

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Freedom

What is Freedom? Freedom is something that everybody has heard of but which has different meanings for different people. It might be free to travel, free to speak up, free to dress however you want, free from oppression and prejudice. Freedom by definition is the right or ability to do or say what you want. But with true freedom comes responsibility.

Nelson Mandela, who served 27 years in prison for fighting against apartheid in South Africa, wonderfully stated the meaning of freedom as follows, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

Freedom of expression is the right to speak, but also the right to hear. Because we need to hear all sides of the story and make our own conclusions. So, if we are concerned only with our own good and give secondary importance to the freedom of others then we cannot boast about living an ideal way of life. Social recognition and being praised do not mean freedom. Our aspirations and ambitions of being

somebody are absurd and do not suggest freedom. Education or preaching does not make us free. Following an ideal person or an example of a master is not a sign of freedom of a person. Freedom is the absence of any pressure from the political, religious and social environment that we live in.

By natural law, all the humans are equal, and they are all born with "inalienable" rights. These rights are God-given and can never be taken or given away. These fundamental rights include the right to live free, the right to enjoy the nature, the right to consume natural resources like air, water and light etc.

One of the greatest blessings given to us by God Almighty is freedom. But contrary to the literal meaning of this word, freedom means responsibility and it means submitting to the laws set by God, the Provider of our true freedom.

[33:72] We have offered the responsibility (freedom of choice) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were

afraid of it. But the human being accepted it; he was transgressing, ignorant.

God offered the responsibility to the heavens, earth and mountains but they refused to bear it. We see how foolish we humans were and are. Even today we see people challenging God's might, violating the commandments of God. Therefore, very truly God calls us ignorant and transgressing in the above verse.

Freedom is a gift from God. We have not earned it, initiated it or created it. Therefore, it is essential to follow His laws. God created us, one cannot deny this fact. He decided the time and place of our birth and death, our hair and eye colour, our Mom-Dad, our siblings, our complexion, our abilities, the capability of our brains, the extent of wisdom one would have, the amount of wealth one would earn etc. But He gave us the significant freedom to believe in God or not. To worship Him alone or take a partner with Him.

God has been just and fair with us. He has allowed us to decide, without any

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pressure, in whom do we choose to believe. He has given full freedom to the opposite party (that is Satan) to present his version of theory of belief and freedom. God says in the Quran, "There is no compulsion in religion". Hence, we are free to accept any path we think is right. God has also blessed us with the brains, the eyesight and the hearing. We are very well equipped with these special abilities to use while deciding. But unfortunately, humans will fail badly for they will decide by their heart and not by their mind. Even though the two paths are clearly visible in front of us we will be dragged towards the path of destruction by the illusions of Satan.

[2:256] There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in GOD has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient.

[73:19] This is a reminder; whoever wills, let him choose the path to his Lord.

God says *let him choose the path*. There is no compulsion at all. God has given us full freedom of choice and decision. Satan presents his theory in an appealing way to entice his followers. He promises them false promises of wealth and well-being. Thus, they are repelled from the path of God.

[17:64] "You may entice them with your voice, and mobilize all your forces and all your men against them, and share in their money and children, and promise them. Anything the devil promises is no more than an illusion.

Satan attacks people with weapons of intoxicants, gambling and illicit carnal satisfaction. They get addicted to these and get involved in all kinds of vices. Once addicted, he controls their brain and takes away the ability to think and decide right from wrong. It

leads to grossly violating God's laws. At times they get involved in lies, cheating, corruption, robbery, and even murder to feed their addictions. They do not find anything wrong in keeping extra marital relationships to satisfy their carnal desires. They lose their souls to such an extent that all these activities seem normal to them. In this process they become slaves to their lust. Due to which they also lose their self-control and get locked up in the prison of bad habits. In fact, they do not enjoy freedom of mind. Contentment of their heart is replaced with misery and pain.

God promises us happiness in this world and in the hereafter, provided we strictly follow God's laws and not Satan's theory of happiness. God's promise is absolute whereas Satan's promise is nothing but an illusion. God guides the righteous to the right path and guarantees success for following His teachings.

[39:23] GOD has revealed herein the best Hadith; a book that is consistent, and points out both ways (to Heaven and Hell). The skins of those who reverence their Lord cringe therefrom, then their skins and their hearts soften up for GOD's message. Such is GOD's guidance; He bestows it upon whomever He wills. As for those sent astray by GOD, nothing can guide them.

[3:104] Let there be a community of you who invite to what is good, advocate righteousness, and forbid evil. These are the winners.

God says those who uphold His word are the real winners. They are guided on the righteous path by God. Those who advocate righteousness and forbid evil are the allies of God. Even though we are divided by our nationality, ethnicity, creed, color, etc., God does not make any distinction between the believers. Therefore, we must support each other to uphold God's word, to convey His message and to resist the Satanic forces. Do not get discouraged looking at the small number of people who believe.

Because, only by God's grace do a few successfully make it to God's kingdom.

[9:71] The believing men and women are allies of one another. They advocate righteousness and forbid evil, they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), and they obey God and His messenger. These will be showered by God's mercy. God is Almighty, Most Wise.

In present times we are exposed to various forms of media. We are free to use all these sources. We get to collect information, news, stories etc. from these different media sources. Therefore, it becomes necessary to verify the information well before accepting it. It is not advisable to accept any information blindly. God does not forbid us from using these media sources, but He teaches us to use caution.

[17:36] You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them.

[39:18] They are the ones who examine all words, then follow the best. These are the ones whom GOD has guided; these are the ones who possess intelligence.

We must compete to be closer to God. Our closeness to God will depend upon our soul growth. God has sent messengers from time to time to deliver His message. We are free to accept or reject the message. We too have a responsibility to spread the message of God. We cannot stop others from propagating against God because it is their freedom of speech. But we can demonstrate the best possible behavior to inspire them. It is our duty to encourage belief in God in our loved ones but again we cannot impose anything upon anyone. We must seek God's help for their guidance.

[28:56] You cannot guide the ones you love. God is the only One who guides

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in accordance with His will, and in accordance with His knowledge of those who deserve the guidance.

The sole mission of our life is to pass the test and make it to Paradise which God has promised us. For passing the test we need to make the right choice of living life. We give a lot of importance to this temporary life. We consider a lot of parameters while buying a house, while choosing a bride, while buying a car, while choosing a career etc. All these choices are short lived, because this life is no more than an illusion. God does not forbid us from choosing these things. But our prime focus should be to choose a righteous life here and prepare for eternal life.

All our deeds and minute actions are recorded. The results will be out only on the Day of Resurrection. Even though God has marked us all, we do not know our final destiny. We all know that to pass the test we must study hard or else we are bound to fail the test. Therefore, to clear the test of our final destiny we must study the scripture of God well and make the right choice to determine our eternal life. We have already failed the test by not upholding God's side. Now this is the final chance God has given us to make it to Paradise. God has sent us on this earth equipped with guidance through His scriptures and messengers. But we were also given the free will to make the right choice to ensure the best results. For favorable outcome of the test, we need to prepare well, leaving no chance of failure.

[7:175] Recite for them the news of one who was given our proofs, but chose to disregard them. Consequently, the devil pursued him, until he became a strayer.

The righteous strive hard to defeat their greed, envy, and arrogance. They strive hard to avoid vain talks, abusive language and boasting. They take utmost care to show mercy and honor

their parents. These are the special qualities and behaviors that God encourages and appreciates from His servants. These qualities are not forced upon us but are expected from us.

[18:29] Proclaim: "This is the truth from your Lord," then whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve. We have prepared for the transgressors a fire that will completely surround them. When they scream for help, they will be given a liquid like concentrated acid that scalds the faces. What a miserable drink! What a miserable destiny!

God does not declare us unbelievers or disbelievers without giving us many opportunities to repent and reform. Even though the clock is ticking, we get sufficient time to mend our ways in this third and final chance; the opportunity and freedom to think and decide for ourselves and plan our journey for the final abode. While striving in the path of God, we must take utmost care to be humble. Our communication, behavior and style while transmitting the Message should not reflect any kind of compulsion, aggression or pride. Simultaneously, we must also set the best example for others. God has given us free will; absolute freedom to think and act freely to plan our final journey to make it to Paradise. Let us not forget that this is the Divine Scheme. God does not force anything upon us or snatch this freedom from us at any moment of our life span. May God protect us and guide us to get closer to him. May He make it easier for us to pass this test.

[17:18] Anyone who chooses this fleeting life as his priority, we will rush to him what we decide to give him, then we commit him to Gehenna, where he suffers forever, despised and defeated.

[17:19] As for those who choose the Hereafter as their priority, and work righteousness, while believing, their efforts will be appreciated.

Abdul G

War, Peace, Freedom

We are thankful to God for the freedoms we have and that God has given us people who will serve to protect them. We humans like to be free. Whether it's the basic desire to worship God alone, or to speak our minds, not to be oppressed or enslaved, or to choose to go for a walk when you want. The Declaration of Independence reflects these ideas when it talks about, "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". People want the right to live. Which allows you to have liberty or freedom. And which in turn allows you to make choices to "freely pursue what makes you happy". Other countries have similar ideals, e.g., in France the motto is "Liberty, equality, fraternity." Canada has a Charter of Rights & Freedoms, e.g., freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom from unreasonable search/seizure and more.

Some of these are related to each other. Take Freedom of Religion: if you don't have freedom of thought and expression, you don't really have freedom of religion. Similarly, freedom to move and assemble also relates to religion, being able to come and pray Friday Prayer together or study Quran together.

Part of this innate desire for free-choice I think comes from the "free will" God has given us. Which is a great gift, but also a great responsibility. And the responsibility comes from making choices. If we are making choices, we are responsible for them. And our choices have consequences. And as an adult, we are responsible for the consequences.

Some of the choices we make are undoubtedly bad choices. The first bad choice we made goes all the way back to the Great Feud. As unfathomable as it

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may sound, it seems we went to war, in some manner, against God and His servants. And the angels knew we would let Satan influence us to shed blood (2:30, see Introduction).

We chose free will (33:72). We opted-in to see Satan's demonstration. And what we are living in this world is proof of the differences between good choices and bad choices. To truly be free, we have to choose wisely with God's help. Our choices can either bring freedom for ourselves and others around us, or we can make choices that harm ourselves and others. True freedom comes from submission to God. It may come as a surprise that true freedom comes from surrendering our will to God's will and observing His laws. But, when we think about it, any choice where we break God's laws results in pain for ourselves or others. It can result in war or hardship and loss of property or health or well-being. Problems arise when we choose to commit evil or sin.

Another piece of why submission to God is so important in freedom, is because even if our choices are good, other people may make bad choices. And without God to protect us – others' choices can lead to loss of our freedoms. Loss of life, or happiness. At the end of the day, it is a huge blessing that God controls all things including happiness. He makes us rich or

poor. No one else can. Which means no one else can take it away either.

This is why it is in submitting to Him that we get the happiness and freedom we want. Because any sin you can think of ultimately will reduce the "life, liberty, pursuit of happiness." What kinds of commands does God tell us to observe?

The Major Commandments
[6:151] Say, "Come let me tell you what your Lord has really prohibited for you: You shall not set up idols besides Him. You shall honor your parents. You shall not kill your children from fear of poverty—we provide for you and for them. You shall not commit gross sins, obvious or hidden. You shall not kill—GOD has made life sacred—except in the course of justice. These are His commandments to you, that you may understand."

Even the "simplest" of these, i.e., life being sacred is tough for humans to observe. Look at the homicide rates in the US (homicide is sadly the leading cause of death among children in USA). Or look at all the wars around us.

According to wiki, multiple wars claimed more than 10,000 lives in 2023 alone: Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Myanmar, Central Africa etc. And sadly this pattern has been going on for a while. A 2003 NY Times article by former war correspondent Chris Hedges says in the history of the past 3400 years humans have

been entirely at peace only for about 268 years or 8% of recorded history (<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>).

A similar sentiment is echoed by Professor Robert Simpson from UCLA who says there have been no periods in history that have been free from war (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture-online/case-studies/2022/mar/can-there-ever-be-world-peace>)

Given the above, it helps put into sobering context the Quranic verses on war. One may think that the verses on war are not relevant in our "modern, enlightened age", but that's not the case. We humans can still benefit from the key rules of war in verses like 2:190, 60:8-9 that make it clear we are never to aggress.

If only more people went by God's command of greeting people with "Peace" and living by it. We can certainly use more peace in today's world. When we pause to think on how we are so violent as a race, it comes down to idol worship and being influenced by Satan. Bad choices lead to pain and misery, and the loss of freedom. The unfortunate origin of all this is in our own choices during the Great Feud. We pray that God helps us make the right choices so that we can, God willing, enjoy eternal freedom and happiness.

Faiz