

Applying Liberty Personally

Guest post by Spencer Morgan.

After several years of involvement with freedom-oriented political efforts in Utah, there are some strategic lessons that have become evident to me, and the application of which I believe will help spread and build a much more viable culture of liberty here.

Taking a look at the typical approach to liberty, both in Utah and in just about any given locale, sadly reveals how deep our conditioning in favor of centralized control really is. Once we stumble upon the ideas of liberty and self-determination, most of us tend to instinctively see political processes as the means to apply them. **We turn to these abstract rituals and rigged games as if the idea of liberty were just another competing government control scheme to be imposed on all of society from the top down.** What doesn't tend to occur to us, including myself... until my repeated brick-wall-to-forehead experiences in politics apparently jarred something loose, is that this "liberty by enactment" approach may not be the answer. I would argue, at least, that it's not the answer for any sort of prevailing or enduring liberty.

To determine what needs to change for liberty to prevail, we must understand the full nature of what is undermining it. In any given geographic area, including Utah, the greatest enemy to individual freedom of determination is government. It could be a distant federal enactment, a state edict or just the whim of local councils and enforcement officers. **What these human beings who routinely violate liberty all have in common is the perception they enjoy,** and which is held in the minds of most of the people over whom they rule. That perception is that their actions, by virtue of their titles, written statutes, votes, judicial decrees etc, are to be held to a different moral standard regarding the question of using or threatening force.

This can be illustrated with a simple mental exercise. Take a look at just the literal facts about any encounter with government and imagine it as if it were just an average individual taking the action. For example, imagine your neighbor Joe puts a light on his car and puts on a blue costume and decides to keep you in a cage in his basement because you failed to comply with something that 100 other people wrote down in a fancy white building.

These actions take on a whole new light when viewed in this way. Obviously, private individuals would have no basis to do such a thing in the absence of a clear act of harm to themselves or their property, and even then only to the extent necessary to prevent or obtain restitution for the harm. The perception based on the "government" label alone is the difference between a use of force being deemed "moral" or "immoral" by most of

society. That perception and that double-standard is what needs to be undermined if liberty is to prevail in any enduring way.

The next question, then, is how do we bring this reality to light and (perhaps even more importantly) how do we motivate those around us to act upon this understanding. If we take a look at the social mechanisms which keep oppressive government entrenched, it's clear that the use of brute force is only a small portion of what keeps people in submission. Apart from the perception of legitimacy already discussed, the most important mechanism motivating compliance is our fear of social hostility. We face these social reprisals among our friends, co-workers, families etc. when we question that perception or legitimacy.

Playing the role of the boy who said “the emperor is naked” is not an easy thing in a society where statistically about half of the people in one’s immediate circles are net beneficiaries of this scope of government power. People are unlikely to act on any realization they may have which they anticipate will threaten important social relationships. Right now, that is a dynamic working against the movement for liberty, however we can turn the tables and use it for our cause... and it won't take a single vote, sign-waving or act of legislation. It will, however, require you to make liberty very personal in your life and leave your comfort zone in several regards.

The first step would be to raise your children not only with an intellectual understanding of the principle of liberty, but in a way that presumes its validity. Treat them as free agents who deserve to choose and to know why something is right. Refrain from teaching them by example the validity of violence, fear and authoritarianism. A child raised with the language of violence, or with “because I said so” as the refrain, is being psychologically prepared to accept that rationale from the state as an adult. This aspect of the strategy is a slow intergenerational process, but it is critical.

The other step I'd suggest is that you hold those in your social circles accountable for the government oppression they enable. I'm not suggesting that you shun, anger or alienate them or approach this with anything but a kind demeanor. What you can do, however, is make it uncomfortable for them. When a friend, co-worker or church associate expresses support for what you know to be a government undertaking that violates liberty, ask them if they would personally support that action being taken against you. You're not likely to get a direct “yes” in response, and there is no need to press for an answer or dwell on the issue. **The more often people encounter such awkward conversations, the sooner we will reach a situation as a society in which the average individual has more social fear of supporting injustice than they do of opposing it.**

Like the movements that ended institutional slavery, segregation and subjection of women, this approach depends on the cultural shift as a catalyst for any consequent governmental changes. **It was not the politicians who determined that these things would end, but the masses of individual people who responded with empathy to the**

spectacle of the bus boycotts and other oppressions, and who had the courage to use their influence with others until the cultural climate was altered. When this happens, and when a critical mass of children grow up surrounded by the presumptive reality of liberty in their own lives, the governmental changes will be inevitable no matter who is in office.