

Organization Without Freedom and Freedom Without Organization Are Both Detrimental.

The Legend of Democracy, Freedom,
Human Rights and Ousta Abbas Kashi

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*Nature is a poor teacher, for she
gives the exam before the lesson.*

– Confucius

Winston Churchill was asked whether he approved of a democratic system. He replied, “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.”

The sweet word of **freedom** pleases every palate, and the phrase “**human rights and democracy**” is delicious to all tastes. Alas, human beings are still lost on the corner of human rights, to date wrestling with religion. Whatever democracy builds, the extremist religions destroy, without building another useful building in its place, as science would have done.

That’s because the intrinsic unchangeability of a religion contaminated with bigotry stands in conflict against the issue of democracy; and because wherever the religion allows for one right, it immediately constrains it with some new yokes and harnesses, some more ifs and buts. But when it comes to human beings, **the better yoke is to help bring about a better understanding of things, and not to fasten the harness.** Those who understand better will be rewarded their rightful shares, those who are ready to preserve their rational beliefs and to receive the benefits of human rights.

Ultimately, every group praises freedom as they understand it, and as they wish to act.

Some people want equal freedom and liberties for everyone, because they know that **as long as my neighbor is not free, I will not have my freedom;** and until individual safety is not maintained, collective security will not be possible. Some others prefer to think of freedom – and it’s well known and documented – in having, say, four wives at one time, besides the side dish of a few fresh, seasonal, temporary marriages known as *sigheh*, plus numerous children, who might often be raised without a mother. Then there are the countless many who see their freedom in a

state of “topsy-turvy”, even if it means to let them be free to oppress others, fight other people, brain-wash them, and teach religious and sectarian hatred at schools. Meanwhile, they insist that only they understand things, and others don’t understand that only *they* understand things! Now, try to make *them* understand that **freedom can be respected as long as it won’t interfere with the freedoms of others**, and you’ll hear them cry out aloud, “There is no freedom!”

We may question if everyone is equally equipped to understand freedom, so that we could apply the sacred bill of human rights uniformly to everyone. For instance, Persian literary figures have taught us that “a bad essence won’t turn good if the person’s foundation is bad.” Or that,

**A tree of a bitter nature,
Plant it in the Garden of Eden,
Water it from the heavenly rivers,
Or feed pure honey to its roots,
Yet it won’t yield you gold,
But its old bitter fruit.**

What can be done? The solution lies in teaching the culture of democracy, and to observe democratic principles, from the early days of childhood, at home and at schools, from kindergartens to universities.

**The spring may be sealed with just a shovel at its origin;
But once flooded, it can’t be blocked even by an elephant.**

Good old childhood memories. One hot summer night of the Kashan desert, I was sleeping alongside my family over the straw-and-mud roof of our house, when a hubbub broke out in the alley. At the middle of the night, we heard that **Ousta Abbas, our Kashani neighbor, had caught a thief**. I jumped out of the bed and dashed away to see the thief, whom I truly imagined would look quite different than us ordinary humans. In the alley, I was seized by the sight of a tall, strong, heroic Ousta Abbas, who was pulling a weak and miserable man behind him by the wrist. I was surprised that the man had eyes and brows; he looked just like the rest of us. Together with the rest of the neighborhood, Ousta Abbas took the man to the police station, all the while beating and slapping him on the head.

(My childish assumptions about the strange looks of a thief remind me of the late **Khajeh Eliahoo Esmailian**. He was a rich Jewish merchant who about those days had returned to Kashan from a trip to the town of Savej Balagh. He told my father that the people of that town had rushed to see “the Jew”, and that he had heard them saying, “Look, the Jew has eyes and ears, too!” Crying out aloud from such ignorance.)

Anyhow, those days in Iran, when the people caught a thief, quite often, they would first beat him nonsense, then they’d hand him over to the law! This was a telling example of **disobedience** against the authority, and public distrust in the practice of the law. The bad luck of those thieves brings to the mind the story of a fox that one day had to escape a village. “What’s the rush,” he was asked. “Humans are killing every fox with three nuts,” he explained. “What’s there to worry? You’ve got only two!” **“They kill first, then do the counting!”** They beat up the man first, and give him up to the law afterwards.

The crowd before Ousta Abbas’s house praised Abbas’s courage (!) and spoke of beating a thief as a “good deed”! Meanwhile, his highness Ousta Abbas returned back from the police station. He looked like a champion who had been denied the medal he had so deserved. He cried

out in his thick Kashani accent, **“At the police station, the cop placed two chairs for the two of us, one for me, one for the thief! But since when a thief became a human?! What’d be the difference between me and a thief?! What kind a law is this?! What kind of a cop is he?!”** Well, there are also people who understand freedom and human rights as he did; and they react to every action within the narrow limits of their understanding. How beautifully **Confucius** put it, that Nature was a poor teacher, for she gave the exam before the lesson. Sooner or later, humanity can only learn through experiencing the hardships. I hope that by now, those people too have learned their lesson.

The effective power of any law is in how it’s understood and employed. As **Einstein** is often quoted, **No law can be any better than those who carry it out.** The many tedious and multi-sided even contradictory religious laws are among the most important of such laws, as when they say, “Do not murder,” only to ask you “to kill” just a few pages later. Let’s be blunt: such essentially arbitrary ifs and buts, such conditional and relative justice, these are not consistent with **human rights**, or even the **philosophy of religions**. How could the modern bill of human rights be consistent with some ancient scripture which instead of abolishing slavery regulated it at the time, and by doing so prolonged its practice? Could we grant freedom in the name of human rights to those who deem other people’s right to their freedom, even their very right to live, as some arbitrary relative considerations? The answer is clearly, No. Equality does not mean to equate a healthy mind with an unhealthy mind. The equality of human rights means to give to each person according to their capabilities and merits. It does not mean to give away all freedoms blindly, without taking into account individual merits and beliefs, and the psychological, intellectual, cultural and religious conditions of the person. Mistakes as such in the past have allowed such mad men as Gadhafi, Idi Amin, and their likes, to put nations in chains, export terrorists to all over the world, or speak some nonsense at the United Nations’ podium. Such absurd cases make me sympathize with Ousta Abbas, that “we shouldn’t set up a chair for them.”

It’s said, **Fear the wise enemy only once, but fear the ignorant man a thousand times, even if he is a friend.** . The Gadhafis of the world are not wise and reasonable. Freedom extends to all of those who deserve it. Alas, some groups think that “humankind” means only those who follow the same book as theirs. Such people consider others to be nothing, have no respect for their freedom, and even think that their own survival depends on eliminating the others.

**Sigh, for our secret pain’s remedy,
The solution to our consternation,
It’s been left to a crowd who imagines
Their prosperity at the cost of our destruction.**

We may observe that misplaced liberties have led to anarchy in the progressive countries of the world, especially in Europe. Because those who can see only one side of the issues they look at every law and regulation through their absolutist glasses and within the frame of their own beliefs. They ignore all other people, speak like a radio and act as they wish, but wouldn’t understand what others have to say.

Yet human being is born out of progressive evolution, and not from ossified stagnation. If the absolutists were right; if their belief in the unchangeability of their ideas, their mono-sided view of things, their closed mentality of “it is what it is”, were in fact correct and practical, then

we wouldn't have gone through millions of years of Darwinian evolution; instead, we would all remain as apes and live with our good old monkey brains!

Alas, to grant freedom and kindness to undeserving people is to waste both the kindness and the blessing of freedom. The world has to start with the foundations, that is, with families and schools, to remove hateful religious writings, and to prevent our children's minds from becoming polluted by hatred and discrimination. Until we do this, the world won't see peace, and the holy laws of human rights will not be practiced. To shed some light on this subject, we may have a look at the contents of the textbooks and religious books in many countries where hatred is promoted, including Persian language books. We may then realize how the future will look like if the students of these books increase in numbers and find more means at their disposal. To draw some statistics, we may compare the generation of the past 30 years in countries ablaze in the evil of violence with the generation of the preceding 30 years to get a glimpse of the horrible dangers that lurk on humanity's road to the future.

Even if presumably we could remove the regressors from the families and even the society, it would not mean that we had succeeded to eliminate regression. The world will succeed only when the motivation behind preserving superstitions, as a delusional means to preserve the religion, is taken out from the beliefs of the society and of the so-called religious schools. Otherwise, soon enough, while the world's sound asleep, once an extremist is gone, his school will deliver ten more like him to the global community!

Today, across the world, especially in advanced countries – and this is not limited to one religion, sect, or particular country – **religious extremists, smuggling rings, and other anti-humans** form the largest groups which **stump and crush freedoms in the name of freedom, and by abusing the laws of human rights**. They commit every wrong, and when they are caught, they draw upon religion, resort to the very humane laws of human rights, and receive help from deft lawyers of the same countries; and they often have themselves acquitted, only to continue with their cruelties. I personally observed such a scene as I attended the very civil international court of justice at the Hague, Netherlands.

There is a difference between observing human rights versus using them as a means to an end. There is a difference between the sincere, likable and respectable people who are religiously observant, and those who use religion as a means to impose cruelty, violation, and hateful divisions, who run from the law, yet demand legitimacy in the holy names of religion and the law. For example, I'm reminded of the shameful and tragic events of September 11, 2001, which included attacks on the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and as a result of which about 3000 innocent lives were perished. Awhile later, when the mastermind of this despicable crime was captured, he reportedly told the arresting officer, **"See you in court!"** In other words, he knew that according to the laws of the human rights in the United States, he would be taken to the court, "a chair would be provided for him", and even the government besides his own supporters would openly hire lawyers to acquit him; and thus for years, they would take care of him. He is still in prison.

The following question arises: Where we speak of practicing the human rights, whom do we mean by "human"? Isn't it true that the humane behavior of any human being is the measure of his humanity? Could we call "human" the kind of people who in the name of religion, do not allow even for other people's right to live? There are people who imagine it to be an obligation and "a rewarding good deed" to carry out any act of cruelty in the name of promoting their own

religion, even if it means to murder those who think differently than them. Do they deserve to enjoy the benefits of the progressive laws of the human rights, and are they ready to receive them? Meanwhile, the repulsive theory of inequality based on sectarian or religious differences, which in general is an arbitrary criterion, has remained the chronic cancer of freedom and human rights, and it continues to deprive many people of the benefits that they truly deserve.

Stephen Weinberg said, “With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.” It was in effect the belief of some pretentiously good but deeply and truly ignorant thugs that brought down the two 110-floor towers along with the innocent people who were inside them, not just the power of the planes, nor their fuel. Let us have a better look at the history of the world to realize that most wars and genocides, even the Holocaust, had their roots in the despicable religious and sectarian hatred; and the trouble continues to our time.

**If sorrow gave out smoke like the fire,
The world would remain dark forever.**

Oppression does not consist only of imposing cruelty on the innocent, but also to remain silent in the face of tyranny is a double oppression against us and others. We’ve even seen how those countries that once supported terrorism are now themselves caught up in that same evil. May the world come to before it’s too late.

To feel pain is one of the blessings of life, because it warns us that it’s time to seek a cure. On a larger scale, miners take a little bird along with them to the depths of the mines to warn them of any serious shortage of oxygen or the presence of poisonous gases. If the bird faints, they learn of the imminent danger and immediately vacate the place to avoid sudden suffocation or gas poisoning. **Let us think of our children and the future.** We shouldn’t ignore the pain. The air of the world security is poisoned. The footsteps of ignorance and poverty can be heard, and even though humanity is equipped with modern wealth and technology, the import and export of the evil men can be heard all around the world. The laws of human rights have not been implemented effectively enough to provide a definitive cure. The world badly needs another leap forward, alongside the giant leap made by science. This is a leap comparable to our dramatic passage from the stone ages to the age of science and industry, but this time toward providing the human rights. Today, thanks to the digitization of channels of education and the instant communication of data, the grounds for such a progressive change have been laid for the long run.

To fight Malaria, they don’t go after the mature Anopheles mosquitoes; rather, before the population of the mosquito has reached maturity, they apply insecticides to the swamps where they grow. Likewise, we may cleanse of hatred the minds of those in closed-circuit schools around the world that are dedicated to promoting religious hatred; thus, we’ll resolve the current conflict and tension between religion and human rights, between bigotry and civilization, and it would cost us less than one thousandth of the defense military solutions to comparable ends. **Let us fight with our pens, so that there will be no more wars.** Let us call a war on ignorance, equipped with science, so that there’ll be no more ignorance. The problems of the anti-rational humans; to replace reason with religion and tradition, in order to achieve some illegitimate goals; these are nothing new. Over the centuries, countless literary figures, mystics and poets of Iran, including Khayyam, Hafez, Saadi, Attar, Baba Taher, etc. have tried hard to tame the bestial human by the way of reminding him of the unreliability and transitory nature of life, so that

human rights would be observed. For long, in Persian households, their books have been in use like “sleeping pills” alongside religious scriptures. While most people didn’t understand the language of the religious books, they did understand very well the language of poetry. Khayyam said,

**If this mixture of elements pleases you though temporarily,
Go and live happily, even if you’re exposed to cruelties.
Be happy with the men of reason, for the essence of your body
Is composed of some dust, a breeze, some fog, and a breath.**

Sadly, today’s world is in turmoil, and an unbridled crowd, who in the guise of religion support and rely on cruelties, claim to be observing human rights. I think of the deeply rational motto of the state of Missouri, which reads as follows, “**Salus populi suprema lex esto**”, that is, “**The welfare of the people shall be the supreme law.**” Reason awakens those feelings in us that can be understood only when we are awake. Let’s prevent wasting the rational minds of our children from the early childhood, so they would be prepared to understand and practice the sacred laws and culture of human rights. We all have a share in this responsibility.

That society will be alive and continue to have a special existence whose members will all be required to protect the security and morals of the society. In today’s world community we can no more say, “As long as they don’t bother me, I won’t be afraid of them.” All humans are connected to one another, like the matches in a matchbox; if a flame nears any one of them, the entire content of the box will be at risk. We have inherited our religion, culture, science and freedom from our ancestors; but also, we have borrowed them from the future generations for their good and welfare. We must try and improve on these legacies before we pass them on. To that end, two fundamental ways are readily before us, to omit from the books those sections that are contaminated with hatred, and to promote the bill of human rights.

The bill of human rights has no fault of its own. They asked Rumi whether wine was “halal” (permitted) or forbidden by the religion. He answered, “It depends on who drinks it.”

**Don’t blame the wine if it’s drunk by an idiot,
Who opens mouth to obscenities and loses his coins.
Drink as wisely as Avicenna did, and
I swear to God that you’ll surely merge with Himself.**

My friends: As we see, by Nature’s law, and without the approval or disapproval of religions with their constant and formulaic laws, the eyes and the ears have become sharper. The French author Mouren has said that, and I paraphrase, science created a new progressive religion whose natural followers included the scholars and science-lovers of the world. Guided by reason and current technology, they constantly destroy and reconstruct the past to rectify humanity’s many shortages. It’s been the leaders of this “new religion” who have succeeded to increase life expectancy within the past century from 40 to 84 years. It’s been these people who relied on science and technology to increase production and agricultural efficiency, find new resources of energy, and improve our use of nature to prevent famines and illnesses; and they maximized these results without podiums and priests, without temples and clerics. In the long run, this very earthly group will conquer some of those so-called heavenly problems, and they’ll realize the bill of human rights.

A blind man asked a wise man, "Is there anything worse than losing one's sight?" The wise man replied, "Losing once insight." May the day never come when the insights of a group of people be tarnished, especially the followers of the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, who all agree on the Torah. May the prescribed panacea of these religions never be ignored, e.g. such fine solutions as the command of the Torah, *ve-'ahavta le-re'akha ka-mokha*, **"love your kind as you would love yourself."** May their followers know forever that "your kind" does not mean a person with your color of skin, or your religion, your country, your tradition, or your race, but it means all of humanity; and the aim is to observe the human rights in general. May freedom never be wasted. I think of **Voltaire**, who said, **"Oh, Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!"**

Therefore, the bill of human rights resembles a little garden full of flowers. To the dismay of the chief gardener (the founders of the bill of rights), when the lawn is watered, both the flowers and the weeds are nourished and grow; unless the gardeners (the parents, teachers, and promoters of the religions) have uprooted the weeds (the religious hatred) in advance.

We should break poisoned pens. We should wash poisoned books. We should rewrite destiny anew by spreading knowledge. As the poet said,

**If the audience cannot understand the words,
Don't ask for the speaker's rhetorical powers.**

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