

Who Are The Shia?

Syed H. Akhtar
Austin, Texas

The month of Muharram is here again. The Shia of Imam Ali (A.S.), the lovers of Ahlul Bayt, commemorate the great tragedy, the sacrifice of Imam Husain (A.S.), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Progeny). He laid down his life and the lives of his family and friends in Karbala 1400 year ago to defend the religion of his grandfather, the religion of Islam. The emotions and the grief displayed draw the attention of the world to that momentous event, thereby keeping the message of Imam Husain alive.

Being a Shia is not easy. It may not be out of place at this time to find out what the privileges and responsibilities of a Shia are. Furthermore, as Shia, are we fulfilling our responsibilities towards Allah, the Prophet, our Imams (Peace be upon them all) and towards the communities around us? In the following few paragraphs, I have attempted to present material on this subject based upon the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Progeny) and the teachings of the Infallible Imams (A.S.)

The word Shia, which is an Arabic word, means a person who is a follower or a helper. The term is also used referring to the followers of Imam Ali (A.S.). They used to be called "the Shia of Ali." Currently the term Shia is used for the followers of twelve purified Imams from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh&p).

In the Qur'an Allah swt in reference to Prophet Nuh says this; "*And verily of his Party (Shia-tihi) was Ibrahim.*" (Surah 37, verse 83). In the next verse of the same Surah Allah says this; "*When he came unto his Lord with a submissive heart (Qalb-e-saleem),*" (37:84)

Another verse of the Qur'an is, "*The day when will avail not the wealth or sons, save him who comes unto God with a heart submissive (Qalb-e-saleem).*" (Surah 26, verses 88, 89)

According to a saying of Imam Jafar-as-Sadiq (A.S.) "*Qalb-e-saleem* is that heart which meets Allah in a state where it has only Allah in it and nothing else." (Al-Kafi)

Hadrat Musa's follower, who asked for his help against a disbeliever, and Musa A.S. came to his rescue, is also called one of his Shia. Please refer to Surah Al-Qasas (28:15).

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his progeny) said, "Ali and his Shia are the ones who will be successful." (Yanabi-al-Muwaddah)

Shias are Embodiment of Sincerity and Love.

Zarief bin Nasih reported that Imam Al Baqir (S.A.) said, "The Shia of Ali are those, who for the sake of our friendship (*Wilayat*), spend their resources on each other, for the love of us, they love each other, who visit each other to keep our pronouncements alive. They do not commit excesses even though they may be very angry. During happy times, they are not extravagant and lavish. They are a source of goodness to their neighbors and a means of safety for the people around them.

Imam Ali gave good news to his Shia

Shaykh Sadooq reported that, (this is an excerpt from a lengthy discourse). "Amir-ul Mu'mineen (A.S.) said to his slave Qambar to rejoice because of his proximity to the Imam, and told him to inform the people that when the Prophet of God (Peace be upon him and his progeny) left this world, he was unhappy with people of his Ummah except the Shia. He also said that Prophet would intercede on their behalf on the Day of Judgment. "On that Day, after us, you (Shia) will be closest to the Divine Throne (*Arsh-e-ilahi*). Allah has bestowed such honor upon them."

Amir-ul-Mu'mineen further said that our helpers and friends would come out of their graves on the Day of Judgment with faces lit up. Their eyes will experience coolness because they will be granted safety and protection. Other people will be fearful but these will have no fear. Others will have grief but not them."

Signs of a Shia.

Sindi bin Muhammad is quoted to have said, "Some people were walking behind Amir-ul-Mu'mineen. He turned and asked them as to who they were. They replied, 'we are your Shia.' Ali (A.S.) said, 'why is that I do not see signs of Shia in you?' They asked what are those. He replied that the faces of his Shia are pale due to keeping awake at night, they have flat abdomen due to frequent fasting, their lips are parched from constant supplications and they have fear of Allah and piety."

In his famous "Khutba Shi-at" as reported by Jabir al-Jufi, Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (A.S.) said this about Shia:

O' Jabir, does he who claims to be a Shia consider it sufficient merely to acknowledge us as Ahl-al-Bayt? By Allah! He is not our friend and follower unless he fears Allah and obeys His commands. They (our true followers) can be recognized by these qualities: they are hospitable, kind-hearted and trustworthy. They remember and

praise Allah often; they establish Salaat (prayers) and observe fasting in the month of Ramadan. They show kindness to their parents, help their neighbor, the needy, the traveler, the destitute, and the orphan. They are truthful, they recite the Qur'an regularly, they restrain their tongues from speaking about others except for what is good and the members of their communities regard them as honest and reliable.

Jabir replied, "O son of the Prophet! At present I do not find anyone with all these Qualities."

The Imam then said, Muslims think it is sufficient to profess love and friendship of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), without the need to adopt a righteous lifestyle. If a person professes love and affection for the Messenger of Allah, even though Allah has bestowed upon the Messenger (Peace be upon him and his progeny) a higher status than upon 'Ali, but he does not emulate the lifestyle, the noble character and the Sunnah of the Prophet, then the mere claim of love of the Prophet will be of no benefit to him.

The Imam then continued: Fear Allah and strive to earn the heavenly rewards promised by Him. There is no kinship between man and Allah. Allah befriends him who is foremost in piety and who excels in obedience to Him. O Jabir, by Allah! His nearness can be attained only by submitting to His will. We do not have the authority to save anyone from the fire of Hell, nor is it obligatory upon Allah to accept the pleas or the arguments of His subjects. He, who is obedient to Allah, is our friend, and he, who is disobedient, is our enemy. Our friendship cannot be gained unless one practices piety and virtue!

Ref. Usul-al-Kafi, Chapter, "Ita'at wa taqwa"
By Allamah Majlisi

In summary, a Shia is one who not only believes in Imam Ali as the true successor of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his progeny), but also adopts his teachings in his/ her life and returns to the Lord with a pure and submissive heart (*Qalb-e-saleem*), a heart emptied of all material things (*Dunya*).

(The End)

References: 1. Book "Shiaan-e-Ahlebayt" by Shaykh Sadooq, translated (Urdu) by Allamah Razi Jafar Naqvi, 2. Usul-al-Kafi by Allamah Majlisi, 3. The Holy Qur'an, English translation by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali.