



RAZA-E-KHUSHTAR FOUNDATION

Spreading Love for Rasoolullah ﷺ - The Life of Imān

TRUE FREEDOM THROUGH SUBMISSION TO ALLAH ﷻ

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Freedom is one of the most valued ideas of the modern age. It is generally understood as the ability to choose for oneself, to live without unnecessary restrictions, and to decide the course of one's own life. Yet this raises a deeper question: What if a man is free from everyone around him, but unable to free himself from himself?

A person may answer to no human master and still be controlled by his desires. He may possess wealth while being terrified of losing it, enjoy status while depending upon the approval of others, or claim to live according to his own choices while being unable to resist a desire or give up a harmful habit. Such a person may be outwardly free, but can he truly be called free?

The Holy Qurān takes this discussion deeper. It presents the example of a man belonging to several quarrelling masters and another belonging entirely to one master, stating:

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَكِّسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَبِّهِ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِينَ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Allah illustrates an example, "A man having several wicked masters as partners, and another man belonging wholly to just one master; are the two equal in comparison?" All praises are for Allah; in fact, most among them do not know.
{Holy Qurān 39:29}

In another place, Allah Ta'ala states,

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَى
سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَى بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ
أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Just look at him who makes his desire to be his god, and Allah has sent him astray despite his knowledge, and set a seal upon his ears and his heart, and a covering upon his eyes; so who guides him after Allah? So do you not ponder?

{Holy Qurān 45:23}

The human being, therefore, does not necessarily become free by rejecting a master. He may simply become the servant of many lesser masters.

Here lies an important point: servitude to Allah Ta'ala is not the loss of freedom. It is freedom from being a servant to everything besides Him.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas explains that true freedom is more than simply having the ability to choose. In his book *'Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam'*, he connects freedom with choosing what is good, and explains that true freedom requires a person to control his lower desires rather than be controlled by them. Freedom, therefore, is not just the ability to satisfy every desire, but the ability not to be ruled by it.

Allah declares in the Holy Qurān

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

"I have not created jinn and mankind except that they worship Me."

{Holy Qurān, 51:56}

If Ubūdiyyah (absolute submission and devotion to Allah) is the purpose for which man was created, true freedom cannot consist in escaping that purpose. Rather, it consists in being freed from everything that prevents its fulfilment.

Few lives demonstrate this freedom of the heart as powerfully as that of Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam Sayyiduna Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (Alaihir Rahmah).

The teachings of Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam (Alaihir Rahmah) repeatedly return to freeing the heart from the control of the nafs (lower self) and wrongful dependence upon creation. In the seventh discourse of Futuh ul-Ghayb, he teaches that the desires of the flesh are removed from the heart by resisting

them and refusing to be controlled by them. In the tenth discourse, he again associates true submission with opposing the lower self.

This distinction is essential. Islam does not demand that the believer owns nothing. It demands that nothing owns the believer's heart. The following incident of Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam (Alaihir Rahmah), often narrated by our scholars and pious predecessors, illustrates this beautifully.

It is said that while he was teaching, a man came and informed him that a ship carrying his merchandise had sunk. The loss would have been substantial. Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam (Alaihir Rahmah) paused, examined his inner state and said, *"Alhamdulillah."* After some time, the messenger returned and informed him that there had been a mistake. It was another ship that had sunk. His merchandise was safe. Again Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam (Alaihir Rahmah) paused, examined his heart and said, *"Alhamdulillah."*

When questioned about responding to two opposite situations in exactly the same manner, he explained that upon hearing of the loss he had examined his heart to see whether it had become disturbed by the loss of his possessions. When informed that his merchandise was safe, he again examined his heart to see whether worldly gain had altered its state. In both circumstances, his heart remained content with Allah Ta'ala. The lesson is not that loss and gain become meaningless, nor that a believer ceases to experience human emotion. Rather, his relationship with Allah Ta'ala is not controlled by the condition of his possessions.

The merchandise belonged to him. He did not belong to the merchandise. This is true

freedom. Today the ships may have changed, but the test has not.

For one person, it is wealth. For another, it is reputation, position, appearance, career, comfort or the approval of others. Often, we discover how much power these things possess over our hearts only when one of them is threatened. We should therefore ask ourselves a difficult question, *"What can be taken from me that would cause me to lose myself?"*

If the praise of people gives us worth and their criticism destroys it, something has taken hold of the heart. If gaining wealth makes us heedless and losing it causes despair, something has taken hold of the heart. If our desires command and we continually obey, merely calling ourselves free does not make us so.

Huzoor Ghaus-e-Āzam (Alaihir Rahmah) teaches a freedom greater than the freedom to satisfy every desire; it is the freedom to say no to the carnal desire itself.

A'la Hazrat Imam Ahmad Raza Khan (Alaihir Rahmah) beautifully captures this struggle between the higher attachment of the heart and the lower pull of desire:

دل میں روشن ہے شمع عشق حضور
کاش جو شش ہو س ہو نہ کرے

*The lamp of love for the Beloved Rasool
(Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) is illuminated in
the heart*

*Would that the force of greed and desire
never extinguish it*

{Hadāiq-e-Bakhshish}

This does not mean abandoning effort, trade or worldly responsibility. The believer takes

the means, but his heart does not choose the means over the One who created them.

Modern discussions of freedom often begin by asking, *"What am I free to do?"* The spiritual teaching asks for something more penetrating, *"Who or what has the power to command my heart?"*

A person who refuses submission to Allah Ta'ala does not necessarily become a master of himself. He may simply exchange one Master for countless masters; desire, wealth, ego, society, fear, ambition and the expectations of creation. But when a person truly becomes Abdullah, the servant of Allah Ta'ala, those rival masters begin to lose their authority and control over him. The apparent contradiction therefore disappears. The believer is not liberated from Ubūdiyyah. He is liberated through Ubūdiyyah. The true abd (slave) of Allah Ta'ala is truly free, because he has ceased to be the abd (slave) of everything else.

This is perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can take from the teachings of Sayyiduna Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (Alaihir Rahmah). In fact, the lives of the Companions of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) beautifully illustrate this very point, of how a nation entrapped by slavery to their desires became liberated through complete submission to Allah Ta'ala and His Beloved Rasool (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam).

May Allah Ta'ala free our hearts from the slavery of the lower self and attachment to creation, and grant us the honour of absolute submission to Him.

آمین بِجَاوِزِ سَيِّدِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﷺ