



TAQIYA I. IN SHI'ISM

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The foundations of *taqiya* can be traced back to certain Qur'anic verses, perhaps the most explicit of which is Qur'an 3:28. The exegetes agree that the exception in the verse to taking the unbelievers as *awliyā'* (protectors) when guarding against them in fear refers to *taqiya*; the pivotal word *toqā* (piety) is glossed and even sometimes read as *taqiya* (Ālusi, III, p. 121). Other commonly cited proof-texts for the permissibility of *taqiya* are the verse granting permission for those under compulsion to recant their belief (Qur'an 16:106) as well as the story of the believer from the people of Pharaoh who followed Moses but hid his faith (Qur'an 40:28).

Taqiya holds an exceptional degree of legitimacy in Shi'ism owing to the abundant *Hadith* in its praise from the *Imams* (Majlesi, XXXVI, pp. 569-605). Some widely quoted Traditions state that it is a part of religion or religion itself, and others identify it as a sign of faith. There is also a reoccurring motif in the Shi'ite literature of numerous prophets and friends of God using *taqiya* at critical points in their lives; figures as diverse as Seth (Šit, son of Adam and Eve), the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus* (Aṣḥāb al-Kahf), and Moḥammad's forefathers are cited as champions of *taqiya* (Mo'alleh, I, pp. 11-30). In Shi'ite *exegesis* there are also several *taqiya* related interpretations of Qur'anic verses with no apparent connection to the topic; thus "the most noble of you before God is the most God-wary (*enna akramakom 'enda Allāh-e atqākom*)" (Qur'an



49:13) is creatively reinterpreted as “the most noble of you in before God is the most firm in *taqiya*,” where the multivalency of the word *taqwā* (piety, being righteous, being wary) is drawn upon to support *taqiya* (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 396).

The emphasis on *taqiya* in Shi'ism originates in the difficult circumstances of the early community in the decades after the events of *Karbala*, in particular the tumultuous period of the later Umayyads and early *Abbasids*. As part of their general position of quietism in expectation of a messianic figure who would deliver the community from persecution (see *HIDDEN IMAM*), the Imams practiced discretion on a variety of occasions and urged their companions to do the same. Firstly, they deliberately gave contradictory rulings on sensitive issues and at times publicly dissociated themselves from close companions. Secondly, they urged the concealment (*ketmān*) of mundane and esoteric secrets related to their Imamate and condemned the dissemination (*edā'a*) of those teachings to those considered incapable or untrustworthy (Majlesi, XXXVI, pp. 339-55). Finally, they urged their followers to intermingle with other Muslims in various social and religious occasions and show them courtesy and respect. Despite the considerable stress the Imams placed on *taqiya*, however, it does not seem they deemed it literally a pillar of faith, but as a temporary measure for times when the Shi'ites were under threat (Kohlberg, 1995, pp. 367-68; Bojnurdi, V, p. 54).

Although *taqiya* is often regarded as a shibboleth of Shi'ites, it is incorrect to consider it exclusive to them. The basic principle is agreed upon by the Sunnite ulama, but they tend to restrict its use in dealings with non-Muslims and when under compulsion (*ekrāh*; in general see Sarkasi, XXIV, esp. p. 45; Ālusi, III, pp. 121-26). In contrast, the Shi'ite ulama allow it in interacting with both non-Muslims and Muslims (including other Shi'ites) and practically in all necessary matters (*zaruriyāt*); Makki, II, p. 158; Bojnurdi, V, p. 75). Perhaps because of its ubiquitous presence in Shi'ite history, *taqiya* is a veritable *bête noire* of anti-Shi'ite polemicists; they regularly berate the Shi'ites for exaggerating its importance and the more vociferous of them claim that it is the basis of a Shi'ite conspiracy to destroy Islam from within (Ālusi, III, pp. 123-25; Ebn Taymiya, II, p. 46).

In systematizing the wide-ranging Hadith about *taqiya*, the Shi'ite jurists developed various retrospective classifications. First, they divided *taqiya* into five categories corresponding to the rulings of the *šari'a* (Makki, II, pp. 157-58; Anṣāri, p. 39). Thus, *taqiya* is obligatory (*wājeb*) in cases when its



abandonment causes significant harm, such as 'Ali' b. Abi Ṭāleb's acceptance of Abu Bakr's caliphate (r. 632-34), and illicit (*ḥarām*) when its practice results in widespread corruption in religion; hence Imam Ḥosayn b. 'Ali's refusal to pledge allegiance to Caliph Yazid I (r. 680-83) (Makki, II, pp. 157-58; Anṣāri, p. 39). It is agreed that *taqiya* is forbidden if it involves the murder of an innocent (*lā taqiya fi'l-demā*), although there is disagreement over whether it is allowed to dissociate oneself (*barā'a*) from the Imams, which is ordinarily considered an act of unbelief (Anṣāri, pp. 65-69, Mo'alleṃ, I, pp. 84-92). Another juristic analysis of *taqiya* relates to the motives behind it: there is *taqiya* arising out of fear of a immediate danger (*kawfiya*) and *taqiya* when there is a need to conceal secrets (*ketmāniya*), but not necessarily an imminent threat. A third type of *taqiya* is for the sake of reducing tensions with non-Shi'ites by showing them friendliness (*modārātiya*; Komeyni, II, pp. 174-75, Mo'alleṃ, I, p. 204).

The attitude of prominent Shi'ites before and after Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 regarding the contemporary relevance of *taqiya* might be described as ambivalent. Ayatollah Komeyni, who supported traditional jurisprudence (*feqh-e jawāheri*), forbade its use when it became an excuse for inaction in the face of "deviant tyrants [who] intend to alter the laws of inheritance, divorce, *ḥajj*, and prayer" (Komeyni, II, p. 178). 'Ali Šari'ati, who was highly critical of the seminary (*ḥawza*) approach, also condemned excessive use of *taqiya* as a sure sign of reactionary Safavid Shi'ism (Šari'ati, pp. 83-84). Despite their divergent methodologies, however, neither of them rejected *taqiya* outright: Komeyni wrote a treatise specifically on the topic in which he largely concurred with the opinions of previous jurists (Komeyni, II, pp. 173-207), while Šari'ati argued for a modernist reinterpretation of *taqiya* as a tactic in revolutionary struggle (Rahnema, pp. 303-5). After the revolution, one of the priorities of the Islamic Republic has been fostering a rapprochement (*taqrib*) between Shi'ites and Sunnites, and this goal is even enshrined in the constitution (article 11). Although the policy rests on clear political considerations, on a theoretical level it could be interpreted as a modern application of *taqiya modārātiya*.



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