

As Islam spread to new settings in Afro-Eurasia, believers adapted it to local cultural practices. The split between the Sunni and Shi'a traditions of Islam intensified, and Sufi practices became more widespread.



# SUNNI SHI'ITE

The split between SUNNI and SHI'ITE Muslims is one of the most important schisms in modern religion. The centuries-old strife sporadically erupts into new bloodshed throughout the Middle East. The split itself was mainly based on one issue: SUCCESSION. *Who should lead Islam after Muhammad?* Muhammad died without any (living) sons. He also had no will. His closest male heir was ALI (whose followers were *Shiat Ali* or Shi'ite). As the SHIITES thought the power should stay in Muhammad's family, the SUNNI felt the power should go to the person who was best equipped politically to handle this position: ABU BAKR (*Muhammad's Father-in-Law*). The SUNNI side won out and ABU BAKR became the first CALIPH. ALI became Caliph 25 years later, but was later assassinated in the first FITNA (*civil war*).

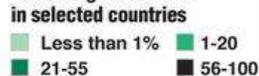
The ACTUAL SPLIT occurred nearly 50 years after the death of Muhammad. HUSSEIN (Ali's son; Muhammad's Grandson) rose up against what he considered to be a corrupt Umayyad leadership. HUSSEIN and all of his followers were defeated and executed at the BATTLE OF KARBALA (in present-day Iraq). The massacre of Muhammad's grandson and 72 members of his family was a turning point in Islamic history. HUSSEIN became known as the PRINCE OF MARTYRS. The SHI'A believe that HUSSEIN sacrificed himself for the sake of all oppressed people.

Looking at the map below, you can see that today SHI'A Muslims are focused in Iran & Iraq. The Iraq focus dates back to the early days of Islam (both ALI & HUSSEIN were killed in Iraq). But Iran (Persia) may seem strange. This was the center of Sunni learning for centuries after Muhammad. *What changed?*

## Muslims in the Mideast

Less than 15 percent of the world's Muslims are Shiite, or Shia; most Muslims are Sunni.

### Percentage of Shiites in selected countries



### Who the Shiites are

- Name derives from the phrase "Shiatu Ali," or followers of Ali
- Believe that Ali, cousin and son-in-law of founder Mohammad, is his rightful successor

- Reject the legitimacy of the first three caliphs (leaders), whom the Sunni follow
- Have some doctrinal, as well as political differences with Sunnis



## MEET THE SAFAVIDS

A Turkic dynasty from East Turkey; left over from the Mongol invasions, that ruled Persia from 1501-1736. Shi'ism eventually became the "glue" that held together the Safavid Empire against the Sunni Ottoman Empire. The geography of Ottoman v. Safavid remains the predominant Islamic geography today (former Ottoman=SUNNI and former Safavid=SHI'A)

## MEET THE SUFIS

Sufism or *Tasawwuf* is known in the Islamic world as ISLAMIC MYSTICISM. Unlike SUNNI/SHI'A, Sufism is not an actual sect of Islam; rather, it is more of an aspect or dimension of Islam. Both SUNNI & SHI'A have Sufi orders. Below is Ibn Khaldun's description:

... dedication to worship, total dedication to Allah most High, disregard for the finery and ornament of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, wealth, and prestige sought by most men, and retiring from others to worship alone.

Sufis were instrumental in spreading the faith to the furthest reaches of Islam in Africa, India, and the Far East. In the West, Sufis are most famous for the "active meditation" of the Mevlevi order. In abandoning one's personal egos, focusing on Allah, listening to music, and spinning one's body in repetitive circles mirroring the motion of the stars.

