**Alive or Dead**

[Askari Raza Malik](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/askari-raza-malik)

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A saint of old times had said, “The people with faith are alive. Those without it are dead”. Faith and freedom are essentially intertwined. The conviction that there is ‘no god but God’ makes the Muslims free and fearless.
Once Omer (RA) saw a prominent man beating a poor mortal. The Caliph was beside himself with rage. “When every man is born free, you have no right to treat him like a slave.” Freedom is the birthright of all human beings.
Rachid Ghannouchi, a world-famous Tunisian philosopher “defends the value of human freedom from an Islamic perspective. Ghannouchi argues that mankind’s status as God’s vicegerent (caliph) on earth requires our exercise of reason and freedom. All obligations imposed on mankind by God, beginning with bearing witness to God and His Messenger, require the exercise of freedom. He defends multiple conceptions of freedom, beyond freedom from external coercion. Obedience to God renders humans freer than disobedience because it is through religious practice that we learn to control the self and its appetites, and to channel our will towards purposes of ultimate human value. Yet this “positive” conception of freedom nonetheless requires public freedoms and rights to allow humans the space to exercise their moral personality on their own, without coercion or domination.”
The individuals make a nation. Individual freedom is meaningless without unconditional “Public Freedoms”. The first amendment to the US constitution aptly encapsulates the concept of Public Freedoms. It reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances”.
A nation is as free as it can independently exercise its right to frame its national policies, without any internal or external constraints, except its national interest. And that, it can choose its rulers and follow a system of governess collectively structured by it. Last but not the least, its judiciary is absolutely free and scrupulously honest. It should have the audacity to outrightly reject the evidence of the son of the sitting caliph in establishing his claim against an ordinary citizen.
A living nation asserts itself internally and externally. Assertion is not aggression. It is a polite reminder to others to remain off its turf. It fiercely defends its geographical and ideological frontiers, despite the enemy.
Afghanistan is a nation alive and kicking. In the first instance, it made a superpower bite the dust and leave Afghanistan in utter disgrace. In the recent past, it humiliated a combined force of all the remaining superpowers of the world. It is abysmally poor but fiercely free. While there are many others, atrociously rich but literal slaves. A caravan of few widows and orphans was captured on the Sindh coast. A force was sent from Arabia to Sindh under a 17 years old commander that defeated the army of Hindu Raja Dahir to rescue the captives.
In the early 1950s, an American couple was kidnapped near Pakistan-Iran border. The US demanded and the armed forces of both the countries were employed in a rigorous search to recover the kidnapped couple, apparently a well-nigh impossible undertaking. The nations that are alive jealously guard their rights without caring for the consequences. Power is no criterion. Iran has done that for over four decades, accepting the dire economic repercussions but unequivocally asserting its freedom and pride.
The living place high premium on human resource development. They invest heavily in the center of power, their people, and draw strength from them. The armed forces are one instrument of national security. The real strength lies in the character of the ordinary folk. Without the nation’s support, the fighting machine has limited potential. If an ordinary citizen is demoralised, fearful, insecure and hungry, he turns diffident. The fight in him is lost to the oppression suffered on daily basis. The armed forces are left with nothing to protect their base.
In 1971, the Indian Army knew even the number of bricks laid in our defense works. The Bengalis, defying history and common perceptions had suddenly become alive. More than the enemy our own brethren hurt us bad, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Our backs were always exposed, not a comfortable prospect by any means.
According to another saint, majority of the judges’ community will find itself in hell. Their job is morally highly demanding and their test is arduous. A general impacts his command, a judge influences the entire nation. A God fearing and courageous judge leads the people by his example, makes the nation fearless and free. The slave and corrupt judges only catalyse their nation’s demise. “Ethical governess and social justice greatly contribute towards the rise and fall of a nation.”
The Prophet (PBUH) said, “toleration entails abundance and blessings and those lacking it are devoid of God’s grace. Toleration is the basis of wisdom indeed.” Great nations are astonishingly tolerant and broadminded. They can just brush off serious rancor concerning their scriptures and even Prophets. They harbor no false pretensions about honor or religious obsessions. There are no holy cows and no political martyrs, no dynastic claims and no blueblood. They never put their martyrs on sale. The living beings are watchful not anachronistic. They perceive and account for the changes in societal environment. They thus, remain forearmed.
The greater the oppression the stronger is the revulsion. Relentless repression could kick the weakest to revolt. When the volcano erupts the weight of the mountains cannot suppress it.