

ALI 453 - Readings #4

Freedom and Bondage

A Question - If attachment and bondage to anything is a kind of unhealthy condition that leads to abandonment of human values and cause stagnation, inertness, and inertia of the human personality, what difference does it make whether that thing is something material or spiritual, this worldly or otherworldly?

Some schools of thought equate man's human identity with his capacity to rebel and disobey every form of servitude and to assert his absolute freedom. Accordingly, every manner of bondage, confinement, and submission is, according to them, inconsistent with man's real identity and leads to self alienation.

There is a great difference between desiring God, the movement towards God, the love of God, the attachment and the servitude to God and submission to Him, and the love, the submission, and the servitude to other things. The servitude to God is freedom itself.

It is the only relation and tie which does not stagnate the human personality or make it inert and immobile. It is the only kind of worship which does not imply self-forgetfulness and self-alienation. Why? Because He is the Absolute Perfection and the Ultimate Goal and the Destination of all existents: 'And unto thy Lord will be the end of all things' (53:42).

To love Allah is to love perfection. The love of true perfection is the love of a higher self, and a praiseworthy love is in itself a desirable and praiseworthy egotism or self-love.

The Qur'an states that forgetting God is forgetting one's own self and the separation from God is absolute annihilation. It says;

They have indeed lost their selves, and that which they were forging has gone astray from them. (7:53)

Say: 'Surely the losers are they who lose their selves and their families on the Day of Resurrection' (39:15)

Be not as those who forgot God, and so He caused them to forget their selves; those-they are the ungodly. (59:19)

Often man mistakes 'non-self' as his self, regards that non-self as his real self. Then imagining the non-self to be his self, he treats the non-self and takes care of it as he would have treated and cared for his true self.

The true self, as a result, falls into neglect and oblivion, and occasionally undergoes a metamorphosis. For instance, when man imagines his body to represent his total entity, all his endeavour revolves about his body, it means that he has forgotten his self conceiving the non-self to be his real self.

Imam Ali (a) says; *I wonder at the man who searches for his lost things but doesn't care to recover his lost self.*

Every being in the natural course of its development moves from the self to the self; that is, it moves from a lower, weaker self to a self which is powerful and higher. Accordingly, the deviation of every existent from the path of its perfection and development is deviation from the self towards the non-self.

Man, more than any other creature, being endowed with a free will and freedom of choice, is subject to this deviation. By choosing a deviant objective as ultimate for himself, in reality he replaces his true self with the non-self, mistaking the non-self to be the self. It is on this basis that the human being's total immersion in material aspects of life has been regarded as condemnable.

The value of worship in the rediscovery of the self.

As much as the bondage to material matters and immersion in them severs man from his true self and induces self-alienation, worship helps him in recovering his own self. Worship awakens and arouses man from his spiritual slumber.

It rescues him from drowning in the sea of self-neglect and forgetfulness and saves his identity from being lapsed in the world of material things. It is in the mirror of worship and God's remembrance that man can observe himself as he really is and become aware of his failings and faults. It is in worship that he acquires the true perspective of being, life, space and time, like watching a city from a high mountain, and perceives the insignificance, pettiness and abjectness of his materialistic hopes, desires, and ambitions. It is in worship that a yearning is awakened in his heart to attain to the very core of being.

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