

Analysis of the Obstacles to Political Freedom Based on Quranic Teachings with an Emphasis on Verses 63-73 of Surah Taha

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Abstract

This research aims to explain and analyze the obstacles to political freedom based on the teachings of the Holy Quran. The main issue of the article is that in the Quranic system, political freedom is not understood merely as liberation from external constraints; rather, it acquires meaning in deep connection with monotheism (*tawhīd*), servitude to God (*ʿubūdiyya*), and the existential orientation of the human being. Therefore, the research seeks to clarify what factors hinder the realization of political freedom from the Quran's perspective and how these obstacles prevent human beings from attaining true freedom. The central question of this research is: what are the obstacles to political freedom in the Quran? The article is founded on the premise that if political freedom in Quranic thought has a specific meaning, levels, and ultimate goal, then its obstacles must also be identified and analyzed at various levels. Therefore, the main objective of the research is to extract and classify the internal and external obstacles to political freedom and to explain their relationship to the concept of divine lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and the rejection of domination by anyone other than God. The research method in this article is descriptive-analytical with an intra-religious approach. The data and evidence of the research have been collected and analyzed based on the verses of the Holy Quran, a conceptual reading of Quranic teachings, and an analysis of the relationship between fundamental concepts such as freedom, *ṭāghūt* (false deities or tyrannical forces), arrogance (*istikbār*), servitude to God, and divine lordship. In this method, the author, relying on the religious text and its semantic contents, analyzes the conceptual structure of political freedom and extracts its obstacles from within the epistemological system of the Quran. The findings of the article indicate that freedom in the Quran has three levels or three ultimate goals: initial freedom, intermediate freedom, and ultimate freedom. These stages demonstrate that freedom in the Quranic perspective is not a single-layered, merely political matter, but rather a gradual and transcendent process that begins with initial forms of liberation and leads to complete, divine freedom. Within

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this framework, the obstacles to political freedom can be identified in two main categories: internal obstacles and external obstacles. Among the internal obstacles are following false assumptions, instinctual tendencies, and carnal desires, which prevent a person from recognizing the truth and making free choices. At the external level, factors such as *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical or false authorities), arrogance, opposition to reason, avoidance of certainty, pseudo-consciousness, and incomplete or false understandings of the criteria of freedom have been identified as obstacles to the realization of political freedom. The article shows that these obstacles not only undermine a person's intellectual and political independence but also keep them trapped in cycles of domination and dependency. The final conclusion of the research is that accepting the lordship of anyone other than God is the most fundamental obstacle to true and political freedom in the Quran. In other words, whenever a person or a society departs from the sphere of monotheism (tawhid) and divine servitude and accepts the domination of *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical forces), arrogance, or carnal desires, the possibility of realizing genuine political freedom is also weakened. Therefore, from the Quran's perspective, political freedom is not defined by the negation of all constraints, but rather by liberation from non-divine domination and conscious commitment to the truth of monotheism. By highlighting this point, the article demonstrates that political freedom in Quranic teachings is not merely a legal or social matter, but an epistemic, moral, and existential reality whose realization depends on removing internal and external obstacles and moving toward divine lordship.

Keywords

Political Freedom, Holy Quran, Obstacles to Freedom, *Ṭāghūt* (Tyrannical Forces), *Istikbār* (Arrogance), Divine *Rubūbiyya* (Lordship), *ʿUbūdiyya* (Servitude to God), Freedom in Islamic Thought.

1. Introduction

Quranic teachings consider the ultimate goal of human creation to be a monotheistic life based on consciousness, freedom, and rationality; undoubtedly, political freedom is an indispensable requirement of a monotheistic life. The Quran is the charter of monotheistic life, and the purpose of its revelation is to provide the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral foundations compatible with the existential (*takwīnī*) creation of the human being. Rationality, consciousness, freedom (liberation from slavery and servitude to anyone other than God), opposition to *tāghūt* (tyrannical forces), truth-orientation, and justice-centeredness are among the anthropological foundations of Quran-based political science and are also components of a monotheistic life. As such, the necessity of a monotheistic life and its requirements are among the reasons why Quranic revelation is concerned with political sciences. Understanding the truth of political freedom, determining its conceptual scope, and identifying its components and objectives are among the important subjects of political science. The influence of the prevailing concept of political freedom on the destiny of contemporary humanity, its increasing role in shaping the political geography of the world, legitimizing governance, and its spread across all societies—including Islamic societies—adds to the necessity of analyzing the concept of freedom in the Quran. According to the definition provided by liberal schools of thought, "freedom is a territory in which an individual or a group of individuals can, or should be able to, do what they want and be as they wish, without interference from others" (Berlin, 1989, p. 236). This definition is formulated based on the epistemological and anthropological foundations of liberalism. The mission of international institutions such as the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as legal instruments, is to impose the prevailing liberal concept of freedom upon all countries of the world, including Islamic countries. Motahhari, offering a different definition of freedom, writes regarding humanity's need for freedom: Securing social freedom—i.e., humanity's liberation from any form of slavery and servitude to anyone other than God—is among the undeniable goals of the divine prophets (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 23, p. 438). He emphasizes that "human beings must have freedom in society; others should not be obstacles to their growth and development, should not imprison them, should not exploit or enslave them, and should not harness their intellectual and physical powers for their own interests" (ibid., p. 437). Motahhari considers spiritual freedom to be the factor that enables the flourishing of humanity and a prerequisite for social freedom,

and he regards the neglect of spiritual freedom as the greatest loss of the present age (ibid., p. 461). The acknowledgment among contemporary Muslim religious scholars of the importance and necessity of analyzing the concept of freedom has provided the impetus for conducting research in this field. In bibliographic surveys conducted on the subject of freedom, numerous books, theses, and articles have been introduced (Lakzaei, 2000; Aslani & Askari, 2009). The topic of freedom is also addressed, to a greater or lesser extent, in the sources of political science, legal studies, and Quranic exegesis (tafsir). However, only a small portion is dedicated to Quran-based research. Among examples of Quranic research are *Al-Hurriyya fī al-Qurʿān* (Freedom in the Quran) by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *An Introduction to Freedom in the Quran* by Abdolali Bazargan, *Freedom in the Quran* by Seyyed Ali Ayazi, *Political Freedom in the Quran* by Mansour Mirahmadi, and *The Quran and Political Freedom* by Seyyed Ebrahim Sajjadi.

2. Conceptual Analysis

2.1. Freedom

Freedom is used to mean choice, the power to choose, liberation, release, and magnanimity—the opposite of servitude, captivity, and coercion. Maurice Cranston defines freedom as: being free from the captivity of others, being released, unrestricted, having found liberation from constraints or obligations, unobstructed, and unbound in action (Cranston, 1999, p. 44). Some believe that the meaning of freedom will forever remain beyond conceptual grasp (Jean Wahl, 1993, p. 93). "The meaning of freedom, like happiness, goodness, nature, and truth, is highly flexible and adaptable to any interpretation" (Berlin, 1989, p. 243). Isaiah Berlin reports over two hundred definitions of freedom (ibid., p. 236). Abraham Lincoln believed that the world has never had a good definition of freedom, and that we do not intend the same meaning when using the same word (Cranston, 1999, p. 45). In the last two centuries, freedom in its modern sense has been used mostly in connection with political, social, and economic freedoms and as the foundation of democracy, defined within the framework of liberties such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, thought, and the press, and freedom of occupation and political and economic endeavors (Haeri, 2004, pp. 9-10). Allamah Tabataba'i considers existential freedom to be among self-evident concepts (Tabataba'i, 2008, vols. 3 & 4, p. 183) and regards social freedom as a necessary implication of existential freedom—a rationally acceptable response to the human nature (fitrah) of "natural exploitation" (*istikhdām bi-l-ṭabʿ*), not an answer to the

whatness and whys of freedom (ibid., p. 316). Social freedom is among the most important pillars of the mission of the prophets; however, this social freedom is unattainable without spiritual freedom (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 23, pp. 440-441). The greatest loss of the advancing world is the neglect of spiritual freedom (ibid., p. 461). Taqwa (God-consciousness/piety) is among the most frequently used concepts in Quranic ethics—it secures spiritual freedom and rescues the human being from servitude to caprice and carnal desires (Motahhari, 1999, vol. 16, p. 508).

2.2. Political Freedom

Political freedom is a type of social freedom and one of the most important topics in political philosophy; it is a modern concept and a specific perspective on the relationship between the individual and the state. In some definitions, political freedom is a realm in which an individual or a group of individuals can, or should be able to, do what they want and be as they wish, without interference from others (Berlin, 1989, p. 236); it is being protected from the interference of others within an area with variable but identifiable boundaries (ibid., p. 244); not being subject to the arbitrary and endless demands of the state, employer, relatives, others, or any authority; the existence of a social order in which governmental and non-governmental powers are confined within the limits of the law (Tinder, 1995, p. 108); in carrying out lawful desires, not being compelled or subject to the variable, uncertain, and arbitrary will of another (Sanaei, 2006, pp. 126, 160); security or the belief in the existence of security (Montesquieu, 1983, p. 336); the possibility of performing actions through which a citizen can make their voice heard by others and have a practical impact on governance (Cohen, 1995, p. 184); the possibility for the people to remove someone they have elected from power if that person abuses power (Montesquieu, 1983, p. 292); the enjoyment of privileges such as the right to vote, the right to candidacy, the right to join political parties, competition of ideas, determining rulers, and participation in political life (Mirahmadi, 2002, p. 84). Political freedom from the perspective of the Quran is defined as: the absence of obstruction by human masters and *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical forces) against political activities, and the possibility of justly enjoying fundamental rights (the right to choose, the right to supervise, the right to expression, and the right to form assemblies), with the aim of accepting divine sovereignty. In this definition, in addition to the two elements of the agent and the obstacle, the characteristics of the agent of freedom, as well as the type of political activities and the fundamental rights of

individuals, are considered as the goals of political freedom (Mirahmadi, 2012, p. 3). Alongside the numerous verses that explicitly affirm social and political freedom, certain limitations and duties for human beings are also mentioned (e.g., Quran 23:115; 75:36; 37:24). Human beings will be held accountable for their actions and words (Quran 17:36). Allamah Tabataba'i, while acknowledging the inevitability of limiting freedom and explaining the reason for such limitations, writes: The same creation that has bestowed free will upon humanity also restricts that initial freedom. Since the very existence of human beings is made possible through social life, the will encourages humans toward freedom from the domination of others; however, social life compels humans to align themselves with the will of others, to accept social laws, and to moderate their own will (Tabataba'i, 2008, vols. 2, p. 183).

3. Types of Freedom

Freedom is divided into two types: negative and positive (Berlin, 1989, p. 22). Negative freedom means the absence of obstacles and liberation from barriers and constraints that have been deliberately and unjustifiably placed in the way of voluntary action. Negative freedom has been interpreted as "freedom from" (Rasekh, 2008, p. 279). Isaiah Berlin states that the degree of freedom depends on the degree to which others do not interfere in an individual's activities; in his view, political freedom acquires meaning when a person can act without the obstruction of others (Ghari Seyyed Fatemi, 2003, pp. 45-46). In positive freedom—the positive concept of freedom—besides the absence of obstacles, the presence of specific elements and conditions is also necessary for the realization of freedom. In positive freedom, or "freedom to," the focus is on the individual's possession of the capacity to perform political action (Rasekh, 2008, p. 280). Berlin writes regarding the origin of positive freedom: "The positive meaning of freedom derives from the individual's desire to be his own master. I wish to be moved by reason, by conscious purposes, which are my own, and not by causes which are external to me" (Berlin, 1989, p. 250).

4. Components of Political Freedom in the Quran

The fundamental components of political freedom are: 1) the agent, 2) the obstacle, and 3) the goal. Political freedom, like freedom itself, is realized based on these three components (McCullum, 1967, p. 76). The agent refers to the individual (the human being), the obstacle refers to the state, and the goal refers to performing an action or enjoying a right. The analysis of the components of freedom has always been among the fundamental concerns of

philosophers, politicians, sociologists, and legal scholars; among these, the obstacles to human activity have provoked the most reflection (Sajjadi, 2003, p. 15). Explaining the Quran's perspective on political freedom requires identifying "the agent, the obstacle, and the goal"—the three components of freedom in the Quran.

4.1. The Agent

The human being is considered the agent of freedom. In Quranic anthropology, the human being is a free-willed, choosing creature (Quran 76:3) and God's vicegerent (khalifah) on earth (Quran 2:30). God has placed the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the inclination toward good and aversion to evil, within human nature (fitrah) (Quran 91:8). In addition to innate knowledge, God has provided the human being with opportunities for knowledge by granting sensory, rational, mystical, and revelatory knowledge (Quran 22:8; 31:20). From the Quran's perspective, the human being possesses noble dignity and high dignity (Quran 17:70), and the universe has been placed at his service (Quran 45:13).

4.2. The Goal

Among the three components, the "goal of freedom" is the most important component, playing an increasing role in defining freedom and determining its boundaries. The goal of freedom will vary according to differences in the anthropological foundations of political schools of thought. Since the Renaissance, in Western societies, liberal anthropological foundations have gradually replaced revelatory and innate (fitrah-based) foundations; the role of revelation and fitrah in social life is denied. In this approach, the reality of the human being is shaped by his material desires (Motahhari, 1982, p. 79). Freedom in these schools of thought is interpreted as the development of instinctual tendencies and the enjoyment of greater pleasure; only when the freedom of the individual conflicts with the rights of others is he compelled to forgo some of his desires! Civil laws are also codified based on this criterion (Jafari, 1991, p. 439). In Quranic anthropology, however, the goal of political freedom and the determination of its boundaries are explained based on the purpose of human creation—a purpose that has been neglected in accepted definitions within modern political literature (Mirahmadi, 2012, p. 3).

4.2.1. The Goals of Political Freedom in the Quran

In the Quran, the goals of political freedom are divided into three types:

ultimate, intermediate, and initial. The ultimate goal of freedom is the acceptance of God's lordship (*rubūbiyya*) (Quran 3:64; 16:36) and attaining servitude to God (*'ubūdiyya*) (Quran 51:56); among its necessary implications is the denial of the lordship of anyone other than God, and the rejection of the rule of *tāghūt* (tyrannical forces) and the arrogant (*mustakbirūn*) (Quran 2:265). Therefore, the first and most fundamental principle of Islamic monotheism (tawhid) begins with the word "no" (lā): "Lā ilāha illā Allāh" (There is no god but God) (Quran 37:35). The essence of this verse is repeated 36 times in the Quran, emphasizing its necessity. According to a prophetic hadith, affirming and adhering to it guarantees salvation. In a narration from Rabi'ah ibn 'Abbad, it is said: I saw the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) with my own eyes in the marketplace of Dhū al-Majāz, proclaiming: "Say 'Lā ilāha illā Allāh' and you will succeed" (Ibn Ḥanbal, 1995, vol. 25, p. 404). The intermediate goal of freedom is the realization of comprehensive justice in social relations, which is the second prerequisite for accepting God's lordship. The initial goal of freedom is the first step toward accepting God's governance and enjoying fundamental rights. Some scholars have divided certain fundamental rights in the political domain into three groups: "the right to choose," "the right to supervise and express opinion," and "the right to form assemblies" (Mirahmadi, 2012, p. 1). Freedom and justice, and the ordering of each in relation to the other, are fundamental concepts that have attracted the attention of many disciplines, especially political philosophy, and have given rise to various schools of thought (Bashiriyyeh, 2011; Arblaster, 1984). The schools of liberalism, with their specific interpretation, prioritize freedom over justice (ibid.), while socialism and Marxism emphasize the priority of justice (Bashiriyyeh, 2017; Wright, 1987). As societies become more complex, discussing justice, freedom, and the relationship between the two within large social structures and frameworks becomes more difficult (Strauss & et al., 1994, pp. 214-262).

The relationship between freedom and justice has also been a focus of attention for Muslim religious scholars. In the thought of Allamah Tabataba'i, justice is the mechanism for the lawful restriction of the "natural exploitation" (*istikhdam bil-tab'*) of human beings (Tabataba'i, 2008, vols. 1 & 2, p. 175) and guarantees the continuity of social life, just as the continuation of human life itself depends on a justice-centered society. In Tabataba'i's definition, justice, from two perspectives, constitutes a pillar of political philosophy. From the first perspective, justice is seen as the foundation and prerequisite for social freedom (Tabataba'i, 2008, vols. 10 & 11, p. 388), because social

freedom is a right that can only be realized within a just framework. From the second perspective, justice is seen as the goal of freedom, because the goal of social freedom is the realization of justice, and the result of social justice is that individuals in society, in a healthy competition, are hopeful of achieving the fruits of their efforts (Tabataba'i, 2008, vol. 2, p. 206).

In Quranic thought, comprehensive social justice is among the requirements for accepting divine lordship. Numerous verses explicitly affirm and emphasize the importance and necessity of justice: "We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice. And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people, and so that God may make evident those who support Him and His messengers unseen. Indeed, God is Powerful and Exalted in Might" (Quran 57:25). In this verse, while expressing the importance of establishing justice, several noteworthy points are mentioned:

1) The pursuit of justice is a universal duty of all human beings, and every single member of society is obligated to strive for the realization, expansion, and dissemination of justice.

2) Universal acquisition of knowledge is a prerequisite for the practice of justice, because justice linguistically means placing everything in its proper place; and this expectation cannot be fulfilled except through the awareness of all members of society. In contrast, liberalism emphasizes law above all else for the implementation of social and political justice.

3) The third point in the verse is that the word "qisṭ" has been used instead of "ʿadl." Justice in Quranic usage is expressed both with the word "ʿadl" (Quran 5:8; 4:58) and with the word *qisṭ* (Quran 5:42), and their derivatives (Quran 5:42). Linguistically, *qisṭ* refers to the outward manifestation and concretization of justice. Furthermore, the word *qisṭ* indicates greater and more precise attention to the implementation of justice and is used when there is no leniency or negligence in granting rights to those entitled to them (Makarem Shirazi, 2007, vol. 10, p. 331). In a narration from the Prophet (peace be upon him) concerning the characteristics of the government of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance), justice is contrasted with oppression (*zulm*), and *qisṭ* with tyranny (*jawr*): "He will fill the earth with justice and *qisṭ* (equity), just as it was filled with oppression and tyranny" (Majlisi, 1982, vol. 3, p. 268). The most important dimensions of justice are its social and political dimensions, and among the key indicators of justice is equality for all in the implementation of the law (Quran 4:58).

4.3. The Obstacle

After the formation of democratic systems, the tyranny and autocracy of rulers remained among the most significant concerns of the founders of liberal schools of thought. Fundamentally, to prevent chaos and disorder, the broader the domain of freedom, the greater the necessity for clarity of the boundaries of freedom and the protection of citizens' rights—a necessity that has always been a focus and emphasis of renowned liberal figures. Hobbes expressed his understanding of freedom as follows: "By freedom I mean that there is no impediment to any action a human being intends to perform according to natural law, except in cases where the good of society and the state requires it" (Mahmoudi, 1999, p. 15). According to Article 4 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, freedom consists of being able to do anything that does not harm another person (Movahed, 2002, p. 187).

5. Obstacles to Political Freedom from a Quranic Perspective

Differences in foundations should be considered among the most important reasons for the distinctions between political systems. The scope, extent, and criteria for limiting freedom should also be sought in the differences of these foundations. In liberal schools of thought, based on certain anthropological and ontological foundations such as humanism, individualism, the primacy of empirical science, rationalism (the sufficiency of reason), and the inherent goodness of human nature, the goal of freedom is also to satisfy instinctual needs. In these schools, freedom consists of the individual (the agent of freedom) being protected from the interference of others within a variable but identifiable boundary (Berlin, 1989, p. 244). Article 29, paragraph 2, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, following the definition of freedom provided by liberal schools, states: "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society." Human rights, as a legal instrument guaranteeing the maximum possible freedom for individuals, seeks to expand the domain of freedoms as much as possible. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasizes that all human beings are born free, and Article 4 states that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited. This content is also explicitly stated in Article 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), Article 5 of the American

Convention on Human Rights (1969), and Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1982). The right to liberty and security of person, and the prohibition of arbitrary arrest, detention, or imprisonment, are also emphasized in Articles 3 and 9 of the Universal Declaration, as well as in Article 9, paragraph 1, and Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 7 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and Article 6 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Smith, 2005, pp. 148-234). In the Quran, based on revelatory anthropological (i.e., related to human nature) foundations, a different definition is presented of the human being, freedom, the goal of freedom, and the obstacles to freedom. The obstacles to political freedom in the Quranic verses are divided into internal and external, and the mission of the divine prophets is to liberate the human being from both internal and external servitude (Quran 3:64). Freedom, then, means liberation from internal and external bondage in the light of servitude to God (Sadr, n.d., p. 23).

5.1. Internal Obstacles

An intense inclination toward material attractions (Quran 100:8) is part of the existential structure of the human being and a requirement of worldly life (Quran 12:53), as well as the most difficult divine test on the path to human salvation (Quran 2:155; 47:31). Excess in the pursuit of pleasure can provide the ground for accepting the domination of the arrogant (Quran 9:24). In Quranic and narrative teachings, it is emphasized that rebellion against the will of autocrats is possible only when a person is free from the servitude of their own carnal desires (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 23, pp. 440-441). The Quran stresses that without liberation from internal bondage and the greater struggle (*jihād akbar*) (Quran 91:1-10), one can never attain social and political freedom. The importance of *taqwā* (God-consciousness/piety) in the Quran is because it frees a person from servitude to caprice and whims; people who are freed from the bondage and servitude of wealth, status, comfort, and the pursuit of ease will not accept social and political captivity either (ibid., Collected Works, vol. 16, p. 508). In the view of Sadr, social freedom is attainable only when a person frees themselves from the bondage of the self (*nafs*) and sensual desires (Sadr, n.d., pp. 23-24). In lexical sources, the word “*hurri*” (free person) is also defined as liberation from vices such as greed, avarice, and covetousness (Rāghib Ṣfahānī, 1991, p. 224). Among other very important internal obstacles to freedom are incorrect cognitions, thoughts, and

false beliefs, which constitute the origin of inclinations, behaviors, and the most beloved existential dimension of a person (Quran 25:43; 45:23). Liberation from this prison is possible only through tireless effort and by relying on reason and revelation (Quran 29:69; 53:39). This effort is the highest manifestation of the greater struggle and the combat against the self (Quran 91:1-10). Any individual, social, political, and moral transformation depends on a change in insights, beliefs, and inclinations. According to Quranic teachings, this change is entrusted to human will (Quran 13:11). Regarding external bondage, the Quran addresses it under concepts such as arrogance, *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical forces), enslavement, political and military domination, cultural domination, obedience to the laws of *ṭāghūt* and arrogant systems, ignorance, opposition to reason, and pseudo-science. In this article, only the external obstacles will be examined.

5.2. External Obstacles

Islam, based on divine theological and revelatory anthropological foundations, identifies the external obstacles to political freedom with terms such as the lordship of anyone other than God (Quran 3:64), arrogance (Quran 23:45-46), and *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical forces) (Quran 16:36). The Quran refers to this servitude and bondage through the words of Pharaoh and his companions: "So they said, 'Shall we believe in two human beings like ourselves while their people are for us in servitude?'" (Quran 23:47). Similarly, in the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh, Moses refers to the enslavement of the Children of Israel and calls it a great and irreparable injustice: "And is this a favor you remind me of—that you have enslaved the Children of Israel?" (Quran 26:22).

5.2.1. Acquiescing to the Lordship of Those Other Than God

From the verses of the Quran, it is understood that the first obstacle to political freedom is accepting the lordship (rububiyyah) of anyone other than God. In a number of the Quran's political teachings, it is emphasized that all human beings must avoid accepting the lordship of anyone other than God, as well as the rule of the arrogant (mustakbirun) and taghut (tyrannical forces) (Quran 3:64). In this verse, the prohibition of non-divine domination appears after a universal call to accept God's lordship, indicating three fundamental points: 1) The importance of political freedom in Islamic thought, because political freedom is mentioned alongside the call to monotheism (tawhid). 2) Political freedom is a prerequisite for monotheism and among its necessary requirements. 3) The acceptance of the lordship of anyone other than God is

prohibited for all human beings, because the object of divine negation and prohibition is mentioned without any restriction. This third point also alludes to the truth that universal struggle against the claimants to lordship is among the prerequisites of tawhid-centeredness and among the requirements for liberation from the lordship of anyone other than God. The Quran's historical accounts of previous nations indicate the reality that the arrogant, the *ṭāghūt*, and the claimants to lordship will never submit to the truth, and that liberation from their domination can only be achieved through struggle, jihad, and sacrifice (Quran 40:35; 27:14; 9:12).

5.2.2. Despotism

According to the verses of the Quran, the ultimate goal of the prophetic mission (*bi'tha*) is the elimination of polytheism (shirk) and the acceptance of the lordship of God. Motahhari considers social freedom to be among the most important goals of the divine messengers and reminds that spiritual freedom and freedom from the lordship of anyone other than God are prerequisites for social freedom. Motahhari regards the neglect of spiritual freedom as the greatest loss of the advancing world (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 23, p. 461). *Tāghūtī* (tyrannical) systems have always regarded this mission of the divine messengers as tantamount to the end of their political life and the death of their authority (Quran 6:112). Therefore, the *ṭāghūt* forces strive to guarantee the survival and continuity of their rule by all possible means, including hard and soft power (military and cultural domination) (Quran 27:45; 43:7). The Quran emphasizes that being rationally acceptable and compatible with human nature (*fitrah*) are characteristics of revelatory teachings; however, those intoxicated by the world (the *mutrafūn*—the affluent and pleasure-seeking elite) and the leaders of disbelief (Quran 56:46; 23:64; 17:16; 9:12) will submit only to military force. Hence, a number of Quranic passages are devoted to recounting the confrontation between the leaders of disbelief and the divine messengers. God, for example, commands the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to fight the leaders of disbelief (Quran 9:12). In this verse and similar verses, when explaining the reason for fighting the disbelievers, the Quran points to factors such as their breaking of covenants ("Indeed, they have no regard for oaths") and their spreading of discord (*fitna*) ("And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for God") (Quran 2:193; 8:29). The mention of these characteristics recalls the truth that in Islamic thought, freedom of belief is an accepted principle, and disbelievers and polytheists are also free to choose their beliefs (Quran 9:6). Moreover, if they refrain from spreading

discord and breaking covenants, they can enjoy peaceful coexistence with Muslims (Quran 60:8). While acknowledging the danger of despotism, the Quran offers three fundamental strategies for liberation from it: 1) The political participation of the general public in the selection of qualified rulers and managers, which is articulated in Islamic political thought as the principle of *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance) (Quran 48:10 and 18). 2) General supervision, through two strategies: "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*) (Quran 3:104 and 114) and "watchfulness" (Quran 3:200). 3) Liberation from the bondage of the self and animalistic desires (Quran 91:1-9). Describing the characteristics of a worthy ruler is another of the Quran's measures. Knowledge, strength, boldness, courage, capacity, patience (Quran 2:247), thoughtfulness, faith, devotion (Quran 5:117), sincerity (*ikhhlās*) (Quran 38:46), moral conduct (Quran 3:159), love for the people (Quran 9:128), consultation with the people and sharing governance with them (Quran 3:159)—these are the signs of a ruler's worthiness in Quranic teachings (Sajjadi, 2003, pp. 33-39).

5.2.3. Opposition to Reason, Ignorance, and Pseudo-Consciousness

Irrationality (opposition to reason), ignorance, and pseudo-consciousness are among the other obstacles to political freedom. From the Quran's perspective, knowledge is the constitutive distinction of freedom and its most fundamental pillar, and knowledge acquires meaning through reasoning and discernment. How can one expect the choice of freedom without thought, discernment, and cognition? In the Quran, religious beliefs, moral behaviors, and political and social orientations are worthy of human dignity only when accompanied by knowledge and freedom (Quran 39:41; 42:6; 88:21-22; 6:66, 107). The Quran considers the primary function of reason to be the discovery of the truth of speech in the light of free choice (Quran 39:17-18). Wisdom, good exhortation (*maw'iza ḥasana*), and arguing in the best manner (*jidāl aḥsan*) are the three methods of invitation (*da'wa*) from the Quran's perspective (Quran 16:125). According to the methodology and epistemology derived from the Quran, these three methods revert to demonstrative reasoning, which is the most valid form of deductive argument, and its conclusions are certain and indisputable (Majlisī, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 126-127; Tabataba'i, 1996, vol. 17, p. 265; Ṭabarsī, 1987, vol. 8, p. 391). Hegel considered freedom to be the essence of spirit (Hegel, 1973, p. 58) and wrote in defining freedom: "Freedom is nothing other than knowing and willing universal and essential matters, such as right and justice, and creating a reality in accordance with them—that is, the country

and the state" (ibid., p. 95). He regarded the entire process of world history as the stages of attaining freedom and considered spirit's consciousness of its own freedom and its awareness of the reality of its freedom as among the reasons for the existence of spirit (ibid., p. 67). Hegel described the external manifestation of spirit as an effort to realize freedom and, in explaining the relationship between reason and consciousness, acknowledged that spirit can only attain self-consciousness through human reason (ibid., p. 95). Where pseudo-consciousness and the instrumental use of emotions replace consciousness, thought, and reason, one can never speak of freedom. In such conditions, individuals in society, in seemingly free choices, unintentionally and unknowingly choose a path whose acceptance has already been prepared by the dominant cultural and political hegemony, even though citizens themselves believe that they have chosen their social destiny with free will. In the Quran, this is considered a form of compulsion and coercion, because it lacks the most important pillar of freedom, namely reason and consciousness. However, based on liberal principles and foundations, this pillar of freedom is not taken into account in the concept of freedom. Hence, political parties, in practice, use every tool to defeat their rivals; the stirring of emotions, character assassination of opponents, and repeated lies are common tools in election campaigns, carried out through media domination and news propaganda. In Quranic epistemological discussions, the elements of consciousness and reason are emphasized above all else. Verses that describe the methods of prophetic propagation (Quran 16:125); verses that call human beings to wisdom and reasoning (Quran 2:111; 21:24; 27:64; 28:75; 29:43; 39:17-18); verses that remind of the importance of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge (Quran 29:43; 39:9); verses that consider the most important mission of the prophets to be the delivery of God's message (Quran 35:23; 7:188; 26:115); verses that urge the audience of the Quran to seek truth and incline toward it (Quran 2:42, 91, 109, 119); verses that emphasize insight (Quran 12:106)—these are examples of Quranic teachings in which the relationship between freedom and consciousness is emphasized. In some of the Quran's historical teachings, we also witness a historical analysis of social and political freedom. In certain Quranic chapters, such as Taha, al-Shu'ara, and al-A'raf, while analyzing important events of the time of Moses (peace be upon him), reference is made to the magicians (*sāḥirūn*) whom Pharaoh summoned to confront Moses. The picture painted by the Quran's historical accounts and analysis suggests that, according to the indicators of freedom in liberal schools, the magicians possessed the necessary freedom, and the

magicians' choice to defend Pharaoh's political system was also a free choice. However, continuous and discontinuous intra-textual Quranic evidence shows that the system of domination, through extensive propaganda, deceptive and persistent slogans (Quran 34:33), and the stirring of emotions, was able to compel the magicians to confront Moses: "And Pharaoh said, 'Let me kill Moses and let him call upon his Lord. Indeed, I fear that he will change your religion or cause corruption to appear in the land'" (Quran 40:26). Quranic accounts indicate that the magicians themselves believed that they had chosen to confront Moses by their own choice and will, and in their view, confronting Moses was, in truth, a struggle against corruption and ruin. That is why, after the truth became manifest to them and an inner transformation occurred (Quran 7:125; 26:50), acknowledging and becoming aware of Pharaoh's deception, they immediately believed in Moses and his God (Quran 26:45-48) and, without any fear of Pharaoh's anger, confessed that the source of their cooperation with Pharaoh (Quran 40:26) and their opposition to Moses had been deceptive slogans and ignorance of the truth: "Indeed, we aspire that our Lord will forgive us our sins because we were the first of the believers" (Quran 26:51) (Naghipourfar, 1998, p. 200). This Quranic principle has been examined and analyzed in detail in several chapters (*ibid.*). A noteworthy point is that the magicians considered their confrontation with Moses to be a result of compulsion and coercion by Pharaoh's regime: "Indeed, we have believed in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and what you compelled us [to do] of magic" (Quran 20:73), while evidence shows that they accepted Pharaoh's proposal in complete freedom!

According to Quranic epistemological foundations, the origins of our cognitions and beliefs are not uniform. The Quran identifies blind adherence (*ta'aṣṣub*), uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*), following one's forefathers, emotions, excitations (Quran 2:170), and pseudo-science (Quran 26:10-51) as common sources of religious cognitions and beliefs. In a number of Quranic verses, it is emphasized that religiosity is desirable when consciousness and freedom are the origin of the formation of belief systems, interests, actions, and religious habits (Quran 12:108). From the Quran's perspective, "pseudo-science" is one of the most important factors in the formation of beliefs, in which cognitions, choices, and criteria for accepting ideas are mixed with ignorance and manifest or hidden fallacies (Quran 26:10-51). Pseudo-science will also bring with it the illusion of freedom. The allocation of hundreds of Quranic teachings to the necessity of thought, reasoning, insight, deep understanding, and their repetition and emphasis through various expressions indicates the

danger of the harm of "pseudo-science" in the process of discovering truth. Motahhari writes regarding freedom of belief: "Thought is the source of human beliefs, but not all beliefs arise from correct thought. Many beliefs originate from habits, imitations, and blind attachments." In his analysis of freedom arising from imitation, habit, and blind attachment, he reminds that freedom in this sense is not only unbeneficial but also harmful (Motahhari, 1982, p. 6). According to Quranic epistemological foundations, the goal of the divine prophets is that human beings may be liberated from blind attachment, imitation, and pseudo-science, and choose the path of happiness through consciousness and reason (Quran 18:21; 8:42). The verses of the Quran report on political systems that, relying on "pseudo-consciousness," establish and perpetuate their power and domination. In systems based on pseudo-consciousness, there exist manifestations of civilization, thoughtfulness, and respect for freedom, consciousness, and culture. However, when rulers see their authority threatened, they reveal their true face through bribery, threats, exile, terror, and violence. Pharaoh calls the social system under his control an exemplary and ideal civilization (Quran 20:63) that is being threatened by Moses (Quran 20:63), while he presents himself as a reformer (Quran 7:127) and the agent of flourishing and growth: "And I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct" (Quran 40:29), and considers Moses to be an agent of corruption and ruin and a threat to public security. This logic is also repeated by Pharaoh's courtiers (Quran 7:127; 40:26). To consolidate and deepen his deceptive slogans, Pharaoh relies on sacred beliefs and considers Moses' movement and words a threat to religious beliefs and values (Quran 40:22-29). The Quran clearly shows that slogans and propaganda are not ineffective but play a decisive role in the formation of *tāghūtī* (tyrannical) systems and their survival and continuity (Quran 34:33), and can even compel elites to align with arrogant systems. Thus, Pharaoh brought with him magicians whom the Quran describes as "learned" (*‘alīm*): "They will bring you every learned magician" (Quran 7:112).

The influence over elites increases when value judgments are based on material criteria, material possessions become the measure of worth and superiority, and deceptive slogans are mixed with concepts such as freedom, social reform, civilization, equality of rights, enjoyment of natural rights, citizenship rights, and the fight against corruption (Safaei, 2000, p. 14). The nature of the magicians' motivation and the reason for their alliance with Pharaoh in confronting Moses (peace be upon him) are among the fundamental questions in this historical event. The dialogues reported from the

magicians, as well as their belief in the God of Moses after the discovery of the truth, indicate that they possessed the necessary grounding for accepting the truth, and what compelled them to fight Moses was ignorance of the truth (Quran 26:113). Despite the multiple pieces of evidence in this story suggesting the magicians' freedom in confronting Moses, some commentators, citing certain narrations, have considered fear of Pharaoh's anger as the main factor behind the magicians' confrontation with Moses (Tabataba'i, 1996, vol. 14, p. 254). This group of commentators considers the presence of the phrase "what you compelled us [to do]" in verse 20:37—"Indeed, we have believed in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and what you compelled us to do of magic"—as among the continuous intra-textual evidence for their interpretive view. However, numerous continuous and discontinuous Quranic indications suggest the incorrectness of this interpretation. The picture painted by the Quran of this story, especially its outcome, which ends with the magicians' steadfast faith, is never compatible with the magicians having been coerced. It is a faith that made the magicians eager to meet God and indifferent to Pharaoh's threats (Quran 7:124), expressed clearly and emphatically without any fear of torture or death: "And the magicians fell down prostrate. They said, 'We have believed in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron'" (Quran 7:116-122), continuing to the point of longing for death and self-sacrifice in the path of truth: "Indeed, to our Lord we will return" (Quran 7:125-126). This interpretive possibility has also been accepted by some commentators (Makarem Shirazi, 2007, vol. 13, p. 250). In the magicians' statement, "We will never prefer you over what has come to us of clear proofs (*bayyināt*) and [over] He who created us" — in response to Pharaoh's threats, which is the magicians' main argument — the word "*bayyināt*" (clear proofs) is explicitly mentioned. Linguistically, "*bayyina*" (sing. of *bayyināt*) is a rational or sensory proof that leaves no doubt in establishing a truth (Raghib Isfahani, 1991 CE, p. 157). In the Quran, the word *bayyina* has been used repeatedly in this same sense (Quran 2:185, 256; 3:97, 118; 6:55; 8:42; 11:17; 14:45; 16:39, 44; 30:9; 43:63). A miracle is also called a *bayyina* in the Quran because it removes any ambiguity from the face of truth (Quran 57:25). Hence, after discovering the truth, the magicians cry out, "So decree whatever you are to decree. You can only decree concerning the life of this world" (Quran 20:72); they will never submit to Pharaoh's false demand, while they are joyful about their choice: "Indeed, to our Lord we will return" (Quran 7:125).

5.2.4. Tyranny and Arrogance

In the Quran, *tāghūt* (tyrannical forces) is the symbol of illegitimate rule, the

primary obstacle to the realization of political freedom, and one of the fundamental dangers facing tawhid-based (monotheistic) upbringing. From the Quran's perspective, the essential goal of negating *tāghūt* and achieving political freedom is to create the necessary groundwork for servitude to God (Quran 16:36; 2:256). In these and similar verses, the necessity of confronting taghut and the inseparability of avoiding *tāghūt* from true servitude to God are emphasized, and it is also reminded that explaining this political principle is among the common duties of all divine messengers. Struggling against *tāghūt*, alongside the elevation of monotheism (*tawhīd*), is one of the two fundamental pillars of the prophetic mission and the first pillar of servitude to God: "So whoever disbelieves in *tāghūt* and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold" (Quran 2:256). The necessity of opposing *tāghūt* is also emphasized in verses 16:36, 2:256-257, 4:60, 5:60, and 39:17. Essentially, without this struggle and before removing obstacles, the realization of the prophets' goals would be impossible. The first and most fundamental slogan of Islam, "Say 'Lā ilāha illā Allāh' and you will succeed," begins with the word "no" (*lā*), and the condition of being a Muslim is to affirm and acknowledge this slogan. The Quran's explicit emphasis on removing *tāghūt* is because dominant powers do not relinquish power except through war, and the universal communication of the monotheistic message cannot be achieved except by removing this great obstacle. According to Quranic accounts, all prophets who had the capability for armed struggle fought against the enemies of their mission (Quran 3:147; 2:246; 16:37). The necessity of initiatory jihad (*jihād ibtidā'ī*) in Islam and Islamic jurisprudence is also justified by the goal of removing obstacles to awareness. In the history of the divine prophets, especially the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), numerous battles are reported. Some contemporary commentators refer to initiatory jihad as defensive jihad (*jihād difā'ī*) aimed at removing obstacles and providing the conditions for conscious choice (Tabataba'i, 1996, vol. 2, pp. 66-71). Given the Quranic genealogy of the leaders of disbelief in relation to the truth, the prophets could only, through this initiatory jihad, convey the heavenly message to all the worlds (Quran 6:90; 12:104; 9:12; 16:14). Naturally, after the delivery of the message and the establishment of proof, people are free to choose disbelief or faith: "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills, let him believe; and whoever wills, let him disbelieve'" (Quran 18:29). This freedom is expressed clearly and explicitly by divine prophets such as Noah (peace be upon him): "Shall we compel you to accept it while you are averse to it?" (Quran 11:28). Arrogance, meaning self-aggrandizement and

considering oneself superior, is among the most frequently used terms in the Quran; this word, together with its derivatives, is repeated 60 times in the Quran. In some Quranic usages, it is placed in contrast to the word “‘allīn” (the highest/exalted ones): "He said, 'O Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating to what I created with My hands? Were you arrogant, or were you among the exalted ones?'" (Quran 38:75). In the Quran, Iblis is the symbol of arrogance and confrontation with God (Quran 2:34; 7:11). In a number of Quranic usages, the word “istid‘āf” (weakness/oppression) and its derivatives stand in contrast to *istikbār* (arrogance) (Quran 34:32-33).

5.2.5. Materialistic Value-Judgments

Tāghūtī (tyrannical) systems, for their own survival and to prevent political freedom, employ not only hard war (military force) but also soft war and cultural domination. From the Quran's perspective, the intellectual and cultural domination of tyrannical and arrogant systems, and its perpetuation, is possible based on material value judgments. In verses 50-54 of Surah Az-Zukhruf, speaking in the words of Pharaoh, material wealth and capability are presented as requirements of rulership and the sole criterion of superiority: "And Pharaoh called out among his people; he said, 'O my people, does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and these rivers flowing beneath me? Then do you not see?'" (Quran 43:51). Pharaoh continues, saying: "Or am I [not] better than this one who is insignificant and hardly makes himself clear?" (Quran 43:52). Relying on material criteria, Pharaoh considered kingship and wealth an indisputable measure of his own superiority, and called the other (Moses) despicable due to material deprivation, and illogical. In arrogant thought, one who does not possess wealth and material status cannot, essentially, speak clearly and acceptably. In the next verse, Pharaoh names other examples of manifestations of material wealth and power which, in materialist thought, indicate mastery and superiority (Quran 43:53). The Quran considers Pharaoh's criterion to be a false notion, contrary to reason, and a sign of foolishness (Quran 43:54). In the Quranic view, *fisq* (transgression and deviation from the path of sacred law) is the origin of accepting this false criterion: "Indeed, they were a transgressing people" (Quran 43:54).

6. Conclusion

In the conceptual analysis presented, while briefly indicating the Quranic meaning of political freedom, the goal and components of political freedom,

and the nature of the obstacles to political freedom in Quranic teachings, these obstacles were examined alongside a comparative look at them in liberal thought. Political freedom, in Quranic thought, is defined as the absence of obstacles to political activities and the possibility of justly enjoying fundamental rights, with the aim of accepting divine sovereignty. In the political literature of the Quran, non-divine lordship, *ṭāghūt* (tyrannical forces), and *istikbār* (arrogance) are the obstacles to political freedom. Based on liberal anthropological foundations, according to which the reality of the human being is shaped by his earthly dimension and material desires, freedom is interpreted as the removal of obstacles to the development of instinctual tendencies and greater enjoyment of pleasure. The only criterion limiting freedom is respecting the right to freedom of others, and religious and moral criteria play no role in determining the boundaries of freedom. In the Quran, the obstacles to freedom are divided into internal and external. Following false cognitive assumptions and the insatiable appetites of instincts are the most important internal obstacles. External freedom, meanwhile, means liberation from the bondage of the lordship of anyone other than God. The mission of the divine prophets is, in truth, to liberate the human being from both internal and external servitude. The most important obstacles to freedom from the Quran's perspective are: accepting the lordship of anyone other than God, despotism, arrogance, tyrannical forces, opposition to reason, ignorance and pseudo-consciousness, and material value judgments. Among the obstacles mentioned, only despotism is emphasized in liberal thought. The research conducted contains certain innovative points regarding the Quran's perspective on the concept of freedom and the obstacles to political freedom. Adding two specifically Quranic components—1) pseudo-consciousness and 2) reliance on material value judgments—as well as providing a different definition of the word “*ikrāh*” (compulsion/coercion) and a lexicological analysis of its difference from the word “*ijbār*” (force/compulsion), are three examples of these innovations. The meaning presented for the word “*ikrāh*” has been confirmed through Quranic investigations.

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