

Freedom by Geoffrey Farthing

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Freedom is a magic word. It means the chance to be oneself, to grow straight and true without distorting, even crippling, influences and the opportunity to live one's life according to one's own lights without interference, discord, irritation and even fear. It means privacy free from intrusion, freedom of thought and choice, and the chance for people and races to develop their particular bent and characteristics. Freedom means all this and much more.

Is a baby, is a schoolboy free? Is a young man in love, or learning his trade, free? Is a married man or woman free? Are we, as parents, free when the children are grown up and have left home? Are we free in old age? All these situations we find limiting and maybe irksome. Is a castaway on a desert island or a hermit on a mountain free? Each would certainly be free of interference from other people. The only limitations he would suffer would be his own. In such cases as these, unless we saw our failings and strengths for ourselves, they would never come to our notice and we would have no measure of ourselves. We could live with our conceits unchallenged. There would be no one to bring them to our attention. Maybe a few of us do withdraw from our fellows to avoid this or comparisons with others or to avoid having to cope with the pressures and difficulties inherent in relationships with others.

The recluse or hermit has the necessity of looking after his body. He needs food, clothes, warmth and so on, but these do not challenge him, make him justify himself. Only other people do that.

Natural circumstances of climate, weather, geographical situation, our dependence on food, water, air, rest and so on, even most of our own limitations, are all acceptable. We can move, or otherwise change our circumstances. We can ignore our limitations but we cannot ignore other people nor alter them to make them more compatible. This has often been tried, by persuasion, sometimes gentle, sometimes violent. What right has anyone to try to alter his fellows, recognizing that whatever he does must inevitably interfere with their freedoms, their social habits, religions, views and political ideals? Who has the right to set the standard and to say what is desirable and so enforceable?

These questions seem virtually unanswerable in meaningful terms. Evolution, however, seems to have worked out the means of peaceful development in human communities. The first essential is the restriction of individual liberties - within acceptable limits. Custom over a long time prescribes the limits,

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and "authority" imposes the observance of them. Within these limits, the maximum individual freedom for self-expression, use of time, work, the general ordering of life, thought, etc. is essential. The "authority" must be acceptable too. Authority must not be unpredictable, erratic, or arbitrary. It must enforce the law but not make it. Any community law should be justifiable and challengeable by that Community and never become absolute and fixed.

Outside of these limitations of liberty no one should have any rights or powers to impose his will on others, unless it be for example, parents bringing up children, but who could make practical rules for this, other than love and understanding (and a good deal of courage)? Freedom demands a look at problems such as "permissive" sex relationships and the effects of these on the community. How far does the individual subserve the community or the community the individual?

We have looked at the freedom limitations a man suffers, just because he is what he is, and at the inevitable restraints imposed by society. We have noticed the reactions of personality to personality, which include the subtle ones typified by, as it was said, Mark Anthony's genius being "rebuked" by Caesar.

Man is dependent on nature. Units of the human family are interdependent. They cannot get on without one another. No man can come into existence by himself or rear himself. As an infant, he is helpless, utterly dependent. Humans congregate into communities for protection, division of labour, mating, and so on. A community provides much more than man's physical well-being. It puts him into these important relationships with other people. This supplies his further needs of affection, admiration, assurance as well as of criticism and test. This takes care of our emotional needs. Similarly we require the stimulation of our fellows to make us think, to make us express ourselves clearly, in other words - to promote our mental development.

Physically, emotionally and mentally we are largely dependent on others, but, as we have seen, as well as providing the stimulation and the pleasantries of intercourse, they mean limitations and sometimes unpleasantness. In the Theosophical Society we say these trials and constraints are our Karma, the result of what we have done. Looking at them in the present light as character-developing aids, would we really be free of them even if we could?

Does it begin to look as if there is no such thing as freedom, and if there is, would it really be desirable? Maybe we shall have to have a deeper look, a look at the essential nature of being, of our individual being. Here we come against great difficulties because we can only know our being in terms of our own "knowingness". This knowingness might be described as the awareness of knowing (subject), of knowing something (object). It might be thought we are now becoming unnecessarily abstruse. But it must have become obvious that apart from interference from other people the limitations imposed on us by our own vehicles of "being," e.g. our bodies, and by the physical circumstances or other conditions in which we find ourselves, are the real restrictions on our liberty. Real freedom can apply only to an unconditioned and unlimited state of being. Absolutely, this is probably unattainable, at least until our emergence into the ONE is attained, at the end of our cycles of being, in what has been called Para-Nirvana. Para-Nirvana implies that Nirvana is a condition less absolute than Para-Nirvana. This implies that there are degrees of liberation. For our deeper meaning, freedom must be thought of in these terms. Real freedom becomes an inner subjective condition. Such a condition could only apply to consciousness, and for us

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as humans, unselfconsciousness. This must also mean that somehow consciousness is graduated. We have to try to see what that could mean.

We are familiar with the idea of levels of being: physical, emotional, mental and so on. What we are saying is that to operate self-consciously at each of these levels means our operating in a different mode of consciousness for each of them. The 'feeling', so to speak, of consciousness at each of them is different. The appreciation of things operates in one band of consciousness. Our response, in terms of feeling, to these things and to creatures and other people operates in another band. The experience is of a different order. Similarly with mind activity, thinking and remembering, where not so much feeling is involved, we are aware of a definite kind of inner activity. The *awareness* of each of these kinds of inner response and activity is knowingness. Notice that this too is an inner activity different again from the physical perceptions, or emotional feeling or actual thoughts themselves, of all of which we can be aware.

This state of being aware, reflexively, of our responses and so on has been called self-remembering or self-awareness. In such a state we say a man *knows* in a particular way, what he is doing. This state of being aware of oneself in action and of the action, is knowingness in our present sense.

Now knowingness of this kind is not conditioned, in that it is not dependent on the thing, or action, known. It is the thing known that is limited or conditioned. If then, we would know freedom, we must somehow cultivate our knowingness. This means lifting our awareness free of objective consciousness, i.e. of the ordinary activities or use of ourselves at all levels in waking life. This is a special human ability. Carl Jung, the eminent psychologist, has told us of the occasion one day, going to school, when he suddenly became aware of himself, self-aware, in this special way. It is the state so admirably described by Dr Maurice Nichol in his Psychological Commentaries. It must be the climax of a certain period of effort and growth. It seems it is an ability that can be cultivated, but seemingly not for its own sake. In any case, we could not do this because we cannot know the experience till we have had it.

In theosophical terms it must correspond to what we could call "Egoic" consciousness. This is a paradoxical state because in it, while one is freed from the limitations of personal "vehicles" and circumstances in that they are transcended, the degree of transcendence is limited to the degree of our Egoic growth or development.

The achievement of this growth is by "spiritual" training. We all now know what this means, even if only vaguely. It is right action, in the right spirit; it is devotion, perseverance, and self-forgetfulness.

The culmination of this in due time, not of our choosing, is a break-through, seemingly always sudden, into a new world a new state of being - a state of freedom where everything is seen in a new way, a detached way, an uninvolved way, and yet everything is of interest and concern. We see nature at work, in creature and process, as life, living and moving, in LOVE, to an inevitable end wherein all share and all is well. Anxiety as to ultimate outcome can have no place. All the seeming petty detail of our lives is played out against this background of undisturbed serenity and compassion. Our own selves, as we once regarded them, are part of that process, but we are now unattached, unconfined. We are of the process but not in it. We are free and can say, as could Milton even when in prison: "the fishes that tipple in the

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deep know no such liberty ..". This is real freedom; it is Theosophy too.

Within our Society we must surely have regard to all that is written here. Our rules are all the restrictions we should suffer. The Society cannot prescribe forms of belief or desirable literature, formulate dogma, follow an orthodoxy, recommend practices. Its function is to promote its Objects, nothing else. Members must be free, free to follow Truth their own way, free to make their own mistakes, read what they like, do what they like, only with reasonable regard for others interests and freedom. Let us remember that "The Truth shall make you free"; vice-versa, Truth can only survive in Freedom.