

Spiritual Wealth and Human Freedom in Nahj al-Balagha

M.M. Kazem Hussein Ali, Assist. Prof. Dr. Javad Ishagian Dorcheh, Prof. Alireza TTabib, Dr. Maryam Alizadeh

PhD Candidate University of Tehran – College of Islamic Knowledge and Thought

Kazemalhusseini5@ut.ac.ir

Faculty Member, University of Tehran – College of Islamic Knowledge and Thought, Iran

dorcheh@ut.ac.ir

Faculty Member, University of Tehran – College of Islamic Knowledge and Thought, Iran

Tabibi.alireza@ut.ac.ir

Faculty Member, University of Tehran – College of Islamic Knowledge and Thought, Iran

Alizadeh62@ut.ac.ir

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This research aims to deconstruct the "dialectical relationship between the and " in contemporary human thought through a structural analytical and hermeneutic approach to the texts of *Nahj al-Balagha* by Al-Sharif al-Radi, which compiles the legacy of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (pbuh). The problem of the study manifests in the stark contradiction between modern, procedural, and liberal approaches to the concept of freedom and the latent enslavement of contemporary man under the weight of materialism, consumerism, and existential alienation. Utilizing a textual deconstructive methodology and an integrative comparative approach, this study examines the Alawite texts to trace the conceptual development of spiritual wealth and human freedom. This progression moves ascendingly from the individual-subjective level (liberation from the tyranny of whims and instincts) to the interactive-ethical level (the freedom of responsibility), culminating in the socio-political dimension (resisting tyranny and establishing ontological justice). The scientific and practical value of this work resides in stressing the concept of "spiritual intelligence," which is based on psychic self-sufficiency and utter certainty (Yaqeen), as an objective and essential existential prerequisite for the reestablishment of human dignity and balance in the cosmos. As such, it goes beyond conventional sermon-like interpretations to present a scientific analytical framework consistent with the APA's documentation guidelines.

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Introduction:

The controversy related to human richness and freedom in modern human thinking can be considered as an epistemological problem due to the dominance of materialism and consumerism in the present world order, which has narrowed down human existence to limited functional and productive aspects leading to spiritual estrangement and loss of the compass of freedom. Considering the complexity of this epistemological framework, there is a need to revisit the Islamic philosophical and ethical legacy, including the Alawite intellectual legacy embodied in “Nahj al-Balagha” of Sharif al-Radi, which incorporates the sermons, letters, and wisdom of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib. It is not only a document of eloquence and history, but an epistemological framework, an existential ontology that creates an alternative vision of the concepts of human existence. This ontological system has been based on an essential duality of metaphysical, psychological and social dimension, that is, duality of spiritual richness and human freedom. The two concepts are not considered separately, but a whole dynamic system where inner freedom creates a solid social and political freedom able to fight against any kind of oppression and human estrangement.

Research Problem:

The problem of the present investigation is rooted in a serious contradiction between modern interpretations of the concept of freedom that emphasize only its legal, political and economic aspects (the approach to freedom is generally subdivided into negative and positive freedom according to Isaiah Berlin), and the reality that demonstrates a sophisticated enslavement of a modern human being through market mechanisms and consumerism.

Contemporary approaches have overlooked the ontological root linked to psychological independence and liberation from the shackles of materialism, which has rendered political freedom merely a fragile outer shell, easily shattered at the first encounter with economic crises or psychological pressures. Hence, this research poses its pivotal question: How does the approach of rhetoric establish a cognitive framework that links comprehensive human liberation with psychological and spiritual richness as an indispensable objective and ontological condition for achieving human dignity and justice? This question branches out into a number of sub-questions about the nature of the conceptual development of wealth in the school of Ahl al-Bayt, how the levels of freedom are articulated ascendingly from the individual to the social, and the textual and deconstructive mechanisms that Imam Ali used to link contentment and asceticism with liberation from the humiliation of subservience and the enslavement of others.

How does the approach to rhetoric establish a cognitive framework that links comprehensive human liberation with psychological and spiritual richness as an indispensable objective and ontological condition for achieving human dignity and justice?

This question leads to several sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the conceptual development of richness in the school of Ahl al-Bayt, and what are its Quranic roots?
2. How are the levels of freedom articulated progressively in Alawite thought, from the individual and subjective to the general social?
3. What textual and deconstructive mechanisms did Imam Ali use to link conviction and certainty with liberation from

the humiliation of subservience and enslavement by others?

Research Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to overcome the long-held didactic and rhetorical interpretations of Nahj al-Balagha and to turn to a new form of deconstruction and structure-based text analysis. This study attempts to reveal the epistemology on which spiritual abundance as a liberating motive force behind the human being operates. Its academic importance consists in providing a new systematic interpretation approach that integrates religious texts and contemporary philosophical interpretation, which shows how spiritual intelligence obtained within the framework of Alawite teachings can help solve the problem of human alienation. The procedural significance of this study is that it will enrich the scientific literature with an analytical framework that will be useful for specialists in the field of Islamic studies, moral philosophy, and rhetorical text analysis.

Methodology and Study Structure

The research problem is addressed through an analytic/deconstructive method through interpretation of the primary sources of Nahj al-Balagha through deconstruction of their semiotic and semantic structure and its correlation with their philosophical and Qur'anic backgrounds. In addition, the research method adopts a comparative and integrative method for following the evolution of the concepts of richness and freedom in the texts of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt in order to build a holistic framework that highlights the coherence of this school of thought. This research is comprised of three major sections, starting with this introductory section and ending with the conclusions. The first axis deals with the philosophical and theoretical foundation of the concept of spiritual wealth and its

linguistic and Qur'anic origins, while the second axis deals with the levels of human freedom in an ascending order that begins with the individual self and ends with the general social, while the third axis, which is the nerve of the research and its analytical weight, focuses on the direct structural and textual dialectic between wealth and freedom through the deconstruction of selected and precisely defined speeches, letters and wisdom from Nahj al-Balagha.

Previous Studies:

Studies have explored human thought and its manifestations in the discourse of Imam Ali, but we have not found a study that specifically addresses the themes of wealth and freedom. These studies include:

– **Al-Sharmani's Study (2018):** Researcher **Tamar Razzaq Al-Sharmani** conducted an academic study at the College of Arts, University of Kufa, entitled "**The Intellect in the Thought of Imam Ali: An Academic Study.**" This study highlights the urgent need to consider the spiritual and intellectual aspects of Alawite speeches as a means of rescuing contemporary humanity from the throes of overwhelming material conflicts. The study concludes that activating this spiritual vision allows individuals to rediscover their latent abilities and create a balanced life that combines material needs with spiritual elevation. This represents the first step towards self-liberation and the development of human consciousness.

– **A study by a group of researchers – Nahj al-Balagha Sciences Foundation (2019):** This study was a joint research project by a group of researchers and academics, presented at the **National Scientific Conference** held by the **Nahj al-Balagha Sciences Foundation at the Holy Shrine of Imam Hussein**, under the title "**Manifestations of Human Thought in**

Nahj al-Balagha: Methodological Studies." This paper was concerned with freedom and ontological dignity from the point of view of social and political aspect of the issue and proved that the core of Alawite speeches lies in providing absolute freedom to the person and denying subjugation to any regime that denies humanity and dignity to people.

– **A study by the Islamic Thought Foundation (2020): The Islamic Awareness Foundation** presented a study published by the **Islamic Thought Foundation** entitled **"Freedom and Human Dignity in Readings of Shirazi's Thought and the Heritage of Nahj al-Balagha."** This paper examined the commandments of Imam Ali and the doctrines of Imam Shirazi, focusing on the everlasting constitution of the Alawites, which states that "do not enslave yourself to anyone while God has freed you." The findings of the research show that protecting human rights and fighting tyranny come naturally with spiritual enlightenment and high ideals when one understands the fact that he/she is inherently free and thus should feel dignified about it.

– **Jabr's study (2021): Professor Dr. Ahoud Hussein Jabr** explored in her study published through the College of Education for Girls' Journal of Human Sciences at the University of Kufa and the ResearchGate platform, entitled **"The Human Dimension in the Personality of Imam Ali: Specialized Articles and Analyses"**, depth of purification and reformation of souls as a true means and initial step towards attaining human freedom. According to the researcher, true freedom in the Alawite philosophy is not just the external liberation; instead, it is the purity without any material bondage, as well as the pressure of instinct and greed as expressed in the following quote

of the wise Alawites, which says, "Most minds are destroyed by the lightning of greed," and spirituality is the safety brake ensuring freedom of choice for man.

The First Axis: The Concept of Spiritual Wealth in Nahj al-Balagha and its Theoretical Foundations:

1. A Linguistic and Terminological Approach and the Structure of the Concept

A precise understanding of Imam Ali's arguments in Nahj al-Balagha necessitates beginning with a linguistic and terminological definition of the concept, to grasp the semantic shifts that Islamic thought has brought about in the structure of the word. The root of the word in authentic Arabic linguistic thought denotes sufficiency and complete fulfillment that definitively eliminates need and want. Ibn Faris, in his structural dictionary, refers to this semantic meaning by saying that the letters ghayn, nun, and the weak letter indicate sufficiency and wealth in money. It is said that he is rich, rich, and wealth, with the ghayn having a fatha and a long vowel, means sufficiency. Similarly, they say that so-and-so does not have the wealth of so-and-so, meaning he does not have enough to satisfy him. The woman who is rich is the woman who is content with her parents' house or with her beauty and does not need jewelry (Ibn Faris, 1399 AH: 4/397). This relationship between wealth and sufficiency makes it apparent that the notion in its linguistic sense transcends the mere existence of wealth as a material phenomenon to embrace a state of independence and completeness. As we proceed to the terminological and cognitive level, we find that the notion is reiterated in a way to transcend the quantification of economic resources since technically speaking, wealth refers to sufficiency and

satisfaction and thus does not refer to money alone but refers to an absolute state of psychological satisfaction despite the fact that wealth in ordinary sense is sufficiency in money (Al-Tabarsi, n.d.: 500). It follows that the Islamic terminology managed to transcend the narrow material sense of the concept and expand its connotation to the wider psychological and cognitive sense such that the state of satisfaction becomes the basic criterion of richness or poverty.

2. The Conceptual Development of Spiritual Wealth in the School of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.)

However, Imam Ali's view on spiritual wealth in Nahjul Balagha is not separate and stands as a vital component in the chain of knowledge that developed and flourished in the teachings of subsequent Imams of Ahlul-Bayt, who gave new life to the idea, making it richer with psychological and social connotations. This integrative approach is vividly evident through the study of the writings of Imam Ali bin Al-Hussein Al-Sajjad, who saw the concept of wealth beyond the monetary meaning, understanding it as a state of psychological satisfaction and peace with one's self and surroundings. He stressed patience, dependence, and thankfulness even under the most desperate material conditions, asking God for protection from psychological imbalance caused by material changes. In Al-Sahifa Al-Sajjadiyya, he said that man should ask God for protection against the wealth which makes him arrogant, the poverty which makes him forgetful, the neighbor who harms him, as well as the scandals of poverty, the shame of his religion, and the boasting of his enemies (Al-Sajjad, n.d.: 275). Imam Al-Sajjad highlights the point that real wealth means wealth of the soul, while patience, reliance, and gratefulness are much higher than money.

Imam believes that real wealth means wealth of the soul, whereas poverty means poverty of knowledge and piety meaning inability to rely on God and inability to obey Him. Imam Zayn al-Abidin also presents his profound perception of wealth and poverty as the two sides of one coin which can be considered as the tests and reflections of inner satisfaction. In addition, he highlights the importance of submission to God's decree and advises Muslims to be content with what God gives them, whether it is wealth or poverty (al-Saduq, 1403 AH: 2/621). He insists that real wealth means wealth of the soul which manifests in piety and contentment, but not in money and material things. According to him, it is a great fortune for a person to conduct business in his/her own country, have righteous companions, and have sons who will look after him/her. In his pursuit of this spiritual and material balance, he would always pray to God to grant him sufficiency that maintains equilibrium without excess or want, saying in his supplication: "May God bless Muhammad and his family, and grant me sufficiency and bless it for me, and not tempt me to seek more than I need, and may He compensate me for what I lack" (al-Sajjad, n.d.). 20), and this spiritual approach did not call for idleness; rather, Imam al-Sajjad is keen on work and earning lawful income, and he urges trade and toil, and he rejects dependence on others, and he believes that honorable work is the basis of a balanced economy, as it is narrated from him that he loves to see a man seeking the bounty of God Almighty, so he earns and obtains lawful income, so that he can be self-sufficient and provide for his family (al-Kulayni, 1407 AH: 5/72). He translated this thought practically by honoring the poor and distributing food and money secretly to preserve their dignity, and by working with his own hands on his lands and crops to be an example, expressing his hatred of seeing a man idle, neither

working in this world nor in the hereafter (al-Kulayni, 1407 AH: 5/85), which contributes to strengthening social solidarity and building a cohesive society in which contentment and piety prevail.

In the same intellectual context, Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir focused on the concepts of asceticism and humility and strongly warned against blind attachment to the world and its material allurements. He considered poverty and deprivation to be trials by which God tests His servants, emphasizing in his formulation of the concept that true wealth is not in material possessions, but rather in the richness of the soul (al-Majlisi, 1403 AH: 64/300). Imam al-Baqir calls for investing money in good works, urges charity and benevolence, and believes that a life of simplicity and piety is better than boasting and the relentless pursuit of wealth. He establishes the psychological equation for overcoming asceticism by saying that whatever enters a person's heart of this world diminishes their asceticism to the same extent (al-Majlisi, 1403 AH: 64/300). Imam al-Baqir sees poverty and wealth as two complementary divine tests, and he worked diligently to strengthen the concept of social solidarity by distributing money to the poor and spreading a culture of work, competence, and self-reliance. It is narrated that he said he works his land until his brow sweats, and that he has enough to provide for him, but he loves for God to see him seeking lawful sustenance (Al-Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 64, p. 300). He emphasizes the greatness of divine bounty and mutual support by saying that God gives ten to one hundred thousand or more for every single act of kindness (Al-Majlisi, 1403 AH: 64/300), considering easing the lives of the poor and strengthening the foundations of social solidarity among the greatest acts of devotion that guarantee

the stability of society and its protection from hatred and materialistic classism.

3. The Quranic Roots of Spiritual Wealth in Imam Ali's Thought

An analysis of Imam Ali's writings in Nahj al-Balagha definitively reveals their structural foundation and absolute reliance on the foundational authority of the Holy Quran. The Imam does not present an idea that exists beyond the framework of revelation; instead, the Imam begins his reasoning process from a broader existential view presented through various verses of the Quran like {And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient} from Surah Ad-Duha. The concept of this wealth of the Prophet according to the Imam's hermeneutics and approach cannot be explained as the wealth of temporary material things. Rather, the wealth is of comprehension and being filled with guidance, certainty, prophethood, and absolute independence of God. In the approach of Imam Ali, the concept of self-sufficiency of human self is linked with dependency on the Absolute Self-Sufficient Being, who possesses the keys of the heaven and earth, inspired by the following Quranic verse {O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy}. The recognition of the complete ontological dependency on God is the only and essential condition for attaining spiritual wealth and liberation from the chains of human necessity. As a result, Imam Ali converts the Quranic text from an instrument of legislation to the living psyche of a person, providing a means of tranquility through continuous dependence and struggle within. Imam Ali creates the relationship with the Quran as a means of protection against violent transformation of the soul caused by material changes.

The Second Axis: The Concept of Human Freedom in Nahj al-Balagha

Human thought has seen philosophical, legal, and social discussions about the concept of freedom, which is considered the main pillar for preserving human dignity and defining the essence of the relationship between the individual and the state and society. In general, the concept of freedom has fluctuated from intellectual and theoretical origins to legal and religious foundations to achieve a balance between individual freedom and the interests of the public through "social and moral constraints." In this sense, the concept of freedom appeared in modern laws as a natural right attached to the existence and safety of man. It is reflected in international conventions, which affirm the right of individuals to their lives and bodies as a result of the international perspective that individual freedom comes to an end when it starts violating other people's rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) confirmed this right in its third article, stating that everybody has the right to life, liberty, and security (Mustafa, 1989: 43; Sabarini, 1995: 47). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) also reinforced this trend in its sixth article by stipulating the natural right to life and protecting it from arbitrary deprivation, setting strict and restrictive controls even in extreme cases such as the implementation of the death penalty (Sarhan, 1987: 121).

In contrast to these dry legal texts, the thinker John Bury did not address the issue of freedom from the perspective of rigid legal or jurisprudential legislation. Rather, he discussed it through profound intellectual and cultural dimensions that address the relationship between the individual and their environment. Bury believes that culture and intellectual production play a vital role, acting as the "cement" that binds social classes

together and unites them ideologically to achieve peaceful change or revolution against a crisis-ridden reality filled with injustice and alienation (Masayef, 1981: 94). In this, he links the historical and social starting points; society is founded on the accumulation of inherited historical relationships (Fadl, 2002: 39). Through this link, Bury calls for intellectual and physical freedom that is inseparable from ethics related to justice and compassion, ensuring that the dignity of others is not violated and that the public interest of society is not harmed.

While Islamic law recognizes the intellectual and practical freedom of individuals to manage their lives and choices, it has established strict moral and social controls to prevent freedom from degenerating into societal chaos, based on the principle of preventing harm to the public order. From this perspective, Islam has prescribed punishments and regulations to protect society from intellectual and moral corruption. It prohibits individuals—regardless of their beliefs, whether Muslim or non-Muslim—from openly committing or displaying immoral acts in public, because such openly committing immoral acts offends public decency and pollutes the general environment (al-Amili, n.d.: 16/272). For this reason, jurists stipulated in the covenant of protection (dhimma) that certain behaviors contrary to the values of the general community should not be displayed openly, and they considered displaying such behavior a cause for discretionary punishment (al-Hilli, n.d.: 1/252; al-Jawahiri, n.d.: 21/269).

Islam is rooted in the principle that "freedom ends where the freedom of others begins," as the Prophet, set the most wonderful examples to illustrate the balance between personal freedom and the public interest using the "pigeon of the ship's passengers"

metaphor. He explained that the individual's freedom to dispose of his share (making a hole in the bottom of the ship to draw water) does not permit him to harm everyone. If they leave him alone, they will all perish, and if they stop him, they will all be saved (Al-Bukhari, n.d.: 3/111). This rule is confirmed by the legislation of the principle of "no harm, no foul," and its practical application is shown in the story of Samra bin Jundub and the Ansari, where the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, expropriated Samra's palm tree and ordered it to be uprooted when the latter was obstinate and refused to seek permission or sell, which caused harm and annoyance to the owner of the house. The Prophetic ruling was to deny the legitimacy of any freedom that leads to crowding out and infringing upon the rights of others (Al-Kulayni, n.d.: 5/292). The matter was not limited to that, but Islamic education established a system of self-evaluation that makes a person a monitor of his freedom, which was manifested in the advice of Imam Ali to his son Imam Hassan when he said: "O my son, make yourself a scale between you and others, so love for others what you love for yourself, and hate for them what you hate for yourself..." (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, n.d.: 3/45). This is the ethical approach that creates an internal restraint that prevents the clash of individual freedoms and public interests (Mughniya, n.d.: 218).

In a parallel development, Islam opened the door wide to contemplation, even making the application of reason to the universe one of the noblest and best acts of worship, as narrated from Imam al-Rida: "Worship is nothing but contemplation of the affairs of God Almighty" (al-Kulayni, n.d.: 2/55). However, this intellectual right was restricted by one doctrinal and epistemological principle, which is "the prohibition of contemplating the sacred Divine Essence,"

due to the limitations of the human mind. For the human mind is created and limited, while the Divine Essence is absolute and unlimited. Consequently, attempting to comprehend the essence of the Creator is beyond the scope of human capability and inevitably leads to confusion, turmoil, bewilderment, and misguidance (al-Kashani, n.d.: 4/383; al-Mazandarani, n.d.: 8/176). Hence, the Prophetic guidance came explicitly directing the energy of thought towards creation, not the Creator: "Contemplate creation and do not contemplate the Creator, for you cannot comprehend His greatness" (al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, n.d.: 3/106). Reflecting on the wonders of creation leads to glorifying God and understanding His wisdom, while reflecting on the self leads to intellectual ruin (Al-Saduq, n.d.: 56). The Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt also emphasized this principle to protect man from error and falling into intellectual confusion, as Imam al-Sadiq said: "Beware of reflecting on God, for reflecting on God only increases confusion" (Al-Saduq, n.d.: 503).

Based on the foregoing, this argument concludes that freedom – whether intellectual or physical – is not an absolute right without restrictions. While contemporary international laws and the intellectual arguments of John Bury establish freedom as a human right to ensure a decent life, Islamic law sets the practical frameworks that protect this freedom through an integrated system of moral, social, and doctrinal controls, ensuring that the individual's freedom does not become a means to destroy society, harm others, or lead the human mind into the perils of error and cognitive confusion.

1. Freedom from the Bondage of Passion and Desire in Nahj al-Balagha

Freedom from the domination of desire and emancipation from the chains of desire is the basis and the first step toward human liberation philosophy according to Imam Ali in Nahj al-Balagha. In such an approach, freedom does not start with the issuance of political rights or drafting of civil constitutions, but rather starts exclusively with the individual, namely by breaking down the fetters of uncontrolled desire which dominates the person, making his reason and consciousness disappear.

According to Imam Ali, complete submission to passion and desire is the core of true and ontological slavery, where no being ruled by transient desires can ever be considered free in any social or political field even when he possesses millions or holds high offices. In this connection, the Imam correctly portrays the character of desire as a true enslaver of man:

"O people, there are two things of which I am more fearful for you than anything else: following desires and hope of long life; for following desire makes one go astray from the right path." (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, 1412 AH, p. 91).

Inward liberation is the necessary and indispensable pre-requisite in forming a stable individual who can make independent and ethical decisions. This particular individualistic and subjective approach emphasizes the need to restructure and empower the will of humans in order to resist materialistic temptations and instinctive pressures, making reason reign supreme as the guiding light of action and desire to become disciplined vitality that will not destroy humanity but will benefit it. In doing so, the individual becomes immune to any

external influence, as stated elsewhere by Imam Ali:

"Desire is the companion of blindness" (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, 1412 AH, p. 401).

2. The Freedom of Moral Responsibility

At the second stage on the ascending scale of freedom put forward by Imam Ali, it is clear that freedom is no longer a narrow concept of selfishness and ascetic individualism, but an organic union with the idea of responsibility. The freedom discussed in Nahj al-Balagha does not mean existential disorder or a release from any controls and measures; it is definitely not "absolute freedom" that destroys the social fabric. Rather, a person is free because they are a responsible being, and responsible because they possess choice, awareness, and reason.

This interactive level links individual freedom with one's duty to society and to the Creator. True freedom manifests itself in conscious choice, commitment to truth and justice, fulfilling trusts, and protecting the vulnerable. In his advice to his son, Imam al-Hasan, the Imam outlines the ethical standard that governs the actions of a responsible free person towards others, saying:

"My son, make yourself a measure between yourself and others. Love for others what you love for yourself and hate for them what you hate for yourself. Do not wrong others as you would not like to be wronged." (Al-Sharif al-Radi, 1412 AH, p. 397)

The person who has freed himself from his own desires at the first level becomes qualified at this level to play an active and reformative role in his society, where he bears the consequences of his actions and exercises his freedom through voluntary commitment to the lofty moral values, which are the values that protect him from

infringing on the freedoms of others, and make his behavior a tool for building civil peace and human solidarity, far from the excessive selfishness that characterizes contemporary liberal theories of freedom.

3. Freedom of Social Justice and Rejection of Tyrannical Oppression (The General Societal Level)

At the zenith of the logical and ascending pyramid of the concept of liberation in *Nahj al-Balagha*, freedom transforms from its subjective and interactive ethical dimensions into a comprehensive political and social movement that rejects oppression, classism, and tyrannical practices in all their forms and guises. This general and societal dimension is manifested in its most splendid procedural and foundational form in Imam Ali's covenant with Malik al-Ashtar al-Nakha'i when he appointed him governor of Egypt, and in his numerous sermons that clearly stipulate and emphasize the dismantling of the unjust political and economic structures that attempt to enslave the people or plunder the resources and wealth of the Islamic nation.

Here, freedom becomes a general right guaranteed to every human being by virtue of their respected and honored humanity, regardless of their class, religious, or ethnic affiliation. The Imam lays down the golden rule that prevents a ruler from becoming a tyrannical pharaoh who sees his subjects as his slaves, as he addresses Malik al-Ashtar, saying:

"Fill your heart with mercy for your subjects, love for them, and kindness towards them. Do not be a ravenous beast to them, devouring them. For there are two kinds of them: Your brother in religion or your equal in humanity." (Al-Sharif al-Radi, 1412 AH, p. 427)

Social justice and equality in wealth is the basic guarantee for maintaining human dignity and freedom, and he proclaims the great existential principle of freedom as follows:

"And do not be a slave to others when God has made you free." (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, 1412 AH, p. 402).

At this level, we find the real peak of the previous two levels. Human freedom will never be maintained in societies where injustice and class exist, while oppressed people, economically and socially, cannot make use of their moral and personal freedom. Therefore, attaining social justice and ending tyranny becomes the highest task and the greatest indication of the achievement of human freedom in general.

Third Axis: The Structural Dialectic Between Spiritual Richness and Freedom

The principles of Imam Ali as outlined in *Nahj al-Balagha* provide an exhaustive epistemological structure that serves to deconstruct the very essence of the connection between the human existence and its surrounding environment. These principles move beyond mere moral appeals to create an ontology of human liberation. The Alawite doctrine comes from a deep philosophy of the freedom that characterizes human beings as their divine prerogative. But at the same time, this freedom is perpetually endangered by the shackles of the material and the temporal. Therefore, the central idea presented by the Imam is that of the dialectic of maintaining one's inner freedom and reaching external freedom. Political and social freedom are not possible without cutting the shackles of the material world and its power game. And this important philosophy is best illustrated in the Imam's covenant with his son, al-Hasan.

With regard to the magnanimous will of Imam Ali written to his son Al-Hasan at the time of his leaving Siffin, which was included in Nahj al-Balagha with the title "Letter 31," Imam Ali creates a beautiful philosophy about human freedom, which is connected with causality to spiritual wealth and being high above the rubble of this world, as it is mentioned in the Alawi text in a clear semantic way:

"Respect yourself and abstain from everything even if it brings you desires, because you will not get anything in return from what you gave of yourself. You should not be a slave to others if God has created you free. How can you achieve goodness through doing evil and ease through difficulties?!" (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, 1412 AH, pp. 401-402).

Analysis of the structure and meaning of the cited phrase gives an idea of the intricate semantic connection between self-respect, spiritual independence, and existential freedom received from God. In his statement, the Imam uses the imperative "Be honorable," turning this moral instruction into an ontological duty of protecting the very essence and integrity of man. The phrase "from all baseness" allows one to understand that baseness means to be ready to accept the temporary and inferior in exchange for the eternal and absolute. The following parenthetical conditional clause, "And if it leads you to desires," shows the psychological process that leads a person to slavery. Desire, profit, and position are all the bait that can make a person lose his/her freedom and independence. The use of the verb "(led you)" in the quotation makes an amazing rhetoric that reflects the loss of willpower when "desire" is the leading driver, and "man" becomes the driven one.

"The Imam uses the terminology of business deals to uncover the falsity of this existential deal by saying: 'You will never get anything in return for your own self that you give away,'" The Imam stresses that the human spirit, its freedom and dignity are sacred and cannot be valued on the basis of material exchange and supply and demand in the business market. Deconstruction reveals the fallacy of utilitarian thinking whereby every gain made using material goods in order to enslave human beings is a great existential loss which cannot be undone since material is transient but free human existence is permanent.

This is where the text culminates in the declaration and foundation of this prohibition which is categorical and straightforward: "And be not slaves to anyone but God; for God has made you free." In this case, the use of the prohibitive particle and the circumstantial conjunction "and" (wa-qad ja'alaka Allahu hurran) conveys the universal truth (for God has made you free) as well as signifies the methodology and doctrine that freedom is an intrinsic and divine right of human beings, and that being the slave of anything except God is a deviation and temporary status caused by human weaknesses and falling prey to desires. Psychological sophistication or spiritual richness is portrayed in this context as a resistance power that will not allow a person to trade in their freedom which is an intrinsic right of human beings in exchange for material gains which are temporary.

This deconstructive construction is followed by a question from the Imam of denial nature: "What good is there that can only be attained through evil?" This breaks up the false association between the gains of material benefit and genuine good. The distortion of the end in the Alawite school of thought, and the material ease of life based

on dependency and humiliation, is an inhibition of human freedom.

According to the Imam Ali school of thought, words act as lamps of enlightenment that outlive time itself, transforming human concepts in ways that are beyond material limits. One of the most profound statements about breaking the dichotomy of stability and alienation made by him is this wise saying that is a complete social and psychological constitution. He says in his sayings (Aphorism 134):

"Wealth in exile is like being at home, and poverty in one's homeland is like being a stranger." (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, n.d., p. 493).

The text, small in form, but endless in substance, should not be taken in its physical sense, which includes geographical presence and liquid and real property. The text is a call for subverting the existing ideas, and it deconstructs an existential and emotional equation, changing the concepts of "homeland" and "exile" from the physical and geographical level to the spiritual one.

The wealth which is established by the Alawite discourse here is the spiritual wealth of contentment, satisfaction, certainty, abundance in values and complete trust in God. This type of wealth is not the bank account but the "existential energy that transcends borders and geography." If a man has such spiritual and psychological wealth, he has his homeland and security inside himself, no matter where he goes.

The psychological immunity stemming from contentment with what is right and freedom from greed transforms "material and spatial alienation" into a safe and stable homeland. This is because the self does not seek its security from a volatile external environment, but rather its tranquility springs from within,

where no worldly power can deprive it of this wealth or exploit it.

In contrast, Imam Ali, presents us with a precise diagnosis of "true poverty," which is the poverty of the soul, moral deficiency, greed, and a morbid attachment to material things. This spiritual poverty has a destructive power capable of transforming the familiar geographical and social homeland into a harsh and humiliating alienation.

Even though one is surrounded by his family and his tribe, living in luxury palaces, the greed can make him feel very much alienated. Because the greedy man is forever in the state of desire, servitude, and groveling in front of the rich and powerful people, he loses all his freedom and independence. In this way, geography becomes irrelevant as the wide homeland is turned into a small prison. In addition, the individuality of the person is affected by his self-enforced servitude to material things.

The ultimate deconstruction of the Alawite equation will bring us to the idea of liberation from humiliation. Being spiritually rich gives the person a strong psychological immunity to all the temptations and pressures of the powerful and wealthy and helps him remain independent, free and dignified.

Greed, on the other hand, forces the individual into the cycle of voluntary servitude to other people due to constant thirst for money and its accumulation. Therefore, in the Alawite philosophy, "homeland" becomes that place where the individual maintains dignity and freedom, while "exile" becomes that state of the soul when the individual is humiliated and loses his/her humanity. From this perspective, wealth is the homeland, while poverty becomes the exile.

The beloved servant of God Almighty, according to Imam Ali, in Sermon 87, has the following features: "He has cast off the garments of desires and rid himself of all worries except one, which has been overcome... He is as certain as the light of the sun" (Al-Sharif Al-Radi, n.d., p. 119).

The structure of existential discourse in Nahj al-Balagha: A semiotic reading in deconstructing matter and achieving ontological liberation

The discourse of Imam Ali Bin Abu Talib is distinct in its style and cognition, where elements of spirituality, philosophy, and psychology come together to create a cohesive vision of human life. This text, however, does not present conventional moral exhortation; rather, it provides an overall theory of spiritual and existential emancipation from the bondage of matter and instinctive rule through an elaborate and careful use of metaphorical, allegorical, and semiotic language that redefines the notions of "freedom" and "wealth".

The characteristics of the theory become evident through an astounding kinetic metaphor in "he has taken off the garments of desires," a metaphor whose semiotic significance includes both kinetic and psychological aspects of utmost importance. Although "garments" in cultural and linguistic consciousness are considered to be something that surrounds and guards the body, in this metaphor they become a means of imprisonment and encirclement through which the movements of the soul are prevented from being liberated. The action of "taking off" becomes an action of absolute will that represents an affirmative movement to liberate the body from the physical confinement through the hands of the seeker, thus turning the action of taking off the

garments of desires into a "metamorphic purification" (transformation).

From this external practice of desire renunciation, the discussion moves into the internal structure of consciousness through deconstruction of material multiplicity and the construction of existential singularity through the semiotics of "single concern." The text defines liberation in terms of a transformation from ontological multiplicity that is created by the world through "multiple concerns" such as fear of poverty, amassing of wealth, and power struggles that fragment and disperse the self energy into unity within "a single concern that has permeated it." The equation offered by Imam Ali in contrast is that this singularity is not about isolation; rather, "it is the concern with the truth, justice, and communion with the Creator." This process can be described as a "laser-like" one through which psychological energy is intensified and the conscious and unconscious forces of the person unite to pass through the narrowness of worldly limitations to absolute expansiveness.

The aforementioned premises—the abstraction of the outward (renunciation of desires) and the unification of the inward (the focus on one goal)—lead, therefore, to a cognitive and psychological result stated by the text in the most brilliant form of eloquence: "It is a certainty as clear as the sun." Cognitive realization corresponds to the apogee of spiritual and psychological richness. Here, certainty does not mean the mere mental or sightless acceptance, but an enlightened force filled with the energy of the sun, which, being a symbol of the universe, signifies the embodiment of truth and full clarity. In this way, certainty provides humans with the unique capacity to dispel "the illusions of matter" and to discover "the falsification of power." One can see the truth beyond illusions and appearances, seeing the

evanescence of palaces and fall of thrones. Thus, cognitive richness leads to the total independence from all those things that are in the power of others.

The causal sequence illustrates the indivisibility of freedom because no one can be liberated from tyranny externally while being chained to oneself through one's concealed passions. Tyranny outside depends mainly upon the internal vulnerability of enslavement that comes with greed and fragmentation.

The human being, as illustrated in Nahj al-Balagha, is not some kind of ivory tower creature or a mystic hiding in his/her seclusion. Instead, he/she is a top-notch social and political player with the capacity to resist tyranny.

This political and social dimension of freedom, emanating from the right to destroy the instruments of fear and temptation utilized by the oppressive powers, becomes clear. Since an illegitimate system depends on intimidating the citizens by threatening with either poverty or death, or bribing them through money, suddenly the whole power of oppression becomes useless when addressing someone who is spiritually liberated from material poverty. The spiritual freedom enables him or her to think independently and speak their mind, thereby becoming existentially firm such that nothing can move or shake them. Material temptations and political propaganda bounce off them like bullets off a rock because now they are spiritually free in every respect: in themselves as individuals, with people socially, and with politicians politically.

Modern societies based on the principles of capitalism and over-consumerism have resulted in people experiencing spiritual and psychological alienation. The real problem is the association of the value and freedom of a

human being with consumption and possession, where the individual changes slowly from a value-driven being into a mere cog in the machine of production (Bauman, 2000: 85).

This methodical objectivation of mankind has made individuals continuously vulnerable to feelings of anxiety and distress and also to indirect forms of slavery due to domestication and manipulation of their desires in order to serve market interests. This phenomenon is termed as "cultural and economic alienation" in the critical literature, which strips the individual of his true self (Fromm, 1976: 42).

Out of this existential pain comes the true wisdom of the Alawites in Nahj al-Balagha:

"Wealth in exile is like being at home, and poverty in one's homeland is like being a stranger" (Al-Sharif al-Radi, n.d.: 543, Saying No. 56).

This wisdom acts as a very rigid mental instrument for deconstruction of the existing problem. This wisdom helps in identifying the proactive diagnosis of the issue of "alienation in one's native place," which stems from psychological poverty and material greed. In contrast to this concept, there is "alienated wealth," which is derived from self-sufficiency and satisfaction as an integral way of obtaining liberation and existential emancipation from materialism.

The ontological perspective of Nahj al-Balagha is completely in line with the latest findings of the positive psychology, especially when it comes to the increasing demand within educational institutions for implementation of programs of development of "spiritual intelligence." From a psychological point of view, this type of intelligence implies the use of high-level spiritual abilities for solving existential problems and coping with the difficulties of

everyday life (Emmons, 1999: 14). Moreover, spiritual intelligence acts as the compass in search of the deep meaning of one's life (Zohar & Marshall, 2000: 37).

The activation of such a kind of intelligence, profoundly influenced by the general principles of Alawite philosophy, aims at bringing about a fundamental change in humans by turning them from a civilization of material possession into a civilization of spirituality (Fromm, 1976: 76). As for Imam Ali, he puts contentment, conviction, and full trust in God as crucial factors of interior richness. Such are the factors that modern psychology regards as the necessary guarantees and defense mechanisms against existential fear and depression resulting from consumerism (Nassel, 2012: 112).

On the basis of this background, embedding the values of Alawite philosophy in modern education becomes a crucial need for protecting the coming generation from assimilation into the prevailing civilization of the world market. In other words, the process of embedding requires formulating curricula and educational methods aimed at building the values of contentment and rising above basic desires, which act as psychological defenses against material dependency (Amara, 1998: 58).

It also paves the way for the development of an autonomous morality and politics that resists injustice because of how the individual views his freedom as an ontologically right that is divine and immutable such that it should not be exchanged for instant benefit (Shubr, 2015: 145). In the end, the education process results in the creation of an existential extension that surpasses geography such that young people get an "inner homeland" of values that makes them immune from the shocks of alienation,

migrations and economic upheavals (Kilani, 1987: 213).

conclusion:

Such a study, based on the strict application of analysis, deconstruction, and textual approach towards the texts of Nahj al-Balagha and the examination of this process in relation to the evolution of concepts within the Ahl al-Bayt school, resulted in a set of exact and comprehensive academic conclusions which provide the decisive answer to the epistemological question raised in the introduction of the work. The textual and thematic investigation revealed the inseparable organic and structural connection between the freedom of humans and spiritual and psychological richness in Alawite philosophy. It proved the fact that freedom, whether in its ethical, social and political dimensions, can neither be deconstructed nor practiced in real and sustainable way in the public space without the solid base of spiritual richness, satisfaction, and certainty which would guarantee the protection of the human identity from falling into the traps of materialism, need and subordination of other people.

The findings of the study also confirmed the hierarchical and conceptual nature of the concept of freedom in the Nahj al-Balagha, whereby its mandatory movement starts from an individual and subjective perspective, that is, liberation from the captivity of passions and desires. The next level in the hierarchy includes an interactive perspective associated with responsibility and a voluntary moral commitment to oneself, one's community, and to God. Finally, this movement comes to its climax in the general and societal perspective, which is reflected in achieving full social justice, redistribution of

wealth, and rejection of any kind of oppression.

Lastly, this research proves that the Alawite concept of freedom in Nahj al-Balagha has an advanced philosophical and humanitarian model that goes much beyond the contemporary concepts of freedom of liberalism and materialism. In spite of the fact that freedom in modern conceptions is limited to superficial procedure, legal, and consumer freedoms making man vulnerable to alienation and covert oppression, in rhetoric, man is granted existential freedom, self-fulfillment with God, and moral transcendence as real and ontological guarantees that will prevent from the deification of man and turning him into productive tool or fleeting consumer product, thus, indicating that man's freedom and dignity is a fixed and unchangeable divine creation and a source.

The research produced important results which confirm the unity of the Alawite approach in forming man's existence that may be outlined as follows:

1. **The ontological foundation of wealth and freedom:** The Alawite philosophy rises above the physical level of wealth and places its base on the idea of "self-sufficiency and certainty." On the other hand, it was proved by the research that freedom is not a political right that man acquires from outside, but it is divine gift and characteristic, which gives man absolute dignity without any compromises made for "desires" or status.
2. **The dynamics of escalating liberation:** This study highlighted the presence of a hierarchy in which there was freedom, starting from self-cleansing (stripping off the clothes of one's desires), to morality (balance in relationships), and ending with social justice (resistance to tyranny). What comes out of this process is

that political freedom can be fragile without inner strength.

3. **Deconstructing the Dichotomy of Homeland and Exile:** The dichotomy was reinterpreted by Imam Ali psychologically to make "wealth" (certainty) their home and "poverty" (greed) their exile, which enabled people to find peace of mind in times of existential chaos.

4. **Ethical Guidelines as a Protection of Freedom:** The study also confirmed that the freedom in Nahj al-Balagha does not equal "chaos," but it is freedom under the concept of "no harm, no foul," and free from "epistemological confusion" due to channeling the energy of the mind towards the universe and away from the nature of the divine Being.

Recommendations:

Based on the aforementioned findings, and considering the existential alienation faced by contemporary man under the weight of consumerist tendencies, the research recommends the following:

1. **Re-reading Nahj al-Balagha as a tool for spiritual intelligence:** Academic and philosophical institutions should move beyond traditional didactic readings of Nahj al-Balagha and adopt it as an analytical model in human development and spiritual intelligence programs, enabling individuals to build psychological resilience against the pressures of consumerism and dependency.
2. **Adopting the Alawite model in institutional reform:** Recommending the activation of the principles of social justice established by Imam Ali in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, and considering them a standard for evaluating the performance of officials in political spheres, especially in affirming equality between "brothers in faith" and "equals in creation" as a foundation of human rights.

3. **Integrating the concept of "psychological sufficiency" into education:**

Advocating for the inclusion of the concepts of "contentment, certainty, and transcendence of base desires" within educational curricula, not as a call for passive asceticism, but as essential life skills for achieving independence in decision-making and protecting the individual from the "sparks of greed."

4. **Promoting interdisciplinary research:**

We recommend opening new research avenues that combine "Islamic studies" and "contemporary psychoanalysis"

(existential psychology) to explore how "certainty," as a Alawite value, can address the anxiety and alienation experienced by individuals in the digital age.

5. **Establishing a value-based framework for freedom:**

Working to formulate an "ethical charter" derived from Alawite thought, to be presented to human rights organizations, linking freedom with responsibility, and affirming that human dignity is not merely a legal slogan, but a reflection of the nobility of the human spirit and its independence from "internal and external tyranny."

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