Sunnis and Shi‘is have more in common than what appears to casual observers.

The Origins of The Concepts of Shi‘ism and Sunnism

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Introduction

Following the demise of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), religious sectarianism did not exist in Islam. There was neither Shi‘ism and Shi‘a Islam, nor Sunnism and Sunni Islam. The two concepts were the products of subsequent times and subsequent generations. Back then, there were only pristine Islam, the best generation of Muslims (sahabah or the companions), the exemplary nascent Muslim society, and all the problems that the people were attempting to come to terms with and successfully triumph over following the departure of their Prophet (pbuh). Definitely, this entire group of Prophet’s companions, with a hierarchy of merits which they all shared, by the texts of both the Qur‘an and the Prophet’s tradition, were the best community that has ever lived and will ever come to live.

Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) spoke much about the virtues of following jama‘ah (the majority, or consensus of the Ummah or community), the Qur‘an and his Sunnah, the last component signifying the way Islam was to be perceived, lived and practiced as taught and shown by the Prophet (pbuh), the most excellent role model for the faithful. At the same time, both the Qur‘an and the Prophet’s Sunnah in most uncompromising terms warned against disunity, schism and sectarianism, that is to say, against anything that may imperil the dignity and honor of the people. However, that which was feared most, and warned against, was predestined to come. Its coming was certain and unavoidable, on account of a wisdom whose profundity, for specific reasons, God concealed and did not make accessible to all. Its coming, furthermore, signified the most challenging test, or trial, which the community of the final Messenger to mankind was

1 "pbuh" stands for "peace be upon him" which the Muslims are strongly advised to utter whenever a reference to the Prophet Muhammad is made.