

Axis of Salvation: The Centrality of the Imam in Life from the Shia Perspective

The Centrality of the Imam in Life: From Individual Salvation to Social Order

In any coherent system, survival and well-being depend on having a stable and trusted center. A family without a decision-making authority, an organization with no defined core values, or an individual who lacks an ultimate criterion for their choices will, sooner or later, face conflict, exhaustion, and breakdown. This rule is not merely a management or psychological principle; it is a deeper truth within the very structure of human existence. To be saved from confusion, a human being is inevitably required to choose an “axis,” one that both determines the direction of movement and serves as a standard for evaluating decisions.

In Shia teachings, this axis is neither an abstract idea nor merely a moral role model. It is the Infallible Imam. The primary objective of this article is to explain how the centrality of the Imam in life can save a person from existential collapse, regardless of external circumstances, and lead them toward Divine pleasure and eternal bliss.

The Meaning and Status of the Centrality of the Imam in Self-Knowledge

In the Shia worldview, the infallible Imam holds a position far beyond that of a religious leader or a legal authority. The Imam is the living proof of God, the mediator of Divine grace, and the criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood in every aspect of human life. Accordingly, the centrality of the Imam in life means accepting the Imam as the ultimate reference for planning, decision-making, and

acting, not merely as a slogan, but in the internal structure of one's decision-making. Contrary to purely emotional interpretations, this centrality is a completely rational principle. Without a stable criterion, a human being is forced to treat shifting values and desires, whether personal or social, as the basis for action. The Imam is the only criterion who, by virtue of his connection to Divine knowledge and infallibility, can guarantee the direction of a person's journey. Therefore, accepting the Imam as the axis is, in reality, the acceptance of a reliable system of guidance.

One of the clearest manifestations of the centrality of the Imam in life is the event of Ashura. Ashura establishes a vital principle: Even in the most corrupt social conditions, an individual can stay on the path to salvation by making the Imam their focal point. The absence of the Imam in one's life leads to a hell in all dimensions. This hell refers not only to the hereafter punishment but also to internal collapse, family conflict, the meaninglessness of efforts, and moral exhaustion. The centrality of the Imam in life stands in direct opposition to this state. A person who centers their life on the Imam does not collapse even when faced with hardship, deprivation, or social pressure because their destination, meaning, and criteria are clear. Such an individual organizes life not based on short-term pleasure or profit, but based on ultimate salvation.

The Family: The First Arena for Realizing the Centrality of the Imam in Life

The family is the most fundamental environment for practically making the Imam the center of one's life. A balanced family is one whose members define themselves in relation to the Imam rather than focusing solely on individual interests. In such

a family, the Imam is accepted as the “Main Father,” not to replace usual roles, but to serve as the final reference for directing all deeds in one’s lifestyle.

Accepting this position has tangible effects: Selfishness diminishes, conflicts lose their intensity and significance, and relationships are elevated from the level of personal interest to the level of a shared goal. An Imam-centered family is an active, dynamic, and responsible environment. If we liken the family to a human-building workshop, its axis determines the quality of the output. Imagine a family where every important decision, from the way spouses communicate, to child-rearing methods, financial planning, and even reacting to disputes, is measured by a question: “Does this decision draw us near to or farther from the Imam’s satisfaction?” In such a family, the Imam is not merely a mental belief or a sacred name, but a practical criterion for regulating relationships. When this standard is active at home, disputes are resolved before they intensify, as family members hold themselves accountable to a higher authority. Gradually, personal interests give way to a common goal, and the family transforms from a mere emotional gathering into a harmonious and purposeful unit. This is where the family truly becomes the first and most effective field for realizing the centrality of the Imam in life, a place where a person learns how to structure life around a fixed truth. Just as the presence of the Imam in one’s life brings order, his absence causes the family to malfunction. Without the Imam, life becomes hell, and this is not a metaphor; it is a destiny that results from this wrong choice. This condition manifests itself in the exhaustion of marital relations, crises in child-rearing, and constant tension. In such conditions, even moral efforts lack cohesion. The centrality of the Imam in life restores this cohesion because all components of the family are aligned with a superior truth.

Testing Sincerity in Relation to the Infallible Imam

One of the deepest criteria for measuring a person's relationship with the Imam is found in a phrase repeated in most *ziyarat* texts (texts for pilgrimage): “May my father, my mother, my soul, my wealth, and my family be sacrificed for you.” This statement is not a mere ritualistic compliment; it is a profound test that measures our *ma'rifa*. The centrality of the Imam in life becomes a sincere expression only when a person is willing, in real-life decisions, to align their priorities with the Imam's satisfaction. This test draws a person out of the illusion of love and compels an individual to honestly re-evaluate their choices.

There is a direct and undeniable link between testing personal sincerity toward the Imam and one's social and political responsibilities. If an individual sincerely accepts in their private life that their soul, wealth, and status are defined in relation to the Imam, this sincerity will inevitably manifest itself in their social behavior. Someone who truly regards the Imam as the ultimate criterion cannot remain indifferent in the public sphere toward the appointment of incompetent leaders, the spread of injustice, or the violation of people's rights. They know that every social decision ultimately results in either the abandonment or the assistance of the Imam. Conversely, if this sincerity is lacking at the personal level, social actions will gradually turn into self-interest and political opportunism.

Therefore, *ziyarat* texts such as *Ziyarah Jamia Kabira* [1] are not just devotional texts. They are bridges connecting our inner faith to our social and political responsibilities. They show that our relationship with the infallible Imam is tested both in private life and on the social stage. In society, we must be concerned with ensuring that the Imam is neither oppressed nor left alone. At a social level, the

centrality of the Imam in life means accepting the principle that the administration of society must not be handed over to the treacherous or the dangerous. A society that discards this criterion, even if materially advanced, will suffer from insecurity, distrust, and moral decay.

One of the neglected yet fundamental points in our social life is the issue of the Imam's loneliness and displacement. This concept is not merely an emotional expression; it describes a social reality: A society that does not place the Imam at its center effectively leaves him alone. Understanding this truth transforms the centrality of the Imam in life from a personal choice into a collective responsibility that prevents people from being silent in the face of injustice and betrayal.

The fact that the Imam is alone should not be understood solely as an emotional or historical concept. It is a sign of the society's disconnection from the criteria for Divine guidance. Whenever major decisions in a society are based on self-interest, fear, or short-term expediency rather than the axis of truth, the Imam is effectively marginalized, even if his name remains on people's lips.

For instance, a society that remains silent in the face of blatant oppression, structural corruption, or the betrayal of officials has, in fact, shirked its responsibility and left the Imam alone. The *Wali* (Guardian) of God is supported only when his standards are put into practice. From this perspective, the isolation of the Imam becomes the engine for social responsibility: Every conscious person realizes that their indifference contributes to this isolation. The solution lies in responsible presence, conscious choice, and standing against injustice. Such an understanding elevates the centrality of the Imam in life beyond personal belief,

turning it into a social and historical commitment upon which the moral life of society depends.

The centrality of the Imam in life is not a mere moral recommendation or a spiritual inclination. Rather, it is a fundamental principle for human salvation. This centrality begins within the individual, strengthens in the family, and manifests in political and social responsibility within society.

The person who centers their life on the Imam will stay on the path of salvation, even in the most difficult circumstances. Such individuals and families not only rescue themselves from an existential hell but also pave the way for the formation of a society that, instead of collapsing, moves toward Divine pleasure and the realization of the Divine promise.

Notes

[1]. A major Shia pilgrimage text that includes salutations and expressions of devotion to the infallible Imams, emphasizing loyalty, guidance, and moral responsibility in both private and public life.