

Sunni and Shia Islam: Commonalities and Differences

Mohamed Jawad Khaki

January 23, 2022

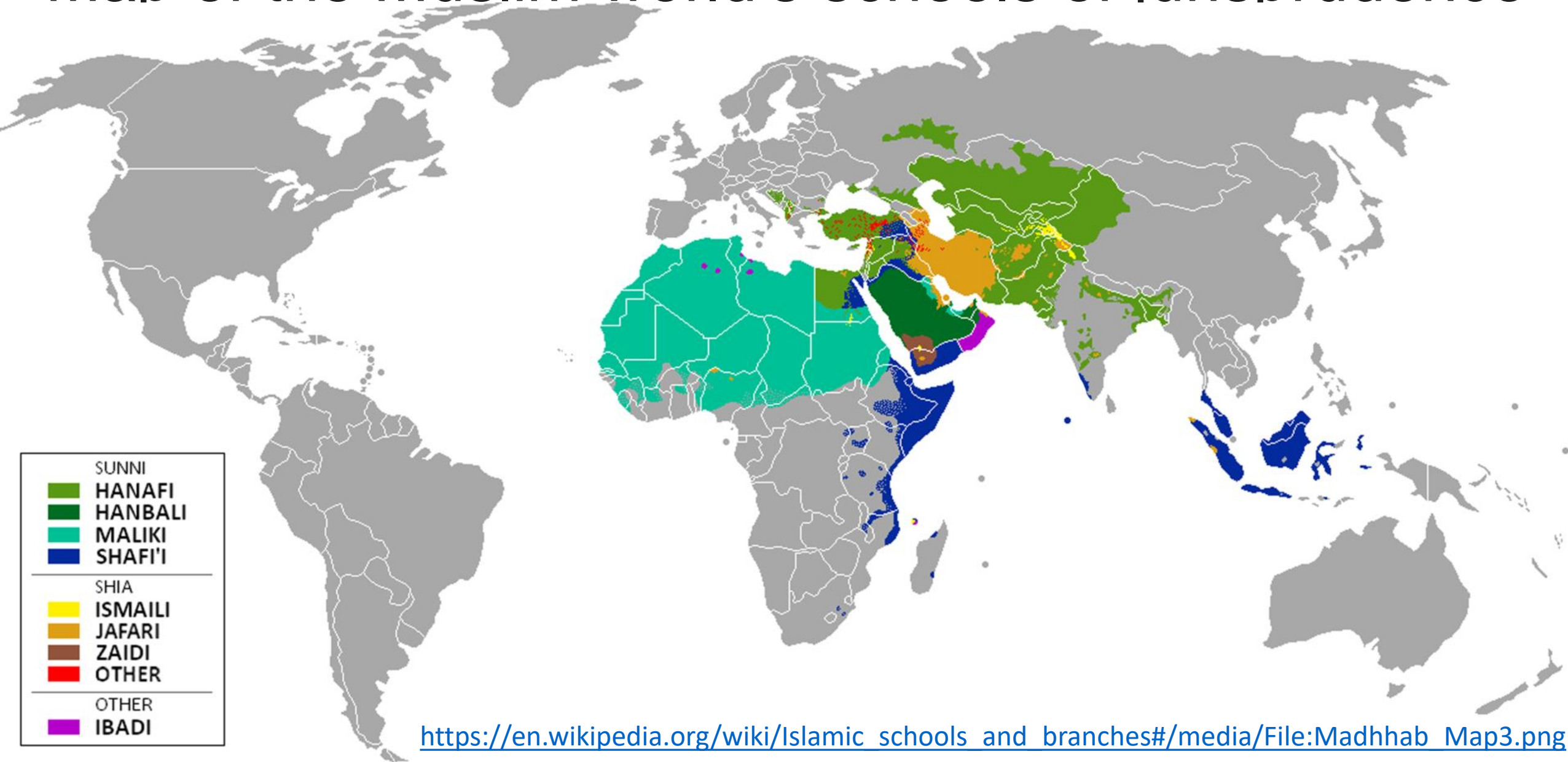
Islamic schools and branches

- There are many different sects or denominations, [schools of Islamic jurisprudence](#), and [schools of Islamic theology](#), or [‘aqīdah](#) (creed)
- Within Islamic groups themselves there may be differences, such as different orders ([tariqa](#)) within [Sufism](#), and within [Sunnī Islam](#) different schools of theology ([Atharī](#), [Ash‘arī](#), [Māturīdī](#)) and jurisprudence ([Hanafī](#), [Mālikī](#), [Shāfi‘ī](#), [Hanbalī](#))
- Groups in Islam may be quite large (for example, [Sunnīs](#)) or relatively small in size ([Ibadis](#), [Zaydīs](#), [Ismā‘īlīs](#))
- Differences between the groups may not be well known to Muslims outside of scholarly circles or may have induced enough passion to have resulted in [political](#) and [religious violence](#) ([Barelvi](#), [Deobandi](#), [Salafism](#), [Wahhabism](#))
- There are informal movements driven by ideas (such as [Islamic modernism](#) and [Islamism](#)) as well as organized groups with a governing body ([Ahmadiyya](#), [Ismā‘īlism](#), [Nation of Islam](#))
- Some of the Islamic sects and groups regard certain others as not truly Muslim ([Ahmadiyya](#), [Alawites](#), [Quranists](#))
- Some Islamic sects and groups date back to the [early history of Islam](#) between the 7th-9th centuries CE ([Kharijites](#), [Sunnīs](#), [Shī‘as](#)), whereas others have arisen much more recently ([Islamic neo-traditionalism](#), [liberalism and progressivism](#), [Islamic modernism](#), [Salafism and Wahhabism](#)) or even in the 20th century ([Nation of Islam](#)).

Schools of Islamic jurisprudence

- [Sunnism](#) (85% of all Muslims) contains several schools of thought ([madhhab](#))
 - [Hanafi](#) school, founded by [Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man](#) (699 – 767 CE)
 - [Maliki](#) school, founded by [Malik ibn Anas](#). (711–795 CE)
 - [Shafi'i](#) school, founded by [Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i](#) (767–820 CE)
 - [Hanbali](#) school, founded by [Ahmad ibn Hanbal](#) (780-855 CE)
- [Shi'ism](#) is divided into two main groupings
 - [Twelver Shi'ism](#) (85% of shias) believe in [the divinely ordained twelve Imams](#), who not only guide the community with justice, but keep and interpret [sharia](#) and the [esoteric meaning of the Quran](#). The twelfth and final Imam is [Muhammad al-Mahdi](#), who is believed by the Twelvers to be currently alive and hidden in [the Major Occultation](#) until he returns to bring justice to the world.
 - [Ismā'īlism](#) get their name from their acceptance of Imam [Isma'il ibn Jafar](#) as the appointed spiritual successor to [Ja'far al-Sadiq](#), wherein they differ from the [Twelver Shia](#), who accept [Musa al-Kadhim](#), the younger brother of Isma'il, as the [true Imām](#). Larger sect of Ismaili are [Nizaris](#), who recognize [Aga Khan IV](#) as the 49th Imam, while other groups are known as the [Tayyibi](#) branch.

Map of the Muslim world's schools of jurisprudence



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches#/media/File:Madhhab_Map3.png

Sunni and Shia – Common Beliefs

- Unity and Justice of God
- Angels
- Prophets
- Holy Books
- Day of Judgment
- Equality of all people before God

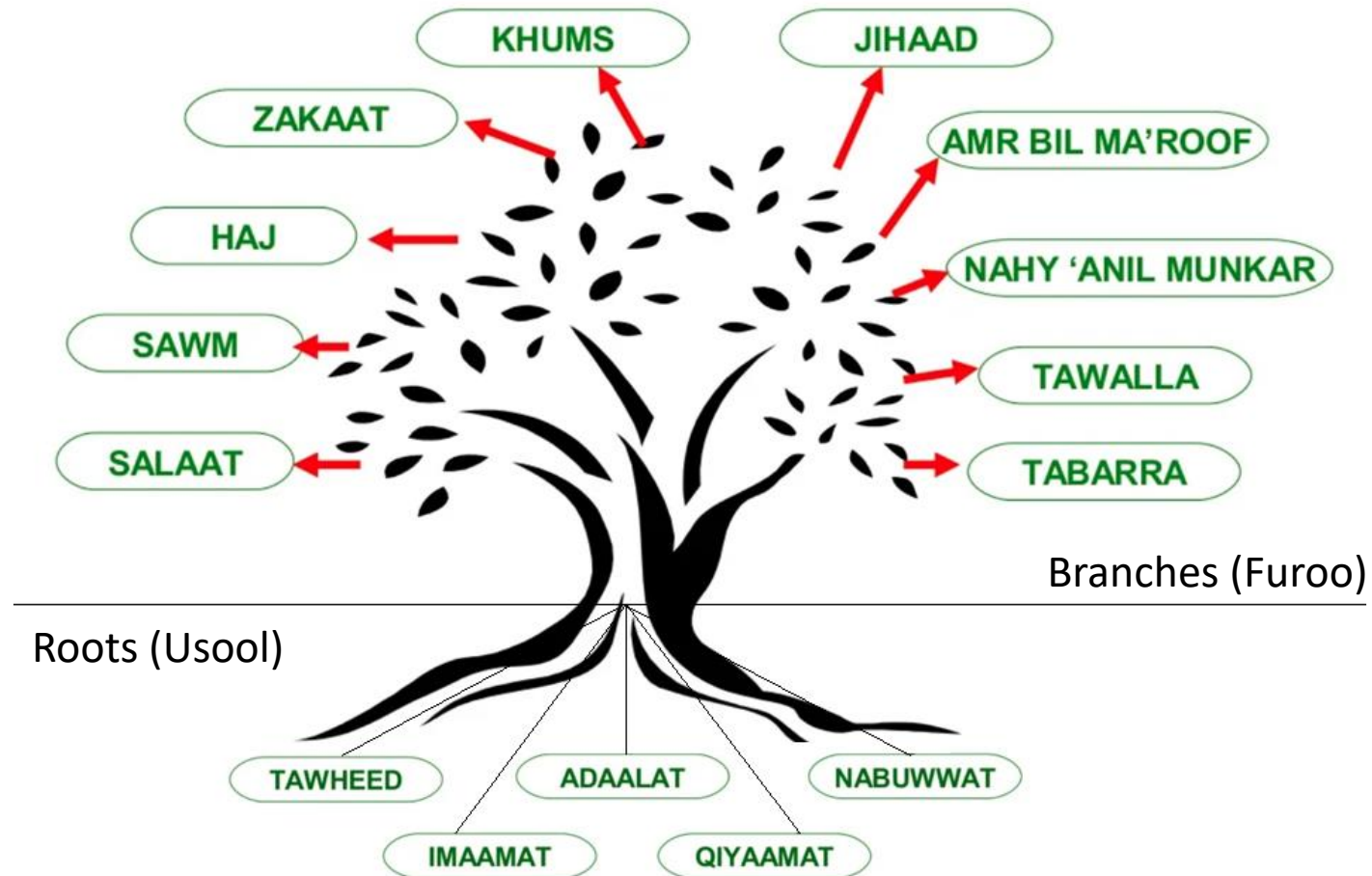
Sunni and Shia – Common Values

- Enjoining the Good, forbidding the Evil
- Self exertion: urged to strive and act
- Pursuing social justice and fairness
- Humility and modesty
- Importance of family as basic social unit
- Pursuing truth and knowledge
- Worshipping God and serving humanity

Sunni and Shia – Common Practice

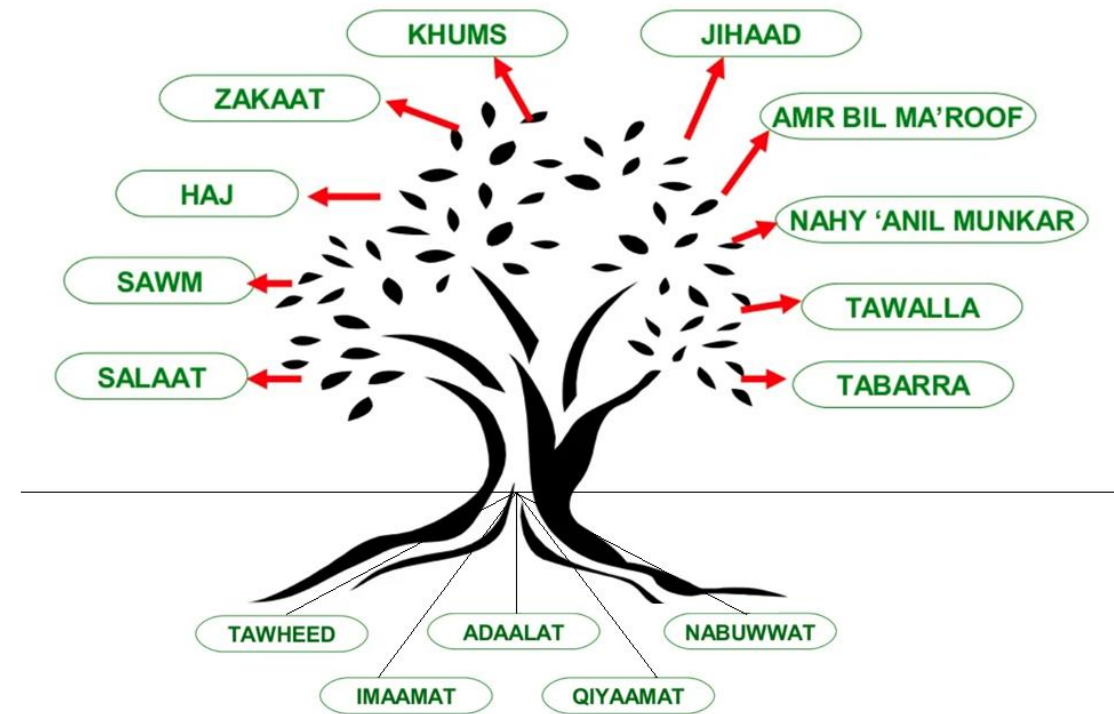
- Shahadah: Declaration of faith
- Salat: Ritual prayer 5 times a day
- Zakat: Giving to charity minimum of 2.5% of wealth annually
- Sawm: Fasting during the month of Ramadan
- Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca, for those who can afford the journey

Tree of Islam – (Twelver Shi'ism)

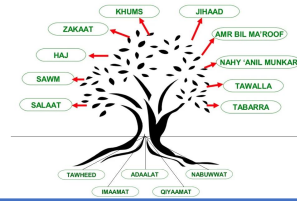


Usool e deen – Roots of religion

- Tawheed – Unity (Oneness) of God
- Adalat – God is Just
- Nabuwwat – Prophethood
- Imaamat – Successors to the Prophet
- Qiyaamat – Day of Judgment



Furoo e deen – Branches Roots of religion



Branch	Meaning	Reference
Salaat	Daily Prayer x 5	Q 2:45: And seek help through patience and prayer,
Sawm	Ramadhan Fasting	Q 2:183: O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous -
Hajj	Pilgrimage to Mecca	Q 2:196: And complete the Hajj and 'umrah for Allah ...
Zakaat	Almsgiving (2.5% of accumulated wealth)	Q 2:277: Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.
Khums	Almsgiving (20% of savings from income)	Q 8:41: then indeed, for Allah is one fifth of it and for the Messenger and for [his] near relatives and the orphans, the needy, and the [stranded] traveler...
Jihad	Struggle	Personal struggle against one's evil inclinations and passions (jihad-ul-akbar). 2 nd type of jihad, (jihad-ul-asghar), is for for self-defense and self-preservation.
Amr bil ma'roof	Encourage good	Q 3:104: And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right...
Nahi 'anil munkar	Forbid wrong	Q 3:104: ...and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.
Tawalla	Keep good company	Befriend and associate with those who love God, Prophets and Imams
Tabarra	Avoid bad company	Avoid and do not associate with who are enemies of God, Prophets and Imams

Sunni Shia Differences

- Shia and Sunni division dates to the death of the Prophet [Muhammad](#) in 632
- It was over question of Leadership: Who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation?
 - Sunni Muslims elected [Abu Bakr](#) from among one of the companions to succeed
 - Shia Muslims believe in divinely appointed leadership of [‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib](#) per Prophet’s declaration
- Leadership differences had spiritual significance.
 - Shia Muslims believe that the divinely appointed Imam is sinless by nature
 - Imam’s authority is infallible because it comes directly from God
- This has led to practices that also have spiritual significance
 - Shia Muslims venerate Imams as saints.
 - Observe annual birthday celebrations and death commemorations
 - Perform pilgrimages to their tombs (Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran) for inspiration and draw spiritual strength
 - In the absence of the [12th Imam](#), shias have a well-defined clerical hierarchy to guide the community
- Sunni Muslims counter that there is no basis in Islam for a class of spiritual leaders
- Some Shias feel animosity towards some companions of the Prophet Muhammad due to early discord
- [States, dynasties](#) and [imperial](#) powers continue to exploit the sunni/shia fault line for divide and control
- Sunn, in Arabic, means "one who follows the traditions of the Prophet"
- Shia, in Arabic, means a group or supportive party of people
- All Shia’s follow traditions of the Prophet. All Sunnis regard Ali as their 4th [caliph](#)
- Most Muslims do not distinguish and prefer, simply, to call themselves "Muslims"

World needs “SuShi”s who build on commonalities and tolerate differences!

Acknowledgment

- The above presentation has been made possible using information readily available on: [Wikipedia](#)