

SHI'A

by

**Allamah
Sayyid Mohammad Hosseyn Tabatabai**

Translated By:

Sayyid Hossein Nasr

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

INTRODUCTION

This book, which we have called Shi'ite Islam seeks to clarify the true identity of Shi'ism which is one of the two major branches of Islam-the other being Sunnism. It deals in particular with the way Shi'ism originated and later developed, with the type of religious thought present in Shi'ism, and with Islamic sciences and culture as seen from the Shi'ite point of view.

The Meaning of Religion (din) Islam, and Shi'ism

Religion. There is no doubt that each member of the human race is naturally drawn to his fellow-men and that in his life in society he acts in ways which are interrelated and interconnected. His eating, drinking, sleeping, keeping awake, talking, listening, sitting, walking, his social intercourse and meetings, at the same time that they are formally and externally distinct, are invariably connected with each other. One cannot perform just any act in any place or after any other act. There is an order which must be observed.

There is, therefore, an order which governs the actions man performs in the journey of this life, an order against which his actions cannot rebel. In reality, these acts all originate from a distinct source. That source is man's desire to possess a felicitous life, a life in which he can reach to the greatest extent possible the objects of his desire, and be gratified. Or, one could say that man wishes to provide in a more complete way for his needs in order to continue his existence.

This is why man continually conforms his actions to rules and laws either devised by himself or accepted from others, and why he selects a particular way of life for himself among all the other existing possibilities. He works in order to provide for his means of livelihood and expects his activities to be guided by laws and regulations that must be followed. In order to satisfy his sense of taste and overcome hunger and thirst, he eats and drinks, for he considers eating and drinking necessary for the continuation of his own happy existence. This rule could be multiplied by many other instances.

The rules and laws that govern human existence depend for their acceptance on the basic beliefs that man has concerning the nature of universal existence, of which he himself is a part, and also upon his judgment and evaluation of that existence. That the principles governing man's actions depend on his conception of being as a whole becomes clear if one meditates a moment on the different conceptions that people hold as to the nature of the world and of man.

Those who consider the Universe to be confined only to this material, sensible world, and man himself to be completely material and therefore subject to annihilation when the breath of life leaves him at the moment of death, follow a way of life designed to provide for their material desires and transient mundane pleasures. They strive solely on this path, seeking to bring under their control the natural conditions and factors of life.

Similarly, there are those who, like the common people among idol-worshippers, consider the world of nature to be created by a god above nature who has created the world specially for man and provided it with multiple bounties so that man may benefit from his goodness. Such men organize their lives so as to attract the pleasure of the god and not invite his anger. They believe that if they please the god he will multiply his bounty and make it lasting and if they anger

him he will take his bounty away from them.

On the other hand, such men as Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims follow the "high path" in this life for they believe in God and in man's eternal life, and consider man to be responsible for his good and evil acts. As a result they accept as proven the existence of a day of judgment (qiyamat) and follow a path that leads to felicity in both this world and the next.

The totality of these fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of man and the Universe, and regulations in conformity with them which are applied to human life, is called religion (din). If there are divergences in these fundamental beliefs and regulations, they are called schools such as the Sunni and Shi'ite schools in Islam and the Nestorian in Christianity. We can therefore say that man, even if he does not believe in the Deity, can never be without religion if we recognize religion as a program for life based on firm belief. Religion can never be separated from life and is not simply a matter of ceremonial acts.

The Holy Quran asserts that man has no choice but to follow religion, which is a path that God has placed before man so that by treading it man can reach Him. However, those who have accepted the religion of the truth (Islam) march in all sincerity upon the path of God, while those who have not accepted the religion of the truth have been diverted from the divine path and have followed the wrong road.

Islam etymologically means surrender and obedience. The Holy Quran calls the religion which invites men toward this end "Islam" since its general purpose is the surrender of man to the laws governing the Universe and men, with the result that through this surrender he worships only the One God and obeys only His commands. As the Holy Quran informs us, the first person who called this religion "Islam" and its followers "Muslims" was the Prophet Abraham, upon whom be

peace.

Shi'ah, which means literally partisan or follower, refers to those who consider the succession to the Prophet-may God's peace and benediction be upon him – to be the special right of the family of the Prophet and who in the field of the Islamic sciences and culture follow the school of the Household of the Prophet.

PART I: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SHI'ISM

CHAPTER I THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SHI'ISM

Shi'ism began with a reference made for the first time to the partisans of Ali (shi'ah-i 'Ali), the first leader of the Household of the Prophet, during the lifetime of the Prophet himself. The course of the first manifestation and the later growth of Islam during the twenty-three years of prophecy brought about many conditions which necessitated the appearance of a group such as the Shi'ites among the companions of the Prophet.

The Holy Prophet during the first days of his prophecy, when according to the text of the Quran he was commanded to invite his closer relatives to come to his religion, told them clearly that whoever would be the first to accept his invitation would become his successor and inheritor. Ali was the first to step forth and embrace Islam. The Prophet accepted Ali's submission to the faith and thus fulfilled his promise.

From the Shi'ite point of view it appears as unlikely that the leader of a movement, during the first days of his activity, should introduce to strangers one of his associates as his successor and deputy but not introduce him to his completely loyal and devout aides and friends. Nor does it appear likely that such a leader should accept someone as his deputy and successor and introduce him to others as such, but then throughout his life and religious call deprive his deputy of his duties

as deputy, disregard the respect due to his position as successor, and refuse to make any distinctions between him and others.

The Prophet, according to many unquestioned and completely authenticated hadiths, both Sunni and Shi'ite, clearly asserted that Ali was preserved of error and sin in his actions and sayings. Whatever he said and did was in perfect conformity with the teachings of religion and he was the most knowledgeable of men in matters pertaining to the Islamic sciences and injunctions.

During the period of prophecy Ali performed valuable services and made remarkable sacrifices. When the infidels of Mecca decided to kill the Prophet and surrounded his house, the Holy Prophet decided to emigrate to Medina. He said to Ali, "Will you sleep in my bed at night so that they will think that I am asleep and will be secure from being pursued by them?" Ali accepted this dangerous assignment with open arms. This has been recounted in different histories and collections of hadith. (The emigration from Mecca to Medina marks the date of origin of the Islamic calendar, known as the hijrah.) Ali also served by fighting in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khaybar, Khandaq, and Hunayn in which the victories achieved with his aid were such that if Ali had not been present the enemy would most likely have uprooted Islam and the Muslims, as is recounted in the usual histories, lives of the Prophet, and collections of hadith.

For Shi'ites, the central evidence of Ali's legitimacy as successor to the Prophet is the event of Ghadir Khumm when the Prophet chose Ali to the "general guardianship" (walayat-i 'ammah) of the people and made Ali, like himself, their "guardian" (wali). It is obvious that because of such distinctive services and recognition, because of Ali's special virtues which were acclaimed by all, and because of the great love the Prophet showed for him, some of the companions of the Prophet who knew Ali well, and who were champions of virtue and truth, came

to love him. They assembled around Ali and followed him to such an extent that many others began to consider their love for him excessive and a few perhaps also became jealous of him. Besides all these elements, we see in many sayings of the Prophet reference to the "shi'ah of Ali" and the "shi'ah of the Household of the Prophet."

The friends and followers of Ali believed that after the death of the Prophet the caliphate and religious authority (marja'iyat-i 'ilmi) belonged to Ali. This belief came from their consideration of Ali's position and station in relation to the Prophet, his relation to the chosen among the companions, as well as his relation to Muslims in general. It was only the events that occurred during the few days of the Prophet's final illness that indicated that there was opposition to their view. Contrary to their expectation, at the very moment when the Prophet died and his body lay still unburied, while his household and a few companions were occupied with providing for his burial and funeral service, the friends and followers of Ali received news of the activity of another group who had gone to the mosque where the community was gathered faced with this sudden loss of its leader. This group, which was later to form the majority, set forth in great haste to select a caliph for the Muslims with the aim of ensuring the welfare of the community and solving its immediate problems. They did this without consulting the Household of the Prophet, his relatives or many of his friends, who were busy with the funeral, and without providing them with the least information. Thus Ali and his companions were presented with a fait accompli.

Ali and his friends-such as 'Abbas, Zubayr, Salman, Abu Dharr, Miqdad and 'Ammar-after finishing with the burial of the body of the Prophet became aware of the proceedings by which the caliph had been selected. They protested against the act of choosing the caliph by consultation or election, and also against those who

were responsible for carrying it out. They even presented their own proofs and arguments, but the answer they received was that the welfare of the Muslims was at stake and the solution lay in what had been done.

It was this protest and criticism which separated from the majority the minority that were following Ali and made his followers known to society as the "partisans" or "shi'ah" of Ali. The caliphate of the time was anxious to guard against this appellation being given to the Shi'ite minority and thus to have Muslim society divided into sections comprised of a majority and a minority. The supporters of the caliph considered the caliphate to be a matter of the consensus of the community (ijma') and called those who objected the "opponents of allegiance." They claimed that the Shi'ah stood, therefore, opposed to Muslim society. Sometimes the Shi'ah were given other pejorative and degrading names.

Shi'ism was condemned from the first moment because of the political situation of the time and thus it could not accomplish anything through mere political protest. Ali, in order to safeguard the well-being of Islam and of the Muslims, and also because of lack of sufficient political and military power, did not endeavor to begin an uprising against the existing political order, which would have been of a bloody nature. Yet those who protested against the established caliphate refused to surrender to the majority in certain questions of faith and continued to hold that the succession to the Prophet and religious authority belonged by right to Ali. They believed that all spiritual and religious matters should be referred to him and invited people to become his followers.

The Two Problems of Succession and Authority in Religious Sciences

In accordance with the Islamic teachings which form its basis, Shi'ism believed

that the most important question facing Islamic society was the elucidation and clarification of Islamic teachings and the tenets of the religious sciences. Only after such clarifications were made could the application of these teachings to the social order be considered. In other words, Shi'ism believed that, before all else, members of society should be able to gain a true vision of the world and of men based on the real nature of things. Only then could they know and perform their duties as human beings-in which lay their real welfare-even if the performance of these religious duties were to be against their desires. After carrying out this first step a religious government should preserve and execute real Islamic order in society in such a way that man would worship none other than God, would possess personal and social freedom to the extent possible, and would benefit from true personal and social justice.

These two ends could be accomplished only by a person who was inerrant and protected by God from having faults. Otherwise people could become rulers or religious authorities who would not be free from the possibility of distortion of thought or the committing of treachery in the duties placed upon their shoulders. Were this to happen, the just and freedom-giving rule of Islam could gradually be converted to dictatorial rule and a completely autocratic government. Moreover, the pure religious teachings, could become, as can be seen in the case of certain other religions, the victims of change and distortion in the hands of selfish scholars given to the satisfaction of their carnal desires. As confirmed by the Holy Prophet, Ali followed perfectly and completely the Book of God and the tradition of the Prophet in both words and deeds. As Shi'ism sees it, if, as the majority say, only the Quraysh opposed the rightful caliphate of Ali, then that majority should have answered the Quraysh by asserting what was right. They should have quelled all opposition to the right cause in the same way that they fought against the group

who refused to pay the religious tax (zakat). The majority should not have remained indifferent to what was right for fear of the opposition of the Quraysh.

What prevented the Shi'ah from accepting the elective method of choosing the caliphate by the people was the fear of the unwholesome consequences that might result from it: fear of possible corruption in Islamic government and of the destruction of the solid basis for the sublime religious sciences. As it happened, later events in Islamic history confirmed this fear (or prediction), with the result that the Shi'ites became ever firmer in their belief. During the earliest years, however, because of the small number of its followers, Shi'ism appeared outwardly to have been absorbed into the majority, although privately it continued to insist on acquiring the Islamic sciences from the Household of the Prophet and to invite people to its cause. At the same time, in order to preserve the power of Islam and safeguard its progress, Shi'ism did not display any open opposition to the rest of Islamic society. Members of the Shi'ite community even fought hand in hand with the Sunni majority in holy wars (jihad) and participated in public affairs. Ali himself guided the Sunni majority in the interest of the whole of Islam whenever such action was necessary.

The Political Method of the Selection of the Caliph by Vote and Its Disagreement with the Shi'ite View

Shi'ism believes that the Divine Law of Islam (Shari'ah), whose substance is found in the Book of God and in the tradition (Sunnah) of the Holy Prophet, will remain valid to the Day of Judgment and can never, nor will ever, be altered. A government which is really Islamic cannot under any pretext refuse completely to carry out the Shari'ah's injunctions. pi] The only duty of an Islamic government is

to make decisions by consultation within the limits set by the Shari'ah and in accordance with the demands of the moment.

The vow of allegiance to Abu Bakr at Saqifah, which was motivated at least in part by political considerations, and the incident described in the hadith of "ink and paper," which occurred during the last days of the illness of the Holy Prophet, reveal the fact that those who directed and backed the movement to choose the caliph through the process of election believed that the Book of God should be preserved in the form of a constitution. They emphasized the Holy Book and paid much less attention to the words of the Holy Prophet as an immutable source of the teachings of Islam. They seem to have accepted the modification of certain aspects of Islamic teachings concerning government to suit the conditions of the moment and for the sake of the general welfare.

This tendency to emphasize only certain principles of the Divine Law is confirmed by many sayings that were later transmitted concerning the companions of the Holy Prophet. For example, the companions were considered to be independent authorities in matters of the Divine Law (mujtahid), being able to exercise independent judgment (ijtihad) in public affairs. It was also believed that if they succeeded in their task they would be rewarded by God and if they failed they would be forgiven by Him since they were among the companions. This view was widely held during the early years following the death of the Holy Prophet. Shi'ism takes a stricter stand and believes that the actions of the companions, as of all other Muslims, should be judged strictly according to the teachings of the Shari'ah. For example, there was the complicated incident involving the famous general Khalid ibn Walid in the house of one of the prominent Muslims of the day, Malik ibn Nuwajrah, which led to the death of the latter. The fact that Khalid was not at all taken to task for this incident because of his being an outstanding military

leader shows in the eyes of Shi'ism an undue leniency toward some of the actions of the companions which were below the norm of perfect piety and righteousness set by the actions of the spiritual elite among the companions.

Another practice of the early years which is criticized by Shi'ism is the cutting off of the khums from the members of the Household of the Prophet and from the Holy Prophet's relatives. Likewise, because of the emphasis laid by Shi'ism on the sayings and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet it is difficult for it to understand why the writing down of the text of hadith was completely banned and why, if a written hadith were found, it would be burned. We know that this ban continued through the caliphate of the khulafa' rashidun into the Umayyad period and did not cease until the period of Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who ruled from A.H. 99/A.D. 717 to A.H. 101/A.D. 719.

During the period of the second caliph (13/634-25/644) there was a continuation of the policy of emphasizing certain aspects of the Shari'ah and of putting aside some of the practices which the Shi'ites believe the Holy Prophet taught and practiced. Some practices were forbidden, some were omitted, and some were added. For instance, the pilgrimage of tamattu' (a kind of pilgrimage in which the 'umrah ceremony is utilized in place of the hajj ceremony) was banned by Umar during his caliphate, with the decree that transgressors would be stoned; this in spite of the fact that during his final pilgrimage the Holy Prophet-peace be upon him-instituted, as in Quran, Surah II, 196, a special form for the pilgrimage ceremonies that might be performed by pilgrims coming from far away. Also, during the lifetime of the Prophet of God temporary marriage (mut'ah) was practiced, but Umar forbade it. And even though during the life of the Holy Prophet it was the practice to recite in the call to prayers, "Hurry to the best act" (hayya 'ala khayr el-'amal), Umar ordered that it be omitted because he said it

would prevent people from participating in holy war, jihad. (It is still recited in the Shi'ite call to prayers, but not in the Sunni call.) There were also additions to the Shari'ah: during the time of the Prophet a divorce was valid only if the three declarations of divorce ("I divorce thee") were made on three different occasions, but Umar allowed the triple divorce declaration to be made at one time. Heavy penalties were imposed on those who broke certain of these new regulations, such as stoning in the case of mut'ah marriage. It was also during the period of the rule of the second caliph that new social and economic forces led to the uneven distribution of the public treasury (bayt al-mal) among the people, an act which was later the cause of bewildering class differences and frightful and bloody struggles among Muslims. At this time Mu'awiyah was ruling in Damascus in the style of the Persian and Byzantine kings and was even given the title of the "Khusraw of the Arabs" (a Persian title of the highest imperial power), but no serious protest was made against him for his worldly type of rule.

The second caliph was killed by a Persian slave in 25/644. In accordance with the majority vote of a six-man council which had assembled by order of the second caliph before his death, the third caliph was chosen. The third caliph did not prevent his Umayyad relatives from becoming dominant over the people during his caliphate and appointed some of them as rulers in the Hijaz, Iraq, Egypt, and other Muslim lands. These relatives began to be lax in applying moral principles in government. Some of them openly committed injustice and tyranny, sin and iniquity, and broke certain of the tenets of firmly established Islamic laws.

Before long, streams of protest began to flow toward the capital. But the caliph, who was under the influence of his relatives particularly Marwan ibn Hakam - did not act promptly or decisively to remove the causes against which the

people were protesting. Sometimes it even happened that those who protested were punished and driven away.

An incident that happened in Egypt illustrates the nature of the rule of the third caliph. A group of Muslims in Egypt rebelled against Uthman. Uthman sensed the danger and asked Ali for help, expressing his feeling of contrition. Ali told the Egyptians, You have revolted in order to bring justice and truth to life. Uthman has repented saying, 'I shall change my ways and in three days will fulfil your wishes. I shall expel the oppressive rulers from their posts.'" Ali then wrote an agreement with them on behalf of Uthman and they started home. On the way they saw the slave of Uthman riding on his camel in the direction of Egypt. They became suspicious of him and searched him. On him they found a letter for the governor of Egypt containing the following words: "In the name of God. When 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Addis comes to you beat him with a hundred lashes, shave his head and beard and condemn him to long imprisonment. Do the same in the case of 'Amr ibn al-Hamq, Suda ibn Hamran, and 'Urwah ibn Niba'." The Egyptians took the letter and returned with anger to Uthman, saying, "You have betrayed us!" Uthman denied the letter. They said, "Your slave was the carrier of the letter." He answered, "He has committed this act without my permission." They said, "He rode upon your camel." He answered, "They have stolen my camel." They said, "The letter is in the handwriting of your secretary." He replied, "This has been done without my permission and knowledge." They said, "In any case you are not competent to be caliph and must resign, for if this has been done with your permission you are a traitor and if such important matters take place without your permission and knowledge then your incapability and incompetence is proven. In any case, either resign or dismiss the oppressive agents from office immediately." Uthman answered, "If I wish to act according to your will, then it is you who are

the rulers. Then, what is my function?" They stood up and left the gathering in anger.

During his caliphate Uthman allowed the government of Damascus, at the head of which stood Mu'awiyah, to be strengthened more than ever before. In reality, the centre of gravity of the caliphate as far as political power was concerned was shifting to Damascus and the organization in Medina, the capital of the Islamic world, was politically no more than a form without the necessary power and substance to support it. Finally, in the year 35/656, the people rebelled and after a few days of siege and fighting the third caliph was killed.

The first caliph was selected through the vote of the majority of the companions, the second caliph by the will and testament of the first, and the third by a six-man council whose members and rules of procedure were organized and determined by the second caliph. Altogether, the policy of these three caliphs, who were in power for twenty-five years, was to execute and apply Islamic laws and principles in society in accordance with ijтиhad and what appeared as most wise at the time to the caliphs themselves. As for the Islamic sciences, the policy of these caliphs was to have the Holy Quran read and understood without being concerned with commentaries upon it or allowing it to become the subject of discussion. The hadith of the Prophet was recited and was transmitted orally without being written down. Writing was limited to the text of the Holy Quran and was forbidden in the case of hadith.

After the battle of Yamamah which ended in 12/633, many of those who had been reciters of the Holy Quran and who knew it by heart were killed. As a result Umar ibn al-Khattab proposed to the first caliph to have the verses of the Holy Quran collected in written form, saying that if another war were to occur and the rest of those who knew the Quran by heart were to be killed, the knowledge of the

text of the Holy Book would disappear among men. Therefore, it was necessary to assemble the Quranic verses in written form.

From the Shi'ite point of view it appears strange that this decision was made concerning the Quran and yet despite the fact that the prophetic hadith, which is the complement of the Quran, was faced with the same danger and was not free from corruption in transmission, addition, diminution, forgery and forgetfulness, the same attention was not paid to it. On the contrary, as already mentioned, writing it down was forbidden and all of the written versions of it that were found were burned, as if to emphasize that only the text of the Holy Book should exist in written form. As for the other Islamic sciences, during this period little effort was made to propagate them, the energies of the community being spent mostly in establishing the new sociopolitical order. Despite all the praise and consecration which are found in the Quran concerning knowledge ('ilm), and the emphasis placed upon its cultivation, the avid cultivation of the religious sciences was postponed to a later period of Islamic history.

Most men were occupied with the remarkable and continuous victories of the Islamic armies, and were carried away by the flood of immeasurable booty which came from all directions toward the Arabian peninsula. With this new wealth and the worldliness which came along with it, few were willing to devote themselves to the cultivation of the sciences of the Household of the Prophet, at whose head stood Ali, whom the Holy Prophet had introduced to the people as the one most versed in the Islamic sciences. At the same time, the inner meaning and purpose of the teachings of the Holy Quran were neglected by most of those who were affected by this change. It is strange that, even in the matter of collecting the verses of the Holy Quran, Ali was not consulted and his name was not mentioned among those who participated in this task, although it was known by everyone that he had

collected the text of the Holy Quran after the death of the Prophet.

It has been recounted in many traditions that after receiving allegiance from the community, Abu Bakr sent someone to Ali and asked for his allegiance. Ali said, "I have promised not to leave my house except for the daily prayers until I compile the Quran." And it has been mentioned that Ali gave his allegiance to Abu Bakr after six months. This itself is proof that Ali had finished compiling the Quran. Likewise, it has been recounted that after compiling the Quran he placed the pages of the Holy Book on a camel and showed it to the people. It is also recounted that the battle of Yamamah after which the Quran was compiled, occurred during the second year of the caliphate of Abu Bakr. These facts have been mentioned in most works on history and hadith which deal with the account of the compilation of the Holy Quran.

These and similar events made the followers of Ali more firm in their belief and more conscious of the course that lay before them. They increased their activity from day to day and Ali himself, who was cut off from the possibility of educating and training the people in general, concentrated on privately training an elite.

During this twenty-five year period Ali lost through death three of his four dearest friends and associates, who were also among the companions of the Prophet: Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, and Miqdad. They had been constant in their friendship with him in all circumstances. It was also during this same period that some of the other companions of the Holy Prophet and a large number of their followers in the Hijaz, the Yemen, Iraq, and other lands, joined the followers of Ali. As a result, after the death of the third caliph the people turned to Ali from all sides, swore allegiance to him and chose him as caliph.

The Termination of the Caliphate of 'Ali Amir al-mu'min and His Method of Rule

The caliphate of Ali began toward the end of the year 35/656 and lasted about four years and nine months. During his period as caliph Ali followed the ways of the Holy Prophet and brought conditions back to their original state. He forced the resignation of all the incompetent political elements who had a hand in directing affairs and began in reality a major transformation of a "revolutionary" nature which caused him innumerable difficulties.

On his first day as caliph, in an address to the people, Ali said, "O People, be aware that the difficulties which you faced during the apostolic period of the Prophet of God have come upon you once again and seized you. Your ranks must be turned completely around so that the people of virtue who have fallen behind should come forward and those who had come to the fore without being worthy should fall behind. There is both truth (haqq) and falsehood (batil). Each has its followers; but a person should follow the truth. If falsehood be prevalent it is not something new, and if the truth is rare and hard to come by, sometimes even that which is rare wins the day so that there is hope of advance. Of course it does not occur often that something which has turned away from man should return to him."

Ali continued his radically different type of government based more on righteousness than political efficacy but, as is necessary in the case of every movement of this kind, elements of the opposition whose interests were endangered began to display their displeasure and resisted his rule. Basing their actions on the claim that they wanted to revenge the death of Uthman, they instigated bloody wars which continued throughout almost all the time that Ali was caliph. From the Shi'ite point of view those who caused these civil wars had no end in mind other than their own

personal interest. The wish to revenge the blood of the third caliph was no more than an excuse to fool the crowd. There was no question of a misunderstanding.

After the death of the Holy Prophet, a small minority, following Ali, refused to pay allegiance. At the head of the minority there were Salman, Abu Dharr, Miqdad, and Ammar. At the beginning of the caliphate of Ali also a sizable minority in disagreement refused to pay allegiance. Among the most persistent opponents were Sa'id ibn Ass, Walid ibn 'Uqbah, Marwan ibn Hakam, Amr ibn Ass, Busr ibn Artat, Samurah ibn Jundab, and Mughirah ibn Shu'bah.

The study of the biography of these two groups, and meditation upon the acts they have performed and stories recounted of them in history books, reveal fully their religious personality and aim. The first group were among the elite of the companions of the Holy Prophet and among the ascetics, devout worshipers and selfless devotees of Islam who struggled on the path of Islamic freedom. They were especially loved by the Prophet. The Prophet said, "God has informed me that He loves four men and that I should love them also." They asked about their names. He mentioned Ali and then the names of Abu Dharr, Salman and Miqdad. (Sunan of Ibn Majah, Cairo, 1372, vol.I, p. 66.) A'ishah has recounted that the Prophet of God said, "If two alternatives are placed before Ammar, he will definitely choose that which is more true and right." (Ibn Majah, vol. I, p. 66.) The Prophet said, "There is no one between heaven and earth more truthful than Abu Dharr." (Ibn Majah, vol. I, p. 68.) There is no record of a single forbidden act committed by these men during their lifetime. They never spilled any blood unjustly, did not commit aggression against anyone, did not steal anyone's property, never sought to corrupt and misguide people.

History is, however, full of accounts of unworthy acts committed by some of the second group. The various acts committed by some of these men in opposition to

explicit Islamic teachings are beyond reckoning. These acts cannot be excused in any manner except the way that is followed by certain groups among the Sunnis who say that God was satisfied with them and therefore they were free to perform whatever act they wished, and that they would not be punished for violating the injunctions and regulations existing in the Holy Book and the Sunnah.

The first war in the caliphate of Ali, which is called the "Battle of the Camel," was caused by the unfortunate class differences created during the period of rule of the second caliph as a result of the new socioeconomic forces which caused an uneven distribution of the public treasury among members of the community. When chosen to the caliphate, Ali divided the treasury evenly as had been the method of the Holy Prophet, but this manner of dividing the wealth upset Talhah and Zubayr greatly. They began to show signs of disobedience and left Medina for Mecca with the alleged aim of making the pilgrimage. They persuaded "the mother of the Faithful" (umm al-mu'minin), A'ishah, who was not friendly with Ali, to join them and in the name of wanting to revenge the death of the third caliph they began the bloody Battle

of the Camel. This was done despite the fact that this same Talhah and Zubayr were in Medina when the third caliph was besieged and killed but did nothing to defend him.

Furthermore, after his death they were the first to pay allegiance to Ali on behalf of the immigrants (muhajirun) as well as on their own.

Also, the "mother of the Faithful," A'ishah, did not show any opposition to those who had killed the third caliph at the moment when she received the news of his death. It must be remembered that the main instigators of the disturbances that led to the death of the third caliph were those companions who wrote letters from Medina to

people near and far inviting them to rebel against the caliph, a fact which is repeated in many early Muslim histories.

As for the second war, called the Battle of Siffin, which lasted for a year and a half its cause was the covetousness of Mu'awiyah for the caliphate which for him was a worldly political instrument rather than a religious institution. But as an excuse he made the revenge of the blood of the third caliph the main issue and began a war in which more than a hundred thousand people perished without reason. Naturally, in these wars Mu'awiyah was the aggressor rather than the defender, for the protest to revenge someone's blood can never occur in the form of defense. The pretext of this war was blood revenge. During the last days of his life, the third caliph, in order to quell the uprising against him, asked Mu'awiyah for help, but the army of Mu'awiyah which set out from Damascus to Medina purposely waited on the road until the caliph was killed. Then he returned to Damascus, to begin an uprising to revenge the caliph's death. After the death of Ali and his gaining the caliphate himself, Mu'awiyah forgot the question of revenging the blood of the third caliph and did not pursue the matter further.

After Siffin there occurred the battle of Nahrawan in which a number of people, among whom there could be found some of the companions, rebelled against Ali, possibly at the instigation of Mu'awiyah. These people were causing rebellion throughout the lands of Islam, killing the Muslims and especially the followers of Ali. They even attacked pregnant women and killed their babies. Ali put down this uprising as well, but a short while later was himself killed in the mosque of Kufa by one of the members of this group who came to be known as the Khawarij.

The opponents of Ali claim that he was a courageous man but did not possess political acumen. They claim that at the beginning of his caliphate he could have temporarily made peace with his opponents. He could have approached them

through peace and friendship, thus courting their satisfaction and approval. In this way he could have strengthened his caliphate and only then turned to their extirpation and destruction. What people who hold this view forget is that the movement of Ali was not based on political opportunism. It was a radical and revolutionary religious movement (in the true sense of revolution as a spiritual movement to reestablish the real order of things and not in its current political and social sense); therefore it could not have been accomplished through compromise or flattery and forgery. A similar situation can be seen during the apostleship of the Holy Prophet. The infidels and polytheists proposed peace to him many times and swore that if he were to abstain from protesting against their gods they would not interfere with his religious mission. But the Prophet did not accept such a proposal, although he could in those days of difficulty have made peace and used flattery to fortify his own position, and then have risen against his enemies. In fact, the Islamic message never allows a right and just cause to be abandoned for the sake of strengthening another good cause, nor a falsehood to be rejected and disproven through another falsehood. There are many Quranic verses concerning this matter.

The Benefit which the Shi'ah Derived from the Caliphate of Ali

During the four years and nine months of his caliphate, Ali was not able to eliminate the disturbed conditions which were prevailing throughout the Islamic world, but he was successful in three fundamental ways:

1. As a result of his just and upright manner of living he revealed once again the beauty and attractiveness of the way of life of the Holy Prophet, especially to the younger generation. In contrast to the imperial grandeur of Mu'awiyah, he lived in simplicity and poverty like the poorest of people. He never favored his friends or

relatives and family above others, nor did he ever prefer wealth to poverty or brute force to weakness.

2. Despite the cumbersome and strenuous difficulties which absorbed his time, he left behind among the Islamic community a valuable treasury of the truly divine sciences and Islamic intellectual disciplines. Nearly eleven thousand of his proverbs and short sayings on different intellectual, religious and social subjects have been recorded. In his talks and speeches he expounded the most sublime Islamic sciences in a most elegant and flowing manner. He established Arabic grammar and laid the basis for Arabic literature.

He was the first in Islam to delve directly into the questions of metaphysics (falsafah-i ilahi) in a manner combining intellectual rigor and logical demonstration. He discussed problems which had never appeared before in the same way among the metaphysicians of the world. Moreover, he was so devoted to metaphysics and gnosis that even in the heat of battle he would carry out intellectual discourse and discuss metaphysical questions.

3. He trained a large number of religious scholars and Islamic savants, among whom are found a number of ascetics and gnostics who were the forefathers of the Sufis, such men as Uways al-Qarani, Kumayl al-Nakha'i, Maytham al-Tammar and Roshaid al-Hajari. These men have been recognized by the later Sufis as the founders of gnosis in Islam. Others among his disciples became the first teachers of jurisprudence, theology, Quranic commentary and recitation.

The Transfer of the Caliphate to Mu'awiyah and Its Transformation into a Hereditary Monarchy

After the death of Ali, his son, Hasan ibn Ali, who is recognized by the Shi'ah as

their second Imam, became caliph. This designation occurred in accordance with Ali's last will and testament and also by the allegiance of the community to Hasan. But Mu'awiyah did not remain quiet before this event. He marched with his army toward Iraq, which was then the capital of the caliphate , and began to wage war against Hasan.

Through different intrigues and the payment of great sums of money, Mu'awiyah was able gradually to corrupt the aides and generals of Hasan. Finally he was able to force Hasan to hand the caliphate over to him so as to avoid bloodshed and to make peace. Hasan handed the caliphate to Mu'awiyah on the condition that the caliphate would be returned to him after the death of Mu'awiyah and that no harm would come to his partisans.

In the year 40/661 Mu'awiyah finally gained control of the caliphate. He then set out immediately for Iraq and in a speech to the people of that land said: "I did not fight against you for the sake of the prayers or of fasting. These acts you can perform yourself. What I wanted to accomplish was to rule over you and this end I have achieved." He also said, "The agreement I made with Hasan is null and void. It lies trampled under my feet." With this declaration Mu'awiyah made known to the people the real character of his government and revealed the nature of the program he had in mind.

He indicated in his declaration that he would separate religion from politics and would not give any guarantees concerning religious duties and regulations. He would spend all his force to preserve and to keep alive his own power, whatever might be the cost. Obviously a government of such a nature is more of a sultanate and a monarchy than a caliphate and vicegerency of the Prophet of God in its traditional Islamic sense. That is why some who were admitted to his court addressed him as "king." He himself in some private gatherings interpreted his government as a monarchy,

while in public he always introduced himself as the caliph.

Naturally any monarchy that is based on force carries with it inherently the principle of inheritance. Mu'awiyah, too, finally realized this fact, and chose his son, Yazid, who was a heedless young man without the least religious personality, as the "crown prince" and his successor. This act was to be the cause of many regrettable events in the future. Mu'awiyah had previously indicated that he would refuse to permit Hasan ibn Ali to succeed him as caliph and that he had other thoughts in mind. Therefore he had caused Hasan to be killed by poisoning, thus preparing the way for his son, Yazid.

In breaking his agreement with Hasan, Mu'awiyah made it clear that he would never permit the Shi'ah of the Household of the Prophet to live in a peaceful and secure environment and continue their activity as before, and he carried into action this very intention. It has been said that he went so far as to declare that whoever would transmit a hadith in praise of the virtues of the Household of the Prophet would have no immunity or protection concerning his life, merchandise and property. At the same time he ordered that whoever could recite a hadith in praise of the other companions or caliphs would be given sufficient reward. As a result a noticeable number of hadiths were recorded at this time praising the companions, some of which are of doubtful authenticity. He ordered pejorative comments to be made about Ali from the pulpits of mosques throughout the lands of Islam, while he himself sought to revile Ali. This command continued to be more or less in effect until the caliphate of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, when it was discontinued. With the help of his agents and lieutenants, Mu'awiyah caused elite and the most outstanding among the partisans of Ali to be put to death and the heads of some of them to be carried on lances throughout different cities. The majority of Shi'ites were forced to disown and even curse Ali and to express their disdain for him. If they refused, they were put to

death.

The Bleakest Days of Shi'ism

The most difficult period for Shi'ism was the twenty-year rule of Mu'awiyah, during which the Shi'ites had no protection and most of them were considered as marked characters, under suspicion and hunted down by the state. Two of the leaders of Shi'ism who lived at this time, Imams Hasan and Husayn, did not possess any means whatsoever to change the negative and oppressive circumstances in which they lived. Husayn, the third Imam of Shi'ism, had no possibility of freeing the Shi'ites from persecution in the ten years he was Imam during Mu'awiyah's caliphate, and when he rebelled during the caliphate of Yazid he was massacred along with all his aides and children.

Certain people in the Sunni world explain as pardonable the arbitrary, unjust and irresponsible actions carried out at this time by Mu'awiyah and his aides and lieutenants, some of whom were like Mu'awiyah himself, among the companions. This group reasons that according to certain hadiths of the Holy Prophet all the companions could practice ijtihad, that they were excused by God for the sins they committed, and that God was satisfied with them and forgave them whatever wrong they might have performed. The Shi'ites, however, do not accept this argument for two reasons:

1. It is not conceivable that a leader of human society like the Prophet should rise in order to revivify truth, justice and freedom and to persuade a group of people to accept his beliefs - a group all of whose members had sacrificed their very existence in order to accomplish this sacred end - and then as soon as this end is accomplished give his aides and companions complete freedom to do with these

sacred laws as they will. It is not possible to believe that the Holy Prophet would have forgiven the companions for whatever wrong action they might have performed. Such indifference to the type of action performed by them would have only destroyed the structure which the Holy Prophet had built with the same means that he had used to construct it.

2. Those sayings which depict the companions as inviolable and pardoned in advance for every act they might perform, even one unlawful or inadmissible, are most likely apocryphal ; the authenticity of many of them has not been fully established by traditional methods. Moreover, it is known historically that the companions did not deal with one another as if they were inviolable and pardoned for all their sins and wrongdoings. Therefore, even judging by the way the companions acted and dealt with each other, it can be concluded that such sayings cannot be literally true in the way some have understood them. If they do contain an aspect of the truth it is in indicating the legal inviolability of the companions and the sanctification which they enjoyed generally as a group because of their proximity to the Holy Prophet. The expression of God's satisfaction with the companions in the Holy Quran, because of the services they had rendered in obeying His Command, refers to their past actions, and to God's satisfaction with them in the past, not to whatever action each one of them might perform in the future.

The Establishment of Umayyad Rule

In the year 60/680 Mu'awiyah died and his son Yazid became caliph, as the result of the allegiance which his father had obtained for him from the powerful political and military leaders of the community. From the testimony of historical

documents it can be seen clearly that Yazid had no religious character at all and that even during the lifetime of his father he was oblivious to the principles and regulations of Islam. At that time his only interest was debauchery and frivolity. During his three years of caliphate he was the cause of calamities that had no precedent in the history of Islam, despite all the strife that had occurred before him.

During the first year of Yazid's rule Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Holy Prophet, was massacred in the most atrocious manner along with his children, relatives, and friends. Yazid even had some of the women and children of the Household of the Prophet killed and their heads displayed in different cities. During the second year of his rule, he ordered a general massacre of Medina and for three days gave his soldiers freedom to kill, loot, and take the women of the city. During the third year he had the sacred Ka'bah destroyed and burned. Following Yazid, the family of Marwan gained possession of the caliphate, according to details that are recorded in the history books. The rule of this eleven-member group, which lasted for nearly seventy years, was successful politically but from the point of view of purely religious values it fell short of Islamic ideals and practices. Islamic society was dominated by the Arab element alone and non-Arabs were subordinated to the Arabs. In fact a strong Arab empire was created which gave itself the name of an Islamic caliphate. During this period some of the caliphs were indifferent to religious sentiments to the extent that one of them - who was the "vicegerent of the Holy Prophet" and was regarded as the protector of religion - decided without showing any respect for Islamic practices and the feelings of Muslims to construct a room above the Ka'bah so that he could have a place to enjoy and amuse himself during the annual pilgrimage. It is even recounted of one of these caliphs that he made the Holy Quran a target for his arrow and in a poem composed to the Quran said: "On the Day of Judgment when

you appear before God tell Him 'the caliph tore me.'"

Naturally the Shi'ites, whose basic differences with the Sunnis were in the two questions of the Islamic caliphate and religious authority, were passing through bitter and difficult days in this dark period. Yet in spite of the unjust and irresponsible ways of the governments of the time the asceticism and purity of the leaders of the Household of the Prophet made the Shi'ites each day ever more determined to hold on to their beliefs. Of particular importance was the tragic death of Husayn, the third Imam, which played a major role in the spread of Shi'ism, especially in regions away from the center of the caliphate, such as Iraq, the Yemen, and Persia. This can be seen through the fact that during the period of the fifth Imam, before the end of the first Islamic century, and less than forty years after the death of Husayn, the Shi'ites took advantage of the internal differences and weaknesses in the Umayyad government and began to organize themselves, flocking to the side of the fifth Imam. People came from all Islamic countries like a flood to his door to collect hadith and to learn the Islamic sciences. The first century had not yet ended when a few of the leaders who were influential in the government established the city of Qum in Persia and made it a Shi'ite settlement. But even then the Shi'ah continued to live for the most part in hiding and followed their religious life secretly without external manifestations.

Several times the descendants of the Prophet (who are called in Persian *sadat-i 'alawi*) rebelled against the injustice of the government, but each time they were defeated and usually lost their lives. The severe and unscrupulous government of the time did not overlook any means of crushing them. The body of Zayd, the leader of Zayd Shi'ism, was dug out of the grave and hanged; then after remaining on the gallows for three years it was brought down and burned, its ashes being thrown to the wind. The Shi'ites believe that the fourth and fifth Imams were

poisoned by the Umayyads as the second and third Imams had been killed by them before.

The calamities brought about by the Umayyads were so open and unveiled that the majority of the Sunnis, although they believed generally that it was their duty to obey the caliphs, felt the pangs of their religious conscience and were forced to divide the caliphs into two groups. They came to distinguish between the "rightly guided caliphs" (khulafa rashidun) who are the first four caliphs after the death of the Holy Prophet (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali), and the others who began with Mu'awiyah and who did not possess by any means the religious virtues of the rightly guided caliphs.

The Umayyads caused so much public hatred as a result of their injustice and heedlessness during their rule that after the definitive defeat and death of the last Umayyad caliph his two sons and a number of their family encountered great difficulties in escaping from the capital. No matter where they turned no one would give them shelter. Finally after much wandering the deserts of Nubia, Abyssinia, and Bajawah (between Nubia and Abyssinia) during which many of them died from hunger and thirst, they came to Bab al-Mandab of the Yemen. There they acquired travel expenses from the people through begging and set out for Mecca dressed as porters. In Mecca they finally succeeded in disappearing among the mass of the people.

Shi'ism During the 2nd/8th Century

During the latter part of the first third of the 2nd/8th century, following a series of revolutions and bloody wars throughout the Islamic world which were due to the injustice, repressions, and wrongdoings of the Umayyads, there began an anti-

Umayyad movement in the name of the Household of the Prophet in Khurasan in Persia. The leader of this movement was the Persian general, Abu Muslim Marwazi, who rebelled against Umayyad rule and advance his cause step by step until he was able to overthrow the Umayyad government.

Although this movement originated from a profound Shi'ite background and came into being more or less with the claim of wanting to avenge the blood of the Household of the Prophet, and although people were even asked secretly to give allegiance to a qualified member of the family of the Prophet, it did not rise directly as a result of the instructions of the Imams. This is witnessed by the fact that when Abu Muslim offered the caliphate to the sixth Imam in Medina he rejected it completely saying "You are not one of my men and the time is not my time."

Finally the Abbasids gained the caliphate in the name of the family of the Prophet and at the beginning showed some kindness to people in general and to descendants of the Prophet in particular. In the name of avenging the martyrdom of the family of the Prophet, they massacred the Umayyads, going to the extent of opening their graves and burning whatever they found in them. But soon they began to follow unjust ways of the Umayyads and did not abstain in any way from injustice and irresponsible action. Abu Hanifah, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law, was imprisoned by al-Mansur and tortured Ibn Hanbal the founder of another school of law was whipped. The sixth Imam died from poisoning after much torture and pain. The descendants of the Holy Prophet were sometimes beheaded in groups, buried alive, or even placed within walls of government buildings under construction.

Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph, during whose reign the Islamic empire reached the apogee of its expansion and power, occasionally would look at the sun

and address it in these words: "Shine wherever thou wilt, thou shalt never be able to leave my kingdom." On the other hand his armies were advancing in the East and West, on the other hand a few steps from the palace of the caliph, and without his knowledge, officials had decided on their own to collect tolls from people who wanted to cross the Baghdad bridge. Even one day when the caliph himself wanted to cross the bridge he was stopped and asked to pay the toll.

A singer, by chanting two lascivious verses, incited the passions of the Abbasid caliph, Amin, who awarded him three million dirhams. The chanter in joy threw himself at the feet of the caliph saying, "Oh, leader of the faithful! You give me all this money?" The caliph answered, "It does not matter. We receive money from an unknown part of the country. "

The bewildering amount of wealth that was pouring every year from all corners of the Islamic world into the public treasury in the capital helped creating luxury and a mundane atmosphere. Much of it in fact was often spent for the pleasures and iniquities of the caliph of the time. The number of beautiful slave girls in the court of some of the caliphs exceeded thousands. By the dissolution of Umayyad rule and the establishment of the Abbasids, Shi'ism did not benefit in any way. Its repressive and unjust opponents merely changed their name.

Shi'ism in the 3rd/9th Century

At the beginning of the 3rd/9th century Shi'ism was able to breathe once again. This more favorable condition was first of all due to the fact that many scientific and philosophical books were translated from Greek, Syriac, and other languages into Arabic, and people eagerly studied the intellectual and rational sciences. Moreover, al-Ma'mun, the Abbasid caliph from 198/813 to 218/833, had

Mu'tazilite leanings and since in his religious views he favored intellectual demonstration, he was more inclined to give complete freedom to the discussion and propagation of different religious views. Shi'ite theologians and scholars took full advantage of this freedom and did their utmost to further scholarly activities and propagate Shi'ite teachings. Also, al-Ma'mun, following demands of the political forces at the time, had made the eighth Shi'ite Imam his successor, as is recounted in most standard histories. As a result, the descendants of the Holy Prophet and their friends were to a certain extent free from pressures from the government and enjoyed some degrees of liberty. Yet before long the cutting edge of the sword once again turned towards the Shi'ites and the forgotten ways of the past came upon them again. This was particularly true in the case of al-Mutawakkil (233/847-247/861) who held a special enmity towards Ali and the Shi'ites. By his order the tomb of the third Imam in Karbala was completely demolished.

Shi'ism in the 4th/10th Century

In the 4th/10th century certain conditions again prevailed which aided greatly the spread and strengthening of Shi'ism. Among them were the weaknesses that appeared in the central Abbasid government and administration and the appearance of the Buyid rulers. The Buyids, who were Shi'ite had the greatest influence not only in the provinces of Persia but also in the capital of the caliphate in Baghdad, and even upon the caliph himself. This new strength of considerable proportions enabled the Shi'ites to stand up before their opponents who previously had tried to crush them by relying upon the power of the caliphate. It also made it possible for the Shi'ites to propagate their religious views openly.

As recorded by historians, during this century most of the Arabian peninsula

was Shi'ite with the exception of some of the big cities. Even some of the major cities like Hajar, Uman, and Sa'dah were Shi'ite. In Basra, which had always been a Sunni city and competed with Kufa which was considered a Shi'ite center, there appeared a notable group of Shi'ites. Also in Tripoli, Nablus, Tiberias, Aleppo, Nayshapur, and Herat there were many Shi'ites, while Ahwaz and the coast of the Persian Gulf on the Persian side were also Shi'ite.

At the beginning of this century Nasir Utrush, after many years of propagation of his religious mission in northern Persia, gained power in Tabaristan and established a kingdom which continued for several generations after him. Before Utrush, Hasan ibn Zayd al-'Alawi had reigned from many years in Tabaristan. Also in this period the Fatimids, who were Isma'ili, conquered Egypt and organized a caliphate which lasted for over two centuries (296/908-567/1171). Often disputation and fighting occurred in major cities like Baghdad, Cairo and Nayshapur between Shi'ites and Sunnis, in some of which the Shi'ites would gain the upper hand and come out victorious.

Shi'ism from the 5th/11th to the 9th/15th Centuries

From the 5th/11th to the 9th/15th centuries Shi'ism continued to expand as it had done in the 4th/10th century. Many kings and rulers who were Shi'ite appeared in different parts of the Islamic world and propagated Shi'ism. Toward the end of the 5th/11th century the missionary activity of Isma'ilism took root in the fort of Alamut and for nearly a century and a half the Isma'ilis lived in complete independence in the central regions of Persia. Also the Sadat-i Mar'ashi, who were descendants of the Holy Prophet, ruled for many years in Mazandaran (Tabaristan). Shah Muhammad Khudabandah, one of the well-known Mongol rulers, became Shi'ite and his descendants ruled for many years in Persia and were instrumental in

spreading Shi'ism. Mention must also be made of the kings of the Aq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu dynasties who ruled in Tabriz and whose domain extended to Fars and Kerman, as well as of the Fatimid government which was ruling in Egypt.

Of course religious freedom and the possibility of exerting religious power by the populace differed under different rulers. For example, with the termination of Fatimid rule and coming to power of the Ayyubids the scene changed completely and the Shi'ite population of Egypt and Syria lost its religious independence. Many of the Shi'ites of Syria were killed during this period merely on the accusation of following Shi'ism. One of these was Shahid-i awwal (the First Martyr) Muhammad ibn Makki, one of the great figures in Shi'ite jurisprudence, who was killed in Damascus in 786/1384. Also Shaykh al-ishraq Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi was killed in Aleppo on the accusation that he was cultivating Batini teachings and philosophy. Altogether during this period Shi'ism was growing from the point of view of numbers, even though its religious power and freedom depended upon local conditions and the rulers of the time. During this period, however, Shi'ism never became the official religion of any Muslim state.

Shi'ism in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th Centuries

In the 10th/16th century Isma'il, who was of the household of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardibili (d. 735/1334), a Sufi master and also a Shi'ite, began a revolt in Ardabil, with three hundred Sufis who were disciples of his forefathers, with the aim of establishing an independent and powerful Shi'ite country. In this way he began the conquest of Persia and overcame the local feudal princes. After a series of bloody wars with local rulers and also the Ottomans who held the title of caliph, he succeeded in forming Persia piece by piece into a country and in making

Shi'ism the official religion in his kingdom.

After the death of Shah Isma'il other Safavid kings reigned in Persia until the 12th/18th century and each continued to recognize Shi'ism as the official religion of the country and further to strengthen its hold upon this land. At the height of their power, during the reign of Shah 'Abbas, the Safavids were able to increase the territorial expansion and the population of Persia to twice its present size. As for other Muslim lands, the Shi'ite population continued the same as before and increased only through the natural growth of population.

Shi'ism from the 12th/18th to the 14th/20th Centuries

During the past three centuries Shi'ism has followed its natural rate of growth as before. At the present moment, during the latter part of the 14th/20th century, Shi'ism is recognized as the official religion in Iran, and in the Yemen and Iraq the majority population is Shi'ite. In nearly all lands where there are Muslims one can find a certain number of Shi'ites. It has been said that altogether in the world today there are about eighty to ninety million Shi'ites.