

A Short History of Liberty

Written by Dean Russell for The Freeman in 1955.

From biblical times onward, the history of liberty and progress among various peoples seems to have followed a remarkably similar pattern. There are exceptions, of course—and the time element varies widely—but the pattern may be generally described by ten key ideas in sequence:

1. *Bondage.* At some point in their histories, all peoples seem to have existed in some form of bondage or slavery; frequently even to their own domestic rulers by their own votes or acquiescence. But when thoughtful persons finally become aware that they are no longer free men, they want to know why. When they ask themselves that question, they automatically turn to contemplation and soul searching. Out of this grows...
2. *Faith.* If people in bondage have no faith—either in a personal Creator or impersonal ideal—they will remain slaves and eventually die out or be absorbed by another culture. But an intelligent faith will almost always develop into...
3. *Understanding.* A person's faith needs to be buttressed by an understanding of why it is evil to force any peaceful person to conform to the will and ideas of another person. Otherwise he is apt to remain a faithful slave or attempt to become a slave owner. But the combination of faith and understanding results in the necessary...
4. *Courage.* You may depend upon it, courageous men with faith and understanding will neither remain in bondage nor keep others in bondage. Even against great odds, this combination leads to...
5. *Liberty.* Liberty is a relationship among persons wherein no person molests any other peaceful person in his ideas, possessions or actions. Liberty may also be viewed as the responsibility one assumes for himself and recognizes in all others; for there can be no liberty where there is no responsibility. Liberty has never existed completely among any people at any time, but where it has existed to a high degree, the resulting freedom to work, trade, choose, win, lose and bargain has always meant...
6. *Abundance.* But if an abundance of material things is the primary aim of a person, his life is devoid of any real meaning. For if the goal is abundance, its achievement logically results in...
7. *Complacency.* Complacency and self-satisfaction (the “full barns” of the biblical lesson) inevitably lead to...

8. *Apathy*. With apathy comes a dullness and a loss of interest—a “let George do it” philosophy. And there will always be many political “Georges” around to accept this invitation to seize both the reins and the whip. This always degenerates into...

9. *Dependency*. For a time, it is possible for dependents to be unaware that they are dependents. As they continue to shed the personal responsibilities which are freedom, they also continue to delude themselves that they are still free so long as they themselves are able to participate in the mechanical processes of selecting their rulers—“We can still vote, can’t we?” But dependents are at the mercy of the persons or groups of parties upon whom they depend for their housing, or security in old age, or subsidies, or education, or medical care, or any of the other “aids” from political authority which cause persons to depend on others instead of themselves. Sooner or later, this dependency becomes known by its true nature...

10. *Bondage*. Fortunately, the record shows that people can regain their faith, understanding and courage. They can again become persons and citizens who are responsible for their own welfare, rather than units and subjects identified by numbers for purposes of regimentation and subsidization. The record shows that people can, by their own intelligent actions, regain their liberty any time they want it.