

Imamate and the duty of the faithful [mu'minīn]

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After the acceptance of Imamate as an ideological principle, this question is raised: What is the duty of a faithful believer with respect to the principle of Imamate?

Undoubtedly, the primary requisite of the belief in the Imām ('a) is that we have to accept the way of the Imāms ('a) as our intellectual, ideological and practical reference. This means that alongside the Qur'an, we have to give importance to the sayings and actions of the infallible Imāms ('a). Relying only on the Qur'an and ignoring the authentic narrations is tantamount to ignoring the intellectual authority of the infallible Imāms ('a) which is in no way compatible with true Shī'ah doctrines.

Thus, one of the duties of the faithful is to love their Imāms ('a). In the Holy Qur'an, love of the Prophet's

#7779;) relatives [dhū'l-qurbā] has been mentioned as the reward for his prophetic mission.⁵⁰ Many of the laws and rules of etiquette prescribed in Shī'ah collections of law for the people are meant to attain the station of affection—nay love—of the pure Imāms ('a). In the Shī'ah way of thinking, the Imām is the theoretical and practical leader to whom the people have also deep emotional attachment.

The emphasis on the performance of pilgrimages [ziyārāt] and establishment of esoteric relationship with the Imām ('a) which are common in Shī'ah tradition generates a particular disposition in the faithful. Attachment to the truth and the truthful [tawallā] and the establishment of affectionate relationship lead to the intellectual and emotional fondness of the faithful to the perfect man.

This characteristic naturally influences the political insight and attitude of the faithful. Love of those who have dedicated themselves to the religion and the struggle against the ṭāghūt makes the heart of the faithful overflowing with abhorrence and disgust for the oppressors and infidels. As such, tawalli and tabarri [disgust for falsehood and the people of falsehood] have a pivotal role in the attitudes and interactions of the faithful society.

Apart from purifying man's soul, love of the Imāms ('a) generates similar loves, embellishes his beliefs, organizes his actions, fosters idealism, and cleanses his sociopolitical insight and outlook.

Meanwhile, the people have been invited to take the Imāms ('a) as their mediators in their supplications and connections to God. In our religious sources, supplication without any mediator or medium [wasīlah] has been described as defective and unanswered.

The practice of tawassul⁵¹ which is one of the elements of the Shī‘ah beliefs is in no way incompatible or inconsistent with monotheism [tawḥīd]. It is rather the acceptance of a kind of linear system in the relationship with the Creator. In the Shī‘ah culture, the Imām is the embodiment of tawḥīd on earth. In establishing communication with him, the people are actually connected with the vicegerent of God and this never contradicts the sovereignty of God. In fact, it is exactly dependence on God.

Tawassul is the fostering of a special type of spiritual thinking in which the perfect man is highlighted and in the relationship between human and God the existence of the Imām is not ignored. In principle, the term tawassul, or resorting to intermediaries, is the promotion of the idea that God is the Essence of the universe and through the means of tawassul we seek to connect to this Essence. In this idea, the Imām is the cord of Allah [ḥabl Allāh].

By clinging to this cord, the people provide the means for their improvement and proximity to God. Just as facing the qiblah (the Ka‘bah) is a manifestation of tawḥīd and can never be considered worship of an object, turning to the Imāms (‘a) and seeking their intermediation is also not a negation of tawḥīd. In fact, the Imāms (‘a) are the spiritual ka‘bah of the hearts. By drawing the people toward it (the more they pay attention to the Imāms (‘a)) the more their belief in God will increase.

The other duty of the faithful is to increase their knowledge of the Imāms (‘a).

In religious sources, it is stated that knowledge of God depends on knowledge of the Imāms (‘a).⁵² In the words of the Imām (‘a) himself, it is thus narrated: “God has no sign greater and more important than us for the people⁵³ and had it not been for us, God would not have been recognized (as He ought to be recognized).”⁵⁴

Notes:

50. – Sūrah Shūrā 42:23: “Say, I do not ask of you any reward for it except the affection for [my] relatives.”

51. – Tawassul: literally, to resort to intermediaries. Technically, it refers to the practice of petition prayer addressed to God through a holy personage such as a prophet [nabī] or a saint [walī]. [Trans.]

52. – Biḥār al-Anwār, vol. 5, p. 312 as narrated from Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a).

53. – Uṣūl al-Kāfī, vol. 1, p. 207.

54. – Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, At-Tawhīd, p. 290.