

Introduction to Islamic Theology

Lesson 4



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

Shi'i Theology

- Shi'i scholars from the earliest days introduced five doctrines which they held to be characteristic of Shi'ism:
 - 1. Monotheism التوحيد
 - 2. Divine justice العدل
 - 3. Prophethood النبوة
 - 4. Imamah الإمامة
 - 5. Resurrection المعاد

Shi'i Theology

- It is generally said that these five are the basic tenants of faith.
- However, a person is technically recognized as a Muslim by declaring the two testimonies of faith which relate to monotheism and the prophethood of Muhammad.
- This declaration of faith does not imply that other beliefs are non-essential.
- There are other doctrines which must be affirmed for a person to remain within the fold of Islam.

Shi'i Theology

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أَنزَلَ
مِن قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

“O you who have believed, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book that He sent down upon His Messenger and the Scripture which He sent down before. And whoever rejects God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray.” Quran

4:136

Shi'i Theology

- **Muslims are required to believe in God's essential attributes like power, knowledge, life etc. Why is divine justice singled out as one of the five doctrines of Shi'ism?**

Shi'i Theology

- The five principles were selected in such a manner as to, on the one hand, determine certain tenets essential to the Islamic faith, and on the other hand, to specify the particular identity of the Shi'i school.

Shi'i Theology

- **If faith in the existence of angels is also, on the authority of the Quran, essential and obligatory, then why was it not stated as the 6th article of faith?**

Shi'i Theology

- Imamah was also singled out because Muslims had diverging views on the conditions of an Imam, how an Imam is chosen and the scope of the Imam's authority etc.
- Thus, the five tenets of faith in the Shi'i school primarily focused on clarifying those aspects of belief that were controversial among Muslims.

Monotheism

- Monotheism has many levels:
 - **1. The Oneness of God's essence** **توحيد الذات**: this means that God is One but not in the numerical sense. He is indivisible, meaning that He is not composed of parts. And there is nothing even remotely similar to Him.
 - **2. The Oneness of God's attributes** **توحيد الصفات**: God's attributes differ in terms of meaning **مفهوم** but they are one in terms of the external reality.

Monotheism

وَكَمَالُ تَوْحِيدِهِ الْإِخْلَاصُ لَهُ، وَكَمَالُ الْإِخْلَاصِ لَهُ نَفْيُ الصِّفَاتِ عَنْهُ.

“And the perfection of believing in His Oneness is sincerity to Him and the perfection of sincerity to Him is negating attributes from Him.”

Imam Ali

Monotheism

- The Oneness of God's attributes according to the Mu'tazilites means the absence of all attributes from the divine essence: the divine essence has no attributes.
- But the Shi'i notion of the Oneness of God's attributes means the affirming of the attributes to the divine essence.

Monotheism

- **3. Oneness of God's actions** **توحيد الأفعال**: Creation completely relies on God and thus nothing can happen without His involvement. Thus, everything is His action. However, sometimes God acts directly and other times, He acts through the medium of His creatures.

وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى

“And you threw not, [O Muhammad], when you threw, but it was God who threw...” Quran 8:17

Monotheism

- The Oneness of God's actions means that for everything that happens in creation, the process begins with God and it is always under His control although the last part of this process is sometimes in our hands. Once it reaches us, it is characterized as good or bad because we are morally responsible.
- Ex. Similar to the relationship between the light in your home and the utility company.

Monotheism

- The Shi'i conception of the Oneness of God's actions differs from the one held by the Ash'arites.
- For the Ash'arites, this means that no creature is of any consequence in the scheme of things and everything is directly ordained by God.
- Accordingly, He is the direct creator of the deeds of human beings and they are not creators of their own acts.

Monotheism

- However, in the Shi'i tradition, it means that causal relations are at work in the realm of being, and every effect, while being dependent on its proximate cause, is also dependent on God.

Monotheism

- **4. God is the only One worthy of worship** **توحيد العبادي**: This aspect of monotheism is affirmed by all Muslims. Nothing is worthy of worship other than Him.

Divine Justice

- The doctrine of justice is common to both the Shia's and the Mu'tazilites.
- This means that God bestows upon people His mercy and blessings as well as His punishments in accordance with what they deserve, and that divine mercy and torment, reward and punishment, follow a particular and exact order in the grand scheme of being.

Divine Justice

- In Shi'i thought, divine justice permeates through the entire creation. It is not just associated with God, rather it is reflected in the created order.
- Justice is not only a part of God's essence but He has created the universe on the basis of justice and part of justice is to create everything in balance
- We don't possess any inherent rights before God. He has granted us rights and has imposed justice and mercy upon Himself.

Divine Justice

كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

“Your Lord has imposed mercy upon Himself...” Quran 6:54

- This is not a legal requirement for God. His absolute perfection demands that He shows mercy and love to His creatures.

Divine Justice

- Interestingly, God doesn't describe Himself in the Quran as عادل "Just".
- He does negate any type of oppression from Himself.

وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ

"And Your Lord does not oppress His servants [in the least]." Quran
41:46

- Why does God not describe Himself in the Quran as being "Just"?

Divine Justice

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

“Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance so that people stand for justice...” Quran 57:25