

Islam and Freedom

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Abstract: *from the Islamic point of view, freedom is considered as one of the human's natural rights. It is also introduced as God's blessing, and as a mankind's value. "Tohid" -unity of God- which is the most essential and fundamental principle of Islam has a very close relation with freedom. In fact, freedom and equality can be inferred from Tohid. The divine decrees found in Qur'an and Hadith emphasize on freedom of religion and government, enjoying personal independence, and freedom of speech.*

Key words: *freedom, Islam, attachments to the world, Qur'an, worship.*

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Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the attempts have been done to introduce Islam against the modern civilization, and to humiliate Muslims in international society. Unfortunately, some unaware, ignorant, and simple-minded people by writing articles or taking inappropriate measures extend credit to that point of view. One of the symbols of modern civilization and also intrinsic tendencies of all mankind is freedom which is always considered as the most valuable human's merit. Nowadays the West is the most noted claimer of it. But the truth is that not only Islam is in compatibility and agreement with freedom, but also freedom is one of the greatest mottos of it. Here, we study the place of freedom in Islam in a theoretical framework.

1- Freedom, The Blessing of God

From an Islamic view, freedom is the God's blessing donated to all human beings; and this is human being who destroys it in social, political, and economical affairs and accepts slavery to people like him.

In a speech from Amir ul-Momenin Ali (p.b.u.h) it goes: "Do not be the slave of others, for God has created you free." (Nahj al-Balaghe1117/3, letter 31)"

2- Freedom: A Human Value

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Not only is freedom respected highly in Islam, but also as freedom is a human's value, all human beings regardless of their religions and beliefs, should attempt to make it and keep it.

In a speech of Imam Husain (p.b.u.h) - the third Imam of Shia – he addressed the vicious people:" If you do not have religion and do not scare of the day of doom, at least be free in this world and do not accept slavery."

From the Islamic great leader's point of view, freedom is a human value and people of different religions and nations should respect it.

3- Freedom and Unity of God

"Tohid" means "Unity of God", and one of its levels is "Tohid in action". It means that we should only obey Him, and do not be servant of others. "Tohid in action" will be resulted in elimination of slavery. It is said that the Pharaoh who claimed of being God, did not intend to be recognized as creator of heavens and earth; but as he said:" obey me and do not obey anyone else!" Pharaoh restricted the freedom of Egyptians,

"And he treated them as slaves."

"And on the earth, through extending his territory and exerting his power, he considered him better and above others, even his agents did not have the right to approve or deny anything without his permission."¹

He addressed the sorcerers and said:

"You have believed in Him before I permit you to!" (Qur'an; 7: 123)

¹ Al-Mizan 5/16

The holy prophet's representatives went to Iran, Rome and other places to invite people to Islam, took the message of freedom with them.

One of those representatives, in response to the Iran's army leader who asked about their aim, said, "We are here to help anyone who wants to be the servant of God and not the servant of people; improve their life from misery to happiness and welfare; and set people free from the cruelties of traditions and customs, and gave them the Islamic justice."¹

Yes, Tohid means eliminating the gods and lords of properties, power and injustice and Tohid will bring equality of freedom and justice.

4. Freedom of Religion

If religion is defined, as belief in God, and praying and social practice of a group, actually, the possibility of omitting those beliefs will be zero. In another word, it is impossible to force people to accept and support an unwanted thing in their hearts and minds, or dictate a way of thinking to them. The holy Qur'an points to this logical reality and states:

"There should be no compulsion in religion." (Qur'an ; 2:256)

In another verse, it is said to the unbelievers:

"You have your religion, and I have my religion." (Qur'an; 109:6) and thus the Almighty God confirms freedom of religion, providing the acceptance of its results and consequences. The holy Qur'an explicitly states on behalf of the believers and faithfuls:

"We do not differentiate any of His messengers." (Qur'an; 2:285) They all have been sent to guide us and their laws and orders will lead human beings to salvation.

¹ Tarikh 401/2

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On the other hand, the holy Qur'an advises Muslims to have friendly relationships with the followers of other Divine Books and to emphasize on the commonalities of their beliefs, and to avoid the differences. It states: *"Say: "people of the book, [let us] rally to a common formula to be binding on both us and you"* (Qur'an; 3:64)

To the holy Qur'an holding the title of Muslim, Christian or Jew is not enough for salvation: *"Those who believe, and those who are Jews, Christians and Sebeans; [in fact] anyone who believes in God and the Last Day, and acts honourably will receive their earnings from their God; no fear will lie upon them nor need they feel saddened."* (Qur'an; 2:62)

5- Freedom of Choosing Government

From an Islamic view, people are free in choosing governorship; and God does not force any governorship on them.

The holy Qur'an indicates: *"God does not change what any people may have until they change whatever they themselves have."* (Qur'an; 13:11)

The people themselves choose the type of governorship. Even if people do not want prophet's or infallibles' governorship, the prophet and infallibles will not force their government upon the people. The clear examples of this fact are apparent in the life of all faithful leaders of Islam and Shia Imams, in the establishment of their government.

The holy prophet of Islam suffered and tolerated all tortures during 13 years in Mecca. Due to the oppositions of the people of Mecca, he migrated from Mecca; but perceiving the public requests and desires of Medina's citizens, he entered there, and accepted to govern them. After the holy prophet, Imam Ali

(p.b.u.h) was the best choice for being the leader of Muslims, but out of nonacceptance and people's reluctance he kept silence for 25 years. Watching the public desires and requests, he said: "If the people had not come to me and supporters had not exhausted the argument ... , I would have cast the rope of Caliphate on its own shoulders..."(Nahj al-Balaghe; sermon3)

This trend is also identifiable in the life and tradition of the third Imam. Imam Husain did not head for Iraq until he received the requests of Iraqis; all wanted him to accept the governorship. On his way to kofa - the capital city of his father's government period- they stopped him and asked him why he travelled to Iraq. He said: "The people of this city wrote me that they do not have any leader or governor and demanded that I come to them. I trusted them, but they broke their promises, even though the number of the letters was 13000 for me to come, when I became closer and become aware of their tricks, I decided to return, but Hurr ibn Yazid stopped me. So let me be free to return."¹

And when he was prohibited from returning, in an unequal war, Imam Husain and his followers all became martyrs.

The life and trend of the other Shia Imams all confirm this truth; from an Islamic view, public willing and desires is an obligatory and fundamental requirement in choosing the form of governorship.

6- Freedom in Personal and Private Affairs

Islam puts emphasis on enjoying personal and individual freedom. This religion believes no one has right to interfere with the other individual's private life.

¹ Akhbar Attaul; 276

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Everyone is free to choose the place of his (her) residence. If he (she) does not feel comfortable, he may move to another place. Qur'an addresses the oppressed people of the world and states: *"Is not God's earth so vast that you might settle down elsewhere on it?"* (Qur'an; 4:97)

- Everyone is free to reveal his (her) individual and personal talents and abilities. The holy Qur'an says:

"Say: everyone acts according to his own disposition" (Qur'an; 17:84)

- Everyone is free in choosing their spouse, and no one can choose a spouse for the other, regardless of being his (her) parents or guardian. From an Islamic view, women are free in choosing their husbands and proposing him.

- No one has the right to have doubt or suspicion about others. The holy Qur'an states: *"You who believe, refrain from conjecturing too much; even a little suspicion forms a vice..."* (Qur'an; 49:12)

- No one has the right to disturb the other's privacy. The holy Qur'an says: *"...Do not spy on one another"* (Qur'an; 49:12) In Islam, no one has the right to inspect what others eat, wear, and do.

- No one has the right to enter others' houses without the owners' permission, Qur'an says: *"You, who believe, do not enter any houses except your own homes..."* (Qur'an; 24:27), and states: *"If you do not find anyone in them, still do not enter them until permission has been granted you."* (Qur'an; 24:28)

7. Freedom of Speech

One of the significant branches of freedom in society is freedom of speech. Islam extends credit to this right. In Islam, it is believed that speech is taught by God, and no one may neglect this capacity and oppose it. In holy Qur'an, it is said: *"...Created man, taught him self-expression..."* (Qur'an; 39:18)

On the other hand, it states: *"The ones who turn aside from the arrogant ones lest they serve them, and turn toward God, will have good news: proclaim such to my servants who listen to the Statement and follow the best in it."* (Qur'an; 39:18)

Therefore, the presence of various statements and speeches in society is necessary to enable us to choose the best one out of them. The holy Qur'an confirms the doctrine of talk among different groups of society, regardless of being faithful or unbelievers. The holy prophets Moses and Aaron were ordered to go to Pharaoh, who claimed he be a god, and talk to him gently: *"...Speak a soft word to him..."* (Qur'an; 20:44)

To order people to join good and forbid evil which are rules of Islam are also good examples of having the right of speech: first, there should be various statements of good and evil deeds in society, and then we ask people to join good and avoid evil deeds. In a narrative from the Islam's leaders we read:

"It is in the presence of different thoughts and conflict of ideas that the true thought and the best idea comes in to existence."¹

8- Freedom and Prophethood

Some believe that the holy prophets or their successors are guardians of mankind, and therefore, being faithful is against being free. While the holy prophets themselves were the

¹ Bahar Al-Anvar

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heralds of freedom and they were sent to break the chains of slavery from the human beings.

As the holy Qur'an says about the holy Prophet: " *...and relieves them of their obligation and the shackles which have lain upon them...* " (Qur'an; 7:157) In the holy Qur'an, the role of the holy Prophet of Islam is introduced as the role of a teacher of ethnic, as it said: " *...to recite His verses to them and purify them and teach the Book and wisdom...* " (Qur'an; 62:2) And if people do not listen to his message, he has no right on them.

The holy Qur'an says: " *We have guided him a long the [right] part, whether he is thankful or thankless* " (Qur'an; 76:3). It is interesting to know that none of the wars of the holy

Prophet was aggressive. All of them were to defend Muslims, or fight with the opponents' plots and tricks. Although after the demise of the Prophet, some rulers and caliphs chose the policy of conquest and attack other countries.

9- Freedom and Worldly Concerns

One of the reasons of elimination of freedom is love and care for worldly belongings. Attachment to property, means, position and the other belongings of the world can lead human beings to their slavery. The holy prophet said: " How bad on the slaves of coins and servants of gold coins."

In the school of Islam, the value of soul of human being is superior than the worldly concerns which may lead to the mankind slavery.

Imam Ail (p.b.u.h.) compared the world to chewed morsel of ancestors and says: "Is there no free man who could leave this chewed morsel (of the world) to those who like it? Certainly, the only value of you is Paradise. Therefore, do not sell yourself except for Paradise." (Nahj Al-Balaghe 694, saying 465)

10- Freedom and the Next World Concerns

Sometimes prayers are due to the love and attachment to the means of the other world. This kind of prayer can prepare the tools of the attachment: Attachment to the gifts and blessings of heaven or to remain aloof from the torture of the other world. These loves sometimes result in the eliminating of freedom of mankind; but if human being regardless of the hell or heaven, and only for the sake of appreciating God's kindness pray Him, no fear of feeling attached to the world will be felt.

Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) says:" A group of people worshipped Allah out of desire for reward surely. This is the worship of trades. Another group worshipped Allah out of fear; this is the worship of slaves. Still another group worshipped Allah out of gratefulness; this is the worship of free men."(Nahaj Al-Balaghe 646; saying 238)

Though, in the holy Qur'an, fear and desire are respectively introduced as the prohibiting and encouraging factors in doing goodness or committing sins, but it says the basic motivation for faithful people is seeking the satisfaction of God and reaching to this point is a high status: *"God has promised believers, whether they are men or women, gardens through which rivers flow to live in forever, and goodly dwellings in the gardens of Eden. Yet approval by God is greatest; that will be the supreme Achievement!"* (Qur'an; 9:72)

Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) in his litanies introduces the distance from God even more difficult than tolerating the tortures of hell and says: " o' God, i will stand your torture, but how can i stand your distance from me and oh, my God! I will stand the heat of

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fire of hell but how can I stand not looking at your Benediction?"¹

11- Freedom and Impiousness

Freedom does not mean to be impious, lustful or aggressor to the other people's rights.

For example, a Muslim can not be addicted by the excuse of being free or drawn in lust by the excuse of freedom.

This inference from the meaning of freedom is not only against the true meaning of freedom, but also it is against the freedom, and is very slavery. Imam Ali (p.b.u.h) says:" the servant and slave of lusts is more than a slave."² and also says:" the servant and slave of lust is the slave who will never be free."³

Conclusion

Freedom is recognized as one of the fundamental rights in Islam. In Islam the huge emphasis is placed on having individual freedom in choosing the governorship.

Separation from materialistic and worldly attachments and of mundane and body lusts is counted among the most significant discussions on freedom in Islam.

¹ Mafatih Al-Jinan, 65

² Ghorar al-Hakam and Dorar al-Kalem;352/4,N.6298

³ in explanation of Ghorar al-Hakam and Dorar al-Kalem;352/4,N.6300

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