

Love or Devoted love: Which One Defines Our Duty Toward the Ahl al-Bayt?

How Does Love or Devoted Love for the Infallible Imam Influence Our Way of Life?

Many of us have heard the terms love or devoted love before. However, when we do not grasp the true depth of concepts like these, the impact does not remain limited to our personal lives. It can create consequences that humanity may never fully repair. Love or devoted love may appear similar at first, but in reality they differ in fundamental ways that shape completely different results for us.

Human attraction to different things usually comes from the perfection we see in them. This perfection may appear in their power or beauty, or in qualities such as knowledge, kindness, or generosity. Because of this, feeling affection and love toward perfect human beings such as the prophets, the Imams, and the friends of God—who embody all divine attributes and reflect Absolute Perfection—is entirely natural.

Yet an important question remains: Is the mere love toward the perfect human and infallible expert who is meant to lead us to the purpose of our creation enough to achieve the goal?

Can this love alone meet all the responsibilities we have toward the perfect human and the infallible expert who is going to help us walk with him on this path, and prepare us for the discipline required to become similar to God?

If having love by itself truly fulfilled our needs in relation to the infallible Imam, then why were so many prophets and Imams killed throughout history? And why are we deprived today of the presence of the infallible expert?

Does this mean that the divine leaders were never genuinely loved by the people? It can be concluded that the missing element in our relationship with the infallible expert was not only love, but something beyond it. It is a factor that goes higher than mere love and obliges us to take concrete actions toward the Imams. This factor is called "devoted love."

In fact, devoted love is a friendship and affection accompanied by obedience, leading to sacrifice. This is a concept that is common and natural even in our ordinary family and social lives. After all, in any emotional relationship, expressing affection without making any effort to gain the satisfaction or trust of the other person you love is never acceptable.

Now the question arises: How have we, for years, satisfied ourselves with the mere illusion of love toward the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them) without striving to show devoted love to them?

The answer likely lies in our misunderstanding of what a proper relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them) requires, and in our incorrect grasp of the concepts of love and devoted love. In reality, we have mistakenly treated these two distinct concepts as one, and for this reason, we have considered mere love toward the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them) as sufficient.

Naturally, changing this path requires, first and foremost, that we understand the true meaning of devoted love. According to the clear text of the Quran, the Prophet's (Peace be upon him and his family) only request from his community was

to achieve devoted love ¹ toward the Ahl al-Bayt, not to possess mere affection for them.

In this lesson, we intend to explore the concept of devoted love, the conditions necessary for its development, and the consequences of lacking devoted love in our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them).

The Difference Between Love and Devoted Love

As we mentioned earlier, devoted love goes beyond love. It refers to an affection that motivates a person to take constructive action. To gain a practical understanding of the differences between love and devoted love, we will now examine the role of each in individual and social life.

-The Effect of Love

Having love allows us to share the joys and sorrows of the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them), bringing us closer to them. In some cases, it may even lead us to react toward the infallible, such as participating in celebrations or mourning ceremonies, or feeling obligated to contribute financially or help organize these events.

However, this kind of relationship does not fundamentally change the structure or style of our lives. In fact, we can observe this level of affection even among non-Muslims. In other words, when we have mere love, we continue with our daily routines and life plans, while still regarding the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them) as a source of comfort or a means to fulfill our material worldly needs.

-The Effect of Devoted Love

Devoted love, on the other hand, refers to an affection that forms the foundation of our motivation to support the infallible Imam, obey him, and take action to fulfill his wishes. Through devoted love, we do not merely form a deep and comprehensive relationship with our guide and mentor; we intertwine all the aspects of our lives with the Imam and his wills. From the lowest material concerns to the highest intellectual and spiritual aspirations, we align ourselves with the infallible Imam. It is not only our work, education, or place of residence that are shaped according to the Imam's lifestyle, expectations, and commands, but all our choices, decisions, and interactions. We plan and strive to assist him, seeing the Imam present in every moment of our lives. The strength of our devoted love determines the extent to which we are willing to sacrifice and dedicate our wealth, time, reputation, skills, and love for the Imam.

A Criterion for Devoted Love

Certainly, devoted love, like the mere love, has levels and degrees. But what determines the true criterion for devoted love? Naturally, someone who spends only their wealth for their beloved differs greatly from someone who involves the Imam in all aspects of their life or is ready to sacrifice their life and reputation for him. Perhaps the simplest way to gauge the level of our devoted love is to observe our daily concerns that occupy our minds.

Unconsciously, we place at the top of our priorities what we consider most important. Therefore, the extent to which we are willing to place the Imam's wishes

at the forefront of our personal priorities reflects how present the infallible Imam is in our lives and how much we benefit from his presence.

Our lifestyle clearly demonstrates the level of knowledge, interest, and concern we have for the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them). The intensity of these concerns motivates us to fulfill the Imam's wills, and we allocate a share of our resources—material, spiritual, emotional- perfections, and talents—to this purpose. In other words, when our hearts are engaged in a relationship with the Imam and we prioritize his wishes in our plans and actions, we become willing to sacrifice other dimensions of our existence to gain his satisfaction. Naturally, reaching this stage requires self-knowledge and a correct understanding of our position as true children of the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them).

A True Relationship Based on Devoted Love

Although in our physical and material dimension we are connected to specific parents, as discussed in previous lessons, the essence of our being comes from the light of Muhammad and the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them), and our spirit is linked to them. In reality, the infallible Imams act as our heavenly parents, and this establishes an innate bond of love and devoted love between us and the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them). If we know our existential dimensions and understand the true essence of our being, we naturally form a relationship with the Imams that goes beyond an ordinary connection, seeing ourselves as their true children. The more we are conscious of this close relationship and believe in it, the more willing we become to make sacrifices and dedicate ourselves to our true spiritual family. In

this way maintaining family ties and performing the usual actions for our family will be completely natural; not only is it part of our responsibilities, but we also pursue these relationships with eagerness.

Naturally, the intensity and depth of our true relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt are directly related to how often we remind ourselves of this connection, whether through suggestion or imagination. Just as imaginal faculty can inspire many of our actions, it can act like a powerful wing in our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them). It not only gives us strength, but also the courage to spend and sacrifice for the truth of our being.

In this lesson, we explored the role of devoted love for the Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be upon them) in life, the difference between having devoted love or mere love toward the infallible expert, the requirements for cultivating devoted love toward our true and heavenly family, and the criterion that determines its level. It is natural that obstacles preventing the cultivation of this devoted love will arise, and we will discuss them in future lessons.

References

¹ . Quran, 42:23