

## OBJECTIVITY TOWARDS BELIEFS IN THE WORKS OF IMAM SHAHRISTANI

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**Annotation:** This article describes the relationship to religions in the work “al-Milal wa-n-nihal” written by the famous scholar Muhammad ibn Abdulkarim Shahrastani of the XI-XII centuries. The scientist objectively studied religions in his work. The tolerant attitude of the Allama to religions serves as a program for the proper organization of interreligious dialogue today.

**Keywords:** Shahrastani, religious tolerance, Christianity, Judaism, philosophy, kalam.

Today, representatives of various confessions and beliefs in the Republic of Uzbekistan live side by side in peace and harmony. In order to maintain peace in society and ensure mutual understanding, it is essential that people of different faiths work together for the development of the nation. Religious tolerance plays a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence among them.

Religious tolerance implies the ability of people belonging to different nationalities and ethnicities, as well as representatives of diverse religions and beliefs, to live together in a single homeland, united by noble ideals, in cooperation, solidarity, and mutual understanding.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has stated: “Our state is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country. Today, more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups live together in harmony and friendship, like members of a single family. Without doubt, the traditions of tolerance that have been intrinsic to our people since ancient times play an important role in this regard” [1:464].

Uzbek scholars define religious tolerance as follows: “Religious tolerance means the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of people of different religions regardless of the differences in their beliefs, and showing respect for every religion. It reflects the unity of people with diverse religious beliefs in the pursuit of noble goals and their joint efforts for the progress of human society” [2:33].

Religious tolerance is based on mutual respect and courteous interaction between individuals of different beliefs and worldviews. In this regard, the work al-Milal wa-n-Nihal contains valuable ideas that are significant for establishing effective interreligious dialogue and promoting tolerance among followers of different faiths in today's globalized world.

In al-Milal wa-n-Nihal, religious beliefs are presented in an objective manner. This work does not only describe Islamic schools and sects, but also presents other religions without criticism. Regarding the impartiality of the work, the French researcher G. Monnot stated: “This work is considered an encyclopedic treatise that describes religions based on available sources and observations. It was written with the aim of systematically introducing world religions. One of its important aspects is that, unlike previous works, it also provides detailed information about Greek and Indian philosophical teachings” [3:199–200].

In the introduction to his work, Muhammad ibn Abdulkarim al-Shahrastani states that he committed himself to maintaining impartiality towards the beliefs of other religious groups, refraining from issuing refutations, avoiding futile disputes, and not distinguishing between correct and incorrect creeds. He writes:

“I made it a condition upon myself to present the doctrines of each sect exactly as I found them in their own books, without bigotry, without refutation, and without differentiating between what is true or false, right or wrong in matters of belief. Indeed, when rational arguments are brought forth, the

truth will become evident, and the stench of falsehood will not remain hidden from those endowed with intellect and understanding” [4:22].

One of the most highly valued aspects of *al-Milal wa-n-Nihal*, recognized by scholars, is the author’s particular emphasis on scholarly objectivity when studying religions and sects other than Islam. As the author himself notes, he made a conscious effort to maintain respect toward followers of other faiths throughout his work. This approach is rarely found in earlier writings of similar nature.

In this regard, the scholar followed the principles of his teacher, the founder of the Ash‘arite theological school, the mutakallim Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (873–936), who stated:

“I have seen people who write or speak about religions and sects with the intention of finding faults, waiting for their opponents to make a mistake, and then deliberately disparaging them for it. When presenting opposing views, they misrepresent them and try to portray themselves as the only bearers of truth. This is not the path of scholars and intelligent people” [5:3]. Al-Shahrastani took these words as a guiding principle for his own scholarly work.

In *al-Milal wa-n-Nihal*, despite the challenging political and religious circumstances of his time, the author presents the Shi‘a doctrine of Imamate—accepted by all Shi‘a factions—with objectivity. The scholar writes:

“The Shi‘a are those who supported ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him). They believe that the Imamate and Caliphate of ‘Alī (r.a.) were established through an explicit or implicit textual designation (*naṣṣ*) and testament (*waṣīyya*). According to their belief, the Imamate cannot be transferred to anyone outside the descendants of ‘Alī (r.a.); and if it does pass to someone else, it is either due to the oppression of others or because of their own practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*)” [4:169].

This demonstrates that the scholar approaches the Shi‘a primarily as a political faction rather than a purely theological one. He emphasizes that their doctrinal identity is largely formed around the concept of Imamate.

“The Shi‘a unanimously hold that the Imamate must be established through explicit textual designation and appointment. They also agree that both prophets and Imams are infallible (*ma‘ṣūm*), free from major and minor sins. Furthermore, except in cases of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), they are bound by their words, actions, and agreements” [4:169].

One of the Shi‘a factions that contributed to the downfall of the Seljuk state was the Bāṭinīyah (Esotericists). The scholar notes that the Compilers of Doctrines (*Aṣḥāb al-Maqālāt*) sometimes considered the Bāṭinīs within the scope of Islamic sects, and sometimes outside of it. The author emphasizes that he had personally read the books of Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ, the founder of the Bāṭinī creed, and states:

“Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ propagated the Bāṭinī doctrine using both Arabic and Persian expressions. We reproduce his Persian works here in Arabic; there is no shame in quoting them! The truly successful person is the one who follows the truth and distances themselves from falsehood. The One who grants success and support is Allah” [4:214].

At the same time, the scholar did not refrain from debating the Bāṭinīs in order to explain the incorrectness of their beliefs. He recounts their responses and remarks:

“No matter how much I argued with them based on the aforementioned principles, they did not change their views. They said to me: ‘Do we need you? Are we to hear this from you or learn it from you?’ In response to this matter of ‘need,’ I argued with them more gently, saying:

“Where is the person who claims to be self-sufficient? What can he prove to me in matters of theology? What principles can he establish for me concerning rational knowledge (*ma‘qūlāt*)? The aim is not the teacher himself, but the knowledge he conveys. You have closed the doors of knowledge and opened

the doors of blind submission and imitation. No rational person follows teachings that contradict reason, nor does anyone walk a path without reliable evidence” [4:234].

In today’s era of globalization, the proper organization of interreligious dialogue, the cultivation of friendly relations among representatives of various confessions, and the development of tolerance toward other beliefs are becoming more pressing than ever. Islam commands Muslims to treat followers of other religions—especially those who live alongside them—with respect and dignity. Cooperating with them in social matters is also among the practices encouraged by the faith.

Al-Shahrastānī demonstrated a tolerant approach toward non-Muslim religious traditions such as Judaism and Christianity. He writes:

"These two are the largest religious communities among the People of the Book. The Jewish community is greater, for its law was revealed to Mūsā (Moses, peace be upon him), and all of the Children of Israel were commanded to believe in this law, to accept the rulings of the Torah, and to act upon them" [4:248].

The scholar also mentions how the Torah expresses respect for the descendants of Ismā‘īl (peace be upon him). He states:

“The Torah addresses tribes descended from Ismā‘īl through the Children of Israel and acknowledges the presence of divinely inspired knowledge (‘ilm ladunī) among the progeny of Ismā‘īl—knowledge not found in the Torah. Historical sources refer to the sons of Ismā‘īl as Ālullāh (the Family of God) and Ahlullāh (the People of God), while the sons of Isrā‘īl are called Āl Ya‘qūb (the Family of Jacob), Āl Mūsā (the Family of Moses), and Āl Hārūn (the Family of Aaron). This is considered a significant merit for the descendants of Ismā‘īl.

According to the Torah, God came from Sinai, appeared in Seir, and was manifested in Paran. Seir is a mountain near Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem), where Jesus (peace be upon him) became a prophet. Paran is a mountain in Makkah, where al-Muṣṭafā (the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him) received prophethood" [4:248].

This information, presented by al-Shahrastānī, clearly indicates that Jews and Muslims share a historical and spiritual lineage, and that there should be no grounds for disputes between them.

When presenting Christian beliefs, al-Shahrastānī approaches the doctrines concerning the Trinity and the nature of Jesus (peace be upon him) with objectivity.

He writes:

“Christians, who attempt to ascribe the concept of a trinity (uqnūm) to God, say: ‘God is a single essence (jawhar), that is, He exists by His own essence. He is free from space and dimension. From the perspective of essence, He is one; but in terms of substance (mahiyya), He is three. By substance, they refer to attributes such as life, knowledge, and being.’ The Christians name these attributes—derived from the substance—as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, they hold that knowledge (‘ilm) is embodied and preserved without dependence on other substances” [4:263].

Here, the author emphasizes that Christians do not believe in three separate gods. Rather, they believe in one God who manifests in three distinct forms. This approach helps foster an accurate understanding of Christian beliefs and serves as a deterrent to intolerance toward them in the present day.

In many parts of his work, al-Shahrastānī refrains from drawing conclusions about various beliefs, instead leaving such judgments to the reader. He believed that a person, upon reading the text, could derive appropriate insights based on their own worldview and faith perspective.

From the above, it is important to emphasize that al-Shahrastānī strictly adhered to the principle of impartiality in the study of religions and creeds. He applied the principle of religious tolerance and refrained from criticizing adherents of other faiths. This approach ensures accuracy in exploring the

foundational and historical aspects of religious beliefs, while also playing a vital role in the development of religious tolerance.

For this reason, al-Shahrastānī primarily relied on reason when analyzing various doctrines, and examined beliefs that contradicted Islamic teachings only within a specific methodological framework. In short, his *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl* serves as a key source for objectively studying the history of religions, exploring sacred texts, and fostering a tolerant attitude toward followers of other faiths.

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