

FREEDOM-LOVING MUSLIMS AND FREEDOM-LOVING AMERICANS

Bulletin quote: “We are teaching the world the great truth that governments do better without Kings and Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity without than with the aid of government.

--James Madison, letter to E. Livingston, July 10, 1822

MAIN TALK—

In the heat of the clash of peoples, there is the tendency to brand all those peoples for the acts of a few. Whether it is the those awful Brits and Tories of 1776 and 1812, the raiding Mexicans of 1846, the dastardly Yankees or Johnny Rebs of 1862, those despicable Spanish of 1898, the dominating Germans of 1914 and 1940's with their equally devilish Japanese, those brutal North Koreans and Chinese of 1952, the insidious Viet Cong and North Vietnamese of the 1960's and 1970's, or the barbaric Islamists of the current era, our thinking of the time toward these people as a whole frequently overwhelms our better judgment. It is a part of gearing up mentally for war.

When I read the popular writings during those periods, I'm frequently drawn by curiosity toward reading writings on those same nationalities and ethnic groups written outside the periods of conflict, likely colored by different emotions than those of fear, hate, the psyching up each other for battle. I find looking outside the emotions of the time builds my confidence in humanity for the long term. And, in those past days and during the dark side of these generally bright times, humanity needs a bit of confidence building. And maybe even a bit more -- humanity.

We see and hear much nowadays about the Moslems. Most of it is—shall we say—spirited? Some of what flows across the internet, or over the airwaves on everything from NPR to talk radio, or what trots across the pages of the New York

Times, Washington Post, and, I suppose, the National Enquirer -- stops us in our tracks. So let's do a bit of time traveling in the literature away from this period of fear and conflict.

Among other sources, I'll be tapping Henry Grady Weaver's 1947 book, *The Mainspring of Human Progress*, which provides a perspective on the forces driving the continuing betterment of human life on this planet. Henry Grady Weaver was an industrialist, (actually, I learned later, a General Motors executive) and observer of the world around him and its history, in a very big picture way. He points out the ongoing improvement of the overall human condition occurs when good people are free to pursue their own interest without undue interference.

So let's begin-- And let's pretend for the moment we are in our new building and our growth has brought with it a group of youngsters in attendance for a story portion of this talk.

About 1400 years ago, a self-made businessman began a major attempt to establish individual freedom. Born in the year 570 A.D, he was an orphan—of good family, but cheated out of his property inheritance. As a child, barefoot, ragged, and hungry, he worked 16-18 hours a day and slept on the bare ground under the sky. He had no schooling, but he had practical ability. He got ahead and, as time went on, became widely known and respected. He traveled, buying and selling goods throughout the greater part of the then-civilized world.

Babylon was long forgotten, and the Roman Empire had ceased to exist. Europe, sunken the barbarism of the Dark Ages, was less important than Africa is today.

Constantinople—surrounded by the thriving cities of Baghdad, Damascus, Antioch, Alexandria—had become the center of world trade.

To understand this man, think of a seasoned business executive today who earns, say \$150,000 a year—sufficient, but not spectacular success. Shrewd, humorous, and friendly, he is more interested in human relations than in problems of trade. He marries his employer, a woman of business ability. Comfortably well-off at middle age, they retire to live, let's say, in Miami.

He and his wife keep open house. They serve coffee to their friends. The entertainment is conversation. The host's opinions are so unusual that for some three years he is rather reserved in stating his views, lest they sound too radical. But little by little, he begins to express himself more openly, and friendly arguments originating in his living room begin to spread over the town.

He agrees with Abraham and Jesus: The pagan gods do not exist; there is only one God—the God of Truth and Rightness—who judges people but does not control them; each individual is self-controlling and responsible for his own acts; all people are brothers.

The man's name was Mohammed. His ideas created terrific excitement because he was expressing them in Mecca, the shrine of the most renowned pagan gods.

From far and wide, pilgrims came to Mecca to worship a strange, heavy, black stone which was believed to have descended from the heavens. Lesser gods surrounded it, and the most famous poets of the day displayed their rhymes in the holy *Kaaba* that sheltered the sacred stone. Mecca made its living by serving pilgrims, just like Miami is supported by tourists. So Mohammed's blasphemy not only shocked the more devout Meccans, but also the merchants and tradesmen had grave misgivings as to its effect on business.

But Mohammed went right on saying what he thought, pointing out that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus had stated these same truths. He was convinced that the priests had corrupted Abraham's teachings when they assumed authority over the Jews. Jesus had attacked the priests and reasserted the truth. Now the priests were corrupting the teachings of Jesus by assuming a controlling authority over the Christians. Mohammed concluded that formal organization brings the danger of corruption; that each person is responsible directly to himself for his thoughts, speech, and acts (so far it sounds a bit UUish, don't you think?); and that God will do the judging.

The pagan priests pronounced their most blasting curses against Mohammed, but to no avail. The plain people thronged to Mohammed's home in increasing numbers. The more "respectable" Meccans were increasingly alarmed, but Mecca was a sanctuary in which no blood might be shed. The subversive elements were not to be killed. All that

might be done was to harass them, in hope that they would leave. Many of Mohammed's followers did leave, but this had an effect opposite to what had been hoped. Those who left spread Mohammed's ideas to other places; and many visitors to Mecca spent their time listening to Mohammed instead of worshipping at the shrine of *Kaaba*.

Then, in spite of the ban against bloodshed in the holy sanctuary, Mecca's more respectable citizens—including the tradesmen—took the law into their own hands. They organized a vigilance committee and stormed Mohammed's home with drawn knives and sabers.

But Mohammed was no longer there. Together with his family and companions, without haste or confusion, he had made tracks for the South. Hot on the trail, the Meccans pursued him; but Mohammed, this time without leaving any tracks, had swung leisurely northward. He was headed for Medina, a small town in the palm groves, where people lived mostly on the date harvest and flocks of goats and sheep. For some time past, he had a standing offer to come there and be its emir.

Medina was on the travel path of the pilgrims to Mecca. Many travelers stopped, listened to Mohammed, and began to look at the Meccans as idolators. Mecca's income was cut at its roots and the city crashed into its worst depression. Mecca prepared for war and set out for Medina.

As they attacked an apparently sleepy Medina, they were bombarded by a flurry of arrows from a source they couldn't identify. The survivors pulled back from what still seemed to be only sleepy little Medina. This had never happened before.

Mohammed had invented a new type of warfare. His men had hidden in a trench completely surrounding Medina. To charge into the trench was suicide; to leap the trench was to be completely surrounded, and volleys of arrows merely littered the ground. After much bluster and an unsuccessful siege (as the siegers ran out of food and water long before the sieges oasis of supplies was even taxed), the Meccans gave up and trudged the 200 miles south to their homes.

News of their unfought war probably reached there ahead of them. Certainly it traveled with the caravans as fast as camels could go—it was the kind of news that no one forgets to tell. Soon it had spread to all the bazaars of India, China, Persia, Arabia, Byzantium, Palestine, all Northern Africa, and to every oasis in the Sahara.

Six years later Mohammed returned to Mecca (with 30,000 of his followers) where the city fathers welcomed him, accepted his new religion, and destroyed the idols in the *Kaaba*. Simple economics. Two years later Mohammed died.

Historians have never seemed to be able to explain the terrific expansive force of Mohammed's influence. Carlyle marvels: "...as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a

world of what seemed black unnoticeable sand; but lo, the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven-high from Delhi to Grenada!

Textbooks lay great emphasis on European history, ancient and modern; but no point is made of the fact that, when Europe was stagnating in the so-called Dark Ages, the world was actually bright with a civilization **more closely akin to what we have in America** than anything that had gone before. Thirty generations of human beings who believed in personal freedom created that civilization and kept it going for 800 years.

From purple mountains majesty all across the fruited plains and deserts from the Ganges to the Atlantic, these people were of all races and colors and classes, all creeds, all former cultures, all former empires. They included Buddhists, Christians, Moslems, Jews, Hindus, Mongolians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians, Persians, Medes, Arabs, Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Hittites, Africans, and hundreds of others whose ancient ancestors had been a part of human progress since the earliest dawn of history.

There is no one name that correctly applies to all of these people. The Europeans, who hated them, called them “Saracens.” For today’s discussion, I’ll do the same.

Since American historians are European-minded, most of us have been exposed to only glimpses of the Saracens’ world, seen through European misunderstanding and bitterness going back to the Crusades. Our UU seventh principle says that **we affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.** So,

because of the deep-seated prejudice, and in the interest of fair play, it seems appropriate to swing the pendulum the other way and present a bit of the Saracens' side of the story.

It is to the Saracens that the world of today owes much of its science—mathematics, astronomy, navigation, modern medicine and surgery, scientific agriculture—and their influence led to the discovery and exploration of America.

In the world of the Saracens, no authority suppressed scientists, and no policeman harried them—nor did any government fund or take care of them. They opened schools and people flocked to them. The Saracen universities had no formal organization—Mohammed contended that too much organization leads to corruption. The rules were few. To guard against the fallacious idea that education ends with graduation, the Saracens' schools granted no diplomas, no degrees. They were institutions, not of teaching, but of learning. Students went there to acquire knowledge just as you now go to the grocery store to buy food.

For 800 years the Saracen schools proceeded on the principle of freedom—on basis of voluntary agreement between teacher and student. They offered all the learning of the past with special emphasis on scientific knowledge. They built on the experience of others; studying Aristotle, Galen, Euclid, the Greeks, the Chinese, the Romans—and usually found a way to improve upon them. And we today have benefited. We can tick off the list from these people who were free to look for better ways: Arabic numerals really of Hindu origin, the priceless concept of zero (if you have doubts just try some

calculations in Roman numerals or think how a non-zero computer might function), algebra including quadratics, to Euclid's geometry they added plane and spherical geometry and trigonometry, applying these to the sun, moon, and stars, they produced astronomy. They invented the compass and the sextant and put their study of the heavens to practical use for navigation. From their multiple observatories, they deduced the shape of the earth and its movement around its axis and around the sun, and they gave the Europeans the information that the earth is round along with calculations of its measurements.

Rivaling their work in astronomy and navigation, the Saracens made important contributions in the field of health and sanitation. From the Ganges to the Atlantic, they built medical schools and hospitals. Since dissection was forbidden in Europe, the northern Italians, who were Europe's first surgeons, learned their anatomy from the Saracens and used local anesthetics from the Saracens in these operations. The thriving city-state of Venice was carrying on trade with the Saracens and was the first in Europe to understand and use the concept of quarantine, an affront to the European interpretation of the times that pestilence was God's punishment for sin.

Precisely 100 years after the death of Mohammed, the Saracens moved into central France. The fanatic Europeans looked upon them as the followers of the Antichrist—the mystic body of Satan on earth—and the Saracens considered the Europeans crude barbarians. A European army was raised and the Saracens stopped at Tours. But some remained in southern France and Spain.

In Spain—at Cordova, Granada, and Seville—the Saracens built great centers of learning and art, science, production, and commerce. From India and Africa and Cathay, students came to the universities in Spain, and from Spain, students went to the universities in Cairo, Baghdad, and Delhi. Progress continued for 500 years, until Saracenic Spain was more than twice as old as the United States is today. Then from darkest Europe, a half-million fighting men set out to attack the Saracens in faraway Palestine. The Saracens had held the Holy Land for 500 years and during all that time, Christians had worshipped unmolested in its Christian shrines. Jerusalem had always been a holy city to Moslems, who have a deep reverence for Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samuel and Jesus. Christian shrines are also Moslem shrines. But these facts were apparently unknown to the Crusaders who eventually massacred all in Jerusalem except one little group of Christians who had the presence of mind to huddle singing Christian hymns in Greek. The Crusaders didn't understand the words but recognized the tunes.

This unprovoked aggression began a world war which lasted until the United States Marines subdued what we called the Barbary Pirates in the Mediterranean harbor of Tripoli in 1804. They thought they were still fighting the war which the Europeans had launched against their forefathers.

One of the most amazing things to the Crusaders was the cleanliness of the Saracens. They bathed daily and their homes were spotless tile floors and mosaic walls with shoes left outside whereas the Europeans occasionally got caught in the rain or fell in a river

and their homes and castles contained the offal of everyday life with dogs and pigs kept to keep the table scraps and debris down to a manageable level. The knight in his leather and coarse wool unwashed body wiped his greasy hands on his sleeve and threw bones over his shoulder to the dogs. The Saracen, in cottons and silks, washed his hands before he ate and also between each course of a meal, dried them on linen damask or terry cloth, and ate from trays of inlaid metals and bowls of porcelain.

So the Crusaders came into a country where everyone was clean. Fountains were everywhere as Mohammed was a fanatic about cleanliness and emphasized the importance of running water vs. standing water. Moslem sensibility did not interrupt business to recall that there are no pagan gods—they bathed and repeated that fact in their streets and bazaars. Anyone who wanted a fountain -- built one. Everything was on the basis of individual initiative and voluntary co-operation.

Mosques were built in the same spontaneous way. There was no more organization about a mosque than there was about a Saracen university. Men in the neighborhood kept the mosque in repair if they liked it; if they didn't, it fell into ruin in time. There was a spontaneous religion, sprung from and depending upon personal self. And for 800 years, during the period when the greater part of Europe was submerged in the Dark Ages, this religion produced the most brilliant scientific progress and the greatest material prosperity that had ever been known to man.

Trade with the Saracens continued through Ragusa and a few other “free cities” set up in Europe. It is important to note that trade—the exchange of material goods—is always an exercise of individual freedom. Production and trade are possible only to the extent that restraints upon personal freedom are absent. Their free cities were the only spots in Europe where men could manage their own affairs, and it was in these spots that religious freedom began to take root. While most of Europe was being torn by fanaticism and religious jealousies, traders of all faiths were building their churches in Ragusa—a Roman Catholic church, a Greek Catholic church, a Moslem mosque and fountain. In the painting above the door of the ancient market, Mother Ragusa is surrounded by children of all peoples—Norman, Mongolian, African, Slavic, Levantine. Ragusa prospered enormously and, at times, even outstripped the Venetians. Spain sought Ragusa as an ally and Ragusan ships sailed as part of the Spanish Armada.

The Saracen lack of organization preserved the individual’s ability to act freely. In addition, the Saracens maintained, what could be called, the anarchy of groups more than the anarchy of persons. This means that most of them chose to remain in tribal and family groups, voluntarily obeying many forms of authority which could not have been enforced. The different groups kept their old customs and traditions. They increased the natural authority of parents over children and the natural influence of wise and able leaders. Workers, traders, scholars, and others formed fraternal groups. Like has been said of the Americans, the Saracens were a people of “joiners.” The parallel has been drawn with American industry and commerce organized on the same basis of free, mutual co-operation, by people of free will working together for some common purpose,

voluntarily accepting some authority which is not and cannot be enforced upon a single one of them.

As to conflict resolution, you may have seen a quarrel develop in an Arab bazaar. One voice, one loud word of anger is heard -- the sound shocks the turmoil of bargaining into silence. Out of it comes a mob-roar. **'Brothers! You are Brothers! Moslems, remember you are brothers!'** With that roar goes what I guess you would call a mob-rush. We see the descendent of this mob-rush response on our TV's today.

Scores of hands tear the quarreling men apart, snatch knives from their fists or sashes. While the masses return to their bargaining, a small group sees to resolution between the angry men which may entail a walk to the nearest Cadi, who, if he wants to keep his reputation for wisdom, must then and there settle the quarrel in a way that satisfies everyone's sense of justice.

One must admire the method, because it works. But it is not law. There is a feeling of personal responsibility to help resolve the situation. Do we react the same way with a feeling of personal responsibility or do we abandon the issue to some authority under the excuse that "we don't want to get involved?"

Actually it is the way people always, everywhere, keep the peace, when no one of them has a recognized right to use force. Then each one feels his responsibility. This is the way the Americans kept the peace on the frontier.

The Saracens had no police force. No state defended their civilization by military power. The armies of history were an ad hoc gathering. They had no civil law which the populace could rally to defend. There was no organization, no political structure, to hold together the millions of persons who for 800 years had been creating a vast and complex empire extending over three continents.

Eventually the white heat of religious fanaticism broke through the Pyrenees and the bloody killings, torture, purges and mass deportations went on for years. Swept up and murdered by this fanaticism were also Jews and Christians as the resource of Saracens thinned out before the wave of zealotry had run its course. An inquisition settled in.

The experience with the Saracens left the people of Spain different from the rest of the Europeans. The Saracens had left the beginnings of an awakening of Europe to science and learning. The Spaniards had been living for hundreds of years in an atmosphere of freedom and religious tolerance as the European ideas of bigotry, class hatred, and authoritarian control began to leak in from the north. Christopher Columbus felt the impact as his negotiations were delayed for ten years as Isabella and Ferdinand were continuing the busy-ness of warring against the Moslems and Jews and had no time for outside ventures. Eventually, in January 1492, the beautiful city of Granada—the great center of learning, art, science, architecture, and commerce which the Saracens had been creating for 800 years—fell to the royals. And, behind the trenches outside of Granada, Columbus finally closed the deal which was to change the course of world events. And

the rush of the energetic, the industrious, the freedom-loving people to get out of Spain followed Columbus in waves into the New World for the next 150 years and beyond.

And the conflict between authority and freedom, interference and liberty, did not end with the fall of Granada. The new America re-proved what can be accomplished when people, in absence of authority, exercise the freedom as individuals to succeed and their personal responsibility to each other. . A modern parallel may be that, in trying times, one segment of the population flecks to the cities in hopes that the authorities will help while the other segment flecks to the countryside where they can better survive outside the interference of authority.

So what's the take-home from all this? What you hear today from all your sources and friends about the Moslem world, you may want to consider in light of the freedom-loving Saracens. What you see today on TV and elsewhere of Moslem groups and individuals in action, you may want to consider in the light of the freedom-loving Saracens and their seeming lack of Western-style organization. And what you enjoy today as a lifestyle here in Eastern Virginia, you may want to consider including in your gratitude the Saracen contribution to that comfort and longevity.