

## Al-Azhar Verdict on the Shi'a

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

What follows is the Fatwa (religious verdict/ruling) of one of the Sunni world's most revered scholars, Shaikh Mahmood Shaltoot with regard to the Shi'a. Shaikh Shaltoot was the head of the renowned al-Azhar Theological school in Egypt, one of the main centers of Sunni scholarship in the world. It should be of interest to know that a few decades ago, a group of Sunni and Shi'a scholars formed a center at al-Azhar by the name of "Dar al-Taqreeb al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah" which translates into "Center for bringing together the various Islamic schools of thought".

The aim of the effort, as the name of the center indicates, was to bridge the gap between the various schools of thought, and bring about a mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of each school's contributions to the development of Islamic Jurisprudence, among the scholars of the different schools, so that they may in turn guide their followers toward the ultimate goal of unity, and of clinging to one rope, as the well-known Qur'anic verse, "Hold fast to the Rope of Allah and do not diverge" clearly demands of Muslims.

This massive effort finally bore its major fruit when Shaikh Shaltoot made the declaration whose translation is appended below. It should be made unequivocally clear as well, that al-Azhar's official position, vis a vis the propriety of following any of the Madhaahib, including the Shi'ite Imami school, has remained unchanged since Shaikh Shaltoot's declaration.

Some people who follow pseudo-scholars in Hijaz may beg to differ; that notwithstanding, what you see below is the view held by the overwhelming majority of Sunni scholars, and not just those at al-Azhar. Let it be known to those who strive to divide us, that their efforts are but in vain.

For the readership's reference the phrase "al-Shi'a al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna 'Ashariyyah" means the Twelver Imami Shi'ite School of thought which comprises the overwhelming majority of Shi'ites today. The phrase "Twelver Shi'ites" is used interchangeably with "Ja'fari Shi'ites" and "Imami Shi'ites" in various

literature. They are merely different names for the same school of thought.

"al-Shi'a al-Zaidiyyah" are a minority among the Shi'ites, concentrated mainly in Yemen located in the Eastern part of Arabian peninsula. For a more detailed description of the Zaidis vs. the Twelver Shi'ites, please refer to the book, "Shi'ite Islam" written by the great Shi'ite scholar, Allamah Tabataba'i, and translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and published by the State University of New York Press (SUNY).

And as for Shaikh Shaloot's declaration:

Head Office of al-Azhar University:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

**Text of the Verdict (Fatwa) Issued by His Excellency Shaikh al-Akbar Mahmood Shaloot, Head of the al-Azhar University, on Permissibility of Following "al-Shi'a al-Imamiyyah" School of Thought**

His Excellency was asked:

Some believe that, for a Muslim to have religiously correct worship and dealing, it is necessary to follow one of the four known schools of thought, whereas, "al-Shi'a al-Imamiyyah" school of thought is not one of them nor "al-Shi'a al-Zaidiyyah." Do your Excellency agree with this opinion, and prohibit following "al-Shi'a al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna Ashariyyah" school of thought, for example?

His Excellency replied:

1) Islam does not require a Muslim to follow a particular Madh'hab (school of thought). Rather, we say: every Muslim has the right to follow one of the schools of thought which has been correctly narrated and its verdicts have been compiled in its books. And, everyone who is following such Madhahib (schools of thought) can transfer to another school, and there shall be no crime on him for doing so.

2) The Ja'fari school of thought, which is also known as "al-Shi'a al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna Ashariyyah" (i.e., The Twelver Imami Shi'ites) is a school of thought that is religiously correct to follow in worship as are other Sunni schools of thought.

Muslims must know this, and ought to refrain from unjust prejudice to any particular school of thought, since the religion of Allah and His Divine Law (Shari'ah) was never restricted to a particular school of thought. Their jurists (Mujtahidoon) are accepted by Almighty Allah, and it is permissible to the "non-Mujtahid" to follow them and to accord with their teaching whether in worship (Ibadaat) or transactions (Mu'amilaat).

Signed,

Mahmood Shaloot.

The above Fatwa was announced on July 6, 1959 from the Head of al-Azhar University, and was subsequently published in many publications in the Middle East which include, but are not limited to:

1. al-Sha'ab newspaper (Egypt), issue of July 7, 1959.
2. al-Kifah newspaper (Lebanon), issue of July 8, 1959.

The above segment can also be found in the book "Inquiries about Islam", by Muhammad Jawad Chirri, Director of the Islamic Center of America, 1986 Detroit, Michigan.

## **English and Arabic text Images**

Dear Muslim: *Assalamo Alaykom Wa Rahmatollah-e Wa Barakaatoh.*

This is the verdict which the great Imam Shaltut, the late head of al-Azhar University, issued concerning the *Shi'ah* school of thought. The verdict is followed by Imam Shaltut's letter addressing a *Shi'ah* scholar.



Head Office of al-Azhar University

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL

Text of the Verdict (*Fatwa*) Issued by His Excellency  
Shiekh al-Akbar Mahmud Shaltut,  
Head of the al-Azhar University,  
on Permissibility of Following *al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyah* School of Thought

*His excellency was asked:*

Some believe that, for a muslim to have religiously correct worship and dealing, it is necessary to follow one of the four known schools of thought; whereas, *al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyah* school of thought is not one of them nor *al-Shi'ah al-Zaidiyah*. Do your excellency agree with this opinion, and prohibit following *al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyah al-Ithna Ashariah* school of thought, for example?

*His excellency replied:*

1. Islam does not require a muslim to follow a particular sect. Rather, we say: every muslim has the right to follow one of the schools of thought which has been correctly narrated and its verdicts have been compiled in its books. And, everyone who is following such sects can transfer to any other, and it shall be no crime on him for doing so.

2. The *Ja'fary* school of thought, which is also known as *al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyah al-Ithna Ashariah*, is a school of thought that is religiously correct to follow in worship as other *Sunni* schools of thought.

Muslims must know this, and ought to refrain from unjust prejudice to any particular school of thought, since the religion of Allah and His Divine Law (*sharyat*) was never restricted to a particular school of thought. All jurisprudents (*mujtahidun*) are accepted by Almighty Allah, and the one who is not *mujtahid* is allowed to follow them; and practice what they prescribe in their jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and there is no difference in that regarding worship (*ibaadaat*) and dealing (*muamelaat*).

Signed,  
Mahmud Shaltut

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His excellency the great *Allamah* Mohammad Taqi al-Qumi:

the general secretary of The League to Bring Together Islamic Schools of Thought  
(*Jama'at at-Taqrīb bain al-Mathahib al-Islamiyah*)

*Salamollah Alaykom Wa Rahmatoh*

Then, it is my pleasure to send your excellency a copy of the verdict, bearing my signature, which I issued on the permissibility of following *al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyah* school of thought, hoping that you document it in the *Jama'at at-Taqrīb*, which we participated in its establishment with you, and Allah grant us success in achieving its mission.

*Wa Assalamo Alaykom Wa Rahmatollah*

Signed,  
Sheikh al-Jaamea al-Azhar,  
Mahmud Shaltut

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

نعم القوي

التي أصدرها السيد صاحب الفضيلة الأستاذ الأكبر  
الشيخ محمود شلتوت شيخ الجامع الأزهر

في شأن جواز التعبد بذهب الشيعة الإمامية

قبل لفضيلته :

ان بعض الناس يرى أنه يجب على المسلم لكي تقع عباداته  
ومعاملاته على وجه صحيح أن يقلد أحد المذاهب الأربعة المعروفة وليس من بينها مذهب  
الشيعة الإمامية ولا الشيعة الزيدية ، فهل توافقون فضيلتكم على هذا الرأي على ما طرأ  
تضعون تقليد مذهب الشيعة الإمامية الاثنا عشرية مثلا .

فأجاب فضيلته :

١ - ان الاسلام لا يوجب على أحد من أتباعه اتباع مذهب معين بل نقول : ان لكل مسلم  
الحق في أن يقلد بادي ذي يد أي مذهب من المذاهب المنقولة نقلا صحبا والدونة  
أحكامها في كتبها الخاصة ولعن قلده مذهباً من هذه المذاهب أن ينتقل الى غيره -  
أي مذهب كان - ولا حرج عليه في شيء من ذلك .

٢ - ان مذهب الجعفرية المعروف بمذهب الشيعة الإمامية الاثنا عشرية طهه يجوز التعبد  
به شرعا كسائر مذاهب أهل السنة .

فينبغي للمسلمين أن يعرفوا ذلك ، وأن يتخلصوا من العصبية بخير الحق والمذاهب  
معيبة ، فما كان دين الله وما كانت شريعته بتابعة لمذهب ، أو مقصورة على مذهب ، فالكل  
مجتهدون مفلحون عند الله تعالى يجوز لمن ليس أهلا للنظر والاجتهاد تقليدهم والعمل  
بما يفرونه في قلوبهم ، ولا فرق في ذلك بين العبادات والمعاملات

صحر رشدي

السيد صاحب المساحة العلامة الجليل الأستاذ محمد تقي القمي

السكرتير العام

لجماعة التفرغ بين المذاهب الاسلامية

سلام الله عليكم ورحمة  
بصورة موقع عليها باضائي من القوي التي أصدرتها في شأن جواز التعبد  
بمذهب الشيعة الإمامية ، وارجوا أن تحفظوها في مجلات دار التفرغ  
بين المذاهب الاسلامية التي أسبنا معكم في تأجيرها ووفقنا الله لتحقيق رسالتها .

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله

شيخ الجامع الأزهر

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