

The Concept Of Freedom In Islam

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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. "And those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, bidding them to do what is right and forbidding them what is wrong, making lawful for them the good (things), and forbidding for them the corrupt (things) and relieving them of their burdens, and the fetters that were upon them. Those who believe in him and honour him, and help him and follow the

light while has been sent down with him - those are they the successful." Holy Qur'an (7:157) Submission to the will and laws of Allah is the source of all freedom. It liberates the mind, soul, and behaviour from the evil influences of the world. It helps mankind overcome oppressive tyrants, unjust laws, lusts, deviation and psychological complexes which enslave his will. Submission to the will of Allah grants man the right to choose a better way of life, to live his life in a moral and upright way. Islam was revealed to the Prophet of humanity as merciful, eternal and all powerful. If during his life man submits to the will of Allah, he can depend on His mercy at the time of judgement. "And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the world." Holy Qur'an

(21:107) The Prophet (s.a.w.) is quoted as having said: "Surely, I am a granted mercy." Islam freed mankind from the darkness of polytheism, slavery, and injustice. It introduced the light of faith. It opened the doors to moral and social reform, and created an atmosphere of security and safety in which man was free to think, invent, and seek the road to perfection and salvation.

Freedom is the source from which the tree of life grows. A little sapling needs of light, water, air, a spacious field in which to grow, extend its branches, bloom and bear fruit. So, too, does freedom need the light and guidance of Islam to flourish. If the young tree is deprived of light and space its growth will be distorted and stunted. So, also will oppression and servitude deprive man of his moral freedom. Oppression and servitude are like a horrible prison in which terror and tyranny devour man's self image, his will and his desire to grow spiritually. It deprives human life of all sense of a higher purpose, robs man of his free will and destroys all that is good in human nature. Islam came to break man's fetters and tear down the wall of this prison. It enabled mankind to cast off the chains that hindered his growth and induced him to give proper expression to his humanity and follow the path to moral perfection. It created an atmosphere of hope and optimism which gave a true meaning to human existence.

The freedom that Islam grants is based on commitment and responsibility without which there

can be no true freedom. Freedom without restraints leads only to nihilism, the consequence of which is the complete breakdown of the moral and social order. The irresponsible concept of freedom expounded by existentialism, democracy and modern theories of freedom of expression lead only to corruption and immorality since they are not tied to any concept higher moral values or self control. For Islam, freedom lies in commitment and responsibility. They form an integral part of each other and can in no way be separated. There is no freedom of choice without responsibility; no responsibility without freedom.

The Ullama (scholars), over centuries, have studied and researched the relationship between freedom and responsibility. On the basis of their research they produced their explanation of human behaviour, and outlined their connection with the divine justice. They concluded that if man were deprived of free will and the right to choose his path in life, he could never be reconciled with Allah, the Glorified. Because Allah has granted man free will, which allows him to choose his course in life, man is answerable to Allah for his actions. "Surely We have shown him the way: he may be thankful or unthankful." Holy Qur'an (76:3)

"...Nay! man is evidence against himself, Though he puts forth his excuses." Holy Qur'an (75:14-15) Divine reward or punishment is ordained in accordance with man's free will. Without free will and its adherent responsibility and commitment there could be neither reward nor punishment. "And stop them, for they shall be questioned." Holy Qur'an (37:24)

"And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the Resurrection Day a book which he will find wide open. Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day." Holy Qur'an (17:13-14) Because Islam insists that man has free will because that is the way that Allah created him. It allows him to express this freedom and to practise it within the limits of commitment and responsibility and self control. Man has an obligation to choose the path of righteousness, and to safeguard his freedom and that of others.

Because Islam grants free will, it is expected that man will use it to further his knowledge in all areas which help in the improvement of the human lot on this earth. Otherwise, freedom may become a tool of destruction, annihilation and doctrinal deviation. Man is urged, by Islam, to consider the physical and spiritual welfare of others in all his endeavors. This prevents freedom from being turned into a dictatorship, exploiting other's inalienable rights to share in nature's natural resources.

Political freedom in Islam is a means of leading mankind to justice, goodness and peace. It guarantees and protects the political rights of all. Art and literature should reflect the values of the Holy Qur'an, and emphasize love, goodness and human relations in an aesthetic way.

Irresponsible freedom in these areas leads to pornography, debauchery, and disrespectful for all moral values. Man should therefore, practise his personal freedom without encroaching on the rights of others and deviating from a correct moral conduct. In an atmosphere which respects the rights and freedoms of others, mankind can grow and prosper. Life is filled with knowledge and good deeds. Freed from lusts and the control of tyrants, man can find his way to true happiness.

Freedom is "the power to choose and determine one's position". As such, man should choose and decide carefully on a course of action which would best benefit himself and others. Freedom does not mean to satisfy all his instincts. Nor does it mean to give into the pressure of lusts and desires. Behaviour should be guided always by our inane sense of what is right and should not be motivated by our desire for pleasure or immediate gratification. The collapse of the civilization and man's fall into misery and helplessness are direct consequences of permissiveness and the frenzied pursuit of pleasure. The Qur'an presents us with lessons drawn from history. It tells us of nations and communities that destroyed themselves by ignoring the way of Allah and following only the way of the flesh, being ruled by their unnatural desires.

Allah, the Almighty, says:

"But there came after them an evil generation, who neglected prayers and followed the sensual desires, so they will meet perdition." Holy Qur'an (19:59) "So leave them plunging into false discourses and sporting until they meet their day which they are threatened with." Holy Qur'an (43:83) "Like those before you, who were stronger than you in power, and more abundant in wealth and children; so they enjoyed their share; so you enjoy your share, as those before you enjoyed their share. You have gossiped as they gossiped. Those it was whose deeds shall be nullified in this world and in the Hereafter; and those - they are the losers. Has there not come to them the tidings of those who were before them - of the people of Noah, and Ad and Thamood, and the people of Abraham, the inhabitants and the destroyed cities? Their Messenger came to them with the clear signs; Allah would not wrong them, but they wronged themselves." Holy Qur'an (9:69-70)

The emphasis on materialism and freedom without responsibilities in today's societies is destroying the social and moral fabric of these societies. It gives rise to moral decadence, promiscuity, crime and a lack of respect for all moral, legal and natural courses of actions. Freedom is abused and has become a subversive tool, a scourge to mankind. This abuse of freedom has resulted in chaos throughout the world. It has led to corruption, crime, war, poverty, drug addictions, alcoholism and life destroying diseases such as AIDS

DRUGS

National and international organizations agree in their surveys that drug addiction throughout the industrialized world is increasing at an alarming rate. This increase is taking place in spite of massive public awareness campaigns and millions of dollars spent on education. Thousands of people are jailed through the world every day for drugs related crime. But the true causes of drug addiction- the breakdown of moral values, the helplessness and despair of the underprivileged, and the emphasis of a secular society on instant self gratification and

solution of problems- are never addressed. Let the statistics speak for themselves: Drug addiction is increasing at an alarming speed. More than 50 million people worldwide are thought to be addicted to drugs. It is estimated that among the poor, black ghettos of North American cities the addiction rate is 50%. Across the population at large surveys suggest that 20% of the people are addicted either to drugs or alcohol. Rates are highest amongst the young. Millions of dollars, that could be spent on bettering the lives of the poor and underprivileged, are wasted on the war against drugs, and drug pushers. In 1980s, with the introduction of crack cocaine into the U.S.A. the crime rate due to drug addiction increased dramatically. It is estimated that at least 60% of young America have experimented with drugs. In one report of high school students (1988) 47% of students had smoked marijuana and hashish, over 90% had tried alcohol. (Drugs, Society and Human Behaviour: 1990). There is no reason to expect that the figures are any lower in the other industrialized countries.

In the Soviet Union alcoholics are now estimated to number about 40 million. This is having an adverse effect on the country's industrialization and production figures. The Paris based "Jeune Afrique" magazine reported that 60% of traffic accidents and 40% of divorce cases are as a result of alcoholism. In 1986, in Japan, 25524 people committed suicide. (National Police Agency of Japan: 1987). The numbers are expected to increase as materialism takes its toll on the Japanese population).

In Britain one out of every five children suffers from the consequence of family breakdown. Drug addiction and related crime are reaching unprecedented rates and bringing appalling .suffering to the people

SEX AND DISEASES

Human life is gravely threatened by the collapse of the natural male-female relationship, free sex, debauchery and man's lack of self control. Dangerous and often fatal diseases are the natural consequence of unlicensed sexual practices.

Throughout the world it is estimated that between 5 and 10 million people carry the AIDS virus. It is expected that at the close of this century there will be over 100 million infected people

who because of the laxity of moral standards will continue to infect others. AIDS is an epidemic disease. It destroys the body's immune system and leads to an appalling death. So far no cure has been discovered for it although it is well known that sexual abstinence can prevent it. Except in the rare circumstances where aid is contacted through infected blood transfusion and medical contact, AIDS is a result of illegal drug use (infected intravenous needle use) and illicit homosexual and heterosexual relationships. It is spreading rapidly throughout the world wherever moral values are not upheld. The "Sunday Times" of London

has reported that Britain may lose 10,000 citizens to AIDS before the end of the century. The number of AIDS victims doubles every eight months. The report stressed that the number of victims, which at the time of the report stood at 512 was equal to the number of cases in the USA four years previously. The report criticized the British government's attitude towards the disease which it concludes is not taking the disease, its causes and effects seriously enough. In the USA the number of AIDS victims continue to rise at alarming rates. More children are born with the disease and suffer dreadfully throughout their short lives. Educational authorities, hoping to stem the increase of victims, emphasize "self-sex" rather than stressing the moral turpitude that leads to the disease in most cases. It appears that the authorities believe that moral values have no role to play in the correction of the disease. They would be well advised to look at Muslim countries where strict moral values are the norm and consequently such diseases do not exist. These statistics and reports draw a grim picture of the consequences of the materialistic life which has turned its back on Allah and all the moral and spiritual values of the Holy Qur'an.

The appalling suffering brought about by these diseases and addictions are a result of man's inability to practise freedom with restraint, and responsibility. The limitless freedom has resulted in chaos, disorder, crime, despair and death and for many the annihilation of the very freedom they wished to express. Our young people were attracted by the outward manifestation of the freedom of the west. They did not understand the dangerous, destructive underside of the materialistic world. They looked to the West for ideas on clothing, eating and social conduct forgetting that the price of such behaviour is a loss of moral values. Lured by the fashionable clothing and standards of behaviour, they absorbed the bankrupt moral codes of the west, ignoring for the moment their own superior values. Many perceived, too late, the moral void that existed underneath the veneer of civilization.

Those who understand freedom as a license to act as one pleases should look to the Western societies and observe the fruit of such thinking. One of the major results is that women viewed freedom as breaking away from the home. Sexual freedom was unrestrained by moral

commitment or responsibilities and promiscuity raged and ravaged the population. The family collapsed and a generation of children was lost- a generation which is in need of love and care. The results are seen everywhere in drinking, drug taking and crime which is destroying millions of young lives. Economic freedom is seen as a means to exploit the underprivileged by bribery and corruption. A capitalist class, whose sole aim is to amass wealth in the hands of a few, has grown powerful and influential on the sweat of others. Man has an obligation to pursue knowledge and to increase his skills and to use them in his life. But, we should distinguish between science and useful products and civilizations which means guiding society towards a certain point in accordance with certain methods.

The Muslim should keep in mind that his outlook on moral behaviour should always be in accordance with the Creator of the Universe and His ordained principles and moral values. A divine civilization is that which is ordained by the Islamic Message. Man, in this philosophy, is a servant of Allah. Allah alone has full authority over man. Within the framework of obedience to the Will of Allah, man can live a life founded on justice and wisdom and exercise his divine given rights of freedom in his daily behaviour. The necessity to think through one's actions and accept responsibility for them are clearly specified by Prophetic tradition:

"Should you set your mind on doing something, think of its outcome. If it is honest, go ahead. But if it is dishonest, refrain from doing it." We must discover our God given personality and understand and be sincere in our beliefs. Only by doing so we can become strong enough to resist imitating others and their seductive but unethical moral codes of behaviour. Islam encourages freedom of thought, speech, politics, economy, individual conduct, but insists that this freedom encompass a sense of responsibility and commitment. By doing so, Islam aims to build strong, unwavering characters who are secure in their self knowledge and have confidence in themselves and their values, and whose behaviour will always reflect their strength.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) warned us not to be foolish imitators of others. He urged us to develop our independent characters nourished by Islamic teachings. He (s.a.w.) has said: "Do not be a mere imitator with no firm determination. You say, 'I am with the people. Should people do good, so do I. And if they do evil, so do I'. But school yourselves. If people do good so should you. But if they do evil shun their evil deeds." The Qur'an and the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) nourished the Islamic concept of freedom. Never did he deny his followers freedom of expression. Muslims could always speak their minds while in his presence. He consulted them about his revelations and listened to their views and counsels. The first Muslim community lived in unprecedented freedom under the banner of the Holy Qur'an and the leadership of the

guiding Messenger. Everyone lived in an atmosphere of social justice and harmony. There was no place for pride and arrogance. Even as the teeth of a comb did they live. The only privilege accorded to anyone was that conferred by piety. All nations lived as one. The pre-Islamic society into which Islam was revealed was pastoral. Its pillars were slavery, exploitation and injustice.

Islam laid down the principles of justice, equality and freedom and established moral values. Since the concept of slavery was entrenched in the pre-Islamic world, and equally contrary to the Islamic concept of freedom, many inducements to free slaves were introduced. Freeing a slave could help expiate sin. Sin is a spiritual perversion, called by the Holy Qur'an "a deviation, a malady". It separated man from Allah and His Mercy. Manumission of a slave was one way in which a sinner could show remorse and atone for his sins and so be restored to grace. There were many sins which could be atoned for in this way; a Muslim who was unable to fast during the Holy month of Ramadan: false testimony; breaking a sacred pledge to Allah; al-Dihar [1], premeditated murder, or unjust murder, or even unintended murder as in the case of the death of a fetus: women cutting off their hair as a sigh of deep mourning or self mutilation for the same reason; all these could be atoned for by emancipating a slave without giving sanction to the sins. Emancipation had always to be accompanied by true contrition.

Islam, moreover, allocated a certain percentage of zakat revenues (an Islamic tax) for the purpose of emancipating slaves and established the laws of al-Mukatabah [2], and al-Tadbi [3] to legalize and be instrumental in the process of manumission. Throughout the books of fiqh (jurisprudence) and Islamic legislation there are numerous rules and details about the emancipation of slaves. Slaves were freed primarily so that they could live in the freedom and dignity of Islam and be emancipated in soul as much as in body. Thus, it is clear that from the very beginning freedom of the individual was of paramount importance in Islam.

"And surely We have honoured the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them the good things, and We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellent over most of those whom We have created." Holy Qur'an (17:70) In Islam freedom is an inalienable right which enable man to lead a moral and upright life, and brings him under the mantle of the justice and mercy of Allah.

.Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds

Notes

[1] Al-Dihar is the saying of a husband to his wife. "You are like my mother to me", which means he would not be allowed to go to bed with her. He can't do so without an expiation.

[2] Al-Mukatabah is a written agreement between a master and his slave to emancipate the

tatter in return for something.

[3] Al-Tadbir is the process of emancipating a slave after the death of his master. It is fulfilled on the strength of a statement said by the master during his life. It is "You are free after my .death