

My dear friends,

Yesterday morning in shul we devoted about twenty minutes to discuss a complex and urgent topic: the history and longevity of the split between Sunni and Shia Muslims and the contribution of that split to violence and warfare between these groups for almost 1,400 years. I had six objectives for this discussion - that as a result, congregants would:

1. Understand the origins and longevity of the Sunni/Shia split in Islam;
2. Memorize the fact that Sunni are 85% - 90% of Muslims, Shia are just 10% - 15%;
3. Memorize the facts that Iran is 90% Shia, Iraq is 65% Shia; Yemen is 35% Shia, other countries in the region are overwhelmingly Sunni;
4. Recognize that the Sunni/Shia split explains much of the current conflict;
5. Understand that ISIS began in Iraq in 1999 and participated in the Sunni insurgency after the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 and toppled Saddam Hussein, ending the Sunni minority rule there; and
6. Be able to formulate an informed opinion on whether the United States should take military action in any of the wars now being waged in the Middle East.

We used three documents for our study, which can be downloaded on this website:

A timeline;

A map; and

A list of fifteen headlines that appeared in the New York Times the day before our discussion.

I hope these documents may help dispel some of the fog around these issues and shed some light on choices to be made by the United States.

Shavua Tov.

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