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 **True Enlightenment?**

When you hear the word freedom what is the first thing you think? An escape from captivity? A departure from a toxic relationship? Driving on the open road for the first time? To me, freedom is the result of coming to terms with our own personal demons, as well as overcoming our own individual obstacles that hinder our distinctive growth. Every individual has personal battles that they must endure, a person who has reached full enlightenment and gained true freedom must overcome their hinderance. An example of this can be seen in an excerpt from an autobiography of Malcolm X titled, “Learning to Read” written by Malcolm (X) Little and coauthored by Alex Haley. In this excerpt, Malcolm X, a man who went from being a convicted street hustler in 1946 to overcoming his personal demons and becoming ‘one of the most articulate and powerful leaders of black America in the 1960s’ speaks on his lack of literacy and how he overcame that personal struggle during his lowest point in life.

During Malcolm’s time in prison, he became frustrated at the fact that he encountered difficulty writing letters. He felt as though he wasn’t able to convey his thoughts through his writings, illiteracy became his figurative shackles. There are many instances where an individual can have figurative shackles, for instance: a person who is stuck on their past, has fears that limit their personal lives, or even lacks ambitions. These “shackles” can be internal or external and can have different severities, but what Malcolm’s story shows is that it’s possible to overcome and achieve.

There can be many forms of inspiration towards a person’s journey to freedom. In the autobiography, Malcolm speaks on his time in Charlestown Prison where he met a fellow prisoner named Bimbi, his encounter with Bimbi became the catalyst for his quest for knowledge; Malcolm admits to feeling a sense of jealousy towards Bimbi. In life, inspiration can be found in a multitude of ways: a helping friend, a rival, failure, others’ success, or traumatic events. Sometimes these inspirations are not always obvious, it can take a lot of hard work and reflection. It’s astounding how minor events can became the stimulus for major changes in a person’s life.

Furthermore, an individual’s journey to freedom is never easy, it takes countless trials and possible tribulations. Originally, Malcolm would skim through the book and skip over words he could not understand; he would continue while transferred to the Norfolk prison county where he came close to the verge of giving up on his efforts. The journey to freedom can be very strenuous, not everyone is able to overcome these obstacles, it is easier to succumb to your deterrents than it is to keep striving towards liberation.

There can be numerous tools that people can use during their pursuit to freedom. Malcolm’s tool was a dictionary he eventually got hold on where he would study the words that he lacked knowledge on and also began to practice his penmanship with tablets and pencils. Tools, whether tangible or intangible, are crucial factors to one’s journey to liberation; from advice from others to self-help books there is a vast quantity of options to help with further advancements. The tools needed for freedom are entirely based on an individual’s personal drawbacks.

Advancements towards your freedom can surprise you. Malcolm was surprised by the vast amount of words that he discovered during his studies. He states, “I spent two days just riffling uncertainly through the dictionary’s pages. I’d never realized so many words existed! I didn’t know which words I needed to learn.” (1) This quote shows the amazement Malcolm felt from his newly acquired knowledge.

Freedom brings a newfound enlightenment to an individual’s life. Malcolm found a new sense of satisfaction from his achievements. In the excerpt he states, “If I weren’t out here every day battling the white man, I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity – because you can hardly mention anything I’m not curious about. I don’t think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did” (2) This quote shows how much Malcolm’s time in prison has changed his views and interests.

Confinement is more mental than it is physical. I say this because even while locked up in prison, Malcolm still found a way to ‘free himself’ from shackles that he felt limited him. In the excerpt he states, “In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended some college” This quote shows how even though Malcom could not physically free himself in prison he was able to free himself mentally and he shows gratitude for that.

In conclusion, freedom is something rigorous to obtain but can give true enlightenment if it is achieved. Malcolm’s strive for literacy during his time in prison was a true representation of liberation from mental confinement. Restraints can come in many forms and severities, in order to overcome these restraints a person must come to terms that they are restrained.

 **Sources Cited:**

* Malcolm X. “Learning to Read”. “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” 1987. https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/schmerlereng1121e106spring2019/files/2019/02/Malcolm-X-Learning-to-Read.pdf