

The Intellectual Unity of Muslims

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1) Freedom of Thought:

Thought has been described as intellectual contemplation for gaining knowledge. A belief, which is the product of logical deduction, has been referred to as thought. In this essay we shall use the term "thought to mean both the mental effort of inspection and gaining wisdom, and also the convictions and results which are achieved by this effort. If thought in this sense is an inner process which only inwardly occupies man, directing his reason to contemplate and theorize in order to attain an empirical knowledge, then what can "freedom of thought mean? Because apparently man has basically free in his thought and beliefs and no limits or elements threaten this freedom.

The answer to this question is that the term "freedom of thought, in the context that we are here using it and as it is generally used, transcends personal dimensions of man's relation to himself and has basically gained a social characteristic based on two crucial elements.

A) Man's freedom lies in his choosing ways of mental contemplation and its methods without the misleading diversions imposed on him by others, propelling him on certain pre-determined paths which may be right or wrong. Such act is considered an aspect of the denial of this freedom of thought for it causes man to be swayed by others in the direction of specific goals and conclusions while if left free he would have reached quite different or even conflicting ones.

This method of denying freedom of thought is the same method applied by the Pharaoh in dealings with his followers and aides whilst deciding to order the murder of Prophet Moses (a.s). Pharaoh was trying to convince those around him that Moses should be murdered but there was a believer present who negated Pharaoh's theories. The Pharaoh silenced him, and while trying to divert attention from the man's reasoning, forced those around to see the matter according to his own views so they would reach his desired conclusions.

The Holy Qur'an reports: "Pharaoh said, I come only to reveal to you what I see as [meritorious], only setting you on the path of righteousness and correct conduct. (Ghafir:29).

Today we witness this Pharaonic method applied specifically by the mass media and how it diverts and misleads public opinion.

B) Man's freedom to express, promote and defend ideas he has accumulated through debate

and discussion. This may be the most crucial aspect of the freedom of speech. Freedom of thought in this sense is more widely used than any other. For what is the value of an idea imprisoned in a mind, lacking any influence on life and of which society is unaware and does not put in to practice? Consequently the freedom of thought means that there must be no obstruction in man's expression of his views and his presentation of those views to the public, while having full access to necessary measures for protecting and promoting those views. Any obstruction of this path limits and negates the freedom of thought. Also in many cases the freedom of thought means the removal of inner mechanisms that prevent reasoning, particularly egoism and the pursuit of habits which are all considered crucial factors in limiting this freedom, directing the intellect towards pre-determined goals. Because freedom of thought in both of these senses depends on social responsibility, it is considered a common social responsibility shared by the individual since society is constantly exposed to the danger of restricting this freedom through customs and imitations. We must also remember the significant point that freedom of thought is not confined to individual insights, initially reached by personal contemplation and speculation, but also include those ideas which one has borrowed from others by way of their worth and correctness and struggles for their promotion. Certainly freedom of thought is safeguarded by clear rules and regulations such as the investigation and processing of external data and the application of methods of search after truth and sincere intentions regarding common interests. Otherwise, without these rules and regulations freedom of thought may become an instrument of sophistry, deceit and vanity. Moral values such as honesty and truthfulness in advocating and proselytizing one's views and theories and utilizing methods for convincing others are another constraint. Otherwise freedom would gradually lose its true meaning, as it would turn into another tool for promoting excessive inwardness as well as public deception. What we are trying to defend in the present essay is the freedom of thought safeguarded by .these very rules and constraints

Freedom of Thought as A Shari'a Principle (2

Freedom of thought as taught in Islam is not only considered an obvious religious right among the Mubah [permissible] rights but has also been specified as an imperative religious prerogative. In view of the vast body of religious teachings strongly endorsing the freedom of thought, it is

possible to elevate the issue of this freedom in the conclusive hierarchy of Shari' a to a religious necessity and interpret it as an imperative of Shari' a. The verses of the Chapter Alaq, the first of Qur'anic verses revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), firmly establishes the most crucial sources and pillars of Islamic ideology such as the existence of God, and the source and destiny of Existence.

We are faced in these verses with the religious legitimacy of freedom of thought. In the Chapter Alaq, we come upon verses expressing shock and admonition over the actions of he who hinders the Prophet in his prayers, denying him the freedom of beliefs and of worship, restraining the Prophet from guiding the people through his proselytizing and promoting his religion.

The mention of the source of freedom of thought inherent in the first verses of the Holy Qur'an is a clear indication of the high esteem and regard reserved for the issue of freedom of thought in the hierarchy of the Islamic Shari' a. Islamic teaching has emphasized the freedom of thought as a valid introduction to the belief in God.

According to Islam absolute and authentic faith is a faith founded on freedom of thought and treading the path of reason and knowledge, independent of external influences such as habits and imitation or the guidance of others which leads to a belief and certainty founded upon the freedom of beliefs and speculations. Because of this, certain philosophers have rejected the validity of imitative faith and belief while many others have regarded it as an incomplete or blind faith.

The same applies to freedom of thought in the sense of having the conditions, data and ways of achieving freedom of thinking, doing away with imposed obstructions and constraints. According to the Holy Qur'an, the background and conditions that provide freedom of thought and the struggle to achieve it are considered mandatory.

God Almighty says: "When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say: In what [plight] were ye?' They reply: Weak and oppressed were we on earth.' They say: Was not the earth of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourself away [from evil]?' Such men will find their abode in Hell. What an evil refuge! Their abode is Hell from which return is impossible. (Nisa':97)

One of the meaning of this verse is that those who have conceded to live by a close system of thought, accepting the limits to free thought in order to base their lives on faith and have not delivered themselves from these obstructions by immigrating to a land ruled by free thought and ideas deserve God's wrath.

The Holy Qur'an stresses on the freedom of thought and its spread among people, considers it

as one of the main social factors for establishing the Islamic Umma, safeguarding it and maintaining its unity. The Holy Qur'an says: "Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity. Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear Signs (Al-i Imran: 104- 105)

We know that the essence and foundation of freedom thought and expression is indeed "enjoining good of and prohibiting evil.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) of Islam believed that any hindrance in the way of this freedom and indifference towards it would culminate in the destruction of unity and the severance of ties between God's servants and God. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) says in this regard: "By God, you should either enjoin good and prohibit evil, prevent the oppressor from committing atrocities and guide him towards returning to the right path, or God will separate your hearts from each other and as a result He would not respond to you when you pray to Him. (Abu Dawoud, "Kitab-ul-Malahim in Sunan-un-Nabi, , Hadith No. 4336.)

We come across several practical instances of the encouragement of freedom of thought in the life of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w). The life of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) clearly indicates how he emphasized the liberation of thought from the intrinsic and extrinsic deterrent factors as well as preparing the grounds for the free expression of ideas.

(For such instances, readers are referred to Muhammad Yousuf Mustafa's Hurriyat--Ra y-ifil Islam, p. 68.) Islam has not overlooked the required guarantees for preventing deviation from the path of freedom while legislating the freedom of expression. Though Islam considers freedom as a fundamental right, it has subjected it to immunizing rules and regulations that deter and prevent it from deviation from the right path.

Some of these rules are methodological and are employed for the collection and analysis of data, their proper understanding, and their truthfulness before they are introduced to the society as the fundamentals of thought and idea. For instance, the Holy Qur'an says: "O ye who believe! if a wicked person comes to you with any news ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done. (Hujurat:6)

The Holy Qur'an also says: "When there comes to them some matter touching [public] safety or fear, they divulge it. If they had only referred it to the Apostle, or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them [direct]. (Nisa' :83) There are other verses of the Holy Qur' an which elaborate on the method of expression of belief and its publicity: "Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; but speak to him mildly; perchance he may take warning or fear [God]. (Taha: 43-44)

Yet there are other verses that emphasize moral and social issues, especially banning the harassment and disturbing others. The following Qur'anic verse underlines this point: "Those who slander chaste women, indiscreet but believing, are cursed in this life and in the Hereafter:

for them is a grievous penalty. (Nur: 23)

Some of the Qur'anic verses forbid men from engaging in hypocritical exaggerations and admirations. Once in the presence of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) a person started admiring and praising his friend. Upon hearing such an admiration, the Holy Prophet castigated him, saying:

"Woe is to you for you cut your friend's throat several times.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) then added: "If one had no option but to praise and admire his brother, he should say: I know him as such and he is accountable to God. I do not admire anybody more than Allah. If he finds a good attribution in his friend, he should say I know him for being such and such. ("Kitab-ush-Shahada Bab Idha Zakiya Rajolon Rajolan in Sahih Bukhari, and also Mohamrnad Yousuf Mustafa's Hurriyat-ar-Ra v-i Ji I Islam, p. 39 and p.

132.)

The inference that can be drawn from what we discussed above is that the most important objective of the legislation of the principles of freedom of thought and guarantees and rules meant to safeguard it are to protect the broad-based unity of the Islamic Umma, especially ideological unity. Since freedom of thought materializes ideological unity among the Muslims, it should therefore materialize the five methodological principles that we mentioned above as the foundations of ideological unity. But, how can the freedom of thought create each of the fundamentals and finally lead to the ideological unit among Muslims? In the continuation of our discussion we are trying to find an answer to this question. For this purpose we will follow our

discussion in two main sections:

A) Attempts will be made to prove -- from theoretical point of view -- that if the freedom of thought becomes an established tradition among the Muslims, it can lead to nurturing the intellects on the basis of a methodological principle which is foundation of ideological unity among Muslims. B) We will mention specific examples from the past history and present .conditions of the Islamic Umma in this regard

Freedom of Thought and Comprehensiveness - (3

Freedom of thought from individual and social points of view leads to epistemological contemplation in all epistemological issues and collection of data in the propositions about which the objective of wisdom is the discovery of truth in them.

If man rids himself of the inner factors -- like habits, imitations, the domination of sensual

desires --which push wisdom towards predetermined objectives, and if man rids himself of the external factors which impose certain data through a specific method to mould his thought, he will attain the real, unlimited freedom and will be able to garner informative data which can lead to the discovery of truth. He will also be able to select various ways and methods leading to knowledge and awareness in order to propel the wings of wisdom in different directions, and collect the necessary scientific materials, proofs and witnesses for research in order to attain an accurate judgment.

Also if the scientific, cultural grounds are suitable enough to prepare the necessary grounds for the expression of thought and its defense, an appropriate ground will be prepared for dialogue and conflict of opinions. Also scientific data and proper, rational ways for the discovery of truth will be revealed. With the help of scientific information and materials, man can discover more than what he can discover by relying on himself alone and even he may adjust or totally change his own personal findings through this path. All this will lead to the growth and comprehensiveness of reason in epistemological attempts, utilization of the suitable factors and discovery of the paths that lead to truth.

In return limiting the freedoms at any of the above-said three levels, will confine the intellectual endeavor to specific data, giving it a particular direction. As a result reason will be deprived of comprehensiveness and human beings will reach different and quite contradictory results. Moreover, if freedom of speech is denied and the grounds for debate and conflict of opinions are eliminated, dogmatism and parochialism will dominate man, depriving him of opportunities to correct and adjust his own intellectual findings.

This will in turn culminate in disunity and differences in the society. The Messenger of God, Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w) used to encourage freedom of thought among his companions and used to spread it among them in a manner that they adopted a comprehensive attitude in their approaches to the problems.

This very characteristic used to bring about unity in their decision-making process. Quite very often the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) held meetings with his companions and consulted them for solving certain problems. He used to insist on finding out their ideas to gather maximum information and grasp their viewpoints in order to find the most appropriate solution to the problems -- and finally to reach unity through finding the accurate solution.

The most outstanding example of the Prophet's consultation with his companions was the event of Badr. Before the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (s.a.w) decided to find the most appropriate decision on military attack against the Quraysh. He convened his followers and put the issue on the agenda to be discussed. After extensive debates all of them agreed that it was

necessary to wage a war against the Quraysh tribe. (Muhammad Yousuf Mustafa's *Hurriyat-ar-Ra'y-iJil Islami*, p. 70, and Ibn Hisham's *Sirat-un-Nabawt* vol. 1, p. 205.)

Without any doubt the main objective of the Prophet was to bring up Muslims as comprehensive free thinkers in approaching the problems. Otherwise, he did not need to consult others, for he was guided through revelation. In the post-Prophet society, too, freedom of thought was prevalent during the first centuries. The multiplicity of jurisprudential (Fiqhi) schools of thought during this period and intermittent political skirmishes strongly supports this point.

Despite the occurrence of undesirable events, including political divisions--whose roots should be traced in the lack of freedom of thought--in the first centuries, this freedom gained root as a general, essential methodic characteristic in the epistemological contemplations in the Islamic thought and mentality. In fact this characteristic is rare compared to other civilizations. For instance, all branches of human knowledge spread freely during those days and the Islamic ideology used to utilize all of them without any hesitation as raw materials to attain the truth. The same intellectual movement opened its bosom to free, extensive dialogues between Muslims and non-Muslims and allowed any party to offer its reasoning. Finally it accumulated

a great heritage and valuable asset of scientific material and data through this method. Although in the unbridled free atmosphere, some negative currents and ideas also emerged, the comprehensive epistemological approach of the Muslims led to a kind of ideological unity among them, which in the light of the general free atmosphere encouraged the Muslims to remain committed to religious obligations -- stemming from Islamic culture -- in all Islamic sciences and all forms of worldly knowledge and even for setting up a civilization and implementing development projects. This ideological unity which was acquired in free social, intellectual conditions, encouraged the Muslims to defend the Islamic teachings and values which were neglected under the influence of the previous religions and cultures.

The approach of defending the Islamic values and thought is manifested in an outstanding manner in the interpretations of the renowned scholar Muhammad Ghazzali while he refutes Greek philosophy.

He says: "I, as a critic who is seeking knowledge, not as a person who is after proving his own ideas, challenge [the advocates of Greek philosophy] and try to refute their ideas through relying on their own reasoning. On the basis of what they say, I discuss with them from the standpoints of Mu'tazilite, Karramite, or Waqifite schools of thought.

I am not defending a specific religion, but I consider all Islamic schools of thought in my debate on an equal footing. Although these schools of thought have certain differences in

particular affairs with us, we have fundamental differences with them [the followers of Greek philosophy] and we should unite with each other to overcome them, for animosities are removed at the time of difficulty and challenges that we face. (A1-Ghazzali, Imam Muhammad, Talafat-ul-Falasfa, pp. 82-83.)

The ideological unity that Ghazzali speaks about in the face of Greek philosophy stems from the comprehensiveness that is inherent in Islamic thought. In fact all schools of thought that he mentions, used to hold dialogue with each other with tolerance. Hence, utilizing their ideas and viewpoints by Ghazzali in his debate with Greek philosophy was absolutely justified and rational.

A precise study of the history of Islamic thought indicates that whenever or wherever the freedom of thought was restricted among a group of Muslims, the volume of scientific materials and the multiplicity of epistemological methods for development of religious sciences and principles was drastically slowed down and the Muslims were caught in the clutches of parochialism and particular approaches, the end result of which was nothing but disunity, division and chaos.

For instance, one may mention the deadly stagnation in Ijtihad Fiqhi (individual reasoning in jurisprudence) during the centuries that the Islamic civilization remained backward. During this period the restricted intellectual atmosphere dominating the jurists [Fu qaha] made them repeat the Fiqhi ideas of the past jurists to the extent that they failed to realize and study some of the events and developments which took place in the Islamic societies of their own time.

They even stayed away from the text of the Holy Qur'an and traditions. As a result jurisprudence and discussions in this field remained limited to the level of sporadic, particular issues and were confined to offering subjective, superficial solutions to the problems of the Muslims, or, in leading in their scientific and cultural endeavors.

(Editor's Note: The author here is presenting his views on Ijtihad based on his understanding on the state of Ijtihad in the Sunni world. Whereas the Sunni world closed the door to Ijtihad, the Ijtihad in the Shi' a world, especially after the 12th century A.H has been developing and evolving.)

The phenomenon of extremist Sufism [Islamic mysticism] that encouraged its followers to limit themselves to inner findings is another outcome of the lack of freedom during the period of deterioration. Through taking away the freedom of its followers, Sufism compelled them to accept the ideas of the spiritual guides for understanding the reality of life and even grasping the ideas and viewpoints of others. As a result, their teachings and decrees were based on

particular individual findings and could not provide the foundations for a social life. The above-mentioned examples show that whenever the freedom of thought is restricted, wisdom and reason face a mortal suppression in their attempt to garner scientific data and find out the ways for acquiring knowledge. Hence, they reach worthless, particular results that are .not capable of guiding man

Freedom of Thought and Monotheistic Methodology - (4

Freedom of thought is a suitable ground where reason flourishes and becomes equipped with capabilities to study and analyze monotheism and epistemological elements. In fact such an atmosphere liberates the reason from the imposed internal and external bondage and provides it with an opportunity to acquire relevant, interdependent facts about a subject in the area of intellectual contemplation. This atmosphere finally enables the reason to discover the causes and common factors of this interdependence and establish links and coherence between them in its interpretation and analysis.

The result of this process is the emergence of a monolithic, homogeneous texture of the findings, enabling the reason to comprehend the real reasons behind the multiple phenomena, mould ideas and formulate principles for attaining a single objective. But if the reason is directed to find out a predetermined result due to subservience to sensual desires, submission to habits and traditions or the imposition of certain materials and data, it is doomed to move towards that direction.

As a result it will be able to comprehend only the factors and objectives that are closer or limited to the pre-oriented given data. Under such circumstances, the materials and data given to the reason will be considered as independent, scattered islands that it neither understands the bonds and common relations thereof, nor can it direct them towards a single goal. The following two examples may help us expound the issue.

The first example is related to the picture the Holy Qur'an depicts about the Pharaoh and his followers. Pharaoh and his magicians had denied freedom to the people, directing them towards seeing Pharaoh as their lord. They were also deprived of any data and information opposing this idea.

This issue deprived the followers of Pharaoh of any integrated analysis and study of the events. Hence, they were unable to reach the single truth through compilation and analysis of data. The Holy Qur'an says in this regard: "But when good (times) came, they said, "This is due to us; when gripped by calamity, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him! Behold! in truth the omens of evil are theirs in God's sight, but most of them do

not understand! (A'raf 131)

The followers of Pharaoh used to interpret natural phenomena such as drought and abundance of the blessings on the basis of their own chaotic reasoning. They attributed abundance and affluence to their deeds and thought that their deeds deserved to be rewarded by affluence, and, on the contrary they ascribed drought to the evil omens connected with Moses and his

followers. Ibn Ashour says in this regard:

"They thought the presence of people who opposed their ideas among them would cause catastrophe and calamity, hence, they considered them evil omen and did not realize that the reason behind their hardships and calamities was their blasphemy. Due to this deviation and blindness, they were deprived of understanding the real reasons and causes. Therefore, the polytheists by attributing the events to evil omens ascribe the causes of the phenomena to unrealistic issues. And this is the invention of those who created polytheism that is based on

hallucinations. (Ibn Ashour, Au? ħrir-wat-'l anwir)

The second example is the shaping of public opinion by Western media under the sway of the Arrogant Powers in today's world. The mass media and news agencies affiliated to superpowers report and publish international and regional news with specific objectives and project them in a manner that they do not seem to be interrelated. As a result, in understanding and analyzing various events, the public opinion tends towards division and disunity, attributing

international events to particular regional factors.

They neglect their interdependence and therefore it is not possible for them to find out their interrelations to reach a single cause for them, that is, the hegemony of Global Arrogance. Hence, the reason cannot find out that the Arrogant Powers, due to their hegemonic and aggressive characteristics, create such incidents in various parts of the world in order to

protect their own interests.

This parochial, particular mentality which is prevailing today stems from lack of freedom, which can not be attained except through the provision of unlimited information which is free from any orientation. This issue also applies to the freedom of thought in the domain of mass media. If a free atmosphere prevailed over the mass media, there would be room for conflict of

opinions.

Consequently, the way will be paved for the real reasons and causes of the events to come to the fore. Therefore a unified criterion will be created for judgment among the public in analyzing and studying issues and events on the basis of this single criteria. But if the reasons are left to themselves to pass their judgments on the basis of personal evaluation, they cannot

reach a single general criterion for analyzing and evaluating the events.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) used to train his companions on the basis of freedom of thought at various levels. This prepared the ground for the companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) to equip themselves with the ability to unify their approaches to scientific materials and data in analyzing the events and legislating rules and regulations for running their individual and social affairs.

This in turn helped them to direct their life towards attaining a divine goal. It was on the basis of this approach that the Holy Qur'an was compiled in various stages and finally compiled in the form of a single book, i.e., the Holy Qur'an compiled by [the Third Caliph] Othman, which became known as the Holy Qur'an for all the Muslims. Again it was on the basis of this mentality that during the caliphate of [the Second Caliph] Omar the first nucleus for an administrative system was established to form a government within the framework of religious teachings to serve the Ummah.

The mentality and reasoning of the Islamic Ummah in general was molded in accordance to this method. This reasoning enjoyed unity at the levels of methodology and ideology. The atmosphere-- freedom of thought--which prevailed during the first period prepared suitable grounds for the Muslims to utilize intra-religious dialogue among various schools of thought as well as inter-religious debates with the followers of other religions and civilizations.

This issue shaped the thought and reasons of the Muslims in a manner that they could realize the common reasons behind the dispersed superficial manifestations. They also could coordinate between intellectual and practical achievements of man to employ them in the service of religion which is the ultimate goal.

This issue was particularly manifested in the arena of science and establishing various branches of science with general rules like jurisprudence (Fiqh), literary criticism, and sociology. As much as the freedom of thought was restricted in various Islamic periods, this methodological characteristic too became sluggish.

During the first era that more freedom of thought prevailed in the Islamic society, the characteristic of finding uniform reasons and causes behind the phenomena was more visible. From the fifth century Hejira onward when gradually political tyranny dominated various Islamic governments, with the closure of the doors of individual reasoning (Ijtihad) and spread of Sufi-like inclinations, thought and reasoning lost their glow and the enthusiasm for unity declined.

Contrary to the first period which was an era of scientific boom when the scientists used to theorize their scientific findings, the scientists and scholars were deeply involved in particular scientific issues. For instance, during this era Fiqhi works were limited to the exposition and

description of the works writers. Whereas during the previous periods Fiqh was in the service of formulating and legislating rules of social life with Islamic characteristics and divine objectives.

Theology, too during this period was entangled in the repetition of the past arguments while earlier it was responsible for utilizing general human knowledge making it compatible with the Islamic teachings and beliefs within a rationalistic framework to prove the fundamentals of belief and find answers to the queries. As described by the author of Miftah-us-Sa'ada, the subject of theology used to grow parallel to the development of science. Whenever the Muslims became acquainted with a new branch of science, they used to pick up one of its subjects and deduction

Freedom of Thought and Realism - (5

The natural phenomena and day-to-day events occurring in man's life have more affinity with man's intellect as a starting point for moving towards acquiring awareness. If reason is left to itself, it is predominantly inclined towards pondering on the nature, life and the events which are common to it and others as well as exchanging views and sharing information with others. In case of freedom, reason--due to the requirements of its nature and essence--has a tendency towards realism and reality.

Probably this characteristic could help us understand why and how the nomads and desert dwellers--who were free from the impositions of civilization and complicated social relations--were more balanced and fair in pondering and analyzing the reality compared to the city dwellers. The epistemological realism of the Bedouin Arabs of Arabia at the time of the advent of Islam vis-à-vis the Greek, Indian and Iranian thought which was full of philosophical, subjective abstractions and mystic ideas is the best proof for this claim.

When the freedom of the innate reason is exposed to various bondages and limitations, it loses its realistic characteristic while thinking and contemplating. Hence, it moves beyond realism and molds its ideas and principles on the basis of abstract data which are far from the outside reality. Therefore, lack of freedom of thought in contemplation, thinking, expression and reasoning indeed diverts the reason from realistic approach and directs it towards abstract idealism.

Hence, if sensual desires dominate the reason and restrict its freedom, the reason, in its search for the truth, turns away from the prevailing reality and by indulging in the inner world, enslaves itself in the justifications, which the sensual desires permit. Likewise, the factors which are based on reality--and are crucial in molding ideas and establishing principles--but need a

move contrary to the one based on sensual desires will not be unveiled by a reason which is dominated by sensual desires.

It is therefore clear that sensual desires destroy many human beings and their reasons fail to realize realistic proofs and signs that warn them of their doomed fate. Therefore, they cannot understand the liberating rules and principles which are clearly shown by the surrounding realities.

The Holy Qur'an describes several scenes which refer to this situation. For instance, Chapter 56 (Waqi' a) of the Holy Qur'an describes the account of those who deny the truth of man's Resurrection in the Hereafter. According to the Holy Qur'an these people fail to comprehend the realities of existence which confirm the truth of the Resurrection because of their indulgence in pleasure and debauchery which fan the flames of their lust. Their reason, enchanted with pleasure and debauchery, dictates that there is no other world except this world which is meant for pleasure and prosperity. The Almighty God says in this regard: "For that they were wont to be indulged, before that, in wealth (and luxury), And persisted obstinately in wickedness supreme! And they used to say, What! when we die and become dust and bones, Shall we then indeed be raised up again? (We) and our fathers of old?" (Waqi'a:45-48)

After giving the account of these people, the Holy Qur'an tries to liberate their reasons which has been afflicted with negligence and forgetfulness due to the domination of sensual desires and to encourage them to return to their free nature in order to grasp the reality and consider it the starting point for moving towards reaching the truth of the Resurrection; a truth whose realization has been blocked by the domination of sensual desires. Hence in order to reinvigorate and attract the attention of their reasons the Holy Qur'an says: "Do ye then see? -- the [human seed] that ye throw out, -- Is it ye who create it, or are We the Creators? ... See ye the seed that ye sow in the ground? Is it ye that cause it to grow, or are We the Cause? ... See ye the water which ye drink? Do ye bring it down [in rain] from the cloud or do We? (Waqi' a: 5 8-69) Elaborating on the domination of the sensual desires over the reason of the deniers of the Hereafter which makes

them overlook the signs existing in the reality, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh says: "Whenever someone presents the reasons for the appointment of the prophets onto mankind and the revelation of divine religions, or someone encourages them to listen to a true speech, due to their power of selection and will, they turn it down and put their fingers into their ears lest right reason reaches their minds to force them to accept right belief which entails embracing the Shari' a, which will be tantamount to their deprivation from the joy they have

experienced or they like to enjoy and this is the very illness of the soul and heart... (Abduh, Sheikh Muhammad, *Rissalat-ut-Tawhid*, p. 104)

When obedience to hereditary habits and ideas overwhelms the reason and overshadows the freedom of thought, reason turns back to contemplation on the real problems and difficulties of life. It, therefore, turns to the heritage of forefathers and past history as the fundamentals for passing rules and regulations, combined with a kind of historical idealism and imitation and adaptation of the past heritage instead of relying on research methods in the historical events with the aim of learning lessons.

The Holy Qur'an strongly censures the restriction of the freedom of thought and weakening its realistic approach to the phenomena of life and nature. For instance, on the people of Prophet Abraham, the Holy Qur'an says: "And rehearse to them [something of] Abraham's story. Behold, he said to his father and his people:

What worship ye?' They said: We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them. He said: Do they listen to you when ye call [on them], or do they do you good or harm?'

They said: [Nay] but we found our fathers doing thus [what we do]. (*Shu'araa*:70-73).

The limitations and bondage stemming from hereditary beliefs, in fact prevented the people of Nimrod from contemplating on the signs which existed in the reality and Abraham tried to attract their attention to those signs and rescue their reason from blind imitation to make them realistic through analysis and research about the truth.

The same applied to Pharaoh and his people. Moses went to them with definite signs and reasons which proved the authenticity of his call to monotheism. But the veil of blind imitation called on them to sanctify their forefathers. They did not accept any other alternative to them and rejected to think over the signs and reasons Moses brought them and said: "Hast thou come to us to turn us away from the ways we found our fathers following,--in order that thou and thy brother may have greatness in the land? But not we shall believe in you! (*Yunus*:78)

When monk-like spiritual obedience or the Sufist guardianship are imposed on the reason, man fails to realize the visible reality and the existing signs in the universe and life. He remains confined to the prison of spiritual meditations and imaginative fantasies while trying to utilize abstract contemplation in isolation.

For he perceives that the truth must be sought in the holy universe and the surrounding reality is devoid of any truth. This was why the Western colonial powers used to encourage pseudo-mystical movements in the Islamic world and respect the founders of mystic schools to encourage them to spread their reclusive teachings to attract more followers. Hence, they tried to pave the way for them to implement their colonial plans in the Islamic societies free from

people's attention.

If the freedom of expression and its defense is restricted, the freedom of reason will be destroyed through political extermination. As a result man does not show any interest in thinking over the issues around him, for when man is not able to express his views about the real problems and difficulties to remove them, mere thinking about them will not be useful. Hence, he is confined to his own thoughts and capabilities to remain bewildered and astonished in the idealistic, abstract values that are not forbidden by the dictators and the enemies of thought and conception. Hence the more freedom of expression is restricted, the more the manifestations of idealistic, abstract thinking--far from reality--will grow among groups and individuals.

For when reason is banned from contemplating on the reality surrounding it, aiming at reforming that reality, it creates an imaginary world for itself to rule over it. That is why some Islamic groups with idealistic tendencies have emerged in the closed societies and political, intellectual despotism of some newly established Arab countries.

As we mentioned above, Islamic thought in general was based on a realistic approach. But we witness that this tendency is weakened in some periods in the Islamic history and an inclination towards abstract thinking grows. If we look at the roots of the problem, we will realize that the reason for this tendency has been the restrictions imposed on the freedom of thought.

Perhaps the best witness to prove this claim is the history of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). We witness in the history that when the freedom of expression bade farewell to the realm of individual reasoning (Ijtihad), the jurists (Fuqaha) stopped solving the problems of the

Muslims on the basis of Shari'ah and limited themselves to subjective, abstract Fiqhi issues. Another example is the growth of idealistic tendencies in the Islamic societies. With the domination of political tyranny over the Islamic countries, especially in the early Islamic era, idealistic tendencies in the arena of political thought predominated the methods in Islamic thought which was based on a realistic approach to government institutions and their kinds which corresponded to the changing situations. And the Islamic political jurisprudence--even during the intellectual, scientific blossoming--contrary to the legal jurisprudence (rules of transaction) tilted towards theoretical, abstract issues instead of focusing on the real problems.

In sum, it can be said that freedom of thought--at different levels--leads to a realistic approach in the arena of intellectual contemplation, and restriction of freedom culminates in idealistic tendencies.

Freedom of Thought and the Critical Method - (6

Freedom of thought is an important factor in molding the characteristics of the reason to follow comparative analysis and intellectual criticism in an attempt to acquire knowledge. When the reason is liberated from the factors which direct it towards a specific goal, it finds an opportunity to contemplate on the data given on the issue under the study. Under such circumstances, it is possible for it to compare the given data and compare and contrast contradictory information. As a result of this comparison, it can find out their weak and strong points and their verifiability. Through this method, it can achieve an accurate approach and pass the correct judgment.

According to the Holy Qur'an, Prophet Abraham, too, followed this method. Relying on a reason free from indoctrination, he contemplated on the various phenomena of the nature to be able to know God. Then he contemplated on the idols, the deities of the people, the sun, the moon, and the ideas that called on him from within to search for another Being Who was greater than all of them. In this endeavor, he followed a critical method in making a comparison between them to find out the weak and strong points of the primary data, realized the strong points of what had occurred to his mind, and finally reached the truth, saying: "For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I ascribe partners to God. (An' am:79).

When blind imitation of the forefathers dominates the reason and the power mongers and influential ones determine its orientation, the reason is faced with limited, specific data. Hence, it does not have any incentive or opportunity for a comparative analysis and fails to realize the weak and strong points of those data.

As a result it is entangled in a one-dimensional approach and often reaches wrong results. The account of the people of Pharaoh is an example of this situation. When they were deprived of any data except what Pharaoh gave them in the process of the plot to kill Moses, they were deprived of any opportunity to think about the ideas of that faithful man. In order to maintain the status quo, Pharaoh said: "I but point out to you that which I see [myself]; nor do I guide you but to the Path of Right! (Ghafir:29) The followers and associates of Pharaoh confined themselves to the exclusive path he had determined for them and rejected the guidance and reasons of that faithful man (Moses) and as a result they were misled.

Whenever the freedom of thought is allowed at the level of expressing viewpoints and reasons, the doors naturally open to the reason to learn about contradictory ideas and data. It prepares the ground for the conflict of opinions and ideas and as a result the weak and strong points of the viewpoints clearly come to the fore. On the contrary, restriction and limitation of the

freedom of expression and dialogue will lead to parochialism and dogmatism. Under such circumstances, the reason looks at the issues only from a specific point of view and often commits mistakes. Hence, not surprisingly in the absence of the freedom of expression, we witness blind fanaticism, and in a free atmosphere we see flexibility of the reason and tolerance of opposite ideas.

Truly, the method of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) in bringing up the Muslims is very interesting. Through his teachings, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) created an open atmosphere for the expression of various (even contradictory) ideas and plans and their criticism and analysis. The motto of His Eminence was "O, people, provide me with your consultation. (See Muhammad Yousuf Mustafa's *Hurriyat-ar-Ra'y-ifil Islam*, p. 70.)

The objective of the Holy Prophet was to create an open atmosphere for freedom of expression in order to institutionalize critical approach among the Muslims. Otherwise, since he was connected with the revelation and was infallible, he was fully aware of the truth and did not need the consultation of others.

The freedom of expression, which was prevalent during the first centuries among the Muslims, was the main factor responsible for the growth of Islamic reason on the basis of a critical approach. It gave birth to the rationalism which was manifested in the Fiqhi heritage and religious, as well as philosophical teachings. We come across some ideas and decrees during this period which were the result of criticism, comparative study and reasoning in a free atmosphere which made the conflict of opinions and ideas possible.

It was in the deterioration era when the arena of *Itihad* (individual reasoning) was limited (or even banned in some cases) that the governments--relying on one religious sect--tried to refute other sects and through orienting research towards a specific sect tried to restrict freedom of thought. As a result, religious fanaticism and intolerance dominated the society, eliminating various Fiqhi and theological viewpoints which represented different sects. (See: (Ghazzali, Mohammad, *Dostour-ul-Wahdath-Thaqafiya Bayn-alMuslimin*, p. 125

Freedom of Thought and Scientific Attitude - (7

If reason is enslaved by sensual desires while undertaking a research, it will move in a certain direction which the sensual desires dictate. Naturally, it will reach the results which suit the sensual desires. Blind imitation also plays the same role. It prevents the reason from a value-free observation and analysis of data and information in research.

Likewise, indoctrination and outside determinative factors orient the reason towards a specific objective and prevent it from reaching any result other than the pre-determined ones. Under

the circumstances, the ways to scientific methods for analyzing the problems and studying the data--independent from the tendencies that direct the reason towards a pre-determined goal--are closed, and therefore, the truth is lost.

On the contrary, if the reason is liberated from sensual desires, inculcations and orientations determined by others; it will establish a direct rapport with the issue under study and will analyze the data freely. As a result it will find the truth as it is--not as the determinative factors project it.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) in this regard says: "Do not behave like those who are not firm in their ideas or follow others who say we will respond the good deeds of people with good deeds and their oppression with oppression, but train your soul and mind in a manner to respond to people's good deeds with good deeds and do not commit any oppression vis-à-vis their oppression. (See Hadith No. 2007, in "Kitab-ul-Birri was-Sifa , in Tirmidhi's Sunan)

The above statement indicates that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) in fact calls on the Muslims to liberate their reason from the bondage of determinative factors which make reason an imitator of others. The reason then can realize the ugliness inherent in oppression and will not consider the wrong and oppressive acts of others as a license to oppress others in order to fulfill its aspirations. But it will refrain from any oppression by realizing its ugliness.

The freedom of thought, which implies freedom of expression and conflict of opinions, has similar characteristics. The main advantage of the expression of idea and an open call to the expression of idea is that through dialogue and reasoning, the deterrent non-epistemological factors which are hidden behind the ideas are exposed.

These factors or some of them have become intertwined with man's nature and therefore the reason may overlook them while conducting a research. They may be also the result of man's unconscious desire in materialization of a desirable goal. Hence, dialogue and free discussion provide a ground for these factors to come to the fore, paving the path for the thought to concentrate on real data and information independent from such factors while studying an issue.

In many cases, when we expose our ideas to debate and dialogue with others, we realize that the inferences drawn from, or judgments made on, the issue are the results and decrees we have imposed on it, otherwise, the nature of the issue is not compatible with such judgments. When the freedom of expression is restricted, the reason while debating and analyzing the data given on a specific problem--which should be the basis of any judgment--resorts to self-centered criteria.

In fact, in the absence of freedom of expression, judgments and results are confined to the

limited inner domain of man's thought and are not exposed to outside criticism. Therefore, they are not studied or judged on the basis of the given data and information. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) used to allow his companions to propose their ideas and then analyzed and criticized them to remove deterrent and anti-epistemic doubts from them. As a result of this intellectual training method, the companions got used to realistic, rational approaches. The issue of the distribution of booties after the Battle of Hunayn is an example of this method. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) allotted the booties to a group of Muslims, which meant that the Helpers (Ansar) would not get any. The Ansar developed an undesirable feeling due to the Prophet's decision and each of them gave his personal analysis on the basis of their own assumptions and conjectures. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) in fact prepared the ground for them to express their ideas about the issue. He finally elaborated on the rational, logical reasons for his decision which everybody accepted. (Ibn Hisham, Sirat-un-Nabawiya, vol. 4, p. 196.) It is evident that they could never realize their own mistakes if the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) had not .allowed them to express their ideas

Role of the Freedom of Thought in Ideological Unity - (8

We said earlier that ideological convictions, especially religious beliefs, are the prime factors for ideological unity. We should add that the above factor creates ideological unity with the formulation of reason on the basis of common methodological characteristics. The common methodological characteristics do not themselves lead to ideological unity in the society and are not activated without the help of other factors. In the previous discussions we emphasized this fact while analyzing the methodological impacts of Islamic beliefs on the formulation of reason on the basis of the five principles.

Now we are saying that the said characteristics can practically appear and turn into dynamic characteristics for thought and idea only when they are assisted with other motivating factors. The most important factor in this regard is freedom of thought. If the members of a society accept a belief passively but the society is deprived of the freedom of thought, the said ideological characteristics will remain as potential powers and cannot play an actual role in the materialization of ideological unity in the realm of epistemological contemplation. The freedom of expression the Muslims enjoyed extensively was a motivating factor which turned the methodological effect of belief from potentiality to actuality. It also actualized common methodological characteristics and prepared the ground for their emergence. As a result when the general characteristics turned into a common reality in the method of Islamic thought, it played a crucial role in bringing about ideological unity among the Muslims.

Therefore, it should be said that freedom of thought is a factor responsible for the emergence of common methodological characteristics among the Muslims and that these characteristics have in turn forged ideological unity among the Muslims. It was through this ideological unity that the Islamic way of life was established in its complete form and manifested in the form of sciences in the realm of theory, and various aspects of civilization in practice.

Thus ideological unity coordinated theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic culture and civilization. The following supposition will enable us to better understand this fact. If instead of the said characteristics, particular characteristics, subjectivity, one-dimensional approach and reclusiveness had dominated the Islamic mentality, then Islamic thought and life would have a different situation.

Under such circumstances, with the dissipation of ideological unity in the society, the structure of this life would have collapsed.

In order to be ascertain the impact and role of the freedom of thought on the ideological unity among the Muslims, one should compare various periods of the Islamic history which enjoyed different levels of freedom of thought. Hence, if we compare the first four centuries with the ensuing centuries, specially the recent ones, we will realize that the level of freedom of thought -- though relatively -- was more prevalent among the Muslims whether in intellectual individual reasoning (intellectual *ijtihad*) or at the level of political debates.

Plentiful debates in the realm of jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), theology, philosophy and other branches of science during the said period as well as positive political debates and competitions carried out during the same period are an eloquent witness to this claim. This is why we witness more unity and solidarity in the ideological fields during this period.

The existence of various *Fiqhi*, doctrinal approaches during this period was merely a kind of multiplicity and diversity within the framework of ideological unity and as seen in Ghazzali's words, they were at the service of defending Islam in confrontation with other cultures and rival religions. During the same period various Islamic governments in different territories were considered as states of a great federal system which united all of them from Andalusia to Mesopotamia in the front-lines of the holy war for conquering other territories and inviting others to embrace Islam. But during the ensuing periods religious fanaticism in the *Fiqhi* and theological domains grew and pushed the Muslims to the brink of disunity.

During this period Muslims neglected the assistance of the religious teachings in facing various challenges of the time and did not seek the help of the religion to solve the new problems and difficulties besetting them in their new life.

If we compare the political aspects of each period with its intellectual aspects, we will realize

that Fiqhi, theological dimensions in each period have enjoyed more freedom compared to political aspects. This fact explains why the Muslims have been more successful in the area of Fiqhi, religious unity in contrast to political unity.

In fact, the freedom of thought in the Fiqhi, doctrinal domains and the lack of freedom in the political field led to the emergence of common rules--in the light of the existing realities--among Muslims in the former domain and on the contrary, political jurisprudence was deprived of a practical rule to organize political institutions for the establishment of a practical model. As we witness in the books on Islamic and canonical politics, political Fiqh has remained under the domination of abstract issues.

This issue itself has prepared a suitable ground for political despotism and disunity among the Muslims, specially during the recent centuries. Therefore, given the above, we can conclude that whenever freedom of thought existed among the Muslims, it caused unity and solidarity, and whenever it bade farewell to the social, political life of the Muslims, or was weakened, disunity and division visited upon the Muslims.

In conclusion, we can say that freedom is in fact an important gate to the materialization of unity among Muslims. For, freedom invests the individuals with a particular methodological characteristic which leads them towards unity in their approach through exchange of views which in turn culminates in the convergence and proximity of analyses in finding the causes and final conclusions. This trend finally unites the Muslims in objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives.

According to the Holy Qur'an, freedom of thought in "enjoining good and prohibiting evil creates unity and is the original source of the salvation of the Umma. The Almighty God says: "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity. Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear Signs: for them is a (dreadful penalty. (Al-i Imran: 104-105