

PROPHET MUHAMMAD, p.b.u.h.

The Greatest liberator of

"man, who is born free and everywhere he is in chains!"

by Khalifa Abdul Hakim

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*Also reproduced here is an excerpt written by **Thomas Carlyle** about the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h. from the **Dictionary of Islam***

Whenever a modern thinker contemplates human well being, he arrives at a conclusion that what is required is liberty, fraternity and equality. Instinctively or logically he puts liberty as the first requisite. Man is neither a material object subject to the inexorable determinism of the laws of matter, nor is he a mere animal whose life is guided by unerring instincts working as instruments of biological self-preservation. Although there is determinism from matter to animal life, still one could detect gradual realization of more and more liberty from one stage to the other. The plant is freer than inorganic matter in a sense that it has freed itself from the pure mechanism of matter and is guided by its own vital urges. Similarly the animal is freer than the plant because it is endowed with movement and an incipient consciousness, which makes the range of its choices much wider, and it has much larger capacity of adaptation to the environment; to some extent it molds the environment to suit the purpose of its life. When we arrive at man, there emerges a new instrument of life. He is endowed with reason besides his instincts, many of which he has in common with the higher animal. The higher animals were merely conscious; man has become self-conscious. The widening of consciousness is also the ascent of reason and side by side with this, the scope of liberty too increases, it is obvious that that the progressive evolution of life advances liberty simultaneously with consciousness and reason. The Greek philosophers defined man as a rational animal; with them the problem of free will had not attained that prominence and importance that we find latter on in Christianity and Islam. For the Greeks the liberty of choosing between various alternatives belonged to the mixture of irrationality with reason. They did not realize that liberty was as much the essence of man as reason. Whoever said that man was born free but was everywhere

in chains, [Jean Jacques Rousseau] uttered an essential truth about man.

Let us start with the Quran to study the Islamic view of human liberty. By their adversaries Muslims are stigmatized as believers in '*Kismet*', fate or Predestination. This is only a partial and, therefore, a misleading view of the Islamic creed. There is no doubt that according to this teaching, Allah is the source of all existence, the cause of all causes. Whatever exists; exists because of His Will. He is the Creator the Supervisor and the Guide. If He had so willed, people would have not erred. If He had so willed, He would have made human beings uniformly good, incapable of choosing the wrong way. The Qur'an says He did not will it to be so. He did not will it because He did not want human beings automations of virtue; the paragon of existence could not be made compulsorily virtuous. Liberty is the essence of virtue; where there is no liberty there may be goodness of an angelic type or of a sub-human variety, as the fitness or beauty or goodness of a plant or an animal or a phenomenon of Nature but that is not what we understand by virtue.

According to Islam, God is essentially free; absolute freedom belongs only to Him. He creates what He wills. The intellectualists ask whether this Omnipotence does not engulf all other freedoms. But if we take Islamic view of God and His relation to man, the problem can easily be solved by another approach. The Qur'an says that the spirit of man is the Divine Spirit itself; if God is free, His essential attribute of freedom is shared by man. Man was made God's viceregent on earth; hence he too possesses delegated freedom. Adam's first exercise of liberty manifested itself in disobedience. However undesirable freedom may be, it is the proof of liberty - freedom even over against his Creator. The revolt of [the] adolescent is a sure sign of

the coming of age. Man is destined to acquire Divine attributes; that is the goal of his life. He has to cross over from external determinism to self-determinism, which is the same thing as liberty. His humanity and his liberty are identical. A man is only human to the extent that he acts freely. Even when he makes [the] wrong choices freely he is more human than when he is made to act rightly under compulsion.

Granting of freedom to man is a free act of Divine Grace. It does not take away anything from the Omnipotence of God, nor does it diminish His All-Encompassing Mercy. But this liberty too is not chaotic; it is also subject to Divine Laws. As the Qur'an says, "*We have shown man the two ways*"; it is open to him to make himself blessed or cursed. For man, God has established a Moral Order. Man's freely chosen good and his freely chosen evil are weighed in a sensitive balance. As moral evil is the result of liberty granted by God, it might be said that even this evil ensuing from liberty is divinely willed; rewards and punishments accrue from good or evil actions but the Moral Law is divinely promulgated. An intellectualistic logic or crude materialism which makes all life including the soul of a man a necessary product of the blind forces, may not be able to understand the nature of freedom but entire human life is based on this intuition. Even materialism is now gradually receding from its old determinism and conceiving of atoms as endowed with freedom of movement. Biology too is moving away from mechanistic determinism, conceiving all life as a goal-seeking activity.

Whatever hypothesis the natural science might choose, freedom shall remain as the essence of human spirit. The Quranic verses describe the Omnipotence of God and the moral responsibility of man in the same breath, and a superficial logician is perplexed by the dilemma. But the Islamic view is sound and free from any inherent contradiction. By granting freedom to man, God has not abdicated nor is the order of Nature violated.

Liberty is essential for man's ascent towards divinity and therein lies the dignity of man. The Qur'an says man is destined to rule over Nature; how could he command Nature if he is slave of natural forces which push and pull him according to their own deterministic laws? How could a being with the Spirit of the Lord in him be anything but free? But liberty is not an end in itself. Islam teaches that we are made free in order to freely surrender our will to the Will of God; thereby man does not become a slave but a participator on the universal freedom of God. Only the spirit of Lord can

make us genuinely free. Liberty in itself may not be an intrinsic value but it is an indispensable condition for the realization of all the intrinsic values of life. The freedom of the seeker of truth leads him to truth; if this is free pursuit is hampered; truth is not attained. The freedom of the artist creates all great art. Freedom from wants clears the way for the human soul to advance towards the things of the spirit. Liberty is the breath of all the progress; it is the chief prerogative of man. All that makes existence valuable depends on it; it is as sacred as truth itself. As compared with liberty, life itself is comparatively an inferior gift. Ingersoll has expressed this truth most rhetorically, "what light is to the eyes, what air is to the lungs, what love is to the heart, liberty is to the soul of man. Without liberty the brain is a dungeon, where the chained thoughts die with their pinions pressed against the hinge less doors." It is the best beloved of best men; 'free lives and lips, free hands of men free born.'

Life is offered to us as a synthesis of determinism and indeterminism. To some extent we are determined by our environment and by our heredity or the constitution with which we are born. There is also Divine determinism; we are born with different aptitudes and varying capacities. There is also social determinism, which instills into us good and bad biases and compels us to move within ruts made by hallowed customs and ancient usages. The instincts within our own individual selves become imperious and tend to make us slaves of passion. The thesis of Islam is that all this is there but still man remains potentially free; this essence of his spirit cannot be alienated from him. The human spirit must be so strengthened that it overcomes all these resistances; it is by overcoming of obstacles that the soul is fortified against the onslaughts of fortune.

The mission of all true religion ought to be the emancipation of man because only truth can make man free. Since about a century there has been a revolt against religion because it was considered to stand in the way of free human development. It was thought that religion was product of man's ignorance, a creation of false fears and hopes. Some thought it presented a spurious science and stood in the way of free scientific enquiry. The communists said that it was designed as an opiate for the masses. Nietzsche put forward the thesis that it was a n invention of the slave to delude their masters in order to protect themselves. Others revolted against religion because it curbed the exercise of useful and legitimate human instincts. Another cause of revolt against religion was that people had ceased to believe in life after death and had become indifferent to the

otherworldly aspects of their creeds. The phenomenal progress of physical sciences, the development of rationalism and ever growing craving for the liberty is responsible for this revolt. This revolt is not due so much to any perversion of human nature as to the perversion of creeds in which man was asked to believe. Positive religions everywhere tend to become reactionary or conservative and orthodoxies get fossilized. This is true about all religions. The worship of the later smothers the spirit; man-made laws and conventions become more important than life itself. In this book it is the original spirit of Islam and its essential outlook on life, which we have attempted to discuss. Islam through the centuries has accumulated much, which is not only not essential to it but is positively hostile to it. We must get back to the core of the creed.

When we look at Islam from this angle we find that its essential purpose was the liberation of man, to make him free from complete self-realization. This liberation released immense human energies and Hitti, the great historian of Arabic civilization, is perfectly right in the assertion that the number of heroes produced by Islam in a span of about two to three decades has no parallel in history. They were not only conquerors and military heroes - their heroism was many sided - they were men who revalued but also the old existing values of life and remolded personal, social, economic and political life according to new ideals.

The hero of all these heroes was the Prophet himself - He was prophet, Administrator, Legislator, Moralist, Reformer, Political Scientist and An Economist---all traits gathered in one personality. We must look at his life from this point of view besides placing before humanity essential human values he explicitly planned to free human beings from all the shackles that chained them from within and from without. This Prophet has been the greatest liberator of mankind. There was hardly any aspect of manifest or disguised human slavery to which he did not turn His attention, in order to suggest the disease and suggest the cure.

Let us start with the fundamental doctrine that He preached as the basis of all true religion He emphasized the unity of God, Whose creation was a visible sign of His presence but Who in His essence was invisible. Epicurus said that men could not be really free unless they are freed from the fear of gods. He said no gods existed in reality; they are the creation of vain human desires. The Invisible God Who truly exists is the Light and Life of entire creation. He demands nothing but

rationality and virtue. He is the Ideal of Life, as much as the Source of it. He possesses the highest attributes, which also on a limited way, form the values of human existence. Nothing stands between Him and man. He is nearer to man than his own jugular vein. No intermediaries are needed. When a call emerges from the human soul, God responds. He demands no human or animal sacrifices to be propitiated. Every soul is directly responsible to Him, and in the matter of Moral Law, all are equal before Him. Man need not fear the phenomena of Nature; Nature is meant to be subservient to him. Man must fear the consequences of the violation of Natural and Moral Laws, and these laws have their source in the will of God; this fear may be called the Fear of God. God himself is not an object of fear; He is loving God, and as the Prophet said, He is many times more loving to His creatures than a mother to her children.

The Muslim savants as well as saints have always believed and felt that all the ameliorative attitudes towards life follow as corollaries from this belief. When fear of imaginary gods and natural forces is eliminated from human consciousness the immense possibilities of human life begin to actualized and wisdom as well as courage follow from it. It has been established by modern psychological research that fear is at the bottom of most of the complexes from which a large number of men suffer; countless phobias paralyse the life activities of human beings and make them unable to face life. A person sincerely believing in an all-powerful, Beneficent God is cured of all fears; such a person goes about the business of life, facing pleasant and unpleasant situations with an equanim [equanimity] that is enviable. He has no feelings that he is at loggerheads with a blind or a hostile universe. He does his best and leaves the result to God.

It was not only imaginary gods and the fear of natural forces that had overawed man into abject submission. Man's unlawful mastery over man had done perhaps a greater damage to his dignity. Rulers had been defied and demanded to be worshipped as visible gods. Men had gained mastery over their fellow beings as if they were cattle or mere instruments of production. Millions of men wasted their labour to erect skyscraping pyramids to entomb these dead deities, who did not cease to command even after their death. Slaves were slaughtered, and buried with them to be ready to serve them at the time of resurrection. Out of the annals of the prophets, the Qur'an repeats more than once the story of Pharaoh and Moses to prove that a great prophet is always a liberator. Rulers become tyrannical when they usurp the place of the Invisible God and cease to rule according to the Eternal Law of Social Justice. The

Prophet realized keenly that the autocratic monarch is the greatest usurper of human liberties. He envisaged the Ideal Straight as a democratic republic in which the people choose the best man to administer the affairs of the State. A Hadith in Bukhari relates that the Prophet trembled with emotion while addressing the people from the pulpit, to an extent that it was feared he might fall, when he denounced these autocratic, immoral, tyrannical, defied rulers. He did not say like Christ, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." He said categorically, "There shall be no Caesars." No ruler is to be recognized until he recognizes the God above him in profession as well as practice and administers, the realm as a sacred trust. He [was] has not entitled to take from the public goods more than his minimum necessities; he must set the example of simple and honest living. That is how the Prophet lived himself at the height of His Power, and that was the practice of His immediate successors. Islamic State was a welfare state and the Chief of the Commonwealth was in *loco parentis* to the citizens. The Prophet whom His people honoured with the title of "*Al-Ameen*," the trustworthy, wanted a system of government in which the State is to be treated as a trust. Later, when Omar the Great was at the helm of affairs he said the head of the State should act as if he were appointed a guardian of the property of orphans. If he can sustain himself by his private means he should take nothing from the property of the orphans as his wages for administering it; if he has no other means, he is entitled to take only the minimum for his simple requirements. It is the duty of the chief to see that nobody starves in his realm. It is his duty to compel the rich to contribute to the welfare of the poor. It is his duty to see that all are equal before law; in that respect all privileges must be abolished. It is his duty to watch that there is no exploitation of the weak by the strong. The short and pithy address of the first Khalifa, Abu Bakr, contained this declaration that he would make the strong man weak who has no right on his side, and he would make the weak strong who has the right on his side. There must be a right of direct approach to the governors and the Chief of the State, and the poorest citizen shall have the right to lodge a complaint in the court against the judges, governors and even the head of the State. These weren't merely Utopian ideals or counsels of perfection: they were actually practised in early Islam. This was the political liberation of man at its best no subsequent revolution for the Right of Man has ever advanced an inch further than this teaching and practice.

The second great act of liberations successfully

accomplished by the prophet was the emancipation of man from priesthood. In many ancient cultures the priests formed a class that became the guardian of the souls of men. Religions was practised by this class as a profession, venerated as superior to every other occupation. In the Christian civilization they were organized as Church with a hierarchy culminating at the top in the person of an infallible Pope. The rulers as well as the subjects of Christendom were so thoroughly in the grip of the Church that the relation of secular government to the overriding power of the Church constitutes a long history of conflicts between these two powers. The relation of organized religion to the State became a problem for the European countries and people were subjected to dual loyalties that were often contradictory. Protestantism developed as a revolt against the Roman Catholic Church but even in the Protestant States the trouble continued to crop up in new forms. In Europe the revolt against the Church reacted adversely even on the attitude towards religion in general. Religion' whenever it assumed an organized and institutional form, became reactionary and suppressed essential human liberties. Islam has always had people specially versed in religious knowledge but they never became priests in the sense in which other religions and cultures developed this class. Hinduism did not create an organized Church in the manner of the West, but it developed a whole caste of priests; every one born in this caste was a priest by birth. From birth till death all-important occasions required ministrations by a person of this caste; entire life became sacerdotal and highly ritualistic. It was the interest of this class to fabricate mysterious and complicated ritualism, which only the adept could handle. As priesthood developed, the essentials of religion were lost; even mortality was subordinated to formalism, and the power instinct of the privileged caste.

Islam was the first religion, which realized this danger for religion; instead of men making free it had enslaved their spirit. This evil could not be remedied unless every man became his own priest. To start with Islam did away with the necessity of having special temples or special places of worship where God alone could be worshipped. No doubt, mosques were built, the first one as a thatched hut, to build, which the Prophet Himself worked as a labourer. But it was the prophet Himself who said that "one of the special features of my religion is that every place on the wide earth of God is our place of worship; for our prayers no architecture is necessary." For prayers no aesthetic paraphernalia and no

abracadabra are required. The man who leads the prayers is not an ordained priest; he wears no formal and professional robes and carries no aura of mystical sanctity about him. Any Muslim selected in a very off-handed manner on account of his knowledge and character is asked to conduct the service. Neither at birth nor for any kind of baptism, nor at the wedding, nor at the funeral is any priest required. On every important occasion and in every critical situation the Muslim has nothing else to offer but prayers; and in prayer, except respectful and devotional postures, there is no ritual for which a professional religious man may be required. Islam abolished religion as a profession. Religious learning may be specialized by some, but religious life as a profession was discountenanced by Islam. This was an immense step towards the emancipation of man who was enslaved by priesthood as much as he was shackled by purely lay and secular powers. Priesthood everywhere had set itself up as an intermediary between gods or God and man; the man was supposed not to have any direct access to his Creator and to approach Him either the magic of a ritual or the ladder of a priestly hierarchy was necessary. Directness of approach followed from the Islamic conception of God being nearer to man than his own self. The problem of Theocracy [a state ruled by or subject to religious authority] as it troubled the other nations never troubled Islam, because the problem of Church versus state could never arise in the Islamic polity. As to developing a priestly caste, nothing could be farther from the spirit of Islam. Like other people following other religions, Muslim society too developed sectarian differences and differences of a dogmatic character about inessential points which the ignorance of man magnifies into questions of life and death. But even in the most intellectual and free-thinking epochs of Islamic history, hostility towards the essentials of Islam never developed. Even today in the so-called secular Muslim States like Turkey, the people are essentially religious, Muslim society never exhibited the phenomenon of a mass rationalist rage against religion as it was witnessed in the French Revolution; nor anti-God campaigns encouraged, sponsored by Communist Russia. The mystics and freethinkers of Islam have produced edifying and fascinating literature, denouncing formalism and hardened orthodoxy, which worshipped the letter more than the spirit; but neither the intelligentsia nor the masses have ever doubted, the fundamental verities of Islam. As there never was an organized Church to fight against or a priestly caste to violate the democratic spirit of Islam. Muslim society in all its strata, at every level and in every epoch, has been

essentially religious without being fanatical, except for occasional outbursts of fanaticism in individual cases. This is due to two factors. The creed of Islam is so simple and so rational that the fundamentals cannot be easily attacked. The philosopher appreciates and interprets it intellectually and the mystic verifies it as a religious experience. Besides the Unity of God, the only other requirement is a virtuous life; describing virtue as the essential nature of all noble souls. Islam would have surely gone the way of other religions if it had not taken care to abolish priesthood as a caste or a profession. How much humanity is indebted to Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) for this liberation of the human spirit, every honest historian of culture shall have to admit.

Another great attempt at liberation was the Prophet's attitude towards slavery. His contemporary world was a world of masters and slaves and there were more slaves than masters. The entire economic structure of society was based on slavery. Great philosophers, like Aristotle, had declared that slavery was a natural institution because they could not envisage the socioeconomic life of humanity that could be built or sustained without this inhuman institution. It has been asserted that all ancient cultures were based on the exploitation of man by man; culture required leisure for higher pursuits and this leisure could be created only by slave labour. Men were no longer persons; they were only means and not ends in themselves; like animals and other material things they were also treated merely as means of production. The Prophet started with exhorting people to treat their slaves with kindness. Any ill-treatment of the slave entitled him to seek redress. The Prophet is reported in Bukhari to have witnessed a master beating his slave in an inhuman manner. The master was severely reprimanded and on having expressed regret he was asked to free the slave to expiate his sin. A slave was entitled to earn his freedom by paying off the master from the savings of his wages. For a number of minor and major wrongs, Islam substituted the emancipation of slaves for fines or other forms of punishment. When the Qur'an enumerates cardinal virtues, the emancipation of slaves is often included in the list. Before Islam, the prevalent custom was to murder the captured enemy or to keep him as a slave. Islam gave preference to the prisoners of war being released on the payment of ransom or as a matter of charity. The ransom demanded was not always in the shape of money. The Prophet said whoever could teach the children to read and write would be set free. Among the uses of voluntary charity, the emancipation of slaves was recommended as an act of great merit. *Zakat*, the

funds collected by the State from those who had surplus wealth, was to be used to alleviate all kinds of human distress; setting free the slaves by paying off their masters was one of the purposes for which *Zakat* funds were to be expended. Masters who still wanted to keep their slaves were allowed to retain them on the condition that they feed and clothe them as they feed and clothe themselves. Khalifa Omar took a further step in ordering that no Arab could remain a slave. If Muslim rulers later on had progressed and legislated on these lines, slavery should have been wiped out from Muslim lands before any other civilization dreamt of it. It is unfortunate that the socialistic and equalitarian program of Islam received a severe set-back when Islam passed into the unhappy phase of imperialism. Even then Islam had so much humanized Muslim attitude towards the slaves that some of them, on becoming honorable members of Muslim households, attained to great positions of eminence and it is only in Muslimdom that one reads of slaves founding dynasties, and becoming ministers and commanders of armies under powerful rulers. Some of them became famous savants at whose feet sat the noble children of freemen. Bilal, the much-loved companion of the Prophet was a slave who commanded more respect than many an Arab aristocrat. Slavery that continued in Muslim lands for centuries, however deplorable it may be from the point of view of the Prophet's vision of a classless society of freemen, had nothing in common with that inhuman institution, the cruelties of which are tragically pictured in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' The Christian West cannot blame Islam for not abolishing slavery by a prophetic edict because it took Christendom itself more than a millennium after Islam to start an anti-slavery campaign which in America had moral as well as economic motives. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) abhorred slavery and proposed measures to abolish it, not because slave labor was industrially uneconomical but because it violated the dignity of human beings, making one man the master of the other, while God alone is the Master of all human beings and He alone could be a loving Master.

We now turn to another item in the liberation movement started by the Prophet of Arabia. (p.b.u.h.) He saw that everywhere women had been enslaved by man and was considered to be mere chattel having almost the status of slaves. It was considered a shame to have a daughter, therefore many of them were buried alive after birth, and some were similarly destroyed with impunity even after reaching puberty. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) raised his passionate voice against this cruelty. He said, **"The good among you are those who are good to women."**

Whoever makes sacrifices in bringing up two daughters with love and mercy shall go to paradise." "Paradise is under the feet of your mothers." The Prophet helped women in all possible ways to get equal status with men. The Qur'an says, *"They have rights similar to those against them."*(II-228). The Qur'an preaches a common morality for both the sexes in every respect; in most of the moral injunctions they are mentioned together. Women shared with men equality before law. They were granted civil rights which some of the civilized countries refuse to grant them even to-day. Marriage was made a civil contract between man and woman in which any lawful conditions could be inserted. She was granted right of inheritance and the right to own property in her own name. Until recently even the British woman was fighting for this elementary right.

One of the most unjust charges against Islam is permitting polygamy under certain conditions. But why pick up only Islam from among all ancient cultures and religions that permitted almost unlimited polygamy? Most of the Old Testament prophets, including Solomon the Wise, practised unrestrained polygamy, which was an integral element in patriarchic systems. It was forgotten by critics of Islam that it was the only religion that restricted it, hedging it round with conditions difficult to be fulfilled by any man who burdens himself with this responsibility lightheartedly. The Qur'an Permits it only if one could do equal justice to more than one wife, uttering a warning at the same time that you will find it almost impossible to do justice in every respect. Marriage is not merely a matter of romantic love; it is essentially biological, having an indispensable economic aspect. In a small community denuded of its manpower by incessant wars, there is a surplus of large number of women who must be protected and supported. Unless these women are legally wedded and got economic support and social esteem they become a disgrace and danger to society. What happened in the West after they two Great Wars should be an eye-opener to all pseudo-moralists who tolerate prostitution and prefer illegal, clandestine promiscuity to restricted, legal polygamy, which becomes a social necessity under certain circumstances. There is no doubt that the permission to take more than one wife is often misused. If a law is violated and looseness is connived at, it is not the law that is to be blamed. If we look at it in the correct historical perspective we could see that far from degrading woman, it was a measure for her protection, which prevented her drifting into penury and disgrace. This measure made Muslim society sexually safe and healthy and prostitution as a profession never developed

in Muslim lands until they were contaminated by other cultures. Millions of these unprotected women are a canker in the social organism of the West, spreading physical as well as moral disease. In the missionary and political campaign against Islam the false idea was spread in the world that Islam had cramped the life of women. It was said they spend their lives shut up in their homes; fairy tales about the Sheikh and his harem were circulated to create the impression that this was the life Islam offered to woman. This institution was really the unholy product of degenerate royalties and aristocracies; as bourgeois classes tend to imitate these parasitic classes, some individuals of these classes too practiced it as a sign of respectability. All such customs and conventions are un-Islamic and take away much from the equality of rights and opportunities granted to women by Islam. If Islam were rightly practiced the Muslim women would become the equal of man in every respect in which nature allows her that equality. Muslim women have been glorious rulers counselors and jurists and great savants whenever un-Islamic conventions have been brushed aside. They have even commanded armies, and when necessity arose, fought as soldiers as they did in early Islam or recent in the Turkish war of independence under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal. In the awakening of the Muslim world during the present century, women are playing a most important role. As we have already stated, Muslims generally believe in Islam with a deep-rooted conviction. If there were anything in original Islam to curb their healthy, free activities, this phenomenon could not have taken place. Whenever women struggle to recapture their lost liberties, it is always through an appeal to original Islam. This is a clear proof of the fact that in the liberation of man, Islam had not forgotten the women. A comparative study of legislation about the rights of women in different civilizations would bear out the truth of these assertions. It is a vast subject with which it is difficult to do justice in this short treatise.

We now turn to the important subject of the economic liberation of man. Modern socialists rightly emphasize the economic aspect of life. We have dealt with this topic elsewhere in this book at some length. Marxian economists say that all other aspects of civilization and culture including morality, art and religion, are only byproducts of what they comprehensively call the modes of production. Religion before Islam had laid emphasis on the spiritual and moral attitudes of man in isolation from his economic life. The rich were exhorted to be kind to the poor. Spirituality was equated with poverty. It was preached that the poor

would find it easier to enter the kingdom of heaven and it would be more difficult for the rich to enter it than for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle. The religious man was expected to despise the goods of this world; the next world would compensate him for what he lacked in this mundane existence. The poor were asked to suffer in patience for a short while for this existence was after all very transient. The early Christians believed that the end of the world was very near; when the whole thing is going to blow up very soon, why bother about material goods? Christ had said that man did not live by bread alone; the sustenance of the spirit was more necessary. But as the early Christians were very poor they begged God to give them their daily bread. In Buddhism too, the spiritual man was not a wage-earner but a "Bhikshu" or a religious mendicant who lived on the charity of the wage-earners. These religions despised the world as illusion or vanity and preached purely moral attitudes to the rich as well as the poor. All these religions preached the virtue of private charity without any conception of remolding the economic order in such a manner that exploitation should become difficult if not impossible. The Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.) was a practical idealist; He realized that metaphysical or utopian idealism had little use for the common man. In the entire scheme of Islam the body is indissolubly linked with the soul. The soul is not a product of the body but on this physical plane of existence, the spiritual and the physical aspects are so interlinked that whatever happens to the one affects the other either directly or indirectly. The world of God's creation is a real world; everything in Nature is a gift of God meant to be enjoyed by His creatures. There are, no doubt, realities higher than the physical world but the physical world too is spiritual in its own way. The body must be looked after to become fit and strong and pure in order to help the harmony of the spirit. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) transformed all honest work into worship. He said that the man, who is seeking livelihood for his family, is also worshipping God. "The wage-earner is a friend of God." He was the first great religious teacher who announced in clear terms that for the common man poverty was a great evil. He said, 'Poverty brings a man to the brink of loss of faith in God.' In the Revelation, God mentions as one of the blessings conferred on the Prophet that, he was originally poor and God had granted him freedom from want. It is a famous saying of the Prophet that poverty blackens a man's face in both the worlds; every effort, therefore, must be made to ward it off. But this was only one aspect of his economic outlook. He was equally, if not more, afraid of superfluous wealth which makes the

possessor luxurious, callous and unjust. "I am not so much afraid of your poverty as of your wealth." A man is as much enslaved by wrongfully hoarded wealth as he is degraded by poverty. The middle path of economic sufficiency and security is the path of all social justice and all genuine culture.

1. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was determined to liberate man economically. Let us glance at the chief measures that he adopted: On account of the differences in opportunities and aptitudes some people are bound to earn more than the others: even by nature some are gifted more than others. It is a falsehood to say that men are born with equal capacities. Free initiative must not be curbed; only unlawful means of the acquisition and accumulation of wealth must be stopped by legal sanctions as well as moral injunctions. 2. Usury in all forms and speculations in trade must be legally stopped. Money must not breed without effort. Usury must not be mixed up with trade.

3. All trade and partnership in trade even between capital and labor is allowed, where the benefits as well as the risks are shared. There should be co-operation without exploitation.

4. The hoarding of essential commodities for profit is prohibited.

5. Beyond a certain minimum determined by legislation the rest of wealth shall be considered as a surplus and must be taxed, to be spent on the less fortunate individuals.

6. Private charity is good but the essential needs of the poor must be looked after by the State, which must work as a Welfare State.

7. There must be promulgated an equitable law of inheritance; men as well as women shall inherit in accordance with a prescribed system.

8. Although a man in his lifetime is an absolute owner of his property, he cannot will it away entirely to the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. He can will way his

property only to the extent of one-third. Lawful heirs must not be deprived.

9. All ostentatious and luxurious living shall be prohibited by law. Gold should not be used except as currency or in a limited measure for women's ornaments. The wearing of silk was also prohibited for men.

10. Living on unearned income is bad for the wealthy as well as the poor. Begging is a disgrace for man. Instead of offering charity it is much better to help the beggar to earn his living. The Prophet said, "On the Day of Judgment, the beggars shall be seen without any flesh on their face; begging makes a man 'lose face'."

11. As all estates must be divided on the death of the owner, according to the law of inheritance, the law of primogeniture shall not be valid for upholding the feudal system.

One should easily see from the main items of this Islamic program of economic reconstruction that it is a viamedia between extremes. To give away your coat also to whosoever asks you for your shirt may be the ideal of love and good-will or non-resistance to evil, but it is not a practicable precept for common humanity nor could any State be organized on that basis; while looking up to heaven the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.) had always his feet on the earth. Islam is not earth-rooted but it never ignores the fact that man's physical frame was fashioned out of clay and he cannot ascend to heaven without first planting his feet firmly on the earth. Unlike Christ or Buddha Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was founding a Welfare State. Without agreeing with Marx that man's economic life is co-extensive with his entire existence and all other values are derived from it, the Prophet was fully conscious of the fact that economic life reacts very intimately on the advancement or retardation of spiritual or non-economic values. He realized that the dignity of human life cannot be preserved without economic security, and social justice is, to a very large extent, based on economic justice. He devised a system that could prevent society splitting it up in to classes of haves and have-nots. All the measures that could prevent the concentration of wealth in individual hands were adopted. The Prophet was dealing with the economic system of His own times but the broad principles on which His measures were based are basic for all future

applications. The spirit of the whole system is so manifest that one who runs may tread. There are numerous sayings of the Prophet that throw further light on his fundamental outlook about economic justice. Fixed Zakat is not the only tax on surplus income and capital; He is reported to have said that, if the need arises, much more could be taken from the wealthy and spent on the relief of distressed. His successors Hazrat Omar and Hazrat Ali were both of the same view. Here, again, the spirit is more important than the letter of the law, and Muslim States in dealing with the highly complicated structure of present-day economics can contribute much to establish a better social order if they aim at the realization of Islamic ideals.

- The Prophet visualized clearly what this liberation of the human spirit would achieve even in a short space of time. To His poor nation He said, "A time is soon coming when a man will walk with charity to offer from one end of the realm to the other and he will find nobody to accept his charity." As to political security He prophesied that in the Islamic State a woman would travel alone with gold, from Hira to Mecca and no one will molest her. Both these prophecies were fulfilled during the early decades of Islam when the spirit of Islam prevailed in the land.
- Another great achievement of the Prophet was encouragement of rationality in the human attitudes towards life. Some people think that religion is based on Revelation while science is based on Reason supported by observation, induction and deduction. As Islam reconciled so many apparently contradictory view-points in every sphere of life so did it reconcile Reason with Revelation. According to the Qur'an, all Nature is a great Revelation and the Revelation of Nature is full of the Signs of Divinity, God has revealed Himself in Scriptures too, but the Scriptures of all Scriptures is Life itself and Nature. A Scripture as a Book is an index of the Book, Nature, which is the mother of all Books, containing Eternal Laws, "the Preserved Tablets." A Scripture is an index and no one can understand the contents of the Great Book of life, who reads and recites only the index. Whenever the Qur'an inculcates a great truth or promulgates a law, the rationale of it is always given. Proofs of the existence of God or His Beneficence are all drawn from Nature or the Life of man. The Qur'an exhorts people to study the order and beauty of

Nature both as a means of believing in God, to lead men from creation to the Creator, and to derive all sorts of benefits from knowledge, making Nature subservient to his aims in order to enjoy the gifts of life. Before Islam, religion everywhere was hampering people from free enquiry; Revelation and Reason were not always identical, and Revelation was believed to be concerned with mysteries and dogmas that were either irrational or ultra-rational. It is a distinguishing feature of the Qur'anic Revelation that it exhorts people to observe Life and Nature and reflect. Why don't you use Reason, why don't you reflect? Are often repeated phrases in the Book. Men of knowledge are praised in generous words and wisdom is called 'a great good.' There are numerous sayings of the Prophet putting men of knowledge much above the worshippers and even the martyrs. Acquisition of knowledge was made a duty for every Muslim man and Muslim woman and a prisoner of war could earn his freedom by teaching the children to read and write. It was this love of knowledge, which made the Muslims hunger and thirst for it and their appetites appeared to be insatiable. The Arabs before Islam had little knowledge and no book; therefore they are described in the Qur'an as a nation of illiterates. The Prophet Himself was illiterate, although gifted with the knowledge of the eternal verities of life. He told his followers to go and seek knowledge even if they had to travel to China in search of it. "Knowledge is the lost property of a Muslim"; he should capture and own it wherever he finds it. Ancient cultures of Greece and Rome and India had stores of knowledge of which they were making little use for the further progress of humanity; religious conservatism had thwarted all further advances. Christendom had almost lost the heritage of the great Mediterranean cultures. Islamic peoples unearthed all these buried treasures and they became the heirs of all the abiding elements of the cultures that had preceded them. At first they became pupils; and what greedy pupils they proved to be! Having learnt all that the world had to offer they infused into it the life-giving elements of their own distinctive genius and became the teachers of the world for about eight centuries. In human history, religious cultures have never been distinguished by free enquiry. The priestly class everywhere, by becoming a monopolist of knowledge as well as of salvation, obstructed any free development of knowledge that

threatened its vested interests. Organized orthodoxies have always been reactionary - Islam was an exception in this respect. The historians wonder at the leadership achieved by the Muslim world in almost all spheres of knowledge and culture in so short a time. Some European critics say that Islam was a one-man religion and one-man movement; all Islamic culture, Islamic legislation and Islamic outlook on life can be ultimately traced to the mind of Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Muslim way of life was the objectification of one man's ideals. If this is true to a very great extent, the phenomenal intellectual upsurge of the Muslim world must also be traced back to Muhammad's (p.b.u.h.) vision of a rational universe that could be understood by earnest intellectual pursuit. The Prophet was convinced that there was Reason in the Universe, which is not a playground of arbitrary, wills. God is Truth and Reason can attain to Truth. Reason and Nature may lead human beings to other dimensions of existence but they could not contradict any true Revelation. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), The Universal Liberator, freed human Reason and sanctified it as identical with Revelation in the Book of God as well as in the Scripture of Nature. It is due to Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) that Muslim consciousness has never been greatly troubled by any conflict between Reason, Life, Nature and Revelation; they are all different aspects of the Great Universal Truth. The Qur'an says the Prophet is commissioned *"To remove from them their burdens and the shackles which were upon them"* (7-157), and later on Rumi said that the essential business of a prophet is to liberate man. If the facts stated above are historically true and verifiable, who can grudge to bestow this title on Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) that he has been THE GREATEST LIBERATOR in human history!

And now here is an excerpt under the heading of "Muhammad" from the Dictionary of Islam ©1886 by Thomas Patrick Hughes. In order to retain the old-style flavour of Thomas Carlyle's quote in this passage, we have neither edited nor tampered with it.

Thomas Carlyle, in his lecture, "The Hero as Prophet," says : - "Mahomet himself, after all that can be said about him, was not a sensual man. We shall err widely if we consider this man as a common voluptuary, intent

mainly on base enjoyments - nay, on enjoyments of any kind. His household was of the frugalest, his common diet barley bread and water; sometimes for months there was not a fire once lighted on his hearth. They record with just pride that he would mend his own shoes, patch his own cloak. A poor hard-toiling, ill-provided man; careless of what vulgar men toil for. Not a bad man, I should say; something better in him than hunger of any sort - or these wild Arab men fighting and jostling three and twenty year at his hand, in close contact with him always, would not have revered him so! These were wild men, bursting ever and anon into quarrel, into all kinds of fierce sincerity; without right, worth, and manhood, no man could have commanded them. They called him Prophet, you say? Why, he stood there face to face with them; bare, not enshrined in any mystery, visibly clouting his own cloak, cobbling his own shoes, fighting, counselling, ordering in the midst of them, they must have seen what kind of a man he was, let him be called what you like! No emperor with his tiaras was obeyed as this man in a cloak of his own clouting. During three and twenty years of rough actual trial, I find something of a veritable Hero necessary for that of itself.

"His last words are a prayer, broken ejaculations of a heart struggling-up in trembling hope towards its Maker. We cannot say his religion made him worse; it made him better; good, not bad. Generous things are recorded of him; when he lost his daughter, the thing he answers is, in his own dialect, every way sincere, and yet equivalent to that of Christians: 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' He answered in like manner of Said, his emancipated well-beloved slave, the second of the believers. Said had fallen in the war of Tabuc, the first of Mahomet's fightings with the Greeks. Mahomet said it was well, Said had done his Master's work, Said had now gone to his Master; it was all well with Said. Yet Said's daughter found him weeping over the body; the old gray-haired man melting in tears! What do I see, said she? You see a friend weeping over his friend. He went out for the last time into the mosque two days before his death; asked, if he had injured any man? Let his own back bear the stripes. If he owed any man? A voice answered, 'Yes, me; three drachmas, borrowed on such an occasion.' Mahomet ordered them to be paid. 'Better be in shame now,' said he, 'than at the Day of Judgment.' You remember Kadajah, and the 'No by Allah!' Traits of this kind show us the genuine man, the brother of us all, brought visible through twelve centuries, the veritable

son of our common Mother." (From *Lectures on Heroes*, p. 66.)