

On Freedom

A Spiritual Perspective

Dennis K. Gregory

This short narrative on the nature of freedom comes as an excerpt from the play **The PIT: The Road to Salvation**.

Scene description:

One of the guests participating in this very unusual discourse on GOD is the brilliant Lebanese philosopher Kahlil Gibran. He stands, as it is his turn to speak. He is asked specific questions on topics that are important to the rest of the guests. Segments from his great work, *The Prophet*, are used to answer. His answers are in the form of poetry; which seem to many, very difficult to comprehend; specifically as they relate to GOD.

The question at hand concerns the nature of freedom. It is followed by my interpretation of his answer in an attempt to make his words meaningful to the audience. Do enjoy.

Question: What of Freedom?

Answer: **At the city gate and by your fireside I have seen you prostrate yourself and worship your own freedom as slaves humble themselves before a tyrant, and praise him; though he slays them.**

Ay, in the grove of the temple and in the shadow of the citadel, I have seen the freest among you wear their freedom as a yoke and a handcuff;

And my heart bled within me; for you can only be free when even the desire of seeking freedom becomes a harness to you, and when you cease to speak of freedom as a goal and a fulfillment.

In truth, that which you call freedom is the strongest of these chains, *though its links glitter in the sun and dazzle the eyes!!*

And what is it but fragments of your own self you would discard that you may become free?

And if it is a despot you would dethrone, see first that his throne erected within you is destroyed.

Verily, all things move within your being in constant half embrace, the desired and the dreaded, the repugnant and the cherished, the pursued and that which you would escape. [Sits]

Dennis: [quickly jumps out of his seat as the first to respond] Kahlil, you have outdone yourself! Your words have truly electrified me. If anyone were to touch me right now, they would surely get shocked! I cannot thank you enough.

Now, how shall we interpret this so that there is a common understanding among the group here? If I am right, and I believe that I am, this will prove most difficult, as it will be like telling someone that that which they believe to be most precious, is in reality, a negative and constraining harness.

Let us now reflect on this.

ON FREEDOM

It may be helpful to begin this analysis of Gibran's words on freedom by agreeing that this is a short life, nay, a *very* short life: for each of us. We are all adults here. Just think back on specific things that have happened in the past that were major events in your lives. Now think of how quickly the time has passed from then to now. And mothers, think of how quickly your children grew up right before your eyes. It seems that one day they were young darlings playing without a single care, and then, you find yourself crying, as they go off to college and are on their own! Men, remember our days of glory past when we played sports every day without a single ache or pain? Seems like yesterday, doesn't it? Time moves

quickly indeed. [he sees several guests nod in agreement] One of the major consequences of this rapid time movement is that we surely do not have forever to obtain and mature our faith and adjust our lives and behaviors to do things each day that will be pleasing to GOD. Please keep these things in mind as we proceed with the analysis.

From the view of western civilization, we place 'freedom' on the highest pedestal humanly possible. That is proven by our willingness to send thousands upon thousands of truly brave and honorable men and women, over and over again, to their deaths, in the pursuit and protection of 'freedom'. Furthermore, we strongly believe that it is not only the highest good for us, but also the highest good for all mankind! How wise are we! And how unfair GOD must be to have people born into the lands of tyrants; like Iraq's Saddam Hussein; or Jews to be born in Hitler's Germany, or people born as peasants under Duvalier's Haiti, or those born under Uganda's Idi Amin, etc., etc. And let us not forget those millions of Blacks born under Apartheid!

And on the flip side, what an incredible and unique blessing it is for GOD to have us born here in America, where 'freedom' reigns king! Surely, following this logic, we should truly pity those born elsewhere. No doubt, GOD must be singularly on the side of the Americans and the British! Nothing else could possibly make sense.

For, where is GOD's abundant love, where is His infinite mercy, where is His perfect justice, to have someone born under a brutal dictatorship, where 'freedom' is all but a want and a desire of the many who may have heard of it? Where was His immeasurable kindness towards those who risked their lives at Tiananmen Square in the name of 'freedom'? And what of His infallible wisdom, for those born in Darfur, where 'freedom' has zero meaning and value?

Consider this from Gandhi:

"I hold it a blasphemy to say that the Creator resides in a temple from which a particular class of His devotees sharing the faith in it; are excluded".

For those of us who believe in GOD, and that is practically everyone here, who would **dare** to stand up here to say that GOD made a mistake, or was **not** kind and loving when He brought forth into this life so many of His children in lands under ruthless governments that totally lacked 'freedom'. Governments that lived in laps of luxury while keeping a blind eye to the massive poverty and misery that engulf their own people.

Or even worse, the opposite: that GOD places a **greater value on us**, born here in America, and therefore was *exceedingly* and *especially* kind to **us**; *giving us huge advantages over all His other children.* Who would be so impiously foolish and immensely stupid to stand up here and utter such unforgiveable madness? [now looking very angry; literally screams at everyone in **The PIT** as he pounds both his hands on the table]

STAND I SAY!!!!

[clearly seeing the tears and fire in his eyes; the entire group is stunned into silence]

Socrates: [himself still stunned, speaks rather softly to Dennis from his chair] It is clear that you have our full attention. Please go on.

[things settle down again after a minute; as he regains his composure]

Dennis: [now calm again] Forgive me all, but what we do in this country in the name of 'freedom' disturbs me very, very deeply. And the **audacity** to bring the name of our infinitely just, forever loving and eternally kind GOD into it, as if He somehow **supports** what we do, and all the incredibly massive human suffering that ensues, makes it something I simply cannot stand still about. Once again, I beg your forgiveness. [the group, understanding his passion, appears ready to forgive him]

Thank you all..... Now, where does this leave our analysis of Gibran's words on freedom?

I feel safe in concluding that most, if not all here think Gibran's words on freedom are, let us say, "ether-based", meaning that even if they *are* true, they are nothing we can 'grab onto' that makes them solid and real to our minds. It is almost like he is talking in a dream that is far removed from reality.

Leonardo da Vinci: [interrupts from his seat] Dennis, I have concluded the same thing. For, I cannot place a firm grip on his words. Somehow, deep inside me, I believe them to have a basis in truth, but I am at a total loss to explain how.

Albert Einstein: [speaks from his seat] I am in agreement with Leonardo. I would classify his words on freedom as "unanchorable", as I see no cement in the thinking.

Dennis: [now smiling; continues] I understand each of your thoughts and comments; for who in their right mind would say that 'freedom' is not a good thing? Or, that is a far better way for *all* people to live, than to live under a brutal dictatorship, where one cannot even worship their GOD in peace as they see fit? It is practically common sense to think this. To this *level* of thinking; I am in agreement. However, I still maintain that Gibran is absolutely correct when he claims that **freedom itself is the strongest of chains on us; "though the links of this chain glitter in the sun and dazzle the eyes"**.

Let us begin reconciling these two disparate perspectives with this very common visualization:

Take a deep breath, relax and please pay attention.

We are seated in a plane just taking off. The day is cloudy and raining; and the hour is noon. After listening to the weather report, we also know that where we are travelling to, is also cloudy and raining. We buckle our seat belts preparing for the ride. As the plane speeds down the runway and takes off, we can see ourselves climbing through the heart of the clouds for a few minutes, and can

even see the raindrops splash and splatter outside the windows. We go through some light turbulence as we continue to ascend. All of a sudden, we leave the clouds, which are now below us, and like magic, incredibly peaceful beauty and pure sunshine is everywhere; as far as the eyes can see! The clouds and rain quickly become a distant memory.

Gibran is speaking to us from that peaceful sunshine in the sky while we are listening below the clouds, on the ground. We therefore cannot understand him unless we brace ourselves for a little turbulence and climb above the clouds; but what a payoff!! For once we are there, the sunshine we will witness is beautiful beyond words, our spirits get rejuvenated and we are filled, at least for a short while, with peace and contentment. This has actually happened to most of us many, many times. Is everyone still with me? [most everyone nods in agreement] Excellent! Let us continue on our journey.

Captain: [announces to the passengers] We are now at thirty six thousand feet; our cruising altitude. I will turn off the fasten-your-seat- belts sign in a minute, as I anticipate a real smooth ride ahead. Relax yourselves and enjoy the ride!

Dennis: [continues] We are all now riding, actually basking, in the beautiful sunshine. Our seat belts are off as we all want to get up and move around. We wish to take full advantage of this respite from the clouds and rains as we ride, for all intents and purposes, in the heavens.

Now that the stage is set, and the orchestra engaged; it is now time for us to dance..... and dance we shall! Ladies, consider yourselves Kitty Phelta, a famously majestic and wonderful African ballerina, or Irina Chistyakova that remarkable Russian ballerina from Leningrad. Men, consider yourselves male danseurs in the likes of a Fred Astaire or the marvelous tap dancer Gregory Hines. Here is the point: think of yourself as nothing but an expression of the pure beauty and peaceful splendor that surrounds you. Your athleticism and your talents are your special gift whose sole purpose is to enable you to 'show your infinite love of your environment'. The peaceful beauty that is now your surroundings is completely and wholly absorbed within you, and you simply **must**

let it out: for nothing else matters. And you let it out by your graceful dancing. How completely wonderful it feels to rise on your toes and actually **be** Kitty Phelta or Irina Chistyakova, and for you men, to actually be able to express your love of our beautiful scene by moving with the uniquely smooth grace of Fred Astaire or moving your feet with the perfect harmonious taps of Gregory Hines. Oh,..... to be able to express the complete happiness that is now in your souls in such a beautiful way is, for you: *life itself*.

Finally, as we continue to bask and dance during our ride, our minds have no cares, no worries, no ambitions, and no hidden desires. All our minds want to do is become an expression of the beautiful scene that is now deep inside us.

[looking at everyone with the hope that they actually ‘see and feel their new existence’] Close your eyes. Are you there yet?

[pleasantly surprised, most nod yes with their eyes closed; affirming the scene]

Awesome!

We are now ready to return to the words of Gibran for understanding.

“Ay, in the grove of the temple and in the shadow of the citadel, I have seen the freest among you wear your freedom as a yoke and a handcuff”

“In truth, that which you call freedom, is the strongest of these chains, though its links glitter in the sun and dazzle the eyes”.

And what is it but fragments of your own self you would discard that you may become free.

Take a deep breath. Remember, all you want to do is express your love of the environment.

Unbeknown to us, there is a stowaway aboard who cares not of our beautiful scene. His job is to present this idea of ‘freedom’ to us. Now, this ‘freedom’ is being presented to us, in this brilliantly spiritual and unbelievably beautiful scene, as the most cherished thing we can imagine. However, you deeply dislike the

interruption that this idea of ‘freedom’ brings: for it disturbs and upsets the delicate yet strong magnificence and balance that is our scene. For here, we have no worries, here we have no cares, here we have no ambitions, here we have no desires, and here, peace and contentment is everywhere. Your response to the presenter is:

We just want to dance: that is all we want to do.

You wish to tell the presenter that any attempted addition to this scene is negative, and truly makes you sad, “while your heart bleeds”.

[knowing that he must soon end this exalting trip] Okay all. You can open your eyes now. We are now beginning to remember that we are on our way to a specific destination.

Captain: [announces to the passengers] We are ready to begin our descent. Please return to your seats and fasten your seat belts as I anticipate some rough turbulence ahead.

Dennis: [As he hoped, while everyone understands that we must now return to our normal lives, absolutely no one is *thrilled* about our leaving the ‘heavens’] Your minds can now return to all your normal daily thoughts. All your worries, all your desires, all your triumphs, all your failures, all your very important appointments, all your fears, and all your hopes, are all now returning to you. As we continue to descend and go through some rough turbulence, a safe landing is now utmost on your minds.

Yet through all this, a bright spot remains. Firmly imbedded in our hearts, will be a clear remembrance of our ‘dancing experience in the heavens’. It will not interfere with our minds, as returning to our normal ground level activity and thinking proceeds right on schedule. We have safely landed, but somehow, we are not quite the same.

It is now time to recall our talk on how short life is for each of us. As we said, we clearly do not have forever to change our behaviors, so that GOD is pleased with

us each day in all that we do. Now that we have cemented in our hearts how wonderful and beautiful life can be and feel 'in the heavens', there is **no way** that we will want to do things here on the ground that would interfere, or, even worse, **cancel** a return trip there one day. For our hearts; which are indeed far superior to our minds; will not allow us to be so foolish.

Okay. We are almost complete. Also stated, in a back door kind of way, is that GOD, no matter **where** he brings forth His children on this planet, is **still** what we know Him to be: Incredibly Loving, Perfectly Just, Wonderfully Kind, Ultimately Wise and Infinitely Powerful. Let us now mix in our agreed upon understanding of this being a very short life: for each of us.

I would like us to use our imaginations for one more thing, as I attempt to explain Gibran's words on the true nature of freedom from this final perspective. As most of us have been fortunate enough to have taken several plane rides, the first visualization should hopefully have solid meaning to us and, if my prayers are answered, actually make a difference in our understanding of the true nature of 'freedom'; especially as it relates to our salvation.

This next visualization will prove more difficult, as it will be for me also, as I speak on it. This is because we need to remove ourselves from our culture and abundant lifestyles; in other words, all that we know. As stated a few moments ago, it is **NOT** true that GOD favors some of His children over others. Oh no,... heaven forbid such thinking: for He loves **ALL** His children equally! [now looking apologetic at everyone: Don't worry, I promise not to lose my composure this time; at least I hope I won't!] Armed with the beauty of this simplistic truth, we can now proceed on to our next visualization:

We are born Black in South Africa, under the brutal system of Apartheid. Cold-hearted White people originally from the natural resource barren lands of Europe, are in charge of and literally own everything that is of any material value whatsoever. Any resistance to their greed is met with deadly force. Our land is literally sitting on mounds of gold, diamonds and platinum that they have claimed ownership to. We work the mines for very little, live in poverty, while they reap

enormous profits the world around. They live like protected Kings and Queens on our land: right before our very eyes. Furthermore, with the exception of those of us needed for the menial labor required to support their lavish life styles, they would kill the rest of us, without hesitation, and claim all the land as rightfully their own.

We are now young adults, with strength and energy.

But these Whites, even with the Devil himself as their support, **still cannot stop us from dancing!!** ; precisely the way we ourselves just ‘danced in the heavens’ a short time ago. To actually experience the beauty of this in action, close your eyes once more.

This time, we will remain on the ground, as I introduce you to the ‘Mokhukhu’, a dance group from the early Zion Christian Church in South Africa. To replace the peace and beauty of the environment of our recent ride, we just need to remember that GOD still loves **ALL** His children equally: just as He loves us here in America. His Kindness, Wisdom, Power and Mercy remain just as potent. Their lives too, are indeed very short; as is ours.

We’re almost there. To understand their lives under apartheid, at least to the level we are capable of, we really wish to see ‘ge ba hlomoga pelo gore ba be le Modimo’, which translates into ‘when their hearts grieve for oneness with GOD’.

For it is indeed very difficult for us to imagine seeming them happy, living beneath Apartheid, under any circumstance, at least happy the way we understand it, with our lives of abundance here in America. We are now ready to see them dance:..... as we ourselves did a short time ago.

[looks at everyone and asks] Are you ready? [most respond yes, with their eyes closed again] Awesome!

What we witness, is not the grief we would expect from their ‘awful circumstance’; but **sheer joy** as they place their hands on each others’ strong

shoulders and with handsome smiling faces, powerful leg kicks and smooth rhythm loudly sing:

Ke lella moya,

I yearn to save the soul

Ga ke llele marapo

I don't yearn to save the bones

Ga ke llele nama

I don't yearn to save the flesh

Ke llela moya wa me

I yearn to save my soul

Ga ke llele taemane

I don't desire diamonds

Ga ke llele gauta

I don't desire gold

Ke llela moya

I yearn to save the soul

You can now open your eyes again.

HOW WONDERFUL IS GOD!.....*Even under Apartheid!*

Finally, we can now understand, and even *feel*, what Gibran means when he speaks of even the *desire* of freedom being but a great harness to us.

Freedom itself has a direction and objective that points wholly to our very short lives, when what we should be focused on is our eternal souls, that will live forever, by the Grace of GOD.

For 'freedom itself', and all its glitz and glamour, will not help us dance, and is therefore *not* on the road to **salvation**. [sits back down with tears reappearing in his eyes]

Albert Einstein: [stands to speak] “Can anyone imagine Moses, Jesus or Gandhi, armed with the money-bags of Carnegie?” Such a site is unimaginable! **Carnegie had abundant freedom.** [Sits]

WHAT SAY YOU???