

The Concept of Love in the Shi'i Creed



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The concept of love in Shi'ism plays a fundamental and profound role. Love for Allah, the Prophet, and the Prophet's household.

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Love is one of the most sublime and most appealing of concepts in Shi'ism in particular and Islamic culture and belief in general. In Shi'i belief, *mahabbah* or *hubb*, and related words like *mawaddah* and *waliyah*, play a very significant and profound role, to the extent that, to cite one instance, it is asserted to be the fundamental basis of the faith. In a famous *hadith*, the Prophet (s) is reported as questioning his followers concerning the "firmest handhold of faith" (*awthaq 'urwat al-iman*). When they cannot reply, he declares:

The firmest handhold of faith is to love for the sake of God and to hate for the sake of God, to befriend God's friends and to renounce His enemies.¹

In another tradition, Fudayl ibn al-Yasar, a disciple, asks al-Imam al-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, whether love and hate derive from faith; he replies:

Is faith anything but love and hate?²

It is also narrated that al-Imam al-Baqir, may peace be upon him, stated that:

Religion (din) is love and love is religion. ³

As these statements and traditions indicate, love plays an important role in Shi'i doctrine. Hence it deserves our close attention in order that we may discover the real meaning of the concept.

First of all, some questions come to the mind. What is the kind of love that has been emphasized by Islam in general and Shi'ism in particular? Who is the object of this special kind of love? Why should the believers have this kind of love and what purpose does it serve?

Love, in Shi'i doctrine, includes three interrelated categories: Love for God, love for the Prophet and his Household, and love for the faithful.

Love for Allah

According to Islamic teaching, God is the highest and foremost object of love. The Holy Qur'an says:

Say: "If your fathers and your sons, your brethren and your wives, your kinsfolk and the property you have acquired, the commerce you fear may slacken and the dwellings which you love-if these are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and striving in His way, then wait till God brings His command; God does not guide an ungodly people." (9:24)

This *ayah* clearly indicates that the love of God has precedence over everything and whatever that one may love in one's life. Moreover, the Holy Qur'an points out in another verse that the believers' love of God is greater than that of anything else, but that some people love certain things as much as they love God:

"And there are some among men who take for themselves objects of worship besides God. whom they love as they love God, and those who believe are stronger in love for God ..." (2:165)

That is, God is the source of all love just as He is the source of all that exists. That love is an attribute of God is affirmed implicitly by numerous Qur'anic verses. Hence love for God is the foundation of belief, the foundation on which man is to establish the principles of his faith. This is also affirmed by reason. It may be noted that

(a) Human nature aspires to perfection and beauty, and God is absolute perfection and eternal beauty; thus it is an innate quality of the human nature to love God;

(b) Men by nature love whoever does good to them, and they appreciate such favor and benevolence, as Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

Generosity and magnanimity enslave men. 4

Now, as God is the source of all being, of all generosity and benevolence, man, by virtue of his nature, loves God. The Prophet, may God bless him and his Household, said:

Love Allah because He has done good to you and He has bestowed favors upon you.⁵

It is narrated that God declared to Moses and David, may peace be upon them: “Love Me and endear Me to the people.” When they asked Him how they could endear Him to the people, He replied:

Remind them about My favors and bounties, for they do not recall My favors without the feeling of gratitude. 6

This relationship of love between man and his Creator is reciprocal, and the intensity of a people's love for God is indicative of God's love for them, as indicated by the following verse:

“God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him”. (5:54)

This love stands for a spiritual relationship between God and the God-loving people wherewith they are ever made aware of the beneficence and mercy of their Lord. It is narrated in a *hadith qudsi* that when God loves someone He becomes his ears, his eyes, his tongue, and his hands:

When I love him, then I shall be his ears with which he listens, his eyes with which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks, and his hands with which he holds; if he calls Me, I shall answer him, and if he asks Me, I shall give him. 7

Aside from the fact that one who loves God is loved by Him, a real love for God prompts one to perform the best of deeds. Reason and nature dictate that if someone really loves God, he would act in a manner that is pleasing to God. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an says:

“Say: if you love God, then follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins,” and God is Forgiving and Merciful.” (3:31)

This *ayah* indicates the interrelation between love, as an inner state, and emulating the Prophet, which is an outward action. Moreover, it implies that no one may neglect his religious obligations under the pretext of love for God.

Love for the Prophet

After God, the Prophet, Muhammad, may God bless Him and his Household, is the one whom the

faithful love. It is evident that the love for him is a ramification of the love for God. It is stated in traditions that God loves the Prophet and his Household as the ideals of human perfection so much that He created the heavens and the earth and whatever is in them out of His love for them. In the *Hadith al-Kisa'*, it is narrated by Fatimah, may peace be upon her:

When they, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, gathered under the *kisa'*, the Almighty said: "Let it be known to you, My angels and those who are in the heavens, that I have not created the heavens and the earth and what is in them, but for My love for the Five Ones under the *kisa*." 8

The Prophet, may God bless him and his Household, said to his followers:

Love me because of the love of God. 9

We love the Prophet as he is the beloved of Him, and He has directed us to love him. This is the first and the most important reason for loving the Prophet. Further, he is the Perfect Man and personifies the highest degrees of such virtues as generosity, greatness, moral sublimity and wisdom. Hence human nature is fascinated by his perfect being and loves him. Thirdly, he brought us the most significant and essential gift which benefits us both in this world and the next and gives us true life. 10

For these reasons, and because of the many verses and traditions which declare the necessity of loving the Prophet, may God bless him and his Household, it is obligatory for all Muslims to love him as much as they love themselves and even more, as according to the *Qur'an*:

The Prophet has a greater right on the faithful than they have on themselves. (33:6)

Al-Daylami, *Irshad al Qulub*, p. 226.

Love for the Prophet's Household

As part of the love for the Prophet, love for the Household of the Prophet is also necessary for all believers. In fact, it is a test of the genuineness of one's love for the Prophet, and it is declared in traditions that it is the first thing which they would be questioned about on the Day of Resurrection. 11

As regards the necessity and importance of this love, there are more than three hundred *ayahs* and *ahadith* found in both Sunni and Shi'i sources. In all, they indicate that the main role of this love is to nourish faith. It is narrated that the Prophet, may God bless him and his Household, said:

There is a basis for every thing, and the basis of Islam is the love for us, the People of the Household. 12

In another *hadith* he is reported to have said:

One who wants to partake of the firmest handhold (of faith) should abide by the love of 'Ali and my Household. 13

He also said:

Love of them (my Household) is a sign of faith, and enmity towards them is a sign of unbelief. Whosoever loves them, loves God and His Messenger. And whosoever harbors enmity towards them is enemy of God and His Messenger.” 14

It is narrated that al-Imam Al-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, said:

For every kind of worship there is another which surpasses it, and the love for us, the people of the Household, is the best form of worship. 15

On the basis of the traditions that have been cited and many others like them, it is clear that the love for the Household of the Messenger is a necessary part of every Muslim's faith. This is further confirmed by taking into consideration that the love of the Household is considered by the Qur'an as the mark of gratitude for the guiding mission of the Prophet. God says:

Say [O Muhammad, unto mankind]: “I do not ask you a wage for this except the love of my kinsfolk.” (42:23)

When the Holy Prophet was asked by his followers as to who were his near of kin” whose love God has made obligatory on all Muslims, the Prophet replied; “Fatimah, 'Ali, al-Hasan and al-Husayn.” 16

The Shi'ah believe that, in accordance with this *ayah*, it is necessary for every Muslim, from the point of view of his faith, to love them. For, in this verse, God has told mankind to love them.

On the other hand, God has ordered us to love them because they merit it, as the highest exemplars of obedience to the commands of God, their exalted stations in the eyes of God, and their purity from all traces of polytheism, sin, and everything that deprives His servants of God's mercy.

In summary, if God instructs all people to love certain human beings, they must be the best among them in virtue and the most sublime of His creatures, otherwise they would not deserve to be loved, and God would never prefer some person to another for no reason, or favour someone who has no merit.

However, it may be asked whether love as an emotional attachment is capable of producing any profound results or capable of motivating deeds of higher religious and moral worth. In my opinion, love not only operates on an emotional level but can be a real agent that prompts man towards virtuous action.

The real love which has been emphasized by both the Qur'an and *Sunnah* is not merely an emotional relation between the lover and the object of love without any actual relevance to one's conduct of life. That it is a love which produces piety and encourages the lover to righteous action is confirmed by the Islamic tradition. It is stated in a *hadith*:

Do not neglect righteous action and diligence in worship by relying on the love of Muhammad's Household; and do not neglect the love of Muhammad's Household for reliance on righteous action and diligence in worship, because none of them will be accepted without the other. 17

Al-Imam al-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, said:

One who follows someone would strive to emulate him. 18

Accordingly, God commands the faithful to love the Household and to have recourse to them in order that they may learn their religious obligations from the Imams of the Prophet's family. In this relation, the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his Household, is reported to have said:

Whoever aspires to live my life, to die my death, to enter the Paradise that my Lord has promised me, and to grasp the handhold which my Lord has appointed, should take 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his successors after him, as his masters, because they will never cause you to enter the doors of misguidance, nor will they divert you from the gates of guidance. Never try to teach them, since they are more knowledgeable than you. I have asked my Lord never to separate them from the Book until they meet me by the side of the Pool (*hawd*). 19

Al Imam al Sadiq, may peace be upon him, also said:

God has ordained our guardianship, and He has made loving us an obligation. By God, we don't say anything out of our desires, and we don't do anything according to our whims; we don't say anything but what our Lord, the Almighty and the Glorious, says. 20

They have been given authority and God has ordered people to obey them. They are the witness for mankind, the doors leading to the way of God, the guides to His path, the guardians of His knowledge, the interpreters of His revelations, the pillars of the teaching of Divine Unity, and the custodians of His Wisdom. The Holy Qur'an refers to them in these words:

“Honored servants, who speak not until He has spoken and who act by His command”. (21:26–27)

That is why God has urged the faithful to love them, to seek them and follow them, obeying their commands.

Thus befriending them, which is obligatory for all Muslims according to the Holy Qur'an, would lead the believers to fulfill their duties. A real love, as was mentioned earlier, encourages the lover to act according to the beloved's will and wishes. Therefore, Muslims, by emulating the Prophet's Household, become real believers. Hence the 'wages' of prophecy which the faithful have been asked to pay, ultimately return to the believers themselves. Hence the following verse of *Surat Saba'* says:

“Say (O Muhammad): Whatever reward I have asked of you is only for yourselves; my reward is only with God, and He is the witness over all things.” (34:47)

We may conclude that love plays a great, if not the greatest, formative role in religious faith in the Shi'i creed and is the uniting principle of its universe of religious ideas. So far, we have seen that this principle unites a vast collection of religious ideas each of which relates to the others, and that this totality impels the believer towards a higher form of life.

The principle of love frees religious devotion from a dispassionate and lifeless state, and inspires it with a new refreshing spirit. This is the meaning of the following statement of the Holy Prophet, may God bless him and his Household:

O servant of God, let your love and hate be for the sake of God, because no one can attain to the *wilayah* of God without that, and no one shall find the taste of faith without that, though his prayers and fast be great in number.²¹

I would like to conclude this discussion with a *hadith* of Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, wherein he states:

Most certainly the best and most delightful of things in Paradise is the love of God and love for the sake of God and the glorification of God. God, the Almighty and the Glorious, says "And the last of their cry shall be: 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds."²²

1. Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, "kitab al-iman wa al-kufr," bab al-hubb fi Allah wa al-bughd fi Allah," *hadith* 6, Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, ii, p. 126.
2. *Ibid.*, *hadith* 5, p. 125.
3. Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, 'kitab al-iman wa al-kufr," "bab al-hubb fi Allah wa al-bughd fi Allah," Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, lxvi, p. 238.
4. Al-Amidi, *Tasnif Ghurar al-hikam wa durar al-kalim*, Qum: Maktab al-'ilm al-Islami, p. 385.
5. Al-Daylami, *Irshad al-qulub*, p. 226.
6. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, xiii, 351; xiv, 38.
7. Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, iv, p. 54.
8. Al-Qadi Nur Allah al-Shushtari, *Ihqaq al-haqq*, ii, p. 555.
9. Al-Daylami, *Irshad al Qulub*, p. 226.
10. The Qur'an, 33:6.
11. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, "kitab al-Imamah," "bab thawab hubihim wa nasrihim wawilayatihim, xxvii, p. 82.
12. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, "kitab al-Imamah," "bab thawab hubihim wa nasrihim wawilayatihim," *hadith* 22, XXVII, p. 82.
13. *Ibid.*, *hadith* 14, p. 79.
14. M. R. Muzaffar, *The Faith of Shi'i Islam*, p. 36.
15. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, XXVII, p. 91.
16. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, XXIII, p. 233; from al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, iv, p. 172.
17. Al-Qummi, *Safinat al-Bihar*, i, p. 201.
18. Al-Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, XXVII, p. 108.
19. al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, I, part II, p. 122.
20. Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, xxvii, p. 102.
21. Majlisi, *al-Bihar*, xxvii, p. 54.
22. *Ibid.*, LXVI, p.251; al-Qur'an, 10:10.

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