

The Goals of Freedom of Faith in Islam

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Abstract:

The issue of religious freedom is one of the most discussed topics in modern times, as it is closely related to various political, legal, cultural and religious aspects. This study is a serious attempt to explore the objectives of freedom of belief in Islam, considering it as the mother of all freedoms and the gateway to various forms of freedom. Revealing these objectives shows the value and status of freedom in general within the religion of Islam, especially at a time when civilisations are emphasising the importance of freedom to the extent that it has become a symbol and criterion for the progress of nations. The research problem revolves around the objectives of Islam in legislating freedom of belief and whether Islam has specific objectives in legislating this type of freedom.

The findings include that freedom of belief in Islam reflects its honourable view of humanity, regardless of colour, sex, race or religion.

Keywords: Freedom of belief, honouring humanity, free thought, Sunnah of diversity, Islamic tolerance.

Introduction:

The texts of revelation (Qur'an and Sunnah) have converged to emphasise freedom of belief, considering it as one of the most important types of freedom for human existence. To deny a person the freedom of belief is to deprive him of his humanity from beginning to end. Therefore, the issue of freedom in general and freedom of belief in particular has been widely discussed in the fields of thought, politics, law and religion. This is because it involves various interrelated aspects, not only of the individual but also of society. Thus, discussions on freedom of belief have emerged from different angles and perspectives, ranging from its concept, types and levels, to its limits and objectives. However, these latter aspects have not received significant attention from researchers and thinkers, at least to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap regarding the objectives of freedom of belief in Islam, which are the objectives that shed light on the dimensions of Islamic legislation regarding freedom. What are the objectives of Islamic law in legislating freedom of belief?

In order to answer this main question, I have followed an inductive and analytical methodology, as it is appropriate to the idea and nature of the research.

This study aims to shed light on one aspect of Islam's view of humanity by uncovering the dimensions of Islamic legislation on freedom of belief. These dimensions reflect Islam's honourable view of humanity, irrespective of religion, colour, language or race.

Section One:

The Concept of Freedom of Belief Before discussing the objectives of Islam in legislating freedom of belief, it is essential that we first examine the concept of this term and refine its meanings. Considering it as a compound term, we will first define freedom linguistically and technically. We then define faith linguistically and technically. This process will allow us to formulate a comprehensive definition of freedom of belief that will enable us to adjust its elements, understand its components, and differentiate between its levels and dimensions.

The first section: Definition of Freedom

First section: The linguistic definition of freedom: The word "freedom" and its derivatives in the Arabic language have various noble meanings, all of which imply the opposite of slavery and bondage. Dictionaries and linguistic references agree on this. Lisan al-Arab states: "Al-Hurr (the free person) with a damma (diacritical mark) is the opposite of a slave, and the plural is Ahrar and Hurar. It is said: The slave becomes free, with one fatha (diacritical mark), that is, he becomes free. And from this comes the hadith of Abu Hurairah: "I am Abu Hurairah, the freed one", meaning the emancipated one"¹.

In Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit it is mentioned: "Freedom is the state of being free from impurity, slavery or wickedness"².

Based on the above, it is clear that the term "freedom" expresses the essence of "liberation" and what it implies of "liberation" and "detachment". This is the conclusion reached by the author of "The Unveiling of the Terminology of the Arts" after attributing all the meanings of freedom in the Arabic language to the sense of liberation, as he stated: "Al-Hurr (the free person) linguistically means liberation"³.

The second branch: The technical definition of freedom:

The term "freedom" is considered one of the most ambiguous and tumultuous terms, despite its common usage and prevalence, especially in the modern era. This is due to its association with various aspects of human life, including thoughts, beliefs and actions, as well as its association with society and the individual. We find the presence of freedom in the fields of politics, economics, media, law, social interactions, and even religion. Each field of knowledge has its own specific applications of freedom, which has led to a multitude of definitions and variations, contributing to its ambiguity and confusion.

When we try to go beyond Western definitions of freedom⁴, which often exclude or marginalise religion and emphasise the individualistic aspect of freedom, in order to formulate a comprehensive

concept, we find that Islamic definitions are more accurate and inclusive.

One of the most recent and precise definitions is provided by Fathi Al-Darini, who defines freedom as follows "It is the general ability established by the legislator for individuals equally, which enables them to act in the best way for themselves without harming others"⁵.

As defined by the philosopher Taha Abdurrahman, after reviewing the concepts of freedom in Western thought and revealing their contradiction with the Islamic perspective, he stated: "Freedom is to worship the Creator of one's own free will and not to be enslaved by creation, either in appearance or in essence"⁶.

It is clear from these definitions that they emphasise the role of will, choice and the absence of external coercion as the basis of freedom. In addition, they emphasise the religious dimension, which is reflected in the goals pursued and the limits that exist, which are referred to as the constraints or limits of freedom. This is the fundamental difference between the Islamic and Western concepts of freedom.

The second theme

- The definition of faith:

First Branch - Linguistic Definition: Belief and creed are derived from the verb "aqada" (to hold fast). "Aqada is the opposite of hal (to untie or dissolve). For example, when a rope is tied, it is "maqood" (tied or knotted), and the same applies to a covenant (ahd) or a marriage contract (nikah). The place where the rope is tied is called "maqood" and its plural is "ma'qid"⁷.

In Al-Misbah Al-Muneer it is mentioned: "I believed in it, my heart and conscience held fast to it until it was said: Faith is what a person holds as his religion, and he has a firm faith without doubt"⁸.

From the above, it is clear that the linguistic meaning of belief revolves around what a person holds firmly in their heart. It is then used to refer to the ideas and opinions that a person believes in and that are established in their heart and conscience.

Second branch - technical definition: The technical concept of faith is no different from the linguistic concept. It revolves around the concepts, perceptions and ideas that an individual adopts and in which his heart accepts and his soul finds peace. It reaches the level of conviction and certainty (yaqeen) that is free from doubt and hesitation. If any doubt or uncertainty is mixed with it, it is not called faith. These beliefs can be political, economic, social, cultural or religious. However, the most common and well-known usage refers to the religious aspect, known as "religious belief" or "creed". The freedom associated with this is called "freedom of belief", which refers to "freedom of religion". It is considered one of the most important types of freedom because it is the mother of all freedoms and the gateway to all types of freedom. Mustafa Sa'id Al-Khann has indicated this in his explanation of the meaning of faith in Islamic custom when he said: "It is the collection of

things that a person must believe in Islam and have complete faith in without the slightest doubt. These matters become self-evident and are not subject to debate or discussion". Thus, the science that studies what a person must believe in is called "the science of creed"⁹.

Therefore, we can say that belief in the Islamic perspective is certainty (yaqeen).

Definition of freedom of belief: After understanding the linguistic and terminological meanings of "freedom" and "belief", we can define freedom of belief as "the right of an individual to choose what his religious beliefs lead him to, without being forced by others to adopt a particular belief or to change his beliefs by any form of coercion"¹⁰.

Mohammed Abu Zahra defined it as follows: "That a person chooses his religion willingly and without coercion or burden, and that he bases his choice on sound reasoning, and that he protects his chosen religion without being forced to go against what it entails"¹¹.

It is clear from these definitions that they focus on the element of "prevention of coercion", which is an essential element of freedom of belief. Coercion and compulsion lead to hypocrisy rather than genuine faith. Therefore, definitions related to this type of freedom emphasise the elements of freedom of will and choice, prevention of coercion and compulsion in any form.

It is important to note that freedom of belief or religious freedom has two distinct levels. The first level is the freedom to join a religion, while the second level is the freedom to leave a religion.

Islam makes a clear distinction between these two levels in terms of the scope available to them¹². In the first level (freedom to enter Islam), we find Qur'anic texts that emphasise the freedom of the individual to choose his beliefs and convictions through his own thinking, away from any coercion or violation of this right, which is considered one of the most important human rights. One of the most prominent Qur'anic verses dealing with this is: "There shall be no compulsion in religion. The right way has become clear from the wrong" (Quran 2:256).

Here we see that the high status and importance given to freedom of belief in Islam is related to this level (freedom to enter a religion).

As for the second level (freedom to leave Islam), we find that Qur'anic and prophetic texts limit the scope of freedom in this regard. Apostasy and apostasy are considered crimes that deserve condemnation and punishment in this world and the hereafter because of their psychological and social effects on the individual Muslim and because they represent a threat to the intellectual and doctrinal security of the Muslim community¹³.

This is evident from the following Qur'anic verse, which emphasises the severity of the punishment for apostasy: "And whoever among you turns away from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for such, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and such are the Companions of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever" (Qur'an 2:217). This explains the severity of Islam's punishment for apostasy, which is death¹⁴.

Freedom of belief, which refers to the right of individuals to choose what they believe in according to their own hearts, without coercion or pressure, is a freedom that has two dimensions:

First, personal freedom: By personal freedom of belief, we mean that individuals adopt a set of concepts and ideas to which their thinking and conscience have led them and which remain within their personal sphere (individual), considering it a personal matter, away from any means of coercion or compulsion that would hinder their freedom of choice. This is also known as freedom of thought and conscience.

Second, transcendent freedom: By this we mean freedom that goes beyond the personal (individual) level to the public and visible level. It involves the declaration of beliefs, stating their truth, explaining their concept, providing evidence for them and defending them. This is considered to be the practical translation of intellectual convictions.

The purpose of clarifying these two dimensions is to draw attention to the error of mixing freedom of belief as a personal affirmation resulting from the work of thought and conscience, which we have called "personal freedom of belief", and freedom of belief as a public practice, which we have called "transcendent freedom of belief". This conflation has led to confusion among many scholars about the limits and regulations of freedom of belief in Islam. The difference between these dimensions entails a difference in rulings, as each dimension has its own ruling. Freedom of belief in its personal dimension differs in its effects, interests and harms from its social dimension, which leads to a difference in the legal assessment of its rulings between the personal and social dimensions¹⁵.

The second topic: The goals of religious freedom in Islam.

Imam al-Shatibi, in his explanation of the objectives of Islamic law, states: "The establishment of laws is for the benefit of the believers in both the immediate and ultimate sense, and their provisions are justified by the protection of the interests of the believers"¹⁶.

Indeed, Allah, may He be exalted, has not ordained anything in vain. His commandments have purposes, and His prohibitions serve purposes known to those who know them and unknown to those who do not know them. The freedom of belief, or what is known as religious freedom, which Islam has affirmed and made a principle among the fundamental principles that govern the life of the individual and society, and a great pillar of its policy, and a great principle that reflects its view of the "other", has come to achieve numerous judgments, goals, and purposes that can be summarised in four great objectives:

First, the realisation of human dignity: In the Islamic perspective, man is considered the first and highest creation in the universe. He is distinguished by honour and privilege in accordance with his absolute humanity. Allah, may He be exalted, says: "And We certainly honoured the children of Adam, and carried them on the land and the sea, and provided for them of the good things, and

preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference" (Quran 17:70).

The divine honour bestowed upon man and the distinction bestowed upon him mean "nobility, exaltation, and high status, and the absence of any meaning of degradation, humiliation, or humiliation"¹⁷.

The divine honour of man can be highlighted in the following aspects:

- **The prostration of the angels before Adam:** The divine honour of man is evident in the prostration of the angels before Adam, the father of mankind, when Allah, the Lord of power and majesty, created him and presented him as the noblest of His creatures, and commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before him as an act of respect and honour. Allah, may He be exalted in praise, says: "And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam,' they did so, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became one of the unbelievers" (Quran 2:34).

The symbolism of prostration before Adam indicates the value of man and his elevated status. Similarly, the punishment of the curse that befell Iblees (Satan) for his refusal to recognise the value of this new creature shows from another perspective the level of honour accorded to man¹⁸. One researcher has beautifully expressed the divine honour of man through the story of the prostration, saying: "This powerful symbolic image implies that disrespect for man is in itself evil"¹⁹.

Second, creation at its best: Among the manifestations that reflect the elevation and high status of man is his composition, which combines matter and spirit. In addition to the element of clay from which man was created, there is the breath of the soul. Man is composed of a breath of the spirit of Allah, as Allah, may He be exalted, says: "So when I have formed him and breathed into him of My soul, then prostrate yourselves before him" (Qur'an 15:29).

"Indeed, Allah, may He be exalted, expressed this unique creation of man when he rebuked Iblees (Satan), indicating the value of this creature. Allah, may He be praised, said: "He said: 'O Iblees, what prevented you from prostrating yourself before what I have created with My hands? Were you then arrogant, or were you already among the arrogant?" (Quran 38:75). Adding the creation to Himself and expressing it with the hands means honouring and glorifying the creature, just as we say that the leader or the responsible authority handles things with his own hands, indicating its importance and high status²⁰.

Third, the use of the universe for man: Numerous Qur'anic verses affirm the exaltation and high status of human beings by stating that everything in the universe is harnessed to serve their interests and achieve their benefits in order to fulfil the mission of stewardship and vicegerency. Examples of this include Allah's statement: "And He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is on the earth - all from Him" (Quran 45:13), and "And He has subjected to you the sun and the moon, continuously [in orbit], and He has subjected to you the night and the day. And He has given you of

all that you have asked of Him' (Quran 14:33). These verses speak of harnessing in its broadest sense, both in material and cognitive terms. The harnessing of the universe for human beings is not limited to the material aspect alone, but extends to the cognitive side as well. Allah has made the laws and principles that govern the universe intelligible so that the human mind can observe and understand them and thus benefit from them²¹.

In truth, the divine honour for human beings, as stated in the aforementioned Qur'anic verses, is for the essence of humanity itself, regardless of their beliefs, before they become Christians, Jews or Buddhists, or before they become white, black or yellow²².

Therefore, this Qur'anic affirmation of humanity cannot be seen as exclusive to Muslims.

The principles of Islam are inherently humanistic, for it is a universal religion open to all races and nations. Its message is addressed to the whole of humanity, and Allah in Islam is the Lord of all worlds (Praise be to Allah, Lord of all worlds) (Quran 1:2), unlike some other religions which consider themselves to be "closed religions with a particular God and a particular people in a particular land".

Looking at the reality of religious freedom as affirmed by Islam, we can see that it is intended to achieve human dignity, to promote humanity and to respect the intellect and thoughts. This is understood as a fundamental element of religious freedom: freedom of will and choice, as opposed to coercion and compulsion. Many Qur'anic verses emphasise the freedom of belief and choice, free from any coercion or compulsion. This is because coercion is contrary to human dignity. One such verse is Allah's saying: "There shall be no compulsion in religion. The right way has become clear from the wrong" (Quran 2:256).

This verse was revealed about a group of Ansar, or a man among them, who had children whom they either wanted to convert by force or prevent from embracing Islam. When Islam came, they wanted to force it on their children. But Allah forbade them from doing so, so that the children could choose to embrace Islam for themselves²³.

In this verse, the term "religion" refers to faith and belief²⁴. This verse represents a major principle of Islam, a major pillar of its policy²⁵, and is explicit in indicating that each individual is free to choose his or her own faith, far from coercion, compulsion and restriction. Coercion leads to hypocrisy, not genuine faith, because faith involves sincere conviction and submission of the heart, reaching the level of certainty. Therefore, compulsion and faith cannot coexist²⁶.

This verse is a clear proof of the nullification of religious coercion in all its forms, since the acceptance of faith is based on evidence, the ability to contemplate, and the freedom to choose²⁷. Since faith is the acceptance of the soul, it is impossible for this acceptance to be achieved by force and coercion. Its way is through clarification and proof²⁸.

Thus we see that religious freedom in Islam has no place for coercion and compulsion.

This is because coercion and compulsion contradict the human dignity that Islam respects and emphasises.

The words of the scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi in his commentary on the verse concerning the prohibition of coercion convey the following: "Although the attempts at coercion were made by fathers who wanted to protect their children from being influenced by their enemies who were different from them in religion and nationality, and despite the unique circumstances in which the children embraced Judaism at a young age, and despite the prevailing conditions of the world at that time, where waves of exhaustion and persecution of dissenters in terms of religion and even faith prevailed²⁹, as in the case of the Roman state, which gave its subjects the choice between conversion or death, despite all this, the Qur'an rejected coercion...For Muslims, faith is not merely a word spoken with the tongue or rituals performed with the body, but its foundation is the affirmation and submission of the heart"³⁰.

And among the Qur'anic verses that affirm the element of "freedom of choice"³¹ in faith is the saying of Allah Almighty: "If We wished, We could send them a sign from the sky for which their necks would remain humble" (Surah Ash-Shu'ara, 26:4). In this verse, Allah affirms that He will not force anyone to believe, even though He has the power to do so. Ibn Kathir, in his interpretation of this verse, says: "Had We wished, We could have sent down a sign that would have compelled them to believe, but We do not, because We want only voluntary belief from everyone"³². The "voluntary belief" that Ibn Kathir refers to in his interpretation of the verse is the belief that comes from conviction, not from coercion or force.

The Qur'anic affirmation of rejecting compulsion and coercion in matters of faith and making choice the basis for entering Islam is an expression of the honourable view of humanity. This honour implies, among other things, that people are individually responsible for everything that concerns them, whether in faith or otherwise. This is called "individual responsibility". Many Qur'anic verses support this principle, such as Allah's saying: "Whoever Allah guides, he is guided for his own sake. And whoever He sends astray, you will never find a protector for him beside Him" (Surah Yunus, 10:108), and His saying: "Every soul will be preserved for what it has earned" (Surah Al-Muddathir, 74:38).

These verses indicate that people are free in their choices and decisions, but at the same time they are responsible for those choices.

Freedom and responsibility in action are thus intertwined, for there is no choice for those who have no freedom. Since human beings are responsible for the obligations entrusted to them, "the divine standard of justice requires that they be free in their thoughts to choose the path they take and free to believe in what their thoughts lead them to believe, for how can one not be free to choose his path and not be free to believe in what that path leads to, and then be held responsible for what he

did not have the freedom to choose?³³ This result is incompatible with two aspects:

1. From the perspective of divine justice, which is a quality of Allah's perfection, it is inconceivable that Allah would punish His servant for something that was imposed on him or for something in which his freedom of choice was lost.
2. From the perspective of the divine honour bestowed upon humanity, to hold them accountable for something in which they lacked freedom of choice would violate their dignity and diminish their humanity, which is affirmed in the aforementioned Qur'anic texts.

Here it becomes clear that the value of human beings is undermined and their dignity is violated when their minds and thoughts are restricted and their fate is predetermined. They are not allowed to think, decide or believe. Instead, they are expected to listen and obey. This is the logic of Pharaoh, which is presented in the Noble Quran in the context of condemnation (Pharaoh said, "I show you only what I see, and I guide you only to the right path") [Surah Ghafir: 29].

Noble Islam rejects this logic and has come to combat it, replacing it with the freedom inherent in human beings, because it realises their humanity and preserves their dignity³⁴. Sayyid Qutb, in his discussion of the extent to which Islam achieves freedom of belief for the dignity of human beings and how it came to protect their thoughts and preserve their humanity, states in his reflection on the verse of compulsion: "In this principle (freedom of belief), the honour of Allah for human beings, respect for their will, thoughts and feelings, and leaving their affairs to themselves in matters related to guidance and misguidance in beliefs, and holding them accountable for their actions and self-evaluation... Freedom of belief is the first human right that confirms their status as human beings. To deny a person freedom of belief is essentially to deny his humanity"³⁵.

Thus we see that a person cannot be considered a human being, nor can they be honoured, unless they are given complete freedom to use their intellect and exercise their judgement in what they perceive to be right or wrong. No one else, regardless of their status, has the right to interfere with this except in the context of advice, guidance and counselling.

Second, the encouragement of free thought: When we examine the Islamic stance in its legislation and affirmation of freedom of belief, we find that freedom of will and choice is a fundamental element of it³⁶. Islam believes that the environment in which true faith and sound belief grow is "an environment of noble freedom and comprehensive tranquillity". This is what Islam seeks for all people. Some people may believe in bribery, while others may believe in the sword, and faith may be passed on by inheritance from ancestors to descendants. But the highest example of faith set by the Noble Qur'an is calm and conscious thinking that encompasses the horizons of the earth and the heavens, which leads a person to be attached to the Lord of the earth and the heavens. The atmosphere of freedom is the one in which true faith is born, because the faith that flourishes in this environment is based on complete conviction, far from any constraints or

obstacles that can affect a person's beliefs. In the context of scientific research, this is considered a form of intellectual freedom, because the beliefs reached are not the result of free thinking, but are influenced by external factors that have nothing to do with the means of acquiring knowledge and constructing faith.

Therefore, the teachings of Islam came to prescribe the liberation of thought from the restrictions and biases that deprive the mind of its freedom and hinder its objective interaction with ideas.

It prevents the mind, in one way or another, from reaching predetermined conclusions, as if they were imposed on it from outside the logical requirements of its own reasoning³⁷. This leads to erroneous beliefs. The Qur'an mentions some of these restrictions that prevent the mind from reaching true faith, including

1. Guardianship over the mind: Exercised by those in authority, both material and spiritual, who control the mind and lead it to conclusions they have predetermined, far from the truth that does not satisfy them. This is the guardianship of the Pharaohs, which prevented people from thinking freely, which would have led them to believe in the truth brought by the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), when the Pharaoh said to them, "I show you only what I see, and I guide you only to the right path" [Surah Ghafir: 29].

Submission to desires: Submission to desires, whether it is the inclination towards personal desires, blind fanaticism towards an idea, a tribe or a race, is one of the obstacles that restrict the movement of thought in the process of seeking truth. Islam came to warn against it and to forbid it. Allah, the Most High, says: "O David! We have indeed made thee a successor on earth: judge between the people in truth, and follow not [your own] desires, for they will lead thee astray from the path of Allah. (Quran, Surah Sad: 26)

And He, glorified be He, says: "Have you seen the one who makes his own desire his god? Would you then be responsible for him? (Quran, Surah Al-Jathiyah: 23)

These two verses, among others, warn against following personal desires and emotions, as they are idols that hold people back and prevent them from reaching certainty.

3. Blind imitation: Submission to the customs and traditions of one's ancestors is one of the obstacles that restrict human freedom, seize one's thinking, and make one's mind obedient to them without any attempt to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong³⁸. Islam condemns this harmful approach. Allah, the Most High, says: "And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'Rather we will follow what we found our fathers doing. Even though their fathers did not understand, nor were they guided. (Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah: 170)

This verse is mentioned in the context of criticising the phenomenon of blind imitation³⁹ (imitating one's parents, ancestors and celebrities), where people take their words, opinions and established matters as unquestionable, not open to refutation, investigation or discussion.

The Qur'an came to refute them. How beautifully did al-A'qqad express it: "Islam does not accept that a Muslim negates his intellect in order to blindly follow the customs of his fathers and ancestors. Islam does not accept that a Muslim should negate his intellect out of fear of the tyranny of the powerful... Indeed, Islam refuses to allow a person to excuse himself on the basis of his fathers and ancestors, just as it refuses to allow the sins and transgressions of those fathers and ancestors to be attributed to him. Those who listen to the discourse must free themselves from the shackles of blind obedience, for they have inherited from their fathers and ancestors a creed that lacks reason"⁴⁰.

4. Blindly following the majority: It is ingrained in the minds of some or many people that the majority cannot be wrong. They take its words and opinions without question and consider them to be absolute truth. This idea had complete control over minds before Islam. When the Qur'an was revealed, it warned against the fallacy of this belief. A numerical majority or minority is not a measure of certainty, nor is it a criterion of right or wrong. The Qur'an provides numerous references to debunk this notion. For example:

Allah says: "And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will lead you astray from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but supposition, and they are not but falsifiers" (Qur'an, Surah Al-An'am: 116).

And He says: "And most of the people, though you strive, are not believers" (Qur'an, Surah Yusuf: 103).

If we examine the use of the term "majority" and its derivatives in the Qur'an, we find that it is often used in a negative context. Therefore, the majority is neither a criterion of correctness nor a criterion of error.

Thus, we see how Islamic legislation came about to warn the mind and free it from these shackles and idols that hinder free thinking. This is to pave the way for sound logical reasoning to reach the right belief.

In order for a person to reach complete conviction, which is the basis for entering Islam, and in order to protect the freedom of thought and belief from all the above-mentioned obstacles and restraints, Islam allows the liberation of the mind through the functions of reflection, contemplation, and pondering over the cosmic, natural, and Qur'anic signs. Therefore, a handicapped mind that refuses to think is not honoured, and Allah has likened those who refuse to think to cattle in their misguidance, saying, "They are like cattle, but they go astray in [their] way" (Quran, Surah Al-A'raf: 179).

The Noble Qur'an instructs the mind to think in a wide range of worldly matters. This can be summarised in three main areas:

1. The first area: is to direct the mind to reflect on the signs of Allah in the universe and within

oneself. This serves two purposes⁴¹:

First, to strengthen faith and increase it through the knowledge of the Truth of Allah, as Allah, the Exalted, says: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, are Signs for those of understanding who remember Allah while standing or sitting or lying on their sides, and meditate on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say: 'Our Lord, Thou didst not create this in vain; Thou art exalted [above such a thing]; then save us from the punishment of the Fire'" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran: 190). The second is to learn the secrets of the universe and discover the laws that govern it, in order to use and benefit from them for the development of the earth. Allah has made this universe subservient to mankind, both intellectually and materially, and invites them to use their minds to make use of what He has given them. Allah says: "It is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down rain from the sky, producing some fruits for your sustenance, and made the ships to sail through the sea by His command, and made the rivers subservient to you. And He made subservient to you the sun and the moon, and made subservient to you the night and the day. And He gave you of all that ye asked of Him. And if ye were to count the favours of Allah, ye could not count them. Verily, mankind [in general] is most unjust and ungrateful" (Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim: 32-34).

2. The second area is to direct the mind to contemplate the texts of the Shariah (Islamic law) and to understand their meanings and to comprehend the rulings, secrets and objectives contained therein. Then to make diligent efforts to derive the legal rulings from these texts⁴². Among the verses that call for reflection on the wisdom of legislation and its objectives is Allah's saying: "And there is for you in legal retribution [the saving of] life, O ye men of understanding, that ye may become righteous" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah: 179).

3. The third area is to direct the mind to reflect on the divine laws that govern human societies, including the rise and fall, success and failure, happiness and misery throughout history. These are the immutable laws of Allah. Allah says: "And the Sunnah (way) of Allah that has gone before. And you will never find any change in the way of Allah" (Quran, Surah Al-Ahzab: 62). The purpose of the Noble Qur'an in directing the minds to this broad scope is for consideration and benefit, and subsequently to establish a righteous human society, and to achieve the function of building and administration⁴³.

The Qur'an directs the human mind to contemplate and reflect on the history of past nations. One of the verses that encourages this reflection is the following verse: "Have they not travelled through the earth and seen what was the end of those before them?" (Quran, Surah Ar-Rum: 9).

Through these three areas, the Qur'an guides and directs the human mind, enabling it to understand its worldly and hereafter interests and protecting it from misguidance and deviation. This shows the importance of intellect, freedom of thought and contemplation in Islam. The attainment of sound

faith is achieved through the activation of the intellectual functions, free from the constraints and obstacles mentioned above.

Thus we see how freedom of belief encourages free thinking, since faith is based on conviction and choice, rather than blind imitation or coercion. True faith is achieved only through free and rational thought⁴⁴. This enhances and elevates the position of the intellect as a tool of thought.

Islam establishes faith on the basis of conviction and choice because it knows with certainty that the path of guidance is clear. Those who are not touched by Allah's creation and His signs in the universe, who do not contemplate His actions and do not benefit from His words in the Qur'an, will not be convinced by coercion. Their rejection is not due to lack of conviction or inability to distinguish between right and wrong, but rather because they have recognised the truth and denied it. This understanding can be derived from the justification that Allah gives after forbidding coercion⁴⁵, where He says: "There is no coercion in religion. The right way has become clear from the wrong" (Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah: 256).

Third - Recognition of the Sunnah of Diversity and Difference: Allah created the universe and established it with laws and principles that do not change. One of these principles is the Sunnah of diversity, which is a continuous cosmic principle in the realms of creation, from the inanimate world to the human species. The concept of unity and oneness is specific to Allah alone, while everything else is based on multiplicity, diversity and difference.

Humanity, which Allah created from a single soul, has diversified into different peoples, tribes, nations, races and languages. Allah says: "O mankind! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them dispersed many men and women" (Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 1).

Islam sees this diversity, multiplicity and difference as a sign from Allah. Allah says: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variety of your languages and your colours. In these are signs for those who have knowledge" (Quran, Surah Ar-Rum: 22).

Islam also recognises that differences among human beings are a constant and permanent sunnah (cosmic law) of Allah. It is Allah's cosmic will, not His religious legislation, that people differ in colour, race, language and creed. Allah says: "And if your Lord had wished, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ, except those to whom your Lord has granted mercy. And that is why He created them" (Quran, Surah Hud: 118-119).

In his interpretation of these verses, Muhammad Rashid Rida says: "And if your Lord had wished, O Messenger, who is eager for the faith of your people and saddened by their turning away from your call and from following your guidance, He could have made mankind a community based on instinct, without their having any opinion or choice.

Then they would have been like that type of creation called man, or the species of man, and in their

social life they would have been like bees or ants, and in their spiritual life they would have been like angels... (But they would not cease to differ) in everything, even in religion"⁴⁶.

This verse explicitly affirms the inevitability of differences among human beings. The foundation, rule, Sunnah, and law - as we have discussed - is multiplicity, diversity, and difference in all areas of divine creation. Except for the divine essence itself, everything else is based on diversity and difference, which is Allah's immutable and unchangeable Sunnah⁴⁷. Allah says: "And you will never find any change in the Sunnah of Allah" (Quran, Surah Fatir: 43).

Anyone who contemplates the creation of human beings observes this clear difference between them. Each person has his or her own personality, his or her own way of thinking, and unique characteristics that distinguish him or her from others. Just as each individual has his or her own facial features, tone of voice and fingerprint, so each individual has his or her own way of thinking and perspective on things, people and situations. Therefore, any call that seeks to eliminate this diversity, or that advocates a singular identity based on language, colour, ethnicity or gender, or that seeks to impose a particular belief, ideology or culture on people, is a rejection of its advocates. This is because it is tantamount to obstructing the will of Allah and negating one of His cosmic laws, as mentioned in the previous verse⁴⁸.

Islam, in its legislation of freedom of belief, affirms this cosmic law, which is the law of diversity. It does so by establishing faith on the basis of conviction and choice, far from any coercion, as we have already discussed, whatever its colour or form. The divine discourse is clear in this regard, where Allah warns His Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, against attempts to impose faith on people and force them to accept His call. Allah says: "And if your Lord had wished, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ, except those to whom your Lord has given grace. And that is why He created them" (Quran, Surah Hud: 118-119). The author of *At-Tahrir wa-Tanwir* says: "The meaning is: If Allah had willed, He could have made people's perceptions uniformly inclined towards good, so that they would be equal in accepting guidance and having correct vision. The word 'if' implies that the condition is not fulfilled, since its answer depends on the fulfilment of its condition. Therefore, the meaning is: "But He did not will it. His wisdom required that the creation of men's minds should be influenced and affected by the variations in their perception of Truth, so that they would not unanimously agree on faith. A soul cannot believe unless its intellect is sufficiently developed to enable it to have a correct vision and a good understanding of the call to goodness and the recognition of truth. The phrase, "Do you then compel people?" etc., branches out from what precedes it, because when it is established that Allah's Will does not depend on people unanimously accepting faith in Allah, it follows that any attempt to compel people to believe is refuted"⁴⁹.

Indeed, any attempt to coerce people and force them into a particular creed or form is contrary to

the principle of diversity and variation, which is a universal law. It also contradicts the methodology of Islam in calling people to its creed, which is based on "freedom" rather than "determinism" and on "conviction" rather than "coercion". Coercion or compulsion only produces hypocrisy, not true faith, as we have already discussed.

Therefore, the role of the Prophet (peace be upon him) - as of all the prophets before him - was to convey the message, to remind and to bring good news. We read this in many Qur'anic verses, such as:

"All that the messenger is responsible for is to convey the message clearly." (Quran, Surah Al-Ankabut: 18)

"Remind them, then, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not a controller over them. (Quran, Surah Al-Ghashiyah: 21-22)

"So if they turn away, [O Muhammad], We have not sent you over them as a guardian; on you is only the duty of warning. (Quran, Surah Ash-Shura: 48)

Thus we see how religious freedom is established to affirm and emphasise the principle of diversity. This is what makes freedom of belief one of the manifestations that express the tolerance of Islam and reflect its recognition of the legitimacy of others and their right to exist, think, believe and practice.

Fourth, the demonstration of Islam's tolerance: Islam emerged in an environment dominated by the logic of exclusion and nullification, where each party nullified the other and did not recognise its existence or legitimacy. The Jews turned their religion into an "ethnic-racial" faith when they monopolised the divine and made it exclusive to the Prophet of Israel. On the basis of this monopoly, they considered themselves "the chosen people of God", while other nations were considered inferior to the Jews. As a result, the legislation concerning others was burdened and charged with this spirit and racial tendency.

The same is true of Christianity, which has answered denial with denial, annulment with annulment, and exclusion with exclusion, as recorded in historical texts. As soon as Christianity emerged from Roman pagan persecution and the Romans converted to Christianity⁵⁰, it unleashed its persecution on others, targeting pagans and launching campaigns of exclusion against them in the name of the Church. The Qur'an also records this rejection of others, whether in terms of recognising them or acknowledging their rights, as well as coexistence and tolerance. Allah says: "The Jews say that the Christians have nothing [true] to stand on, and the Christians say that the Jews have nothing to stand on" [Qur'an 2:113]. In another verse we read about this exclusion: "This is because they say, 'Never will the Fire touch us except for a few days.'" [Quran 3:75].

With the advent of Islam, this exclusionary and nullifying view of others changed, as joining this new religion became associated with conviction and choice, free from compulsion and coercion. It

implicitly recognised the existence of others and their right to believe and practice rituals. This can be understood from Allah's statement in the Qur'an, as transmitted by His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "To you, your religion, and to me, mine" [Qur'an 109:6].

This recognition of the existence of other faiths and religions was not merely theoretical or a slogan to be raised. It was practically embodied in what is known in Islamic thought as the "Charter of Medina" or the "Constitution of Medina"⁵¹. Clause 29 of this document states that "the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have their religion", in accordance with Allah's statement: "Yours is your religion and mine is mine" [Quran 109:6].

The "constitution" of the new state, in its clauses 30 to 39, explicitly and clearly declares that each party to the treaty has its own religion and belief, which it is free to practise under the new system of this young state⁵².

It is not a religious or ethnic state, nor a tribal state, but a "state of ideas that opens its doors to different religions, free from the tendencies of aggression".

Thus we see that Islamic legislation on freedom of belief serves as a guarantee and reassurance for others, dispelling their fears. The recognition of others is not only a theoretical recognition, but a practical one, manifested in the recognition of their right to religious freedom, which is considered the mother of all freedoms.

The Charter of Medina was drawn up to lay the foundations for a state based on an open and humanitarian foundation, following the approach of Islam in its call to faith, which is based on free will in the choice of ideas and beliefs. It does not confiscate ideas, cultures or other beliefs, but fights aggression from those ideas and beliefs alone. Allah says: "Allah only forbids you from those who fight you on the grounds of religion and drive you out of your homes and assist in your expulsion - [forbids you] from making allies of them. Those who ally with them are the ones who do wrong" [Quran 60:9].

When aggression ceases, the sanctity of humanity is preserved⁵³. "Allah does not forbid you that those who do not fight you on the grounds of religion and do not drive you out of your homes should be just towards you and act justly towards you. For Allah loves those who do right. [Surah Al-Mumtahanah: 8]

The essence of the matter is that freedom of belief in Islam is a practical recognition of the other and an explicit expression of Islam's tolerance towards them. A person cannot be considered human, let alone honoured, unless he is given complete freedom to use his intellect and judgement in what he perceives to be right or wrong. No one, no matter who they are, has the right to interfere in this except within the framework of advice, guidance and counsel⁵⁴. This is what Islam has established and emphasised, regardless of political circumstances, realistic constraints or human inclinations. Religious freedom is not merely a virtue granted by some and denied by others, but

rather a principle of Islam, affirmed by its Qur'anic texts and embodied in the Prophetic tradition, which reflects the extent of Islamic tolerance towards others.

Conclusion:

In this study, in which we have discussed the objectives of freedom of belief in Islam, it is important for us to summarise the main findings in the following points:

1/ Distinguishing between the levels of freedom of belief in Islam and differentiating between its dimensions ensures a clear understanding and accurate legal assessment of each aspect.

2/ The Islamic faith is based on the principles of conviction and choice, making them the basis for entering Islam. It expresses the honourable view of human beings and respect for their will, thoughts and feelings.

3/ The study has proved that thinking is a religious obligation, as true and valid faith in the Islamic perspective is the result of independent rational contemplation.

4/ Islam rejects compulsion and coercion in matters of faith, as it is contrary to the nature of diversity and difference, and it affirms and promotes universal norms.

5/ The study concludes that Islamic legislation on freedom of belief implicitly recognises and acknowledges other faiths and religions, reflecting the extent of Islamic tolerance towards others.

Footnotes:

¹ - Ibn Manzur: ("The Arabic Language"), Dar Sader, Beirut, 1st edition, vol. 4, p. 181.

² - Ibrahim Mustafa: ("The Intermediate Dictionary"), Academy of the Arabic Language, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 2nd ed: 1972, Vol. 1, p. 165.

³ - Al-Tahanawi: ("Explanation of the Terminology of the Arts"), ed. Ali Dahrug, Lebanon Publishers, Beirut, 1st ed: 1996, p. 291-292.

⁴ - See detailed definitions in: Sultan Al-Omairi: ("Spaces of Freedom"), Arab Centre for Human Studies, 2013, p. 31.

⁵ - Fathi Al-Darini: ("Characteristics of Islamic Legislation"), Al-Risalah Foundation, Beirut, 2nd edition: 2013, p. 404.

⁶ - Taha Abdul Rahman: ("The Question of Action"), Arab Cultural Centre, Morocco, 1st edition: 2012, p. 153.

⁷ - Ibn Manzur: "Lisan al-Arab", vol. 3, p. 296.

⁸ - Al-Fayyumi: ("The Illuminating Lamp"), ed. Abdul Azim al-Shanawi, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 2nd edition, p. 165.

⁹ - See: Mustafa Saeed al-Khan ("Islamic Creed"), Dar al-Kalam al-Tayyib, Beirut, 1st ed: 1996, p. 17.

¹⁰ - Abdul Hakim Al-Ayli: ("Public Freedoms"), previous reference, p. 383.

¹¹ - Muhammad Abu Zahra: "Tanzim al-Islam lil-Mujtama'" ("The Organisation of Islam for Society"), Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, p. 182.

¹² - Sultan Al-Omairi: ("Spaces of Freedom"), Arab Centre for Human Studies, 2013, p. 242.

¹³ - The purpose is not to discuss the effects of apostasy, but to emphasise the distinction between the freedom to enter Islam and the freedom to leave it.

¹⁴ - The assertion that Islam considers apostasy to be a serious crime punishable by death does not necessarily imply that apostates should be persecuted or spied upon. The punishment in Islam is specific to those who openly declare apostasy in Muslim society because of its serious religious and social implications.

¹⁵ - Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("Reviews in Islamic Thought"), Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunisia, 1st edition: 2008, p. 190.

¹⁶ - Al-Shatibi: ("The Harmonisation"), ed. Mohammed Marrabi, Al-Risalah Publishers, Beirut, 1st edition: 2011, vol. 1, p. 334.

¹⁷ - Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("The Jurisprudence of Islamic Warning"), Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 2nd edition: 2006, p. 88.18. Referring to Surah Sad (38:77-78), which indicates the severity of the punishment (curse) as a sign of the gravity of the offence (denying the value of humanity).

¹⁸ - Referring to Surah Sad (38:77-78), the severity of the punishment (curse) indicates the gravity of the offence (denying the value of humanity).

- ¹⁹- Same reference, p. 88, quoting Marcel Boisard: ("The Humanity of Islam"), p. 97.
- ²⁰- See the explanation of this meaning in: Tafsir al-Qurtubi: 15/204.
- ²¹- Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("The Jurisprudence of Islamic Warning"), pp. 131-132.
- ²²- See: Al-Alousi: ("The Spirit of Meanings in the Interpretation of the Noble Quran"), Beirut, vol. 14, p. 117. Ibn Ashur: "Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir", Tunisian Publishing House, Tunis, vol. 15, p. 164.
- ²³- Al-Tabari: ("The Comprehensive Exposition for the Interpretation of the Quran"), ed. Abdullah al-Turki, Dar Hijr, Cairo, 1st edition: 2000, vol. 4, p. 546.
- ²⁴- Al-Qurtubi: ("The Comprehensive Compilation of Quranic Rulings"), vol. 3, p. 238.
- ²⁵- Mohammed Amara: ("Islam and Religious Freedom"), al-Shorouk Library, Cairo, 1st edition: 2004, p. 24.
- ²⁶- Mohammed Rashid Rida: ("Interpretation of the Beacon"), Beirut, 2nd ed: 1947, vol. 3, p. 37.
- ²⁷- Ibn Ashur: "Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir", vol. 3, p. 25.
- ²⁸- Mohammed Rashid Rida: "Tafsir al-Manar", vol. 3, p. 39.
- ²⁹- A Christian sect of the Byzantine rite called the Church of the Romans. They supported the decision of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. against the heresy of "Monophysitism", which claimed a single nature for Christ. Opponents derogatorily called them "Melkites" because they sided with "Mardikianus", who supported the Council. See: Ibn Hazm: "Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa wa al-Nihal", ed. Mohammed Ibrahim Nasr, Dar al-Jeel, Beirut, p. 110. 30. Yusuf al-Qaradawi: "Non-Muslims in the Islamic Society", Library Wahbah, Cairo, 3rd ed: 1992, p. 18-19.
- ³⁰- Yusuf al-Qaradawi: "Non-Muslims in Islamic Society", Library Wahbah, Cairo, 3rd ed: 1992, p. 18-19.
- ³¹- Numerous Qur'anic verses address the issue of "choice" in freedom of belief, including Surah Yunus (10:99) and Surah Al-Ghashiyah (88:25-26). See detailed discussion in Mohammed al-Nasiri: ("Freedom of belief in the Quran"), Majallah al-Tafaqum, Oman, Vol. 17, Issue 66, 2019, pp. 228-230.
- ³²- Tafsir Ibn Kathir: 6/135.
- ³³- Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("Reviews in Islamic Thought"), p. 190.
- ³⁴- Islam came to remove the restrictions that burden humanity. Allah says: "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins them what is right and forbids them what is wrong, and makes lawful for them what is good and forbids them what is evil, and relieves them of their burdens and of the fetters which were upon them". [Surah Al-A'raf: 157]. See: Taha Jabir al-Alwani: ("No compulsion in religion"), Dar al-Shorouk al-Dawli, Cairo, 2nd edition: 2006, p. 116.
- ³⁵- Sayyid Qutb: ("In the Shadow of the Koran"), Dar al-Shorouk, Beirut, 12th ed: 1986, Vol. 1, p. 291.
- ³⁶- Mohammed al-Ghazali: ("Human Rights between the Teachings of Islam and the Declaration of the United Nations"), Dar Nahdat Misr, Cairo, 4th edition: 2005, p. 78.
- ³⁷- See: Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("Reviews in Islamic Thought"), p. 196.
- ³⁸- Same reference, p. 28.
- ³⁹- The scholars disagreed on the faith of the imitator and divided into three opinions: some considered it a valid faith, others considered it a faith of disobedience if capable of independent thought, while some did not consider it a faith at all. Abu Abdullah al-Sanusi was of the latter opinion. See: Al-Sanusi: "Al-Sanusiyya al-Kubra", Dar al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1982, p. 26. The disagreement among scholars about the effect of imitation on one's faith, if it is indicative of anything, points to the illusion of imitation and its fragility in matters of faith, since it is a blameworthy matter.
- ⁴⁰- Al-Uqad: ("Thinking is an Islamic duty"), Nahdat Misr, Cairo, p. 19.
- ⁴¹- Saleh Naaman: ("Research Methodology in the Science of Belief in Light of Modern Scientific Development"), Ph.D. Thesis (unpublished), Prince Abdul Qadir University for Islamic Sciences, Constantine, 2003, p. 109.
- ⁴²- Tawfiq Aziz al-Din: ("Guide to the Souls between the Noble Quran and Modern Science"), Dar al-Salam, Cairo, 3rd edition: 2004, p. 29.
- ⁴³- See: Mohammed Qutb: ("Method of Islamic Education"), Dar al-Shorouk, Beirut, 10th ed: 1987, Vol. 1, p. 113.
- ⁴⁴- See: Abdul Majeed al-Najjar: ("Reviews in Islamic Thought"), p. 197.
- ⁴⁵- Mohammed Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi: "Tafsir al-Sha'rawi", Akhbar al-Youm, 1991, vol. 3, p. 114.
- ⁴⁶- Tafsir al-Manar: 12/193.
- ⁴⁷- Mohammed Amara: ("Fundamentalism between the West and Islam"), Dar al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2nd edition: 2006, p. 75.
- ⁴⁸- Yusuf al-Qaradawi: ("Islamic Awakening between Legitimate Differences and Condemned Division"), Dar al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2nd edition: 2001, p. 45.
- ⁴⁹- Ibn Ashur: "Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir", vol. 12, p. 293.
- ⁵⁰- Similar to what the Patriarch of the Egyptian Church "Theophilus" did to the pagans, burning their temples and books and persecuting their philosophers. Not to mention the bloody conflicts between Christian sects, especially between the "Jacobites" and the "Melkites".
- ⁵¹- See: Mohammed Amara: ("Freedom of Non-Muslim Minorities in the Islamic World"), Majallah Islamiyah al-Ma'rifah, Issue 31-32, Year 8, 1424-2003, p. 126.

⁵²- Akm Dhiya al-Umari, in his book "Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah al-Sahihah", examined the methods of transmission of the document and concluded that, taken together, they attain the status of authentic hadith. See the full text of the document: Ibn Hisham: "Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah", ed. Mustafa al-Saqqā, Ibrahim al-Abiari, Abdel-Hafez Shalabi, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, vol. 1, pp. 446-448. Mohammed Hamidullah: ("Collection of Political Documents"), Dar al-Nafa'is, Beirut, 5th ed.:1985, p. 41-47.

⁵³- Ahmed Qaid al-Shaibi: ("The Document of Medina"), Publications of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Qatar, 2006, p. 82.

⁵⁴- Same reference, p. 81.

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Foundation, Beirut, 1st edition: 1984.

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