

Readings - UNA Sponsored Discussion Thursday October 18, 2012  
Main Boulder Library - 1 to 3 PM

Topic: The Many Faces of Islam.

According to the Traditions, Muhammad predicted that his followers would become divided into seventy-three sects, every one of whom would go to hell, except one sect, the religion professed by himself and his companions. However the number of Islamic sects, now over 150, has far exceeded Muhammad's prediction.

**THIS WEBSITE GIVES SOME BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF FIVE MAJOR SECTS**

<http://contenderministries.org/islam/divisions.php>

**Islamic Groups - Sunnis and Shiites**

The majority of the world's billion-odd Muslims are Sunnis. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of all Muslims follow the Shiite branch (pronounced Shi'ite, Shi'a or Shia). Beyond that, it gets slightly complicated: Who lives where, and why the differences and conflicts between them? The answer is less daunting than it seems.

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Sunnis form the overwhelming majority in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Shiites form the majority only in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan, but they constitute sizable minorities in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

At heart, Sunnis and Shiites are like Catholics and Protestants in the commonality of some fundamental beliefs. But their differences, especially in nations where the Sunni-Shiite split is exacerbated by each other's proximity (as in Iraq and Lebanon), run so deep that intolerance and violence shadow the two groups, making coexistence difficult.

<http://middleeast.about.com/od/religionsectarianism/a/me070907sunnis.htm>

Islam's sectarian divide has turned from mistrust to bitter violence [Nushin Arbabzadah](#)

In the [Kabul](#) of the 1980s, my teacher asked an apparently harmless question: "Which one of you knows how to pray and can demonstrate it to the class?" I raised my hand before anyone else and was soon marching towards the front of the classroom. I put my headscarf in order and made sure my arms were hanging down straight on either side of my body and that my hands were open. This gesture, [arms down and hands open](#), was the first thing I had been taught about praying. There was emphasis during the instruction that the arms be down and the hands open so that it is clear that you have nothing to hide from God.

I remembered this point of caution and followed it. But just then, when I started to say "in the name of Allah", there was turmoil in the classroom. Horrified shrieks turned the silent afternoon into a hysterical cacophony. "What you are doing is wrong!", the girls screeched. Some of them were standing up in protest. I shot back, "How can it be wrong when this is how my grandma prays?"

I had appealed to the taboo that no young girl ever had the right to contradict an old woman. But the taboo failed and if anything, the screaming became louder. This time it was about my arms. "Quick, hold your arms folded over your chest!"

My teacher used a typically Afghan method of problem solving. Without a word, she sent me back to my seat and turned to an eager shouter. "Are you a Sunni?" The girl nodded. "[Hanafi](#)?" Again, there was a nod. The teacher took a breath and started the

act anew. This time around, everyone was happy – the girl held her arms folded over her chest. The theological disaster, innocently personified by me, soon disappeared as if by magic and order was restored in the universe. In Afghan Sufi tales, such scenarios typically end with: "And the believers shed tears of joy for a catastrophe was prevented and no one was harmed in the process."

I had not intended to traumatise my Sunni classmates. After all, the mystery of folded versus straight arms had never been explained to me. Nothing was explained in Afghan society. Everything was a given. We were all-knowing in our ignorance.

Later I learned that the folded arms had to do with Shia paranoia about Sunnis. Hardcore Shia assumed that Sunnis held their arms over their chests to secretly pray to an imaginary idol. In other words, in such people's suspicion, Sunnis were assumed to be crypto-idol worshippers, carrying on with the old, pre-Islamic faith while pretending to be Muslims. I realised that back in Kabul we had all been victims of an inherited inter-Muslim historical conflict, complete with the terror of the straight arms and the hallucination of imaginary idols.

The Shia faith that I knew was contemplative and melancholic, with a taste for philosophy, classical poetry and silent suffering. It somewhat resembled Catholicism but without the Catholics' glitter, gold and candles. Black, the colour of mourning, was the favourite shade. Only the Messiah could lift the mood and he, alas, was yet to come.

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/oct/12/islam-sectarian-divide-shia-islam?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/oct/12/islam-sectarian-divide-shia-islam?CMP=tw_t_gu)

## Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam by [Rit Nosotro](#)

Although there have been other splits among large religions, such as the [Great Schism](#) between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox, no split has led to as much bloodshed as that between the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam. Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with over one billion followers, and growing at a rate of about 20% per year.<sup>1</sup> The religion has two major branches: the Sunnis, with 940 million believers, and Shiites, with 120 million. These two sects also each have their own branches and divisions, including the well-known Wahhabi sect of the Sunnis. The major groups have some very important distinctions that continue to affect the history of the world.

The split between the Muslims was formed over the years when attempting to select caliphs. The third caliph was murdered after twelve years in power. Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, became the next caliph, although with much opposition, including that of one of Mohammed's wives, and he was also murdered five years later. Next, Muawiya came to power in 661, beginning the dynasty known as the Umayyad Caliphate. By now the Shiites had fostered the belief that caliphs should only be from the line of [Mohammed](#), while it simply did not matter to the Sunnis. Around 680 AD, the division officially occurred. Although the two parties agree on the basic tenets, they each eventually developed their own way of thinking and living.

One of the things they agree on is that Allah is one. God is the only god. Both also believe that Mohammed was the last prophet. They agree that one day Allah will

resurrect all humans and question (not judge) their beliefs and actions. They believe that all of the "famous" sins such as murder, adultery, stealing, etc. are sins. Finally, they both agree on the five pillars of Islam. Otherwise they wouldn't be Muslims, would they? But there are quite a few more disagreements with the two branches than agreements. According to the Sunnis, Allah has a body, although it is not exactly human. They interpret parts of the Quran literally where it talks about his leg, face, and hand. The Shiites say Allah does not have a body. Shiites say that Allah will never be seen, and the Sunnis believe Allah can be seen, on earth and in the afterlife. Another theological difference is the Shiites believe Allah commands something because it is a good thing (and does not command something because it is bad). Sunnis think that because Allah orders it, it makes it good. So, according to the Sunnis, if Allah orders you to murder someone it is not a sin. Shiites believe that Allah does not do anything that does not have a purpose, while their counterparts say Allah does some things aimlessly. Another important item is that the Shiites say Allah knows what we will do but does not make us do it. Sunnis say he creates all our acts. Shiites also believe that all prophets are sinless. Sunnis are split: Are they sinless their whole life or just since the beginning of their ministry? Do all sins count, or only infidelity? Does he have to sin intentionally or can it be unintentionally? These are major theological differences, but there are also differences in culture.

One of the things Shiites do differently from Sunnis is that during prayer they put their head on a piece of hard clay instead of the mat. Also, they combine prayers so sometimes they only pray three times a day as opposed to five. Shiites are also permitted "fixed-term temporary marriages", which is banned by the Sunnis even though it was allowed during Mohammed's age.

<http://www.hyperhistory.net/apwh/essays/comp/cw11sunnishiitesplit.htm>

THIS WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE HAS A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION. MUCH OF IT INVOLVES DETAILS AS TO ORIGINS, ETC. OF VARIOUS GROUPINGS. I HAVE SELECTED SEVERAL PARAGRAPHS THAT FOCUS ON GROUPS IN THE NEWS.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_schools\\_and\\_branches#Movements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches#Movements)

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## Alawite State



When the French finally occupied Syria in 1920, they recognized the term "Alawi", gave autonomy to them and other minority groups, and accepted them into their colonial troops.[34] On 2 September 1920 an [Alawite State](#) was created in the coastal and mountain country comprising Alawi villages; the French justified this separation with the "backwardness" of the mountain-dwelling people, religiously distinct from the surrounding Sunni population. It was a division meant to protect the Alawi people from more powerful majorities.[35] Under the mandate, many Alawi chieftains supported the notion of a separate Alawi nation and tried to convert their autonomy into independence. The French considered the Alawites, along with the [Druze](#), as the only "[warlike races](#)" in the mandate territories, as excellent soldiers, and the communities from where they could recruit their best troops.[36]

The region was both coastal and mountainous, and home to a mostly rural, highly heterogeneous population. During the French Mandate period, society was divided by religion and geography: the landowning families of the port city of [Latakia](#), and 80% of the population of the city, were [Sunni](#) Muslim. However, more than 90% of the population of the province was rural, 62% being Alawite peasantry.[37] In May 1930, the Alawite State was renamed "the Government of Latakia", the only concession the French made to Arab nationalists until 1936.[37] There was a great deal of Alawite separatist sentiment in the region,[37] as evidenced by a letter dating to 1936 and signed by 80 Alawi notables and was addressed to the French Prime Minister stating that "Alawi people rejected attachment to Syria and wished to stay under French protection."

### Salafi

The [Salafi](#) movement is a historical revivalist tradition dating back chiefly to the 13th century to Sheikh [Ibn Taymiyyah](#) and with a claim to following the methodology of the

earliest Muslim generations, known as the [Salaf](#). It is a movement recently revived by the 18th century teacher [Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab](#) in the Arabian peninsula, and was instrumental in the rise of the [House of Saud](#) to power. Salafism is a puritanical and legalistic Islamic movement under the Sunni umbrella, and is the dominant form of Islam in [Saudi Arabia](#). The terms "Wahhabism" and "Salafism" are often used interchangeably, although the word "Wahhabi" is a specific for followers of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab who are the far [right wing](#) of Salafi Islam. **Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun**

## Muslim Brotherhood

The Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun, or [Muslim Brotherhood](#), is an organisation that was founded by Egyptian scholar [Hassan al-Banna](#), a graduate of [Dar al-Ulum](#). With its various branches, it is the largest Sunni movement in the Arab world, and an affiliate is often the largest opposition party in many Arab nations. The Muslim Brotherhood is not concerned with theological differences, accepting Muslims of any of the four Sunni schools of thought. It is the world's oldest and largest [Islamist](#) group. Its aims are to re-establish the [Caliphate](#) and in the mean time push for more Islamisation of society. The Brotherhood's stated goal is to instill the Qur'an and *sunnah* as the "sole reference point for... ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community... and state."

## Jamaat-e-Islami

The [Jamaat-e-Islami](#) is an Islamist political party in the [Indian Subcontinent](#). It was founded in Lahore, India, by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 and is the oldest religious party in Pakistan and India. Today, sister organizations with similar objectives and ideological approaches exist in India, (Jamaat-e-Islami Hind), Bangladesh (Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh), Kashmir, [Afghanistan](#), and Sri Lanka, and there are "close brotherly relations" with the Islamist movements and missions "working in different continents and countries", particularly those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood or Akhwan-al-Muslimeen. The JI envisions an Islamic government in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan governing by Islamic law. It opposes Westernization—including capitalism, socialism, or such practices as bank interest, and favours an Islamic economic order and [Caliphate](#).

## Shia Islam

[Shia Islam](#) (شيعية *Sh 'ah* sometimes *Shi'a* or *Shi'ite*), is the second-largest denomination of Islam, comprising anywhere between 19 to 24%<sup>[10][11][12]</sup> of the total Muslim population in the world.<sup>[13]</sup> Shia Muslims—though a minority in the Muslim world—constitute the majority of the populations in [Azerbaijan](#), [Bahrain](#), [Iran](#), and [Iraq](#), as well as a [plurality](#) in [Lebanon](#) and [Yemen](#).



[Imam Ali Mosque](#) in [Najaf](#), [Iraq](#), where [Ali](#) the first [Sh 'ah Imam](#) is buried.

In addition to believing in the authority of the [Qur'an](#) and teachings of Muhammad, Shia believe that his family, the [Ahl al-Bayt](#) (the "People of the House"), including his descendants known as [Imams](#), have special spiritual and political rule over the community<sup>[14]</sup> and believe that [Ali ibn Abi Talib](#), Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was the first of these Imams and was the [rightful successor](#) to Muhammad, and thus reject the legitimacy of the first three Rashidun caliphs.<sup>[15]</sup>

The Shi'a Islamic faith is vast and includes many different groups. There are various Shi'a theological beliefs, schools of jurisprudence, philosophical beliefs, and spiritual



movements. The Shia identity emerged soon after the death of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (the second caliph) and [Shi'a theology](#) was formulated in the second century[16] and the first Shi'a governments and societies were established by the end of the ninth century.

An estimate of approximately 10–13% of the world's Muslims are Shi'a, which corresponds to about 130–190 million Shi'a Muslims worldwide.[12][13] Shi'a Muslims also constitute over 30% of the population in [Lebanon](#),[17] over 45% of the population in [Yemen](#),[18] over 35% of the population in [Kuwait](#), 20–25% of the population (primarily [Alevi](#)) in [Turkey](#), 20% (primarily [Bektashi](#)) of the population in [Albania](#), 15% of the population in [Pakistan](#) and 3% of population in [Afghanistan](#). They also make up at least 25%[19]-31%[20] of the Muslim populations in [India](#), 15-20% in the [United Arab Emirates](#), [Syria](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#), although the total number is difficult to estimate due to the intermingling between the two groups and practice of [taqiyya](#) by Shiites.[21]

**Schools of jurisprudence** *Madhhab* is an Islamic term that refers to a school of thought or religious jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, within Sunni Islam. Each of the *Sahaba* had a unique school of jurisprudence, but these schools were gradually consolidated or discarded so that there are currently four recognized schools. The differences between these schools of thought manifest in some practical and philosophical differences. Sunnis generally do not identify themselves with a particular school of thought — simply calling themselves "Sunnis", but they do follow their individual 'Madh'habs exclusively and respectfully.

### **Hanafi**

The [Hanafi](#) school was founded by [Imam Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man](#); It is followed by Muslims in Central Asia, [Afghanistan](#), [Pakistan](#), [India](#), [Bangladesh](#), Western [Lower Egypt](#), [Iraq](#), [Turkey](#), [Balkans](#) and in many western countries. There are movements within this madhab such as [Barelvi](#) and [Deobandi](#) which are concentrated in [South Asia](#) and in most parts of India.

### **Shafi'i**

[Shafi'i](#) was founded by Imam [Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i](#), It is followed by Muslims in Eastern [Lower Egypt](#), [Somalia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Thailand](#), [Singapore](#), [Philippines](#), [Yemen](#), among [Kurds](#), [Kerala](#) ([Mappilas](#)) and is officially followed by the governments of [Brunei](#) and [Malaysia](#).

### **Maliki**

The [Maliki](#) school derives from the work of Imam [Malik ibn Anas](#), It is followed by Muslims mostly in [North Africa](#), [West Africa](#), the [United Arab Emirates](#), [Kuwait](#), in parts of [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Upper Egypt](#), Oman and many middle eastern countries. In the past, it was also followed in parts of [Europe under Islamic rule](#), particularly [Islamic Spain](#) and the [Emirate of Sicily](#).

### **Hanbali**

The [Hanbali](#) school derives from the work of Imam [Imam Ahmad](#). It is largely followed by Muslims in [Saudi Arabia](#) and parts of the western world.

### **hir**

The [hir](#) is a school established in 800s by [Dawud ibn Khalaf al-Zahiri](#) and [Ibn Hazm](#). Zahiris rely on the literal expression of the [Qur'an](#) and the [Sunnah](#).