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And removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them. (7:157)

Last week I mentioned that our discussion consists of three parts: The meaning of freedom, the two kinds of freedom, namely social and spiritual freedom and the dependence of these two types of freedom upon one another, especially the dependence of social freedom on spiritual freedom.

Tonight, I wish to devote myself to the subject of spiritual freedom, its meaning and its necessity for mankind. This is particularly urgent since today little attention seems to be paid to spiritual freedom by human societies, which is the cause of many present troubles. This is so evident that many people consider spiritual freedom as something abolished, even though the need for it is much greater than in the past. What does spiritual freedom mean? Freedom requires two sides so that one side becomes free of the bond of the other. In spiritual freedom what must the human be free of? Spiritual freedom is freedom from one's self as against social freedom which is freedom from the bonds of others. One may be asked whether the human being can be enslaved by the self.

Can a person be both a slave and a slave owner? The answer is in the affirmative. In the case of animals this may not be true but what about this strange being called the human being? How is it possible for it to be at the same time a slave and master? The reason is that the human being is a complex creature and that is a fact which has been confirmed by religion and philosophy by scientists and psychologists and about which no doubt exists.

Let me begin by an interpretation of the Quran on Creation which says,

"So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down, bowing before him." (15:29)

It is not necessary to know what this divine spirit means, but it is enough to know that this earthly being is granted something else which is unearthly. According to a Tradition, the Prophet says that God created angels and granted them only intelligence. He created animals and gave them only appetites and He created man and granted him both intelligence and appetite; an utterance of the Prophet that

has been used in a poem by Rumi.

Now, besides these verses of the Quran and Traditions and what has been affirmed by philosophers and psychologists, what does spiritual freedom consist of in simple language. We will begin with something which everyone would understand. Undoubtedly we need food to live and the more of it the better, and we need clothing and the finer the better and we require a dwelling and the more magnificent the better. We desire wives and children, luxury, money and material things.

But at one point we may reach a cross-road where we should keep our honor and nobility and at the same time put up with poverty, eat dry bread, wear shabby clothes, live in a poor hut and have no money and be distressed. If we ignore our honor and nobility and submit to abjection, then all material benefits will be provided for us. We see that many people are not willing to suffer humiliations for the sake of material things while others readily accept this exchange, even though they and their consciences are ashamed of themselves.

In the Gulistan, Saidi describes two brothers, one of whom was rich and the other poor. The former was in the service of the government and the latter was an ordinary worker who secured a livelihood by manual labor. One day the rich brother said to his poor brother, "Why don't you accept government service, to be delivered from hardship and distress?" The poor brother answered, "Why don't you work to be delivered from abjection?"

That kind of service with all its accompanying wealth means lack of freedom, for, it involves bowing to others and being humbled. Sa'di goes on to say that according to the wise, sitting down to eat your own bread is far better than wearing a golden belt and standing to serve others.

You may be well-versed about this subject but I wish you to analyze it from a psychological point of view. What feeling makes the human being prefer pain and hardship, labor and poverty to humbling himself or herself before others? He calls it captivity to serve others though it is not of the type of material slavery. It is not his or her strength that is enslaved but the spirit. There is a quatrain attributed to Ali, peace be upon him, saying, "If you desire to live freely, labor like a slave, work and suffer pain and shut your eyes from Adam's offspring whoever they may be, even from Hatam Ta'i (a heroic figure famous for his generosity in pre-Islamic Arabia). So have no expectation not only from mean people but also from the generous."

He goes on to say that when a job is offered to someone, that person considers it below his or her dignity to accept it. He or she thinks every kind of manual labor as mean. But Ali, peace be upon him, believes that every kind of work and labor is better than extending your hand before others begging for something. He says, "Nothing is worse than going to others to beg for something."

Having no need of others means being superior to them. Once I came across a remark of the poet Hafiz who was an extraordinarily eloquent man and had a deep respect for Ali, peace be upon him. He quotes nine sayings of his which are relevant to our discussion, one of which is, "You may be in need but

remember that if you have need of someone, you still turn yourself into his slave. But if you do away with that need, you will be his equal and if you show benevolence to someone, you will be his master."

So you see that your need makes you someone's slave What kind of slavery? Slavery of spirit. These sayings are fine but today they are disregarded since mankind prefers to discuss other problems and pays little attention to ethical ones.

Again Ali, peace be upon him, says, "Greed means perpetual slavery." Thus he considers greed worse than slavery. Here then, spiritual slavery is mentioned as something worse than physical slavery. There is also slavery to wealth against which all moralists have warned mankind.

Another saying of Ali is, "The world is a passage not a residence." Again he says, "There are two groups of people in the world." He continues, "One of these two groups come and sell and enslave themselves and go and the others come and buy their freedom and go." These two attitudes can also be applied to wealth, either to be a slave of wealth or free from it. A person should say that as he or she must not be a slave to riches, he or she should say, "I am a human being. Why should I make myself a slave of inanimate things like gold and silver, land and other things?"

But the truth is that when a person thinks the self to be a slave of wealth, that person is in fact a slave to his or her mental characteristics, a slave to greed and one's animal nature. For inanimate things like money, land, machine and even animals have no power to enslave that person. When one ponders deeply over this matter, one finds the source of slavery to lie in one's own peculiarities such as greed, lust, anger and carnal desires.

The Quran says, "Have you noticed someone who 11as made his carnal desires his god?' Wealth itself is not to blame when a person is warned against his or her own desires. Thus if one liberates oneself from the bond of one's wicked desires, one will realize that one is not at the service of wealth.

It is then that one finds one's own true worth and understands the significance of this verse of the Quran, "All We have created on the earth is for you." Thus riches are at the service of the human being and not vice versa. If so, then, envy and avarice have no meaning and if one engages in them, one is enslaving oneself. There are two stages for the human being: A lower, animal stage and a higher, human one.

The Prophets are sent to preserve the spiritual freedom of humanity. What does that mean? It means preventing human honor, humanity, intelligence and conscience from being subjugated to its own lust, passion and love of profits. If you overcome your passion, you are free. If you conquer your lust and not vice versa, you are free. If you are in a position to gain an illegitimate profit, but your faith and conscience and intelligence forbid you to do so, you have overcome your desire and then you can say that you are really spiritually free.

If you see a woman, but you check your lustful desires and obey your conscience, then you are a free human being. But if your eyes, ears, and stomach incite you to satisfy them by whatever means, then

you are their slave. The human being is ruled by two types of ego: An animal ego and a human one. This fact and this contrast are well illustrated by Rumi in a story of Majnun (in eastern literature, Majnun is the equivalent of Romeo and Laila is the equivalent of Juliet) and the camel.

The story goes that Majnun was riding a camel intending to visit Laila's home. The camel happened to have a baby camel and Majnun, in order to ride faster to his destination, confined the baby camel to the house. He was deep in thought about his Beloved while the camel was worried about its young. Every moment Majnun absentmindedly let the reins loose, the camel turned back towards home. This was repeated several times until the camel collapsed. The poet digresses to say that the human being has two kinds of inclinations: that of the spirit and that of the body.

If you wish to be free in spirit, you cannot be a glutton, a woman-worshipper, a money-lover, a lustful person of passion. I have come across a narrative in the Nahj ulbalagha which says that one day the Prophet went among the Companions (the ansar who were the poor followers of the Prophet in Medina who had migrated there. The Prophet first let them stay in a mosque, but a divine command was issued to him to find another home for them since a mosque was not a proper place to live in and they obeyed the order.

Subsequently, they lived in a large shelter near the mosque). One of them said to the Prophet, "I feel as if the whole world is worthless in my eyes." He did not mean that he made a similar use of stones and gold but that neither of them had the power to attract him. The Prophet looked at him and said, " Now I can say that you are free." Thus we can say that spiritual freedom is in itself something real.

We can give other reasons to show that the human being's personality is complex and that one can either be spiritually free or a slave. God Almighty has granted this power to a person to be one's own judge. In society, a judge stands apart from the plaintiff and defendant. Have you ever heard a person to be his own plaintiff and defendant and judge, all at the same time?

A person is called just. What is a just human being? Does it not mean that a person can judge impartially about one's own problems and issue a verdict against one when guilty? Does this not show the complex nature the human being? Many a time you have seen people who judge fairly about themselves and prefer the rights of others to their own. The late Sayyid Husain Kuh Kamari who was a great religious authority with a following and an uncle o the late Ayatullah Hujjat Kuh Kamari who was our teacher was such a man. It is narrated about him that he had theological class in Najaf which had not yet won the reputation it had later on, especially as his stay in Najaf had not been long for he had been in the habit of travelling here and there to benefit from the teachings of the great masters in various towns such as Mashhad, Isfahan and Kashan.

The late Shaykh Ansari who was dressed poorly and whose eyes suffered from trachoma happened to teach in the same mosque as Sayyid Husain, each in turn, the Shaykh first and Sayyid Husain next, without meeting each other. One day the latter happened to arrive an hour earlier than usual. As there

was no time to go home and come back, he thought he would wait there for his pupils to arrive. He noticed a peculiar looking Shaykh sitting there teaching two or three fellows. He sat in a corner and could hear the Shaykh's words. He found them to be profound and wise. It was a strange experience for a great scholar like him to meet an unknown but erudite teacher. He decided to go earlier to the mosque once more to see how things went.

The second visit proved to be as beneficial as the first and he found the Shaykh very learned and in fact more of a scholar than himself. On repeating the experience for the third time, he was fully convinced of the man's profound knowledge. So he decided to join the small class and when his own pupils arrived, he said to them," I have news for you. That Shaykh is much more learned than I am as I have discovered and I advise you to accompany me to join his class." They arose together and attended the Shaykh's class.

What is the implication of such fairness? Sayyid Husain turned himself into a pupil of Ansari and gave up his claim to being an authority. He must have felt, as we do, what respect and mastership are and must have been pleased at being an authority. And yet his noble and free spirit allowed him to judge fairly between himself and that man, and issue a verdict against himself. This is proof of the human being's complex personality. A person commits a sin and then blames the self. What is this prick of conscience? Exploiting governments train individuals in such a way as to kill their conscience. And yet when that conscience is supposed to be dead, a small light is noticed to scatter its beams at its proper time. The pilot of the plane who bombed Hiroshima was actually trained for such a crime but when he dropped his bomb and saw the city burning and the innocent men and women and children who had no connection with war, being annihilated, he felt spiritually sick. In America they gave him a fine welcome but they could not check that torture of conscience which led him eventually to a lunatic asylum. The Quran says,

"Nay, I swear by the Self-reproaching soul..." (75:2).

Ali, peace be upon him, says, "He who is not granted a preacher within himself by God, will not be affected by other's preaching." Do not deceive yourself into thinking that you will be influenced by others if you are not influenced by your own conscience. One of our religious injunctions is to judge ourselves and issue a verdict against ourselves when necessary. "Call yourself to account before you are called to account." "Weigh yourself before you are weighed for your deeds on the Day of Resurrection."

All these show the human being's complex personality which has a lower animal side and higher human side. Spiritual freedom means that the higher side is free from the lower one.

In connection with self-punishment, I remember a case related to Hadrat Ali. A man came to him to repent, supposing that by saying the sentence of repentance, everything would be all right. Ali reprimanded him sharply by saying, "May your mother mourn for you. Do you know what repentance means? It is very much higher than saying a sentence." Then he told the man that repentance is based on several things: Two principles, two conditions of acceptance and two conditions of completion. That

is, a total of six points.

He then explained this by saying, "The first principle is that one should be truly penitent of one's past wicked deeds. The second is to decide never to commit that sin in the future. The third is to grant people their right if one owes it to them. The fourth is to perform the obligatory devotions which one may have forsaken." The last two points, Ali, peace be upon him, mentioned are most relevant to my discourse. They are: Fifthly, to melt down the flesh that is grown on you by lustfulness through sorrow and constant grief; and lastly, to give this body which has in the past been addicted to the pleasure of sin, the pain of worship and devotion.

Have there been people in the past who have reached this stage? Yes. There have. Today we may forget that repentance exists. But we can cite a fine example of it by mentioning Mulla Husain Quli Hamadani who was a great moralist of modern times and a pupil of the great religious scholars, the later Mirza Shirazi and Shaykh Ansari. A sinful man goes to him to be guided. When the man came back after a few days, he could hardly be recognized due to his extraordinary leanness. The Mulla used neither a whip nor a weapon nor a threat. But he could offer true spiritual guidance. He managed to awaken that man's conscience to fight his lust and passion.

The most significant program of the prophets is to provide spiritual freedom. Self-purification is in fact spiritual freedom. The Quran says,

"Prosperous is he who purifies it and failed has he who seduces it." (91:9–10)

The greatest damage of our time is speaking of freedom and confining it to social freedom. Spiritual freedom is never spoken of and, in consequence, social freedom is not secured. A great crime is committed in our time in the form of philosophy and philosophical schools totally ignoring the human being, its personality, spiritual honor and God's revelation, "I breathed into him of My Spirit, "is quite forgotten. They deny that the human being has two aspects an animal side and a human one. They claim that this human being is no different from animals and is subject to the survival of the fittest. This means that each individual effort is for his or her own interests. Can you imagine how much damage this attitude has done to humanity? They say that life is a battle and the world a battlefield. They also say that a right is what one seizes, not what one ,rants. But the truth is that a right must both be taken and given and not only something which is snatched by force.

The prophets did not come to make such a statement that a right must be seized by force. They came to persuade the oppressed to secure their rights. They also compelled the oppressor to rise against their evil deeds and grant others their rights.

In conclusion I pray God to liberate us all from our carnal desires as he has done for truly generous beings; and to grant us social freedom and blessings in this and the next world; to acquaint us with the facts of Islam; to meet our legitimate needs and to grant salvation to our deceased ones.

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