

Comparison between the sunnis and shiites

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



A Comparison Between the Sunnis and Shiites Have you ever wondered about other religions that are out there and why they are out there? I have and that is why I chose to write my paper on the Sunnis and Shiites. Read on to learn more about a brief history and then I will break each of them into separate religions. In books written on Islam the word " hadith" usually refers to the sayings or " traditions" which have been given from the Prophet. Muslims hold these to be the most important source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an. A lot of books have been written in English about what the hadith means in Islam and a number of important translations have been made. Almost all the studies have been limited to the point of view of Sunni Islam and based on Sunni sources and collections. Practically no one has ever paid any attention to the different nature of the hadith literature in Shiism and the different sources from which the hadiths are recieved. The main difference to be made between Shiite and Sunni hadiths is that in Shiism the traditions are not limited to those of the Prophet, but include those of the Imams as well. I will explain more of the distinctions later on. The difference between the two religions is still hard to distinguish even with easy to understand books like the Encyclopedia of World Faiths. There, the author of the article is aware that there is some difference between Shiism and Sunnism on the question of which hadiths are included, but he thinks that it lies in the fact that the Shiite collections accept " only traditions traced through 'Ali's family." But this is incorrect, since a lot of traditions are also gotten through other sources. What the author fails to mention is that the hadith literature as understood by Shiites is not limited to the sayings of the Prophet, but includes those of the Imams as well. The most famous and

reliable collections of Shiite hadiths are four books. These books relate to the Six Correct Collections in Sunni Islam. These are al-Kafi fi 'ilm al-din (The Sufficient in the Knowledge of Religion) by Thiqat al-Islam Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 329/940), Man la yahduruhu al-faqih (For him not in the Presence of Jurisprudent) of Shaykh al-Saduq Muhammad ibn Babuyah al-Qummi (d. 381/991), Tahdhib al-ahkam (Rectification of the Statutes) by Shaykh al-Ta'ifah Muhammad al-Tusi (d. 460/ 1068) and al-Istibsar fi ma ukhtulif fihi min al-akhbar (Reflection upon the Disputed Traditions) also by al-Tusi. Books that have been found about and of the hadiths in Sunni Islam, such as those of al-Bukhari and Muslim, have only sayings from and about the Prophet. But the Shiite collections, such as that of al-Kulayni, also contain sayings from and about the twelve Imams. The Shiites believe in the words from the Prophet to be much stronger than the Sunnis, but both religions are looked at as having the same beliefs, which is wrong. After giving you a brief over view of both the Sunnis and Shiites I will now go into more depth on both the Shiites and the Sunnis. First I will start with the Shiites. Shiism is the smaller of the two major branches of Islam. In early Islamic history the Shi'ites were a political faction (shi'at ' Ali, " party of ' Ali") that supported the power of ' Ali, who was a son-in-law of Muhammad and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community. ' Ali was killed while trying to keep his authority as caliph. The Shiites stand against the caliph was not normal with that of the more realistic Sunnite majority of Muslims, who were generally willing to accept the leadership of any caliph whose rule followed the way the Prophet believed. In 656 ' Ali became the caliphate with the support, among many others, of the murderers of the third caliph. ' Ali never quite received the

faithfulness of all the Muslims. ' Ali was murdered in 661, and Mu'awiyah, his main enemy, became caliph. ' Ali's son, Husayn, refused to recognize the power of Mu'awiyah's son and successor who was the caliph. The Muslims of the Shi'ite dominated town of Kufah in Iraq, ' Ali's former capital, invited Husayn to become caliph. The Muslims in Iraq generally failed to support Husayn, however, and he and his small group of followers were brought down in 680 by the governor of Iraq's troops near Kufah at the Battle of Karbala', which is now a pilgrimage spot for Shiites. Over the centuries the Shiite movement has deeply influenced all Sunnite Islam, and its supporters numbered about 60 to 80 million in the late 20th century, or one-tenth of all Islam. Shiism (Arabic: Shi'ah, or Shi'i Islam) is the majority faith in Iran, Iraq, and perhaps Yemen (San'a') and has followers in Syria, Lebanon, East Africa, India, and Pakistan. Wanting revenge against the Umayyad government, the Kufans soon gained support from other groups that opposed the upper-class Muslim families of Medina. The Shiites' conviction that the ' Alids should be the leaders of the Islamic world was never fulfilled over the centuries. Though the ' Alids never won power, 'Ali himself was renewed as a major hero of Sunnite Islam. The largest Shiite group is that of the Ithna ' Ashariyah, or Twelvers, who recognize the legitimacy of a succession of twelve ' Alid claimants (beginning with ' Ali himself) who are known as Imams. Despite occasional Shiite rulers, the Shiites remained almost everywhere an Islamic minority until the start of the 16th century, when the Iranian Safavid dynasty made it the sole legal faith of their empire, which then included the Persians of Iran, the Turks of Azerbaijan, and many of the Arabs of Iraq. In the late 20th century, notably in Iran, the Shi'ites became

the chief voice of Islamic. The Sunnites are the other branch of Islamic religion. Sunni Muslims think that their group is the normal and traditional branch of Islam, which is different from the minority group, the Shiites. The Sunnites recognize the first four caliphs as Muhammad's rightful successors, whereas the Shiites believe that Muslim leadership belonged to Muhammad's son-in-law, ' Ali, and his descendants alone. The Sunnites have long conceived of the theocratic state built by Muhammad as an earthly, temporal dominion and have thus regarded the leadership of Islam as being determined not by divine order or inspiration but by the prevailing political realities of the Muslim world. This led historically to Sunni acceptance of the leadership of the leading families of Mecca and to the acceptance of normal and even foreign caliphs, so long as their rule afforded the proper exercise of religion and the maintenance of order. The Sunnites belief held that the caliph must be a member of Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh, but came up with a way of electing a caliph that was flexible enough to allow an allegiance be given to the actual caliph, whatever his origins. The differences between the Sunnites and other groups regarding the holding of spiritual and political authority remained strong even after the end of the Caliphate itself in the 13th century. The Sunnites' strongest belief has an emphasis on the views and customs of the majority of the community, as distinguished from the views of other groups. The Sunnites compromised by allowing the other groups to bring their beliefs and customs that had nothing to do with the Qur'an. The Sunnites recognize the six " authentic" books of the Hadith, which contain the spoken tradition attributed to Muhammad. In the 20th century the Sunnites constituted the majority of Muslims in all nations except

Iran, Iraq, and perhaps Yemen. They numbered about 900 million in the late 20th century and made up nine-tenths of all the followers of Islam. In conclusion I would like to comment on a couple of things. First of all the Shiism makes up 10 percent and Sunnism makes up the other 90 percent of the Muslim religion. Second of all the Shiites and Sunnis both are closely related, but have many differences. The two religions are both very complicated and difficult to understand. I hope after reading this paper you have learned a little more about both.