ He said, ‘My Lord! I have wronged myself. Forgive me!’ So He forgave him. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.” (Qur’an 28:15-16)

According to Shi'a Muslims, Musa did not commit a sin here. He went to help an oppressed person and, in the process, struck a blow with his fist at the oppressor. This ended, unexpectedly, in the death of the oppressor. Helping an oppressed person is a praiseworthy act in itself. The death of the oppressor, at most, can be labelled as an accidental death that is not a crime or a sin. Musa's words, that ***“this is the doing of Satan”***, do not necessarily refer to his own action but of the action of the oppressor. Even though Musa did not commit a sin, he still sought Allah's forgiveness due to his spiritual level and humility. Hence, Shi'a theologians always seek to find an alternative explanation for the actions committed by prophets such as Adam, Yunus (Jonah), Yusuf (Joseph) etc. that seemingly look like disobedience of Allah but in actual fact are not.

The immaculate nature of prophets does not undermine their human nature or render them robotic. Rather they are perfect exemplars or role models for others on how to live a life according to Allah's will. They are free from sin, doubt or error so that their lives can be relied upon with confidence. This is not limited to just revelation but in the general religious sense too of their everyday lives.



Prophets

All Muslims share the belief that Muhammad is a prophet of Allah. However, this does not mean that they believe that he was the original founder of Allah's religion. Instead, he was the last in a long chain of prophets, all of whom taught the consistent message of *Tawhid* and what Allah expects from His followers:

“The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each (of them) has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. (They declare,) ‘We make no distinction between any of His apostles.’” (Qur’an 2:285)

Of these prophets, 25 are named in the Qur’an but this is not the complete list which reaches 124,000, the first being Adam and the last being Muhammad. Some prophets, we do not know:

“Certainly We have sent apostles before you. Of them are those We have recounted to you, and of them are those We have not recounted to you.” (Qur’an 40:78)

Prophets are sent as teachers, moral guides, masters of ethics and as people who warn against divine punishment and invite towards divine reward. The mission of prophets is to ensure that all human societies, regardless of language and culture, grasp fully the nature of actions and

the consequences that follow them. Shi'a Muslims, like other Muslims, regard highly the predecessors of Prophet Muhammad, and regard figures like Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) as prophets and messengers of God who are given the utmost reverence.

What distinguishes Prophet Muhammad from the previous prophets (see **3.2 Prophet Muhammad**) is that he is the universal prophet and for *“all the worlds”* (Qur'an 21:107), whereas the other prophets were for their particular time and society. Prophets receive guidance from Allah; some prophets who are *Rasuls* (messengers) receive this guidance in the form of a scripture and are given a law. Others, called *Nabis* (prophets), call people back to a purer following of the scripture sent to an earlier prophet after they have deviated (and those who forewarn about future events to befall humanity). For example, Ibrahim (Abraham) is seen as a *Rasul* who brought scripture and law and Yaqub (Jacob) is seen as a *Nabi* who called people to follow Ibrahim's teachings.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Belief in Nabuwwah influences me because it makes me realise how much I can learn from the prophets. Although Prophet Muhammad is the greatest of all the prophets, this does not mean I cannot learn from the previous prophets. They all had the same message of believing in Allah and performing good actions. The Qur'an says:

“We did not send any apostle before you but We revealed to him that ‘There is no god except Me; so worship Me.’” (Qur'an 21:25)

Belief in these prophets makes me realise the justice of Allah because He sent every nation a prophet because He wanted to guide them to the message of Tawhid. It also makes me respect the other faiths that believe in these prophets because it is something we all have in common. For example, I can talk about Jesus and Moses with my Christian and Jewish friends and see how they influence them. That is why it is so important to believe in all the prophets, not just the final one.

1.4 Imamah (Divinely-appointed Leadership)

The fourth *'Usul ad-Din* is the belief in *Imamah* (guides/leaders appointed by Allah). The word *imam* (lower case) is used to refer to religious prayer leaders and clerics/scholars. This term is applied in Sunni as well as in Shi'a theology.

In a specifically Shi'a context, though, the *Imam* (capitalised) refers to one of the divinely appointed successors to the Prophet Muhammad from his progeny (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**). In Twelver Shi'a Islam, this means the Twelve *Imams* who lead Islam after Prophet Muhammad. According to Shi'a Islam, the selection of a religious leader, prophet or not, is a divine matter decided by Allah and communicated to prophets. This is seen in the Qur'an when Allah tells His angels:

"Indeed I am going to set an authority on the earth." (Qur'an 2:30)

Although this verse is referring to the creation of Adam, Shi'a Muslims apply this as a general principle that only Allah chooses a leader.

The *Imam* is someone who, in the absence of the Prophet, acts as the leader of the Muslim community. His role includes religious and secular affairs, and while he is not a prophet, the *Imam* is responsible for protecting the message and teachings of the Prophet. Unlike prophets, they do not receive revelation but receive divine inspiration. Like prophets, they are sinless, free from error, and able to interpret the scripture of the prophet that they follow. This is based on the God-given gift of knowledge, which is open to them alone. Hence we can say that Prophet Muhammad brought the final revelation and the *Imams* protect its interpretation.

Thus the *Imam* is regarded as the most learned of the Muslim community after the Prophet. He is learned in all fields of study, not just religion, since his knowledge is inherited from the Prophet and also given directly by Allah. In the Shi'a tradition the *Imam* is described as someone who is the representative of Allah on earth, i.e., their actions and words are consistent with the will of Allah.

Prophet Muhammad, through divine designation chose the first *Imam*. The subsequent *Imams* were chosen by the *Imam* previous to them, through Allah's instructions. Hence, Imam Ali chose Imam Hasan, Imam Hasan chose Imam Hussain, and so on (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**). This is known as *nass* – that is, designation of an *Imam*.

The Qur'an also specifies that the choice of *Imam* is decided by Allah. In other words, Allah selects the *Imams*:

“And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them, He said, ‘I am making you the Imam of humankind.’ Said he, ‘And from among my descendants?’ He said, ‘My pledge does not extend to the unjust.’” (Qur'an 2:124)

The verse highlights that the continuation of leadership is through Prophet Ibrahim's lineage which eventually reaches Prophet Muhammad and the *Imams* of his progeny. It also proves that a leader chosen by Allah cannot be unjust and must therefore be immaculate and infallible. This is crucial to the concept of *Imamah* since the one who speaks on behalf of Allah cannot make errors and must not sin as he is a role model to all.

The doctrine of *Imamah* is what separates Shi'a Muslims from

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The concept of *Imamah* is arguably one of the most important of my beliefs since that this is what distinguishes me as a Shia Muslim. The *Imams* are people who followed Allah and Prophet Muhammad perfectly and they are the figures who I turn to for religious instruction. The fifth *Imam*, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, said:

“Certainly Allah has not left the earth without a knowledgeable Imam, for if it were not such, the truth would never be distinguished from falsehood.” (Hadith in Al-Kafi) I see *Imamah* as an extension of Allah's authority, which He gave to Prophet Muhammad and the *Imams*. I respect all the *Imams* as much as I respect the Prophet since they all take me towards Allah. *Imamah* also highlights Allah's justice since He did not just leave Islam alone once the Prophet died; He left us guides to ensure we stay on the true path of Islam.

other followers of Islam since it holds to the idea that Allah continued to choose people for guidance after Prophet Muhammad. Although they are not prophets who brought revelation, obedience to them is equivalent to obeying Prophet Muhammad and Allah:

“O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you.” (Qur’an 4:59)

This verse indicates that there are three levels of obedience that a Muslim must adhere to: Allah, Prophet Muhammad and those with authority (the *Imams* according to Shi’a Muslims). Although their status differs, since Allah cannot be equated to anyone, obedience towards all three is equal. This is because they never contradict each other and Allah uses the latter two to make His will clear.

1.5 Ma’ad (Life after death)

The fifth *‘Usul ad-Din* is the belief in *Ma’ad* (life after death). The Islamic view of human existence is broken into two: this world and the world after death. Death in the earthly world is not the end of human existence but the beginning of eternal life in the hereafter. In the hereafter, human beings will either enjoy eternal bliss in *Jannah* (Paradise) or damnation and punishment in *Jahannam* (Hell). The Qur’an makes this clear:

“Allah created the heavens and the earth with reason, so that every soul may be requited for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged.” (Qur’an 45:22).

Barzakh

Once dead, Muslims are of the belief that the human soul lives on and is aware of its surroundings, such as when burials and funerals take place. Following the burial, the human soul will detach itself from the body and live in an intermediary realm. This is known as the *Barzakh*. The literal meaning of *Barzakh* is a ‘veil’ or a barrier that stands between two things which does not allow the two to meet. In the context of death, it is a realm kept by Allah between this world and the next where the soul goes:

“And ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected.” (Qur’an 23:100)

While in this intermediary world, human beings will be questioned and held accountable for the deeds they performed during their lives. Shi'a Muslims believe one will be asked who their Lord, Book, Prophet and *Imam* are. It is almost a temporary-Heaven or temporary-Hell depending on the person's responses. Good deeds will bring light to the grave of the deceased, while bad deeds result in fear and torment. They will live in this state until *Yawm al-Qiyamah* (the Day of Judgement).

Resurrection

Given that our life ends in death, a life in the hereafter requires a concept of resurrection from the dead to a new form of life. The resurrection to a new life is indeed the consequence of our creation; as the Qur'an puts it: ***"From God we came and to God we will return."*** (Qur'an 2:156).

Muslims believe that if this were not so, then our life would have no purpose.

Day of Judgement

On the Day of Judgement, human beings will be held accountable for two types of actions: those that deal with the rights of Allah (i.e. the duties a Muslim must perform in devotion to Allah) and the rights of fellow humans (i.e. how a Muslim treated others). The reward for those whose good deeds exceed their bad ones is Paradise:

"Indeed the Godwary will be amid gardens and springs. 'Enter it in peace and safety!'" (Qur'an 15:45-46)

On the other hand, those who have excess of evil, not forgiven by Allah, are punished with Hell:

"For those who defy their Lord is the punishment of hell, and it is an evil destination." (Qur'an 67:6)

In the Shi'a view, one must differentiate between the rewards and the punishments Allah sets out. Allah is *Al-Adl* (all-Just) and this entails that Allah will keep to the promises of the rewards that He has set out. Allah is however free to show mercy and waive punishments. Since humans are fallible and make mistakes, Muslims would rely on the mercy of Allah, rather than His justice, to enter Paradise. Allah created all humans with

the innate nature to want to achieve Paradise. However, due to humans going against Allah's guidance, it may lead some to not achieve Paradise and to suffer the pain of separation from Allah's presence by being in Hell.

Intercession

One way for Allah to show His mercy is through *Shafa'a* (intercession). Shi'a Muslims believe that Allah will allow people closest to Him to intercede for others. The Qur'an says:

“Intercession will not avail that day except from him whom the All-beneficent allows and approves of his word.” (Qur'an 20:109)

Although an Islamic concept that is agreed upon by Muslims, Shi'as believe that those given the privilege of intercession does not just include Prophet Muhammad but also his family (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**), which include the *Imams*. They will be allowed to request for Allah to allow salvation for certain people.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Belief in a life after death ensures that I live this life to the best of my ability in obedience towards Allah. This belief makes me live in a way that is a balance between fear and hope. I fear going to Hell but I hope for Paradise. It would be wrong to live a life full of fear of Allah's punishment and too much in hope of Allah's mercy. The first Imam, Imam Ali, said:

“I yearn for meeting Allah, and I am waiting for His good rewards with hope.” (Hadith in Nahj al-Balagha)

In the end, because Allah is just, I know that wherever I will end up in the afterlife would be the correct decision. However, I am always in hope of Allah's mercy because when I make mistakes and I ask for forgiveness, I am sure He will forgive me.

I also rely on the intercession of the Prophet and Imams for salvation. This belief also makes me aware that this life is temporary and the afterlife is permanent. Hence, if something does not go my way in this world, I will not get too worried over it because this world will eventually end. This is what the Prophet and Imams have taught; to give importance to this world but not in exchange for the afterlife.

1.6 Six Articles of Faith in Sunni Islam – the Shi'a View

Although Shi'a Muslims have their own list of foundational beliefs, it is clear to see that there are overlaps with the Articles of Faith of Sunni Muslims. For example, the Sunni Articles such as belief in *Tawhid* (the Oneness of Allah), the prophets and life after death are covered by three of the Shi'a *'Usul ad-Din*. However, this does not mean the Shi'a reject the Sunni Articles of *Kutub* (holy books), *Malaikah* (angels) and *Al-Qadr* (predestination). The following section will expand on the Shi'a view of these remaining three aspects of faith that are not part of the *'Usul ad-Din*.

1.6.1 Kutub (Divinely Revealed Books)

All Muslims must believe in the divinely revealed books prior to the Qur'an. These are:

- Scrolls of Ibrahim (*Sahifa*)
- Torah (*Tawrat*)
- Psalms (*Zabur*)
- Gospel (*Injil*)

Scrolls of Ibrahim

The *Sahifa* of Ibrahim (Scrolls of Abraham) are part of the religious scriptures of Islam. These scriptures are believed to have contained the revelations Prophet Ibrahim received from Allah, which were written down by him as well as his scribes and followers. They are now generally believed to have been destroyed over the course of time and are considered a lost scripture.

“This is indeed in the former scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.” (Qur'an 87:18-19)

This passage refers to the fact that the truth of Allah's message is present in the earliest revelations and is consistent with what Prophet Muhammad taught regarding the afterlife. This also reaffirms the idea of *Nubuwwah* (prophethood) and the prophets having a consistent message.

Torah

Another of the *Kutub* is the *Tawrat* (Torah) of Musa (Moses). Muslims believe the *Tawrat*, in its original formulations, was a holy book containing the laws of Allah given by Him to Prophet Musa and the Israelites:

“We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. The prophets, who had submitted, judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scribes, as they were charged to preserve the Book of Allah and were witnesses to it.” (Qur’an 5:44)

Muslims believe that in the *Tawrat*, Prophet Muhammad’s name was mentioned and his coming prophesised:

“Those who follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, whose mention they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel.” (Qur’an 7:157)

However, Muslims believe the original *Tawrat* was altered by the words of people which stopped it becoming the infallible word of Allah:

“So woe to those who write the Book with their hands and then say, ‘This is from Allah,’ that they may sell it for a paltry gain. So woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn!” (Qur’an 2:79)

Psalms

Another key book is the *Zabur* (Psalms), succeeding the *Tawrat* (Torah), given to Prophet Dawud (David). The *Zabur* (Psalms) comprise of a collection of hymns and prayers which Muslims believe was used for worship. Some scholars equate this to the Biblical book of Psalms. The Qur’an mentions:

“Certainly We gave some prophets an advantage over others, and We gave David the Psalms.” (Qur’an 17:55)

The *Zabur* does not exist anymore but some scholars argue that the Psalms in the Bible may have some similarities to the *Zabur* but they had additions made by humans.

Gospel

The final of the divine books before the Qur’an is the *Injil* (Gospel). It refers to the book of revelation given to Prophet Isa (Jesus):

“And We followed them with Jesus son of Mary, to confirm that which was before him of the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light, confirming what was before it of the Torah, and as guidance and advice for the Godwary.” (Qur’an 5:46)

Muslims believe that the author of the *Injil* was not Isa but Allah, who inspired Isa and revealed this scripture. Isa memorised the revelation then taught it to all of his disciples. Many Muslim scholars believe that this original *Injil* has undergone alteration; that the words and the meaning of the words have been distorted, with some passages altered/removed and others added. They believe that the current Canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament of the Bible, and lost Gospels, such as that of Peter, contain fragments of Jesus’ message but the majority of the original teaching has been changed over time. For example, the Islamic concept of *Tawhid* means that, in their view, it is impossible for Jesus to be God incarnate or the Son of God, and that the worship of Jesus by Christians is due to later additions.

Shi’a Muslims believe that the original versions of these divinely revealed books are with the final *Imam* (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**). He will disclose them when he returns.

How does this influence a Shi’a Muslim?

Belief in the previous books of Allah is very important to me because it encourages me to learn about the Bible and Torah. The Qur’an instructs Christians, Jews and Muslims to find common things they believe in:

“Say, ‘O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah.” (Qur’an 3:64)

Even though I may not believe they are in their original form, reading these other books can allow me to see what aspects of Islam I can identify in the current Bible and Torah. I can also see the similarities and differences between Islam’s portrayal of the prophets and those in the Bible and Torah. I treat those books with the utmost respect since they still contain the words of Allah.

1.6.2 Malaikah (Angels)

Malaikah (angels) are regarded as completely obedient to Allah:

“They glorify (Him) night and day, and they do not flag.” (Qur’an 21:20)

They have no freewill, no desires and only have the faculty of intellect. According to Muslim belief, angels are created of light instead of earth, like humans. Belief in their existence is of the utmost importance. Through the intermediary of angels, described in the Islamic scriptures as obedient spiritual attendants of Allah, the revelations of the Qur’an, and the other *Kutub*, were communicated and conveyed by the Archangel Jibra’il (Gabriel) to the designated prophets. The Islamic tradition lists the main angels of Allah and their respective roles in the divine plan as follows:

- Jibra’il (Gabriel), the conveyer of revelations;
- Mika’il (Michael), who is in charge of sustenance and mercy;
- Israfil (Raphael), the announcer of the end of times;
- Izra’il (Azrael), the angel of death.

In addition to this, according to Islamic belief, every human being is assigned two angels whose task is to record all the deeds, good and bad, in preparation for the Day of Judgment:

“When the twin recorders record (his deeds), seated on the right hand and on the left: he says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him.” (Qur’an 50:17-18)

One angel, figuratively speaking, sits on the right shoulder and records all good deeds, while another sits on the left shoulder and records all sins. The book in which the angels are writing is the cumulative record of a given person’s deeds. After that person’s death, it is said that on the Day of Judgment each person will be confronted with this record, and the two angels will be present to tell Allah of what the person did as witnesses.

A further key group of angels are *Munkar* and *Nakir*. They are the angels that question a person after they die in the grave. The words *Munkar* and *Nakir* means unknown, unrecognised and unaccustomed. They are called by this way because they come to the dead in a way that he/she has

not seen before. According to Shi'a Muslims, these two angels question the dead and treat them according to the answers that they receive. The questions are: Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Book? Who is your *Imam*? (see **1.5 Ma'ad**).

A final key group of angels, distinct to Shi'a Islam, are the angels present at the graves of the *Imams*. For example, the sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**), said:

“Since the day Imam Hussain was martyred, Allah has appointed seventy thousand angels who are dishevelled and covered with dust; to invoke blessings on Imam Hussain and pray for mercy on him.”
(*Hadith in Kamil al-Ziyarat*)

This indicates that for Allah's chosen people, there are blessings in the places where they are buried due to the legacy they left on the earth and the love He has for them. It also highlights the sacred nature of such places that should be visited (see **2.3.2 Ziyarah**).

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Belief in angels is very important since there are many of them, even though we cannot see them. The Sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

“Allah did not create any creation more (numerous) than the angels.” (Hadith in *Amali al-Tusi*)

This shows how vast the world of angels is. The recording angels influence my life the most since I am aware that they are writing down my good and bad deeds. This makes me think twice about doing something since I know they will write this down and present it to Allah on the Day of Judgement. This ensures that I try my best to fulfil what Allah asks me to do as well as fulfil the rights of human beings.

Belief in Munkar and Nakir also influences me to ensure I know my religion very well and truly believe it in my heart. They will ask me questions in the grave and I must ensure I know Allah, the prophet, the Qur'an and my Imams. The angels at the graves of the Imams are also important as when I visit those graves on pilgrimage, I am aware they are praying for me.

1.6.3 Al-Qadr (Predestination)

Shi'a Muslims do not agree with the view that human actions are predestined and predetermined by Allah. Indeed, Allah has knowledge of all events, past and future, but human beings are responsible for their own deeds and actions. Allah's foreknowledge does not force a human to act in that way.

Thus Shi'a Muslims maintain that human beings are directly responsible for their actions through the freewill given to them by Allah. The natural laws of the universe, however, are not determined by human beings but by Allah. In this way, Allah exercises His general will over the heavens and the earth. But whatever choices human beings make they do so through freewill.

In the view of Shi'a Muslims, Allah sometimes influences events in the universe directly. An example is the ordering of religious commandments such as when Allah commanded the Archangel Jibra'il to convey the revelations of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad. In the broad scheme of things, all power is from Allah; human beings perform actions within the parameters set by Allah. Human beings are free to decide on the paths they take in this life and this is affirmed by the following Qur'anic verse: ***“Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.”*** (Qur'an 76:3)

Shi'a Muslims understand the verse as being a clear indication of Allah providing guidance for human beings through the human intellect and divine messengers. Each person is thus responsible for the state of his or her own soul.

However, Shi'a Muslims also believe that some things are predestined by Allah. For example, Allah has already preordained the sustenance He will provide to a human being or has preordained the time of a person's death. However, the human being has the freewill to earn the sustenance through lawful or unlawful means; one can steal money or work to earn it. Shi'a Muslims also believe that what was destined for you can be changed by Allah. To illustrate this delicate point with an example, Prophet

Muhammad said, when speaking of the importance of family relations: ***“Whoever would like his sustenance to be increased and his life to be extended, should uphold the ties of kinship.”*** (Hadith in *Bihar al-Anwar*) This shows that doing certain good deeds can increase your sustenance or your lifespan; keeping ties with your family is one of these deeds. If I reconcile with a family member, my lifespan and sustenance can increase. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that Allah changes His mind based on your actions. He is not dictated by humans. His eternal knowledge means He was always aware of this. Shi’a Muslims maintain that we should not mix the realm of Allah’s knowledge with the realm of humans. Doing so would be to commit *Shirk* (see **1.1 Tawhid**).

Hence, Shi’a Muslims believe in a middle position when it comes to predestination and freewill. Some things are predestined but we also have freewill to reach this. Such an issue was posed to the sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**). He asked the questioner to stand on one leg, which he did. He then asked the questioner to then raise the other leg at the same time, which he could not do. He was illustrating the idea that some things are in our control whereas other things are not in our control.

How does this influence a Shi’a Muslim?

Belief in predestination allows me to realise that everything is in the control of Allah. However, this does not mean I sit back and do nothing. Allah has given me the freewill to do everything and that makes me accountable for my actions. Hence, if I see someone in need I will help them rather than saying ‘it is Allah’s will’. This belief also gives me hope that even though certain things are written for me, this can change due to my actions.

The belief also reinforces my view about Adalat. The Fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, said:

“Allah, the Exalted, is too merciful to force His servants to sin and then punish them for it. He is also too mighty to want something and it not be accomplished.” (Hadith in al-Tawhid)

This shows the belief in Al-Qadr and Adalat must go together to make sense.



2. Practices

The *'Usul ad-Din* (roots of religion) form the foundation of Shi'a belief. From these roots spring the *Furu' ad-Din* (the branches of the religion) – the 10 obligatory acts. These acts have a clear foundation in Islamic sources and were taught by Prophet Muhammad and the *Imams*.

2.1 Salah (Ritual Prayer)

The first *Furu' ad-Din* is the act of *Salah* (ritual prayer) that every Muslim must perform:

“And maintain the prayer, and give the zakat, and bow along with those who bow (in prayer).” (Qur'an 2:43)

This is seen as the primary way of worshipping Allah. It is seen as a devotional, spiritual conversation between the one performing the prayer and Allah.

Method

There is a set way of performing this act of worship that cannot be altered. It is as much as a physical ritual as it is spiritual. It can be performed privately at home or in congregation - preferably the latter. Shi'a Muslims aim to pray the same way Prophet Muhammad and the *Imams* prayed.

Before one can perform *Salah*, the following ritual preparations have to be observed:

- **Ritual Purity:** To prepare for prayer, Muslims undergo bodily purification through a ritual called *Wudhu*. This involves a sequence of washing the face and arms and then the wiping of the head and feet with your already wet hands. Shi'a Muslims do not wash their feet in this ritual, like other Muslims, but wipe them with their hands as the Qur'an says:

“O you who have faith! When you stand up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your

heads and your feet, up to the ankles.” (Qur’an 5:6)

- Place: Following *Wudhu*, the place where the prayer is to be held has to be carefully considered. It should be clean, resting (i.e. not moving) and permission must be sought from the owner of the place of prayer if it is not public. There are exceptions. Muslims can perform prayers in moving vehicles such as trains and airplanes. In all situations, Muslims must face the direction of *Makkah*.
- Dress: The garments worn during prayer should be clean. The clothes worn cannot be made of transparent material and cannot be made out of non-edible parts of animals, such as fur, leather, bones, horns or teeth. For men, sufficient clothing must provide cover from the abdomen to knee. However, covering the entire body is preferred. For women, the entire body, head to toes, must be covered by clothing, except for the face and hands.
- *Niyah* (intention): Muslims silently declare their intention to draw closer to Allah through an act of obedience. *Salah* must only be done with the intention of seeking Allah’s pleasure to reinforce the principle of *Tawhid* (see **1.1 Tawhid**). Only Allah is to be worshipped and prayed to.

There are five prayers that a Muslim is obligated to perform daily:

- *Salah al-Fajr* before sunrise (2 units)
- *Salah al-Zuhr* at noon (4 units)
- *Salah al-Asr* in the late afternoon (4 units)
- *Salah al-Maghrib* directly after sunset (3 units)
- *Salah al-Isha* at night-time (4 units)

For each *Salah*, one can be flexible about the timing. This allows Muslims to structure their daily routines according to these times. It is an Islamic principle that Allah does not want to make life difficult and for His duties

to be a burden on people. In Shi'a Islam, *Salah al-Zuhr* and *Salah al-Asr*, as well as *Salah al-Maghrib* and *Salah-al-Isha*, can be combined, i.e. the latter can be performed directly after the former is completed rather than waiting for its designated time. In this, Shi'a Muslims point towards the fact that the Qur'an only gives three times for prayer, not five. They also cite a narration where Prophet Muhammad combined prayers and told the Muslims that he did this to show *Salah* is not meant to be a burden on them.

Before *Salah*, the *Adhan* (call to prayer) is made:

- *Allahu Akbar* – Allah is the Greatest (4 times)
- *Ashhadu an la ilaha il Allah* – I bear witness that there is no god but Allah (2 times)
- *Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah* – I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (2 times)
- *Ashhadu anna Aliun wali Allah* – I bear witness that Ali is a divinely-appointed authority (2 times, this is not considered part of the *Adhan* but said as a recommended supplement to reaffirm the belief)
- *Hayya 'ala al-salah* – Hurry to prayer (2 times)
- *Hayya 'ala al-falah* – Hurry to success (2 times)
- *Hayya 'ala khayril amal* – Hurry to the best of deeds (2 times)
- *Allahu Akbar* – Allah is the Greatest (2 times)
- *La ilaha il Allah* – There is no god but Allah (2 times)

Once the *Wudhu* (purification ritual), *Adhan* (call to prayer) and *Niyah* (intention) are done, *Salah* is ready to be performed. Each *Salah* has a specific number of *Rak'as* (units). Each *Rak'a* consists of recitation of Qur'an verses, physical movements and statements. The general sequence of each *Rak'a* is as follows:

1. *Takbiratul Ihram* – Raising of the hands accompanied by the words *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) and then standing. *Salah* has begun. Shi'a Muslims do not clasp their hands, they leave their arms down since they believe this is the way the Prophet and *Imams* performed *Salah*.
2. *Qiyam* – Recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an followed by recitation of another chapter from the Qur'an of your choice.

Unlike some other Muslims, Shi'as start each chapter in *Salah* with the Qur'anic phrase ***“In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.”***

3. *Ruku* – Bowing from the waist to acknowledge the guidance of Allah. The worshipper says in Arabic, ‘All glory be to my Lord, the Greatest’. One then rises from this for a moment.

4. *Sujud* – Going down in prostration with the forehead, palms of the hands and toes placed on the floor in submission to Allah. During prostration, the worshipper says ‘All glory to my Lord, the Highest’. To prostrate in such a manner before Allah is the greatest sign of humbleness and submission to Him. Shi'a Muslims prostrate so that their foreheads rest on a small tablet of dry unbaked earth, called a *turba*. Prophet Muhammad said:

“The earth has been made a place of prostration for me” (Hadith in *Wasa'il al-Shi'a*).

Shi'a Muslims argue that at the time of the Prophet, there were no prayer mats and Muslims ensured that they prostrated directly on the earth or something natural. With the addition of prayer mats, Shi'a Muslims believe one must still prostrate with their head on something natural that cannot be eaten or worn. *Salah* is meant to be an escape from the material world and prostrating directly on carpet does not emphasise this. However, prostrating on something natural such as earth reminds the human that they come from earth and will return to earth. The *turba* Shi'a Muslims carry nowadays is usually made from the earth of the city of *Karbala* in Iraq, since that is considered sacred (see **2.7.2 Ashura**). However, one may also prostrate on a leaf or grass as it is natural or one can prostrate on any piece of land directly. Following this, the worshipper rises to sit on their knees and then repeats prostration for a second time. One *Rak'a* is now complete.

At the end of the prescribed number of *Rak'as*, the Muslim, whilst sitting on their knees, recites the two-part statement of faith called the *Shahadah*: ***“I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger and servant of Allah”*** and calls for Allah's blessings to be sent upon Prophet Muhammad and his family. To finish the *Salah*, the

worshiper sends *salaam* (peace) upon Prophet Muhammad, the righteous servants of Allah and to the whole of creation. Shi'a Muslims end with repeating *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) thrice raising their hands. *Salah* is now complete.

Importance of Salah

Salah is obligatory and must not be neglected, even if physical movement is limited. According to Islamic law, someone who needs to remain seated for *Salah* due to health reasons can prostrate by just moving their upper body as much as possible. Someone who needs to lie down can move just their head. Even movement of the eyes is enough if one has a paralyzed body. The non-negotiable nature of *Salah* shows its importance. Only females, whilst on their period, are excused from performing *Salah* as well as Muslim children who have not reached the stage of puberty.

The verses recited from the Qur'an in *Salah* are always in Arabic and must be spoken from memory and not read from a book. Therefore every Muslim is required to have memorised some verses of the Qur'an in order to be able to pray. Muslims, men and women, are encouraged to attend congregational prayer where the *imam* (leader of prayer) recites on behalf of the whole congregation.

Friday Prayer

The *Salah al-Jum'a* (Friday Prayer) is a weekly prayer performed in congregation with a group of people. Everyone tries to gather at the mosque if they are able to. Shi'a mosques that are close together, within a certain distance, do not all hold Friday Prayer. Rather, only one would hold the Friday Prayer. This is to ensure that the congregation attend one place to worship together rather than scattered across many places of worship within a close range. This allows Muslims to receive the benefits of the social aspect of prayer i.e. praying together with the people of your faith and strengthening the bond.

Salah al-Jum'a replaces *Salah al-Zuhr* but the prayer is shortened to two *Rak'as* so that two *khutbas* (sermons) must be given by the person leading

the *Salah* before it is performed. For Shi'a Muslims, *Salah al-Jum'a* is currently optional in the absence of the final *Imam* (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**) so one has the option of choosing between *Salah al-Zuhr* or *Salah al-Jum'a* on a Friday. However, the latter is always the preferable choice to make due to the additional social benefits of praying with others.



How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Salah influences my life greatly. I fit my day around my Salah rather than the other way around. This is why praying in the morning is difficult; you have to wake up very early. Praying in the afternoon is also difficult as if you are at school, you have to find time and space to perform it and it requires a lot of devotion.

The five daily prayers are what distinguish me as a Muslim from other faiths and it is something I am proud of. Salah ensures that I am able to put aside worldly things five times a day and can speak to Allah. I feel like I am being purified when I pray and that it refocuses my day. It is arguably the most important aspect of the faith. Prophet Muhammad said: "Verily the pillar of religion is the prayer." (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

I must make sure that I know all the rules of Salah and learn the Qur'an verses that are required to be recited in Salah. However, I must also ensure that I concentrate in Salah and it doesn't just become a physical act. I am lucky that in Shi'a Islam I am allowed to combine prayers. This means I have no excuse to neglect my prayers since Allah has made it easy for me.

2.2 Sawm (Fasting)

The second *Furu' ad-Din* is *Sawm* (fasting) that every able Muslim must observe in the month of *Ramadan*:

“O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be Godwary.” (Qur’an 2:183)

Fasting during the month of *Ramadan* is compulsory for all Muslims. The fast carries spiritual and material benefit. In its most basic form, according to Shi’a legal experts, a person must not do the following from just before sunrise to just after sunset (i.e. from *Salah al-Fajr* to *Salah al-Maghrib*):

- Deliberately eating, drinking or the intake of any substance.
- Acts of a sexual nature.
- Deliberately ascribing lies to Allah, the Prophet and the *Imams*.

Sawm is a command of Allah to be observed by Muslims after the age of puberty. It is an important part of religious practice and nurtures the *taqwa* (Godwariness) of a person. The one fasting becomes aware of the hunger and thirst of those less fortunate. Fasting makes humans aware of how much we rely on things. It shows us that all our routines and habits can be instantly stopped when Allah says so. This enables the human to break free from becoming someone who just obeys their desires. It reminds people of their higher purpose in life; obedience towards Allah. The spiritual aspect of the human being is developed during fasting in *Ramadan*. This is why, although fasting has very few things that invalidate it, the emphasis must be on refraining from sinning and doing acts of righteousness.

If fasting harms one’s health, regardless of age, they are not permitted to fast. If you are travelling a long distance or are ill, you also do not need to fast. Women do not fast when they have their periods and are

excused during pregnancy and while breast-feeding, if they wish to. If one misses fasts for those reasons, they can catch up on them later in the year when they desire. Those who permanently cannot fast, like those are on medication or need food consistently for medical reasons, must compensate by feeding the poor and observing the other aspects of *Ramadan*:

“The month of Ramadan is one in which the Qur’an was sent down as guidance to humankind, with manifest proofs of guidance and the Criterion. So let those of you who witness it fast (in) it, and as for someone who is sick or on a journey, let it be a (similar) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you, and so that you may complete the number, and magnify Allah for guiding you, and that you may give thanks.” (Qur’an 2:185)

During the fast, if one feels significantly unwell, they are allowed to break the fast. In such cases, the missed days would be caught up later on in the year or, if that is not possible, acts of charity must be carried out.

Shi’a Muslims open their fast a few moments later compared to other Muslims. The Qur’an says to ***“complete the fast until nightfall”*** (Qur’an 2:187). Shi’a Muslims therefore argue that the fast should not be opened at the moment of sunset but until there is some darkness, since the Qur’an emphasises night. This is why they also pray *Salah al-Maghrib* slightly later than Sunni Muslims too on days outside the month of *Ramadan*. Furthermore, Shi’a Muslims do not perform the congregational *Tarawih* prayers that Sunni Muslims carry out during the nights of *Ramadan*. This is because they do not believe this was a custom of the Prophet.

An important aspect of the month of *Ramadan* is *Laylatul Qadr* (the Night of Power, which some Shia scholars refer to as the Night of Ordainment), the night the Qur’an was revealed to the heart of Prophet Muhammad:

“Indeed We sent it (the Qur’an) down on the Night of Power. What will show you what is the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn.” (Qur’an 97:1-5)

According to Shi'a Muslims, the specific night that the Night of Power lies on is unknown. However, the narrations indicate that it is most likely on the night of 19th *Ramadan*, 21st *Ramadan* or 23rd *Ramadan*. Hence, Shi'a Muslims will spend these three nights in worship of Allah and seeking forgiveness. This involves reciting the Qur'an, supplications and extra prayers taught by the Prophet and the *Imams*. Shi'a Muslims also commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Ali, the first Shi'a *Imam*, who was struck with a sword during prayer on the 19th *Ramadan* and died of his injuries on the 21st *Ramadan* (see **2.8 Tawallah and Tabarra**).

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Sawm during the month of Ramadan influences me greatly. I fast during Ramadan because it trains me to be God-conscious. For 30 days I become more religious, a better human and as perfect a Muslim as I can be. Once the 'training' is over (Ramadan finishes), I must carry on being God-conscious and a better human being throughout the whole year, not just Ramadan. Athletes don't train without purpose. They do it because it leads to something. In the same way, I fast to become a better human throughout the whole year. The first Imam, Imam Ali, said:

"Some people get nothing out of fasting except hunger and thirst" (Hadith in Nahj al-Balagha).

This shows that fasting is not about starving yourself. You must fast from committing acts that displease Allah too in the hope you will carry on this habit after Ramadan. Fasting also creates a feeling of community since you know the majority of Muslims around the world are going through the same thing and this creates unity. Also, staying awake on Laylatul Qadr can be very tough, especially if someone has work or school the next day. However, it is only three nights a year and the blessings and forgiveness on these nights make it worthwhile. On such a night, it is said Allah may alter some of your destiny for the coming year so it is very important I pray to Allah on these nights to make my destiny positive. For example, if I was destined to die in the next year, I would pray to Allah to change this.

2.2.1 ‘Id-ul-Fitr

At the end of the month of *Ramadan*, Muslims celebrate ‘*Id-ul-Fitr*. ‘*Id* means ‘festival’. For Muslims, ‘*Ids* are occasions for showing gratitude to Allah and remembering Him, as well as giving alms to the poor (see **2.4 Zakah**). ‘*Id-ul-Fitr* relates to the communal aspects of the fast, which expresses many of the basic values of the Muslim community, e.g. empathy for the poor, charity, worship, steadfastness, patience etc. It is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide and, in Muslim countries, it is a public holiday.

‘*Id-ul-Fitr* is the first day of the month of *Shawwal* (the month after *Ramadan*) and Muslims are not permitted to fast on this day. ‘*Id-ul-Fitr* has a particular *Salah* (ritual prayer) consisting of two *Rak'as* (units). It is performed only in congregation and then the sermon is given afterwards. For Shi'a Muslims, this *Salah* is not obligatory but optional and highly recommended.

After ‘*Id Salah*, it is customary to wish fellow Muslims ‘*Id Mubarak* (blessed ‘*Id*) and visit friends and family. Imam al-Rida said:

“The Day of al-Fitr became an Eid so that Muslims congregate to glorify God and thank Him for His blessings. The Eid al-Fitr is a day of congregation, a day celebration, a day of breaking the fast, and a day of giving charity.” (al-Hurr al-‘Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a*).

One of the most recommended acts on this day is to continuously remember Allah and recite *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest). People also wear new clothes as Prophet Muhammad is reported to have worn a specific cloak on ‘*Id*.



'Id prayers for Shi'a Muslims in Nigeria

How does
this
influence
a Shi'a
Muslim?

I really enjoy 'Id-ul-Fitr because I feel like I am celebrating a month of trying my best to fast and get closer to Allah. The First Imam, Imam Ali, says:

"Verily it is only a festival for he whose fasts Allah has accepted and whose prayers He has acknowledged." (Hadith in Sharh Nahj al-Balagha)

'Id should not be celebrated in a way that displeases Allah where everything is extravagant. We have just spent 30 days feeling how poor people feel so it would defeat the purpose to over eat on 'Id. For me, celebrating 'Id is celebrating the fact I am now going to become a better Muslim. I am celebrating the fact that Satan is no longer going to be a part of my life. It is always nice on 'Id to go to the mosque for prayers and see everyone happy and together. We then usually get together as a family, decorate the house and wear new clothes. The spiritual aspect of 'Id is never forgotten but it is also important to celebrate the end of a tough month. In some cultures, younger people are often given presents to reward them for fasting. There is also an aspect of sadness since we are saying goodbye to the blessed month of Ramadan.

2.3 Hajj (Pilgrimage)

The third *Furu' ad-Din* is *Hajj* (pilgrimage to *Makkah*). Every adult Muslim should make the *Hajj* once in his or her lifetime, provided that they have the money and health to do so. In the Qur'an the pilgrimage is described as rich in spiritual benefit:

“And proclaim the Hajj to people: they shall come to you on foot and on lean camels coming from distant places, that they may witness the benefits for them, and mention Allah’s Name during the known days over the livestock He has provided them. So eat thereof, and feed the destitute. Then let them do away with their untidiness, and fulfil their vows, and go around the Ancient House.” (Qur’an 22:27-29)

The *Hajj* takes place only once each year on five days in the twelfth and last month of the Islamic calendar, called *Dhu’l-Hijja* (the 8th to the 12th of this month).

Before pilgrims enter into the city of *Makkah*, they put on the dress of the pilgrim which is called *Ihram*. All the men are dressed the same: two separate white sheets of cloth; one wrapped around the lower body and one around the upper body. Shi’a Muslim males do not expose the shoulder like Sunni Muslim males. For women, *Ihram* is a plain simple dress without patterns or jewellery. This symbolises the equality of all humans and reminds Muslims of death, since when they die they will enter the grave in a similar dress. This enforces the Qur’anic principle of being judged by your nearness to Allah rather than race, culture or status: ***“O humankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you.”*** (Qur’an 49:13)

As well as the clothing, *Ihram* indicates that one is now in a state of pilgrimage where certain rules apply. Becoming angry, physically or verbally, now is not allowed. Even committing violence to a plant by plucking it is not allowed, let alone a human or an animal. Married couples are also forbidden from sexual relations whilst in *Ihram*. If one breaks these laws, in addition to others, there is a penalty.

Day One

On the first day of the *Hajj*, pilgrims perform the *tawaf* (walking around the *Ka'ba*). Pilgrims walk around the *Ka'ba* seven times in an anticlockwise direction, whilst praising Allah. When they pass the Black Stone, it is recommended that pilgrims kiss it, but due to the large numbers, most pilgrims acknowledge it by raising their right hands. Next to the *Ka'ba*, there is another stone. This is the Station of Ibrahim which is a place where Prophet Ibrahim used to pray. If possible, pilgrims will try to pray over here to emulate one of the greatest prophets.

Following this ritual, pilgrims walk seven times between the two hills called *Safa* and *Marwa*, as Hajra (Hagar) did, seeking Allah's help. This ritual is called *sa'y*. Then they can drink the water of *Zam-Zam* that was given to Hajra. At other times in the year, people can make a visit to *Makkah* and perform only these two rituals. This minor pilgrimage is known as *'Umra*. On the afternoon and evening of the first day, pilgrims then travel to *Mina*. Here they will spend the night in tents.

Day Two

On the second day, everyone travels together to the Plain of *Arafah*. Here they will spend the afternoon in prayer to Allah seeking His mercy and forgiveness for their sins. During the afternoon, the pilgrims are in constant remembrance of the Day of Judgement (see **1.5 Ma'ad**). Shi'a Muslims generally recite a supplication called *Dua Arafah* taught by their third *Imam*, Imam Hussain; a confessional prayer with a strong theme of repentance. The pilgrims stand in prayer here for a vast amount of time. Pilgrims feel a direct, intimate experience with Allah here where they feel the sins they have committed in the past are being forgiven as they repent.

Following this, the pilgrims make a short journey to *Muzdalifa*, then sleep the night there. They gather small stones there for the next day when they go to *Mina*.

Day Three

The third day of the *Hajj* is also *'Id al-Adha*, the Festival of Sacrifice (see **2.3.1 'Id-ul-Adha**). Pilgrims throw the stones, collected the day before, at only one of the three pillars (*Jamrat al-Aqaba*) representing the places where Satan tempted Ibrahim and Ismail (Ishmael) to not carry out the sacrifice ordered by Allah. This act signifies repelling Satan and all his temptations from their lives from now on.

On this day, the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim and Ismail is remembered. Those on *Hajj* sacrifice a sheep, goat or camel. Nowadays, many pilgrims pay for an animal to be slaughtered humanely. The men then have their heads shaved. This festival is the only element of the *Hajj* that is celebrated by all Muslims around the world who are not on *Hajj*. Pilgrims then return to make a second round of *tawaf* around the *Ka'ba*.

Day Four

On the fourth day of *Hajj*, the pilgrims stay in *Mina*. They then return again to stone the pillars (this time all three) representing the rejection of Satan, in the same manner as the fourth day.

Day Five

On the fifth day of *Hajj*, pilgrims stone all three pillars for the final time. They then return to *Makkah* to the *Ka'ba* praising Allah, for the final time. This is seen as a farewell to the *Ka'ba* and is known as *tawaf al-wada*, which completes the pilgrimage. Shi'a Muslims must also perform a *tawaf* that allows them to resume sexual relations with their spouses called *tawaf al-nisa*. This *tawaf* must be performed whether you are married or unmarried.

After Muslims have completed their pilgrimage, it is a common custom to go to the city of *Medinah* to visit the grave of Prophet Muhammad and, for Shi'a Muslims, some of his family, including four *Imams*, who are buried nearby in the *Baqi Cemetery*, also known as the *Gardens of Baqi*. Here they will pray to Allah in the name of the holy personalities buried there.



How does
this
influence
a Shi'a
Muslim?

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Hajj is very important since I must ensure I do this before I die. I must ensure that I am always aware of keeping enough money to perform this pilgrimage and make this a priority. I have to do this as soon as possible and not delay it since I do not know when I will die. Before going on Hajj, I must ensure all my debts are paid and that I am forgiven by people I have wronged. I must actively seek out forgiveness from people I have wronged in order for Allah to also forgive me during my Hajj. Most Hajj groups do seminars before Hajj so that we are all aware of the rules and rituals. During Hajj, I feel a sense of unity since I cannot tell which sect of Islam each person comes from – we are all there for the same purpose. This is meant to symbolise how Muslims should live together in harmony. When I return from Hajj, I must be aware that all my sins are forgiven and I cannot even doubt this for a moment. The First Imam, Imam Ali, said: "Those who go to Makkah for obligatory and voluntary pilgrimage are the envoys of Allah, and His gift to them is forgiveness." (Hadith in al-Khisal) This would mean I am almost living a new life with a clean slate where I completely change and turn into a better person. I also find it important to visit the grave of Prophet Muhammad, his righteous companions and some of his family members in Medinah. They are the ones who brought this religion to us and it is a good way to end the Hajj where I am able to pay them respect and earn their blessings by being in their presence.

2.3.1 'Id-ul-Adha

'Id-ul-Adha is celebrated in honour of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). It is one of the greatest *'Ids* of Islam which is celebrated on the 10th *Dhu'l-Hijja*. This is the day on which the divine command for Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son, Ismail (Ishmael), was issued. He took Ismail to an altar and was about to fulfil the divine command when Angel Jibra'il came down with a ram and Ibrahim sacrificed the ram instead. The traditional rite of offering sacrifice on *'Id-al-Adha* in the desert of *Mina* during *Hajj* is a commemoration of that event. It is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide and, in Muslim countries, it is a public holiday.

'Id-al-Adha has a particular *Salah* (ritual prayer) consisting of two *Rak'as* (units). It is performed only in congregation and then the sermon is given afterwards. For Shi'a Muslims, this *Salah* is not obligatory but optional and highly recommended. After *'Id Salah*, it is customary to wish fellow Muslims *'Id Mubarak* (blessed *'Id*) and visit friends and family. On this day, it is recommended to offer a sacrifice of an animal if you have the financial capability. It is recommended to prepare a meal using a part of its meat and eat it after the *'Id* prayer.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

'Id-ul-Adha influences me as it reminds me of the concept of sacrifice. On this day, I think about Prophet Ibrahim and how he was willing to sacrifice his beloved son Ismail for Allah. Therefore, I ask myself the question, 'what is my Ismail?' What am I going to sacrifice to please Allah? The Qur'an says you can never claim to be a righteous person until you sacrifice what you love:

"You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear." (Qur'an 3:92)

I may be someone who spends too much time on my phone and I should think about making this my sacrifice. I make a vow to give something up or to reduce the amount of time I spend on it. This will allow me to see the true purpose of this 'Id. It is also good to pray at the mosque, see my family and eventually congratulate the people who come back from Hajj.

2.3.2 Ziyarah

In addition to the *Hajj* pilgrimage, Shi'a Muslims also visit the graves of their *Imams* (see **1.4 Imamah** and **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**). This pilgrimage is known as *Ziyarah* (visitation). This is not an obligatory pilgrimage or a replacement for *Hajj*. Rather, it is a highly recommended spiritual journey. Eleven of the Twelve *Imams* of Twelver Shi'as are buried in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. Shi'a Muslims have a huge emphasis on visiting these sacred places at least once in their life.

On important days of the Islamic calendar, such as the birthdays or death anniversaries of the holy personalities, the number of pilgrims can reach several millions. The erecting of edifices and shrines over graves is something debated within Islam with a lot of Muslims arguing against their permissibility. However, Shi'a Muslims are adamant it is allowed and recommended. The Qur'an speaks of special places where the remembrance of Allah takes place:

“In houses Allah has allowed to be raised and wherein His Name is celebrated, He is glorified therein, morning and evening, by men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah, and the maintenance of prayer and the giving of Zakah.”
(Qur'an 24:36-37)

The graves of the prophets and *Imams* are places where mosques are built and the remembrance of Allah takes place. Furthermore, there are several examples of Prophet Muhammad encouraging Muslims to visit graves to remind them of death. Shi'a Muslims argue that visiting the graves of Allah's chosen leaders is also special and has been highly recommended by the *Imams* that follow the Prophet. For example, the seventh *Imam*, Imam Musa al-Kadhim said:

“One who performs the visitation of our first one (Imam) is like one who performs the visitation of our last one and one who performs the visitation of our last one is like one who performs the visitation of our first one.” (Hadith in *Kamil al-Ziyarah*)

When going to the shrine of the prophets and *Imams*, it is common etiquette

to have a bath before visiting. A Shi'a Muslim has to be aware of who they are visiting and their high status in the view of Allah. Once they reach the mausoleum, they recite a special salutation that sends peace upon the holy person and describes their qualities. These salutations have been taught by the *Imams* themselves to their followers. It is then customary to kiss the grave and rub your cheeks on it. Such areas are deemed to be blessed with Allah's mercy and the presence of angels who pray for the pilgrims. These are areas where Shi'a Muslims believe supplications and requests are answered by Allah since they are in the presence of one of His chosen leaders. This is usually followed by a *Salah* (ritual prayer) consisting of two *Rak'as* (units) where one reminds themselves that Allah is to be worshipped.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Ziyarah is very important to me. Although I need to go on Hajj once in my life, Ziyarah is something I can do several times. When I go on Ziyarah, I feel a spiritual connection with Allah through the Imams because I feel as I am meeting them. The Sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

"He who visits us after our death is as one who visited us in our lifetime." (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

I travel a long way to visit the Imams and it is often very difficult, especially with the threat of attacks from terrorists. However, nothing will stop me from visiting. A big part of the Ziyarah is defiance and we want people to know no one can stop us. The shrines of the Imams are beautiful (apart from the 4 Imams in Saudi Arabia, whose shrines have been destroyed) and it makes me reflect on the lives they lived and how I can follow them. Before visiting them, I ensure I know about their life so I can appreciate what they did and honour them as they deserve. It feels very good to be in the presence of angels at these special places and it also reminds me of the history and sacrifices of my religion. People often have the misconception that this replaces Hajj and that we worship graves. This is not true. We are simply commemorating and honouring the leaders of our religion. If it was up to me, I would go to Ziyarah every year since every time I return from Ziyarah, it boosts my spirituality and inspires me to be a better Muslim.

It is imperative to note that Shi'a Muslims are not praying to the deceased at these graves, and there is no concept of grave worship. The accusation levelled by some Muslims against the Shi'a has no basis whatsoever, as all Shi'as vehemently deny the idea and practice of grave worship. All prayers are directed towards Allah, to maintain the concept of *Tawhid* (see **1.1 Tawhid**), but are done in the presence of the *Imam* one is visiting. Since all the *Imams* (apart from the final) were martyred, Shi'a Muslims do not consider them as dead as the Qur'an says:

“And do not call those who were slain in Allah’s way ‘dead.’ Rather they are living, but you are not aware.” (Qur'an 2:154)

Shi'a Muslims argue that this is a clear indication that those who are martyred are alive in some way, even though we cannot comprehend how. This is why it is customary for pilgrims to approach the grave and speak to the *Imam* as if he is listening.

2.4 Zakah (Almsgiving)

The fourth *Furu' ad-Din* is *Zakah* (almsgiving) that every Muslim must give to certain groups of people:

“Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is (personified by) those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and who give their wealth, for the love of Him, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller and the beggar, and for (the freeing of) the slaves, and maintain the prayer and give the zakat, and those who fulfil their covenants, when they pledge themselves, and those who are patient in stress and distress, and in the heat of battle. They are the ones who are true (to their covenant), and it is they who are the Godway.” (Qur'an 2:177)

The issue of *Zakah* is mostly paired with *Salah* (ritual prayer) in the Qur'an to show its importance. The act of giving *Zakah* in Islam is an act of purification of your wealth. By passing on a portion of money to those in need, the remaining wealth of Muslims is purified so that it can be used according to Allah's guidance. Although it is an obligation, it is viewed as the God-given right of those in need. Each individual adult Muslim is

responsible for calculating their own *Zakah*. The *Zakah* tax is paid yearly on nine items:

- Coins: Silver and gold coins.
- Cattle: Cows, sheep, goats and camels.
- Crops: Wheat, barley, dates and raisins.

The *Zakah* percentage varies on quantity and item; 2.5%, 5% or 10%. For Shi'a Muslims, these items are taken literally. Gold and silver coins do not translate to current money and currency. Hence, unless you literally own gold and silver coins or are a farmer who owns cattle and crops, the obligatory *Zakah* is not applicable to you. This is because the economic system and transactions are different compared to the way it used to be. However, the *Zakah* of *Fitra*, given at the end of *Ramadan* on '*Id-ul-Fitr*' (see 2.2.1 '*Id-ul-Fitr*'), is an obligation that must be given. This equates to approximately £6 currently.

In addition, Muslims are recommended to perform charitable giving, which has no limits provided that the obligatory *Zakah* and charity is met; this is a type of *Zakah* known as *Sadaqah*. *Sadaqah* is not a duty; it is given voluntarily. All kinds of good deeds, not just giving wealth, can count as *Sadaqah*. Thus kindness to animals, cleaning rubbish from a path where it could harm a passer-by, planting a tree, hospitality or even smiling when you are feeling fed up are all examples from Prophet Muhammad's sayings of *Sadaqah*. Hence all Muslims can give *Sadaqah*, not just those who possess a certain amount of wealth. Prophet Muhammad said: ***"Every kindly act is considered charity."*** (*Hadith* in *al-Khisal*)

An important concept within that of *Sadaqah* is the idea of *Sadaqah Ja'ariyah* (ongoing charity). Prophet Muhammad said: ***"When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except three: an ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge and a child who prays for him"*** (*Hadith* in *Mustadrak al-wasa'il* by *al-Nuri al-Tabrasi*)

Therefore, many Muslims are eager to give charity which will continue to benefit people after their death, and continue to earn them reward. Any charity which continues to have positive effects on a community in the long-term, beyond immediate relief, can be considered ongoing *Sadaqah*: building homes, schools and hospitals, installing durable water systems, turning an area of land into a farm which continues to give crops for years to come, helping a poor family start a business which continues generating profit for future generations (see **4.3 Shia Muslim Charities**).

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

There is a clear emphasis of Zakah in the Qur'an and it seems always to be mentioned as something that is a must to gain salvation. However, many of the items that Zakah is payable on are not relevant to me apart from the Zakah of Fitra. However, giving Sadaqah is very important to me since it does not just have to be money. Prophet Muhammad said:

"Your removal of an obstacle from the road is a charitable act; your guiding someone the way is a charitable act; your visiting the sick is a charitable act; your enjoinder of good to others is a charitable act; your forbidding others from wrongdoing is a charitable act, and your returning the greeting of peace is a charitable act." (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

It also influences me because Zakah and Sadaqah will benefit me after I die if my contribution continues to help people.

2.5 Khums (20% Tax)

The fifth *Furu' ad-Din* is *Khums* (20% Tax) that every Shi'a Muslim must give:

"Know that whatever thing you may come by, a fifth of it is for Allah and the Apostle, for the relatives and the orphans, for the needy and the traveller, if you have faith in Allah and what We sent down to Our servant on the Day of Separation, the day when the two hosts met; and Allah has power over all things." (Qur'an 8:41)

The *Khums* tax involves giving away 20% of surplus, income or profits. It is compulsory for all Shi'a Muslims and seen as the right of the Prophet's family and the needy. *Khums* is compulsory on the following seven items:

- War Booty: Everything taken as spoils in war.
- Minerals: Mineral products, such as diamond, rock-salt, etc.
- Treasure: Gold, silver, and jewellery that has been hoarded under the earth or hidden.
- Precious Items: Things that have been grabbed from sea and ocean, such as pearls, shells etc.
- Land: One fifth of the value of excess purchased land.
- Business Profit: The amount accrued profit after all the necessary annual expenses have been met.

Of this list, the last is applicable to most people in today's world. *Khums* is normally paid to the religious authority (see **3.6 Marja Taqlid**) or used with their approval for charitable, social, religious, educational and institutional infrastructure of building the community (see **4.3 Shia Muslim Charities**). They distribute it on behalf of the *Imams*, since the money is their right. As with *Zakah*, every year, a Shi'a Muslim would look at their accounts and look at the amount of savings that are made. They would then take 20% of

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Khums influences my life in a very big way. Every year, I have to give 20% of my savings away. As someone who saves a lot of money, this can be a large amount every year. However, I always remember that this money does not belong to me. The Fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, said:

"It is not permitted for anyone to purchase anything from the money on which Khums has not been paid and until our right has not reached us." (Hadith in al-Kafi)

Sustenance comes from Allah and it is the right of the people who deserve Khums to take this money. It is always positive to see your Khums money being used for worthy causes, especially around the world where people need much more money. I must also be good at maths since calculating Khums requires doing sums and deducting things such as expenditure, debts etc. when working out your savings.

this and give it as *Khums*. This now means their income is purified and the remaining money is now lawful.

2.6 Jihad (Struggle)

The sixth *Furu' ad-Din* is *Jihad* (struggle). To struggle and strive in the path of Allah is to perform *Jihad* – this can involve struggling against yourself to be a better person or struggling physically when self-defence is necessary. This is commonly understood as Greater and Lesser *Jihad*.

The Greater *Jihad* is struggling against the desire to do wrong and evil. It is almost a war against Satan. Muslims are encouraged to fight a spiritual struggle against their desires, to train their soul and control and moderate its desires. Any Muslim who wants to live the life of Islam must be ready to perform *Jihad* all the time:

“Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake.” (Qur’an 29:6)

To struggle against temptation, to obey Allah’s commands and keep away from those things that Allah forbids is *Jihad*. In this way we can say that *Jihad* is a constant, life-long commitment that is obligatory for every Muslim. This is why Prophet Muhammad said:

“The best Jihad is performed by one who awakes in the morning with no intention to wrong anyone.” (Hadith in *al-Mahasin*)

The Lesser *Jihad* is an act of physical self-defence. Muslims are permitted to fight off oppression, oppressors and aggressors.

“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors.” (Qur’an 2:190)

The Lesser *Jihad* comes with strict conditions, however. No harm is to be brought to children, women and innocents. Proportionality must be observed with a Muslim soldier not being allowed to humiliate the opponent. Imam Ali, the first Shi’a *Imam*, was known for being the greatest warrior in Islamic history yet maintaining his principles of humanity. For example, there is a famous incident where he defeated the commander of the opposition army in the Battle of the Trench. Yet, he ensured the shield and armour of the person was not taken as war booty so that the deceased

soldier's family would be able to preserve their family heritage. Prophet Muhammad also banned the mutilation of dead bodies after a war. This was a common custom in Arabia before Islam.

More importantly, only qualified religious authorities can issue a call for physical force in cases where oppression is taking place. During the presence of a divinely appointed *Imam*, only he has the right to call for Lesser *Jihad*.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The concept of Lesser Jihad is not very relevant to me as a Shi'a Muslim living in the UK; I believe in it but physically fighting oppression is not something I need to do in a secure country where everyone has rights. However, if I see someone in need of help if they are being attacked physically, it is my duty to help them. It is sad to see some people abusing Lesser Jihad in other parts of the world and not following the rules. On the other hand, Greater Jihad is something I am always doing. I am at war with myself and Satan every

day. The Third Imam, Imam Hussain, said:

"The first obligatory Jihad is that which a man wages against his own self in keeping away from acts of disobedience to Allah. This is one of the greatest forms of Jihad." (Hadith in Tuhaf ul-Uqool)

I am trying to please Allah all the time. Every time a temptation falls my way, I must struggle to not give into that temptation and be aware that Allah is watching me. The biggest struggle for me is during Salah. When praying, my mind gets distracted by worldly things and I cannot focus on Allah. My Jihad is to remain focused during my Salah. Someone else's Jihad could be another thing.

2.7 Amr bil Maruf (Enjoining Good) and Nahy Anil Munkar (Forbidding Evil)

The seventh and eighth *Furu' ad-Din* are *Amr bil Maruf* (enjoining good) and *Nahy Anil Munkar* (forbidding evil):

“There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. It is they who are the felicitous.” (Qur’an 3:104)

Islam is not a religion of just concentrating on your own faith and neglecting other people. Muslims believe that the guidance of the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad is the ultimate way to live a life according to the will of Allah, i.e. it is for all people. All people, men and women, and the whole of human society will develop and flourish when it lives according to Allah’s commands and avoids the acts that Allah has not allowed.

I must ensure that I am encouraging people to do good and not bad without sounding like I am forcing my views. Prophet Muhammad said:

“Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart.” (Hadith in *Wasa’il al-Shi’a*)

This shows that if I cannot say or do something, then at least I can approve or disapprove of it in my heart. It can sometimes be difficult to say something when everyone around me is doing something that Islam does not agree with. For example, the people around me may drink alcohol and I have to make it clear that this is something I do not agree with and not take part in without offending them. However, there are times where I have to speak out and make it clear that I disapprove of something. On the other hand, if I am about to do a good action, I try to encourage my friends to also join me.

How
does this
influence
a Shi’a
Muslim?

Hence, Shi'a Muslims, like all Muslims, are required to speak truth and right in situations where wrong and evil are present. Commanding right can be through words and statements or action. For instance, Shi'a teachings command speaking out against oppression, suffering, promoting equality, fair treatment and justice. Shi'a Muslims are obligated to also challenge wrong and evil. Forbidding wrong does not make exceptions. All wrongs must be condemned. Shi'a Muslims are obliged to condemn wrongs, to speak against corruption and evil, at all levels.

The third Shi'a *Imam*, Imam Hussain, when standing up to the oppressor of his time before the Battle of *Karbala* (see **2.8.2 Ashura**), famously said:

“I did not revolt for the cause of evil tyranny or corruption, but to reform my grandfather’s (Prophet Muhammad) nation. I want to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and take the course of my father (Imam Ali) and grandfather.” (Hadith in *Bihar al-Anwar*)

It must be noted that enjoining the good and forbidding the evil must be done with etiquette and manners since Islam holds to the principle of **“no compulsion in religion”** (Qur’an 2:256).

2.8 Tawallah (Love and Devotion) and Tabarra (Disassociation)

The ninth and tenth *Furu' ad-Din* are *Tawallah* (love and devotion towards Prophet Muhammad and his family) and *Tabarra* (disassociation from the opponents of Prophet Muhammad and his family).

Shi'a Muslims consider love for the Prophet Muhammad and his family, known as the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (which includes the *Imams*) (see **3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt**), as a religious obligation. They refer to the Qur’an where the Prophet commands his followers to show love towards his family:

“Say, ‘I do not ask you any reward for it except love of (my) relatives.’” (Qur’an 42:23)

Shi'a Muslims, therefore, celebrate their love of the Prophet and his

family by identifying their upright moral characters as models worthy of following and by seeing in them spiritual figures who are most beloved by Allah. This includes celebrating their births and mourning their deaths. This is why one of the most common and important supplication a Shi'a Muslim recites is: ***“Allah, send blessings on Prophet Muhammad and his family.”***

Tawallah means to keep close to all those who show a threefold love for Allah, the Prophet and his family.

Conversely, *Tabarra* means dissociation with the opponents of Allah, the Prophet, and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (family of the Prophet). Shi'a Muslims are obliged to refrain from receiving spiritual and religious guidance from historical and contemporary individuals deemed morally corrupt and religiously misguided. By disassociating spiritually and religiously from such persons, Shi'a Muslims are required to follow the Qur'anic teaching that invites Muslims to distance themselves from oppressors:

“And do not incline toward the wrongdoers.” (Qur'an 11:113)

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Tawallah and Tabarra influence me greatly. My love of Allah extends towards the love of the Prophet and his family, since they are individuals who remind me of Godly values and take me to Allah. I express my love and devotion to them by trying to follow their teachings and celebrating their lives. The Prophet made it very clear that it is a part of Islam to love them; this is why every Muslim must send blessings on them in their Salah. The First Imam, Imam Ali, said: “Be happy on our happiness and sad for our sadness.” (Hadith in Ghurar al-Hikam) Hence, celebrating their lives and mourning their deaths is imperative and anything that I see which would please them or sadden them should do the same to me. Naturally, if I love Allah, the Prophet and his family, I disassociate myself from people and actions who oppose them and those who harmed them in the past. I must do this with wisdom and ethics ensuring that I do not offend anyone.

It is imperative to point out that *Tabarra* does not mean to use foul language, disrespect and curse those individuals from whom one disassociates with. This goes against Islamic etiquette and conduct. Naturally, Shi'a Muslims, with respect, disassociate with figures in history who did not allow the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* to have their right to official leadership. This is sometimes a very sensitive issue between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims as their views on certain figures in history, such as the companions, can differ. For example, Shi'a Muslims do not revere all the companions of Prophet Muhammad, and disassociate from some of them, whereas Sunni Muslims hold them in the highest regard.

2.8.1 'Id-ul-Ghadeer

'Id-ul-Ghadeer is a celebration that is exclusive to Shi'a Muslims. It is celebrated on 18th *Dhu'l-Hijja* which is the day, Shi'a Muslims believe, Imam Ali was officially announced as successor to Prophet Muhammad. The event is unanimously agreed as historically accurate by all Muslims but is interpreted differently. The celebration is a way of showing *Tawallah*.

In the final months of his life, Prophet Muhammad completed his last (and only) *Hajj* pilgrimage with all of his companions. After completion, the caravans of the Muslims headed by the Prophet made their way back to *Medinah*. In the middle of the return journey, Shi'a Muslims believe that the following Qur'an verse was revealed to the Prophet:

“O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and Allah shall protect you from the people. Indeed Allah does not guide the faithless lot.” (Qur'an 5:67)

Allah commands the Prophet to announce something. Failure to announce this message would mean that the completion of Allah's message that the Prophet had been preaching for the past twenty-three years would be void; such was the weight of this announcement. Allah then indicates to the Prophet that He will protect him from the possible negative reaction

of the people. Under the scorching heat of the barren desert, the Prophet halted the caravans and thousands of returning Muslim pilgrims to stop at a pond called *Ghadeer Khumm*, a secluded area lying between *Makkah* and *Medinah*.

After standing on elevated ground, the Prophet Muhammad called on those that had gone ahead of the caravans to be called back and he waited for those who were lagging behind to catch up. When all gathered, eager to hear the delivery, the Prophet said the following:

“Do I not have more authority over you than you have over yourselves?”

(Hadith in al-Ghadeer)

After receiving affirmation, he continued:

“Whoever took me as his mawla, Ali is now his mawla. Oh Allah! Love him who loves Ali, and be enemy of the enemy of Ali. Help him who helps Ali and forsake him who forsakes Ali!” *(Hadith in al-Ghadeer)*

The word used by the Prophet is *mawla*, which has several meanings which can include ‘friend’ or ‘master/authority’. For the majority of Muslims, Prophet Muhammad was affirming his friendship towards Ali in response to some companions criticising him. However, Shi’a Muslims categorically believe that this clearly was an announcement about the authority of Ali; the question posed to the people before the announcement contextualises the fact that the Prophet was talking about authority.

Shi’a Muslims believe that immediately after this announcement, the following Qur’an verse was revealed:

“Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.” (Qur’an 5:3)

For Shi’a Muslims, this event marked the clearest instance of the appointment of Ali as the rightful successor to the Prophet. It also highlights the importance of the concept of *Imamah* (see **1.4 Imamah**), since Allah called the religion ‘complete’ and ‘perfect’ once the announcement of Ali’s *Imamah* was made to the people. Shi’a Muslims also point towards historical accounts of the companions congratulating and paying allegiance

to Ali at this moment. It is important to point out that Shi'a Muslims believe that Ali should always have been the leader and it was made clear several times before *Ghadeer*. However, this is when it was officially announced to the Muslims by order of Allah. Shi'a Muslims argue that

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

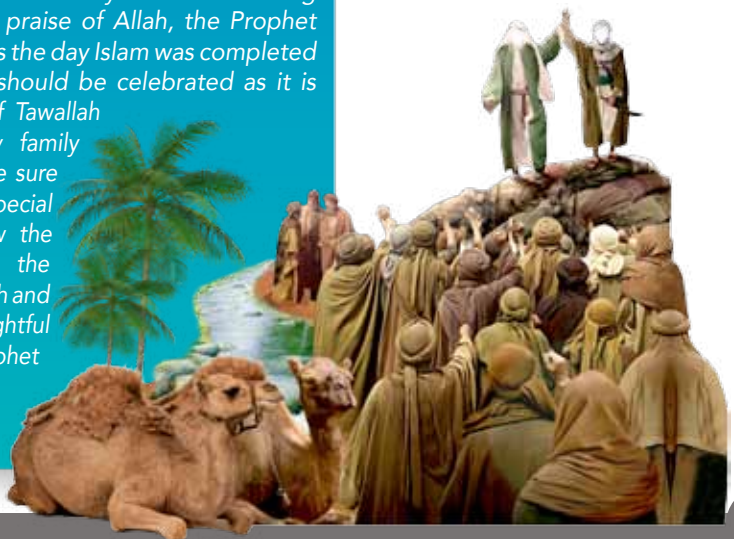
As a Shi'a Muslim, 'Id-ul-Ghadeer is my favourite celebration of the year. Prophet Muhammad said:

"The day of Ghadeer Khumm is the best 'Id of my nation. It is the day on which Allah, the High, ordered me to mention the appointment of my brother, Ali ibn Abi Talib as the flag and standard of my nation." (Hadith in *Amali al-Saduq*)

This day allows me to be proud of my identity as a Shi'a Muslim as I am celebrating the concept of Imamah, which is unique to us. Not every Muslim deems this day as special. I really enjoy the atmosphere on this day and love listening to the poetry in praise of Allah, the Prophet and his family. It is the day Islam was completed and I think this should be celebrated as it is an expression of Tawallah and Tabarra. My family have always made sure this day is really special so that we know the importance of the concept of Imamah and Ali being the rightful successor of Prophet Muhammad.

after the death of Prophet Muhammad, most of the Muslims did not obey this command and the next leader was voted for by a group of the Muslims and Ali's right to leadership was taken away.

In years and centuries following, Shi'a Muslims came to mark the event of 'Id-ul-Ghadeer as a celebratory moment in Islamic history. Throughout the world and particularly in regions with significant



Shi'a communities, *'Id-ul-Ghadeer* occupies a central place in the religious and cultural calendar of Shi'a Muslims. Typically, they congregate in a mosque or a community centre to listen to recitations of poetry praising the Prophet Muhammad and his family (see **4.5 Expression Through Art & Poetry**), lectures and sermons marking the occasion, and other family-oriented activities such as entertainment and workshops. Moreover, on *'Id-ul-Ghadeer*, families visit each other and invite friends and relatives over for a shared meal. Some families celebrate the day by the wearing of new clothes. In some countries, such as Iran and Iraq, the day of *'Id-ul-Ghadeer* is a public holiday.

2.8.2 Ashura

The first month of the Islamic calendar is *Muharram*. For Shi'a Muslims, however, it is not considered a time to celebrate the New Year, rather it is the opposite. *Muharram* marks the beginning of a period of mourning for the martyrdom of the third *Imam*, Imam Hussain. This starts on 1st *Muharram* and reaches its climax on 10th *Muharram* (the day of *Ashura*) which is the day Hussain was killed. The mourning period then continues forty days after this. This commemoration is a manifestation of *Tawallah* and *Tabarra*.

The Story

No more than fifty years had passed since the death of Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim Empire was sliding into corruption under a tyrant ruler called Yazid. Hussain took a stand against his illegitimate rule. Whilst Yazid was in equal parts feared and despised for his ruthlessness, Hussain was admired and respected by society at large. Mindful of this, Yazid decided that he would demand Hussain's allegiance, hoping to gain some form of legitimacy for his inherited rule. Hussain had a choice to make. To endorse Yazid would mean a handsome reward and a life of luxury. To refuse would invariably lead to his own demise. Hussain responded, reaffirming the principles of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil:

“I will never give Yazid my hand like a man who has been humiliated, nor will I flee like a slave...I have not risen to spread evil or to show off...I only desire to enjoy good and prevent evil.” (Hadith in al-Irshad)

His life was now under threat so Hussain decided to move himself and his family from *Medinah* to *Makkah* in the hope that Yazid’s agents would respect the holy city. As he waited, pondering his next move, messages of support began to arrive from his followers in Iraq. He, with his family and supporters, left for *Kufa*, a city in Iraq, but was intercepted by a battalion of Yazid’s soldiers. They blocked Hussain and his followers from going towards *Kufa* and instead forcibly diverted them towards the desert of *Karbala* in Iraq.

Once they reached *Karbala*, forces surrounded their small band and, after a few days, blocked their access to the water supply. With both camps stationed at *Karbala*, a stalemate ensued. Hussain had made it clear that he could not, and would not, accept Yazid as he was corrupting the teachings of Islam. The opposing forces of thirty-thousand soldiers, which vastly outnumbered Hussain’s small band of seventy-two men and their families, were under strict orders not to let Hussain leave. After a while, word reached Hussain that Yazid had sent orders that he was not to be allowed to leave *Karbala* until he had taken an oath of allegiance.

On the evening of 9th *Muharram*, Hussain assembled his group, stressing to them that it was his life that Yazid wanted and that they may leave. His group refused to leave him alone. On this night, a commander of the opposition army, who blocked the water to Hussain’s camp, apologised to Hussain and offered to join his camp. Hussain forgave him and accepted him into his party.

The Battle of *Karbala* commenced at noon on the 10th *Muharram* (*Ashura*). After Yazid’s army shot the first arrow, small bands of men from Hussain’s camp went to go and fight valiantly against the army of Yazid. His men refused to let Hussain be hurt and offered to give their own lives instead. One after another, Hussain’s supporters fought and

were killed. Casualties included his nephews, brother and sons, including his sixth-month-old infant who was struck in the neck with an arrow after Hussain asked the opposition to give him water.

Throughout the day the forces of Yazid asked Hussain for his allegiance, yet Hussain refused. When everyone was killed in his camp, he made a famous call asking if anyone will help him. Shi'a Muslims see this as an eternal call for justice that must be responded to today. They seek to help Hussain by following his footsteps and serving his cause of showing total devotion to Allah.

When Hussain fought, he was heavily wounded until eventually he fell. The enemy forces attacked him from all sides with swords, spears, stones and arrows until a man by the name of Shimr beheaded Hussain on the plains of Karbala. His last words, whilst prostrating, was to praise Allah, asking Him to accept the sacrifice. Shi'a Muslims see this as the epitome of someone at one with the will of Allah, even though he is suffering, and with a pure understanding of *Tawhid* (see **1.1 Tawhid**).

After his murder, Yazid's army trampled on the bodies with their horses and raised the decapitated heads on spears. They wanted to return to Yazid showing what they had done to receive congratulations and reward from him. The women and children from Hussain's party were taken captive. His sister, Zainab, took up the mantle of leadership of the small band, and gave speech after speech condemning the actions of Yazid and his government. This culminated in a confrontation in the ruler's own court when they arrived at his palace in Damascus.

Commemoration

In the period of the first ten days of *Muharram*, Shi'a Muslims hold mourning gatherings that include ritual processions through the streets, gatherings in mosques where poetry is read, lectures are delivered and prayers are held in honour of Imam Hussain and the fallen martyrs of *Karbala* (see **4.4 The Masjid** and **4.5 Expression Through Art &**

Poetry). Mosques are usually draped in black with mourners also wearing the same colour to signify this period as a time of sadness.

The Day of *Ashura* is mourned and remembered by millions of people across the world as the day Hussain and his supporters were killed in the Battle of *Karbala*. Today, Shi'as from all across the world visit the shrine of Hussain in *Karbala* where he is buried, to pay tribute to his courageous stand (see **2.3.2 Ziyarah**). On the day of *Ashura* many Muslims partake in large peaceful gatherings where they recite poems in memory of Hussain and his sacrifice whilst lamenting. The processions usually accompany a large, often stylised replica of the tomb or shrine of Hussain carried on shoulders or pulled on wheels. The procession will then also include lines of men and women chanting to a rhythm often while beating themselves on the chest as a cultural tradition to display their grievance and reminding themselves of the horses trampling on the chest of Hussain. Many people use the day of *Ashura* as a day to perform acts of kindness and charity as a way for them to keep alive the very same principles and values Hussain gave his life for (see **4.3 Shia Muslim Charities**). In some cultures, mourners perform acts of self-flagellation as an expression of grief towards Hussain, symbolising the fact that they would have given their blood if they were at the Battle of *Karbala*. However, there is no consensus amongst the senior Shia scholars on the issue of bloodletting as an act of self-flagellation. Shi'a Muslims are not required to do this and it is performed by a minority of people.

In some parts of the Shi'a world, there are theatrical re-enactments, called *ta'ziya*, of the martyrdom of Hussain and of certain stories associated with the saga. Although there have been buildings specially built for these performances in the larger cities, elsewhere, the performance is usually in an open space with an improvised circular platform acting as the stage. The audience encircles the stage but much of the action, such as the scenes of battle, occur around the stage and often with horses. The art form began in Iraq and Iran as early as the time of the *Imams* but developed starting in the tenth century and reached its peak of development and popularity during the nineteenth century.



How does
this
influence
a Shi'a
Muslim?

Ashura is the most important day and I await it every year. This whole period of mourning is very special to me. Imam Hussain's sacrifice means everything to me and it teaches me what Islam is; to uphold good values no matter what other people think. If he did not sacrifice his life and his family, Islam would be corrupted today. He saved Islam and ensured the Prophet's efforts were not wasted. Some people consider it embarrassing to cry but crying for Imam Hussain is something that I am proud to do. The Eighth Imam, Imam al-Ridha, said:

"If you have to cry over something, then do so over Hussain." (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

Shi'a Muslims often get criticised for excessively mourning but what Imam Hussain did deserves to be given attention. I love the Ahl-ul-Bayt more than my own family, so when I hear about their suffering I naturally get upset. Allah does not forbid showing emotions. Every Muharram, I feel spiritually uplifted and inspired. I am lucky that I have Muharram in addition to Ramadan to reconnect with my religion. The day of Ashura is a very sad day and since I was young, I have taken a day off school or work on this day because my mind is occupied with grief. When I remember the story of Karbala, I try to ensure that I am someone who doesn't dishonour his sacrifice and be ungrateful. Millions of people go to his grave to show their appreciation and it is inspiring to see different cultures and religions come to honour Imam Hussain. He was the perfect Muslim and perfect example of how to follow Allah and the Prophet.

To me, the essence and spirit of every single aspect of Islam can be learnt from the story of Karbala. Even though I have been listening to this story my whole life, I learn something new every year. Unfortunately, the internet shows that this event is all about people self-flagellating but this is not the case. The focus of Ashura should be on the message. Self-flagellation is a cultural tradition that is not taught by the religion. One thing we do nowadays is donate our blood to those who need it. This is to show that Imam Hussain gave his blood to help the people around him so we can do the same in the current era.

There are also many local variations of the *Muharram* rituals. In some parts of Iran, a large picture denoting various scenes from the *Karbala* story is painted onto a large piece of cloth and the story-teller stands in front of this in the street and recites the story. There are also important variations from one country to another in the mourning rituals and in the significance of the rituals for the community. Shi'a Muslims, unlike other Muslims, do not consider it an authentic tradition to fast on this day.

Arbaeen

The mourning then continues for forty more days until 20th *Safar*, the second month of the Muslim calendar. This day is known as *Arbaeen*, which means 'forty'. This period commemorates how Hussain's family were taken captive and paraded around the streets until they reached Yazid's palace in Damascus. They were abused by crowds and deemed as rebels and enemies of the state. They were then imprisoned by Yazid. Eventually, the captives were released as word spread across the region of the crime Yazid had committed against Hussain. It is said that the Day of *Arbaeen* is the day on which Hussain's family returned to the land of *Karbala*, to properly bid farewell to the fallen heroes and finally grieve for their loved ones.

Today, the Day of *Arbaeen* is mourned by millions of people around the world. It is marked as a day to pay tribute to the sacrifice of Hussain for social justice. Typically, on this day, people organise large marches in cities across the world to symbolise the eternal nature of Hussain's revolution and to show they stand for social justice, honour and peace. In recent years a tradition of walking 80km from *Najaf* (the resting place of Imam Ali, Hussain's father) to *Karbala* has been re-established to emulate Hussain's family returning to the graves to grieve for them. People from all walks of life and all corners of the globe make the journey, despite the imminent threat of terrorists who have vowed to attack the pilgrims. Along the 80km stretch from *Najaf* to *Karbala* volunteers distribute free food and drinks to those undertaking the pilgrimage, as well as offering places to relax, wash and sleep. *Arbaeen* is now considered one of the largest annual peaceful gatherings in the world.

Shi'a Muslims commemorate the martyrdoms of all their *Imams* but have a particular emphasis on Imam Hussain due to the nature of his killing. Prophet Muhammad said about his grandson:

“The martyrdom of Hussain will generate such a fire in the hearts of believers which will never be extinguished.” (Hadith in *Mustadrak al-Wasail*)

Shi'a Muslims believe that grieving for Imam Hussain is following the command of Allah and the Prophet in the Qur'an to love his family. The killing of Imam Hussain was prophesised and Shi'a Muslims point to several instances where Prophet Muhammad would cry over this. After the killing of Imam Hussain, the subsequent *Imams* always made it a point every year to mourn him during *Muharram*. They would ask the Shi'a Muslims to gather together, recount his story and cry over it. This tradition has continued and every Shi'a will mourn in various ways according to their culture.



Ziyarah of the Arbaeen to Karbala

2.9 Shahadah (Declaration of Belief)

Although Shi'a Muslims have their own list of obligatory acts, it is clear to see that there are overlaps with the Five Pillars of Sunni Muslims. For example, the Pillars of *Salah* (ritual prayer), *Zakah* (almsgiving), *Hajj* (pilgrimage) and *Jihad* (struggle) are covered by the *Furu' ad-Din*. However, this does not mean the Shi'a reject the first pillar of Sunni Islam, the *Shahadah* (declaration of faith).

Shahadah literally means 'to witness', since one is witnessing the truth when declaring it. The *Shahadah* is the basic statement of the Islamic faith: anyone who cannot recite this wholeheartedly is not a Muslim. You are submitting to Allah and accepting Prophet Muhammad as the final messenger. It is an acceptance of *Tawhid* and rejection of *Shirk* (see **1.1 Tawhid**). Saying the *Shahadah* can be a public declaration of faith where you state what you believe to be the truth.

To enter the fold of Islam, one must recite and believe in the following statements:

• *La ilaha il Allah* – there is no god but Allah.

• *Muhammadu Rasul Allah* – Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

One is now a Muslim. However, Shi'a Muslims traditionally add a third statement to declare belief in the concept of *Imamah* (see **1.4 Imamah**):

• *Aliun wali Allah* – Ali is a divinely-appointed authority.

It could be said that the *Shahadah* is the backbone to all Islamic actions – without believing in this concept, you would not follow the practices of Shi'a Islam, since all the practices come from accepting Allah, Prophet Muhammad and the *Imams*. Its role is inspirational for following the

Islamic path on a personal level and is recited in the *Adhan* (call to prayer), *Salah* (ritual prayer) and in general everyday life. It is said by someone who wishes to convert to Islam. It is also said by people moments before their death and repeated to them by their families whilst being buried.

The first part of the *Shahadah* is a timeless statement: there has never been anything worthy of worship except Allah and there never will be anything worthy of worship except Him. Hence, this statement has been used by all the prophets sent by Allah to the earth expressed in whatever language they used at their time. It emphasises the concept of *Tawhid* (Oneness of Allah), *Nubuwwah* (Prophethood) and *Imamah* (Divinely-appointed Leadership).

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Although the Shahadah is only 2-3 sentences, it sums up Islam perfectly. It is one of the first things you learn as a Shi'a Muslim child. Although the first two sentences are required to be a Muslim, the third sentence about the belief in Imam Ali is important as a Shi'a Muslim as it distinguishes me from other Muslims. When I declare and believe in this statement, my actions must follow. Prophet Muhammad said:

"Faith is inner knowledge by means of the heart, attestation with the tongue and action with the limbs." (Hadith in Kanz al-Ummal)
If I accept Allah's existence, Muhammad as my prophet and the Imams as my leaders, I must therefore do everything they say in total submission to them.



الْقُرْآنُ الْكَرِيمُ

نور علی نور

3. Sources of Wisdom and Authority

Now that the key beliefs and practices of Shi'a Islam have been explained, the next stage is to explore where the beliefs and teachings come from. The following section will explain the status of the Qur'an, the Prophet and the *Imams* in Shi'a thought and why they are sources of wisdom and authority.

3.1 The Qur'an

The supreme authority for all Muslims is their holy book, the Qur'an. It has 114 *Surahs* (chapters) and has over 6000 *Ayahs* (verses). It is a book that contains theology, philosophy, law, ethics, science, economics, prophecy, poetry and history. It is considered a miraculous book due to its unique language and is viewed as the direct, infallible word of Allah that has never changed. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad gradually over a period of twenty-three years. Prophet Muhammad recited back the revelations to scribes of his who recorded every word and statement word for word. Shi'a Muslims believe the main scribe was Imam Ali. The descent of the Qur'anic revelations is described:

“We have sent the Qur'an in (discrete) parts so that you may read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal.”
(Qur'an 17:106)

The Qur'an being a book of guidance is simply mentioned in the following verse:

“This is an explanation for humankind, and a guidance and advice for the Godwary.” (Qur'an 3:138)

Furthermore, in describing the unique nature of the Qur'an, that humans can never replicate, Allah says:

“Say, ‘Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.’”
(Qur'an 17:88)

This was in the response to the people of the time who rejected the Qur'an claiming it was forged by Prophet Muhammad. The verses above show clearly the supreme authority of the Qur'an and its centrality in Muslim learning, religious piety and devotional practice. For Muslims, the Qur'an is much more than sacred scripture; it is a source of comfort, a text to be recited daily, a moral guide and an ethical source to be treated with respect. It cannot be touched unless one has done the *Wudhu* (ritual washing). When reading it, appropriate dress must be worn and one should not eat/drink/talk.

The contents of the Qur'an can be categorised into the following areas that it deals with:

- The nature of Allah.
- The end of time and Day of Judgement.
- Laws about how to live ethically and morally.
- Words and stories about prophets and societies.
- Descriptions of what happened during Prophet Muhammad's life.
- A critique of Jewish, Christian and polytheistic beliefs.

When the Qur'an was revealed, the initial religious experience was in the cave where Prophet Muhammad sought refuge and solitude to contemplate life and pray (see **3.2 Prophet Muhammad**). Further revelations were more public in that they were witnessed by others and recorded. The revelations took place over a period of several years and were sporadic in terms of timing. Verses revealed in *Makkah* were shorter and involved basic religious messages of repentance, judgement and the oneness of Allah. Revelations in *Medinah* were longer and had more of a message of how to live according to Islamic principles. When Prophet Muhammad died, every revelation had been written down and the entire Qur'an was

in circulation. Shi'a Muslims believe Prophet Muhammad supervised the compilation of the Qur'an during his life.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the exact words of Allah. This is extremely important because they believe that the other holy books mentioned in the Qur'an (see **1.6.1 Kutub**) have lost the original wording and have been changed or edited over the years so are no longer fully accurate. Although Allah had sent prophets with His message before to different people at different times, this time the message was for all people for all time and would not be repeated (see **1.3 Nubuwwah**).

Shi'a Muslims do not believe that the Qur'an has been changed or had verses added/removed as some people claim. The Qur'an clearly says that Allah will protect the Qur'an:

“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it.” (Qur'an 15:9)

Muslims read the Qur'an in the original Arabic so that they are sure that the pure meaning does not get lost in translation. Shi'a Muslims do not believe Prophet Muhammad was illiterate but believe that he had not been taught to read and write, hence it is not possible for him to make up the Qur'an.

Muslims also accept the authority of the Qur'an because it helps them to understand the qualities and nature of Allah and it shows them how to follow His path. Also, it encourages believers to lead a good life and it offers support and help in times of need and hardship. Prophet Muhammad said:

“These hearts rust just as iron rusts; and indeed they are polished through the recitation of the Qur'an.” (Hadith in *Kanz al-Ummal*)

Reading the Qur'an benefits the human being, whether they understand it or not. The act of recitation is itself a virtuous act, according to Islam, as it is the words of Allah. However, there is an emphasis on ensuring one also reads translations so they can learn what the Qur'an is saying.

The Qur'an is also used in practical life in several ways:

- Rites of passage – births, weddings, funerals.
- *Salah* – certain verses of the Qur'an must be recited during prayers.
- Friday sermon – the Qur'an is always recited as a part of the sermon in Friday prayer.
- *Ramadan* – it is recited daily during the month of *Ramadan*.
- *Hafiz* (memoriser) – the Qur'an is memorised by people.
- Calligraphy – it is used to create beautiful pieces of art.
- Ward off evil – some people wear jewellery with Qur'an verses written on them to ward off evil. Some even put Qur'an verses outside their homes.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

When I want to speak to Allah, I pray. However, when I want Allah to speak to me, I read the Qur'an. I try to make it a habit of mine to read the Qur'an daily, even if it is one page. I must have a relationship with the Qur'an. The Sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said: "The Qur'an which was not read and was left for dust to collect on it will complain to Allah on the Day of Judgement." (Hadith in al-Kafi)

This shows that the Qur'an should not be used as a decoration and must be used as a part of your life. When I read the Qur'an, it gives me

comfort and I can always find verses that are applicable to my life. I am also inspired by the stories in the Qur'an about previous prophets. Although they were a long time ago, the lessons from them can be applied to my life today. For example, Surah Yusuf (Chapter of Joseph) is about how a young prophet deals with trials and temptations but still shows devotion to Allah. Every person can find Qur'an verses that really deal with issues they are going through. For me, the Qur'an is the first place I go to for everything.



3.2 Prophet Muhammad

Pre-Islamic Arabia

Arabia before Islam, known as *Jahiliyya* (era of ignorance), is seen by several historians as a society at its lowest point. The rich and powerful were not accountable to anyone and were allowed to exploit the poor. Females had no rights and were treated as objects; to the point where the burial of a female baby by their father was acceptable. The ethics were questionable where compulsive drunkenness and gambling were also rife. Society was divided into tribes, made up of several clans, and alliances between them were fragile. However, the religious landscape was diverse where Christian, Jewish, polytheistic and other worldviews were present. There were also people known as *Hanifs*; they did not have a religion as such but followed the strict monotheistic principles of Prophet Ibrahim. Theologically the concept of *Tawhid* (see **1.1 Tawhid**), preached by the prophets, was lost and the worshipping of idols was the dominant practice. In terms of trade, for the tribe leaders, it was imperative for them to promote the worshipping of idols as the industry of carving and tourism was the main source of income for them. People would buy idols and tourists would come to the *Ka'ba*, filled with 360 idols, for their version of the pilgrimage.

Prophet Muhammad's Life

Prophet Muhammad was born in *Makkah* in the year 570 AD. He was born into the powerful Quraysh Tribe and in the well-respected Clan of Bani Hashim. His father Abdullah died before he was born. His mother Aminah died when he was six. Hence, his paternal grandfather Abd al-Muttalib looked after him but he died when Muhammad was eight. Prior to his death, Abd al-Muttalib asked Abu Talib (his son, Muhammad's uncle, the father of Imam Ali) to look after him. As Muhammad grew up, he was known to be spiritual and loved being around nature. He would often retreat to meditate. He became a shepherd as he grew up and had no formal education. He then became a tradesman and through his ethical conduct in business, he was titled *as-Sadiq al-Amin* (the truthful and trustworthy) at the young age of twenty. He would often question the theology and



Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi (*Medinah* - Saudi Arabia)

ethics of the Arabs and did not like the society he lived in. Due to his impeccable conduct, he caught the attention of a wealthy businesswoman named Khadija. After asking him to conduct a business deal for her, the ethics of Muhammad impressed Khadija and they married.

Beginning of Prophethood

At the age of forty, Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation of the Qur'an from Allah in the Cave of Hira where he would often retreat to escape the moral depravity of his society. According to Shi'a narrations, Angel Jibra'il came to the Prophet and asked him to read and the Prophet replied asking what Jibra'il would like to be read. This was when the first revelation of the Qur'an took place:

“Read in the Name of your Lord who created; created man from a clinging mass. Read, and your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (Qur'an 96:1-5)

Although an intense, spiritual experience, Shi'a Muslims reject historical reports that: the Prophet Muhammad had epileptic fits, Jibra'il grappled the Prophet when asking him to read, he attempted to commit suicide and he questioned whether this revelation was from Satan. His fear came from the fact this message of Allah was a huge burden to carry and his mission was great. He went straight to Khadija to inform her what had happened, which she accepted straight away. Shi'a Muslims reject the common view that Prophet Muhammad had to get reassurance from Khadija's Christian cousin that this was indeed a true revelation. Shi'a Muslims argue that none of the previous prophets reacted this way to revelation from Allah, so it would seem out of character for a prophet to do any of these things. It is imperative to note that Shi'a Muslims do not believe he became a prophet at this moment; he always knew he was a prophet but this is the moment it became official and he was allowed to announce it. Hence, this could explain why he did not need any assurance according to Shi'a Muslims.

Following this, further divine revelations started to come to Prophet Muhammad. He was ordered to invite people towards the message of

Islam but the reaction was hostile by the Arabs. A few joined the religion but many were not able to let go of their traditions and the powerful tribes saw this as a threat to their power. This made them persecute Muhammad and the early Muslims. Staying in *Makkah* was becoming dangerous where the Muslims were being tortured and an assassination attempt was being planned on Prophet Muhammad. During this period, Khadija and Abu Talib, vital to his wellbeing, passed away from illness due to the sanctions posed on the Muslims by the Arabs. Hence, Prophet Muhammad migrated to *Medinah*, whose inhabitants gave assurance they were ready to accept him as their leader. This migration is known as the *Hijrah* and it is the moment where the Muslim calendar begins.

On the night of the migration, Imam Ali offered to sleep on the bed of the Prophet whilst he escaped so that the Arabs mistake him for the Prophet and kill him in their assassination attempt instead. Shi'a Muslims believe this is the reason for the following revelation:

“And among the people is he who sells his soul seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is most kind to (His) servants.” (Qur'an 2:207)

This shows Allah praising Imam Ali for this act, further emphasising the high status of Imam Ali.

Once the migration was completed, Prophet Muhammad was able to establish a Muslim society in *Medinah*. It was here he built his mosque, established the practices of Islam and signed a peace treaty with the Christian and Jewish communities to allow them freedom of worship and protection. However, the *Makkans* continued to thwart the growth of Islam which ensued in the Muslims participating in their first physical acts of struggle, all of which were defensive (see **2.6 Jihad**). It is agreed upon by Muslims that Imam Ali's bravery on the battlefield was key to the success of Islam surviving these attacks. Prophet Muhammad died in the year 632 AD.

Authority of Prophet Muhammad

Muslims hold the Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate authority alongside the Qur'an. Whenever the Qur'an asks people to obey Allah, the Prophet

is always included. The Qur'an says:

“Your companion has neither gone astray, nor gone amiss. That is, the Apostle of Allah. Nor does he speak out of (his own) desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed (to him)”. (Qur'an 53:2-4)

This shows that Prophet Muhammad never speaks of his own accord, he only acts and says what Allah wishes. This means he must be obeyed unconditionally, the same way Allah is obeyed.

In addition to this, the Qur'an says:

“In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar”
(Qur'an 33:21)

This shows that the Prophet is a perfect example for humans to follow. Hence when a Muslim considers how to act righteously, he or she would look at the example of the Prophet as a role model.

A final aspect of the Prophet's authority is the idea that he is the final Prophet sent by Allah:

“He is the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets”
(Qur'an 33:40)

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The life of Prophet Muhammad serves as an inspiration to me. Prophet Muhammad said: *“I have come to perfect your morals.”* (Hadith in Kanz al-Ummal)

His sole mission was to call people towards Allah and have good ethics. This makes me try to live a moral life and follow his teachings. It also means that I follow what the Prophet says unconditionally as I believe he is infallible. Every time Allah asks people to obey Him, He always tells people to obey the Prophet as well. This shows that the Prophet does nothing except what pleases Allah and that the Qur'an alone is not enough to be followed; the Prophet must also be followed. The best description of Prophet Muhammad is in the Qur'an where Allah says:

“Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have surely seen it humbled (and) go to pieces with the fear of Allah.” (Qur'an 59:21).

This shows how strong and pure Prophet Muhammad's heart must have been to take the weight of the Qur'an. For me, following the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad is of equal importance. For every Muslim, he is the greatest human being to ever exist.

This shows that in the line of 124,000 prophets, he is the final one. This is why Shi'a Muslims emphasise that the *Imams* are not prophets, since that goes against the Qur'an. The role of a Prophet and *Imam* differ (see **1.4 Imamah**).

It is custom for Muslims to say 'peace be upon him' after saying the name of Prophet Muhammad as a mark of respect and honour. However, Shi'a Muslims, as well as many Sunni Muslims, say 'peace be upon him and his family' to acknowledge the status of his family too.

3.3 Ahl-ul-Bayt

The *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (People of the House) refers to the family of Prophet Muhammad. It is an obligation upon all Muslims to love and honour them (see **2.8 Tawallah and Tabarra**). However, Shi'a Muslims use them as a source of authority alongside the Qur'an. For Twelver Shi'a Muslims, the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* refers to fourteen specific people – Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Lady Fatimah and the Twelve *Imams* (see **1.4 Imamah**):

1. Imam Ali (son of Abu Talib) (buried in *Najaf*, Iraq)
2. Imam Hassan (son of Imam Ali) (buried in *Medinah*, Saudi Arabia)
3. Imam Hussain (son of Imam Ali) (buried in *Karbala*, Iraq)
4. Imam Ali Zayn al-Abideen (son of Imam Hussain) (buried in *Medinah*, Saudi Arabia)
5. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (son of Imam Zayn al-Abideen) (buried in *Medinah*, Saudi Arabia)
6. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (son of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir) (buried in *Medinah*, Saudi Arabia)
7. Imam Musa al-Kadhim (son of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq) (buried in *Kadhmiyyah*, Iraq)
8. Imam Ali al-Ridha (son of Imam Musa al-Kadhim) (buried in *Mashad*, Iran)
9. Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (son of Imam Ali al-Ridha) (buried in *Kadhmiyyah*, Iraq)

10. Imam Ali al-Hadi (son of Imam Muhammad al-Jawad) (buried in *Samarrah*, Iraq)
11. Imam Hassan al-Askari (son of Imam Ali al-Hadi) (buried in *Samarrah*, Iraq)
12. Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (son of Imam Hassan al-Askari) (alive, in occultation)

All of these *Imams* were killed apart from the final *Imam*. Shi'a Muslims believe he was taken into occultation by Allah at a young age and will return with Prophet Isa (Jesus) in the end times to bring peace and justice to the world.

3.3.1 Hadith of the Two Weighty Things

Arguably, the most important *Hadith* (narration/saying of the Prophet) for Shi'a Muslims is known as *Hadith al-Thaqalayn* (two weighty things). In several moments of his lifetime, Prophet Muhammad repeated the following command, particularly towards the end of his life:

“I am leaving among you two weighty things: the one being the Book of Allah in which there is right guidance and light, so hold fast to the Book of Allah and adhere to it. The second are my Ahl-ul-Bayt. I remind you (of your duties) to my Ahl-ul-Bayt.” (*Hadith in Amali al-Sadouq*)

All Muslim historians agree on the authenticity of this narration. However, Shi'a Muslims view it as a direct command of who to follow as sources of authority. Prophet Muhammad places the Qur'an and his family on an equal level in this speech since he emphasises that both are together. Hence, anything that is believed about the Qur'an is also to be believed about the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. Therefore, as the Qur'an is the infallible word of Allah, the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* are also infallible and speak only what Allah approves of. For Shi'a Muslims, the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* are living examples of what it means to follow the Qur'an. Although the initial *Ahl-ul-Bayt* includes five members, the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad, the members extend to the further *Imams* who did not live in his time.

Shi'a Muslims, therefore, do not hold the companions of Prophet

Muhammad as a source of authority. They hold reverence only for the companions that remained loyal to Imam Ali and accepted the concept of *Imamah* and the authority of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. Shi'a Muslims also reject the version of this narration that Sunni Muslims generally accept, which they argue the Prophet said to follow the **“*Qur'an and my Sunnah (prophetic teachings)*.”** (*Hadith in al-Muwatta*)

Although the content of this narration is not problematic for Shi'a Muslims, since following the *Sunnah* is something they follow through the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*, they believe that the Prophet ordered to follow the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* to learn the *Sunnah*.

3.3.2 Verse of Purification / Hadith of the Cloak

Another *Hadith* that Shi'a Muslims point to in order to prove the authority of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* is known as *Hadith al-Kisa* (Hadith of the Cloak). It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad wrapped himself, Lady Fatimah, Imam Ali, Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain in a cloak. This incident caused the following Qur'an verse to be revealed:

“*Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O Ahl-ul-Bayt, and purify you with a thorough purification.*” (Qur'an 33:33)

Shi'a Muslims argue that this verse is a clear indication that the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* are protected from the impurities of sin and therefore should be a source of authority.

Shi'a Muslims reject the common view that the wives of the Prophet are part of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. Although the Verse of Purification is in between several verses talking about the wives of the Prophet, Shi'a Muslims believe this verse was revealed separately to them. Furthermore, they point towards the historical report of one of his wives asking to join them under the cloak where the Prophet politely declined and told her that she is a good woman but not of the same status as those under the cloak. It is common for Shi'a Muslims to recite the story of the Hadith of the Cloak at the start of a religious ceremony in order to bless the gathering.

3.3.3 Verse of Mubahila

The event of *Mubahila* was a debate between Prophet Muhammad and the Christians from a town called *Najran*. Both parties were discussing the concept of Jesus as the Son of God and decided to have a *Mubahila*; an ancient ceremony asking Allah to withdraw His mercy from the party who are not speaking truthfully. The following Qur'an verse was revealed: ***“Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, ‘Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down Allah’s curse upon the liars.’”*** (Qur'an 3:61)

Both parties agreed to bring the best representatives of their religion in order to commence this ceremony. Whilst the Christian party called several key priests and experts, history records that Prophet Muhammad brought just four people with him: Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain as his ‘sons’, Lady Fatimah as his ‘women’ and Imam Ali as his ‘soul’, i.e. he brought the People of the Cloak. Shi'a Muslims point to this incident as a clear indication of the superiority of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* above others. In particular, they point to Imam Ali being brought as the ‘soul’ of the Prophet which indicates no one emulates the Prophet like Imam Ali.

According to historians, the Christian council withdrew from the ceremony when they saw the Prophet bringing his family; they commented on his conviction in his beliefs that he was prepared to bring his own family to such an event.

3.3.4 Verse of Guardianship

A key incident to show the authority of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*, particularly Imam Ali, is referred to in the Qur'an in a particular verse. History reports that whilst in the mosque, Imam Ali heard a beggar asking for a donation. Whilst bowing during prayer, Imam Ali made his ring visible to the beggar for him to take. This caused the following revelation to be given to Prophet Muhammad:

“Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down.” (5:55)

This verse indicates that guardianship and authority is threefold: Allah, the Prophet and Imam Ali, since the latter portion of the verse specifically describes the action of Imam Ali. Shi'a Muslims argue that this incident shows Imam Ali acting as Allah's authority on earth. The beggar had a wish and Allah fulfilled the beggar's wish using His chosen leader, Imam Ali. This verse is used to prove the concept of *Imamah* by Shi'a Muslims (see **1.4 Imamah**).

3.3.5 The Zaydis

All Shi'a Muslims agree in the divinely-appointed authority of the first four Imams of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*: Imam Ali, Imam Hassan, Imam Hussain and Imam Ali Zayn al-Abideen. The majority of Shi'a Muslims are Twelver, i.e. they believe in Twelve *Imams*. However, in history there were some instances where disputes took place over who the next *Imam* was.

The *Zaydis* are named after Zayd, a son of the fourth Shi'a *Imam*, Imam Zayn al-Abideen. Zaydis consider Zayd as the fifth legitimate *Imam* instead of his half-brother Muhammad al-Baqir on the basis that he led an uprising and fought injustice seeking the leadership of the Islamic world. Thus a broad religious movement came into existence believing that legitimacy belonged to any member of *Ahl-ul-Bayt* who is learned, pious and able to fight for the righteous cause and possess power.

3.3.6 The Ismailis

The *Ismailis* hold the same beliefs as Twelver



Ismaili Centre in London

Shi'as with regards to the succession of Prophet Muhammad. However, they believe that Ismail, one of the sons of the sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, was appointed to be the next *Imam* not Musa al-Kadhim. *Ismaili* Shi'as believe that this line of *Imams* from Ismail continues to this day. Hence, currently in 2017, they believe in the *Imamah* of the forty-ninth *Imam*, who is known as Prince Karim Aga Khan, who is a descendent of the *Imams* and, therefore, Prophet Muhammad.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The Ahl-ul-Bayt, which includes the Prophet, are the perfect human beings. They teach me how to follow the Qur'an. Some people neglect the Qur'an and focus on the Ahl-ul-Bayt whilst others do the opposite; this is wrong. The Qur'an tells me what to do and believe whilst the Ahl-ul-Bayt show me how to express my beliefs. Belief in the Ahl-ul-Bayt is linked to *Imamah* and *Tawallah*. Every member of the Ahl-ul-Bayt is special to me and they displayed different qualities. They achieved so much in their lives and as their follower and lover I want to follow their footsteps because I want to be with them. Prophet

Muhammad said:

"Man is with whom he loves." (Hadith in *Kanz al-Ummal*)

Since the Ahl-ul-Bayt are infallible, I can be confident that whatever they say is accurate and the correct way to follow Islam. I respect all other good Muslims of the past but the Ahl-ul-Bayt's authority is the most important to me.

In today's world, I always pray for the reappearance of the final Imam, Imam al-Mahdi. I believe he is alive and with us, but we cannot access him. It pains me that those who lived at the time of the other Imams were able to see and speak to them whereas I cannot do that with the Imam of my time. I pray every single day for his return because when he does return, the world will become a better place.

3.4 Hadith

Whilst Prophet Muhammad lived, he encouraged the act of writing things down. The *Ahl-ul-Bayt* would also encourage this. The Muslims would write down everything they said and did like a journalist would in today's day and age. These reports, stories and traditions are called *Hadith*. It is imperative to note that for Shi'a Muslims, the *Hadith* are not limited to just the reports of Prophet Muhammad, but also extend to reports of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. As things were written down, Muslims were able to refer back to what they had written and pass it on generation by generation so the teachings were preserved. Eventually, Muslims would compile the *Hadiths* into books, which are used to this day.

The *Hadith* primarily contain the commentary and teachings of the Qur'an. Muslims believe that the *Hadith* help them understand the teachings of the Qur'an and put it into the context of day to day life. The *Hadith* also give approval/disapproval of an action or explain things which are good to do/avoid. Sometimes the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* would see something happen – if they did not stop the person from doing it, that is taken as their tacit approval. If they stopped it from happening, however, then it is seen as disapproval of an action. Sometimes they would tell the Muslims to do extra forms of worship or avoid certain actions that aren't necessarily mentioned in the Qur'an. The *Hadith* contain these teachings. In addition to the narrations of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*, *Hadith* collections also contain *Hadith Qudsi* (Holy *Hadith*). These are words of Allah, usually conversations with His prophets, which are not mentioned in the Qur'an.

Hadith Collections

Shi'a Muslims do not use the same *Hadith* collections as Sunni compilations and do not accept their full authenticity. They, naturally, only accept the *Hadith* from these collections that are also present in their own collections. For Shi'a Muslims, those who narrate the *Hadith* of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* must be people who were not their opponents and were Shi'a Muslims themselves. Shi'a Muslims have four key collections they rely on for beliefs and practices:

• *Kitab al-Kafi* (The Sufficient Book) by Shaykh Kulayni

• *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih* (For Him without a Jurist) by Shaykh Saduq

• *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* (The Refinement of the Laws) by Shaykh Tusi

• *Al-Istibsar* (Understanding) by Shaykh Tusi

However, there are several more books that are used. For example *Nahj-al-Balagha* (Peak of Eloquence) is a compilation of the sermons and letters of Imam Ali that is an important text. *Sahifa Sajjadiya* (Scrolls of Sajjad) is a text of supplications by the fourth Imam, Imam Zaynul Abideen, that Shi'a Muslims consider their Psalms. Shi'a Muslims do not claim full authenticity of any of their *Hadith* collections, since only the Qur'an can be considered fully authentic. Hence the validity of the *Hadiths* in their books are constantly researched and verified.

Verifying Hadith

The *Hadith* are equally as important as the Qur'an – you need one for the other to make sense. For example, the Qur'an commands Muslims to pray, fast and go on pilgrimage. However, it does not specify how to do these acts and the rules around them. The *Hadith*, however, do explain this. As Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of Allah, it does not require verification for authenticity as such. This is because Allah promised to preserve it. In addition to this, Muslims hold to the view that whatever Prophet Muhammad says or does is with Allah's approval (see **3.2 Prophet Muhammad**). However, Allah has not promised to preserve the *Hadith* from being changed, therefore the *Hadith* need to go through testing to ensure they are authentic.

Experts in *Hadith* sciences have two methods to work out the authenticity of a *Hadith*. They first look at the *matn* (content of the Hadith). If it contradicts the Qur'an, then it is automatically rejected and deemed as a

weak or fabricated Hadith. This is because the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* would not say or do something that goes against the Qur'an.

The second way of verification is by looking at the *isnad* (chain of narration) of the *Hadith*. This method stems from the Qur'anic instruction: ***“O you who have faith! If an unrighteous (person) should bring you some news, verify it.”*** (Qur'an 49:6)

Every *Hadith* comes with a chain of narrators who passed on the *Hadith* that eventually lead to the member of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* that is reported to have said it.

To illustrate, here is a *Hadith* about what it means to be a Muslim from the sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, that contains a chain of narrators:

Ali ibn Ibrahim from his father from Ibn Mahbub from Ibn Riab from Imam Jafar al-Sadiq:

“Verily, we do not consider a man a believer until he follows all of our commands, willingly, (know that) a part of following our commands and wishing to fulfil it is through piety, then adorn yourselves with it (piety), may Allah have mercy on you.”
(*Hadith in al-Kafi*)

An expert of *Hadith* would study the biographies of the people in the chain and investigate if they are reliable or not. If they are reliable and deemed as trustworthy people, and the *Hadith* does not contradict the

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The *Hadith* are just as important as the Qur'an. They are the way for me to access the life of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. They help me understand the Qur'an, especially the *Hadith* that explain the symbolism of Qur'an verses. Unfortunately, not all of our *Hadith* books are translated into English so I cannot read them all. However, those that are translated are very useful for practical life. It is very important to ensure *Hadith* scholars verify *Hadiths* for us. The Sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

“The *Hadiths* that do not correspond with the Qur'an are false.” (*Hadith in al-Kafi*)

*This shows the importance of ensuring we do not attribute a false statement to the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*.*

Qur'an, the *Hadith* is deemed as correct. It is a rigorous science that requires many years of equipping oneself with the tools to be able to verify *Hadith*.

Logically, if a *Hadith* is found to be weak or fabricated, that does not mean Prophet Muhammad or the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* said anything wrong, since they are infallible. In reality, it cannot really be called a *Hadith* because the report itself is false. Shi'a Muslims argue that, unfortunately, Islamic history shows that after the death of Prophet Muhammad, several people fabricated *Hadith* that got into the collections. The aim of these *Hadiths* was to degrade the Prophet Muhammad and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* whilst raising the status of others. In some instances in Shi'a collections, narrators of *Hadith* attribute sayings to the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* that seem to give them divine status. Such reports are completely rejected by Shi'a Muslims or an alternative explanation is sought for them.

3.5 Shari'ah

The *Shari'ah* (Divine Law) is a complete guide for Muslims on how to live their lives. It covers every aspect of life which is what makes it unique. It wants to make you a better Muslim and, therefore, not solely about making laws that govern society, but also your spiritual and moral needs. In some countries, the laws are made using *Shari'ah* meaning all laws are Islamic, e.g. it is the law of the state that alcohol is illegal or adultery is illegal. In countries that aren't governed by Muslim law, one can still follow *Shari'ah* at least in their personal life even if the laws of the country are not Islamic. For example, the UK law does not make alcohol or adultery illegal, however a Muslim can still follow the *Shari'ah* by not committing those acts. *Shari'ah* deals with beliefs, worship, transactions and social/political/criminal issues.

In Islamic law, every act can be categorised into one of five groups:

- *Wajib* (obligatory) – acts that must be done and it is a sin not to do so. For example, the five daily prayers, fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, going on *Hajj* etc.

- *Mustahab* (recommended) – acts that are not obligatory but are good to do. There is no sin in not doing these things but there is reward and blessing for doing them. For example, *Sadaqah* (voluntary charity), extra forms of worship etc.
- *Mubah / Halal* (permissible) – acts that are neutral and are allowed. They have no merit or no drawbacks. For example, sitting down, sleeping, going for a walk etc.
- *Makruh* (disliked) – acts that are not sinful but better to avoid as they are not liked by Allah. For example, divorce, wasting time etc.
- *Haram* (forbidden) – acts that are not allowed and it is a sin to carry them out. For example, not doing a *Wajib* (obligatory) act deliberately, eating pork, drinking alcohol etc.

Sources of Shari'ah

Muslim jurists have two key sources on how to extrapolate Islamic law and categorising actions – the Qur'an and the *Hadiths* of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* which demonstrate the *Sunnah* (prophetic teachings). Whilst the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* were alive, Muslims were able to easily access information on Islamic law by asking them directly. However, in their absence, and as time went on, new issues arose that the Qur'an and *Hadith* do not explicitly deal with. This meant that scholars had to make rulings on new issues using the Qur'an and *Hadiths*. Things such as phone, internet, advanced medical research etc. did not exist at that time so there were no explicit Qur'an verses or *Hadiths* regarding these issues. Hence Shi'a experts in Islamic law use a tool called *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) using Islamic sources to work out the Islamic rule on a new issue.

For example, the Qur'an and *Hadith* do not mention whether using recreational drugs are allowed or not. Hence a jurist would need to use the principles of the Qur'an and *Hadith* to decide whether drugs are permissible or not. In this example, scholars would rule drugs as forbidden since they fall under the category of an intoxicant and intoxicants are forbidden according to the Qur'an (which alcohol also falls under).

Schools of Law

After the *Hadith* had been compiled into collections, some scholars took it upon themselves to extrapolate Islamic laws using the Qur'an and the *Hadiths*. This resulted in several schools of law within Islam that exist today – each school of law was founded by an Islamic scholar who gave their legal rulings on various issues. The major schools are:

- *Hanafi* – Sunni school of law founded by Abu Hanifa
- *Maliki* – Sunni school of law founded by Malik ibn Anas
- *Shafi'i* – Sunni school of law founded by Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i
- *Hanbali* – Sunni school of law founded by Ahmed ibn Hanbal
- *Jafari* – Shi'a school of law founded by Jafar Sadiq

All the schools of law aim to work out Islamic law using research and different methods. In Twelver Shi'a Islam, there is only one school of law. It is named after and founded by the sixth Shi'a *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq. Out of all the Twelve *Imams*, he was allowed to teach more freely compared to the other *Imams* due to the government of his time being toppled by another dynasty which meant their focus on

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Shari'ah has got a bad reputation due to the media. However, Shari'ah is quite simply the rules of Islam. This has a direct impact on me as it governs every aspect of my life, from my acts of worship to the way I sit down or eat and drink. I am able to follow Shari'ah law in my personal life even though I don't live in a Muslim governed country. As a Muslim, my first aim is to ensure I do the things that are obligatory and don't do the things that are forbidden. The First Imam, Imam Ali, said:

"If you were to preoccupy yourself with recommended acts instead of the obligatory, you will not gain a single merit by losing an obligation." (Hadith in Ghurar al-Hikam)

As I become more devoted to my religion, to become a better person, I would then start avoiding the disliked acts and doing the recommended acts. This level requires a lot of devotion and effort to reach but it will allow me to emulate the Ahl-ul-Bayt as best as I can. The way Shari'ah has categorised the actions make following my religion simple to do.

oppressing him was not there for a period of time. This allowed him to have several thousand students and establish his school of law. This is why the majority of *Hadiths* in Shi'a collections are narrated from him. It is imperative to note that since Shi'a Muslims believe he was chosen by Allah, everything he said was the authentic, divine teachings of Prophet Muhammad since he inherited this knowledge. Although the school of law is named after him, it is the same school of law that all of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* would adhere to since their knowledge is the same.

3.6 Marja Taqlid

Twelver Shi'a Muslims have been without a fully accessible *Imam* for over 1000 years. Whilst alive or present, the people could visit the *Imam* of their time to ask questions. However, with the occultation of the Twelfth *Imam*, Shi'a Muslims have had to find other ways to answer religious questions.

Before the Twelfth *Imam* went into occultation, he instructed his followers: ***“When it comes to matters of religion, refer to the narrators of our Hadiths.”*** (*Hadith* in *al-Ghayba*)

Therefore in the absence of the *Imam*, the scholars who are familiar with the *Hadith* should give religious rulings. These people are *Marja Taqlid* (source of emulation). They usually have the title of Grand Ayatollah. Such scholars are experts in religion who have formally studied Islam for several years until they are given permission to do *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to extrapolate Islamic law. Every Shi'a Muslim chooses a *Marja Taqlid* to follow on legal and moral rulings. They pick the one they think is the most knowledgeable and most accessible just as one would pick the best doctor for their health. Most Grand Ayatollahs have the same rulings but may differ on minor issues. For example, Islam follows a lunar calendar where the start of the next month is decided by the viewing of the new crescent of the moon. Ayatollahs will differ, due to the conclusion of their *Ijtihad*, on whether the viewing of this moon must be done with the naked eye or if optical aid can be used.

In the Shi'a community, Grand Ayatollahs are informally referred to as 'representatives of the Twelfth *Imam*' in his absence. When it comes to religious issues, they do their best to work out what the *Imam* would say in light of the Qur'an and *Hadiths*. Although most of the *Marja Taqlid* live in Iraq and Iran, they have representatives and institutions in several countries. Many of their rulings are translated into English and they also have websites where one can send religious questions to their offices. It is also the *Marja Taqlid* who is responsible for collecting *Khums* and distributing it in the way he sees fit on behalf of the *Imam* (see **2.5 Khums** and **4.3 Shia Muslim Charities**).

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Following a Marja Taqlid is very important as they do all the hard work. I have immense respect for them since they have studied for decades in order to serve the religion. The Qur'an emphasises the importance of a group of people in society to go and become experts in religion to help Muslims:

"But why should not there go forth a group from each of their sections to become learned in religion and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware?" (Qur'an 9:122)

It is very useful that many of their rules are now translated into English and that I can also email their offices if I have specific questions about Shari'ah. I do recognise that they are not infallible like the Imams, but I trust them the same way I trust a doctor with my health. They are trying their best to make Islam simple to follow.



Minaret of the Shrine of Imam Ali (Najaf - Iraq)

4. Forms of Expression and Ways of Life

The final section will explain how Shi'a beliefs and practices are expressed through various ways, making links to beliefs, practices and sources of authority explained in the previous sections. This will also allow an understanding of Shi'a Muslim identity.

4.1 Muslim Identity Through the Ummah

According to all Muslims, being part of the *Ummah* (Muslim community) is of vital importance and is a way of creating a support network. The Qur'an says:

“Hold fast, all together, to Allah’s cord, and do not be divided (into sects). And remember Allah’s blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing.” (Qur'an 3:103)

Despite differences between various groups in Islam, Muslims seek to work together in common causes to help each other. Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, therefore, are able to pray together and visit each other's houses and mosques. For example, it is common for different groups of Muslims to hold intra-faith events celebrating the life of Prophet Muhammad and taking lessons from him, since belief in his prophethood is a common thread amongst Muslims. Any major differences are usually discussed academically and with respect since there is recognition that all Muslims are part of the *Ummah*.

At the same time, Shi'a Muslims also seek to create a strong *Ummah* within their own communities. Since Shi'a Muslims have always been in the minority, they see it as important to ensure they are well-equipped with religious knowledge and a strong identity in the face of persecution. One way this is done is through birth rites so that they are part of the community when born. Rites include:

Reciting the *Adhan* (call to prayer) in the ear of a new-born baby.

Circumcision for a male baby.

Aqiqa – having an animal sacrificed. Its meat is distributed to the poor.

Naming the child, usually a name of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* or righteous Muslims of the past

Recitation of Qur'an and supplications over the baby.

Some Shi'a parents also try to take their child on *Ziyarah* (see **2.3.2 Ziyarah**) at a young age so they are blessed through this visit and learn about the legacy of their *Imams*. They also take their children to gatherings in remembrance of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*, such as their birth or death anniversaries, so they are inculcated with the love of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* to develop their *Tawallah* (see **2.8 Tawallah and Tabarra**). Children are also encouraged to volunteer for their mosque so that they serve their community and feel a part of the *Ummah*.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

I feel like I am part of two Ummahs – the general Muslim Ummah and also the Shi'a Ummah. As a child, you are made to feel a strong sense of identity as a Shi'a Muslim by hearing stories of the Ahl-ul-Bayt and learning from their lives. This creates a love for them and you are able to talk to others who also love them too. On a general scale, the First Imam, Imam Ali, said:

"People are of two types; either your brother in faith or equal in humanity." (Hadith in Nahj al-Balagha)

This shows that if we are not linked through religion, then we are linked through the fact we are human. Being part of the Ummah makes me feel like I am always supported and that if I seek help, it will be given to me. It also means that I should help others even if I don't know them personally. Islam has a big emphasis on the Ummah being strong and united and it is the responsibility of the people in the Ummah to maintain it.

4.2 Muslim Identity Through Dress and Attire

As the *Shari'ah* (see 3.5 **Shari'ah**) covers every aspect of life, there are also guidelines on how to dress. Islam has a very big focus on modesty for both genders and interaction between the genders should reflect this. The Qur'an gives instructions on how to dress and act in this regard:

“Tell the faithful men to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts. That is more decent for them. Allah is indeed well aware of what they do. And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts, and not to display their charms, except for what is outward, and let them draw their scarfs over their bosoms, and not display their charms except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husband's sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or their slave girls, or male dependants lacking (sexual) desire, or children uninitiated to women's parts.” (Qur'an 24:30-31)

The Qur'an first instructs males which addresses the misconception that the dress code is only for females. Males are required to not look at another female in a lustful way and guard the way they dress. Many Muslim scholars argue that this also means that Muslim males should not dress in immodest clothing that is intended to bring attraction from the opposite gender. It is also the consensus amongst many Shi'a scholars that it is obligatory for a man to keep a beard, according to the *Hadith* of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*, to further emphasise the importance of dress and appearance.

The Qur'an then addresses females. It is imperative to note that the females of Arabia already covered their heads, which explains why the Qur'an does not need to command this. However, it instructs them to cover their chest area (which the females used to expose) and not openly display their ***“charms except for what is outward”***. Muslim scholars agree that this means females are required to cover their bodies in loose-fitted clothing but can display their face and hands. It is not obligatory to cover the face. The Qur'an then explains in the presence of whom the female can relax this dress code. It is an obligation for a Muslim female to follow this dress code once she reaches the age of puberty. However it

is common for them to do this earlier in order to get into the habit of it. It is not allowed to be forced, as is the case with other rules of Islam. Many Muslim scholars say that as long as the principles of the dress code are met (i.e. body is covered with loose clothing and only face and hands are shown), a female can dress in the common manner of the culture she is living in.

Whilst the *Hijab* (which literally means ‘veil’) has a physical aspect, there is also a social aspect. Many see the *Hijab* as an attitude as well as a piece of cloth. Muslims argue that one should not dress with modesty yet act with immodesty. A female role model that Shi’a Muslims follow is Lady Fatimah, daughter of Prophet Muhammad. Shi’a females look to her as to how she dressed with modesty but also how she acted. She is someone who dressed according to Islamic principles but also participated in public issues. Shi’a Muslims also look towards *Ashura* (see **2.8.2 Ashura**) where the sanctity of the *Hijab* was violated by the people who martyred Imam Hussain when they took the women captive and removed their veils.

How does this influence a Shi’a Muslim?

The Hijab is very important, both to males and females. It creates an atmosphere of modesty and respect for the opposite gender. Islam says that modesty is natural for a human being. Prophet Muhammad said:

“Verily every religion has a natural disposition and the natural disposition of Islam is modesty.” (Hadith in Kanz al-Ummal)

It makes you see a person for who they are rather than what they look like. Since Islam is very strict on pre-marital relationships, the Hijab and concept of modesty also acts as a protection from having this relationship. However, I think it is very important to not neglect the social aspect of the Hijab. One should not just dress modestly and stop there. The way you speak to others and conduct yourself should also be with modesty. Although some see the Hijab as ‘oppression’, many Muslim females see it as freedom since they are not dictated on what to wear by popular culture.

4.3 Shi'a Muslim Charities

As Shi'a Muslims give away 20% of their yearly savings through the system of *Khums* (see **2.5 Khums**), this money is used by several Shia Muslim charities to help relieve suffering. Such organisations usually receive permission from the *Marja Taqlid* (see **3.6 Marja Taqlid**) to receive *Khums* donations to fund their work. Examples of Shi'a Muslim charities in the UK include:

The Al-Khoei Foundation



(<http://www.al-khoei.org/>)

The *Al-Khoei Foundation* is an international, religious charity organisation set up by the Marja Taqlid in 1989 to address the educational and social needs of Shia communities worldwide. The Foundation:

- Has offices around the world which run schools, emphasising the value of education, particularly for girls.
- Engages in inter and intra faith dialogue which aims to bring communities together through social programmes.
- Established training programmes for clerics to understand other faiths and denominations.
- Promotes freedom of worship, respect for minority groups, and advocates for the rights of other communities at the United Nations.
- Addresses community issues that are being neglected such as providing health care facilities and clinics for low-income or vulnerable communities, such as the Marsh Arabs.
- Provides humanitarian relief at times of crises and natural disasters.
- Develops housing projects for refugees.
- Initiated the *Al-Kawthar Project*. This supports widows and orphans in Iraq by raising their living standards through the provision of monthly allowances, food, clothing, education sponsorship and other basic necessities. The central belief behind the project is to give opportunities to orphans and their families to enhance their prospects

and development through microfinance to provide a sustainable income.

The Lady Fatemah Trust

(<http://www.ladyfatemahtrust.org/>)



The Lady Fatemah Trust is a non-profit, non-governmental and faith-based humanitarian organisation whose mission is to empower the world's poorest to lift them out of poverty with dignity. They believe that the eradication of poverty is not only a matter of conscience; it is a prerequisite for the security and prosperity of humanity at large and that freedom from poverty is a fundamental human right.

The charity's primary purpose is to undertake manageable and sustainable projects that can make a real difference to individuals and communities, enabling them to improve their lives. They help people in need to reduce their dependence on humanitarian aid and facilitate their transition to sustainable self-reliant, long-term development. Their objectives include:

- Providing direct and immediate humanitarian assistance, including food and non-food items, and cash assistance where necessary for the survival of vulnerable populations.
- Providing relief during natural disasters.
- Working towards alleviating poverty by providing microfinance.
- Providing sustainability to the needy, by breaking the cycle of poverty which plagues them.
- Providing educational opportunities to orphans and destitute children.
- Providing medical care to those in need.
- Providing treatment and eye care to those in the world's poorest countries.
- Working at 0% administrative costs thus ensuring every penny donated goes to those in need.

Who Is Hussain

whoishussain.org

(<https://www.whoishussain.org>)

Who is Hussain is a global initiative dedicated to promoting the legacy of Imam Hussain. The organisation aims to inspire people through the timeless example of Hussain and bring positive change in the world (see **2.8.2 Ashura**). It is run by volunteers who organise events that allow people to give back to their local communities, ranging from blood donation drives to feeding the homeless and other community services.

The organisation believes that Hussain ibn Ali's life of compassion, honour and dignity warrants special attention, and is a beacon of light and salvation in dark times.

In 2012, a group of youth from across different communities in London were inspired by Imam Hussain. They found that the world we live in over-emphasises personal need above common humanity where our shared sense of compassion is heavily eroded. Yet Hussain provided a moral compass and an avenue for upliftment.

As Imam Hussain cared more for collective human progression than for titles and names that divide, the organisation emphasises that they are apolitical and transcend religious barriers.

The campaign started with displaying posters in public places: on train platforms, buses and in universities. Since then, *Who is Hussain* has become an international campaign, operating with over sixty volunteer teams in dozens of countries. The organisation is made up of individuals from many cultures, religions, nationalities and social classes.

For example, when a water crisis left tens of thousands in Flint, Michigan without clean drinking water, *Who is Hussain USA* provided thousands of emergency bottles of water. The India chapter offered 1000 tents and emergency provisions to Nepal after a deadly earthquake in April 2015

and provided 70,000 meals during the summer of 2016. The London team organises a weekly food-drive, feeding hundreds every week, whilst providing haircuts and dental checks, whilst the Lebanon team broke a national record in 2016 for the single greatest number of donations in one day.

The World Federation

(<https://www.world-federation.org/>)

THE
WORLD
FEDERATION
OF KHOJA SHI'AH ITHNA-ASHERI COMMUNITIES



The World Federation of Khoja Shi'a Ithna-Asheri (Twelver) Muslim Communities is a faith-based organisation, consisting of about 125,000 community members worldwide, mainly in Canada, East Africa, India, Middle East, Pakistan, UK and USA. *The World Federation* is made up of member organisations based in different regions. The role of *The World Federation* is to facilitate endeavours of its member organisations, through strategic planning and providing necessary resources for effective implementation. Their motto is: 'We exist to serve'.

The World Federation believes that all human beings are entitled to basic provisions, and therefore one of its key strategic objectives is to undertake humanitarian projects. The long-term aim of *The World Federation* is to bring about self-sufficiency within the developing world, through providing access to water, healthcare and education for all. In addition, the organisation's core values include spreading the true message of Islam as a religion that emphasises peace and upholding human values.

Examples of projects undertaken include:

- A rapid response to emergencies and disasters worldwide.
- Relieving financial deprivation through economic development and building human capacity and potential.
- Provision of medical facilities and healthcare, through the running of several Health Centres and Eye Clinics worldwide.
- Supporting projects that provide for safe drinking water in developing

countries.

- Provision of low cost housing.
- Provision of necessities to groups that are most vulnerable, such as seniors, children and women.
- Sponsoring students from developing countries who wish to study in regions where there is a high level of education, supported by adequate resources and facilities.
- Engagement with various interfaith groups aimed at bridging the gap between Muslim communities and those of other religions, in order to promote community cohesion.
- Publication and distribution of Islamic books.

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

Shia Muslim charities are very influential since you see the results of the Zakah and Khums that you pay. Prophet Muhammad said:

"My community will continue to thrive as long as they love each other, deliver the trust, refrain from the forbidden, respect the guest, maintain the prayer, and pay the Zakah." (Hadith in Bihar al-Anwar)

Many of these organisations are run by volunteers. This influences me to also try and volunteer and give my skills to them so that I can help the community. This is linked to the concept of the Ummah since I am able to help people globally by giving to these organisations. Different organisations focus on different things so there is something for everyone to help with, depending on what they are passionate about. Islam has a huge focus on relieving suffering of others; the Ahl-ul-Bayt spent their lives doing this. For example, Imam Ali used to spend his nights giving bread to homeless people and orphans. This inspires me to do the same in my capacity.

4.4 The Masjid

Masjid comes from the word *sujud* (prostration) and is the Muslim place of worship. In English, it is known as a ‘mosque’. In spite of the spiritual and social aspects of the *Masjid*, it still remains a place of sanctity. Cleanliness in all respects is paramount; purity of mind, body, thoughts and actions. Muslims are expected to be in a state of purity, when he or she visits the *Masjid*. *Masjids* are usually carpeted and shoes are removed upon entering. Modesty in dress is expected for both men and women and there is usually segregation between the genders.

Whilst the *Masjid* is often seen as a house of *Salah* (prayer) and worship, both congregational and individual, its other functions are also seen as invaluable support for Muslims. In its further social role the *Masjid* is often the centre of Islamic social/community life e.g. providing nursery facilities, counselling etc. and many *Masjids* are registered charities. In its further religious role each *Masjid* is led by an *imam* – he gives general advice and religious instruction, especially during the Friday sermon. He will often also discuss political and social issues with the community. The *Masjid* is used as a central hub for the celebration of festivals and can be used for important rites of passage ceremonies e.g. weddings.

In terms of educational support, the *Madrassa* (school) is usually based at the *Masjid* for study of the Arabic language, Qur’an, Islamic history, theology and Islamic law. The *Masjid* is also used as a library – a place for lectures, study or Sunday schools. For example, some *Masjids* offer GCSE Arabic tuition or teach English.

Shi’a *Masjids* do not differ greatly from the *Masjids* of Sunni Muslims. There may usually be minarets and a dome but this is not always the case. Some Shi’a *Masjids* may have a flag outside it. This is to emulate the domes above the graves of the *Imams* which also have flags. The flag is changed to black during the period of mourning for Imam Hussain (see **2.8.2 Ashura**). Inside a Shi’a *Masjid*, you are likely to see artwork depicting the holy sites of Shi’a Islam, calligraphy of Qur’an verses and

the names of *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. There is usually also a box that is full of *turbahs* (clay tablets) to prostrate on during *Salah*. There is also a *Minbar* (pulpit) for scholars to give speeches.

Shi'a Muslims also have buildings called *Hussainias*. This is a congregation hall which performs similar functions to a *Masjid* but has the specific purpose of holding mourning ceremonies for Imam Hussain during *Muharram* (see **2.8.2 Ashura**). It is different from a *Masjid* in that it is intended mainly for gatherings for *Muharram* in mourning for Imam Hussain. Many *Hussainias*, like mosques, function as social and community centres.

Shi'a Muslims are not limited to visiting the *Masjid* just for Friday Prayer. Since they commemorate the death anniversaries and birthdays of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (see **2.8 Tawallah and Tabarra**) throughout the year (see **Appendix A: Calendar of Shi'a Religious Commemorations**), there is constant visitation to the *Masjid* or *Hussainia* to remember Allah and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. For Shi'a Muslims, Thursday evening is considered a holy night which one should spend in worship since it marks the beginning of Friday, the holiest day of the week.. Therefore, several Shi'a *Masjids* hold collective

How does this influence a Shi'a Muslim?

The Masjid is the centre point of the community. The Sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

"It is incumbent upon you to attend the Masjids, for verily they are the houses of Allah on earth." (Hadith in Amali al-Saduq)
It is a place that is not just for praying but it is also for socialising and learning. Having a good relationship with the Masjid allows me to learn about my religion and have a good relationship with people. I am very lucky that I am able to go to the Masjid several times during the year, not just on Friday or Ramadan. Thursday nights are very special since we do many prayers together and this strengthens my relationship with Allah. I also enjoy going to the Masjid to learn about Islam because there is always a programme being held that anyone can attend.

worship every Thursday evening where Qur'an and supplications are recited as well as a discussion circle or a speech.

4.5 Expression Through Art and Poetry

The expression of religious belief through the means of art and poetry is something that is very present in Shi'a Islam. When entering a Shi'a *Masjid*, one will be able to view calligraphy of the names of Allah, Qur'an verses and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. To maintain the principles of *Tawhid* (see 1.1 **Tawhid**), Muslims are not permitted to draw or make images of Allah. Hence, to express their devotion towards Allah and express the beauty of His names and words, they use calligraphy. It is reported that when Prophet Muhammad had scribes to write down the revelations of the Qur'an, he would instruct them to write the words beautifully and with care.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon to see illustrations of the *Imams* in areas of the world with a high Shi'a population. Painters use their imaginations and descriptions of the *Imams* to draw them. Although the depiction of holy figures is controversial in Islam, some Shi'a scholars do not object to it as long as respect is shown in the drawings but most Shi'a scholars encourage artists to refrain from such drawings. Hence, some painters would depict scenes of the stories of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* but leave their faces blank and put a shining light there instead. It is common for the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* to be depicted in TV shows and plays to have their faces covered. The most common way to use paintings in Shi'a expression is depictions of the Battle of *Karbala* on the day of *Ashura* where images are used to evoke an emotional response from Muslims. Naturally, such images are not used as icons or in any acts of worship at all since that goes against the essence of *Tawhid*.

In Shi'a expression, the use of the spoken word and poetry is very strong and is used as a very powerful tool. In general, Islam appreciates the use of voice; this is evident through the recitation of the Qur'an and supplications. However, Shi'a Muslims use poetry to praise and mourn the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*.

According to the teachings of the *Imams*, there is encouragement to recite poetry for Imam Hussain in order to make listeners cry. This is evident from a *Hadith* from the Sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq:

“There is none who recites poetry about Hussain and weeps and makes others weep by means of it, except that Allah makes Paradise incumbent upon him and forgives his sins.”

The endorsement of poetry is evident and the poets who lived during the time of the *Imams* were encouraged to write poetry. Poetry is used to express love and devotion towards Allah and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (see **2.8 Tawallah and Tabarra**). It is used in ceremonies that celebrate and mourn the *Ahl-ul-Bayt*. The most famous type of poetry in Shi’a cultures is the *latmiyyah* or *noha* – a eulogy describing the sufferings of the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* that is recited in a rhythm whilst mourners beat their chest in synchronisation with the eulogy. In recent years, there has now been a rise in the use of the English language in poetry which is becoming popular in the western world with English speaking Shi’a Muslims.

Although artwork in Islam is controversial in some circles, I like looking at artwork that depicts Islamic stories. We are always hearing the stories but the stories come to life when you see it visually. Shi’a Muslims are aware that the images should not be used in worship, so there is no fear of falling into idolatry, since we are aware these pieces of art are just reminders. Listening to poetry, however, is an excellent way to show love towards the Prophet and his family and perform Tawallah. The Sixth *Imam*, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

“Whoever recites a single verse of poetry praising us (Ahl-ul-Bayt), Allah, most High, builds a house for him in Paradise.” (Hadith in Uyoon Akhbar al-Ridha)

It is amazing to see the way language is used creatively to describe Islam and it makes Islam appealing to a younger audience too. Poetry that is used for Imam Hussain in particular can be very moving and is used to tell the story of Ashura in a creative way. This allows you to visualise the scene and it makes you cry, which is the purpose of the poetry.

How
does this
influence
a Shi’a
Muslim?

Appendix A:

Calendar of Shi'a Religious Commemorations

Muharram	10	Martyrdom of the third Imam, Imam Hussain (Ashura)
	25	Martyrdom of fourth Imam, Imam Zayn al-Abideen
Safar	7	Birth of seventh Imam, Imam Musa al-Kadhim
	20	Arbaeen (40 th day after Ashura)
	28	Death of Prophet Muhammad and second Imam, Imam Hassan
	29	Martyrdom of eighth Imam, Imam Ali al-Ridha
Rabi' I	8	Martyrdom of eleventh Imam, Imam Hassan al-Askari
	17	Birth of Prophet Muhammad and of sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq
Rabi' II	8	Birth of eleventh Imam, Imam Hasan al-Askari
Jamadi I	5	Birth of Lady Zainab, sister of Imam Hussain
Jamadi II	3	Martyrdom of Lady Fatimah
	20	Birth of Lady Fatimah
Rajab	1	Birth of fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir
	3	Martyrdom of tenth Imam, Imam Ali al-Hadi
	10	Birth of ninth Imam, Muhammad al-Jawad
	13	Birth of first Imam, Imam Ali
	15	Death of Lady Zainab, sister of Imam Hussain

	25	Martyrdom of seventh Imam, Imam Musa al-Kadhim
	27	The occasion of the start of the Prophet's message
Sha'ban	3	Birth of third Imam, Imam Hussain
	5	Birth of fourth Imam, Imam Zayn al-Abideen
	8	Occultation of twelfth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi
	15	Birth of twelfth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi
Ramadan	1	Beginning of Fasting
	15	Birth of second Imam, Imam Hassan
	19	Stabbing of first Imam, Imam Ali / Night of Power
	21	Martyrdom of first Imam, Imam Ali / Night of Power
	23	Night of Power
Shawwal	1	'Id-ul-Fitr (end of fasting)
	25	Martyrdom of sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq
Dhu'l-Qa'da	11	Birth of eighth Imam, Imam Ali al-Ridha
	29	Martyrdom of ninth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Jawad
Dhu'l-Hijja	7	Martyrdom of fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir
	10	'Id-ul-Adha
	15	Birth of tenth Imam, Imam Ali al-Hadi
	18	'Id-ul-Ghadeer

Appendix B:

Glossary of Key Terms

<i>Adalat</i>	belief in the justice of Allah.
<i>Adhan</i>	the call to prayer.
<i>Ahl-ul-Bayt</i>	Prophet Muhammad, Lady Fatimah and the <i>Imams</i> .
<i>Al-Qadr</i>	predestination.
<i>Amr bil Maruf</i>	enjoining the good.
<i>Arbaeen</i>	forty days after <i>Ashura</i> .
<i>Ashura</i>	10 th Muharram, the day Imam Hussain was killed in <i>Karbala</i> .
<i>Ayah</i>	a verse of the Qur'an.
<i>Barzakh</i>	a stage of existence after death in the grave before the Day of Judgement.
<i>Furu' ad-Din</i>	branches of religion.
<i>Ghadeer Khumm</i>	the area where Prophet Muhammad announced Ali as his successor.
<i>Hadith</i>	a report of a saying or action of Prophet Muhammad or his family.
<i>Hadith Qudsi</i>	the words of Allah revealed to prophets that are not in the Qur'an.

<i>Hajj</i>	obligatory pilgrimage to <i>Makkah</i> in the month of <i>Dhu'l-Hijja</i> .
<i>Halal</i>	an act that is permissible in Islamic law.
<i>Haram</i>	an act that is forbidden in Islamic law and therefore a sin.
<i>Hijab</i>	the Islamic dress code and attitude of modesty.
<i>Hijrah</i>	the migration of Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims from <i>Makkah</i> to <i>Medinah</i> .
<i>Hussainia</i>	a dedicated space where commemoration for Imam Hussain takes place.
<i>Imam</i>	a leader chosen by Allah to succeed a Prophet.
<i>imam</i>	a Muslim leader of prayer or leader of the community.
<i>Imamah</i>	the belief in Imams as divinely-appointed authorities.
<i>'Id-al-Adha</i>	festival celebrating Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice.
<i>'Id-ul-Fitr</i>	festival celebrating the end of fasting in the month of <i>Ramadan</i> .
<i>'Id-ul-Ghadeer</i>	festival celebrating the announcement of Imam Ali as successor to Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Ijtihad</i>	independent reasoning using Islamic sources to make Islamic law.
<i>Injil</i>	the Gospel revealed to Prophet Isa by Allah.

<i>Jahannam</i>	Hell.
<i>Jahiliyya</i>	the era of ignorance before Islam was revealed.
<i>Jannah</i>	Paradise.
<i>Jihad</i>	struggle.
<i>Ka'ba</i>	the stone building in <i>Makkah</i> that is visited for pilgrimage and is the direction of prayer.
<i>Karbala</i>	holy city in Iraq where Imam Hussain was killed and where his grave is.
<i>Khutba</i>	sermon.
<i>Khums</i>	20% of yearly savings given to various causes.
<i>Kutub</i>	divinely revealed books.
<i>Latmiyyah</i>	a eulogy in the form of a poem used to mourn the <i>Ahl-ul-Bayt</i> .
<i>Laylatul Qadr</i>	the Night of Power in the month of <i>Ramadan</i> .
<i>Ma'ad</i>	life after death.
<i>Makkah</i>	holy city in Saudi Arabia where the <i>Ka'ba</i> is and where <i>Hajj</i> takes place.
<i>Makruh</i>	an act that is disliked in Islamic law but not a sin.
<i>Malaikah</i>	angels.

<i>Marja Taqlid</i>	a religious expert known as a Grand Ayatollah who is followed for Islamic law in the absence of the Twelfth <i>Imam</i> .
<i>Masjid</i>	a Muslim place of worship.
<i>Medinah</i>	holy city in Saudi Arabia where Prophet Muhammad and some of his family and companions are buried. .
<i>Mubah</i>	a neutral act in Islamic law that is neither liked/obligatory or disliked/forbidden.
<i>Mustahab</i>	an act in Islamic law that is liked or recommended.
<i>Nabi</i>	a prophet.
<i>Nahy Anil Munkar</i>	forbidding the evil.
<i>Najaf</i>	a holy city in Iraq where Imam Ali is buried.
<i>Nass</i>	the appointment of a leader chosen by Allah.
<i>Niyyah</i>	intention.
<i>Nubuwwah</i>	prophethood.
<i>Qur'an</i>	the holy book of Islam revealed to Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Rak'a</i>	a unit of prayer.
<i>Ramadan</i>	the ninth month of the Islamic calendar where fasting is obligatory.
<i>Rasul</i>	a prophet given a new message, scripture and law.

<i>Sadaqah</i>	voluntary act of charity.
<i>Sadaqah Ja'ariyah</i>	an act of continuous charity that is rewarded even after the death of the donor.
<i>Sahifa</i>	the scrolls revealed to Prophet Ibrahim by Allah.
<i>Salaam</i>	peace.
<i>Salah</i>	ritual prayer.
<i>Salah al-Jum'a</i>	Friday ritual prayer done in congregation.
<i>Shafa'a</i>	intercession.
<i>Shahadah</i>	declaration of belief.
<i>Shari'ah</i>	Divine, Islamic law.
<i>Shi'a</i>	a follower of Imam Ali and the subsequent <i>Imams</i> after Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Shirk</i>	ascribing partners to Allah.
<i>Sunnah</i>	a tradition, custom or act of Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Tabarra</i>	disassociation from those who oppose Allah and the <i>Ahl-ul-Bayt</i> .
<i>Taqwa</i>	Godwariness.
<i>Tawaf</i>	walking around the <i>Ka'ba</i> .
<i>Tawallah</i>	love and devotion towards Allah and the <i>Ahl-ul-Bayt</i> .

<i>Tawhid</i>	Oneness of Allah, monotheism.
<i>Tawrat</i>	the Torah revealed to Prophet Moses by Allah.
<i>Turba</i>	tablet made of earth that is prostrated on, usually made from land of <i>Karbala</i> .
<i>Ummah</i>	Muslim community.
<i>'Umra</i>	minor pilgrimage to <i>Makkah</i> that can be performed during any time of the year.
<i>'Usul ad-Din</i>	roots of religion.
<i>Wajib</i>	an act in Islamic law that is obligatory and a sin not to perform.
<i>Yawm al-Qiyamah</i>	Day of Judgement.
<i>Zabur</i>	the Psalms revealed to Prophet Dawud by Allah.
<i>Zakah</i>	almsgiving.
<i>Ziyarah</i>	a pilgrimage of visitation to the graves of the Ahl-ul-Bayt.

Acknowledgements

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Sayeda Zainab Mausoleum, daughter of Imam Ali (Damascus - Syria)