

What Is the Criterion for Our True and Rightful Relationship with the *Ahl al-Bayt*?

What Does Our Relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt Mean? Why Do We Not Benefit from Our Relationship with Them?

-How Is our Relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt (Household of Prophet Muhammad), as the most important beings in the world, defined?

-What is the role of the Ahl al-Bayt in our lives?

-Why, in many cases, is our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt limited to remembering their birth or martyrdom dates?

-Why don't we get more of the most important and magnificent people in this world?

Perhaps it is because of our endless desire for infinity that we tend to associate ourselves with great people. We often seek to connect with those we admire. For instance, we might ask our favorite athletes for autographs or celebrities for selfies. We are happy that an important person remembers us, and consider it an honor when we have the chance to meet someone great. In spite of all this, we overlook our relationship with the most significant true individuals in this world, i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt, and we do not even feel a sense of loss for this neglect. We define our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt as merely visiting their shrines, making a long list of requests, or reciting prayers. This reflects a lack of true self-knowledge and thorough understanding of their genuine significance. In other words, due to not knowing our status and that of the Ahl al-Bayt, we only rely on them as a

refuge or a fulfiller of our minor and major needs, and we are unaware of our true relationship with them. This relationship is defined in two dimensions: true and rightful, and it guarantees our happiness, bliss, and tranquility in both this world and the hereafter.

Our True Relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt

Our mistake stems from the fact that, due to having a wrong worldview, we have made mistakes in knowing the path and the stages of our life. For this reason, we do not reach a correct understanding of our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt. When we consider our birth into this world as the beginning of our life, we unconsciously neglect the part of life that was before this world and to which we will return with the end of our worldly life. Instead of giving primacy to the hereafter from which we came and to which we will return, we prioritize our worldly parents and family, attributing more value and importance to our worldly relationships. In reality, our true essence was formed before our worldly birth and in our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt. We have an existential relationship with them and we are of their essence. Allah created the main and human part of our being from them, who were the first and most complete manifestation of Allah. The Ahl al-Bayt are our true and heavenly family, and they love us as their children with an eternal love. For this reason, being closer to our true essence, they have a far greater share of us compared to our earthly parents. So our relationship with them should be way stronger than the connection, feelings, and actions we have toward our own parents.

Unfortunately, by neglecting this profound truth, we not only deprive ourselves of the feeling of being the children of the most important and noble beings in this world, but we also remain oblivious to establishing a loving relationship with our true family. This kind of love can give us reassurance and strength throughout our entire life, has the potential to save us from many frustrations and failures, and can compensate for the shortcomings of this material and worldly life.

In fact, understanding our true relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt not only changes how we value our true self and prevents us from superficial and delusional behaviors, but also allows us to believe that reaching the status of the Ahl al-Bayt, our heavenly family, is not far-fetched. As a result, we will transform from a person who seeks ultimate progress in worldly life and attaining material or intellectual perfections into a person who tries to achieve the purpose of their creation and seeks similarity with Allah or the Absolute Perfection. Therefore, understanding our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt saves us from the limitations of material life and leads us toward pure human life. This is because establishing a true relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt and maintaining that bond requires us to change our lifestyle and become compatible with the Ahl al-Bayt.

What Does a Rightful Relationship Mean?

Our true relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt goes back to before our birth into this world. However, as soon as we come to the earth, we also have another relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt, which is called a rightful relationship. A rightful relationship is formed according to the ways of the world, and naturally, it requires respecting mutual rights. Each of us may be in a rightful relationship with different

people at the same time. For instance, we may have a rightful parent-child relationship with our parents, while also playing the role of a parent for our own child. As a teacher, we may have a teacher-student relationship with some of our students, or as a manager, neighbor, relative, or even co-religionist, we may have mutual duties and rights toward other individuals.

This rightful relationship returns to the hierarchy between us and others, and while having rightful relationships, we also have true relationships with them. For example, while we are truly brothers and sisters with other believers, we can also be rightfully colleagues or fellow citizens and have religious, rational, moral, or rightful duties toward each other. Therefore, having a true relationship with others does not prevent us from having a rightful relationship with or other duties toward them.

Our Rightful Relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt

Our rightful relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt is defined in terms of the infallible Imam and his followers. Thus, while the Imam is truly our father and loves us as his children with an eternal love, he also has guardianship over us. This guardianship, or prophethood is the rightful relationship of the Ahl al-Bayt with us, and it is a matter that becomes meaningful with our birth.

According to this rightful relationship, the Imam, as the most perfect example and infallible expert, is both our role model for becoming similar to Allah and is responsible for guiding us to reach the status of Allah's deputy and similarity to Him. We, in turn, are rightfully obligated to obey and follow the infallible Imam or expert who wants to bring us to our true status as Allah's deputy on earth.

Therefore, our relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt requires both obedience to them and love for them. That is because according to the rightful relationship, the Ahl al-Bayt are the mentors who are responsible for the well-being of all the dimensions of our existence, from the inanimate, vegetative, animal, and intellectual dimensions to the supra-rational dimension, and naturally, our reaching such well-being requires obedience and submission to them. According to the true relationship, they are like parents who are far more compassionate and kinder than our earthly parents, toward whom we must give our faithful commitment. That is, we must love them wholeheartedly and live like their true children.