

Introduction to Sects (part 2 of 2)

Description: An introduction to sects attributed to Islam. Part 2 discusses some of their signs and gives a brief overview of some of the widespread ones in the West.

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Published on 23 Apr 2012 - Last modified on 25 Jun 2019

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Lesson Objectives

- To understand some of the signs present in sects.
- To know some of the more widespread sects in the West.

Arabic Terms

- *Hadith* - (plural - *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Hajj* - A pilgrimage to Mecca where the pilgrim performs a set of rituals. The *Hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, which every adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their life if they can afford it and are physically able.
- *Sahabah* - the plural form of "Sahabi," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.
- *Sunnah* - The word Sunnah has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

Signs of Deviant Sects

While there is no easy way to tell who belongs to what sect, the following are some guidelines that warrant caution:



1. Disregard for proofs and evidences based on the Quran and *Sunnah*.

2. Speaking badly about the *sahabah* (companions) of the Prophet.
3. Following personal desires and putting them ahead of the Quran and *Sunnah*.
4. Not paying attention to Islamic Monotheism and hating those who do.
5. Creating division among the Muslims.
6. Rejecting the teachings (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad, claiming the Quran is sufficient.
7. Putting another person (usually the leader of the sect) at the same level of Prophet Muhammad in terms of love, respect, and obedience.
8. Hating the scholars of Islam.

Examples of Sects Influential in the West

As mentioned earlier, not all sects are equal. Even within a sect, there are sub sects that vary greatly in their teachings. Keeping this in mind, below is a brief discussion of some sects:

1. Ahmadis^[1]

Ahmadis or Qadiyanis are a missionary-oriented sect of Indian origin, founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908). The Qadiyanis currently have a presence in many countries, including most Western countries. Their world wide numbers are estimated as high as 10 million. Even though their headquarters are in Pakistan, they have a strong presence in London, UK.

2. Ismailis

Also known as “Sevener Shi'ites.” The Ismailis reject the Quran and all forms of prayers found in the main Sunni Islamic tradition. This frees them from obligations such as prayer, fasting, and hajj. They are mostly located in Pakistan, North-west India and the Chinese province of Sin-Kiang. The Khojas, a sub-sect, are mainly to be found in Gujarat, India. There are also Khoja communities in East and South Africa. They are also found in the Western countries. Most Ismaili businesses put the picture of Prince Karim Agha Khan, their leader, at a prominent place in their shop.

3. Bahais^[2]

Bahais follow the teaching of Bahauallah ('splendor of God') (1817-1892). They attract followers by speaking of unity of humanity and the absolute equality of men and women. Bahais see themselves working towards the establishment of a world government which will eradicate extremes of wealth and poverty. The writings of Bahauallah are treated as sacred. It is estimated that there are between 3 to 4 million Bahais in the world today, spread in most countries of the world with the largest concentration in India. In Iran the

Bahais remain the largest minority group with about 300,000 adherents. The international Baha'i center is in Israel.

4. **Shias**[\[3\]](#)

Also spelled "Shi'ites." The "Twelver Shias" believe that, after the death of the Prophet, the Imamate (the political and religious leadership of the Muslim community) should have gone to 'Ali - the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet - and his descendants as a divine right.

Unlike the Sunnis, who perform prayers five times a day, the Shi'ites pray three times a day. The Twelver Shias population in 1980 was estimated to be 73,000,000. They are dominant in Iran, but are also found in Pakistan, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Syria. There are also small Shia communities in the West, one of the largest in Dearborn, Michigan.

5. **Nation of Islam**[\[4\]](#)

The Nation of Islam was founded by Wallace Muhammad in Detroit in 1930. The group believes that a person called Fard Muhammad was "God on earth." It sees Elijah Muhammad as the "Messenger of Truth." Warith Deen Mohammed, the son of Elijah Muhammad, brought the group closer to mainstream Sunni Islam. Some dissatisfied members were led by Louis Farrakhan, who revived the group in 1978 with the same teachings of Elijah. They only allow people of black ethnicity in and believe they are the original race on earth. They are especially popular in the prison system in the US.

6. **Submitters**

Founded by Dr. Rashad Khalifa, an Egyptian computer scientist. Submitters consider Rashad Khalifa to be a Messenger of God. They reject two verses of the Quran, preach the "miracle of 19," and reject the *hadith* and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. They are based in Tucson, Arizona, US, and are prominent on the Internet. They are considered completely out of the folds of Islam, due to their erroneous beliefs.

7. **Sufis**[\[5\]](#)

The most controversial and confusing "sect" would be the Sufis. In the West alone, there are more than 1000 Sufi sects. They are a very diverse group. Some Sunni Muslims adopt certain Sufi ideas, while other sufi orders have close links to ancient mystical orders. Yet, others have developed their own teachings and adapted them to a Western audience. Still others just use the term "sufi" but declare they have no relation to Islam or any religion whatsoever.

Generally speaking, they misunderstand Islamic spirituality and make errors in many key Islamic concepts like proper trust in God, love for the Prophet, and exaggerate the position of pious, deceased Muslims. In terms of rituals, some will hold "Islamic chanting circles" ("*zikr*" circles), religious dancing like the whirling dervishes of Turkey, and keenly celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad.

Endnotes:

[1] For more information, you can view this link: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1736/>

[2] For more information, you can view this link: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/309/>

[3] For more information, you can view this link: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/490/>

[4] For more information, you can view this link: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/656/>

[5] For more information, you can view this link: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1388/>

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