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*All things arise and cease due to
interdependent causes and conditions*

~Δ~

An Overview of Muslim Religious Sects

The Original and Later Meaning of Islam

Compiled and adapted by

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An Overview of Muslim Religious Sects

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The **Sunnis** or Sunnites (Arabic, *Sunna*, Way) are the largest Muslim sect who tend to be more puritanical and legislative with their beliefs. From a historical perspective, this inflexible approach had a role to play in curbing the lawless violence of desert warlords who took their spoils from trading caravans and tribal raids.

Kharijites. (Arabic, *khawagri*, come-outers or seceders) were radical reformers who sought to establish a theocracy, urging that a faithful man of whatever tribe or nation might be called to the caliphate. They opposed the *Shias* or *Shiites*, and eventually broke up into minor sects.

Murijites. In opposition to the *Kharijites*, they declined to judge who was entitled to salvation as good Muslims or Quran Bible Believers. They were called "postponers," who left it to God's decision on the Last Day (Resurrection) regarding a true believer.

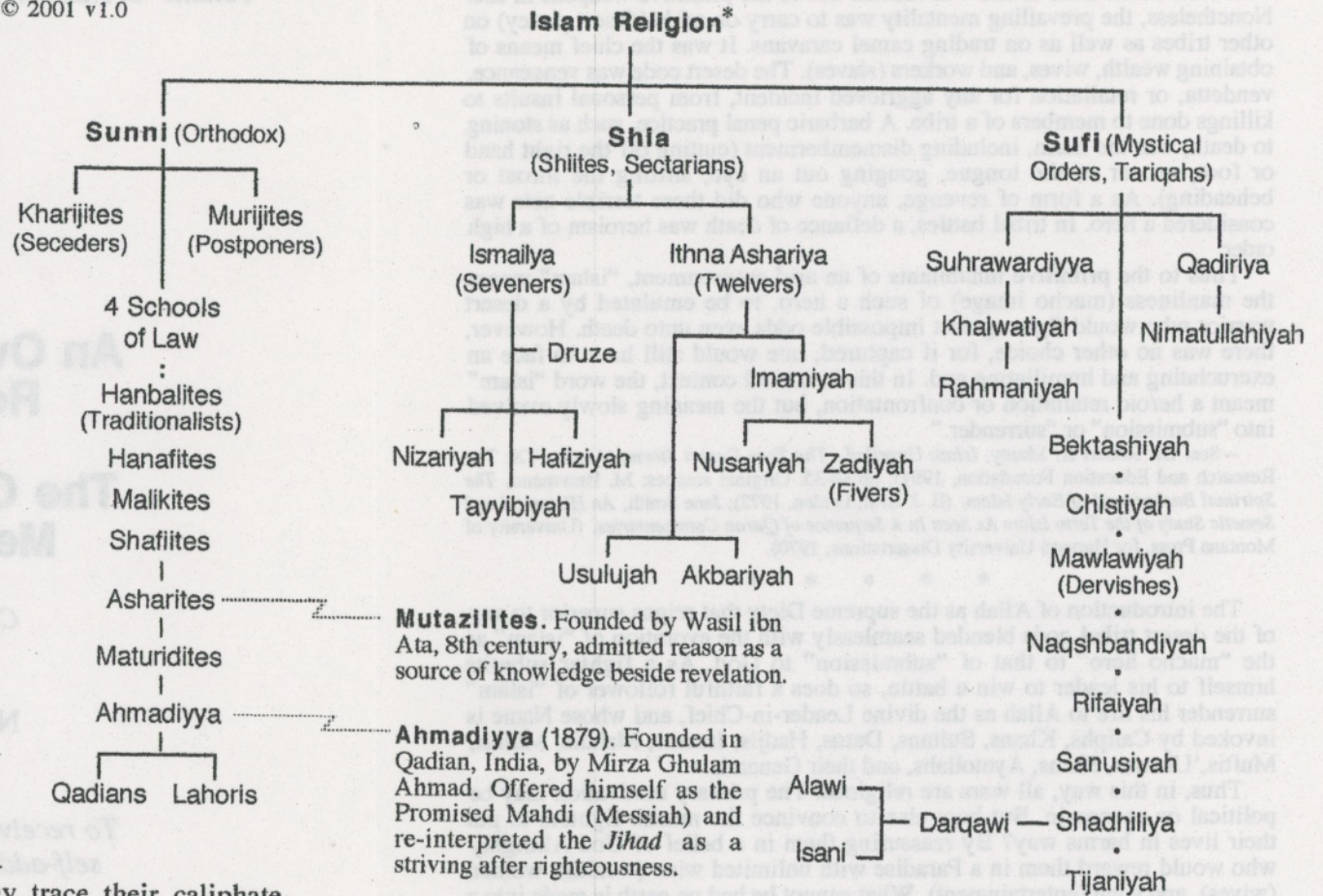
Shia or *Shiites* represent the Persian (Iran) branch of Islam, and resent the passing of the Caliphate to other lands. They regard Ali and his followers as divinely ordained caliphs, and continue to look for the true leader (*imam* or *mahdi*). They adhere to their priestly version of Islamic politics, economics, and socialism.

Ismailiya, also called "Seveners" as they trace their caliphate (divine succession) from the 7th of the 12 original Companions of Muhammad during his lifetime.

Ithna Ashnariya, also called the "Twelvers" who recognize the caliphate (divine succession) of the 12 original Companions of Muhammad.

Zadiyah, also called the "Fivers" who recognize their succession from the 5th caliphate, a Muslim version of apostolic succession.

Sufi. In Arabic *suf* means "wool," referring to the woolen garments worn by such ascetics from the 2nd century. Their practice is a form of mysticism (common to Hinduism and Christianity) toward divine union through abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, and trust, with spiritual love as the key to *Sufi* ethics.**



Wahabites. Reform Hanbalite movement by Mohammed ibn Abd al' Wahab [1703-87], with the aim of restoring the pure religion of the *Koran*, advocating strict monotheism and a literal interpretation of the scripture. This puritanical form of neo-fundamentalism is prevalent in Saudi Arabia, [among the Muslim Brothers, *ikhwan*, in Egypt (Hasan al-Banna, 1928), and in Syria; in an extreme form, the recent Taliban in Afghanistan].

* Zonathan Z. Smith, Gen. ed., *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, San Francisco, CA: The American Academy of Religion, 1995. (Chart, p.501).

** Vergilius Ferm, ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1945.

The Original and Later Meaning of Islam

In the pre-Islamic period, the nomadic desert tribes were at constant war with each other. Loss of life was limited due to the primitive weapons in use. Nonetheless, the prevailing mentality was to carry on raids (desert piracy) on other tribes as well as on trading camel caravans. It was the chief means of obtaining wealth, wives, and workers (slaves). The desert code was vengeance, vendetta, or retaliation for any aggrieved incident, from personal insults to killings done to members of a tribe. A barbaric penal practice, such as stoning to death, was the norm, including dismemberment (cutting off the right hand or foot, an ear or the tongue, gouging out an eye, slitting the throat or beheading). As a form of revenge, anyone who did these terrible acts was considered a hero. In tribal battles, a defiance of death was heroism of a high order.

Thus to the primitive inhabitants of an arid environment, "islam" meant the manliness (macho image) of such a hero, to be emulated by a desert warrior who would fight against impossible odds even unto death. However, there was no other choice, for if captured, one would still have to face an excruciating and humiliating end. In this historical context, the word "islam" meant a heroic retaliation or confrontation, but the meaning slowly evolved into "submission" or "surrender."

—See: Dr. Robert A. Morey, *Islam Unveiled, The True Desert Storm*, (Austin, TX: The Research and Education Foundation, 1991), pp.34-35. Original sources: M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam*, (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1972); Jane Smith, *An Historical and Semetic Study of the Term Islam As Seen In A Sequence of Quran Commentaries*, (University of Montana Press, for Harvard University Dissertations, 1970).

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The introduction of Allah as the supreme Deity that reigns superior to any of the desert tribal gods blended seamlessly with the evolution of "islam" as the "macho hero" to that of "submission" to God. As a fighter submits himself to his leader to win a battle, so does a faithful follower of "islam" surrender his life to Allah as the divine Leader-in-Chief, and whose Name is invoked by Caliphs, Khans, Sultans, Datus, Hadjis, Imams, Mahdis, Mullas, Muftis, 'Ulamas, Shahs, Ayatollahs, and their Generals.

Thus, in this way, all wars are religious. The primary motivation may be political or economic. But how else to convince the macho fighters to put their lives in harms way? By reassuring them in a belief of God Almighty who would reward them in a Paradise with unlimited wine (wealth), women (wives), and song (entertainment). What cannot be had on earth is made into a hopeful reassurance of their availability in heaven—an appealing message to the masses who are degraded, deprived and oppressed—if not, the fearful belief of a horrible Hell is threateningly resonated to compel obedience.

The unity of independent nations is in the realization of their interdependent survival. Until the approach to education, available world-wide, is devoid of an exploitive agenda, and, liberatingly guided by universal ethics and the transcendent spirituality of our altruistic aspirations, such as truth, compassion, kindness, benevolence, courage, forgiveness, justice, fortitude, peace, honesty, service, and the ordering beauty of other selfless endeavors, then could we hasten the day when we can truly live in freedom, responsible and secure, among trustworthy human beings, anywhere in the world. ~ Δ ~