

Invitation for a public discussion about Shiaism

Q: Assalam-o-Alykum, After reading many of the answers to questions about Shiaism on your website, I was amazed at how far off your scholars are from knowing what the SHIA actually believe and teach. It is one thing to know the surface beliefs and another to know the reasoning and true implications of those beliefs. The only way to learn about the SHIA is to actually talk to SHIA scholars who teach the religion of the Ahl-ul-Bayt. I could arrange a meeting between your honorable Ulama and one or more SHIA Ulama so we can have a polite, Islamically conducted public discussion. In this way we can clear up any misconceptions that the two schools might have about each other and also to further our knowledge about the diversity of the Muslim Ummah. Also those who have questions about this issue can hear answers firsthand from the religious leaders of both schools. This would be beneficial for all who attend, scholars and students alike. Please email me back as soon as possible. Assalam-o-Alykum.

A: Wa Alykum Assalam Wa RehmatULLAHi Wa Barakatuhu.

The amazement that the writer of this letter expresses is at the perceived dichotomy between what he is led to think the SHIA believe and what we glean from studying the most essential SHIA sources of knowledge. A counter suggestion should be made to him that instead of arranging a meeting between Shia and Sunni Ulama, he should try to get from the Shia Ulama with whom he is in contact an explanation as to why there is this apparent disparity between the picture presented by the Shia sources, and the views he believes the SHIA hold. The meeting he asks for will, for geographic reasons, not be practical. But we will be prepared to enter into e-correspondence, as our schedules allow.

In my online experience I have come across many a zealous Shia, or Shia sympathizer who labors under the notion that "if only the Ulama of the Ahl-e-Sunnah could know what the SHIA REALLY believe..." With sympathizers this is usually on account of having read one or two books in which Shiaism puts its best foot forward, or having listened to an expurgated lecture or two. As soon as the realization dawns upon them that there is much more to it than what they imagined, the venture of a Sunni-Shia "interfaith" dialogue fizzles out into non-existence.

Be that as it may, I suggest that their bluff be called by accepting the suggestion, and inviting a Shia scholar into an exchange of e-correspondence. However, the parameters of the discussion must be clearly spelt out. It will strictly deal with "misconceptions" Sunnis allegedly have about the SHIA. These discussions tend to start with a topic that is innocent enough, just to end up back with the Hadith-e-Qirtas, the Ayat-at-Tathir, the Hadith Al-Kisa or the Mathalib of the Sahabah (r.a).

Wassalam.

Sheikh Taha Karaan.