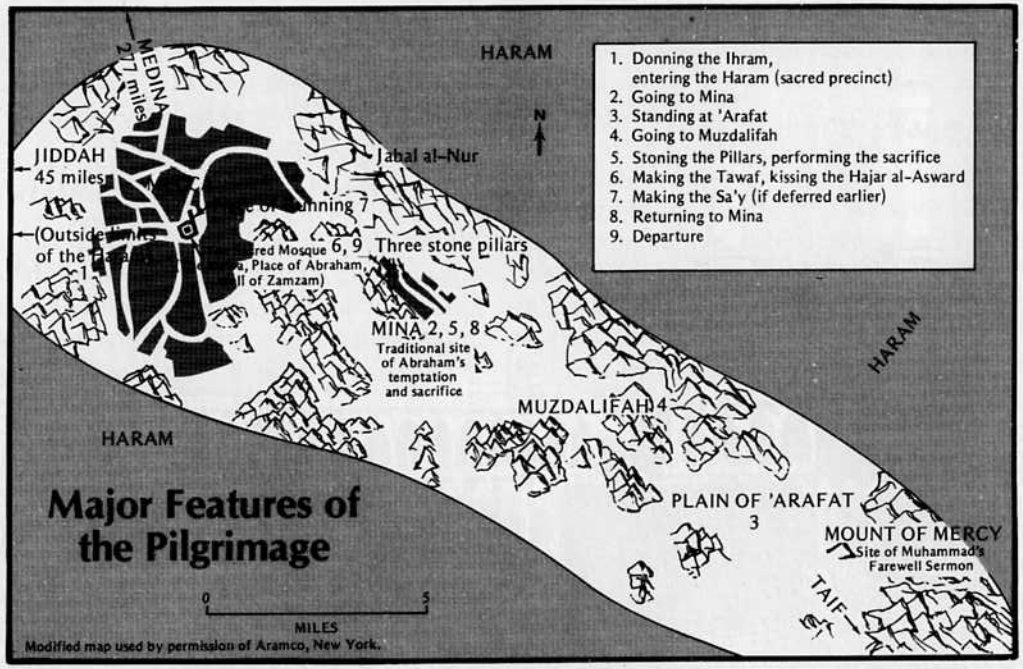


spots, searching desperately for water for her thirsty son. The spot during her quest when water miraculously sprang forth is called the Well of *Zam-Zam*. It is now enclosed in a marble chamber, and pilgrims draw water from it to drink and take home to share with others as a symbol of God's mercy and care.

The next ritual takes the pilgrims from Mecca to Mina, a few miles away. After spending the night there, they proceed to the plains of Arafat. There the whole day is spent in remembrance, meditation, and prayer, and the pilgrims remain standing for as long as they can. In fact, the ritual is called "the Standing," and the pilgrimage cannot be considered complete without its performance. Just before sunset, everyone proceeds to Muzdalifah, a place between Arafat and Mina, where they spend the night.

Before daybreak the next day, the pilgrims leave to return to Mina. There they participate in a ceremony of stoning three pillars. The pillars symbolize evil, and the stoning, an act of repudiation. Tradition also recounts that the stoning has its roots in Abraham's rejection of Satan, who tried to persuade him to disobey God's command to sacrifice his son.

After this event, the pilgrims prepare for the festival of *'Id al Aḍha*, the Festival of Sacrifice. In commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, the pilgrims ritually slaughter a sheep, goat, or camel and give away a portion of the meat to the poor. Muslims all over the world celebrate the same event by performing an identical sacrifice, thus uniting in spirit to honor the end of the Pilgrimage. The pilgrims now gradually begin to resume their normal lives, but must await the final act of circling the *Ka'ba* seven times before they can no longer be considered in a state of *ihram*. After the circling, the pilgrims worship at a location called "the Place of Abraham" that is also within the courtyard of the mosque. The Pilgrimage is now completed and each pilgrim can be honored by the title of *hajji* for men and *hajjiyah* for women, a designation that brings much respect in the various communities to which the pilgrims now return.

The Pilgrimage is a dramatic reenactment of the founding of Islam. Historically, these rituals were performed by the Prophet Muhammad. But the rituals also remind pilgrims of an earlier time, the founding of the *Ka'ba* by Abraham as a sanctuary in which to worship God. Thus, the pilgrims are taken farther back into history, where the roots of Islam are traced in God's communication with Abraham. At the same time the state of *ihram* puts each pilgrim in a state of equality with all other pilgrims, affirming a sense of oneness and fellowship. Within the precincts of the *Ka'ba,* the pilgrims affirm the Quranic concepts of a God who has communicated with humans from time immemorial and of a community that is drawn from all over the world, of which each pilgrim is an integral part. The days of the *Hajj* mark a separation of the individuals from their daily lives to which they can now return with a renewed sense of commitment to God and to the *Ummah,* whose founding experiences they have witnessed and shared during the pilgrimage.

Other Significant Practices and Places

In addition to the practices of Islam mentioned above, Muslims observe and honor several important days and places because they are referred to in the Quran and are linked to the Prophet's life.

Besides the *Ka'ba* and the sacred places around Mecca, importance is given to the cities of Medina and Jerusalem, called *al-Quds,* "the Holy," in Arabic. Muslims revere Medina as the place that offered Muhammad safety and a home, as the city in which the *Ummah* was established, and as the site of the Prophet's mosque and tomb. Jerusalem is significant because it was the first point of orientation of prayer for the early Muslims. During Muhammad's early preaching in Mecca, the Quran enjoined Muslims to face in the direction of Jerusalem when praying. Later, the direction was changed to the *Ka'ba* in Mecca. The city is also associated with the "Farthest Mosque" referred to in connection with an event described in the Quran as the *miraj,* a journey into heaven by Muhammad (17:1). This night is commemorated by Muslims at special gatherings. Jerusalem is also the location of one of the earliest and best-known sites in Islam, the Dome of the Rock. This site is sacred to Muslims because it recalls Abraham, David, Solomon, and Jesus, as well as being the place associated with Muhammad's *miraj,* thus establishing a point of continuity among the great prophets sent by God and relating Muslims to the "People of the Book."

Two major festivals have already been referred to in connection with the month of fasting and the pilgrimage. Muslims also celebrate the birthday of the Prophet with great rejoicing and prayers. See Table 9–1 for a more complete description of the Islamic calendar.

LIFE IN THE UMMAH: *SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND MORAL ORDER*

The *Ummah* provides the setting or context in which Muslims practice Islam. The practices described above are acts of individuals set in a context that enables each Muslim to interact with fellow Muslims. In addition to this interaction at the level of ritual observance, the Quranic and Islamic tradition also provide a framework within which other

TABLE 9–1.
*The Islamic Calendar**

Month		*Special Days*
Muharram	1	New Year
	10	'Āshūrā'
Safar		
Rabi al Awwal	12	Birthday of Muhammad
Rabbi al Thani		
Jumada al Awwal		
Jumada al Thani		
Rajab	27	The night of Mi'rāj
Shaban		
Ramadan		The month of fasting
Shawwal	1	'Īd al Fiṭr
Dhu-l-Qaddah		
Dhu-l-Hijjah	10	'Īd al Aḍḥā

* The Islamic year is a lunar year, with twelve months, each calculated from new moon to new moon. Thus, it has no fixed relation to other calendars like that of the Common Era.

social and personal aspects of daily life are defined. It is in this sense that Islam can be said to address the totality of human life, so that the *Ummah* is not merely a religious community in the strictest sense of the word, but also a political, economic, moral, and social order. The word most often used in the Quran to define this totality of religious perspective is *din,* translated as "religion." This *din* as expressed in Islam consists of responding to God's will in all spheres of human life; its formal aspects are encompassed in a concept that reflects the idea of the "right path" that fulfills these comprehensive goals of organizing society. This concept is that of the *Shariah.*

The Shariah

The basis of political, moral, and social life in Islam is defined by the *Shariah,* often translated as "law" but having the connotation of the total sum of duties, obligations, and guidelines for the *Ummah.* Within a century of Muhammad's death, Islam spread very quickly outside Arabia; it is therefore necessary to understand the process of growth before looking in detail at how the concept of *Shariah* came to be developed in the Muslim community.

The Muslim Conquests. The conquests undertaken by Muslims after the death of the Prophet represent a spectacular military achievement. Within less than one hundred years, the area under Muslim rule stretched from the Atlantic to India, including most of what once was under Byzantine and Sassanian rule. The conquest of these territories carved out the central domain of what was to become the world of Islam. The initial period of conquest was followed by a long period during which Muslim rule was consolidated.

After the death of Muhammad, all territories were ruled from Medina by successors of Muhammad known as *caliphs.* The early Muslim community believed that such leadership was necessary to ensure continuity, preservation, and spread of the Islamic message. After the death of the first four caliphs, who are considered by most Muslims as model rulers, a series of Muslim dynasties came to rule the various conquered territories. During these conquests Muslims also attempted to spread their faith. Quranic and Prophetic practice required that the people of conquered territories be offered the option of converting to Islam or remaining true to their own traditions. If they chose to remain in their traditions, they became *Ahl al Dhimma* (people protected under Muslim rule), and were given the right to practice their own faith in exchange for paying a tax.

The actual process of Islamization of people in these conquered territories took a long time and was effected mostly through the work of Muslim preachers, traders, or rulers. On the whole the process of conversion to Islam was a peaceful one, although many earlier Western writers on Islam tried to portray conversion to Islam as having been undertaken by force. There were occasions when zealous Muslim rulers destroyed places of worship in certain areas and persecuted non-Muslims, but this was generally an exception to the rule. Most Muslims followed the Quranic injunction, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), and attempted to spread their faith more by example than by coercion.

The Formation of Islamic Institutions. As the territories under Muslim rule grew, it became necessary to organize a common pattern of institutions and rules that would govern the lives of the people. Much of this early systematization and organization was carried out by Muslim thinkers and administrators who attempted to work largely within the framework defined by the Quran and the *Sunnah.* It is the resulting framework that is generally referred to as the *Shariah*—judicial in basis, but it has the wider connotation of a comprehensive system that regulated every aspect of life within the Muslim community and governed its relationship with non-Muslim subjects. At the political level the *Shariah* defined the nature of the Muslim state, the duties and responsibilities of the caliphs, the organization of institutions that would assure the security and well-being of its inhabitants, and the nature of relationships with both Muslim and non-Muslim states. At the social and personal level, it

provided for rules and regulations affecting economic, social, and family life. The *Shariah* also defined in detail the specifically religious duties incumbent on Muslims. For the *Shariah* to be implemented fully, the state had an organized system of courts and judges whose function it was to mediate disputes at all levels and to oversee the workings of the *Shariah* by administering justice through the courts. The individuals specializing in law were known as *fuqaha* or jurists (singular *faqih*), whose task was to define and systematize special legal prescriptions within the *Shariah*.

The totality of political, moral, and social order in Islam was thus given specific definition. It was not meant, however, to be a fixed system of rigid rules and regulations. Within the *Shariah* there was always a wider purpose of *maslah* (the public good), which enabled Muslim scholars to interpret and apply the *Shariah* in relation to existing conditions and places. Several schools of thought developed in various parts of the Muslim world, which applied the *Shariah* differently in cases where human and geographical conditions varied. Some scholars tended to be stricter in their interpretations than others, but on the whole the *Shariah* continued to provide for the world of Islam through its various schools, a common framework and code that gave that world much of its sense of unity until modern times.

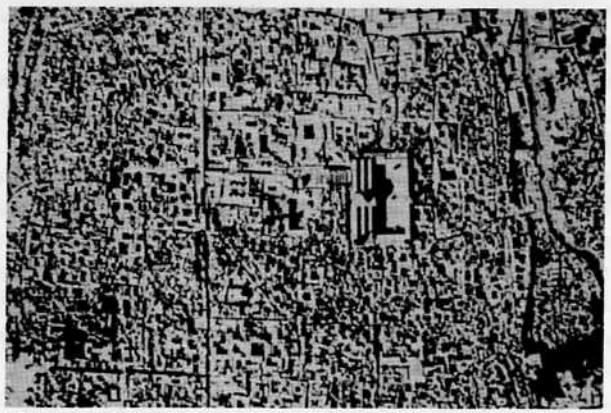
The "Model" Muslim City

One way to understand the influence of such an all-embracing system on daily life within society is to study the traditional Muslim city. Urban environments in Islam have varied according to time, place, and human condition, but it is possible by looking at the city to isolate those common aspects that illustrate Islam's role at the social and human levels. Such environments, though undergoing erosion at present, may still be recognized in the older, traditional parts of Muslim cities.

The Muslim city is by definition the space for an integration of Islamic values in the context of daily life. Its beginnings lay in the organization of a place of worship, which would constitute its center. Within this mosque, the *qiblah* established the point of orientation—toward the *Ka'ba*, the heart of Islam. Each city thus in its initial phase was an attempt to create an environment in which Muslims could put their faith into practice. The mosque was not just a place of worship; it became by extension a place of learning. Adjacent to most mosques were schools or, in the case of larger mosques, more elaborate centers of learning. Learning thus complemented worship, and encompassed a variety of disciplines. Some of these Muslim cities became seats of learning that attracted scholars from medieval European and Byzantine states. These institutions provided accommodation for the students and the teachers, both of whom were paid stipends. Students went through an organized program of study, which varied according to the subjects in which the institution specialized. The famous Al-Azhar mosque and university in Cairo, founded in the tenth century and still flourishing, offered a comprehensive curriculum and recognized students for their achievements by granting them titles. It has even been suggested that the system of gowns worn by teachers and students today in the West developed at this time.

Radiating from the mosque was a vast array of streets, which led to the commercial or market sector known as the *bazaar*, or branched off into dead-end streets that ended in houses. The *bazaar*, often covered, was organized in such a way that shops or boutiques dealing in common products were grouped together. Some commercial products, like meat, fish, or perishables, were kept as far from the center as possible to avoid an unpleasant environment around the mosque. Other products were not found in the *bazaar* because certain categories of food and drink are prohibited in the Quran; among these are pork, the meat of carrion, and all forms of alcoholic drink and intoxicants. The Quran also recommends that the name of God be pronounced when animals are being slaughtered for food.

Besides shops, there were also studios and workshops for artisans and craftsmen. Economic life was represented by the flow of human life, which was a



Old City of Damascus. *Aerial view of the traditional port, showing an urban form linking religious, social, and residential spaces.* (I. Serageldin and S. El-Sadek)

dominant part of city life during the daytime. The rules and regulations governing commercial activity were also defined in the *Shariah* and implemented by officials whose function it was to see that rules were applied. Certain practices such as gambling and games of chance are prohibited in the Quran, and the function of such officials was to see that these prohibitions were followed. Offenders, if found guilty by the courts, were liable to punishment.

Family Life and Housing in the City

Family life is a vital part of the Muslim social order and, based on Quranic injunctions, the *Shariah* defines in great detail the rules affecting marriage, orphans, inheritance, and other aspects of family life.

One of the major changes brought about in the status of the family from pre-Islamic Arab times was the provision of legal rights and status for women; these rights were defined in the context of family life. Female infanticide and unrestricted polygamy, practiced by certain pre-Islamic Bedouin tribes, were abolished.

The Quran permits a man to have a maximum of four wives at one time. However, equality in the treatment of wives is made a strict condition in such cases, as is a due recognition of each person's rights within a polygamous household (4:129). These strictures imply for many modern Muslims that monogamy is preferable. The Quran also recognizes the possibility of marriages breaking down, and allows for divorce after reasonable attempts have been made at reconciling the parties. Marriages are to be accompanied by the signing of contracts in which the husband is asked to specify the amount of settlement to be made to the wife in the event of a divorce. Divorced persons, widows, and widowers are also encouraged to remarry. Another area of family life touched upon in the Quran is that of inheritance.

> From that left by parents and close relations, there is a share for the men and a share for the women. Each one has a designated share, whether it be small or great. (4:7)

A particular concern is expressed for orphans and the disadvantaged. The overriding factor at all levels of personal and social life is a strong sense of justice:

> O you who believe
> Be firm in justice and as witnesses
> for God even though it be against
> yourselves, your parents or those close to you—
> rich or poor.
> (4:135)

It is the notion of intimacy and privacy, however, that dictates the way in which traditional Muslim dwellings are built and organized. Housing is set off from the commercial sector of the city. The concept of *haram* (and *harim,* meaning sanctuary), vulgarized in European literature as the "harem," is essentially a notion of protection because of the recognition that family life and personal life are private but vulnerable. The covering of the interior courtyards of traditional Muslim houses and the traditional clothing worn by Muslim men and women are means of protecting this vulnerability. In urban centers the system of *purdah* or veiling, a practice adapted by Muslims from cultures such as those of ancient Persia (present-day Iran), often became extensions of such practices, marginalizing women and, among certain classes of people in ur-

ban centers, effectively segregating them from public life and activity.

Beyond the mosques, the places of learning, the *bazaar,* and housing, there were fortifications, which exist now as monuments or have disappeared over time. Traditionally, the walls around cities acted as a layer of protection from outside attack and as a definition for those who lived within them. The city also maintained contact with the Bedouins, the farmers, and visitors through waystations built especially to provide rest and refreshment for those from the outside. Nomadic life, fast disappearing in the contemporary world, was a significant part of traditional Muslim life. The city often provided a point of contact between the nomadic and urban life-styles, enabling both to nourish and revitalize each other through a mutual exchange of ideas and energies.

Cemeteries generally fringe the edges of the city. At death, the body is carefully washed and wrapped in a seamless white shroud. The body is placed in a grave with its head facing Mecca and special prayers are said for the soul of the deceased.

Another distinguishing feature of the traditional Muslim city is the presence in it of nature. Most cities are endowed with gardens and fountains, which provide a welcome retreat in arid climates as well as places for social gatherings and family strolls. This quality of the presence of nature also lends the city a certain serenity and a congruence with the natural environment. The city does not appear to dominate its surroundings; rather, it seems to blend into them. The city is also enlivened by the festivities celebrating Muslim holidays and the joyous gatherings that mark weddings, births, and the circumcision of male children, which is a required practice in Islam.

In ideal terms, the physical form of the city in Islam—including the places of worship, work, family habitation, and institutions serving the city—can be said to symbolize the vision of unity in Islam. The architecture and the design, the gardens and the parks all echo the promises of the hereafter described by the Quranic paradise. The physical structures in a Muslim city are therefore meant to reflect the spiritual quality of life and the social and personal values enjoined by Islam.

For many Muslims in Asia and Africa, however, rural and village life still constitute a dominant pattern. In recent times, owing to a combination of neglect and natural disasters (such as droughts), desertification, and deforestation these small villages and nomadic populations have suffered increasing hardship, damaging community life and institutions, sometimes irreparably. Confronted with the deterioration in their built and natural environments, Muslim societies have begun to address specifically ways in which their conceptions of traditional aspects of law and ethics can be broadened to include issues of faith and environment and their impact on Muslim society.

GROUPS IN ISLAM

With the passage of time, the Islamic *Ummah* came to be composed of a number of groups. Each of these represented a synthesis based on a response to the foundations laid down by the Quran and developed in the life of the Prophet. Although the groups reflect divergent views on certain matters of practice and doctrine, it is not proper, strictly speaking, to classify them as "sects" in Islam. The idea of "sects" implies a centrally established body of doctrines or authority from which departures take place. Because no such "centralization" exists in Islam, the various groups may more properly be defined as schools of thought and practice, with no divergence concerning the fundamentals. Rather, they represent differing views as to how these fundamentals can best be fulfilled in the practical life and organization of the *Ummah.*

After the death of Muhammad, the Muslims had to wrestle with the immediate problems of growth and organization. Differences arose over the question of authority in the community. Because there were to be no more prophets, the issue revolved around how best the community could continue to implement the teachings of the Quran and the ideals of the Prophet, and which person was most capable of leading such a community. Some Muslims

felt that Abu Bakr, a respected early convert to Islam and father-in-law of the Prophet, was best suited to this task. Others favored Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet. Eventually, Abu Bakr came to assume this task; no immediate conflict erupted, and the unity of the community was maintained during that early period in spite of differences. Abu Bakr became known as *Caliph,* the term now used to designate the head of the Muslim *Ummah.* Before his death in 634, he nominated another respected Muslim leader, Umar, to succeed him. Umar in turn was succeeded by Uthman, a member of one of the leading families in Mecca. After the Caliphate of Uthman, Ali eventually became head of the Muslim community in 656.

This initial period of the history of Islam, together with the period of the Prophet, has come to be regarded retrospectively as a "golden age." It has been felt that in spite of existing differences, these leaders and the Muslim community strove to remain united, maintained the high standards set by the Prophet, and sought to reflect these standards in their personal lives and in the life of the growing Muslim state.

During the Caliphates of Uthman and Ali, however, differences came to a head and eventually led to a civil war; and out of this conflict emerged the earliest groups in Islamic history. The basic issues in the conflict were twofold: power and authority over the growing Muslim domains; and issues of interpretation of the Quran, as it applied to the needs of a growing and diverse Muslim population.

The Kharijites (Khwarij)

The first of these early Islamic groups is known as the *Kharijites.* Muawiyah, who had been appointed as governor of the newly conquered province of Syria by Uthman, revolted against Ali when the latter became Caliph. During a fruitless attempt at arbitration, Ali was assassinated and Muawiyah seized the reins of power, initiating the rule of a dynasty called the Ummayads, after his ancestors. The seat of this dynasty was in Damascus in Syria. Those Muslims who felt that arbitration should not have been attempted left the army of Ali and came to be called *Khwarij* (those who "left"). It was their contention that no arbitration should have taken place, since the Quran did not allow arbitration in cases where right was clearly distinguished from wrong. In their view, Ali, by agreeing to arbitration, had compromised himself. Their differences with the rest of the Muslims led to much violence and their history was beset with warfare until they eventually ceased to be a factor in Islam.

Only one minor group of *Khwarij* has survived. They continue to represent the tradition of close fidelity to the Quran in matters that pertain to administration and justice, but are not as exclusive as their early predecessors in their relations with others. They are represented today in North Africa, Oman, and Zanzibar on the East Coast of Africa and call themselves *Ibadi.*

Among the other groups that subsequently developed, the two largest and most important are the Shia and Sunni. They represent two parallel syntheses that have emerged to provide frameworks for realizing their respective visions of Islam.

The Shia

The death of Muhammad marked the end of his prophetic mission. In Muslim belief he had been the last of the prophets, who had completed the divinely entrusted task of making known God's final revelation. In order to discharge his mission effectively, he had combined in his person religious, political, and military power.

After his death the early Muslim community was faced with the question of how effectively to maintain the sovereignty of the Muslim state and further the cause of Islam. The question involved them in a discussion and dispute regarding the position of head of the newly established Muslim state.

The Muslims who felt that Ali was best suited to assume leadership of the *Ummah* after the death of the Prophet eventually became known as the *Shia.* The word means "followers" and refers to those who gave their support to Ali. During the eighth

century these followers and others crystallized into a group with definite views about the question of authority, which they saw as being intimately linked to the issue of understanding and implementing Islam. They believed that the Prophet had specifically designated Ali as successor before his own death on the occasion of his "Farewell Pilgrimage," and that Ali was henceforth to represent a new institution called *Imamah* (from the Arabic word *imam,* meaning leader). Such an institution was meant to guarantee protection and continuing implementation of the Islamic message, and to assure that that message would continue to be interpreted for the *Ummah* by the person best suited to do so. The *Imamah* was to continue among the descendants of the Prophet, through Ali and Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, in a direct succession. Each Imam would be specifically nominated by his predecessor to be responsible for the community after his death. The Shia, like other Muslims, continued nevertheless to affirm that there would be no more prophets after Muhammad.

This belief in the *Imamah* as an institution to complement and sustain the work of the Prophet Muhammad is integrated by the Shia in their profession of faith, embodied in the *shahadah.* In addition to professing belief in the Unity of God and the role of Muhammad as a messenger, the Shia also profess that Ali, the commander of true believers, is the Friend (*Wali*) of God. Devotion to the Imams thus becomes a cardinal act of faith among the Shia. The Imam is believed also to possess divinely endowed knowledge and the capacity to provide spiritual guidance. This belief reflects the Shia view that in order to understand and implement the Quran and the *Sunnah,* it is necessary that the Imam be divinely inspired. He can thus provide both material and spiritual leadership, enabling Muslims to remain united both in affairs of state and those of faith. The Imams also act as intercessors, as does Muhammad, seeking forgiveness and welfare for persons who have sinned or are dead.

In time, Shia thought developed the view that a true understanding of the Quran was not limited merely to the literal aspects of revelation. There was also an inner dimension to the Quranic verses that could be grasped through the teachings of the Imams. The science of *tafsir,* consisting of the explanation of the outward significance and context of the Quran, was complemented among the Shia by the science of *tawil,* the analysis of the inner dimension and deeper meanings of revelation. In this respect the Shia contributed greatly to the intellectual tradition in Islam and influenced the development of philosophical and mystical thought in Islam.

On the death of Ali in 661, the *Imamah* devolved to his eldest son Hasan and then to a younger son Husayn. The latter is one of the great tragic figures of early Islam. In order to combat the growing and oppressive rule of the Ummayads and to affirm his role as Imam he refused to accept Yazid, Muawiyah's son and appointee, as the head of the Muslim community. Yazid sent troops to forestall any uprising, and in a brutal massacre Husayn and members of his family were put to death at Karbala in Iraq. This event shocked the Muslims, strengthened the opposition to the Ummayads, and rallied support to the cause of the Imams who succeeded Husayn.

These Imams, though constantly persecuted, maintained an active role in the religious life of the community. They contributed a great deal to the developing sciences of law, philosophy, and theology. In particular the sixth Imam, Jafar al Sadiq, played a key role in keeping alive the aspirations of the Shia. On his death the Shia split into two major divisions: One recognized the appointment of his son Ismail and continued to give allegiance to the successors of Ismail; the other supported a younger son, Musa al Kazim. The former group is known as the *Ismailiyya* and the latter as *Ithna Ashariyya.* On occasions, because of the insistence on the rights of their Imams to head the Muslim community and the emphasis on certain esoteric aspects of faith, each of these Shia groups has suffered persecution and been accused by other Muslims of holding heretical beliefs.

Ithna Ashariyya. After the death of Jafar al Sadiq there were six more Imams. The twelfth and last of these was called Muhammad al-Mahdi; he is

Shia Ritual. *A "Twelver" Shia gathering to commemorate Ashura in the city of Ray, Iran.* (Courtesy of Mohammed Torabi-Parizi)

believed to have gone into *ghaybah,* a state in which he is not perceived physically, a state of being hidden from the world. The *Mahdi,* or "messiah," will manifest himself when God wills and restore justice and peace on earth. In the meantime, he is in touch in a spiritual way with human beings, though they cannot physically perceive him. Because this group of the Shia believes in twelve Imams, it has come to be called *Ithna Ashari* ("Twelver").

In the physical absence of the Imam, the community is guided by individuals who strive to maintain and teach Islam. They are called *mujtahids,* or those who strive for knowledge. Those recognized for their additional knowledge and example are given additional titles, the highest among which is that of *ayatollah.* Although it is only on the return of the hidden Imam that the ideal society can be truly restored, the community, through the *mujtahid*s and *ayatollah*s (who represent the hidden Imam), strives to preserve the principles and practice of faith. These leaders receive their training in centers of Shi'ite learning that are found in Iraq and Iran.

In addition to the various Islamic practices, this group emphasizes the traditions and teachings of the various Imams as supplements to the Quran. They attach importance to these traditions and incorporate them into the concept of *Sunnah,* which in their tradition includes the sayings and actions of the twelve Imams, in addition to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. All of these constitute sources for the development of a specifically Ithna Ashari school of law. Acts of devotion to the Imams and visits to their tombs are also significant. Sanctuaries such as Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, Meshed and Qum in Iran, and others play a prominent part in their religious life.

The ritual practice that stands out most clearly, however, is the commemoration of the events leading to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. During the month of *Muharram* this tragic event is depicted through sermons, recitations of poems, and a drama called *taziyah*—all of these practices being vivid reminders of the theme of good combating evil, the righteous sacrificing their lives in the cause of truth, and above all the passionate commitment in tribute to the figure of Husayn, who for the Shia is the embodiment of Islam's struggle for survival and triumph.

The Ithna Ashari School is the largest of the groups within the Shia. Although most of them are in Iran and Iraq, they are represented in many other parts of the Muslim world.

Ismailiyya. As noted earlier, this group differs from the Ithna Ashari by recognizing the line of Imams descended from Ismail, the eldest son of Jafar al Sadiq. The line of Imams continued until 1094, when a further split developed, dividing the Ismailis into two subgroups: The *Nizari Ismailis* gave allegiance to Nizar, whom they believed to have been designated by his father; the other group followed another son, Mustali, after whom they are known as *Mustali Ismailis.* It is the Mustali belief that after several successors their last visible Imam went into concealment. His successors, though hidden, are in touch with the community through a representative known as *dai.* This *dai* acts as head of the community until the appearance of an Imam, also called the *Mahdi.* The Mustali Ismailis live in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and Yemen, and are scattered in small communities in East Africa and the Gulf.

Meanwhile the Nizari Ismailis have continued giving allegiance to a line of Imams whom they believe to be in direct succession from the Prophet and Ali. The present Imam of the Ismailis, Shah Karim al Husayni, is well known as the Aga Khan. The Ismailis, like other Shia, emphasize the spiritual dimension of Islam; but they believe that the Imam cannot disappear from the world and that his teachings and physical presence are necessary not only for understanding and maintaining a balance between material and spiritual life, but to ensure the implementation of Islam in the context of changing times and circumstances. The Nizari Ismailis are in Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, Iran, Pakistan, India, East Africa, Syria, and increasingly in the Western world, particularly in Britain, Canada, and the United States. The emergence in recent times of the Aga Khan Development Network has enabled this Muslim community and its Imam to make significant contributions to the developing Muslim world in the areas of health, education, social development, and the built environment. The programs highlight how private initiatives, building on Muslim values of service and voluntarism, can complement the efforts of governments and international agencies.

Zaydiyya. A final group among the Shia, the Zaydiyya, trace their origin to Zayd, one of the grandsons of Imam Husayn. His followers considered him an Imam and gave allegiance to him and his successors as individuals descended from the Prophet; by their example and military capability, the Zaydis believe, these successors can establish a just state. Most Zaydis are to be found at present in Yemen.

The Sunnis

The Sunnis represent the majority of Muslims. For them, as for other Muslims, the *Sunnah* has a central significance. But because of their particular