



My Quest

By Daniel Labbe

Today's Meditation - Freedom... Who can say that he (or she) is truly free? Living in Prison I hear a lot about the loss of freedom, but this is not true for me. Many people equate incarceration with loss of freedom, yet I wonder, was I free prior to my incarceration? How many "citizens" can say they are truly free? I guess it all depends on one's definition of freedom.

Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary defines freedom as "... the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action." By this definition there isn't a human alive on this earth that can claim true freedom. Who can make all the decisions of life completely free of necessity, coercion, or constraint? Can you just up and decide to fly to London tomorrow morning without feeling the necessity to work and provide for your family or your own well-being? Every choice we make is influenced by social, legal, moral, and familial constraints, so Merriam-Webster's definition just isn't going to work.

This is my definition of Freedom: My ability to respond to life in ways that reflect my goals and values, that reflect the best of who I am.

This definition puts freedom into my hands. Only I can increase or decrease the quality of my freedom. ~~Not~~ This kind of freedom does not depend on circumstances, it does not depend on any person, system, or authority other than myself. As Viktor Frankl pointed out in

2
his book Man's Search for Meaning, this is "... the last of the human freedoms," and no one can take it away from us.

Strangely, under this definition few people in today's society can say they live with a high degree of freedom. For myself I didn't find any sort of freedom until I had already been incarcerated for 5 years. Before that I led a life that was dictated by my emotions, conditioning, and impulses. For many people this is the truth of their reality. Most people make decisions that are dictated by their conditioning, impulses, fears, desires, emotions, and old, habitual patterns are the creators of our reactions. Think about this.

① A stimulus in the ~~environment~~ environment occurs. ② We perceive this stimulus through one or more of our five senses. ③ We then interpret what this stimulus means to us and ④ we then experience an emotion which is based on this interpretation (the emotion is not a product of the thing we perceived but rather our emotion is a product of our interpretation of what we perceived. Thus, emotions are within our control, though few people are aware of this. Look into CBT, or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for more on this). ⑤ Now this is where we often react out of conditioning. Due to our interpretation of the event and the corresponding emotion we then feel a conditioned impulse, the urge to react in a certain way. This impulse is a product of our past experiences, the culture we identify with, genetic make-up, media exposure, and so on. So many of us live in such a state of distraction that we just go ahead and carry out our conditioned reactions. It's like we are

living on Auto-pilot. This is not freedom. In fact, it's an imprisonment that is far more constraining than any prison made of concrete and steel.

The more distracted we are, the less freedom we have. ~~Because~~ When we are distracted we react out of this conditioning this impulse pattern.

To reclaim our freedom, our ability to ~~no~~ choose responses that reflect our goals and values, we must become Mindful, we must wake up from ~~the~~ the dream that hypnotizes so many of us. Only when we are mindful of the process and mindful of the present moment can we choose freely, choose a choice not dictated by our impulses and conditioning. Here's a model that I find helpful.

Distracted model

- ① Stimulus from the environment occurs
- ② We Perceive that Stimulus
- ③ We interpret what that stimulus means to us
- ④ ~~we~~ An emotion arises due to our interpretation
- ⑤ We react, ~~and~~ carrying out the conditioned response

Mindful response model

- ① Stimulus from the environment occurs
- ② We Perceive that Stimulus
- ③ We interpret what that stimulus means to us
- ④ An emotion arises due to our interpretation
- ⑤ We reflect on our goals and values
- ⑥ We choose a response that reflects our goals and values.

at last chance to reclaim our freedom!

Here's the Key: If you can become Mindful, aware of yourself, within the first 4 steps then you can use the Mindful response model. It's okay if you weren't Mindful until

P.S. This realization of my power, my freedom is what changed me from a dysfunctional being to who I am today - it's Powerful!

Step 4, at any point within those first four steps you can choose to reflect on your goals and values. The more mindful we are ~~are~~ the more we will be able to use the mindful response model, and the more freedom we will have. We are no longer the puppets of our conditioning, of our feelings and impulses. What freedom! And the best part is that we ourselves are the ones in full control of this process. It is our choice. That's my kind of freedom!

For anyone questioning the idea that our emotions are based on our interpretation of events and not based on the events themselves, consider this. Say a friend walks up to you, stumbles and accidentally (your interpretation) punches you in the nose. It hurts. You bleed. But you are not mad at him. Maybe you're even concerned. Now what if ~~a~~ ^a stranger walked up to you, stumbled, and punched you in the nose? It would hurt. You would bleed, but your emotions would probably be quite different. Why? Both sensory experiences were ~~the same~~ the same. Yet how you interpreted the event is what created the resulting emotion, not the event itself. Hence, no one can make us angry. We must take full responsibility for all of our emotions. ~~At~~ At the same time, we need to be accepting of whatever emotion is already present. There is no blame and no need to resist. It is what it is and it is that way due to our own interpretation... which may be right!

So reclaim your freedom to choose responses that reflect your goals and values by cultivating mindfulness and an awareness of the process - Good luck!



3
Current Events - Old Colony Prison will soon have a drama club complete with costumes and props. Last night (June 10) Toastmasters put on four plays. It went rather well. I was in two of those plays, in one I played Ray Ramono. Everyone is always telling me how I remind them of Ray, so it was fitting that I got that role. It was fun, but I'm no actor.

The Mindful Living group had 14 guys show up this week. I'm really getting an appreciation for the skill involved in facilitating groups. The last two meetings really put me to the test when a couple of group members got off topic and began to create an uncomfortable, angry atmosphere. In one instance the guy started to go off about how another inmate screwed him over. He really got into all the horrible attributes of this other inmate. What I did was try to get the guy to focus on his response, to direct his attention away from the other other guy, what he perceived as the source of his anger and pain, and get him to focus on his part in it, how he responded and how he will choose to respond now that these feelings have arisen again. It worked to some degree, but it was a real effort! Luckily the outburst only lasted a couple of minutes. The rest of the group ~~was~~ went smoothly. I really feel the responsibility of leadership in this role as group facilitator. It's a great feeling, but I also feel uncomfortable. I'm not used to my new roles yet. But what a great learning experience, huh? Just 18 months ago, even 12 months ago, I'd never dream of facilitating such a large group. Especially here. I'm really on my own. I

(6)

Was able to get some posters made for the group. And because it falls under religious programs (the group is held during the Buddhist time slot in the religious class-room) I will be able to order books and CD's paid for by the D.O.C. Every religious group has a certain amount of money to spend every year.

I have the first 11 pages of the LifeQuest Prospectus typed up. It's slow going because I have to sign-up ~~to~~ to use the type-writer in the library - don't have my own. I used to have a type-writer, but the motor burned out. Anyway, I only get a couple, ~~about~~ 3 at the most, hours per week. I still plan on having it finished by the end of the month. I'm looking for anyone who would like to become a core member of LifeQuest and for professionals in the fields of ~~the~~ Psychology, addiction, personal development, spirituality (holistic, new-age, Eastern philosophy) and program development to help me create the best program possible. I already have a fantastic frame-work put together for LifeQuest. I have no doubt it will revolutionize the personal development and self-help fields.

Well, take care everyone and happy Questing!

Quote of the day: "If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your own estimate of it." Marcus Aurelius

Like what you read? Leave a comment or write me directly at:

Daniel Labbe W85867
1 Administration Rd
Bridgewater, MA 02324