



Often we think of freedom as freedom from oppression, or comparative freedom granted by a nation's government. Beyond that freedom and all other perceptions about one's situation, is the reality of self. I usually refer to that reality as peace; however it is equally true to call it freedom. Ultimate freedom is when we are not bound and in fact cannot be bound. As such, true freedom is not a state in that it is our reality and not temporary. Freedom is what we are, the very essence of that one which, having no separate other to bind, cannot be bound, and thus is totally free.

Along with being free, we are completely invulnerable, for precisely the same reason. In being invulnerable, we are peace. And in being peace, we have eternal reason to be joy. No one and no nation or government can take this from us.

Being aware of our freedom often seems absent. We're bound by laws, by social mores, by religious ideation, by arbitrary policies about propriety, by commitments, by prejudicial judgments, by self-imposed limitations of many kinds. You could call this accepted bondage. Sometimes it feels okay, and sometimes it seems too tight a fit, binding us and making us uncomfortable.

Beyond these external and internal pressures toward bondage, we find ourselves neatly (or not so neatly) packaged into human bodies, situated on a continent, just above the oceanic waterline, on a planet carrying us through space whether we consciously choose any of this or not.

Although we may say to ourselves that we like to be free, or would prefer to be even more free, we must admit that our situation as humans limits us in certain ways, and that we choose bondage over freedom in certain other ways. But even though this is true, it is often the case that freedom seems to dry up and blow away, and we find ourselves lost and trapped in life situations we do not want, and see no ready way to extricate ourselves from these difficult circumstances.

Generally, we don't think of ourselves as being freedom, but look at freedom in terms of our situation at any given moment. When the situation becomes less than optimal, and when changing that situation seems hopeless, it is a time to get back in touch with what we are...freedom. Regardless of our situation, we can pause our inner and outer activity, and relax into doing nothing, allowing ourselves to more clearly notice or encounter that reality we are, and that we share with all.

If we have opportunities to interact with others, or communicate with them, our interactive sharing can take on an undertone or undercurrent, arising from the influence of giving attention to the reality we are. Even though all are that freedom right now, sharing this allows that influence to ripple outward from us in the perceived world. We need not do this as a cure for difficult situations which seem less than free, and yet we are sharing this influence. If then, circumstances do change, we may not be able to pin down just how or if it was because of our pausing to notice reality. A couple of stories that I know of...

A man incarcerated in a mental hospital setting, with security run by the Department of Corrections, was locked away for an indefinite period of time, extending beyond the year and a half expected and extending beyond the five year maximum criminal time involved. A review by the court for possible release proved futile and depressing, and it appeared this incarceration might never end. At the time, the man had been doing a similar method of pausing and placing attention on reality as described on this site. During day-to-day meditation of this sort, it came to him what the issues were surrounding his continuing incarceration. The hospital, although reporting internally in very favorable ways toward this man, did not want the responsibility of recommending release...so they passed the responsibility to the court by sending the man back with a noncommittal recommendation. When the court received this, along with the man being transported to the jail local to the court for judicial disposition, the court didn't want the responsibility for the man's release...so they passed the responsibility to the (state) Department of Mental Health (DMH), ordering that the man be reviewed by them. When the DMH received the order and brought the man in for review, they didn't want the responsibility for the man's release without the specific recommendation of the hospital involved. It was all very circular. As soon as this became clear within, the man contacted his attorney, who agreed this was "interesting" (and probably was the case). The attorney said he would call a meeting where all three of these buck-passing entities would be in the same room, where they could honestly look at the behavioral and mental health reports pertaining to the man, and together, come to a reasonable decision. The meeting never happened. When apprised of the planned meeting, they presented the man with a deal of sorts, in which the man would not resist the hospital's recommendation for extending his stay, and in return, the court would order his release if DMH would okay it. The head of the program at office of DMH in that jurisdiction would not allow any releases from that facility, and the head of a program in another county agreed and the court ordered release to that program. So that is what happened. After 7 years of incarceration, the entire process of getting the recommendation, going before the court, being reviewed again by DMH, approved by a different jurisdiction, and being physically out the door took about 30 days. Standing on my head! *(yes...it was me...that was 34 years ago as of this writing)*

Well, the first man got out (*uh...that's me*) and started visiting another man incarcerated in the same facility. This second man did not have good reports and the support of hospital staff. Instead, he got into fights and was found doing other unacceptable behavior not suitable for mentioning here. Now and then, he would call the first man, asking him to visit, play chess, etc. During occasional visits, he would eventually always ask the first man what he could do to be released. The first man knew that true freedom starts within, and so would always shift the conversation over to that. This was ignored two or three times, but finally he asked again as though he was getting desperate. But he got the same response about pausing and paying attention within...to whatever is there (which happens to be his reality). This time he agreed. Some time later, he called and they visited again, played chess, etc. He told the first man that he had done it for about two weeks, but then just felt too silly to continue. Around two years later, he was released. Well, they don't release people on a whim, or because they meditate. Whether this the effect of those two weeks had anything to do with his release, I don't know. Most likely he never looked at it that way. Circumstances change, and things happen. Yes! They do! (lol)

Why not let's just make it three stories! While I was still locked away (*see? ...I'm owning it now*), another man...let's call him third man, used to come to me occasionally, asking me how to solve various problems. My response, as you might guess by now, was to redirect him to talk about how to become free within, letting the circumstantial details take care of themselves. We would chat awhile, and he would always go away with a funny look on his face. I used to imagine that he thought I didn't understand his questions, was really out of touch with reality, or was just too far out there to be reached. Sometime during the first year after my release, I followed my wife a few minutes after she went to the gas station, figuring we could both fill up and use the same bank card. When I arrived, she told me this guy had asked if she could use her car to push his across town, as he had broken down. She'd told him to wait until I arrived and maybe I could do it. She was an expert on volunteering my labors. When I went over to check this guy out, it was that guy...you know, the third man. So I pushed his car across town. We met up and talked a couple times after that, and then I lost touch as we didn't really have much in common. Much later, I wondered how he was doing (as he had long-standing leukemia troubles), but when I called, no one answered...it just rung off the hook. So I drove over to where he lived, and when he wasn't home, I asked a neighbor. They said he was at UCLA Medical Center in the hospital. Shortly after, I drove out to Los Angeles and visited, just walking in unannounced. Since the neighbor had told me he was in a bad way, I rather expected him to be very sick and depressed. To my surprise, he was up and about in his bathrobe and looked somewhat cheerful. When I inquired how he was doing, he said he was only expected to live a couple weeks at best. So of course, I asked him, "Why so cheerful???" His response brought undercover tears to my eyes. He said, "*You know, years ago...when you used to tell me all those things, I really, REALLY didn't understand them at all. But now, for some reason, I understand them perfectly.*" That was why he was so cheerful. He was dying as far as anyone around him could tell, but inside he was FREE!