

## Chapter 6: Freedom of Opinion

One of the most important and relevant problems in today's world, especially since the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is the problem of freedom of opinion.

Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political rights states that: Everyone has the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

While Article 19 states that: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without reference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

In this chapter we will examine freedom of opinion from the view point both of reason and Islam, and then explain why this question is so much promoted in today's world. But first we must consider three questions as an introduction to the subject. These are: the meaning of opinion, the sources of opinion and the meaning of freedom of opinion.

### The Meaning Of Opinion

As we saw in some detail in chapter I the world for opinion in Arabic and Persian (*aqideh*) is derived from the verbal root '*adq*', meaning to tie or knot. When a view is 'tied' to person's beliefs, rightly or wrongly, correctly or incorrectly, in accord or at odds with reality, to the benefit or harm of himself and society—is called an opinion.

### Sources Of Opinion

From where do a person's opinion and beliefs, which are the basis of his actions and positions he adopts, originate? This question is extremely important, since it must be answer before we study the problem of freedom of opinion. If we have the answer to this question it will be easier to express an opinion about freedom of opinion.

With a little reflection it becomes clear that a person's opinions and beliefs originate from these two sources:

a) research

b) *Taqlid*

Sometimes a person arrives at a view or opinion about a question by independent thought and by study and research. For example, he concludes from his researches that the earth goes round the sun or that the sun goes round the earth that something other than material objects exists or does not exist, and so on. In such a case the source of his opinion is research, regardless of his theory being in accord with reality or not.

And sometimes a person's opinions and beliefs are not the product of research and study with an open mind: either he has accepted an opinion without carrying out research or, if he has reached his beliefs while his mind was captive to *Taqlid*. The roots of a person's opinions are therefore either research or *Taqlid*. There is of course a third source, which consists of inspiration or enlightenment, but since this source is not general, but only to be found in exceptional persons, we will exclude it from the present discussion.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that a close study of the matter reveals that people's opinions and beliefs are not as a rule based on thought and research, but on *Taqlid*. One's parents, clan or tribe, social environment party organization or group, the personalities one admires, all these are the source of inspiration for one's views. Without demanding reason or proof, but purely on the basis of *Taqlid*, people accept those views and gradually become accustomed to them until they are 'tied' to their minds and become appendices to them, firmly established in their very souls as their own opinions.

For these reasons people's family and social environment play a fundamental role in the formulation of their opinions. Whatever family and environment a person lives in, he usually adopts the opinions and views of individuals in that family or environment, and to tell the truth, therefore are few people who have acquired their opinions and beliefs entirely by means of personal investigation.

This is why the Quran warns people that if they follow the opinions of most people in the world they will be led astray, since such beliefs lack any scientific basis:

***'If you were to obey the majority of mankind they would lead you astray from God's path. They follow nothing but idle speculation and guess' (6: 116).***

## Freedom Of Opinion

Before discussing freedom of opinion we must specify what we mean by such freedom, because until its meaning is clarified we cannot judge whether it is right or wrong. Freedom of opinion may be interpreted

in three ways:

- a) Freedom to choose one's opinions, i.e. the freedom to believe whatever one likes.
- b) Freedom of expression, i.e. the freedom to express whatever one believes.
- c) Freedom to propagate opinion, i.e. the freedom to advocate and disseminate whatever one likes.

So when freedom of opinion is under discussion it is possible that any of these three meanings, or all of them, may be meant.

Now, having clarified the meaning of the word opinion, the sources of opinions and the many of freedom of opinion, let us see what our reason has to say about freedom of opinion.

## **Freedom Of Opinion From The Point Of View Of Reason**

Reason has a specific view about each of the three interpretations of the expression, freedom of opinion, and so we cannot give a single categorical judgment on the matter, but must examine each of these interpretations separately.

### **a) Freedom of choice in one's opinions**

The first interpretation of freedom of opinion is the sense that a person is free to choose his own opinions, and to adopt any opinion he likes and to believe whatever strikes his fancy.

A little contemplation soon shows us that this kind of freedom of opinions is, in practice impossible; because a person's opinions and beliefs are not in his control, nor are they in the control of others. A person can neither believe whatever he wants, nor can another person forcibly impose an opinion or belief on him.

Opinions are not like garments that a person can put on, or change, as the fancy takes him, or that someone else can force him to wear. A person's beliefs are like his loves. Love and friendship cannot be switched on at will, so that he can feel love for anyone or anything as he decides, nor is it in the power of anyone else to induce him to feel love for a person or thing, or not to feel it. If a person is convinced that it is daytime now, he cannot neither believe of his own accord that it is night-time, nor can anyone else force him to change his opinion. A person may be induced to say something against his opinion, but it is not possible for him to be induced to change his opinion.

In 1632, Galileo wrote a book on the subject of the theories of Ptolemy and Copernicus. A year later the Pope summoned him to Rome and declared that his opinion that the earth moves around the sun was blasphemous. The Pope forced him to kneel down and recant his view. The story is well known that after Galileo had recanted he got up and left the room and then they noticed that he had written on the ground with his finger "Nevertheless, the earth does move."<sup>2</sup>

Only in one case can an opinion change and that is when the source of the opinion changes. If the source of the opinion was research it may be that research, in continuing his studies, will come across evidence proving that his earlier opinion was wrong, or if the source of his opinion was *Taqlid* it may be that the chain of *Taqlid* will be broken.<sup>3</sup>

## **b) Freedom of expression**

The second sense in which the expression ‘freedom of opinion’ is used is the freedom to state or express one’s opinion. From the point of view rights for a person to be able to say what his opinion is without being molested by anyone, just as everyone has the right to lead his private life as he wishes, provided of course that he does not disturb others in doing so.

The freedom to express one’s opinion, apart from being the natural right of every person, also promotes the exchange of ideas, the development of scientific beliefs and the correction of opinions. There is therefore the slightest doubt from the point of view of reason the validity and even the necessity of his freedom. There are two further aspects of the matter which deserve inspection, however. The first is whether a person has the right to express a view which is contrary to what he knows to be correct and contrary to his real beliefs. The second is whether or not from the point of view of reason a person has the duty to correct a fallacious opinion or a belief that is not based on thought and research.

The answer to the first question must be that if it is purely a question of the judgment of reason, however much reason may disapprove of a person expressing an opinion which is contrary to his real beliefs, to the extent his use of this freedom does not harm others there is no justification in depriving him of it.

The answer to the question is that reason, while considering the expression of an opinion to be free, also considers it one’s duty to endeavor to correct false opinions, for two reasons. The first is that opinion is the basis of action and superstition and false beliefs can lead society to corruption and perdition. The second reason is that to campaign against superstition is a step towards freedom of thought, and reason cannot ignore its obligation to promote such freedom.

It should also be borne in mind that freedom of opinion and freedom of thought are fundamentally opposed to each other: opinion and thought cannot both be free, because as we have already explained opinion is something which is ‘tied’ onto a person’s mind, forming a knot there and becoming an appendix to his very soul.

So if a person’s beliefs are not based on thought and research they become chains which fetter his reason and soul, imprisoning his mind in walls of superstition and preventing him from thinking freely or arriving at scientific beliefs that are in accord with reality. We must therefore choose between freedom of thought or the freedom to have superstitious opinions, and if we choose freedom of thought the campaign to break the chains of superstitious belief becomes a serious and essential matter.

Just as if a person who is bound fast in chains and cannot free himself single-handed needs the help of

someone who is free so mind that is bound fast in the chains of fallacious beliefs, and encircled by incorrect opinions cannot free itself from the bondage of incorrect beliefs, and someone else who is free is needed to break these chains and set him free.

From the point of view of reason therefore, it is incumbent on a person to correct the opinions of others, and by virtue of the fact that it is impossible to correct opinion by force or compulsion the appropriate measure consist of explaining matters so as to promote correct opinions, acquaint people with the true facts by means of logic and proof, and replacing *Taqlid* with research.

If, however, an individual or a group become obstacles to freedom of thought and the correction of opinion, logic and proof are ineffective, and in this case reason tells us that such obstacles must be forcibly destroy so as prepare the ground for the development of correct opinions and the collapse of false ones.

### **c) Freedom to propagate opinion**

The third sense in which the expression ‘freedom of opinion’ can be interpreted is the freedom to propagate and promote opinions, and transmit them to others, whether such opinions are based on research or *Taqlid* whether they are in accord with reality or not, and whether they are beneficial or harmful to society.

When reason, according to what have been mentioned, considers it an obligation to fight superstition, it most certainly cannot justify absolute freedom to propagate opinion. How can reason accept the spreading of superstitious beliefs that have no intellectual or scientific basis; ideas which imprison the mind and halt the growth of society, or even cause social retrogression and harm? Wrong and harmful beliefs are a kind of psychological sickness. Ideological diseases are more dangerous than physical ones: When does not permit an individual to spread the physical diseases that one may have in the society how can it justify the right to spread psychological diseases?

## **Belief in Slavery**

The inherent slave-like nature of the deprived classes is an opinion ascribed to Aristotle, who says in his book under the title of “Politics”: ‘Nature made slaves. Generally, the barbarians and people far from civilization were created for submission and services and the Greeks for commanding and freedom.’<sup>4</sup>

Will Durant says: ‘After the passage of several centuries slavery because a custom, and people regarded it as essential and innate: Aristotle considered it natural and unavoidable and St. Paul sanctified it and in his opinion it was a system in keeping with God’s will.’<sup>5</sup>

Ernest Renan also confirms this opinion. He says: The West is the master-race and the East is the race of labors and this is why nature made the race of laborers greater in number’.<sup>6</sup>

## **Burying Females Alive**

According to Will Durant: 'In some places, such as New Guinea, New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and India, women were strangled and buried with their dead husbands and were expected to kill themselves so as to be able to serve their husbands in the next world'.<sup>7</sup>

Infidels at the time of the Prophet of Islam believed that females were a cause for shame, and therefore buried their daughters alive.

## **Belief in The Nutritional Qualities Of Blood**

Will Durant, in discussing the general characteristics of civilization, after mentioning the various kinds of food eaten by primitive peoples, from louse-stew<sup>8</sup> to human flesh <sup>9</sup> writes of human blood as follow: 'Now for many tribes human blood is a delicious food. Many of tribal people who are pure and good sometimes drink human blood, either as a medicine or in completion of a row or a religious rite. They usually believe that when they drink a person's blood his strength passes to the drinker.'<sup>10</sup>

These are examples of millions of superstition and false beliefs of various societies. If someone were to write a book about superstitious beliefs it would run to dozens of volumes.

Does reason permit these false and dangerous beliefs and similar, get even more dangerous beliefs, which imperialism today propagates for drinking the blood, eating the flesh and enslaving of man in modern form, to be freely transmitted?

## **Islam And Freedom Of Opinion**

So far we have been looking at freedom of opinion from the point of view of reason and, to summarize briefly, we have concluded that freedom of opinion in the sense of individual liberty to choose one's opinion is not a rational concept, and in the sense of a person's right to express his opinion it is one of his natural rights, and in the sense of the right to propagate superstitious and harmful beliefs and to transmit them to society, it is strictly forbidden from the point of view of reason.

Now let us see what the Islamic attitude to freedom of opinion is. The short answer is that the Islamic attitude to freedom of opinion is the same as the rational attitude. The detailed answer requires an examination of the Islamic view on each of the three senses of freedom of opinion based on the available evidence.

As was explained in our examination of the rational attitude a person's beliefs are in principle outside his control in the sense that he can believe or disbelieve whatever he wishes. Opinions are not like garments that a person is free to choose or to change as the fancy takes him or that he can constrained to change against his will. Opinion is like love which can only change if the source itself changes.

Since opinion is not subject to choice, freedom of choice in this matter is not something that can be discussed in an Islamic context. This it was that when a number of nomadic Arabs of the tribe of Bani Asad came to the Prophet of Islam in a year of drought and professed their adherence to Islam<sup>11</sup>, but did not really accept Islamic beliefs and were motivated by materialistic considerations, the following Quranic verse was revealed:

***'The nomadic Arab say they have found faith. Tell them they are not true believers. They should say they profess Islam, and true faith has not yet entered their hearts' (49: 14).***

To profess Islam is to express one's adherence to Islamic beliefs, while faith is heart-felt belief in Islamic ideology.<sup>12</sup> Expressing one's beliefs is within a person's power, but possession of true faith is not. A person may have various motivations for expressing his belief, but faith is a produce of the heart and can only be claimed when Islamic beliefs have become an appendage of the soul.

## **Freedom of Expression In Islam**

A study of the Quran and the *hadith*, as well as of the history of Islam, shows that Islam officially recognizes the freedom to express one's opinions. Indeed, no other religion respects this kind of freedom to the extent that Islam does. Not only is the expression of opinion free in Islam but the Quran advises people to listen to various different views and opinions and to examine and criticize them with an open mind, and when the investigation has revealed which are the soundest views to adopt them as a basis of action.

In other words, the guidance provided by the Quran is that a person should use freedom of expression as a means to promote the growth of sound opinion and to enable the best opinions to be identify and adopted:

***'Give good news to those of My servants who, listen to what is said and follow what is best ' (39: 17).***

Not only is the expression of opinion free in Islam, but individuals are free even to express views that are contrary to their real beliefs. Although Islam considers such conduct to be shameful, and punishable in the hereafter, it nevertheless never compels a person to confess to what he really considers to be true. In numerous verses the Quran specifically status that faith is not a matter for compulsion and the Prophet of God has no obligation to force people to faith.

## **What Is Faith?**

Faith consists of a belief accompanied by confession and the action that such belief demands.<sup>13</sup> Confessing Islam opinions without heart-felt belief is not faith,<sup>14</sup> and heart-felt belief that is not accompanied by an overt confession is not faith. In this respect, although Pharaoh was convinced that

Moses was speaking the truth and although he believed in his heart that Moses had a prophetic mission<sup>15</sup> he cannot be considered a true believer because in his stubbornness and pride he would not confess to the unity of God and the prophetic mission of Moses. But when he was on the point of drawing, in desperation he did make such a confession, and said: 'I express my faith that there is no god but the God which the Children of Israel believe in, and I am to be counted as one of the Muslims.' (yunis/90)

Here, Pharaoh expresses his faith under compulsion. Earlier, he had believed in his heart, but now fear of drowning provokes him to making a spoken confession. So he becomes a believer, but out of desperation and compulsion. So we see that faith has two main pillars: belief from the heart and practical confession. The first pillar is not within a person's power to control, that is to say, he cannot believe or disbelieve anything he wishes as the fancy takes him, but the second pillar is within his control, that is, he can confess to what he believes and take action as these beliefs demand, and similarly he may fail to confess in practical terms to his beliefs.

Heart-felt beliefs, which are the first pillar of faith, since they are not within a person's power to control, can likewise not be imposed, that is to say, his beliefs cannot compulsorily be changed. But the second pillar of faith, which is practical confession. Since it is within a person's control, is subject to compulsion. Or in other words it is possible to force a person to make a practical confession of his beliefs or to act against them.

Once faith is defined we see that when we say it is not compulsory we are referring to the second pillar of faith, since the first pillar is not susceptible to compulsion. We mean that Islam does not force a person to confess to Islam beliefs without his believing them. On the contrary, as we discussed in detail in chapter 2 and 3 in relation to *Taqlid* as a basis of opinion and research, Islam does not accept that fundamental beliefs should be acquired except through research and individual investigation.

In other words, if someone says he believes that God created the universe and is the one God he should have his reason for believing this. If he says that Muhammad is the Prophet of God, he should know why. If he says he believes that, on the Day of resurrection man will be raised from the dead and his deeds will be examined, he should know reasons for this belief, or says that because his parents or teacher said so he too believes this, his beliefs are not acceptable to Islam.

In short, Islam says that fundamental beliefs must be researched and not based on *Taqlid*, and everybody must solve the basic problems of ideology for himself, and other people's comments have no use to him. Further, Islam does not compel a person, even to confess to what he believes, in other words, when we say that in the Islamic view faith is not compulsory we mean that not only does Islam not compel a person to confess to Islamic beliefs that he does not really possess, and not only is confession of beliefs based on *Taqlid* without research and reflection and knowledge unacceptable, but even people who do believe the doctrines of Islam but for some reason do not admit to doing so are free to adopt such a course, and no Muslim has right to force them to confess their beliefs. The Quran

specifically states that:

***'There shall be no compulsion in religion, since true guidance is now distinguishable from error.'***  
***(2:256).***

This verse, apart from categorically denying the imposition of religious beliefs by force leaves it to the discretion of the individual whether to confess publicly to what he knows to be true, and by doing so explains the reason for this absence of compulsion. It first states that the acceptance of Islamic beliefs and the practical confession of them are not compulsory, and that people are free to accept or not accept Islam (***'There shall be no compulsion in religion'***). Immediately after, it explains that the reason for this freedom is that the right path and the wrong path have been clearly indicated (***'true guidance is now distinguishable from error'***).

Religion is a program and a path to perfection for man to follow, and in order to do so he must either know the path so as to follow it freely and with conviction, or else he must be taken by that path forcibly.

In the Quranic view once the road to perfection has been defined there is no reason for religion to be compulsory. Rather, there is necessity for man to be free in choosing this road, since the desire for perfection is optional and man fulfill the philosophy of his creator only when he chooses the right road freely and of his own volition. So once the right road is defined, but man abuses this freedom and diverges from the road he knows to be right and chooses a road he knows to be wrong, there is no point in exercising compulsion. Let him fail and afterwards learn what his punishment is.

A point worth nothing, one which the author has not seen referred to by any other writer, is that since in this verse the freedom to accept Islam is under discussion, that is to say 'true guidance is now distinguishable from error' it is obvious that this verse, and indeed all the Quranic verses dealing with compulsion refer to people who have been shown the difference between true guidance and error, and those who understand the truth of Islam and Islamic beliefs but for various reasons are not prepared to confess to what they believe.

Nevertheless, the Quran categorically states that none is entitled to force them to do so. Another verse that categorically denies the use of compulsion in the expression of Islamic beliefs is the following:

***'If you are Lord so willed He could have made all the people on earth believe in Him. Would you therefore force faith on people?' (10:99).***

With regard to the revelation of this verse Imam Reza relates that according to his ancestors, going back to Imam 'Ali some of the Prophet's companions proposed to him that if he forced some of the people under his authority to accept Islam the number of Muslims would increase and so would their military strength against the enemy. The Prophet replied: 'I cannot face God having made an innovation that I was not commanded to make, and I am not a person who imposes his will on others.'[16](#)

At this point God Almighty revealed this verse, saying in effect 'O Muhammad, if I had wanted to I could have forcibly converted everyone to Islam. This would be like people suddenly finding faith after death when they are suffering punishment for their evil deeds. If I did this with them they would not be worthy of my rewards and praise. I want them to find faith freely and without compulsion.'

In short, the explanation of this verse, in the light of the circumstances in which it was revealed is this: in the system of creation man has been created as a free being, capable of choosing between perfection and corruption, so that reward and punishment in the after-life have a justification: so the imposition of faith on an individual, since it is against the philosophy of man's creation is not permissible, and the Prophet of GOD is not entitled to do something which is against the tradition of creation and contrary to the divine will, even though such a deed might strengthen the Islamic government and weaken the enemies of Islam.

The third instance of a Quranic verse which specifically rejects the imposition of faith is this verse, addressed directly to the Prophet:

***So give them warning. Verily your duty is only to admonish you are not their custodian. (88-22-3).***

In other words, the function of the Prophet is to warn and explain, to communicate the divine message and show the true path, and it is the people themselves who must make their choice and choose the true path. The Prophet was not appointed by God to a position of supremacy over the people so as to impose faith on them forcibly. The prophet's mission is to expound opinion, not impose it.

The fourth Quranic verse that explicitly condemns the imposition of Islamic doctrine is also addressed directly to the Prophet:

***'You shall not use force on them; rather, use this Quran to warn those who fear My threats.'***  
***(50:45).***

These verses tell us that the Prophet of Islam was extremely sad when he saw how his contemporaries were trapped by harmful and superstitious beliefs. He wanted by whatever means, to free them from these chains, so when he realizes that his constant efforts to free a considerable number of them were of no avail the grief in his soul knew no bounds, and his body could not cope with such distress, so that God was obliged to find a way of reducing his grief, the cause of which was his compassion towards the people.

The verses quoted are therefore a kind of consolation to the Prophet, telling him that his duty is to pass on the divine message and to warn the people and not to impose faith on them by force. He has done his duty, God tells him, he has not failed, and if God wished people to become true believers coercion. He would have acted in a different way. What we infer from these verses is expounded more clearly in another verse:

***'You will perhaps kill yourself by worrying about their lack of faith. If We wished, We could reveal to them a sign from heaven and they would be forced into utter humility. '(26:3-4).***

And another verse tells us:

***'You may destroy yourself on their account, worrying why they do not believe this new revelation. We have beautified the earth so as to test them and see who acquits himself best'. (18:6-7).***

These last two verses tell us clearly that the Prophet of Islam was so distressed at the way in which people were enslaved by superstitious beliefs, yet reluctant to accept correct ones, that sometimes there was the very real danger of him dying of grief. It is worth nothing that to comfort the Prophet the first of these quotations<sup>17</sup> states that faith cannot be subjected to force, and the second<sup>18</sup> alludes to the philosophy of freedom, namely the testing and perfection of man.

## **The Campaign Against Superstition In Islam**

It may be that from what has been said about freedom of opinion and freedom to express one's opinion in Islam the conclusion is drawn that Islam does not prescribe any measure to combat superstition or correct wrong beliefs. Since if a person's opinions are not his to control and everyone is free to state his beliefs, and the imposition of faith even on persons who have recognized its truth is not permissible, any such measures would be pointless.

But a moment's thought shows that such a conclusion is false, because the fact the opinion is not discretionary is not incompatible with the possibility of correcting wrong opinions, and freedom of expression does not preclude a basic campaign against superstitious beliefs, and indeed it is a prelude to such a campaign.

Although Islam confirms freedom of expression as part of the evolution towards the perfection of man it also considers a campaign against superstition so as free the mind from the bondage of incorrect beliefs, to be obligatory, and presages ultimate victory in this campaign Islam, is confident that the day will one day come when human society is freed from such bondage that is the day when Islam rules the whole world.<sup>19</sup>

The justification of the campaign against incorrect opinions, in the Islamic view, is that reason considers it obligatory, just as the method proposed by Islam for the correction of beliefs is precisely the same as that which is proposed by reason. Islam cannot permit that because of wrong and unrealistic opinions, a person's real inner beliefs, which form the basis of all his actions, should be unscientific and false, and that if such is the case the situation should remain so.

Islam cannot permit that opinions which are contrary to reason, should fatter a person's mind, or grapple on to his a very soul or that if his mind remain in the bondage of superstitious beliefs.

## The Islamic Way of Dealing with Superstition

As has already been mentioned, the method selected by Islam for dealing with superstitious beliefs is the same as that which reason suggests. To clarify things further, the Islamic approach to the correction of belief may be divided into two parts. The first is the Islamic way of ridding people's minds of incorrect opinions, and the second is the Islamic way of confronting obstacles to freedom of expression, and encouraging the growth of correct beliefs in society.

With regard to the first part the Islamic way is a publicity campaign and with regard to the second part it is an armed campaign.

### Publicity Campaign Against Superstition

The Islamic way of dealing with superstition eliminating incorrect beliefs from people's minds and encouraging them to adopt correct opinions and beliefs that are in accord with reality consists in the first instance of reliance on reason and proof, advice and exhortation, debate and free discussion, in other words a publicity campaign.

***'Call people to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Dispute with them in the most courteous manner.'* (16: 125).**

In this verse the Quran proposes logical methods of ridding people's minds of superstitious beliefs, and instructs the Prophet to use these methods to invite them to adopt Islamic opinions.

These methods are the following:

#### 1. Wisdom

The first practical method proposed by Islam in confronting incorrect opinions is reliance on reason and proof, rational argument, or as the Quran puts it 'The wisdom' (*al-hikma*).

The meaning of *al-hikma*, as defined by the *'Mufradat of Raghib'* as the acquisition of truth by means of science and intellect. In other words the discovery of the truth through scientific and intellectual reasoning. Islam in every case relies on proof to substantiate its claims and demands its opponents to produce proofs for theirs.<sup>20</sup>

#### 2. Exhortation

The second practical Islamic method of dealing with superstitious beliefs, besides reason and proof, is exhortation and counsel. Exhortation consists of two words of warning and instruction which is to be stimulate the emotionally to accept the truth. Thus wisdom, through the intellect and exhortation through the emotions and inmost feelings call upon a person to break the ties of incorrect belief.

A point worth nothing is that in the Quranic verse quoted above ‘exhortation’, is qualified by the epithet ‘kindly’. This is a reference to the fact that exhortation and counsel are only effective in motivating a person’s emotions and feelings to accept the truth if they are free from all adverse qualities, such as harshness, superiority or contempt, and instead are accompanied by various beauties, such as eloquence, a sympathetic attitude, purity of motivation and even the physical appearance of the person giving the exhortation or advice, all of which help to reinforce his message. Most important of all is the necessity for that person to set a good example himself, for the worst kind of exhortation comes from someone who does not practice what he preaches.

Finally, the more admirable and attractive the exhortation is presented the greater will be the effect on the listener, for it frequently happens that the effect of good advice in encouraging ordinary people to adopt sound beliefs and courses of action is greater than the effect of logical arguments and proofs.

Conversely, unattractive exhortation or ‘sermonizing’ is not only ineffective, but can sometimes have a reverse effect and cause a person to reject what he may have accepted through logic and proof, a Persian poem says:

*The way in which you recite the Quran–  
Being Muslim is not going to be popular around.*

### **3. Debate**

The third practical Islamic way of dealing with unscientific opinions, in addition to the methods already mentioned, is debate and free discussion. The Quran makes mentioned of this method, using the terms *jedal* and *mera* (dispute and controversy).

Debate in this sense consists of discussion in the form of a dispute or competition, in other words kind of wrestling –match between ideas. The Quran has two different approaches for the healthy confirmation of ideas in debate that lead to the clarification of the truth and the development of correct beliefs. The first one is the expression which is translated above as ‘disputing in the most courteous manner’ and the second is what is ‘controversy’.[21](#)

Disputing with courtesy involves the use of the healthiest and kindest forms of debating so as to clarify the truth, and obvious appearance involves the use of proofs so decisive that they are obvious to everyone, learning the other side without an adequate rejoinder.

Islam, which is the religion of all the divinely–inspired prophets, is the founder of free discussion and the healthy confrontation of ideas. The Prophet of Islam, as the bearer of the greatest divine message, in an age when victory and defeat were matters of sheer power and wealth, was the first to introduce such concepts into that society. Both he and the learned members of his family were pioneers in this field and that is why a considerable proportion of the collections of hadith are devoted to debates conducted by the Prophet and the Imams of his family.[22](#)

It is worthy to note that the Islamic method of ridding people's mind of unscientific opinions is completely scientific and logical, and in this regard Islam has entirely refrained from the use of military strength. The method adopted by the Prophet of Islam in his mission, in conformity with the commandments of the Quran, relied on reason proof, good advice and the use of the best and 'healthiest methods' of debate and free discussion. He specifically states that his method and that of anyone claiming to follow him is to invite people to god on the basis of insight, vision and, awareness.

***'Say "This is my path, I call on the people to have faith in God, on the basis of insight, and so do my "followers," (12: 108).***

It is therefore the height of injustice to say that Islam has ever imposed itself by force, especially since such claims have been made by people whose crimes in the Inquisition are a shameful chapter of in the history of their times. Islam does indeed use military force, not to impose its doctrines; but to remove obstacles that the development of correct beliefs.

## **The Struggle For The Liberation Of Thought**

If reasoning and proof debate and exhortation all fail to give satisfactory results the Islamic way of confronting obstacles that are blocking the road to freedom of thought is armed struggle and war.<sup>23</sup>

Obstacles to freedom of thought consist if regimes and false traditions that deprive the people of power, thought discernment and hence prevent them from adopting correct opinions.

Corrupt, dictatorial and unjust regimes and powers that are nourished by the ignorance of the masses, and that will collapse if the public becomes known. Such regimes are therefore an obstacle to correct beliefs, or as the Quran put it, an obstacle on the path of God.

After having made the conditions clear and the discussion completed Islam confronts such regimes with force so as to remove the obstacles to freedom or through and prepare the way for the growth of correct opinion through enlightenment.

In the discussion entitled 'The Prophethood' on understanding the Prophet of Islam and the way in which he dealt with his opponents we shall see that in confronting hostile powers he first of all used debating tactics and relied on reason and proof, and at the second stage he resorted to *mobahilah* a traditions Arab practice of calling on the creator to act as arbitrator in a dispute, and if neither of these methods proved effective, he considered warfare and battle as ways of breaking the obstacles to awareness and freedom of thought. Debate and *mobahileh* were final words of the Prophet's against the powers that were opposed to him.

In addition to corrupt regimes, traditions affecting a society can be an obstacle to freedom of thought. If a person is endowed with freedom of thought a moment's reflection will tell him without the slightest doubt that idolatry, such as the worship of claves or fire, and dozens are even hundreds of other irrational

beliefs are pure superstition. But false traditions and customs which have embedded themselves in the heart and soul of those who believe in them are veritable chains fettering the mind and preventing a person from thinking logically. In the words of Shahid Ostad 'Alameh Mottahari.

First there are greedy and exploitative people who want to establish a regime for themselves. This regime needs an ideological base, for without such a base nothing can be done. The person who established this base is well aware of what he is doing. His treachery is deliberate. He chooses an object, an idol, a bull, a dragon, and gives it extensive publicity. The public are hoodwinked. Perhaps at first people don't pay a great deal of attention to it, but then after a few years their example. Generation follows generation and the cult becomes established, as a historical event, and becomes part of the national heritage, one of their national traditions and a matter of great pride, which cannot be abolished. It's just like plaster. When plaster is first mixed with water it's a gooey substance and you can mould it into any shape you like. But when it has been moulded into its final shape and begins to dry, the more it dries the larger it becomes hard, until in the end it becomes too hard that you cannot even break it with a pickaxe.

'Ought we to fight against such cults? In other words, this freedom of thought that we say should have should it include opinions like this? The world today is in the grip of a fallacy here.

They say people's minds should be free, and they say opinions should be free; idolatry in their opinion should also be free. People should be free to worship a cult or a dragon; everyone should be free to worship what they want, and to choose anything they want for their beliefs, whereas in fact these beliefs run counter to freedom of thought. Its opinions like these that tie a person's mind up in knots.'<sup>24</sup>

Islam says that the chain of superstitious beliefs which fetters the mind and which cannot be unlocked by reason and proof, and exhortation and counsel, must be opened by military force, and that the obstacle consisting of false traditions, which over the years and over the centuries have sedated up society's mind with the sediment of erroneous culture until it has become so hard that it cannot be removed with ordinary implements, must be destroyed in a mighty explosion so as liberate men's minds.

Since direct military action against opinion is as we have seen, impossible, Islam begins its battle against false traditions by campaigning against their social manifestations. For example, in the campaign against idolatry the idol-temples must be destroyed, as Abraham did, and in the campaign against calf-worship the golden calf must be melted down by fire, as Moses did.

Abraham was the only person in his society to discover the secret of existence through independent thought and thus reach a correct philosophy of life.<sup>25</sup> Faced with a people who were bogged down in superstition and false beliefs, and who lacked the basic ability to think for themselves. Abraham tried as hard as he could, using reason and proof and advice, to make them see the error of their ways and to free their minds from the bonds of false beliefs, but without success. The more he admonished them the less effect it had. Finally, he came to the conclusion that he should prove to them in a practical way that

these idols, which they had fashioned themselves, could not be true gods.

On day when the people were celebrating festival by going out into the country, Abraham decided to carry out his plan. He went to the main idol, then hung his axe round the idol's neck and left. Abraham's plan was to stage a scene in which he would accuse the chief idol of massacring the other idols so as to eliminate false beliefs from people's thoughts and set their minds at liberty. When the people came back to the town from their festival they discovered that the idols had quarreled and killed each other. All the idols were broken except the chief idol, which had an axe round its neck.

It looked as if the chief idol was responsible for the carnage but their native wit told them it was impossible for a collection of inanimate objects to quarrel among themselves. So they immediately set about looking for the person who was really responsible. Since Abraham had always been complaining about their idolatry and had also threatened to destroy the idols they their idolatry and had also threatened to destroy the idols they summoned him on charges of having killed their Gods and began to interrogate him in public.

The first question was: 'Did you do this to our gods?' In order to stir their consciences Abraham replied by saying that the seen indicated that the chief idol had done the killing and if idols could talk why didn't they asked the idols themselves what had happened?

The way was gradually being prepared for them to free their minds and think independently, Abraham's answer made the idolaters stop and think, and to realize how wrong they were in their beliefs. In their hearts they blamed themselves for this ideological tyranny and finally they had to confess that their gods could not talk. With their superstitious beliefs thus weakened and the obstacle of false traditions broken, Abraham saw his way clear to begin an appropriate publicity campaign.

***He said: 'Would you worship, rather than God that which can neither help you nor harm you? Shame on you and your false gods! Have you no minds to think with?' (21:66-67)***

It is worth nothing that when Islam has broken the obstacle and freed the mind from the captivity of false beliefs it says 'Now think! See .what your reason tells you. If it tells you that Islam is right, then accepts Islam, and if it tells you some other religion or ideology is right, then accept that. In other words Islam does not break open one chain with military force in order to fetter the mind with another chain, or even to impose another belief founded on reason and thought. On the contrary, when Islam has freed a person from erroneous beliefs it says, 'Think, and choose a belief on the basis of thought and research. Even if you choose Islam without thinking, this is not acceptable.

After the conquest of Mecca when the worship of old traditions was broken and amnesty had been declared, the people of the Hejaz flocked to Islam. But the leaders of the idolaters, who had created innumerable difficulties for the Muslim, felt themselves in a dangerous position, and a number of them therefore fled Mecca. One of those who because of his evil past decided to flee was Safwan bin Ummaya.

‘Safwan bin Ummaya, apart from other serious crimes, had publicly hanged some Muslims in Mecca in broad daylight, in revenge for the death of his father, Ummaya, who had been killed at the battle of Badr. Fearing punishment, he decided to leave the hijaz by ship. ‘Omair ibn Wahab, one of the Prophet’s attendants, requested that his faults be pardoned. The Prophet accepted his intercession and gave him the turban he was wearing when he entered Mecca as a sign of safe conduct. ‘Amir went to Jiddah with the turban and personally accompanied Safwan back to Mecca.

When the prophet saw this arch-criminal of the age he told him with great magnanimity that his life and possessions were safe, but it was advisable for him to accept Islam. Safwan requested two months grace to study and think about Islam. The Prophet said. “I’ll give you not two, but four months, so that you can choose this religion with complete knowledge and understanding.” Before four months had passed Safwan embraced Islam.[26](#)

Even more interesting than this is the story of how Suheil bin ‘Umar become a Muslim. To use his own words, ‘After the conquest of Mecca, when the Prophet of God entered the city, I went to my house and shut myself up and sent my son ‘Abdullah to the Prophet to request an assurance of safety, for I was not prepared to become a Muslim just to save my own life.”

Abdullah came into the presence of the Prophet and said. “My father requests a promise of safety. Will you give it to him?” “The Prophet said, “Yes, he is in God’s care. He can come out of his house. I then he turned to those around him and said, ‘if any of you see Suheil you must not show any hostility to him. He must be allowed to come out of his house. Upon my soul, Suheil is an intelligent and honorable man, and a person like him cannot fail to understand Islam and become a Muslim.”

‘Once he had received the assurance and heard the Prophet’s words ‘Abdullah left the assembly and returned to his father and told him what had happened. Suheil, perhaps not expecting that the prophet would treat him like this, said in voluntarily, “By God, as a child and a grown man he has always been a good and worthy person.”

After he received this assurance of safety, Suheil, although he remained a non-believer, mixed freely with the Muslims and even accompanied the Prophet’s at the battle of Hunein, without accepting Islam. Until finally at place called Ja ‘rana’. He did so.[27](#)

These two tales are clear example of practical biography of the Prophet of Islam in encountering those who theoretically opposed him. These tales prove that despite what a group of orientalist claim, the goals of battles of Islam commanded by Quran decrees were removing the barriers of freedom of opinion and ploughing the ground for the growth of correct beliefs.

## **Freedom To Propagate Opinion In Islam**

So far we have seen that Islam not only confirms freedom of expression but defends it. Now we must

see whether Islam permits anyone to propagate any opinion he may have and to communicate it to another person.

On the basis of what was said about the rational attitude towards this question Islam most decidedly cannot permit the absolute right to propagate opinion. To explain the matter further, the following brief summary is necessary: Propagation of opinion sometimes takes the form of reasoning and submission of proof, with the propagandist genuinely basing his arguments on reason and logic, and sometimes it takes the form of demagoguery and the transmission of false beliefs by means of trickery and guile.

In the case of opinions which have their origins in thought and logic, to the extent that they rely on reason and logic and argument and proof, their propagation and dissemination, and hence the freedom to propagate them, are included in the category of freedom of expression, and here the Islamic attitude has been fully explained.

But demagoguery for the purpose of communicating opinions which lack a logical base and are harmful to society is something that reason cannot justify—as has already been explained—nor can Islam confirm it against the dictates of reason.

To sum up briefly, we may say that in Islam the expression of opinion is free, but demagoguery for the transmission of false opinions to the people is forbidden<sup>28</sup>.

## **Freedom Of Opinion In The World Today**

The final question that must be discussed in this chapter is the question of freedom of opinion in the world today, what are the motives for promoting this freedom in international circles, particularly in Europe, and what objectives the world of imperialism is pursuing in its support for this freedom?

We can say that the promotion of the idea of freedom of opinion in the world today is a social reaction to the inquisition that the fathers of the Church carried out in the Middle Ages. They did not allow anyone to express an opinion, even an opinion unconnected with religious matters that was contrary to what the Church taught. For example, because the Church taught that the sun revolved around the earth no one was entitled even if he submitted logical arguments and proofs to show that the sentenced thousands of scholars to be burned alive.

Giordano Bruno, an Italian priest and one such scholar, was sentenced to be burned at the stake in the year 1600, on charges that he had expressed the belief that ‘Anyone who has reached the age of reason can reach an opinion about the world and life in conformity with his rational and deductive faculties.’ The court considered this opinion to be a proof of his opposition to Christianity, since in the Court’s view every Christian who reaches the age of reason must adopt belief’s about the world in accordance with the Holy bible, and not in accordance with his rational and deductive faculties. By expressing his views Bruno proved himself to be an apostate. His apostasy was due to the Devil entering his body and

therefore he must be burned so as to exercise the Devil!

In addition, religion, in the view of those who control international politics and the philosophers inspired by these policies, is no more than a pastime and pastimes are not concerned with matters such as right or wrong. Religion, in their view, is like a piece of poetry or a film. As Shahid Ostad 'Alameh Mottahari says: 'In the view that concerns only the personal conscience of the individual, regardless of what that religion is, whether, for example, it's idolatry, such as calf-worship, or worship of God...

'Regarding the question of religion, since they do not want to admit to the reality of religion and prophethood or accept that prophets really came from God to reveal the true path to man, and that man's happiness lies in following this true path, they say instead, "we don't know what the reality and origin of religions are, but we do realize that man cannot live without religion.

One of the essential conditions of human life, one of the pastimes and distractions in man's life, is that he occupies himself with this thing known as religion. It does not make any difference whether the object he decides to worship is a monotheistic God a man called Jesus Christ, or a calf or an object made of metal or wood. So nobody ought to be persecuted for their beliefs, and whatever a person's individual preference is, it's quite all right.[29](#)

As has been pointed out, such attitudes towards religion are not inspired by ideas that are based on philosophy, but by ideas that use science and philosophy for political ends.

If those in charge of imperialist policies pretend to be in favor of freedom of opinion it's not because they really want everyone to be free to express his opinion so that correct beliefs might develop, and people be liberated from superstition, since such freedom would be against the interests for their political power. Instead, they want to distract people's minds so that they can more easily achieve their anti-popular political object.

And since the best narcotic pastime is religion without politics, and superstitious religious beliefs, there is no difference between the various false religions, so they judge it to be in their political interests to declare religious opinions to be free, so long as these do not conflict with their interests.

But if a religion tries to gain to the world of politics, and became instrumental to the development of correct beliefs and the liberation of the masses from the bondage of incorrect belief, and hence from the domination of imperialism, this religion is not only deemed illicit by the very champions of freedom of opinion, but it's followers are destroyed by these same exponents of freedom of thought, on the pretext of the defense of freedom.

[1.](#) It is discussed in a later chapter entitled "Understanding with the Heart".

[2.](#) Mohammad Mo'in. Farhange Mo'in (Mo'in's Dictionary) Vol 6. under 'Galileo'.

[3.](#) Freedom to choose the source of opinion will be discussed in the next sense of the expression 'Freedom of opinion.'

[4.](#) Quoted in History of slavery. p.35.

[5.](#) Durant, Will. History of civilization. Vol. 1.p.33.

- [6.](#) Durant, Will, History of civilization. Vol.1.p.33.
- [7.](#) Ibid.p.53
- [8.](#) Others eat the lice in each other's hair and when these numerous they cook them in stew, and if they have caught an enemy they eat him with shouts of joy. Ibid.p.17
- [9.](#) 'To all of these kinds of foods man added a very tasty dish, the flesh of his fellow, man. It can be shown that cannibalism was once almost universal among primitive tribes. This custom was practiced by people until quite modern times, such as the Irish, Iberians Picts and even the Dares of the eleventh century. In New Britain, human flesh was hung up & sold in butcher's shops, just like the flesh of other animals'Ibid.p.18
- [10.](#) Ibid.p.18–19.
- [11.](#) Commentary by Abu 'Ali' Ibn-al- Tabresi, Majm'a-ol-Bayan.Vol. 9. 138.
- [12.](#) See Mizan, Chapter 255 (Al-Imam...)
- [13.](#) Ibid, Chapter 255.
- [14.](#) Holy Quran:49/14,
- [15.](#) Holy Quran:27/14,
- [16.](#) Sheikh Sadug. Tawhid. PP. 341–2. Mizan hadith No. 17496
- [17.](#) Quran, 26:3–4.
- [18.](#) Quran, 18:6–7.
- [19.](#) Quran, 48:28.
- [20.](#) Show us your proof(2:112;27:64;28:75)  
A famous dictionary of Quranic words.
- [21.](#) Quran:Kahf,22
- [22.](#) This subject will be covered more fully in a later Chapter” The scientific understanding of the Prophet.”
- [23.](#) See–Darsi bozorg va arzandeh (An Important and instructive lesson.) p. 22.
- [24.](#) Text of lecture given by the martyred Ostad at the Hoseiniyeh Ershad, in Tehran in the autumn of 1969 entitled–freedom of opinion”, Published in collection of essays entitled “About the Islamic Republic.....
- [25.](#) This was showed Abraham the kingdom of heavens of the earth, so that they might have certain faith. (6:75).
- [26.](#) Jafar Subhani, Forough al-Abadiyat ('The splendor of eternity') Vol,II, PP, 736–7. Full detail of Safwan's Convention to Islam can be found in Kanzol-Ammal, Vol,X–PP.503–6
- [27.](#) Further details are given in the article “Kurnameh Islam” (“The Islamic record”).
- [28.](#) “Mohammad Khatim Peyambar,” “Mohammad the seal of the Prophets” vol.II.PP. 59–71
- [29.](#) About the Islamic Revolution.

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