

Individual freedom

The Imam's treatment of others and his behaviour towards them was based on their freedom.

Man's conscience should take decisions according to its own determination and with freedom. The means are themselves effective without external effects. The external impediments prevent them to some extent from becoming effective.

Collective activities are correct only when they conform with the principles of a free conscience and with the [1](#) natural laws which are themselves free. Man is free fundamentally. A free being possesses feelings. He thinks with his own power, speaks with authority and acts with his determination. To place him under compulsion would, in fact, amounts to finishing his very being. Hence it will be permissible to curb a person's freedom only when it is permissible to kill him. [2](#)

If you wish to restrict the light of the sun and draw a curtain before it as a consequence whereof it cannot make the opposite things hot and bright, you in fact extinguish its light. If you are able to restrain the air from blowing you in fact annihilate the air. Similarly if you deprive the waves of the rivers, the flowers of the deserts, the birds in the air and all other things available in this world from performing their natural functions it is as good as your having destroyed them. Same is the case with man and to deprive him of freedom amounts to killing all human beings. [3](#)

This was the conception of freedom in the eyes of the Imam and this was how he reached its depths. He mentioned freedom with his tongue as he understood it and also acted according to it. Every deed of his was correct according to his own views and beliefs as well as according to those of others. The laws of nature as well as the interests of the society support them.

Ali's words and actions which we have studied thoroughly go to show how he guided the people to do everything with their determination and free will. In fact there was a point which he always kept in view and it was the freedom of the individuals in such a manner that the freedom of others was not hurt.

A group of the old Greek philosophers and some European philosophers of the Middle Ages kept only the individual's freedom in view and did not attach any importance to public interests and national

freedom. There was also another group which took only the collective interests into account and did not favour individual freedom and rights. They considered pressure upon the people and subjecting them to forced labour to be lawful.

However, Ali took the individual's freedom and collective interests into account in such a way that neither of them might be hurt and made them compatible with each other so that an individual might take care of collective interests with his own free will and free efforts of the individuals might be in the national interests. He declared that the individuals were for the nation and the nation was for the individuals. We shall continue this discussion so that the matter may become perfectly clear.

We shall now see how he coordinated the freedom of the individuals with the public interests.

Ali knew that as the individuals are the members of the nation they should apply their freedom to matters which might not hurt the interests of the nation. Here freedom does not mean general licence. On the contrary it should be coupled with the faith and sense of responsibility, and man should consider it his duty to take the public interests into account along with his own freedom.

Ali did not say like other philosophers that human freedom was limited, but said something deeper and did not fix any limit for freedom. His remark is much more valuable and sublime than those of others, and shows that he was much superior to others in understanding the spiritual mysteries of man and the social rules and regulations.

He inculcated in the hearts of the people the belief in freedom, and added to it the belief that every person has some responsibilities which he must fulfil. The proof of this policy of his is that a canal in a village was filled with dust and became useless and some persons who wanted to restart it approached the governor of the area to compel the people to work on it, but the Commander of the Faithful strictly prohibited it and said: "they may work of their own free will and take wages for that. As regards the canal it belongs to the person who works on it of his own accord and considers himself responsible for the result".

Ali accorded respect to the freedom of the working class more than one thousand years ago, and Rousseau, the famous French writer was inclined to remark thus about two centuries ago: "Respect for mankind and philanthropy oblige us to say that we should consider our subordinates to be human beings like the intelligent people even though they may be untrained and ignorant".

The principles set forth by the Imam make it necessary that determination and authority should be limited within their own bounds and authority should be coupled with belief in responsibility. Hence duty and responsibility do not hurt authority and will but support them.

Responsibility alone is not sufficient for the performance of good deeds until determination and authority are also responsible. Responsibility is proportionate with authority. The greater the authority and determination the heavier will be the duty and responsibility.

Responsibility is related with authority in the same way in which it is related with intellect and conscience. A person whose power of thinking is paralyzed and who cannot distinguish between good and evil and whose intellectual capabilities are out of order cannot be held responsible for any action.

Similarly a person who has been deprived of his freedom and authority cannot be subjected to any responsibility. Freedom, authority and mental awakening make a person distinguish between good and evil and carry out his responsibilities as a matter of necessity.

It was on this account that Ali ordered his governors and other officers to release the people from captivity and remove the heavy chains from their hands and feet so that they might do useful deeds for the nation of their own free will, because so long as they were not independent they would be helpless, and helpless persons are under no responsibility. They do not consider themselves to be responsible and do not, therefore, do good deeds, because good deeds can be done only with freedom of thought. The actions of those who do not possess free will are not their own. They are the actions of the government which are performed through them. Their determination is weak and their strength is wasted on inappropriate occasions.

After the Imam the people arrived at that very stage which has been mentioned by us. Although they were free during the period of his caliphate and were safe from harm and torture by the rulers he had prescribed a rule according to which they were required to admit their responsibilities of their own free will and were to realize that they owed some responsibilities to the nation and the nation had some rights on them. As we have already seen on many occasions and shall also see later his orders and directions were based on this principles and he commanded and prohibited and rewarded and punished the people keeping this principle in view.

1. The author proves in this chapter that the individual should, while enjoying freedom, have regard for national interests and should perform all those acts with their determination, free will and choice which are useful for the people and should avoid harmful acts, so that freedom should be confined to one's own freedom and should not result in placing others under compulsion and captivity.

2. By this statement the author wants to prove that the point of view of the socialists that government should monopolize all activities and should not leave anyone free on the ground that in various matters the people look after their personal interests and do not care for national interests is not correct. The opponents of this school of thought say that no interest is higher than freedom and after curbing their freedom the people cannot be provided with any bounty which might equal it. They also say that every kind of blessing and advancement of industry and trade can be achieved in a better way by means of freedom. As we can very well observe abundant facilities are available in free countries and the number of scholars and skilled persons available there is also larger. The workers in such countries live in comfort and the rate of crime there is very low so much so that in many of those countries no criminal case is registered for years.

3. The mischievous and sensual persons also say that freedom is something respectable and the nation should set them free to indulge in their sensual activities and to bring up the children and young men in an irreligious atmosphere. They should be told that the freedom demanded by them is a crime and if they are given this licence, others whose number is thousands of times larger than theirs, will be deprived of their freedom.

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