

Traditions

Shi'i Muslim scholars rely solely on The Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad as narrated by the 12 Imams and reported by their companions as sources of legislation. It is often mentioned that *Reason* is another source of legislation in Shi'i verdicts but this method in fact can't be used independently but rather in conjunction with the 2 above mentioned sources. Other methods such as the consensus of scholars on a certain verdict are used exclusively as supporting evidence for the validity of the verdict. No other sources are considered by Shi'i scholars to derive verdicts.

A certain class of Shi'i scholars dedicate themselves to a lifelong study of the above sources for the sole purpose of reaching the degree of *Ijtihad*, which is the qualification and ability derive verdicts based on these sources. Only a handful of scholars are able to reach this degree due to the stringent rules applied to this specialization, and the long term commitment needed. These *Mujtahids* become jurists who derive verdicts that deal with matters of conduct and the laws of Islam. They leave matters of belief and theology to other specialists. Shi'i Muslim individuals rely on *Mujtahids* for the interpretation of the laws but may not defer to anyone else, including scholars, any matters of faith and their relationship with the deity. Every Shi'i Muslim is required, on his own, to investigate and arrive at the conclusions that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His Messenger. They also must come to believe, on their own, the necessity and infallibility of the Quran and the 12 Imams, the Day of Judgments, and other fundamentals of the faith.

Shi'is pride themselves in having a solid chain to narrate traditions from Prophet Muhammad. They call this the "Golden Chain" . It is a reference to the fact that each narration from any of the twelve guided Imams start with one Imam who repeats what his father said, who also repeats what his father said until they reach the first Imam, Ali Ibn Abu Talib, who narrates from the Prophet, who receives revelation from Allah through the archangel Gabriel.

Yet Shi'is do not hold tradition in the same manner that Sunni sects do. The main source of legislation for Shi'is is the Quran, then tradition. But according to them, if tradition contradicts the Quran then it must be discarded as evidence. Furthermore, Shi'i scholars give little credence to narrations that come from Sunni sources, and only cite such narrations if used in debate with Sunni schools of thought. Comparatively, Shi'is do not hold any of their four books of narrations as "*Sahih*" as Sunnis do with their six books, as Shi'is acknowledge that these four books contain "*Da'if*" or weak narrations. "*Sahih*" means accurate or genuine.

Narrations, according to Shi'is, are used in conjunction with the Holy Quran to support the set of beliefs that Muslims behold to. They are also used to label all actions according to one of the following categories:

1. Permitted: Those actions that are permitted to perform without an obligation to either perform or avoid them. Such as driving a car.
2. Prohibited: Those actions that are not allowed to be performed. Performing such actions is considered a sin that is worthy of punishment by Allah unless one repents from further

committing or performing them. Some of these actions may be punishable in accordance with Islam's penal law such as murder, theft, forgery, etc. Others, like lying, visually observing what is prohibited, or backbiting, may not be subject to penal punishment unless it can be proven that material harm was done to oneself, others, or the society in general.

3. **Obligatory:** Those actions that must be performed by every devout Muslim. Shi'is believe that every human being, whether Muslim or not, is obligated to conduct themselves in accordance to Allah's commands. If someone doesn't do so because of their differing belief system then the penal law may not apply to them unless their actions are harmful to the rest of the society. For example, a liberal Christian may not believe that homosexuality is forbidden and thus advocates its permissibility in a Muslims society. In this case, Islam's penal law would prohibit this individual from such advocacy and may allow for his punishment if he insists on such actions. Other obligations that Muslims must perform are the daily prayers, charity, kindness to others especially one's nearest of Kin and neighbors, etc.
4. **Recommended:** Those actions that are recommended to perform and one is rewarded for performing them but is not punished for abandoning them. For example, it is recommended to perform extra payers, pay more charity than is prescribed by Islam, or to visit friends frequently within reason.
5. **Discouraged:** These are actions that one is discouraged from performing them but is rewarded for avoiding them. For example, one is discouraged from over eating, or sleeping too much.

However, Shi'i Muslims will not base their actions on reading any specific narration regardless of its authenticity. Instead, they leave the act of searching through narrations and those verses that relate to them to the scholars. According to Shi'is, only scholars are qualified to distinguish between the various categories of traditions and decide what is applicable. A remarkable difference in the daily conduct of Shi'is as compared to their Sunni brethren is that you will never find a Shi'i Muslim who cites a tradition to support a certain action that he too while it is almost a daily occurrence among Sunni Muslims. This is because Shi'is believe that traditions are only used to explain the Holy Quran and are not parallel to it.

Further, traditions have different categories of authenticity. They are:

1. *"Sahih"* (not be confused with Sahih Books) or correct traditions. These are traditions wherein all of the narrators are proven to possess noble characters such as justice, honesty, and piety.
2. *"Hasan"* or good traditions. These are traditions wherein narrators are followers of Twelver Shi'i Imams but not all the noble traits of some of the narrators have been proven.
3. *"Muwathaq"* or reliable (sometime these are called strong narrations. These are traditions that are narrated by narrators wherein a non-Twelver Shi'i is among them but whose noble traits have been verified by Twelver Shi'i experts.
4. *"Da'if"* or weak traditions. Having one or more people in the chain of narrators in whose case no supporting testimony is available to prove the existence of the above traits in them.

Shi'i Muslims base all of their books of traditions on four major works. These books contain the vast majority of traditions and have been used by later scholars as the basis for significant works of tradition that came to play a large role in Shi'i thought. These four books are:

1. Al-Kafi of Al-Kulayni
2. Man La Yahduruh Al-Faqih, Madinatul Al-Ilm of Al-Saduq
3. Al-Tahdhib of Al-Tusi
4. Al-Istibsr of Al-Tusi

The number of traditions that Shi'i Muslims count in their books is a fraction of those that exist within the six books of tradition of the Sunni schools. This is due largely to the fact that Shi'is have always been a minority group within Islam, and that the 12 Imams set stringent guidelines for what can be narrated.

Traditions are a major source of legislation for Shi'i Muslims and are used to explain and support the Quran. The books of tradition, both Sunni and Shi'i can be equated to the books which comprise the Bible. Some of the traditions are authentic while others were forgeries. Muslim scholars consider it one of their primary tasks to sort out that which is reliable from forgeries.