

## **Strategies for the Rapprochement of Shia Ithna-Ashari and Ismaili Bohra**

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### **Abstract**

This Article, with is entitled Strategies for the rapprochement of the Shia Ithna- Ashari and the Ismaili of Bohra. The Ismaili Bohra are closer than the Ismaili Aga Khanies to the Twelver Shiites. The Ismaili Bohra religious beliefs is rarely discussed in books. We cannot reach the basic principles and the origin of their beliefs; therefore, we cannot reach the methods and solutions of interaction and desirable unity and rapprochement between the Twelver Shiites and the Ismaili Bohra. The rapprochement between Islamic these two denominations is an important issue and Ismaili Bohra is one of the Shiite sects which is existent and functioning and the continuity of interaction of these two sects also has a positive impact in the region because in region they have many followers. The commonalities and differences within the Shiite sects should be resolved so that the rapprochement of the sects is much easier and more fruitful and the Shia sects can come together peacefully for development of the Islamic Ummah. This research will present the common aspects and differences of these sects to providing the ground to get closer to each other and rapprochement which will recreate a social environment that will beneficial for bring development in the whole society and the Islamic Civilization.

**Keywords:** Rapprochement, Shia Ithna Ashari, Ismaili Bohra.

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## Introduction

The rapprochement of sects is mostly aimed at reducing intellectual and scientific differences that the scholars of the two sects can try to resolve religious misunderstandings in a moral-scientific environment, by getting acquainted with each other's principles and sub-principles. Islam, as the most complete heavenly law, has a strong trunk whose components are monotheism, prophecy and resurrection, and the Islamic sects are as branches of this big tree, that all branches and its followers, must acknowledge and abide by it. In order to preserve the principle of this noble lineage with complete coherence and harmony. The rapprochement between the Twelver Shiites and the Bohras in the first stage is an attempt to identify commonalities and similarities and sayings among the sects of Islam and to establish unity, authorship, and history. Understanding as much as possible in the light of those subscriptions. Also, explaining, justifying and interpreting doctrinal, devotional and moral issues, with the aim of revealing the commonalities or common layers in them, is one of the most important tools for success in the matter of rapprochement. In other stages of the approximate activities, the rapprochement can be strengthened based on the common long-term and short-term goals of the same among the Shiite sects. It seems that the great goal of all Islamic sects is the hereafter and eternal happiness of each individual and individual of the Islamic Ummah in the light of the commitment of all Muslims to the program of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Their short-term goal is to provide material welfare and create a platform for comprehensive development through the formation of religious rules in society.

## Definition of terms

Studying and researching a subject and processing a problem first requires the definition and explanation of its basic and key concepts, especially if the concepts used in the title have different uses and terms, therefore, in this section, the definition and explanation of the concepts Rapprochement, Shia Ithna- Ashari and Ismaili Bohra.



## 1-Rapprochement

Rapprochement in terminology according to the World Assembly for the Approximation of Islamic sects, approximation is the approach of followers of Islamic religions to get to know each other in order to achieve religious brotherhood based on certain principles and Islamic commonalities.

## 2- Shia Ithna- Ashari

Shia<sup>1</sup> in the literal meaning supporter, and considers them strong who love the family of the Prophet (PBUH).<sup>2</sup> Shia means sect, party, group, followers and helpers supporters, ummah, friends, companions and colleagues.<sup>3</sup> Shia refers to those who believe in the Imamate and immediate caliphate of Imam Ali (as).

## 3-Ismaili Bohra

### 3-1-Ismaili

The Ismaili is a sect of Shiites who, after Imam Sadiq (AS) disagreed with the Imamate of Hazrat Musa ibn Ja'far, and did not accept his Imamate and believed in the Imamate of his son Ismail, therefore they became famously known as Ismailis.<sup>4</sup> Even now the Bohras are a group of Muslims from the Ismaili Dawoodi branch.

### 3-2-The Word Bohra

The word Bohra, which lexicographers and scholars know the origin of this word from the Gujarati language.<sup>5</sup> The word is derived from Gujarati (vohra) and means trade, because people in this class are often engaged in business and they were called Vohra.

## Rapprochement between Followers of Islamic Sects

Rapprochement means cooperation in promoting and protecting religious commonalities, and to excuse each other about disputes, approximation of Islamic sects is a serious effort to strengthen

1 - Dictionaries have derived the word "Shia" from the root (شيع),

2- Zubaidi, Taj Al-Arous, Vol 11, Page 257

3 - Farahidi, Al-Ain Vol 2 Page 190,193, Ragheb, Al-Mufradat Page 270-271, Johari, Sahah Vol 3 Page 1240-1241

4- Ahmad Ibn Ali Qalqshandi, Al-Ashi Morning in the Industry of Beirut, Beirut Library, Vol 2 p84

5- The official language of the state of Gujarat India



relations between the followers of these religions by understanding the differences between them and eliminating the negative consequences of these differences and not the essence of differences, in other words, approximation of views and harmonization of Muslim positions. According to the World Assembly for the rapprochement of Islamic Religions, rapprochement is the approach of the followers of Islamic sects to get to know each other in order to achieve religious brotherhood based on certain principles and Islamic commonalities.

### **Factors of Rapprochement of Islamic sects**

1- Forming mixed religious schools and institutes from the followers of various sects, such as the four sects, etc., and the Shiite sects (Twelver Shiites, Ismaili Bohras), etc. In any city where there are followers of two or three sects. This has been done in Iran for several years now, and a university has been established for this purpose, and it is hoped that it will be developed and that efforts will be made in Pakistan as well. It is hoped that wherever there are followers of two or more sects, this will be done, which is the most basic factor of rapprochement,

First: the students find common ground among themselves. And second, the heart is convinced that sect differences are insignificant alongside religious commonalities. And thirdly: they can bring their followers closer to guidance of the society in suitable circumstances.

2- A joint monthly publication by scholars of sects in any city where there are followers of both Shiites and Bohras. And this publication will definitely leave its useful effects.

3- The compilation and publication of the common prophetic hadiths that have been narrated through the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and through the Companions, which are either in agreement with the word and meaning or in agreement with the meaning. This book throws a strong stone into the mouths of divisive people.

4- Organizing joint propagation meetings at appropriate religious times such as in the holy month of Ramadan, celebrating the revelation of the Qur'an, the birth of the Prophet (pbuh), Eid al-Ghadir, the martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS) and the like.

5 – Precise identification of allied and different cases between the parties, so as not to be separated by imaginary and unreal

differences.<sup>1</sup>

6- Participating in the sorrowful and joyous occasions of the followers of other sects who live in the same region. Imam Sadiq (AS) has said concerning relations, interaction and dealing with people of other religions.<sup>2</sup>

عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ وَهَبٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لَهُ كَيْفَ يَتَّبِعِي لَنَا أَنْ نَصْنَعَ فِيمَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا وَبَيْنَ خُلَطَائِنَا مِنَ النَّاسِ مِمَّنْ لَيْسُوا عَلَيَّ أَمْرِنَا قَالَ تَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيَّ أَيُّكُمْ الَّذِينَ تَقْتَدُونَ بِهِمْ فَتَصْنَعُونَ مَا يَصْنَعُونَ فَوَاللَّهِ إِنَّهُمْ لَيَعُودُونَ مَرَضَاهُمْ وَيَشْهَدُونَ جَنَائِزَهُمْ وَيُقِيمُونَ الشَّهَادَةَ لَهُمْ وَعَلَيْهِمْ وَيُؤَدُّونَ الْأَمَانَةَ إِلَيْهِمْ<sup>3</sup>

Mu'awiyah bin Wahab narrated that he asked Imam Sadiq (a.s), how do you tell us to do what is between us, between our people, And among our people there are people who do not believe in what we believe.? Imam said, "You look at your followers, those whom you follow, so they do what they do, and by God, they are returning their ills and they witness their funerals and bear witness to them and against them, and they give trust to them.

7- Continuation of approximate conferences such as this conference and its development in other countries, especially in Iraq, because Bohra's travel more to visit the holy shrines and have good relations with the guardians of Karbala and Najaf.

8- Forming councils of the Islamic Brotherhood in order to approximate in any place where a large number of Shiites and Bohras reside, establishing such councils in Pakistan and to prepare for the approximation of both sects in that city. so that the rapprochement council grows more.

9- Paying attention to the commonalities that firstly try to look at the common sources in Bohra's sources. Secondly, the Shiite thought tries to find its documents in the sources of Bohra. Thirdly, when Shiite want Bohra to accept the ideology of Shitte, they must try to use sources of the Bohra sect.

1 - Mohseni, Asef, Mohammad, Taqreeb Madhhab Az Nazar ta amal, P 110

2 - Rajabi, Hossein, Methods of Interaction and Coexistence....p107

3 - Kulayni Osoul Kafi, Vol 4, p. 347



## Practical Solutions for Unity and Cohesion

### 1: Recognizing the Root of the Dispute and eliminate it

Recognizing the causes of division and eliminating them is one of the most important things that will provide the conditions for Islamic unity and cohesion.

#### 1.1- Lacking Knowledge of other Religions

One of the causes of division is the lack of knowledge of the followers of Shiite sects about each other's beliefs, which has led to pessimism and misunderstandings and sometimes to insulting each other, because Imam Ali (AS) says:

قَالَ عَلِيٌّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: النَّاسُ أَعْدَاءُ مَا جَهِلُوا.

"People are the enemy of what they do not know."<sup>1</sup>

And doubts like that, some of which will be resolved by the familiarity, communication and sincere cooperation of sects with each other. Therefore, communication and knowledge of Shiite sects from each other and eliminating misunderstandings will be the best way to bring Shiite sects closer and more solidarity.<sup>2</sup> The lack of knowledge of the followers of the Shiite sects from each other has led the enemies to seize the opportunity and, by publishing division and sometimes untrue material, to ignite the fire of anger and intensify enmity and hatred among the Shiites.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Shiite scholars, while refraining from publishing such poisonous writings and materials written by ignorant and sometimes biased people, have invited Shiite sects to know the Shiite sects, instead of referring to such books and to their own books and references.<sup>4</sup> Because the knowledge of other Islamic sects is obtained through the sources and documents of those sects themselves, not by what others have written about those sects. Thus, there are two factors, "the defect of the Shiite propagation apparatus" and the superstitions among some Shiites in Pakistan and the lack of proper knowledge of Shiite beliefs. Especially the speeches of uneducated eulogists (Zaakireen) cause more

1 - Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmat 172

2 - Gaftar Masoumeen, Prepared and Edited by: Sayyid Muhammad, Abdullah Zadeh, Qom, School of Imam Ali Ibn Ab Yataleb (AS), 1387, vol. 1, p. 67.

3 - Sakhrani Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, Ayeen Ma, p. 16.

4 - Ibid, 1392/7/10, p. 53



superstitions. With great compassion and patience, they will make up for the weakness of our propagation apparatus and seek to know our religion. In any case, there is still time, we must try and provide a well-equipped propagation machine that is both capable of confronting the well-equipped and strong propagation machines of the enemy and is able to introduce the Shiite sects correctly and properly.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.2- Lack of Knowledge about Imamate**

Shiites in the past have done extensive research on the subject of Imamate and many books have been written that began from the time of the Imams (AS) and continue to this day, so the heritage of the Imams about the Imamate is very rich. On the other hand, not much research has been done on the Imamate among the Ismailis, and for various reasons, such as the lack of attention of the early Ismailis to the recording and dissemination of their own beliefs, and the inspection and censorship of ancient Ismaili works by the Fatimids and the destruction of libraries, and the Ismaili scientific centers attacked by the enemies such as the Ayyubids in Egypt and the Mongols in Alamut Iran.

### **2- The Unity of the Scholars of the two Sects**

Scholars and intellectuals of different Shiite sects, Twelver and Bohra, have the most important influence in strengthening the foundations of Islamic unity and cohesion, and in fact, the helm of the ship of unity is in their hands. Shiite scholars, due to their training in the school of Quran and Itirat, as the heirs of the Prophets<sup>2</sup>. And known as the flag bearers of guiding the people.<sup>3</sup> According to Imam Sadiq, they are in charge of protecting the borders of people's beliefs and faith.<sup>4</sup> They have always tried to acquaint people with moral virtues through their good morals and behavior.

In areas where followers of different Islamic sects live together, especially during the Hajj season and the two holy

1 - Ibid, 1392/7/10, p. 17

2 - Kulayni, Osoul Kafi, vol. 1, p. 32

3 - Abu Naeem, vol. 1, p. 346

4 - Tabarsi, 2007 AH, vol. 1, p. 17



shrines, scholars have always been a manifestation of unity and brotherhood, and with their statements, instructions and fatwas, cause stability and calm in seditions and disputes, and because of that the Hajj ceremonies have been going on. According to the Shiite school, all Muslims are equal, and compassion and affection for each other are their common characteristics.<sup>1</sup> رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ<sup>1</sup> According to Qur'anic verses and hadiths, there are many reasons for this kind solidarity: In this regard, Shiite scholars, while considering the issue of Islamic rapprochement and convergence important, have been the way of life of the scholars of the past. In Pakistan, some sects have filed lawsuits against Ismailis, claiming their beliefs are questionable. However, Shiite scholars stated that they belong to the Shiite sect, so the court rejected the request against the Ismailis.

### **3- The Great Arbaeen Congress of Imam Hussein (AS) and its Effects and Blessings**

Every year, the Shiites have a great religion such as the Arbaeen Walk, which has become very glorious and universal. When the Shiites welcome this great and valuable ceremony in this way, others are encouraged to attend such a service. Therefore, we see that other religions and sects also walk, and in this way, the rapprochement between religions and sects is formed. For the Arbaeen pilgrimage of Imam Hussein (AS), based on a hadith from Imam Hassan Askari (AS), the Arbaeen pilgrimage has been introduced as a sign of a believer.<sup>2</sup> Which can be used to create friendship between Shiites and Bohras, and the philosophy of the Ashura uprising was to create unity and solidarity among Muslims. It is a great pilgrimage ceremony of Arbaeen for Imam Hussein (AS) that every year has a larger number of Shiites and Bohras from Muslims of every race and tribe and from far and near who gather in this great congress to visit Imam Hussein (AS) in the ritual ceremony of Arbaeen. Arbaeen in order to bring religions closer and strengthen bonds between Shiites and Bohras by using the elite of Shiites and Bohras with emphasis on maintaining the dignity and honor of the people, can make full use of their

1 - Surah fatah verse / 29

2 - Sheikh Tusi, Tahdhib Al-Ahkam, Vol 6, P 52



capacities and the potentials of the parties interested and paying attention to the synergy and using the capacity of all institutions to attract people from both sides of the Shiites sects and by proper planning and benefiting from its various dimensions and effects. They are able to strengthen the foundations of unity amongst sects, increase their dignity and greatness and overcome the enemies. Also, the presence of great scientific, cultural, political and economic figures of the Shiite world and the Bohras in this great gathering will bring the Shiite sects closer. Therefore, for the Shiite thinkers and Bohras who participate in this community, prepare a special program for them so that the doubts between them will be removed.

#### 4- Avoiding Insulting Each Other's Sanctities

One of the things that can play a positive and constructive role in strengthening the unity and solidarity of Shiites and Bohras is respecting the followers of Shiite sects and other holy things and avoiding insults and disrespect for them. This is so important that the Holy Qur'an forbids Muslims from even blaspheming the sanctities of polytheists and infidels. Therefore, it is enough proof to the Muslims that the Holy Qur'an has called them a single nation, also another reason is that opposition to this verse has no consequence except division and separation. The Qur'an says in this regard:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

Do not curse those who call on other than God, lest they curse God out of ignorance.

Allameh Tabatabai says in the interpretation of the verse:

This verse reminds one of the religious etiquettes that by observing it, the sanctity of the religious community is preserved and it is not insulted, because defending the sanctity of the saints is a human instinct that is always attacked by a person or persons, he takes a stand against it and seeks to defend his sanctities.<sup>2</sup>

1 - Surah 6 Al-An'am, verse 108

2 - Tabatabai, Mohammad Hussein, Tafsir Al-Mizan, vol. 7, p. 332



## Religious and Cultural Capacities of Shia and Bohra

Expressing Ismaili love for the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and Shiite poems such as shrines and pilgrimages to the saints of God have a strong belief, and visit the holy shrines.

Pakistani Shiites set up a special place in the Husseiniyya for the flag of Hazrat Abbas (AS) and people visit that Husseinyah during the week, especially on Friday night .On Friday night, the Bohras and their families visit the Husseiniyyah that holds the flag of Hazrat Abbas.

### 1. Religious Capacities

#### 1.1- Bohras Belief in the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

The belief of the Bohras in the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), especially the five members of the family of Prophet (PBUH), and the great devotion to Imam Hussein (AS) as well as the Shiite themes can be seen in the religious texts of the Bohras. In fact, the role of Shiite wisdom, their beliefs and convictions of this school of thought and most importantly the absolute presence of the fourteen infallibles (AS) exoneration from their enemies, has been repeated many times in their religious texts. Bohras also agree with the Twelver Shiites in many rules of jurisprudence in terms of jurisprudential principles. In this regard, they strongly disagree with the Sunnis. Discussion of analogy (Qiyas), approbation (Istihsan) consensus (Ijma) that Sunnis believe in, and ijtehad in the Sunni sense has never been accepted. In his book, *The Difference of the Principles of Religions*, Qazi Numan has discussed in detail the Sunni principles regarding the rules of the principles of jurisprudence. The main discussion of this book goes back to the Sunni consensus and the refutation of analogy (Qiyas), approbation (Istihsan).

#### 1.2: Holding Birth Ceremonial Anniversary and Martyrdom of Imams (AS)

Holding religious ceremonies, especially mourning the martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS) and holding Eid Ghadir and mourning Ashura of Imam Hussein (AS) are some obvious manifestations of Bohras doctrinal capacities. Of course, the history of the epic of Karbala and the customs of Ashura are also common among the Bohras through recitation of the books that has recorded the events of Karbala, like the Twelver Shiites. Remembrance of the event of



Karbala and mourning for Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions are also among the common socio-cultural aspects between Bohra and the Shiite community. Also, the memorial of Hazrat Abbas (AS) (Bohra women have a special custom for Hazrat Abbas (AS) where they mentioning the suffering of courageous acts of Hazret Abbas (AS)) and programs to honor Imam Ali (AS) among the Bohras are other religious ceremonies of Bohra which are considered.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.3- Areas of Expansion of the Relationship between the Twelver Shiites and Bohras**

In terms of ideology and mystical thoughts, Shiism and Sufism are common in some cases, such as the love of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and the personality of Imam Ali (AS) which both consider to be extraordinary among Shiite and Bohras. Islam can be a common ground for Shiites and Bohras. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention that the stubborn enmity of Wahhabism with Sufism is so much in practice and thought that Wahhabis seek the destruction of Sufism in any way, while Islam has become the identity element of the people of the region with the Sufism approach.

### **1.4- Love and Affection for the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)**

The followers of the Bohras sect, especially in Pakistan, consider the love of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) as a moral duty that creates enlightenment in their current state. And it enables them to reform their morals and behavior. The love of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is a natural thing for them. And they never commit an act that disrupts this love, but on the contrary, bring the deeds to a place that strengthens this love.

According to Bohras, moral action is an action that is due to the love of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) or to strengthen it.



1 - Kanzul al-Walid, p. 224

### 1.5- Intercession of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

One of the good deeds among the followers of the Bohras ways is to appeal and be alone with the memory of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), the pure Imams and Hazrat Zahra (SA). They turn to the Imams (AS) in the hardships and difficult moments of life, and they ask them to satisfy their difficultes, and they also resort to the authorities and scientific. Most sects also resort to their elders. Bohras consider their Da'is (داعی ها) (Imam's representative during his absence) to be appointed. In Pakistan, it is customary for the sheikhs to bury their elders inside the places that has a significant meaning in worship like close to mosque and other places which brings remembrance of ALLAH. Visiting their shrines are among the religious capacities.



## Conclusion

According to this research, it has been tried to pay more attention to solutions for the approximation of sects at reducing intellectual and scientific differences that the scholars of the two sects can try to resolve religious misunderstandings in a moral-scientific environment, by getting acquainted with each other's principles and sub-principles. Ismailis scholars, including Qazi Numan, like the Shiite scholars, considered Ghadir as an explicit event on the Imamate and succession of Ali (AS), so after the Messenger of God (PBUH) Imam Ali (AS) is considered the Caliph of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Successor. And the most important issue in the doctrinal principles of the Bohras is the issue of Imamate, and they believe that obligatory and recommended actions are not accepted without belief in the guardianship of Imams, because the Qur'an says in Surah Nasa verse 59 to obey God, His Messenger, and those placed in Authority. Obedience to these three authorities are not separated from each other. The Ismaili of Bohra make the same arguments about the immediate Caliphate of Ali (AS) that all Shiites mention. Paying attention to the commonalities that firstly try to look at the common materials in Bohra's sources. Secondly when the Shiites want to bring the Bohras closer to the Shia ideology, they should try to use the resources of the Bohra sect.



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## راهبردهای تقریب شیعه اثناعشری و اسماعیلی بهره

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### چکیده

این مقاله با عنوان راهبردهای تقریب شیعه و اسماعیلیان بهره است. اسماعیلیه بهره از اسماعیلی‌های آقاخانیه به شیعیان دوازده امامی نزدیکتر است. اعتقادات دینی اسماعیلی بهره به ندرت در کتابها مطرح شده است. ما نمی‌توانیم به اصول اولیه و منشأ اعتقادات آنها برسیم؛ بنابراین نمی‌توان به روش‌ها و راهکارهای تعامل و وحدت و تقریب مطلوب شیعیان اثناعشری و بهره اسماعیلیه دست یافت. تقریب این دو فرقه اسلامی موضوع مهمی است و اسماعیلیه بهره یکی از فرقه‌های شیعه است که موجود و فعال است و تداوم تعامل این دو فرقه نیز تأثیر مثبتی در منطقه دارد زیرا در منطقه پیروان زیادی دارند. اشتراکات و اختلافات در فرقه‌های شیعه باید حل شود تا تقریب مذاهب بسیار آسان‌تر و ثمربخش‌تر شود و مذاهب شیعه به صورت مسالمت‌آمیز برای توسعه امت اسلامی گرد هم آیند. این پژوهش با ارائه وجوه مشترک و تفاوت‌های این فرقه‌ها، زمینه نزدیک‌تر شدن به یکدیگر و تقریب را فراهم می‌آورد که فضای اجتماعی را بازآفرینی می‌کند که برای توسعه در کل جامعه و تمدن اسلامی مفید باشد.

### واژگان کلیدی

تقریب، شیعه اثناعشری، اسماعیلی بهره.