

Concept of Love in the Shia Creed

Love is one of the most sublime and appealing concept 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 *wilayah*, play a very significant and profound role. In a famous hadith the Prophet (s) is reported as questioning his followers concerning what was the "firmest handhold of faith". 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.*

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?* It is also narrated that al-Imam al-Baqir, may peace be upon him, stated that: *Religion (din) is love and love is religion.*

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.

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 favour and benevolence, as Imam `Ali (a) said: *Generosity and magnanimity enslave men.* 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 favours upon you.*

The 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.

Love stands for a spiritual relationship between God and the God-loving people through which they are ever made aware of the beneficence and mercy of their Lord. It is narrated in a Hadith al-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.*

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.

Love for the Prophet (s)

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.

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.

For these reasons, and because of the many verses and traditions which declare the necessity of loving the Prophet(s) 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)

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.

As regards the necessity and importance of this love, there are more than three hundred ayahs and hadith 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 everything, and the basis of Islam is the love for us, the People of the Household.* 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 harbours enmity towards them is enemy of God and His Messenger.*

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): *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."

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. 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.

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(s): *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.*

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`.

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