

## Critique of Western Liberalism in Reading Spirituality in Secularism with Emphasis on the Works of Allamah Tabataba'i

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### Abstract

Today, the approach of separating spirituality from religion in modern spirituality, in competition with spirituality derived from established religions, is prevalent. One of the key foundations of this approach is the liberalism towards Western readings. The present study aims to critique the basis of liberalism in separating spirituality from religion in order to clarify the fundamental flaws of this approach and the inadequacy of its results in providing for human spiritual life. In this regard, the works of Allamah Tabataba'i, as one of the greatest interpreters of Islamic teachings, have been extensively utilized. To this aim, data collection was done through library research and information processing using descriptive-analytical method with a critical approach. According to the findings, liberalism towards Western readings, rooted in individualistic humanism, is ineffective in the foundation of human spiritual life regarding the three major criticisms. Firstly, absolute freedom, which is the basis and component of the approach of separating spirituality from religion, is unattainable and non-existent. Then, freedom is not the ultimate goal but a tool to achieve genuine and true spirituality, and finally, rights-based approaches, considered as consequences of liberalism, are in contrast and on the other hand, duty-based approaches are the crucial basis for achieving true spirituality and without it, it is unimaginable.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Foundations, Liberalism, Separation of Spirituality from Religion, Humanism, Allamah Tabataba'i.

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### Introduction

The emergence of abundant spiritual schools in recent centuries indicates the contemporary human inclination towards spirituality and mysticism. Although in modern spiritual schools, anything that provides an opportunity to escape from materialistic frameworks is considered as spirituality.

In the modern and post-modern era, with the slogan "God is dead," many currents and modern spiritual schools emerged entirely based on humanism and expanded. Since the noble spirit and infinite nature of human seeking a worthy answer, and every form of spiritual representation cannot quench his thirst, distinguishing between right and wrong based on the foundations of each school is essential.

Especially in modern West, with the slogan "I am spiritual, but not religious," secular spirituality in competition with established religion has shown its effectiveness in various aspects of collective and individual life to ridicule religion and its applications. In this regard, liberalism, which is one of the vital foundations of secular spiritualities, has manifested individualism and duty-based approaches in Islamic societies and will leave its damages and consequences behind.

Therefore, the present study aims to critically examine and critique the liberalism towards Western readings as one of the key cognitive foundations of secular spiritualities in a descriptive-analytical method using library data to demonstrate their weaknesses and inadequacies in addressing human spiritual nature. In this regard, we have extensively utilized the works of Allamah Tabataba'i, who has greatly elucidated the philosophical and cognitive foundations of Islamic spirituality.

### 1. Research Background

According to the findings of researchers, several studies have been conducted in this area, including "Critique of the Theory of Differentiation between Religion and Spirituality" by Abdullah Mohammadi (Theological Teaching, no. 3); "Critical Review of Recent Developments in Religion and Spirituality" by Behzad Hamidieh (Qabasat, no. 56); as well as the books "New Spiritualism" by Ahmad Shakernjad and "Spirituality and Religion" by Sayyid Ahmad Ghaffari Qarah Bagh.

Although these works have generally delved into the cognitive foundations of secular spiritualities, none of them have explicitly and in detail addressed the explanation of the cognitive foundation of liberalism and its critique with an emphasis on Islamic teachings, especially the works of Allamah Tabataba'i.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Spirituality

In linguistics, spirituality, derived from the root word "Ma'nawī," is attributed to "Ma'nā" in contrast to literal and in the sense of real, intrinsic, internal, and spiritual (Dehkhoda, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 4/2190).

In the conceptual framework of the term spirituality, sometimes the essence of spirituality is meant, and sometimes its cultural and historical aspects are considered; in the latter case, the concept of spirituality becomes a doubtful or fluid matter that varies in each historical period based on different factors from the periods before and after it (Shakernjad, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 64-65).

The term "Spirituality" had a meaning only in the Christian context until the late nineteenth century (Hilenz, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 126). The versatility of the term "Spirituality" for conceptual refinement and application in various spaces in the nineteenth century made it popular among people (Carrette and King, 2005: 30) and gradually transformed it into a term that could be used in any field and with any meaning (Nelson, 2009: 8). This term became prevalent in the West from the mid-twentieth century with a new meaning that supports movements or schools that deviate from established religion (Wiseman, 2006: 37-38). In this article, the new meaning of this term as a postmodern concept is considered, based on which one can define a new spirituality as a life based on non-theistic supernaturalism (Talebi Darabi, (n.d.): 2).

While spirituality in Islamic sources is defined as the utilization of thought, inclination, intention, and behavior with enthusiastic attention to ethical action, accompanied by a focus on the relationship with the Lord of the universe (Ghaffari Qarah Bagh, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 98).

### 2.2. Religion

Religion is a divine and revealed reality presented to humanity in a systematic divine form by the Almighty God through divine prophets (Tabataba'i, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 1/424; *ibid*, 1999 AD/1378 SH (B): 21). This set is endowed with creedal, monotheistic, prophetic, and guardianship foundations and is not devoid of moral sources and an invitation to refine the self, as well as being inclusive of rules and regulations dedicated to life.

## 3. An Analytical Report on Freedom in Western Readings

### 3.1. Conceptualization of Freedom

The term "Freedom" in language means choice, liberty, deliverance, contrary to servitude, captivity, and coercion (Dehkhoda, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 2/87).

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In terminology, like many terms in the humanities, the term "Freedom" is one of the easy and difficult words that, despite its simplicity, it is difficult to reach a comprehensive definition that includes all desired purposes. Additionally, freedom is divided into categories such as personal and social freedom, spiritual and ethical freedom, constitutional and legislative freedom, thought and expression, which also complicates its clarification. Since freedom is a description of human beings, the root of the differences and multiplicity of definitions must be sought in different perspectives on human beings and the cognitive foundations of each approach.

Some have defined freedom as a state in which a person's "Will" does not encounter obstacles to achieve their goal (Ashoori, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 20; Hobbes, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 160). Tim Gray in his book expresses seven interpretations of freedom, all of which fall under a concept of freedom with a triadic formula by McCollum as "X is free from y to do z." (Gray, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 27-28)

In the Western concept, freedom is often defined based on human desires and their appetitive and angry faculties, and the restrictive legal framework is also derived from these desires and demands; although rationality has also been used in some areas, such as the separation of powers, to prevent dictatorship. In the culture of modern liberalism, this term is usually defined as "Freedom from" something rather than "Freedom for" something. The humanistic context of the modern and postmodern era often defines freedom in a negative way, in a situation where a person is not bound by constraints and not under compulsion (Arblaster, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 83).

To further clarify the concept of freedom, we delve into the most important components of Western readings on freedom.

#### **3.2. The Most Important Components of Freedom in Western Readings**

- 1) Freedom without God and Religion: In the West, the root of freedom is not God-given, and freedom is not perceived as a divine gift beyond a truth called religion and God.
- 2) Attention solely to external factors of freedom: In Western readings on freedom, there is no attention to internal obstacles to achieving a higher stage of freedom beyond the freedom from animal instincts and desires; rather, the emphasis is solely on removing external obstacles.
- 3) Restricting the pursuit of freedom to social factors and material interests: In the West, what limits human freedom is human-made written law, which only concerns social issues and material interests and does not interfere with personal matters. Therefore, the common slogan in Western societies is that a person is free as long as their freedom does not harm the

material interests of others (Hosseini Khamenei, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 19-32).

4) Western freedom pursuit opposes human duty: Western freedom pursuit aims to negate all obligations and prohibitions, thus not accepting human duty to achieve higher levels of perfection. What follows describes the characteristics of freedom from the perspective of modern humanists and how it relates to the formation of the separation of spirituality from religion.

5) Individualism in Humanism as the Origin of the Separationists' Pursuit of Spirituality from Religion

The celebration of the human individual in humanism led to the emergence of extreme individualism from the ruins of ancient societies, which honored humans by granting them freedom. Unlike the middle ages, where humans were forced to accept the authority of fundamental institutions like the church, the pursuit of freedom in humanism thrived in societies struggling to achieve autonomy and break free from traditional hierarchical structures (Abbagnano, 1998: 70).

Due to the freedom derived from individualism, each individual's life belongs to themselves, and all individuals have the fundamental right to live, think, and believe according to their own inclinations, with the caveat that the equal rights of others are not infringed upon (Elahi Tabar, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 127).

The extreme exaltation of the human individual and placing them as the measure of understanding seeks to recognize various forms of freedom in different dimensions (Arblaster, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 63).

In this view, the human is an independent designer of their life and the foundation of moral and legal matters (Weber, 1982: 40), and God has no role as a ruler over human life and destiny.

One of the highly influential philosophies in the emergence of freedom pursuit in modern spirituality is the school of existentialism, which liberates humans from all constraints and denies the common human nature (Authors' Collection, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 88).

They do not consider human choices as rational and only introduce the criterion of choice based on what is pleasing to the individual (Malekian, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 87).

Therefore, an extraordinary respect for the human individual, considering individual rights and freedoms as sacred, follows (Malekian, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 20-22).

One of the separationists of spirituality from religion in the context of humanistic individualism and freedom states:

"Individuality emerges only when you are prepared to sacrifice your entire life for the sake of freedom, when freedom becomes your ultimate

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value in life and nothing else matters. At that moment, you reach immortality, and individuality finds meaning." (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 79) Accordingly, the prominent aspect of spiritualism in the modern era is illuminated. In this view, humans are the ones who are the selectors of their own circumstances and nature.

#### **4. The Relationship of Freedom to Western Readings on the Separation of Spirituality from Religion**

Individualism resulting from humanism led to the expansion and growth of the pursuit of freedom in various fields and ultimately created a form of religious tolerance. Therefore, religion and faith became entirely personal matters, which, according to the belief in individualism and the pursuit of freedom resulting from it, are in the hands of the individual, and no one can deprive a person of various social and human rights because of their religion.

Voltaire, among the staunch defenders of political freedom, considers the breaking of the church's power, replacing enlightenment with superstition and Christian fanaticism, as well as individualism and freedom instead of church authority, as prerequisites for freedom, tolerance, and better systems (Hamidiyeh, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 222-223).

On the other hand, with the expansion and proliferation of existentialist views advocating the precedence of existence over essence, Sartre stated that humans are completely free, and there is no predestination (Sartre, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 40).

So, modern spiritualists also presented their teachings in this direction; for example, self-identity based on free choice is one of the points that Paulo Coelho emphasizes greatly, considering humans free in choosing their desires (Coelho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (A): 17).

He believes that death (even in the form of suicide) is absolute freedom and eternal oblivion (Coelho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 25).

Falun Dafa, another branch of contemporary spiritualism, argues that personal freedoms are formed within the framework of tolerance. Therefore, Hong Ji<sup>1</sup> believes that divine religions only lead to the limitation and restriction of personal freedoms and sees the Islamic practice of prayer, including bowing and prostration, as causing the loss of human reason and inability to focus (Ranjbaran, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 32).

Osho, by emphasizing freedom, encourages his audience to abandon the fixed rules of holy books, portraying them as lifeless and soulless matters that hinder human freedom (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 75).

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1. The spiritual leader of Falun Dafa

He transforms the Ten Commandments of the holy book into ten acts of disobedience and places freedom as the first principle and commandment, stating that these ten non-commandments shape my attitude towards reality and human freedom from any form of mental slavery (Osho, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 177).

Krishna Murti, another contemporary spiritualist, explicitly recommends freedom and liberation from institutionalized and traditional religions and considers spiritual existence as experiencing life directly and without the constraints of conditional forms.

He considers institutionalized and traditional religions as organizations, ceremonies, and biases that the modern human should turn away from (Murti, (n.d.) (B): 113).

This excessive emphasis on freedom, without considering human identity and institutions, and turning away from divine religions, leads to necessities that are mentioned below.

## **5. The Necessities and Consequences of Seeking Freedom in Western Readings on the Separation of Spirituality from Religion**

### **5.1. Relativization of Values**

Self-religion and the pursuit of freedom in the modern era are closely intertwined in a way that the conception of one without the other is not possible. Every individual must have the freedom of will to act according to what they have determined for themselves by the general ethical law. As a result, freedom and choice guide the individual towards self-religion, and their self-religion towards ethical legislation.

Existentialism explicitly emphasizes turning away from religion and reminds individuals adhering to traditional values and religion with terms like "Weak Element" and "Vile." (Sartre, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 40 and 72)

Nietzsche also believes that by emphasizing the death of gods, humans must free themselves from all supernatural forces and rigid traditions to achieve freedom and creativity (Ahmadi and Moradi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 262).

In the secular approach to moral and spiritual values, no authority or reliability is accepted other than human beings themselves. Accordingly, secular spiritualists emphasize different expressions and interpretations on human freedom from all authorities, including the value system of divine religions and institutions.

According to some, human pride lies in their freedom, and humans are the only beings that no authority has issued commands to (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (A): 7-8).

Based on this belief, they frequently attack religious laws and consider purity and transcendence as meaning cleansing oneself from all thoughts,

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including good and evil and even the idea of God (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 9).

Osho explicitly denies adherence to religious values and introduces it as a sign of the lack of spiritual responsibility in humans:

"You must burn that mind that clings to holy books... that mind that always avoids responsibility and seeks dead and soulless rules and becomes addicted to fixed matters and fears freedom and dynamism, burn it... The only thing you need to do is to... embrace a life without rules." (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 75)

In this view, achieving spiritual joy is only possible through freedom and abandoning spiritual values and fixed ethical rules (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 73; Murti, (n.d.): 50). Freedom is summarized as the ability for a person to feel what they desire, regardless of others' opinions (Coelho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (C): 95).

Therefore, the first consequence of boundless pursuit of freedom in secular spiritualities is the relativization of values that a liberated individual creates based on their inner understanding.

#### **5.2. Turning Freedom into an End in Itself**

Among the other necessities of freedom-seeking in the perspective of secular spiritualists is turning it into an end in itself. They desire freedom not to achieve a goal or end, but simply for the sake of freedom itself; Sartre, whose perspective is fundamental for many modern spiritualists, explicitly states that the goal of freedom, in every tangible matter, is nothing but freedom itself, and once humans realize that they are the creators of values despite their fallibility, they can only desire one thing, which is freedom and choice, the foundation of all values (Sartre, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 70).

Osho, while enumerating three types of freedom, considers true freedom as liberation from conditioning and believes that freedom comes in three types:

- 1) Freedom from;
- 2) Freedom for;
- 3) Pure freedom.

According to him, "Freedom from" creates politics, "Freedom for" creates artists, and "Freedom for self-freedom" creates spiritual seekers (Osho, 2003 AD/1382 (A): 1/181).

In his view, humans must distance themselves from anything that limits their freedom, even if that thing is God and His commandments. As he explicitly expresses: "Everything must be sacrificed for freedom, even life... You can even sacrifice God for freedom, but you cannot sacrifice freedom for God." (Osho, 2007 AD/1385 SH: 108)



### **5.3. Destruction of Ethics and the Transformation of Moral Corruption into a Value in the Shadow of Absolute Freedom**

Secular spiritualists, relying on freedom, disobedience, and rebellion, have recommendations and ideas that ultimately lead to human moral corruption.

They consider any limit or boundary as a prison that enslaves humans (Osho, 2007 AD/1385 (B): 89) and believe that saints are the greatest slaves on earth (Osho, 2007 AD/1385 (A): 108) because humans should do whatever they desire without considering the consequences (Osho, 2007 AD/1385 SH (B): 99) and only then can they attain the truth (Osho, 2003 AD/1382 SH (B): 226).

Possessing a conscience is also slavery and contradicts freedom (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 236), and the path to closeness to God and achieving spirituality is freedom from the sense of sin and acceptance of human animal nature. A nature that drives humans towards their desires (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 229) and they declare: "Humans must become animals again." (Osho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 8)

Paulo Coelho, another secular spiritualist, calls on his followers to indulge in and enjoy as much pleasure and sensual desires as possible by denying and rejecting conscience and the sense of sin (Coelho, 2005 AD/1384 SH (B): 167).

He states: "In the Great Mother's ritual, what we call sin, usually meaning deviation from conventional ethical norms, does not exist anymore; sexual relations and human habits are freer because they are part of nature and cannot be considered sinful." (Coelho, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 160)

In many of Coelho's books, promotion of nudity and not feeling ashamed of it in the presence of others is seen as a form of freedom. In his view, when the soul feels freedom, the body must also be liberated in order to attain spirituality (ibid.).

It is worth mentioning that the lack of responsibility in the view of secular spiritualists and their emphasis on physical pleasure and freedom from the sense of sin have roots in their perspective on reincarnation. According to their new interpretation of reincarnation, which is based on a materialist view of human and existence, the individual is not responsible for the events of their past life; because the sum of actions, circumstances, and processes of existence creates the current personality of the individual.

This set of factors also justifies the current individual's mistakes and inadequacies; therefore, individual sins should not be counted. Furthermore, in this view of reincarnation, the ultimate goal of the individual is not to escape the cycle of death and rebirth; rather, their goal

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is the endless continuation of this cycle and deriving pleasure from the infinite set of existence (Campbell, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 204).

### **5.4. Rights-oriented Approach**

Freedom resulting from humanism does not entail responsibility, duty-orientedness, and consideration of public interests. In this perspective, the focus is on the rights of each individual. The individual stands for their rights; not for fulfilling duties. If there is any duty, it is to secure their freedom rights. From the perspective of spiritual separatists from religion, true spirituality is only achieved through freedom and the realization of human inner desires. Therefore, talk of duty, responsibility, and limitations and constraints on freedom will not be important.

## **6. Critique of Western Reading of Freedom with Emphasis on the Works of Allamah Tabataba'i**

### **6.1. The Concept of Freedom in Allamah Tabatabai's View**

Freedom, in the view of Allamah Tabatabai, is a natural matter. He considers freedom derived from human will as a fundamental and innate principle in human nature (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 4/183).

According to Allamah, questioning the limitations of freedom is a valid question, not freedom itself as a self-evident matter. He believes that humans, by their creation, are beings with consciousness and will, and only they have the choice in their actions, and leaving them is not bound by any restriction or caused by any reason other than their own choice, and this is the essence of human innate freedom (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 14/579).

According to Allamah Tabatabai's perspective, the prerequisite for the existence of evolutionary freedom is that legislative freedom belongs to humans. In this sense, in social life, no one has the right to dominate over another and impose their will against their inclination. In human relationships, the primary principle is the absence of others' domination over humans.

However, social life requires humans to accompany their will and activities with others and accept laws that restrict their will. Therefore, the same nature and creation that has endowed humans with will and evolutionary freedom also limits human will and actions, restricting the initial freedom (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 2/174).

Allamah Tabataba'i considers human freedom in the context of their equality and believes that humans are equal in humanity, and this equality is the basis of their freedom. This equality in freedom is rooted in the inherent dignity of human nature, and the type of human in their nature, parallel to their evolutionary choice, acquires legislative choice (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 16/28).

## 6.2. Absolute Freedom Does not Exist

Contrary to the perspective of secular spiritualists seeking freedom and liberation from all constraints and limitations, Allamah Tabataba'i believes that absolute freedom does not exist, and humans are always compelled to accept certain constraints.

It was mentioned that in Allamah Tabatabai's view, humans are free based on creation and legislation but do not have absolute free will. In the context of creation, human choice is one of the factors leading to the completion of an action, and other factors are also involved as part of the cause (Tabataba'i, 1981 AD/1360 SH: 2/256).

Humans are not absolutely free in their voluntary actions; rather, human freedom is only in cases where there are causes and reasons within that framework. Therefore, it is not the case that humans can do whatever they will and it will happen (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 10/573).

In social life, humans also do not achieve absolute freedom because social life necessarily requires the alignment of human will with the will of others, and as a result, there are limitations on human freedom (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 4/183).

Therefore, Allamah believes that the freedom existing in society is relative, and there is no absolute freedom in any society (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 10/555-556).

In the realm of legislation, limitations are also imposed on humans. Hence, the type of freedom that Islam has granted to humans, although it is freedom from the constraints and dominance of other humans, should not contradict with servitude and divine sovereignty; as it leads to the downfall and ruin of humans. Therefore, those individuals are freer who have attained a higher acquired dignity in the path of permanence and have reached a much higher level of divine servitude (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 16/98).

Accordingly, Allamah believes that the necessary foundation of an Islamic society is based on human nature and the slogan of following divine rights and will, and its laws should be based on monotheism, resurrection, ethical principles, and the consideration of rational aspects (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 4/171-172).

He believes that such laws give color of faith and spirituality to the fabric of life and make the goal of its followers the satisfaction of God in all actions (Tabataba'i, 1999 AD/1378 SH (A): 32).

Therefore, the first principle in the realm of social freedom is the absence of others' domination over humans, except for divine sovereignty and rule; in the view of Allamah Tabataba'i, although social freedom is sacred, as today's world considers it sacred, what is more valuable than social freedom is spiritual freedom.

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A society that has not reached spiritual freedom will not achieve social freedom either; because spiritual freedom is primarily a spiritual state that, if suppressed, leads to the destruction of human feelings and consciousness, and the consequence of which is the disappearance of humanity in humans (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 4/116-117).

It is worth mentioning that in liberal culture, some have accepted that freedom should be limited, but in terms of the criteria for limiting freedom, they differ from Islam. Their criterion for limitation is the interference among individuals, meaning that as long as a person is free without causing harm to the freedom of others; although they are not seeking to control human selfishness and with the persistence of human selfishness, interference will also remain.

#### **6.3. The Difference in Limitations of Freedom in Two Religious and Secular Perspectives**

Freedom in both religious and secular perspectives is never meant to be absolute liberation and satisfaction of desires; rather, in both perspectives, emphasis is placed on prioritizing certain talents and some powers are considered to be restricted; however, the difference lies solely in the type and extent of these restrictions, which are related to the definition of humans in both perspectives. In the secular perspective, emphasis is placed on animalistic powers, and other innate human talents remain dormant; but in the divine perspective, the emphasis is on innate talents and their blossoming, and animalistic desires are only allowed to the extent that they do not harm the superior human talents (Tabataba'i, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 133).

In our religious culture, the soul and the spiritual dimension of the human being are his/her original reality and attributed to God, and on this basis, the more a human being approaches God, the closer he/she is to his/her true self.

Achieving that primary principle and "True Self" is only possible in the shadow of obedience to religious decrees and in a word, servitude to God, and on this basis, every religious constraint and obligation is considered as dedication and obligation in relation to whims and carnal desires, while in relation to true perfection of the human being, it is liberation from the chains of internal and external slavery and attainment of spiritual freedom and true spirituality.

Therefore, the obligation of humans towards religious commandments is not contrary to true freedom, but is the only way to achieve it, and what is preached as freedom in secular spirituality is nothing but boundless freedom and the captivity of human reason and nature and self-alienation.

Therefore, God, who is the creator of humans and has knowledge of their perfection and happiness, places them under internal and external guidance through wisdom, justice, and human welfare.

He has the right to put humans on the path of humanity and perfection in the form of creative, innate, and legislative guidance, and God is not considered "Other," and everything He does is based on justice and wisdom. Human freedom with God and divine decree and power is meaningful and rational (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 10/730-734).

#### **6.4. Freedom Is not the Highest Value and Goal**

Freedom, despite its great importance, is not the highest value in human life, and there are goals and values superior to it; because in the Islamic and monotheistic worldview, freedom is the means for humans to reach true perfection, and if considered as a goal, it is an intermediate goal; because the ultimate goal is the divine vicegerency of humans, which is attainable through "True and Spiritual Freedom."

Humans are God-oriented creatures, and the concept of freedom for them is only meaningful in the light of the concept of meaningful freedom and liberty, which is achieved through exclusive and comprehensive servitude of humans to God and absolute adherence to the Sharia and breaking the most invisible ties of dependence on the non-existent. Allamah believes in this regard:

"Islam has given freedom to humans that cannot be compared to the freedom of civilization in the present age... One can understand the extent of its meaning by delving into Islamic tradition and practical conduct, and then comparing that conduct with the tyranny and oppression that the present civilization has established among society. Only then can one truly understand the real and dignified freedom that Islam has brought, or the unbridled freedom that the current civilization has brought." (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 1/183-184)

What is noteworthy in secular spiritualities is the reduction of existence and human freedom to materialistic aspects and carnal desires. This matter distracts humans from their true and spiritual freedom and instead of attaining true spirituality, leads humans into the valley of self-alienation. Humans in the modern age do not accept any external authority and external authority and with the negation of the transcendent world, they try to interpret spirituality in a subjective and present way. Spirituality based on unrestricted and conditional freedom and human desires and internal understanding that results in the deprivation of true freedom and spirituality from humans.

Some secular spiritualists' emphasis on sexual freedom as a means to attain spirituality leads to self-alienation, wandering, lack of criteria for

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distinguishing right from wrong, and the absence of a measure for determining validity and invalidity.

This perception of human freedom in new secular spirituality results in a fluid and superficial spirituality derived from individuals' internal and sometimes contradictory thoughts. The outcome of such a view on freedom and spirituality will be nothing but the enslavement of humans. This is because they consider freedom as the goal, not the means, and they have not given intrinsic value to freedom itself, nor have they considered it as a secondary or derivative value; whereas freedom should be for the growth and flourishing of all human potentials, existential perfection, and spiritual essence of humanity.

The approach of separating spirituality from religion has advanced individual freedom to the extent of securing selfish interests, hedonism, and materialism, which are in conflict with human dignity and spiritual perfection.

One of the reasons for the failure of secular spirituality in organizing human spiritual life lies in this neglect of "Freedom" throughout "Liberty." Secular spiritualists have focused on external and social freedoms with their own foundations, meanings, and interpretations.

Therefore, in the eyes of those who separate spirituality from religion, there is no interaction between inner and outer freedom, individual freedom, ethical-spiritual freedom, and social-political-economic freedom. Social freedoms have advanced without spiritual freedoms, leading to a deep void and deficiency. Such a corrupt view also entails the negation of divine guidance, acceptance of self-reasoning and rationalism with all its errors and pitfalls, deserialization of any form of religious belief, religious pluralism, and the collapse of norms and moral and human values.

#### **6.5. Rights and Duties Are Reciprocal**

Contrary to the freedom-seeking ideology of secular spiritualists, which leads to rights-based thinking and evasion of responsibilities in modern human society, in the Islamic perspective, rights and duties are two sides of the same coin and are reciprocal.

Duty-oriented explains human responsibility towards God, oneself, and others. In this view, fundamentally, "Rights and Duties" have a relationship of interdependence, and one cannot prove a right without there being a corresponding duty. Thus, humans are primarily responsible to God and must adhere to divine duties to tread the path of perfection and happiness; Islam considers this type of duty-oriented as the basis of human upbringing (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 3/63).

In this perspective, human freedom does not stem from rights-based thinking and unlimited liberation from one's desires; rather, humans, in

accordance with the call of the elevated nature, seek divine obligations as their rights that their Creator has established for their guidance and upbringing (Tabataba'i, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 7/245).

Therefore, rights and duties are two sides of the same coin that lead to human excellence and ensure spiritual life.

### **Conclusion**

According to what has been mentioned in this writing, freedom-seeking in Western readings is one of the crucial foundations of separating spirituality from religion in the modern age, which has consequences such as relativizing values, turning freedom into an end in itself, the destruction of ethics, and transforming moral corruption into a value and rights-based thinking. Some of the potential consequences of this approach include nothing but self-alienation and human wandering, not guiding them towards spirituality, but leading them towards anti-spirituality and ethics. Spirituality arising from this foundation will be confused, relative, and without criteria or measure for evaluation.

In contrast, in revealed teachings, especially in Islam, freedom, although valued and respected, is never considered as a final and self-sufficient goal. According to Allamah Tabataba'i, based on Islamic teachings, freedom is respected to the extent that it serves as a means for human servitude and liberation from their carnal desires, becoming a tool for attaining spiritual life. Accordingly, divine duties are not only a barrier to human freedom but also the crucial factor in achieving spiritual life, and submission to divine revelation brings the highest level of freedom, which is spiritual freedom, to humans.

In religious culture, the true essence of human beings is attributed to God, and closeness to God and the "True Self of Humans" is only possible through obedience to the commandments of the Sharia and servitude to God, and on this basis, every religious restriction and duty is a restraint and obligation in relation to worldly desires and carnal inclinations, while in relation to the true perfection of humans, it is liberation from internal and external bondage and attainment of spiritual freedom and true spirituality. Therefore, human religiosity is not contradictory to true freedom but is the only way to reach it, and what is preached in secular spirituality as freedom is nothing but unlimited freedom and liberation from desires, leading to the enslavement of human reason and nature and self-alienation.

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