

The Features of the Shi'a from the Perspective of Imam al-Sadiq¹

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ABSTRACT: The Shi'a are those who follow Ali—the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad—and believed in his Imamate and caliphate according to the explicitly teachings and testament of the Prophet Muhammad. In this article, Imam al-Sadiq, the sixth Shi'a Imam, gives advice to his companion Abd-Allah ibn Jundab on the features of a true Shi'a, some of which are those who know God, heed the hereafter, constantly engage in self-reckoning (*muhasabah*), being generous, and treat wrongdoers with respect and forgiveness.

In his advice to Abd-Allah ibn Jundab, Imam al-Sadiq first warned the Shi'as of Satanic traps, and then enumerated the features of his true friends and those of other Shi'as. Some prominent features of the Shi'a from Imam al-Sadiq's perspective are as follows:

1. Attention to the hereafter

Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

¹ Fahang-e Kawthar Journal

The hereafter is so great in their eyes that they do not exchange it for anything... Likewise, they view this world as a poisonous snake and a dumb enemy.²

The true followers and friends of the Prophet's progeny do not think about anything but the hereafter and measure all their actions and behaviours against it. In the eyes of the believers, this world is a means of attaining a great goal, which is the [felicitous] eternal life in the hereafter. The true friends of the Ahlul-Bayt benefit from worldly blessings, but they never exchange the eternal life for the ephemeral worldly life.

2. Becoming familiar with God

Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

They become accustomed to God and are fearful of what the affluent are get accustomed to.³

The believers benefit from Divine blessings, although they do not become dependent on them. Dependence on the worldly wealth leads to one's servitude to material things. The affluent are always dependent on their wealth, but the true Shi'as' hearts find rest in the remembrance of God.

After enumerating these important features, Imam al-Sadiq said, "They are our true friends. Through them, seditions are foiled, and all hardships are solved."⁴

لقد جلت الآخرة في أعينهم حتى ما يريدون بها بدلا... و إنما كانت الدنيا عندهم بمنزلة الشجاع الأرقم و العدو الأعمى

انسوا بالله واستوحشوا بما به استئانس المترفون

اولئك اوليائي حقا بهم تكشف كل فتنه و ترفع كل بليه

Self-reckoning

Imam al-Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

It befits every Muslim who knows us to present his deeds to himself and reckon them so that he may add to his good deeds, if any, and may repent from his bad deeds, if any, so as not to be subject to abjectness and humiliation on the Day of Judgement.⁵

Generosity

O' the son of Jundab! Verily our Shi'as are known for two features: generosity and forgiveness for their brothers in faith.⁶

Performing 50 rak'ats of prayer and observing the timing of prayer

Our Shi'as perform 50 rak'ats of prayer every day and night, and they do not neglect the timing of dhuhr prayer (i.e., they perform the prayer early).⁷

Avoiding quarrelling and shouting

Our Shi'as do not howl like dogs.⁸

Refraining from avarice

Our Shi'as are not avaricious and greedy like crows.⁹

⁵ حق على كل مسلم يعرفنا ان يعرف علمه في كل يوم وليبه على نفسه فيكون محاسب نفسه فان رأى حسنه استزاد منها و ان رأى «
سئته استغفر منها، لئلا يخزي يوم القيمة

⁶ يابن جندب! ان شيعتنا يعرفون بخصال شتى: بالسخاء و البذل للاخوان

⁷ و بان يصلوا الخمسين ليلا و نهارا... و يحافظون على الزوال

⁸ لا يهرون هريرا الكلب

⁹ ولا يطمعون طمع الغربا

Keeping away from the enemies

Our Shi'as do not live next to the enemies, and do not ask them for anything even if they starve.¹⁰

Being exact in their diet

Our Shi'as do not eat eels...and do not drink wine.¹¹

A selection of his other pieces of advice

The positive effects of perseverance

If our Shi'as persevere, they will be hand in hand with angels, the clouds of God's mercy will cover them, and they will also shine like the sunlight, will receive their sustenance from both the earth and the heaven, will be granted by God whatever they request Him.¹²

How to treat sinners

1. Referring to their virtues and refraining from hurtful words

O' son of Jundab! Do not tell the Muslim sinners anything but good.¹³

One must bring sinners hope through using kind words and talking about their virtues; he should also refrain from violence against them, hurtful words addressed to them, and any reference to their slips because such

¹⁰ و لا يجاورون لنا عدوا و لا يسألون لنا مبعضاً ولوماتوا جوعاً

¹¹ شيعتنا لا يأكلون الجرى... و لا يشربون مسكراً

¹² يابن جندب لو ان شيعتنا استقاموا لصافحتهم الملائكة و لاطلمهم الغمام و لاشرقوا نهاراً و لا كلوا من فوقهم و من تحت ارجلهم ولما سألوا الله الا اعطاهم

¹³ يابن جندب لا تقل في المذنبين من اهل دعوتكم الا خيراً

treatments crush their hopes of treading the right path and alienates them from Islam and its teachings.

2. Praying for the sinners' support

Beseech Allah submissively for their support.¹⁴

3. Asking for the sinners' repentance

Repentance constructs men spiritually, and God loves the repentant.

*Indeed Allah loves the penitent.*¹⁵

Repentance is the method recommended by Imam Sadiq in order to be cleansed of sins. The true Shi'as should pray to God for the sinners' regretting their evil deeds and returning to God because "*Indeed Allah is the All-clement, the All-merciful.*"¹⁶

The ways to Heaven

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq introduced three ways to the seekers of Heaven:

1. Following the Imams
2. Dissociating from the Imams' enemies
3. Speaking based on knowledge and keeping silent when they lack it

Everyone who seeks and follows us, does not follow our enemies, says what he knows and keeps silent at an issue unknown to him (i.e., a dubious issue), he will enter Heaven.¹⁷

¹⁴ واستكبنوا الى الله في توبيخهم

¹⁵ ان الله يحب التوابين. The Qur'an, 2: 222.

¹⁶ ان الله هو التواب الرحيم. The Qur'an, 9: 118.

¹⁷ فكل من قصدنا و تولانا و لم يوال عدونا و قال ما يعلم و سكت عما لا يعلم او اشكل عليه فهو في الجنة

The value of silence

Whether you are knowledgeable or ignorant, you had better choose silence so that you are considered patient because silence is regarded as an adornment in the presence of the knowledgeable and as a cover in the presence of the ignorant.¹⁸

Keeping away from the deviating beliefs

Heresies, deviating tendencies, and wrong interpretations of Islam have always threatened Shi'a societies.

O' son of Jundab! Tell our Shi'as to beware of giving up their religion because of deviated beliefs.¹⁹

The signs of powerlessness

The powerless are those who are not equipped with patience in the face of afflictions, with gratitude for blessings, and with ease in the face of hardships.²⁰

The superior deeds

O' son of Jundab! Connect with the one who has severed his relations with you; grant [something] to the one who has deprived you [of something]; do good to the one who has done evil to you; say 'Salam' to the one who has insulted you; be fair to the one who has been hostile to you; and the same way you like to be forgiven,

¹⁸ عليك بالصمت، تعد حلما، جاهلا كنت او علما، فان الصمت زين لك عند العلماء و ستر لك عند الجهال

¹⁹ يا بن جندب! بلغ معاشر شيعتنا و قل لهم: لاتذهبن بكم المذاهب

²⁰ قد عجز من لم يعد لكل بلاء صبرا و لكل نعمه شكرا و لكل عسر يسرا

forgive the one who has oppressed you so that you may learn a lesson from God's forgiveness. You see that the sun created by God shines on both the righteous and the evil and it rains on both the righteous and the evildoers, don't you?²¹

The pillar of Islam

The last sentence of Imam Sadiq's advice to Jundab concerns the importance and value of love for Ahl-ul-Bayt:

There is a pillar for everything, and the pillar of Islam is the love for us – the Ahlul-Bayt.²²

يا بن جندب! صل من قطعك، واعط من حرمك، و احسن الى من اساء اليك، و سلم على من سبك، و انصف من خاصمك،²¹
واعف عن ظلمك، كما انك تحب ان يعفى عنك، فاعتبر بعفو الله عنك، الا ترى ان شمسك انشرقت على الابرار و الفجار و ان مطره
ينزل على الصالحين و الخاطئين
لكل شئىء اساس و اساس الاسلام حبنا اهل البيت²²