

MEANING OF TRUE FREEDOM

Mankind in the whole of this universe is the only creature which has been endowed with 'freedom of choice'. It is this incredible creature which has the power of deciding whether to act or not, even in the most sensitive and dangerous situations. Although he lives in a world of conflict both within and without himself, he is able to make decisions and choose the right way at the right time and place.

If a person is left alone with his natural virtues and his inner-self, he will instinctively be successful in his 'choices'. However if his virtues, were to be destroyed by evil passions and self-centred acts, the future of his life and his society would be endangered.

The humanbeing is social by nature. He lives in a society and prefers to achieve his goals and needs through social means. Inevitably, however, a conflict appears. Man, therefore, must decide where to draw the line on his 'freedom'.

There is often a tug-of-war between his own interests and his social ones. Man cannot always satisfy both himself and others around him at the same time. Therefore, would it not be unfair for him to satisfy himself at the expense of others? Would it not be better for all those concerned if self-control and freedom from evil passions were to be exercised? In order to remain human, man has to sacrifice for the sake of and in consideration of others.

Materialists and the so-called champions of human rights define 'freedom' and 'liberty' in doing whatever that benefits themselves. Where there is no limitations nor fear of Allah, the Almighty, they think and act according to their interests, irrespective of harm caused to others. They believe in enjoying all pleasures of this world without any restriction.

Self-control, virtue and self-purification which come through faith in Allah and fear of Him do not exist in the vocabulary of those who preach slogans of 'freedom'. As such they are unable to define and apply true freedom in their daily lives. Hence we witness constant conflict between nations, races and communities in this world today.

If the consciousness of every humanbeing is not purified through worship and fear of Allah, it will then command man to do evil as the following ayat of the Holy Qura'n suggests:

'And I do not declare myself free, most surely (man's self is wont to (himself to do) evil except such as my Lord has had mercy' (Sura Yusuf v.53)

وَمَا أُبْرِيْ نَفْسِيْ اِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَمَّارَةٌ  
بِالتَّوْبِ اِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي

What makes man lose his true sense of freedom is when he becomes exceedingly mentally enslaved and attached to worldly gains. His craving for more and more of wealth and with its influence to attain high posts, irrespective of one's qualification, in society. The following words of Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) in provide good food for thought on the subject:

'Is there no free man who can leave this chewed morsel (i.e. this worldly gains) to those who like it. Certainly the only price for yourselves is Paradise. Therefore do not sell yourselves (in return) for Paradise!

اَلَا خَيْرٌ يَدْرَعُ هَذِهِ السَّاطَةَ لَا يَعْطَلُمَا اِنَّهُ  
لَيْسَ لِانْفُسِكُمْ تَمَنُّ اِلَّا الْجَنَّةُ فَلَا  
تَبِيْعُوْهَا اِلَّا بِهَا

By this statement, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) has compared this worldly goods with a chewed morsel of food. The same way as no sensible person would prefer to swallow a chewed morsel of food, a truly free minded person is the one who does not lower himself after this worldly gains. Such a person tends to concentrate more of his attention towards attaining the ultimate pleasure of Allah and the eternal bliss in afterlife.

Islamic history tells us of how the Muslims, after the demise of the Holy Prophet, (saw) lost the true meaning freedom as prescribed by Islam. In pursuit of worldly gains, they succumbed to the misguidance of temporal rulers of Bani Umayya. It was to revive and safeguard the true freedom of conscious and action of mankind that Imam Husain (a.s.) rose against Yazid - the tyrant. His following words uttered before the armymen of Yazid on the plains of Kerbala on the day of Ashura inspire us with the true concept of human freedom:

'If you have no religion and do not fear the Day of Judgement, then atleast be free men in your worldly affairs'.

In other words, the Imam was admonishing and arousing the conscious of his enemies to feel and act as free men. Even if they did not follow religious principles and cherished no fear of afterlife, the dictate of reason and humanity was to act freely without submission to the tyrant and oppressive ruler of the time.

The Imams have sacrificed their lives in order to provide lessons of true freedom and it is upto us to emulate them in our daily lives.