

## Do Chains Liberate?

A soldier came to a Zen master, and asked: "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired the master.

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed the Zen master. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar."



The samurai became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but the master continued: "So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As the samurai drew his sword the master remarked: "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said the master.

It is through the presence or absence of discipline and self-control that we create our heaven or hell.

### The key attention areas

Adults often fail in three areas:

1. In observing discipline, particularly in areas like health, addictions and in dealing with power and success.
2. In dealing with money, particularly with budgeting and in handling debt,
3. In relationships, particularly with letting go, with expectations, in sharing and in relating with people's feelings and emotions.

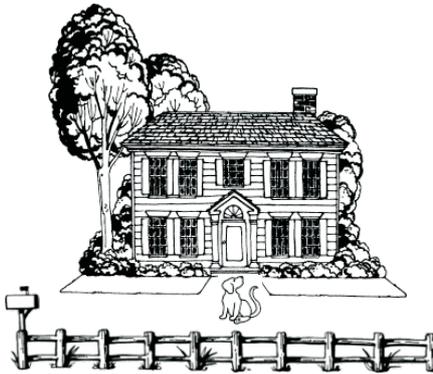
All these issues necessitate strict adherence to certain norms. Left on our own, we often fail to follow these norms. We all need the external help of a master craftsman to regularly prune and weed out our imperfections. We are saved from deviations and dilution if we hold ourselves accountable to some external force. Losers hate accountability, winners self-impose it, even if none is required.

### The meaning of freedom

The word freedom is often interpreted to mean total or absolute freedom. This is a selfish approach and signifies irresponsibility. We must appreciate our limits.

Recently I read an essay titled 'Freedom and Fences'. The author

lives with his family and a dog in a house, which has a big fenced yard. The fence is not high; it is mainly ornamental. It is more a mental limit than an obstacle. Any time the dog wished, it could cross over it and run in the city. But the dog never did it. "Not the fence, but only her acceptance of the fence keeps her in the yard".



The fence does not keep the dog in bondage; it keeps it free. Don't we know the fate of a wandering dog in the city? Haven't we heard the curse 'you will die the death of a dog'. A street dog rarely dies a natural death, in most cases it is accidental. The fence does not limit the dog's freedom as much as it guarantees it. It defines how far it can go without losing its freedom, a relative freedom.

We can't have absolute freedom. We can enjoy freedom only if we accept the limits as well. If we assert our freedom without having the powers to maintain it, we will be doomed to lose it totally. In the Ramayana, Sita crossed the Lakshman-rekha and paid a heavy price.

Man makes his own fences. Sometimes, society does it. Sometimes, law does it. These fences evolve after centuries of experience. Governance is one such fence, which the many long surviving and successful business groups have applied in true spirit and reaped the benefit. We only have to learn from them.

In our quest for freedom, we throw away every restraint, every limit. Many people behave as if there are no fences and they can go as far as they want. Freedom comes from growth, strength and mastery; and they all come from discipline. The undisciplined are imprisoned by their personal weaknesses and high-headedness, because to succeed is to be free.

David C. Korten says, "As we awaken to life . . . ., we come face-to-face with one of the most fundamental of life's lessons: we gain true freedom only as we accept responsibility for using it with mindfulness of the needs of the whole. In the living world it is the cancerous cell that seeks freedom without responsibility, and its freedom is ultimately self-limiting. Freedom, whether in economic or political life, comes only with mindful responsibility. . . ."

### Collective individuality

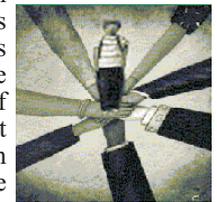
**We are not islands, we are all part of a continent.** It is foolish to think in terms of total isolation from society.

In the movie 'Cast Away', when his plane crashes, Tom Hanks spends some years in an island with no civilized man around. He has to lead the life of a stone-aged man. Put yourself in that situation and imagine how complicated life can become in the absence of even basic things like fire or a knife. Imagine no food, clothes or shelter, no shaving or combing, having fever or a toothache and being all alone.



We take for granted all the protection and comfort the society provides us. The freedom that you so passionately cherish and try to assert is totally at the mercy of the society that you live in. You would not even utter the word 'Freedom' if you were born in a communist country.

We need to promote individualism of the sort where each person seeks to preserve his judgment, his will and his dreams, not at the exclusion or harm of others, but with respect for others. Such freedom is the foundation of a true democracy.



**Let us be like the lines that lead to the center of a circle, uniting there, and not like parallel lines, which never join.**

- Oriental wisdom

A mountain peak stands alone, but it doesn't travel that way all through. It asserts its individuality only at the fag end. For most part, it remains immersed with



other peaks. Similarly, we build our identity through others and with others.



We cannot think of breaking away from the society and its customs and rules. Happiness in life comes by harmoniously

adjusting with the whole without losing the self. When a leaf breaks away from the tree, it just drifts with the wind and is finally submerged in the earth. When a wave tries to break away from the sea, it goes mad.

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In the name of independence, youngsters often desert their parents. What if the parents also desert their newborn babies in a jungle. What would you look like and behave like if you were lucky enough not to be eaten up by a predator? You will never know any language, will probably walk like animals using your hands and legs both, and will be as scared of fire as any other animal.

Let us consider another story. A boy was flying a kite with his father and asked him what kept the kite up. Dad replied, "The string," the boy said,

"Dad, it is the string that is holding the kite down." The father asked his son to watch as he broke the string. The kite came down.



Sometimes the very thing that we think are holding us down, are the things that are helping us fly. That is what discipline is all about.

We often remember the restrictions and discipline thrust upon us during our childhood, but that is what actually allowed us the freedom to grow as mature and healthy human beings. "Such maturation requires accepting the responsibility that accompanies the freedom to choose."

**"If, as youngsters, some discipline had been imposed upon you at home, at school, or through the courts, you might not now be standing here for this dreadful offence."**

*- Mr. Justice Scott Baker, in the Phillips case*

Any person with a false sense of maturity, by behaving irresponsibly, is bound to get into some kind of trouble sooner or later. We all have many choices, but the ability to choose with responsibility is the true sign of maturity. Any rich fool can indulge into womanizing, gambling and drinking; only a mature mind opts for higher goals that require immense character.

There is a need for spiritual governance. That is achieved by aligning ourselves with nature. Nature follows an order. Day and night, weather, our bodies everything has a natural discipline. When we play with this order and discipline, we pollute the environment. We suffer from diseases when we eat foods that are not suitable to our body, when we follow a schedule that is against the time cycle and when we breath air that is not suitable to it. In most cases, we do it by making wrong choices. It is a conscious decision.

If you are not watchful, you can easily descend into being an animal by allowing arrogant, selfish and corrupt thoughts to take possession of you. We must conquer our weaknesses and selfishness and should rise above slavish indulgence.

There is a need to revive some of the old-fashioned values of discipline, restraint and control.

Members of a system constitute the environment for one another. If your aggression hampers my growth, you need to be chained and that will liberate me. Does it mean that governance is a tool for disciplining others? Unfortunately this is how we treat governance - a tool for protecting our self-interests and forgetting to apply the same discipline on ourselves. But such approach encourages faultfinding and vengeance.

### **Governance ensures freedom**

A well-governed family firm gives its members and managers freedom to pursue the strategic direction that it has defined for itself. Instead of micromanaging, asking members to come back for specific permission on a host of decisions, the limits of authority are described. Within this circle of authority, defined by those limits, members are free to be excellent and creative in reaching for the strategic goals.

The role of governance is to provide balance, objectivity, strategic direction and stretch by maximizing the strengths of the organization and by minimizing the impacts of its negative features.

Governance is a navigating tool that comes into operation in case of deviations. Governance is a catalyst that unleashes the captive energy of creativity and innovation through empowerment. Governance is a binder that allows people to work in synergy towards a shared vision. Governance is a prime mover that doesn't allow the organization to rest in illusive desire for status quo, which would in any case be disturbed by change agents operating otherwise.

Governance is a mirror that presents to you your beauty or ugliness just the way it is, minus the cover-ups and make-ups. Governance is a looking glass to external world. Governance is the window that exposes your credibility or deficiency to the outside world.

Governance is like routine medical check-up that detects the life-threatening diseases at nascent and curable stage.

Governance is a conduit or medium for exchange of knowledge and ideas.

Governance is a chain that liberates.

In Homer's 'The Odyssey', Ulysses is confronted with a classic Intra-personal conflict. He knows that he will soon encounter the Sirens - those mythical female enchantresses, who by singing sweetly try to lure sailors to their island, subsequently to kill them.



He receives advice to put wax in his men's ears to block out the tempting voices of the Sirens. As for Ulysses himself, he is told to have his men bind him with chains to the ship's mast and to order them in advance not to release him, no matter how much he begs, until after they pass safely by the Sirens. In this way Ulysses will have the pleasure of listening to the sirens without being trapped by them. As his ship sets sail, he warns his men, "if I plead with you and force you to set me free, then you must tie me even more strongly." Everything goes as planned, and the men survive this adventure.

Did the chain bind Ulysses or did it liberate him?

**"No horse gets anywhere until he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated, disciplined."**

*- Harry Emerson Fosdick, D.D.*