



Delineating the Components of a Transcendent Livelihood Based on Raḍavi Teachings

*Mohammad Soleimani*¹ , *Amir-Hossein Khorshidi Athar*² 

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Abstract

This article elucidates the components of transcendent livelihood at the individual level from the perspective of Imam al-Riḍā (‘Alī ibn Mūsā), examining a distinctive livelihood model. Fundamentally, this model differs from prevalent materialistic models based on individualism, profit maximization, and destructive competition. This distinction is manifested in its ontological foundations (the human being as God’s vicegerent), teleological foundations (the ultimate goal of perfection rather than the accumulation of wealth), and methodological foundations (the primacy of cooperation rather than competition). An examination of narrations transmitted from Ali ibn Musa al-Riḍā led to the identification of several key components and distinguishing features of this livelihood model. Within the Raḍavi intellectual framework, livelihood management is undertaken not merely to satisfy needs but also as a means of realizing individual growth and perfection, with a comprehensive approach to all dimensions of human existence. This attention to the various dimensions of human existence places the economy at the service of ethics and spirituality and regards the provision of material well-being and lawful pleasure as a means of enhancing an individual’s capacity for spiritual pursuits. Furthermore, livelihood should provide a context for self-actualization and individual development rather than being merely a routine and repetitive daily activity. From the perspective of social interactions, a transcendent livelihood is founded on cooperation, empathy, and mutual assistance, and individual economic activity should contribute to the welfare and flourishing of society as well. In addition, the transcendent livelihood model defines a specific level of social responsibility, encompassing concern for

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1. Faculty Member, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Economics, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran.
(Corresponding Author) (solimani@isu.ac.ir)

2. PhD Student in Oil and Gas Contracts Management, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Economics, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran.

society and nature, which effectively controls the negative externalities of economic activity through endogenous and ethical mechanisms. Accordingly, the Raḍavi model of a transcendent livelihood can be understood as a comprehensive intellectual and practical framework for individuals and society that has the potential to address crises arising from the gap between spiritual values and economic activities.

Keywords: transcendent livelihood, spiritual growth, dimensions of human existence, individual development, social responsibility

1. Introduction

In Islamic teachings, the human being is a creature composed of spirit and body, and true happiness depends on the balanced and harmonious provision of material and spiritual needs. The economic systems that dominate the contemporary world—founded on materialism, pure individualism, and the maximization of profit (utility)—have failed to produce a life of dignity. Instead, they have generated a crisis of meaning, ethical rupture, and deep social inequalities. In these materialistic models, livelihood has transformed from a tool for dignified existence into an infinite goal for satisfying material needs, and the higher dimensions of human existence have been marginalized. This one-dimensional approach has not only led to the psychological and spiritual erosion of the individual but has also endangered the social order and the environment by disregarding the human being's divine responsibility (that is, vicegerency of God). In contrast to this material and one-dimensional view, the epistemic system of Islam introduces a comprehensive framework for managing life, which is the subject of this article. In other words, given the inefficacy of materialistic livelihood models in providing true happiness and the necessity of returning to authentic Islamic foundations, this research is necessitated by the theoretical and practical gap in explaining and applying a comprehensive and ethics-centered model of livelihood.

Many Islamic teachings elucidate this comprehensive framework, and in this article, with a specific focus on narrations transmitted from Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Riḍā, an attempt is made to delineate this model under the title "transcendent livelihood." (*ma'īshat-i muta'ālī*) In this model, livelihood management is not merely an economic activity but an operational system whose ultimate goal is the attainment of the good life (*ḥayāt ṭayyibā*—a pure and flourishing life) and the realization of individual perfection in the path of servitude to God, which places all areas of the individual's life in complete harmony and provides a practical criterion for evaluating the efficacy of individual and social life.

This research, by presenting a conceptual model, will demonstrate that transcendent livelihood from the perspective of Islamic teachings is a comprehensive and ethics-centered system that, by providing distinctive answers to certain fundamental questions, distinguishes itself from purely materialistic models and charts a new path for the good life at the individual and social levels. These fundamental questions concern the relationship of the livelihood model with (1) individual growth and perfection, (2) the dimensions of human existence, (3) the provision of a context for individual development, (4) the framework of interactions among individuals in society (cooperation and mutual assistance versus competition), and (5) the control of positive and negative externalities.

These key questions were selected because they distinguish the intellectual and theoretical boundaries of different ideas regarding livelihood from one another. In reality, the answer to these questions reveals the nature of a livelihood system and shows whether that system is limited merely to providing material sustenance or also aims at human transcendence and perfection.

This research, using an analytical-inferential method, addresses these questions and ultimately, from among these answers, delineates the conceptual model of transcendent livelihood.

2. Theoretical Literature

2.1. Explanation of the Concept of Livelihood and Its Position

The word "livelihood" (*ma'īsha*) refers to the things by which a person lives (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī n.d., 596). Livelihood is defined as a set of activities essential for daily life that are carried out over the course of an individual's or household's life. These activities include the provision of basic needs such as water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, and clothing. Managing livelihood requires creating the possibility and performing activities to meet the basic needs of the individual and their family. However, in the specialized development literature, particularly based on definitions by organizations such as the FAO and the DFID framework (UK Department for International Development), the concept of livelihood is much more comprehensive. The specialized definition of livelihood³ is that it encompasses the capabilities, assets or capital, income, and activities required to secure the necessities of life and ensure well-being (Chambers & Conway 1992; DFID 1999). This framework is based on the assumption that livelihood is not a point but a complex and systemic process.

The modern attitude toward livelihood in social sciences and development entails the goal of expanding the horizon of human choices. Amartya Sen considers

development as freedom and the expansion of options before humans. In progressive societies, the improvement of livelihood is not merely about increasing income; rather, its goal is to transition societies with subsistence economies, through balanced development, into a "leisure society" (Sen 1394 SH). In a society with broad horizons of choice, leisure becomes institutionalized, and citizens find opportunities to participate in the public sphere and engage with political and social issues—something that lays the groundwork for philosophizing and free dialogue (Sen 1394 SH).

2.2. Livelihood Model

"Livelihood model" is a comprehensive concept that encompasses all economic, social, and even environmental aspects of individuals' lives and shows how they strive for their survival and well-being. In fact, livelihood model refers to the manner in which individuals, households, or communities seek to earn income, provide for their basic needs (such as food, clothing, housing), and achieve welfare and economic security. This model includes a set of activities, resources, skills, knowledge, and relationships that individuals use to manage their lives. Many livelihood models are formed based on social customs, traditions, or even unwritten rules that individuals follow unconsciously or consciously. These rules specify the framework of livelihood behavior and usually tend toward stability, with their change occurring slowly unless affected by strong external factors. Certainly, whether from a Western or Islamic perspective, the concept of livelihood not only includes the satisfaction of needs but also refers to the framework governing the determination of what is defined as a "need," the prioritization of needs, the methods of responding to needs, and our expectations of the consequences of need satisfaction. In fact, the livelihood model must delineate how the individual confronts key questions on the subject of livelihood, including: (1) Which of our "wants" are our real "needs" that we must act to satisfy? (2) Among the recognized needs, which needs are prioritized and must be answered before other needs? (3) Which methods are permissible and desirable for responding to our needs, and which methods are forbidden and reprehensible?

2.3. Explanation of the Concept of the Transcendent Livelihood Model

"The transcendent life" in Islamic texts is a concept beyond the enjoyment of mere material welfare. This concept includes a quality life that is flourishing, in which the spiritual, intellectual, moral, and physical needs of the human being are provided in a balanced manner. From the perspective of Imam Reḍā, the transcendent life depends on balance, which, based on the narration of *Fiqh al-Riḍā*, has four fundamental

pillars: 1. Intimate supplication with the Lord (spirituality), 2. The livelihood affairs (economy), 3. Socializing with religious brothers (society), and 4. Solitude for lawful pleasure (psyche and body) (Imam Riḍā 1406AH, 337)¹. These four pillars show that livelihood must be regulated in such a way as to provide the opportunity and energy necessary for growth in all dimensions of life (material, spiritual, moral, and social). On the other hand, these four pillars somehow indicate the balance in the individual's behavior in facing God, himself, and society.

The distinction of transcendent livelihood from prevalent material models can be examined in three main axes: ontological, teleological, and methodological. To understand this distinction in these three axes, attention to this narration is helpful. Given the above, the two models of Islamic and Western livelihood have a fundamental gap theoretically and practically in each of the three axes:

A) Distinction in Ontological Foundations

Material economic models (such as neoclassical economics or Western development theories) rest on the assumption of “economic man” (*Homo Economicus*) and the primacy of individual profit. In this view, the human being is a creature whose behavior is defined solely based on the maximization of utility and personal material interests. But in transcendent livelihood, the human being is considered as “God's vicegerent” (*khalīfat Allāh*), composed of material and spiritual dimensions, and their behavior is oriented within the framework of monotheism and proximity to God. This view fundamentally constrains individual profit by ethics, social responsibility, and a purpose beyond the world, and emphasizes the comprehensiveness of human existence.

B) Distinction in the Ultimate Goal

The ultimate goal in material models is generally defined around the quantitative accumulation of wealth, profit maximization, income growth (or GDP), or utility maximization. In this system, welfare is summarized merely in the material and tangible dimension, and wealth is considered a self-sufficient goal. In contrast, the ultimate goal in transcendent livelihood is the attainment of the good life and individual perfection. According to this hadith, livelihood is not an end in itself but an essential means of strengthening the foundations of religion. Its ultimate purpose is expressed in the phrase “*wa-staʿīnū bi-dhālika ʿalā umūr al-dīn*” (“and seek help through that for the affairs of religion”); meaning that a balanced livelihood and the provision of carnal desires within the limits of what is lawful and moderation gives the individual the energy, psychological stability, and peace of mind necessary to attend to the main affairs of life, namely religion and perfection, with greater strength

and focus. Therefore, livelihood in this system has the status of "spiritual infrastructure" and defines the limit of dependence on the world at a point that neither leads to licentiousness and caprice nor destroys human capability and dignity through severe deprivation. In this model, a good livelihood and material comfort are merely a tool and prelude to moral and spiritual transcendence and the worship of God. Therefore, transcendent livelihood emphasizes the "quality" of life, ethics-centeredness, and justice, not merely the "quantity" of wealth.

C) Distinction in the Driving Force and Methodology

Material models accept absolute and sometimes "destructive" competition as the main driving force for efficiency and innovation. Of course, regarding the driving force, it should be known that sometimes motivations are internal and sometimes external. This excessive emphasis on competition leads to individualism and the neglect of the rights of society and the environment. But the methodology of transcendent livelihood is based on cooperation, empathy, mutual social responsibility, and adherence to jurisprudence. According to the above hadith, the believer must consider "*ḥaẓẓan min al-dunyā*" (a share of the world) for themselves, which includes not only the provision of primary needs but also the satisfaction of the lawful desires of the self ("*mā tashtahī min al-ḥalāl*"). However, this enjoyment of the world is strictly bound by two moral criteria: the preservation of "*murūwa*" (chivalry and dignity of the self) and the avoidance of *isrāf* (extravagance). Moreover, in this model, profitability must be based on peaceful coexistence with society and cooperation, and the goodness of an individual's livelihood is tied to improving the livelihood of others (as in the narration that considers the best of people to be the one who also improves the lives of others). This approach prioritizes social and moral sustainability over mere economic growth.

2.4. Similar Concepts in Conventional Western Literature

In non-Islamic literature, the concept of transcendent livelihood is not directly addressed, but there are alternative and related concepts that attempt to go beyond the purely material framework. These concepts are mainly formed around the axis of quality of life and distinguish themselves from the traditional criterion of GDP:

A) Welfare and Subjective Well-being (SWB): In welfare economics, the goal is the maximization of utility and the satisfaction of individual needs. But in recent decades, the emphasis on "subjective well-being" has increased, which includes an individual's evaluation of their life (life satisfaction) and the balance between positive and negative emotions. This view attempts to include the psychological and emotional dimensions of the human being in measuring success, but it remains incapable of

explaining the moral and teleological dimension of life and substitutes a subjective criterion (feeling of satisfaction) for an objective criterion (proximity to God).

B) Capabilities Approach and Human Development: The capabilities approach, proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, attempts to see development beyond income. From this perspective, "the good life" is summarized in the ability of individuals to do and to be and to attain basic capabilities (such as health, knowledge, and political participation). This approach pays attention to the multiple dimensions of the human being and goes beyond purely economic models, but it lacks a metaphysical and divine foundation, and its ultimate goal is defined within the framework of worldly life. On the other hand, in the conventional Western view, there is an instrumental attitude toward human development, and its function is evaluated in terms of increasing production and welfare.

C) Sustainable Economy: After the 1970s, a concept called "sustainable development" was introduced, the goal of which was to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This view raises environmental and social dimensions alongside the economic dimension. While this model overlaps with the component of "social and environmental responsibility" in transcendent livelihood, its motivation is merely the preservation of material survival and human interests, and it lacks the support of divine and moral responsibility (such as the necessity of working for God).

D) Decent Life: The concept of "decent life" in contemporary development literature has an inseparable link with human dignity and individual freedoms. According to Amartya Sen's theory (Sen, 1999), a decent life should not be measured merely by economic indicators such as per capita income; rather, the main criterion is "individual capabilities" to achieve goals that the individual rationally values. This approach emphasizes that having health, education, and political participation are essential tools for elevating the human being from the state of "mere survival" to the state of "flourishing." On the other hand, international organizations focus on the structural and material aspects of this concept. According to the definitions of the International Labour Organization (ILO, 1999), achieving a decent life is impossible without the realization of "decent work." This organization believes that having a job with fair income, physical safety in the workplace, social protection for families, and freedom to express concerns constitute the main pillars of a standard and dignified life. In fact, a decent life is realized when the individual is protected against economic shocks and enjoys fundamental human rights in all arenas.

As a conclusion, conventional Western literature, with concepts such as subjective

well-being, human development, and capabilities, has attempted to move beyond materialistic limitations, but none has been able to provide a single and comprehensive framework with a spiritual foundation and otherworldly purpose for all livelihood activities.

3. Components of Transcendent Livelihood Based on Raḍavi Teachings

By referring to the hadiths and narrations transmitted from Imam Reḍā, it can be shown that certain key components distinguish the system of transcendent livelihood from purely material models and provide a context for the realization of the good life. Here, based on the search and research conducted among the narrations, some components are examined.

3.1. Balance between the Dimensions of Human Existence in the Transcendent Livelihood Model

Balance among the dimensions of human existence is both a necessary condition for, and a natural outcome of, the transcendent livelihood model. Based on the Islamic view, in addition to the material dimensions of the individual, other existential dimensions, including the divine and social dimensions, must flourish, and neglect of any of these dimensions leads neither to the welfare of the individual and society nor to spiritual growth and transcendence. This balance is first manifested in the management of time and energy; therefore, the Imam emphasizes that the individual must allocate their time to earning income, worship, and socializing (Imam Riḍā 1406 AH, 337).² And the use of "leisure time" and lawful pleasures, not excess, is a condition for the ability to correctly perform other life duties, including worship and livelihood. On the other hand, the use of the world and the accumulation of wealth is bound by a moral red line; in a narration transmitted from Imam Reḍā, it is stated that wealth is not gathered except with five characteristics: intense miserliness, long hopes, excessive greed, severing family ties, and preferring the world over the hereafter. (Ṭabrisī 1344 SH, 1: 573).³ [Blameworthy] wealth is gathered only by relying on five reprehensible characteristics, including intense miserliness, dominant greed, and preferring the world over the hereafter. A careful examination of the context of this narration shows that any acquisition of wealth that leads to preferring the material dimension (the world) over the good and benefit of the hereafter is blameworthy, and any economic activity that leads to the weakening of moral virtues and the dominance of the love of the world over the hereafter is in fact contrary to the transcendent

livelihood model and will lead to loss instead of perfection for the individual.

In their noble narrations, the Imam presents a transcendent view of the issue of economy and livelihood; a view in which the world and its activities are considered a bridge for crossing to the hereafter and gaining spiritual degrees. In a sermon delivered after rain fell in response to his prayer, Imam al-Riḍā said: O people! Be mindful of the blessings that God has bestowed upon you, and do not drive them away from yourselves by disobeying Him; rather, by obeying God and giving thanks for His blessings and favors, make them lasting. Know that after faith in God Almighty and after acknowledging the rights of the divine guardians from the family of Muhammad, the Prophet of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), [there is no thanksgiving dearer to God than your assisting your believing brothers in their worldly affairs]. (Ṣadūq 1378 SH, 2: 169, hadith 1).⁴

While referring to the position of thanksgiving and the most accepted and beloved instances of thanksgiving (faith in God, acknowledgment of the rights of the divine guardians, and assisting believing brothers in their worldly affairs), the Imam points out that the world is a "passage" (*ma'bar*) that leads believers to "the gardens of their Lord," from which it can be understood that the world is the carrier and place in which individuals must acquire sufficient spiritual provisions to reach paradise, and earning a living and living in this world must be organized in a way that leads us to this goal. On the other hand, thanksgiving for blessings (and one of its instances is assisting brothers) places the individual among "the elect of God, Blessed and Exalted" (*khāṣṣat Allāh tabāraka wa-ta'ālā*), and in other words, the activities of individuals, if carried out with the intention and purpose of solving the problems of believers and relieving their burdens, have a serious effect on their growth and transcendence.

The emphasis of Islamic teachings on financial obligations (particularly *khums* and *zakāt*) and beneficence and charity reveals another dimension of creating balance between material and spiritual affairs.

The Imam explicitly states that paying this right is not only "*awnunā 'alā dīninā*" (help to us in the affair of our religion) but also for the payer themselves "*miftāḥu rizqikum wa tamḥīṣu dhunūbikum*" (the key to your sustenance and the means of purifying your sins).⁵ This definition creates an inseparable link between economic performance and divine favors (the opening of sustenance) on one hand, and spiritual purification (*tamḥīṣ al-dhunūb*) on the other. By fulfilling the divine covenant in the financial sphere, the Muslim individual establishes balance between the world and the hereafter by preparing a store for "*yawm faqatikum*" (the day of your need in the resurrection).

This balance has a practical effect on individuals' lives and specifies the framework of the individual's economic activities. Economic activity that leads to the accumulation of wealth without charity and generosity is not only not perfection-generating but also leads to spiritual decline and exit from the circle of faith. For economic activity to lead to individual growth, the individual must have a balanced and moderate approach in managing their assets and expenditures. This balance is the same "*bayn al-makrūhayn*" (between the two reprehensible things) that the Imam introduces; that is, avoiding both reprehensible extremes of *isrāf* (extravagance and waste) and *iqtār* (stinginess and miserliness).⁶ Achieving this "*qiwām*" or middle ground not only guarantees financial health but also the psychological and moral health of the individual and transforms economic activity into a correct spiritual wayfaring.

On one hand, the Imam emphasizes that whenever a person provides food for a year, they become light-hearted and at ease. It is narrated from Imam Reḍā: Imam Reḍā: Whenever a person provides food for their year, they become light-hearted and at ease. Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq would not buy property until they had prepared food for their year.⁷ (Kulayni 1362SH, 5: 89, hadith 1). And emphasis is placed on expanding sustenance for the family and dependents. Imam Reḍā: The possessor of blessing must place their family in comfort.⁸ (Kulayni 1362SH, 4: 11, hadith 5). And on the other hand, emphasis is placed on avoiding extravagance, luxury, and world-worship: "May God have mercy on you, do you not know that God, Mighty and Majestic, hates extravagance and hates stinginess" (Ḥakīmī 1370SH, 4: 205). In fact, the squandering of property must be avoided.⁹ (Majlisī 1403AH, 78: 335).

This component of transcendent livelihood refers to the philosophy of human creation and the comprehensiveness of their existence; that is, the human being is created with a purpose, and the economy must serve human perfection, in contrast to material attitudes that consider "pleasure and welfare" as the ultimate goal. In contrast, in the Islamic view, emphasis is placed on balance (justice) between material needs (body) and spiritual needs (spirit and intellect) so that no dimension is sacrificed for another. In transcendent livelihood, the provision of material comfort is a tool for "leisure for spiritual affairs." This distinction shows that if livelihood prevents worship and transcendence, it is not a desirable livelihood.

3.2. Livelihood as a Context for Self-Actualization and Individual Development

The lifestyle of each individual has a tangible effect on their individual development; and in particular, each individual's effort to manage livelihood affairs can provide the

context for their individual development. Individual development¹⁷ means the flourishing of a person's various capacities. Economic activity should not be limited to earning income to meet needs; it should also develop the individual's material and spiritual talents and capacities. Individual development is the process of self-improvement through conscious habits and activities, which means striving to reach maximum potential in various aspects of life. In some texts, individual development is interpreted as a lifelong journey of self-improvement, learning, and growth. The core of individual development includes (1) identifying areas for improvement, (2) actively striving to realize improvement, and (3) creating habits and participating in activities that help realize maximum individual potential. In individual development, various aspects are considered, including improving job skills, striving for job and income advancement, developing communication skills, personal financial management, improving health and fitness, expanding one's knowledge, and cultivating critical thinking and enhancing emotional intelligence.

The emphasis on individual development in managing transcendent livelihood refers to the flourishing of the infinite existential capacities of the human being and the necessity of their continuous growth. In transcendent livelihood, unlike material models that summarize development merely in economic growth, emphasis is placed on self-actualization and continuous flourishing (individual development) in various dimensions. In this regard, two dimensions should be mentioned:

Imam Reḍā has said: One who is content with a small amount of lawful wealth, their expenses become light, their family becomes comfortable, God makes them aware of the pain and remedy of the world, and He brings them out of it safe and sinless to the abode of peace, paradise.¹⁰ (‘Aṭṭaridī 1406AH, 1: 269). Therefore, it can be said that the realization of transcendent livelihood leads to an increase in the individual's insight and vision and an increase in their ability to steer their personal life.

Considering metaphysical and spiritual dimensions for economic activity indicates Islam's attention to the comprehensiveness of human personality and the negation of a reductionist material view. In Islam, work is not merely a response to economic need; it is an existential duty. Lawful work is a means for proximity to God, self-purification, and combating laziness. This attitude takes work out of being a merely worldly matter and turns it into a devotional and perfectional act. In material models, work is an imposed matter with negative utility¹⁹ (*disutility*) that the individual is forced to endure to earn income, but in transcendent livelihood, work is an opportunity and a value that is placed on par with jihad and worship. This distinction changes the individual's internal motivation from earning profit to earning God's

pleasure and increases quality and ethics in production.

From the perspective of the teachings of Imam Reḍā, economic activity and earning lawful sustenance are not merely a material necessity but an unparalleled opportunity for perfection and individual growth. Imam Reḍā has said in this regard: "People are inevitably engaged in the pursuit of their livelihood, so do not abandon the pursuit of wealth."¹¹ (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1409AH, 12: 18; Ḥakīmī 1370SH, 5: 320). And this effort is on par with and even higher than the reward of jihad in the way of God: One who seeks the grace of God, Mighty and Majestic, to provide for their family, their reward is greater than the warrior in the way of God, Mighty and Majestic.¹² (Kulayni 1362SH, 5: 88, hadith 2). One who seeks the grace of God, Mighty and Majestic, to obtain "*mā yakuffu bihi ʿiyālahu*" (that by which he suffices his family), has in fact engaged in a type of greater jihad; a jihad that has a very high status and dignity before God. The religious attitude takes the daily effort for lawful livelihood out of being a neutral act and turns it into a practical obligation for gaining perfection. Of course, growth and perfection on this path require that the individual avoid the moral pests that threaten this spiritual journey and refrain from greed, miserliness, covetousness, unlawful gain, usury, lying, etc. (There are numerous hadiths on avoiding these sins that have been omitted for the sake of brevity).

From another perspective, poverty and straitened livelihood are not only obstacles to growth but also one of the obstacles to individual development. Imam Reḍā: Neediness is the key to wretchedness.¹³ (*Shahīd-i Avval* 1379SH, 37). By limiting the mental capacities of the poor individual, poverty takes away their power of thought and resourcefulness, causing the continuation of their poverty and the intensification of their wretchedness. Based on the statement of Imam Reḍā, God detests "*al-buʿs wa-l-tabāʿus*" (wretchedness and feigning wretchedness)¹⁴ and therefore individuals must exert all their efforts in their lives to use their individual capacities and avoid feigning wretchedness and poverty.

Simultaneously with the development of livelihood and the increase of the individual's income, their sense of gratitude and thankfulness for the blessings given to them must increase, and on the other hand, their sensitivity to observing God's rights must increase. The Imam says: "One who is wealthy is continuously threatened by danger, and God's rights are obligatory upon them. By God, I am continuously fearful of the blessings that God has given me until I fulfill the rights that God has made obligatory" (Kulayni 1362SH, 3: 502, hadith 19). And the Imam continues: "Of course, I praise God for this blessing that He has bestowed upon me." The development of sustenance is not desirable if it is not accompanied by thanksgiving

and the fulfillment of the rights of property and blessings, and in other words, the development of livelihood is desirable and acceptable if it is accompanied by individual development.

One of the dimensions of individual development is facilitating living conditions for the family. The Imam bought a larger house for one of his employees who had a large family and lived in a small house. That individual, while thanking the Imam, expressed that they preferred to stay in the same small house because "my father, despite having good financial status, lived with difficulty in this same house until he died." The Imam became upset at this foolish reason and said, "If your father was ignorant, should you also be like him?" (Kulayni 1362SH, 6: 525, hadith 2). Misplaced asceticism is rejected, and individuals must improve their living conditions in proportion to changes in society as their income improves, just as in the noble hadith above, living in a small house despite good financial status is considered blameworthy.

3.3. Methods of Managing Livelihood: Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with a Focus on Empathy and Solidarity

The management of livelihood in a believing society is based not on individual profit and not at the expense of others, but on the moral principles of mutual benefit and non-harm. Deception and trickery with Muslim brothers are considered a cause for expulsion from the guardianship (*wilāya*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them): Imam Reḍā—narrating from his fathers (peace be upon them) from the Prophet of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family): "He is not from us who deceives a Muslim, or harms them, or tricks them."¹⁵ (Ṣadūq 1378 SH, 2: 29, hadith 26). This severe prohibition of fraud, harm, and trickery in transactions creates a decisive boundary between lawful livelihood and healthy competition with destructive competition and unethical profiteering.

On the other hand, another narration from Imam Reḍā makes the criterion of the goodness of an individual's livelihood contingent upon improving the livelihood of others in the path of managing livelihood and considers the worst of people to be the one who does not include others in their livelihood.¹⁶ (Ibn Shu'ba al-Ḥarrānī 1404AH, 448). The best life belongs to the one who "*ḥasuna ma'āshu ghayrihi fī ma'āshihi*" (the life of another is good and flourishing in their life). In contrast, the worst life belongs to the one whose livelihood does not affect the livelihood of another. This narration reveals the position and necessity of the interdependence of individuals' livelihood and welfare in livelihood; the economic success of the individual must lead to the development and welfare of others.

Every individual in society must seek to relieve the grief of believers because

according to the Imam's statement, whoever relieves a knot from the work of a believer (and removes a grief from them), God will also relieve their closed work (and remove their sorrow) on the Day of Resurrection.¹⁷ (Kulayni 1362SH, 2: 200). And "one of the best types of charity is your assisting the weak."¹⁸ (Ibn Shu'ba al-Harrānī 1404AH, 446). This assistance transforms livelihood from a one-sided relationship (earning for individual benefit) into a cycle of cooperation and empathy. On the other hand, in the hadith mentioned in previous sections, it is indicated that the continuation of the use of blessings is contingent upon obedience and thanksgiving to God (*istadīmūhā bi-ṭā'atihi wa-shukrihi 'alā ni'amihi wa-ayādihī*), and one of the instances of thanksgiving is assisting and helping believing brothers (one of the most beloved instances of thanksgiving: [your assisting your believing brothers in their worldly affairs, which is a passage for them to the gardens of their Lord]). This shows the importance of other-orientedness and cooperation in Islam.

Managing livelihood based on empathy and cooperation indicates the importance of human unity and the negation of extreme individualism and is rooted in the ontological foundations of Islam (monotheism). The crisis caused by destructive competition in material models has led to social rupture and severe inequality, while in the transcendent livelihood model, individual profit must be linked with social profit, and livelihood must be a means for the public good. In sum, managing livelihood in the Islamic view is not an individual race but a system of cooperation and solidarity whose survival and transcendence depend on mutual benefit and avoiding harm to others.

3.4. The Position of the Individual's Social Responsibility Toward Society and the Environment

Western scholarship has placed strong emphasis on social responsibility (both individual and institutional) in recent decades. Islamic teachings likewise contain extensive guidance on this subject. The individual finds identity in the context of society and traverses their path of perfection and transcendence, and therefore the path of growth of all individuals depends on the collection of actions and behaviors related to society. In the luminous statement of Imam Reḍā, it is obligatory upon the human being to develop the livelihood of their family.¹⁹ There are numerous hadiths that attend to others (helping the poor and the oppressed of society, beneficence and charity, solidarity and self-sacrifice, the rights of religious brothers, the rights of neighbors, etc.) and also to nature (how to interact with nature, plants, animals, etc.), showing the various dimensions of this social responsibility.

One of the main mechanisms for realizing social responsibility is the institution

of *zakāt*, whose philosophy the Imam has described as "*qūt al-fuqarā*" (the sustenance of the poor) and "*taḥṣīn amwāl al-aghniyā*" (the protection and preservation of the wealth of the rich).²⁰ Wealth in society is a trust of which a portion is the right of the needy, and its payment is in fact a divine insurance for the remaining wealth. Charity, solidarity, and *zakāt* in this system are not merely financial assistance; they are the manifestation of compassion, mercy, and kindness toward the weak and the poor, which encourages society toward empathy and the strengthening of the poor and offers them "*al-ma'ūna lahum 'alā amr al-dīn*" (help in the affairs of religion). As a result, the individual's social responsibility toward society is a two-way tool for individual spiritual development (thanksgiving, compassion, and lesson-learning) and social development (providing livelihood, consolidating wealth, and strengthening the religiosity of society).

Earlier, a precious hadith was also mentioned that introduced one of the most beloved methods of thanksgiving and divine obedience as "*mu'āwanatukum li-ikhwānikum al-mu'minīn 'alā dunyāhum*" (your assisting your believing brothers in their worldly affairs). This is not only a moral obligation but also a direct path for proximity to God, such that the doer is placed among the "elect of God" (*khāṣṣat Allāh*). The individual's economic activity must always be accompanied by a social attachment; and it must be a path for assisting others so that they can use their world as a "passage" (*ma'bar*) to paradise.

The Imam's encounter with extravagance and the throwing away of materials is also instructive. In his encounter with one of the servants who had left an apple half-eaten and thrown it away, he said: "Glory be to God, if you are not in need of it, there are people who are in need of it. Give it to someone who needs it." (Kulayni 1362SH, 5: 297, hadith 8). The understanding derived from this narration is that as long as there is a needy person in society for goods and resources, extravagance is not permissible, and mere ownership of a good cannot justify its wasteful use. On the other hand, in the Islamic view, each of the goods and objects has a purpose, and the correct use of them by individuals helps realize that purpose; and therefore individuals are responsible for each and every object and creature in their surroundings.

Attention to the individual's social responsibility toward society becomes necessary due to the human being's divine responsibility (being God's trustee) toward themselves and the environment, and its result is the all-encompassing sustainability (moral, social, and environmental) of individual and social livelihood. In material models, the control of negative externalities³⁰ is carried out through government laws and external punishments (exogenous). But in transcendent livelihood, the primary

tool of control is through divine piety and religious responsibility (endogenous). Sustainability in this model is not only environmental sustainability but also the moral and spiritual sustainability of the individual and society, which is directly linked to divine sustenance.

4. Conclusion

This article has delineated the components of transcendent livelihood according to the intellectual system of Imam al-Riḍā, presenting a comprehensive, ethics-centered model for managing life at the individual level. In the Raḍavi view, livelihood is not merely an economic mechanism for satisfying material needs; it is a perfection-generating operational system whose ultimate goal is the attainment of the good life and proximity to God. This model is fundamentally distinct from prevalent materialistic models (based on individualism, profit maximization, and destructive competition); a distinction that is manifested in ontological foundations (the human being as God's vicegerent), teleological foundations (the ultimate goal of perfection rather than the accumulation of wealth), and methodological foundations (the primacy of cooperation rather than competition).

The analysis of Raḍavi teachings and reference to authentic narrations led to the extraction and explanation of five key and distinctive components:

1. In the Raḍavi intellectual system, livelihood management is undertaken not merely with the aim of satisfying needs but as the realization of individual growth and perfection and with a comprehensive approach to all dimensions of human existence. This approach considers work on par with worship and jihad and introduces the servant who has a profession as beloved to God.
2. Attention to the dimensions of human existence, which places the economy at the service of ethics and spirituality and regards the provision of material well-being (lawful pleasure) as a means for capability in spiritual affairs; in the principles of planning for individual livelihood, nourishment of the spirit, strengthening of the intellect, and cultivation of moral virtues are also considered. For example, based on Raḍavi teachings, emphasis is placed on providing material needs to realize the peace of the spirit and freedom from the world to attend to spiritual affairs.
3. Livelihood must be a context for self-actualization and individual development and must flourish the existential capacities of the individual and attend to all their existential dimensions. Livelihood is not merely a routine and repetitive activity; it provides the necessary context for self-actualization and individual flourishing (individual development), and in fact, its goal is the elevation of the human being

on the path of servitude and proximity to God.

4. Cooperation, empathy, and mutual assistance, with the axis of the narration "*aḥsan al-nās ma'āshan*" (the best of people is the one who improves the livelihood of others), are central to the management of livelihood. Also, social interactions in this framework are defined based on cooperation and mutual assistance, and the emphasis is that the individual's activity in the path of realizing livelihood must also lead to the good and prosperity of society.
5. Social responsibility (attention to society and nature), which attends to the religious obligation of caring for others and the components of the individual's living environment and effectively controls the negative externalities of the economy through endogenous and ethical mechanisms. Helping others, *qarḍ al-ḥasana* (interest-free loans), charity, and assisting the needy are relevant, and in fact, the side effects of this cooperation and other-orientedness will be the increase of social security and cohesion and the reduction of poverty. According to Islamic teachings, any economic activity that is morally corrupt or harmful to society or the environment is undesirable; and therefore, moral, social, and environmental sustainability is considered an inseparable part of livelihood management.

Future research should develop this conceptual model in the form of a quantitative measurement model (indicator system) to evaluate the efficacy of economic systems based on Islamic criteria.

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Notes

¹ Wa-jtahidū an yakūna zamānukum arba‘ sa‘āt: sā‘a minhu li-munājātihi, wa-sā‘a li-amr al-ma‘āsh, wa-sā‘a li-mu‘āsharat al-ikhwān al-thiqāt, wa-alladhīna yu‘arriqūnakum ‘uyūbakum, wa-yukhlīṣūna lakum fī al-bāṭin, wa-sā‘a takhlūna fihā li-dhātikum, wa-bihādhihi al-sā‘a taqdirūna ‘alā al-thalāth al-sā‘āt.

² Wa-sā‘atan yakhluw fihā bi-ladhdhatin fī ghayri muḥarramin, wa-bihādhihi al-sā‘ati taqdiru ‘alā al-thalāthi al-sā‘āt.

³ Lā yajtamī‘u al-mālu illā bi-khiṣālīn khamsin: bi-bukhlīn shadīdin wa-amalīn ṭawīlin wa-ḥirṣīn ghālībīn wa-qaṭī‘ati raḥīmīn wa-īthārī al-dunyā ‘alā al-ākhirā.

⁴ “Yā ayyuhā al-nāsu! Ittaqū Allāha fī ni‘ami Allāhi ‘alaykum, fa-lā tunaffirūhā ‘ankum bi-ma‘āṣīhi, bal istadīmūhā bi-ṭā‘atihi wa-shukrihi ‘alā ni‘amihi wa-ayādīhi, wa-‘lamū annakum lā tashkurūna Allāha ta‘ālā bi-shay‘in — ba‘da al-īmāni bi-Llāhi wa-ba‘da al-i‘tirāfi bi-ḥuqūqi awliyā‘i Allāhi min Āli Muḥammadīn rasūli Allāhi (ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa-ālihi) — aḥabba ilayhi min mu‘āwanatikum li-ikhwānikum al-mu‘minīna ‘alā dunyāhum allatī hiya ma‘barun lahum ilā jināni rabbihim, fa-inna man fa‘ala dhālika kāna min khāṣṣati Allāhi tabāraka wa-ta‘ālā.”

⁵ In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Indeed, God is All-Encompassing and Generous. He has guaranteed reward for action, and grief for straitness. Regarding opposition, He has guaranteed punishment and penalty. No wealth is lawful except through the path that God has made lawful. And indeed, khums is our help for our religion and our dependents and our followers, and what we bestow and the honor we buy from those whose dominance and power we fear (like the money we give to those who are not deserving, in order to protect our honor). So do not withhold it from us, and do not deprive yourselves of our supplication as much as you are able. For indeed, its payment is the key to your sustenance and the purification of your sins, and it is something you prepare for the day of your need. And the Muslim is one who fulfills the covenant that God has made with them. The Muslim is not one who accepts with the tongue and opposes with the heart. And peace". (Kulayni 1362SH, 1: 547)

⁶ Al-Khiṣāl ‘an Muḥammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Sa‘īd ‘an ba‘ḍi aṣḥābihi: sami‘tu al-‘Ayyāshiyya wa-huwa

yaqūlu: ista'dhantu al-Riḍā ('alayhi al-salām) fī al-naḥaḥ al-'iyāli, fa-qāla: bayna al-makrūhayni. Qāla: fa-qultu: ju'iltu fidāka, lā wa-Llāhi mā a'rifu al-makrūhayni! Qāla: fa-qāla: balā yarḥamuka Allāhu, ammā ta'rifu anna Allāha ('azza wa-jalla) kariha al-isrāfa wa-kariha al-iqtāra, fa-qāla: "Wa-alladhīna idhā anfaqu lam yusrifū wa-lam yaqturū wa-kāna bayna dhālika qawāman"?! (Majlisī 1403AH, 71: 347, hadith 11) Al-Khiṣāl — narrating from Muḥammad ibn 'Amr ibn Sa'īd, from one of his companions: I heard from al-'Ayyāshī that he said: I sought permission from Imam Reza (peace be upon him) regarding expenditure on the family. He said: "The middle ground between the two reprehensible things." He said: I said: "May I be your sacrifice! By God, I do not know what the two reprehensible things are!" He said: He said: "Yes, may God have mercy on you! Do you not know that God, Mighty and Majestic, detests both extravagance and stinginess, and He has said: 'And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor stingy, but take a moderate course between that'?"

⁷ Inna al-insāna idhā adkhala ṭa'āma sanatihī khaffa ḥayruhu wa-stāḥa, wa-kāna Abū Ja'farin wa-Abū 'Abd Allāhi ('alayhimā al-salām) lā yashtarīyāni 'uqkātā ḥattā yuḥrizā ṭa'āma sanatihimā.

⁸ Ṣāḥibu al-ni'mati yajibu 'alayhi al-tawsi'atu 'alā 'iyālihi.

⁹ Imam Reza (peace be upon him): God detests gossip, squandering wealth, and excessive begging. "Inna Allāha yubghīdu al-qīla wa-l-qāla, wa-idā'ata al-māli, wa-kathrata al-su'āli."

¹⁰ Man raḍiya bi-l-yasīri min al-ḥalāli khaffat ma'ūnatuhu wa-tana'ama ahluhu wa-baṣṣarahu Allāhu dā'a al-dunyā wa-dawā'ahā wa-akhrajahu minhā sāliman.

¹¹ Laysa li-l-nāsi buddun min ṭalabi ma'āshihim, fa-lā tada'i al-ṭalaba.

¹² Alladhī yaṭlubu min faḍli Allāhi ('azza wa-jalla) mā yakuffu bihi 'iyālahu, a'ḥamu ajran min al-mujāhidi fī sabīli Allāhi ('azza wa-jalla).

¹³ Al-maskanatu miftāḥu al-bu'si.

¹⁴ Al-Imāmu al-Riḍā ('alayhi al-salām): Urwī anna Allāha (tabāraka wa-ta'ālā) yuḥibbu al-jamāla wa-l-tajammula, wa-yubghīdu al-bu'sa wa-l-tabā'usa, wa-anna Allāha ('azza wa-jalla) yubghīdu min al-rijāli al-qādhūrata. (Majlisī 1403AH, 79: 303, hadith 16.) I narrate that God, Blessed and Exalted, loves beauty and adornment and detests wretchedness and feigning wretchedness. God, Mighty and Majestic, detests filthy and malodorous men.

¹⁵ Laysa minnā man ghashsha musliman, aw ḍarrahū, aw mākarahū.

¹⁶ Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl — narrating from 'Alī ibn Shu'ayb: I had the honor of meeting Imam Reza (peace be upon him). The Imam said to me: "O 'Alī! Who has the best life?" I said: "My master! You know better than me." The Imam said: "O 'Alī! The one in whose life the life of another is good and flourishing. O 'Alī! Who has the worst life?" I said: "You know better." He said: "The one in whose life another is not [good and flourishing]." 'An 'Alīyyi bni Shu'ayb: dakhaltu 'alā Abī al-Ḥasani al-Riḍā ('alayhi al-salām), fa-qāla lī: Yā 'Alīyyu, man aḥsanu al-nāsi ma'āshan? Qultu: Anta yā sayyidī a'lamu bihi minnī. Yā 'Alīyyu, man ḥasuna ma'āshu ghayrihi fī ma'āshihi. Yā 'Alīyyu, man aswa'u al-nāsi ma'āshan? Qultu: Anta a'lamu. Qāla: Man lam ya'ish ghayruhu fī ma'āshihi

¹⁷ Man farraja 'an mu'minin farraja Allāhu 'an qalbihi yawma al-qiyyāmati.

¹⁸ 'Awnuka li-l-ḍa'ifi min aḥḍali al-ṣadaqati.

¹⁹ It is obligatory upon the possessors of blessing to expand upon their family and bring ease to their lives. (Kulayni 1362SH, 4: 11.)

²⁰ Al-Imāmu al-Riḍā ('alayhi al-salām): Inna 'illata al-zakāti min ajli qūti al-fuqarā'i, wa-taḥṣīni amwālī al-aghniyā'i. (Ṣadūq 1378SH, 2: 89) Al-Imāmu al-Riḍā ('alayhi al-salām): Inna 'illata al-zakāti min ajli qūti al-fuqarā'i, wa-taḥṣīni amwālī al-aghniyā'i; li-anna Allāha ('azza wa-jalla) kallafa ahla al-ṣiḥḥati al-

qiyāma bi-sha'ni ahli al-zamānati wa-l-balwā, kamā qāla Allāhu (tabāraka wa-ta'ālā): "La-tublawunna fī amwālikum wa-anfusikum." Fī amwālikum: ikhrāju al-zakāti, wa-fī anfusikum: tawṭīnu al-anfusi 'alā al-ṣabri. Ma'a mā fī dhālika min adā'i shukri ni'ami Allāhi ('azza wa-jalla), wa-l-ṭama'i fī al-ziyādati, ma'a mā fīhi mina al-ziyādati wa-l-ra'fati wa-l-raḥmati li-ahli al-ḍa'fi, wa-l-'aṭfi 'alā ahli al-maskanati, wa-l-ḥathti lahum 'alā al-muwāsāti, wa-taqwiyati al-fuqarā'i, wa-l-ma'ūnati lahum 'alā amri al-dīni, wa-huwa 'izatun li-ahli al-ghinā wa-'ibratun lahum li-yastadillū 'alā fuqarā'i al-ākhirati bihim.