

Shi'i doctrines and practices

This chapter contains a brief account of the doctrines and practices that are specific to Shi'is and in particular to Twelver Shi'is. As far as doctrines are concerned, the principal cause of differences is Shi'i views about the Imams and the fact that, at the end of the tenth century, when the Sunni majority was rejecting the rationalism of the Mu'tazili school, the Twelver Shi'is adopted most of its tenets into their theology. One important consequence of this adoption of Mu'tazili thought is that Shi'is consider that all theological and doctrinal matters can be proved by rational argument, since God must necessarily act in a rational manner (some indication of this is given below). With regard to practices, historically what set the Twelver Shi'is apart from the evolving Sunni community was their rejection of the authority and the rulings of the first three caliphs, as well as their rejection of the majority of the companions of the Prophet as sources for the transmission of Traditions. This, together with specific episodes in Shi'i history, has led to differences in Shi'i practices (the Shi'i implementation of the *shari'ah*) from Sunni ones.

There are several verses in the Qur'an which forbid the blind following of the rulings of others (*taqlid*) in matters of religion (Qur'an 33:67–8; 2:170; 5:104–5; 17:36; 21:52–4; 43:22–4). However, this prohibition is interpreted by the clerics to refer only to the fundamental tenets or doctrines of religion (*usul al-din*) and so belief in these fundamental doctrines must be the result of each individual's independent investigation and not be the result of merely following their parents or religious leaders. With regard to the practices of the religion (*furu' al-din*, subsidiary elements of the religion), the position of the predominant Usuli School of Twelver Shi'i Islam is that anyone who is not qualified to be a *mujtahid* must follow the rulings of a *mujtahid*. Despite this theoretical distinction between *taqlid* of doctrines and *taqlid* of practices, one finds *mujtahids* giving rulings on matters of doctrine which their followers are expected to obey.

Distinctive doctrines

In addition to the fundamental tenets (*usul al-din*) of *Tawhid* (Divine unity), *Nubuwwa* (prophethood, especially that of Muhammad) and *Ma'ad* (the Resurrection at the End of Time), where Twelver Shi'is are in agreement with

Sunnis, there are two distinctively Shi'i tenets: Divine Justice (*'Adl*) and the Imamate (*Imamah*). The doctrine of Divine Justice was derived from the Mu'tazili teaching that human beings have free will and are therefore responsible for their own actions and God subsequently judges these actions according to His justice. The doctrine was adopted in opposition to the Sunni belief in *qadar* (predestination). Shi'is also believe that although God has knowledge of everything that has happened and will happen and this is inscribed on *al-Lawh al-Mahfuz* (the Guarded Tablet), He may change what He chooses to reveal to human beings about the future. The alteration in the revealed Divine Will is called *bada'* and has been extensively debated in Shi'i history. Undoubtedly, it was an important doctrine in early Shi'i Islam; al-Kulayni devotes a whole chapter to the subject in his authoritative collection of Traditions. *Bada'* was used in Shi'i history to explain the fact that Imam Ja'far first appointed his son Isma'il as his successor and then Musa al-Kazim. Later Shi'i scholars rejected this explanation and pointed to Traditions from the Prophet Muhammad that appeared to indicate that Musa had been the intended Imam all along. Most Shi'i theologians today define *bada'* so as to make it the equivalent of *naskh* (the abrogation of one Divinely-revealed ordinance by a subsequent one). The doctrine of *bada'* is also applied to events in the future and in particular to the signs for the coming of the the Hidden Twelfth Imam.

The doctrine of the Imamate

In early Islam, the word 'Imam' referred to the supreme leadership of the whole Islamic community and so there were rival Sunni, Shi'i, Khariji, Mu'tazili and other theories of the Imamate and the word was used as an equivalent to 'caliphate'. Later, however, the Sunni theory focused on the political leadership of the community and favoured the term 'caliphate', while Shi'is tended to use the word 'Imamate' for their vision of the politico-religious leadership of the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'is agree with Sunnis that the function of a prophet is to reveal God's law to humanity and to guide human beings towards God. Of these two functions, the Sunnis believe that both ended with the death of Muhammad, while the Shi'is believe that, whereas legislation ended, the function of guiding human beings and preserving and explaining the Qur'an and the Divine Law continued through the line of Imams.

The station of the Imams

The Imam is the successor of the Prophet and the vicar or vicegerent of God on Earth. Thus not only does he have ultimate spiritual authority but all

political authority and sovereignty is his. Obedience to him is obligatory to all on Earth. Although anyone can say the declaration of belief (*shahada*) and be a Muslim, to have true faith (*iman*) and be a true believer (*mu'min*) requires submission to the Imam of the age. To die without recognizing the Imam of one's time is to die the death of the time before Muhammad (al-Jahiliyyah, the time of ignorance). The Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, is reported to have said:

We are the ones whom God has made it obligatory to obey. The people will not prosper unless they recognize us and the people will not be excused if they are ignorant of us. He who has recognized us is a believer (*mu'min*) and he who has denied us is an unbeliever (*kafir*) and he who has neither recognized nor denied us is in error unless he returns to the right guidance which God has made obligatory for him. And if he dies in a state of error, God will do with him what He wishes.

Indeed, since the Imams are the Light and Bounty of God (see below), the earth would not continue to exist if there were no Imam present. The Fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, is reported as having said:

By God! God has not left the earth, since the death of Adam, without there being on it an Imam guiding (the people) to God. He is the Proof of God to His servants and the earth will not remain without the Proof of God to his servants.

Thus the Imamate is not an institution confined to Islam. Twelver Traditions give a list of a continuous succession of Imams from the time of Adam to the Twelfth Shi'i Imam (each prophet is also an Imam). The Twelfth Imam is considered to be the living Imam of the present age whose life has been miraculously extended, who is currently in hiding and who will appear at some point in the future. The Imams are also considered to be intercessors for the Shi'is on the Day of Judgment. The Imams are assisted by God through the Holy Spirit.

The attributes of the Imams

The attributes of the Imams are considered to be proven from both the Traditions and by logic:

1. Immunity from Sin and Error (*'Ismah*). The sinlessness of Muhammad, Fatimah and the Twelve Imams (The Fourteen Pure or Immaculate Ones) is considered proven by the Traditions. Shi'i Traditions consider that the Qur'anic verse: 'God desires to remove all uncleanness from you, O members of his family, and to purify you completely' (33:33) applies to Fatimah and the Imams alone and not to the other members of Muhammad's family, such as his wives, as Sunnis maintain.

In Shi'i texts, this concept of infallibility and sinlessness is mainly related to a perfect observation of the *shari'ah*; in other words, the Imam is safeguarded by God from an action that is contrary to the *shari'ah*. The Imam is also infallible in the guidance he gives; the correct explanation of the Qur'an can only be

obtained from the Imam; and the true Traditions (*hadith*) about the Prophet Muhammad are only those authorized and transmitted through the Imams (the companions of the prophet who transmitted the Sunni *hadith* are not considered trustworthy as they failed to support Imam ‘Ali)

This matter is also proved from logic by Shi‘i writers in that, since God has commanded obedience to the Imam, the Imam can only order what is right, or otherwise God would be commanding human beings to follow the pathway of error and this would be contrary to God’s justice. If the Imam did not give infallible guidance, human beings could not be held accountable for their actions by God on the Day of Judgement.

2. Designation (*nass*). It is an important part of Shi‘i doctrine that the Imam is appointed by God, who inspires in the heart of each Imam the name of his successor. It is this designation that gives the Imam his authority, regardless of whether he holds temporal power or not. He is the true religio-political ruler of the world, whether recognized or not.

There can only be one Imam at a time, but once his successor is appointed, the successor becomes the Silent Imam (*al-Imam al-Samit*) until the present Imam, the Speaking Imam (*al-Imam al-Natiq*) dies. Each Imam sets up a covenant with his followers regarding the next Imam. The sixth Imam al-Sadiq is reported to have said:

Do you imagine that we place this Cause of ours (the Imamate) with whomsoever we wish? No! Not at all! By God! It is a covenant of the Apostle of God with ‘Ali, the son of Abu Talib, and then one man after another until finally it comes to the Lord of this Cause (the Mahdi).

The concept of a covenant (*‘ahd*) is thus an important one in Twelver Shi‘i Islam. Each prophet sets up two covenants with his followers, one regarding the next prophet who will eventually come and one regarding his immediate successor, the Imam. Then each Imam sets up a covenant with his followers regarding the next Imam. The conferment of the Imamate by designation is also considered a logical necessity, since the Imam must be immune from sin and error and only God can know who is immune and can therefore designate the Imam. This designation can similarly only be conveyed to humanity by one who is himself immune from error, the previous prophet or Imam.

3. Being the most excellent of people (*afdal al-nas*). This again is considered proven by both the Traditions that extol the Imams and by the logical necessity of his being immune from sin. Also it is considered that if there were anyone better than he, God would choose that person to be His Proof (*hujjah*) on earth and His Guide (*hadi*) to the people.
4. Knowledge (*‘Ilm*). The Imam is considered to have perfect knowledge of the Qur’an and the *shari‘ah*. The Traditional proof for this relates to the Quranic verse ‘He it is who has sent down the Book ... and none know its explanation

except God and those who are deeply-rooted in knowledge' (3:7). Imam al-Sadiq interprets this verse thus: 'We are the ones who are deeply-rooted in knowledge and we know its explanation.' This concept is again considered proven by logic, since God holds human beings responsible for obeying His injunctions and it would be contrary to His justice not to allow someone (the Imam) to be on Earth who has the perfect knowledge to be able to interpret these injunctions correctly.

There is some disagreement concerning the time and manner of the transfer of this knowledge from Imam to Imam. With respect to 'Ali, there are numerous Traditions attesting to how assiduous 'Ali was in collecting knowledge concerning the revelation and how he would not go to sleep each evening until he had ascertained what revelations had been vouchsafed to Muhammad that day and the circumstances of the revelation. However, with respect to some of the later Imams, and in particular the Ninth and Tenth Imams, Muhammad al-Taqi and 'Ali al-Naqi, who became Imams while they were mere children, the emphasis is on a miraculous transfer of knowledge at the moment of death of the previous Imam.

5. Spiritual authority and guidance (*Walayah* or *Wilayah*). As noted previously, the words *mawla* and *wali* are difficult to translate and the word *walayah* comes from the same root. No single English word conveys all of its meanings, but among the words that can be used in this context include: authority, guardianship, patronage, protection, friendship, companionship, spiritual guidance and sanctity. In the first place, it denotes the station of the Imam as the friend of God and thus protected by God and sanctified by this relationship. It also denotes the relationship between the Imam and his followers, which combines the authority and rule of the Imam, his love and care for his community and his friendship for and spiritual guidance of the individual believer. For more mystically-oriented Shi'is, it also denotes the ability of the Imam to initiate his followers into the inner truth of religion and to guide them on the spiritual or mystic path. The relationship of *walayah* requires that the true Shi'i reciprocate this love and be obedient to the commands of the Imams, which, for Usuli Shi'is, have been made known since the Greater Occultation through the mediation of the clerical class. Shi'i Sufis tend to regard the shaykh of their order as the true revealer of the will of the Imam and thus the mediator of the Imam's *walayah*; hence the tension between the clerical class and the Sufi orders. Some scholars have asserted a difference between two pronunciations of this word: *wilayah* (referring more to the aspects of power and authority in the legal and political spheres) and *walayah* (referring more to the aspects of love and guidance), but most do not make this distinction.

This notion of *walayah* is very important, some would say key, to understanding Shi'i Islam. It is the basis for the charismatic leadership of the Imams as divinely guided, infallible interpreters of the revelation given to the

Prophet Muhammad (*walayah* as authority but also as loving guidance): it involves sacred power, sacred love and sacred guidance. But in reciprocating this *walayah*, the Shi'ah themselves become a charismatic community: metaphysically shards of light created from the light of Muhammad and 'Ali; and in the world, the *khas* (the spiritually distinguished, the anointed) as distinct from the '*amm* (the generality of the people).

The Imams in Qur'an commentary

There is a tradition of Shi'i commentary on the Qur'an which interprets much of the Qur'an as relating to 'Ali and his descendants, the Shi'i Imams. Although linked most closely to the Akhbari school, such interpretations of the Qur'an have widespread acceptance among Shi'is. A few of the many possible examples are:

1. 'You are a warner and to every people there is a guide' (Qur'an 13:7). Many sources, including Sunni ones such as al-Suyuti, acknowledge that when this verse was revealed, Muhammad said: 'I am the warner and you, O 'Ali, are the guide and through you will be guided those who are to be guided.'
2. 'Your guardian (*wali*) can only be God, His apostle and those who say their prayers, pay alms (*zakat*) and bow down before God' (Qur'an 5:55). As noted previously (p. 20), the word *wali* can mean either friend, helper or master. Many of the commentators, both Sunni and Shi'i, are agreed that this verse refers to 'Ali and was revealed after 'Ali had given his ring away to someone in need who had entered the mosque while prayers were in progress. The verse itself can be translated: '... those who pay alms while bowing down before God', thus referring more closely to this episode.
3. 'Only the unjust would deny our signs' (Qur'an 29:49). The Imams are the Signs of God (*ayat Allah*) on earth. Many other references to 'sign' or 'signs' are also held to be references to the Imams (e.g. 7:9; 10:7; 10:101; 22:57; 38:29).
4. 'Guide us to the Straight Path' (1:6). The Imams are the 'Straight Path' (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) referred to in this opening chapter of Qur'an (and also in 6:153; 15:41; 16:76; 20:135; 43:42).
5. 'The Way'. The Imams are the Way (*al-sabil*) referred to in several verses (25:827; 6:153; 29:69; 31:15).
6. 'Do you not see those who exchange the Bounty of God (*ni'mat Allah*) for disbelief' (14:28). The Imams are the Bounty of God and the people referred to in this verse are their opponents and especially the Umayyads (see also 16:83). The Imams are also 'the Favours of God' (*ala' Allah*, 7:69; 55:13).

7. 'He who disbelieves in idols and believes in God has grasped hold of the firmest handle (*al-'urwa al-wuthqa*) which will not break' (2:256). The 'firmest handle' is love for the house of the Prophet (the Imams).
8. 'Hold fast to the cord of God (*habl Allah*)' (3:102). The cord or rope of God can mean the Qur'an or the religion of Islam, but it is also interpreted as referring to the Imamate.
9. 'Therefore believe in God and His Apostle and the Light which we have sent down' (64:8). The light (*nur*) of God is within the Imams. Several other verses mentioning light are stated to refer to this light (e.g. 4:174; 6:122; 7:157; 9:32; 24:36; 57:28; 66:8).

Similarly, the Imams are: the Proof of God (*hujjat Allah*) to humanity (Qur'an 6:149); the Possessors of Knowledge (3:7; 13:43); the Possessors of Authority (4:59); the Truthful Ones (9:119); the Family of Ya Sin (37:130); and the People of the Remembrance (16:43–4).

The inheritance of the Imams

The station of the Imam is enhanced by certain books entrusted to them. These include a number of books that had been in the possession of the Prophet Muhammad: Al-Jafr (The Divination), Al-Sahifah (The Book); Al-Jami' (The Compilation); another is the Book of Fatimah (Mashaf Fatimah), a book revealed by Gabriel to Fatimah to console her on the death of her father, the Prophet. All of these items are, of course, now with the Twelfth Imam in occultation and will be with him when he appears.

Another book that is with the Imams is a copy of the Qur'an written by 'Ali and containing 'Ali's commentary and this is a matter of controversy. There is clear evidence in the most respected volumes of Shi'i Traditions (such as Kulayni's *al-Kafi* and Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar*) that the Twelvers originally believed that passages (and even whole surahs) that extolled 'Ali, referred to his successorship or were about the Imamate, were deleted or substituted in the Qur'an and that the true text of the Qur'an is with the Hidden Imam. Present-day Shi'i scholars state very firmly, however, that they fully accept the current text of the Qur'an and that these Traditions about deleted and substituted verses are not trustworthy. They say that the book that is with the Hidden Imam is the text of the Qur'an as we now have it, but with 'Ali's authoritative commentary. This matter is, however, frequently brought up in Sunni attacks on Shi'i Islam.

The Imam also has knowledge of one of the great mysteries in Islam, the Greatest Name of God. Indeed, it is through his knowledge of this that he has

been given his powers. Imam ‘Ali is reported to have said:

Our Lord has given to us knowledge of the Greatest Name, through which were we to want to, we would rend asunder the heavens and the earth and paradise and hell; through it we ascend to heaven and descend to earth and we travel to the east and to the west until we reach the Throne (of God) and sit upon it before God and He gives us all things, even the heavens, the earth, the sun, moon and stars, the mountains, the trees, the beasts, the seas, heaven and hell (cf. Qur’an 22:18).

Going on from the above-mentioned Qur’an interpretations of the Imams as the Light of God, Muhammad, Fatimah and the Imams are conceived in their mystical dimension as being a light that God created before He created the world. This light then became the cause and instrument of all the rest of creation. The following Tradition is attributed to the Prophet: ‘God created ‘Ali and me from one light before the creation of Adam ... then He split (the light) into two halves, then He created (all) things from my light and ‘Ali’s light’.

Although the consensus of the Shi‘is is that the full prophetic revelation (*wahy*) that came to Muhammad and the other Messengers of God (such as Moses and Jesus) did not come to the Imams, nevertheless some Shi‘i scholars allow that a lesser form of *wahy* came to the Imams. This type of *wahy* is explained in a Tradition ascribed to Muhammad al-Baqir, the Fifth Imam: ‘It is not the *wahy* of prophethood but, rather, like that which came to Mary daughter of ‘Imran (Qur’an 3:45) and to the mother of Moses (Qur’an 28:7) and to the bee (Qur’an 16:68)’. In any case, if there is disagreement among the Shi‘i scholars on the question of *wahy*, there is no disagreement on the fact that the Imams received inspiration (*ilham*) from God and hence were given the title *al-muhaddath* (one who is spoken to). The following is attributed to Muhammad al-Baqir, the Fifth Imam: ‘Ali used to act in accordance with the book of God [the Qur’an], and the Sunnah [customary practice] of His Messenger [Muhammad] and if something came to him and it was new and without precedent in the book or the Sunnah, God would inspire him’.

The Twelfth Imam, his occultation and his advent

The doctrine of the Occultation (*ghaybah*) declares that the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan, did not die but has been concealed by God from the eyes of humanity. His life has been miraculously prolonged until the day when he will, by God’s permission, manifest himself again. The occultation has been in two stages, the Lesser Occultation lasting sixty-seven years, during which the Imam remained in contact with his followers through the four agents; and the Greater Occultation, which extends from 941 to the present day, during which he is still alive and in control of human affairs as the Lord of the Age (*Sahib al-Zaman*), but no longer communicates directly. However, it is

popularly believed that the Hidden Imam still occasionally manifests himself to the pious, either when awake or more commonly in dreams and visions. It is also popularly believed that written messages left at the tombs of the Imams can reach him. This severance of communication with the Hidden Imam is not considered to contradict the dictum that the Earth is not left without an Imam, for, say the Shi'i writers, the sun still gives light and warmth to the Earth even when hidden behind a cloud.

The reappearance of the Hidden Imam is envisaged as occurring shortly before the final Day of Judgement. The Imam will appear as the Imam Mahdi, together with the return of Christ, the Imam Husayn and also the other Imams, prophets and saints. He will lead the forces of righteousness against the forces of evil, led by the one-eyed Dajjal and the Sufyani and including all those who opposed the Imams during their lifetimes, in one final apocalyptic battle in which the enemies of the Imams will be defeated. The Imam Mahdi will then establish his rule and fill the Earth with justice. He will rule for a number of years, variously said to be seven, nine or nineteen. Strictly speaking, the term 'return' (*raj'ah*) only applies to the return to life of people who have died, such as the Imam Husayn. It is more correct to refer to the *zuhur* (appearance) or *qiyam* (arising) of the Twelfth Imam, who did not die and is in occultation. 'Return' is envisaged by Shi'is as involving only the Imams, their supporters and their enemies. Those who were neutral, or unaffected by the struggle, will remain in their graves until the Day of Resurrection.

The idea that the Twelfth Imam will bring justice to the world is a central concept in Shi'i expectation and there are probably more Traditions about this than any other aspect of the appearance of the Twelfth Imam. However, it is important to note that the word 'justice' here, and in most other places where it appears in this book, does not equate with Western ideas of equity and fairness before the law. Rather, the interpretation of the word 'justice' by Twelver Shi'i scholars relates to a correct imposition of *shari'ah* law. Thus it is not so much that the Hidden Imam will act justly in the Western sense of that word when he establishes his rule, but that *shari'ah* law will be applied universally and correctly.

A messianic expectation of the appearance of the Twelfth Imam plays an important part in Twelver religiosity. Shi'is pray, especially in times of social hardship, for God to hasten his advent and relieve their suffering. There are many Traditions about the signs that will presage his appearance. In general, the world will be in a state of moral decadence, with corrupt political leaders. Even Islam itself will be in a degraded state with the clerical class being the most corrupt people on Earth. There are many other Traditions giving specific

details of what will occur with the coming of the Imam Mahdi; many of these contradict each other. There will be a caller calling out from heaven; the Arabs will throw off the reins of the authority of the foreigners and take possession of their land; there will be a great conflict in Syria until it is destroyed; death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and a fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover them. In the last two centuries, many have claimed to discern these signs in the current state of affairs and have stirred up messianic expectation; most recently in Iran (in particular President Ahmadinejad) and Iraq (the Jund al-Sama' in Najaf in 2007 and the Ahmad al-Hasan movement in Basrah in 2008).

Regarding the Mahdi, he will announce himself in Mecca between the Corner (of the Ka'bah) and the Station (of Abraham) and will summon the people to pay allegiance to him, then he will go from Mecca to Kufah. He will be a young man of medium stature with a handsome face and beautiful hair that flows onto his shoulders; his beard and hair will be black. He will do what the Prophet did, demolishing whatever precedes him just as the Prophet demolished the structure of the Time of Ignorance (al-Jahiliyyah – the period before Islam); he will come with a new Cause – just as Muhammad, at the beginning of Islam, summoned the people to a new Cause – and with a new book and a new religious law (*sunnah*), which will be a severe test for the Arabs; between the Mahdi and the Arabs (the Quraysh), there will only be the sword; the Qa'im when he arises will experience as a result of the ignorance of the people worse than the Apostle of God experienced at the hands of the ignorant people of the Time of Ignorance. However, these signs are under the purview of the doctrine of *bada'* and Shi'is are commanded that if the Mahdi comes in a different way, they are not to deny him.

THE SIGNS OF THE ADVENT OF THE IMAM MAHDI

The following typical Tradition recorded in Kulayni's al-Kafi (al-Rawdah) demonstrates why many Shi'is consider that the signs for the reappearance of the Hidden Imam Mahdi have been fulfilled and his reappearance is imminent:

When you see that truth has died and people of truth have disappeared, and you see that injustice prevails through the land; and the Qur'an has become despised and things are introduced into it that are not in it and it is turned towards men's desires; and you see the people of error having mastery over the people of truth; and you see evil out in the open and the doers of evil are not prevented nor do they excuse themselves; and you see moral depravity openly manifest and men being content with men and women satisfied by women, and you see the believer silent, his word not being accepted; and you see the sinful lying and he is not refuted nor does his

deceit redound upon him, and you see the lowly despising the great, and you see the ties of kinship severed, ... and you see men spending their wealth on things other than pious deeds and no one opposes or hinders them; ... and you see one person molesting his neighbour and no one prevents it; ... and you see alcoholic drinks being drunk openly; ... and you see women occupying places in the assemblies just as men do and usury is carried out openly and adultery is praised; ... and you see the forbidden thing made legal and the legal thing forbidden, and you see that religion becomes a matter of opinion and the Book and its laws fall into disuse; and you see the leaders drawing close to the unbelievers and away from good people; and you see the leaders corrupt in their rule; ... and you see places of entertainment appearing which are frequented and no one is prevented from entering them; and you see a worshipper only praying in order that the people may see him; and you see the experts in religious law devoting themselves to things other than religion, seeking the world and leadership, ... and you see the pulpit from which fear of God is enjoined but the speaker does not act in the manner he has enjoined others to act; ... then be aware [of the advent of the Mahdi] and seek salvation from God.

Distinctive practices of Shi‘i Islam

As well as these tenets, there are a number of practices that are distinctive to Twelver Shi‘is, some of which occasion criticism from other Muslims. These practices are based on the Shi‘i interpretation of the Qur’an and on the Shi‘i collections of Traditions. With regard to the text of the Qur’an, Twelver Shi‘is in the modern era accept the same text of the Qur’an as Sunnis. With regard to the Traditions as a whole, since the Shi‘is believe that most of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad sinned in rejecting the authority of ‘Ali, they do not accept the Sunni compilations of the Traditions of the Prophet, which were recorded on the authority of those companions. Instead they rely on compilations of Traditions recorded on the authority of the Twelve Imams. These include Traditions about the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his interpretation of the Qur’an, but also, since the Imams are regarded as having been sinless and infallible, their words and actions are also recorded in the Shi‘i compilations of Traditions.

In general, Shi‘i practices in many areas of the *shari‘ah* are very similar to Sunni ones. The differences between Sunnis and Shi‘is in such matters as ritual prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*, *siyam*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), are minimal and are not much greater than the differences between the four schools of Sunni law. The following are some distinctive Shi‘i practices:

1. *Khums*. This is a one-fifth tax that was authorized in the Qur’an (8:41) to be paid to the Prophet, and, for Shi‘is, to the Imam, and spent on the Prophet, his family, orphans, the needy and travellers. Sunnis consider this tax to have lapsed