

Education and Change

One day Ronald stopped to think about what it means to be in prison. These were the exact words he wrote later when he paused for a moment of reflection:

...I was sitting in the prison yard playing cards when it hit me. I asked, what am I doing in a place like this, and what am I going to do about it? Am I going to keep on coming here or am I going to do something to keep from coming back? This is what I asked myself. So I thought it's about time for me to make something out of my life. So I went to school.

Education in prison is one of the most important factors that leads to authentic change in life. There have been many studies that indicate educational advancement has a direct effect on the rate of recidivism. This is especially true when any level of higher education has been achieved. Many men and women have indicated that authentic change began when there was significant educational achievement in their lives.

More than just statistical factors education often opens new avenues that have life-giving qualities. Men like Malcolm X have indicated that it was prison education, which of course involved more than just books and numbers, that led to a whole new world view and made possible the move from being a victim to an intentional human being.

Prison education can certainly lead to power and choice. Instead of standing before only one avenue that leads back to prison – there are now many that hold the promise of a future life without prison. Ronald discovered this. He finished high school and one year of college before he was released. A few years after release he established his own business and got his family back together. As far as I know he never came back to prison.

Bondage and The Wilderness

To live in a state of bondage is to live in captivity in a way that one's personal freedom is severely limited. To say that in such a state a person has no freedom at all would be to deny the freedom of the human spirit itself. However, in a state of bondage the spirit is devastated and subjected to severe pain. In bondage the major concern is with the oppressor, or, whatever else which sets the limits to our existence.

To live in the wilderness is different. Here there may be no oppressor, gun, or whip. The crisis of existence in the wilderness is that one finds life without apparent direction of meaning. Meaning is not to be found in the wilderness itself, rather, in the decisions one makes while there. In this sense, we need to understand that the wilderness is not geographical or physical, rather, a matter of the spirit. In this context then, one becomes a wanderer or a person on an intentional journey. The person who adopts a life style of intention will probably not stay long in the wilderness. His or her sense of purpose and meaning will carry them through to new possibilities. The wanderer may wander out by accident or, may even wish after a period of time, to return to some form of well-defined bondage which from the wilderness can sometimes appear attractive.

For most people the wilderness is the place of greatest danger. This is true because it is usually the place where most of us end up in our flight from pain and struggle. In our escape from what we think might put us in bondage we are not ready to face the great demands that confront us in the wilderness. The demand is for invention and not reaction of rebellion. There are no familiar roads in the wilderness, therefore, new paths must be created, and a new sense of

authenticity must be established. This is the challenge we face today and the one to which we must respond.