

Belonging to Living Earth, All Life, All People, and Spirit-Self:

Insights by Mandela, Barfield, Bellow, Steiner

Nelson Mandela was and remains a remarkable inspirational human being. He led a nation of a majority (close to 10 to 1) severely oppressed people to forgive a minority oppressor. This is a first in human history as we know it. It is close to incomprehensible for those of us in the West to understand and appreciate the depth of the acts and spirit of forgiveness that pervaded.

For purposes of this paper we will think about President Mandela's life in three interconnected segments.

1. Ages 1 through 47
2. Ages 47 through 73
3. Ages 73 through 95

A great deal of focus in this paper will be on Mandela's inner work while in prison for 27 years, but no period of a person's life can be fully understood without considering it in the context of the whole.¹

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Mandela was born into regal blood of the Thembu tribe in southeastern South Africa an area where many rivers run to the sea. His life was poor in material possessions, but rich in family love and in the freedom of the open veld, where he herded cattle beneath vast, expansive skies. Mandela's father died when

he was 12. It had been arranged if his father died, he would go to live and be raised by the head of the Thembu tribe. This King – the leader of the Thembu tribe lived by choice in a Methodist enclave. Christianity and tribal customs were side by side. The King worked with many people over a large area. He governed by consensus being cautious to never crush a minority. This had a deep influence on Nelson as a young man and throughout his life.

As Nelson developed, he was sent to the best boarding schools available to young black people at the time. He was a good student and a leader. Due to standing up alone for students rights as an elected class representative he was told not to come back to school after only partial completion. The King was furious. The King then decided for Nelson that an arranged marriage would occur. This did not suit Nelson who wanted to pick his own love and do so when it was reciprocal and free. So with no “pass” he went to Johannesburg and worked as a security guard in the gold mines. This was his first real exposure to the brutalities of apartheid. He rarely saw a white person in his early years. He was raised in a supportive positive environment. Seeing the reality of the effects of apartheid on his people both physically and psychologically was crushing to both him and of course, to his people.^{1, 2}

He married. He had three children. He decided to become a lawyer. He did so by clerking at a Jewish law firm. He walked seven miles from his small home in

Soweto to the law firm in order to save bus money to buy candles so he could read law books at night. He was studying law at night by candlelight in a correspondence course. He could not be admitted as a black man to a law school at that time in South Africa. Ultimately he became a lawyer and opened a practice with his friend Mr. Tambo. A gold-plated sign still exists on a building in downtown Johannesburg titled Mandela and Tambo.^{1, 2, 45}

He was an excellent lawyer. He used the King's English and powerful oratory in court to frequently point out the horrors of apartheid. He participated in his own defense in three trials. In the first trial for treason he was acquitted. The second trial was for leaving the country without a pass. He was convicted and sent to Robben Island for the first time. The third trial was again for treason. Many expected he would receive the death penalty. At this third trial he gave a four-hour closing argument putting the apartheid regime on trial. He received a sentence of life imprisonment and was sent back to Robben Island.

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I have given approximately 20 presentations about Nelson Mandela titled: The Greatest Lawyer or The Greatest Human Being of the 20th Century. It is different each time and attempts to respond to many varied audiences. The presentation on my website was given at the Basilica in Minneapolis, MN on June 22, 2023.^{13, 14}

The presentation describes the conditions on Robben Island and many important events that occurred during Mandela's time on the island. Prison on Robben Island involved working conditions that were tantamount to torture. Numerous wardens were abusive to the political prisoners.

Bishop Tutu in conjunction with numerous of Mandela's colleagues in the African National Congress (ANC) say of Nelson that he entered prison in 1963 at age 46 impatient, impulsive, slightly arrogant, and firmly set on overthrowing the white government by force. When he emerged from prison in 1990, he was restrained, profoundly thoughtful, deeply humble and eager to detect good qualities in even his adversaries. Bishop Tutu has further said, that Mandela went on a long, spiritual journey that was intimately connected to the excruciating ordeal of his long imprisonment.¹¹

It is that long spiritual journey that is explicated in his magnificent autobiographical book: *The Long Walk to Freedom*.¹ This book can be read on many levels: i.e. - the history of South Africa, the history of the African National Congress (ANC), the details of his life story, the history of the entire movement or what I am focusing on in this paper - *The Spiritual Life of Nelson Mandela*.

Mandela was raised as a Christian. He was a card-carrying Methodist his entire life. His - was a "profound" Christianity not a "fundamentalist" Christianity. He never carried his religion on his sleeve. He viewed himself as a political leader.

Hence, he needed to appeal to the many tribal peoples and the many religions that made-up the people of South Africa.

So what was Mandela's path? It was his own individualized path that he developed by himself in prison. His inner life “path” was active, disciplined, practiced, individualized, and flexible. He engaged in a process of deeply thinking about great thoughts. In other words, sense free thinking about thinking that revealed to him his own divinity, infinity, and eternity. Allow me to explain, below is a partial list of what Mandela read and studied and some of which he memorized in his 27 years in prison:

- Mandela had a copy of the Bible throughout most of his imprisonment, initially smuggled, later officially permitted. It was the Gideon's Bible given to him in 1976 by a fellow inmate, MAK MAHARAJ, disguised as a legal text. It circulated among prisoners who marked their favorite verses before signing it. The actual Bible is now in the British Library.
- Mandela marked and underlined several texts: Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my shepherd...” This was a favorite for comfort and courage in confinement.
- Psalm 121 - “I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come?” Mandela said this verse reminded him of hope and endurance.
- Romans 8:28 - “All things work together for good to them that love God” This was one of his guiding verses.

- 1 Corinthians 13 – “Love is patient, love is kind ...” He referenced this passage when speaking about forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Joshua 1:9 – “Be strong and of a good courage.” This was one of the most underlined verses in his Bible.
- Matthew 5-7 - (Sermon on the Mount) He often cited the themes of humility, forgiveness and moral strength that appear in the passage.
- He read Psalms and the New Testament deeply and repeatedly, often for meditation and solace.

Poetry That Sustained Him

- Mandela was a lifelong lover of poetry. In prison poetry was a lifeline for inspiration, memory, and quiet rebellion. Besides “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley which he famously recited to fellow inmates he also read and memorized several other poems.
- “If -” by Rudyard Kipling - He recited it often; its stoic courage mirrored his own ethos.
- “The Odyssey” (Homer translated) -- He admired the endurance and the long struggle home.

- “The Rubayyat” of Omar Khayyam - A copy circulated in Robben Island prison
- African poets: works by Wole Soyinka, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay were shared among prisoners when available.
- “Still I Rise” - (Maya Angelo) - he later quoted this after his release, calling it a “prison poem of the human spirit.”

Shakespeare: The Robben Island Bible

- Perhaps the most famous literary work read in prison was the complete works of Shakespeare, smuggled in under the guise of a Hindu prayer book and shared by the political prisoners. Each prisoner signed their name to a favorite passage.
- Mandela signed beside this passage from Julius Caesar (Act 2, Scene 2):
“Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once.” He said those lines reminded him to remain brave in the face of possible execution.
- Other inmates marked passages from Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, reading Shakespeare as both literature and moral philosophy.

Other Literature and Philosophy Mandela Read

- Mandela's prison reading was astonishingly broad for a man confined to a cell. Over time, he was allowed to order and receive approved books, and he made use of the prison library.
- Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Lenin - for political and ideological study.
- Mahatma Gandhi's writings - particularly The Story of My Experiments with Truth.
- Leo Tolstoy - War and Peace and The Kingdom of God is Within You.
- Charles Dickens - A Tale of Two Cities and David Copperfield.
- Alexandre Dumas - The Count of Monte Cristo (a story of unjust imprisonment and justice).
- John Bunyan - The Pilgrims Progress.
- Winston Churchill's Memoirs - for leadership study.
- Plato's Dialogues, Aristotle, and Marcus Aurelius meditations.
- Biographies: Lincoln, Garibaldi and others.

- African writers: Sol Plaatje (Mhudi), Chinua Achebe (Things Fall Apart), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (A Grain of Wheat).

Reading Habits and Practices

- He read every morning before breakfast and every night before lights were out. He often memorized verses and poems.
- He used reading as a discipline and a form of inner liberation to “keep his mind sharper than his jailers” as he put it.
- He also led literary discussions and informal “university” sessions among the political prisoners known as the “University of Robben Island”.¹²

As is evident, this is a wide and varied list that filled his inner life and from which he developed his own path. His path can be described as active, disciplined, practiced, individualized, and flexible. He was engaged through memorization in a daily process of thinking about great thoughts that revealed his own divinity infinity and eternity. If that was in him it was in all 8 billion plus people on the Earth including the terrible wardens and repressive guards. It was also in the horrible English and Dutch white leaders who perpetuated the cruelty of apartheid. This was a deep and likely difficult realization as it meant he had to look for and speak to the higher good in each individual.^{1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9}

Now I will turn to other approaches to an inner life through a path. Let's start with Owen Barfield. Barfield was an Inklings. The Inklings are individuals who began as atheists or agnostics all colleagues at Oxford and all converted to a different stream of Christianity. A partial list is: J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and Owen Barfield.²¹ Barfield is credited by Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* for Lewis's conversion. Lewis says that Barfield cracked open his citadel of materialism when Barfield explained that for the Greeks Philosophy was not a subject, but was a "WAY."³⁶ Lewis explains that when he realized that consciousness could change over time that he could understand that The God-Head walked in the reality of the Incarnation of Christ.^{35, 36}

Barfield was an ardent agnostic as he was raised by two parents who were atheists. As an only child he was very well educated. His greatest "Joy" was when he read the lyric poetry of Coleridge. When doing so it produced a quasi - meditative state that Barfield found comforting and something he could repeat. Through a friend Barfield discovered Rudolf Steiner. When he delved into Steiner's work and particularly the indications for an inner path he found it produced the same Joy as reading Coleridge's lyric poetry.^{22 --- 35}

Barfield was a lawyer until age 50. At 50 he retired from being a Solicitor and wrote 14 to 15 books over the remaining 50 years of his life. I was fortunate in my early years after becoming a lawyer to take one year and read all of Barfield's

books.^{22 --- 35} My wife and I then went to meet Barfield in the English countryside. I have written a blog on the meeting.⁴¹ I recommend it for your reading.

One incident is worth repeating. My wife, who is very well read, had read little of Steiner. So after hours of conversation and comfort with each other my wife asked, “Owen if Steiner is such a big deal why has the world not heard of him?” After a long pause and drawing repeatedly on his pipe Barfield replied, “if the world heard of Steiner they would have to rewrite all the textbooks.” In short Barfield, inspired by Steiner, carved out a deep analysis of the evolution of consciousness that pervades his wide-ranging body of work.^{22 --- 35}

Barfield also became a friend and a mentor of Saul Bellow. A book of letters they exchanged is most fascinating.³⁷ Before and during the writing of “Humboldt’s Gift”, Barfield provided Bellow with spiritual insights and direction regarding inner work. Barfield specifically recommended “Guidance in Esoteric Training” by Steiner.³⁸ He also shared with Bellow the meditations more fully developed in this book such as:

More brilliant than the Sun
Purer than the snow
Finer than the vast blue sky (ether)
Is the self
The Spirit in my heart
This self am I
I am this self.

This meditation and many others by Steiner is an example of “Sense Free Thinking.” Steiner develops what sense free thinking is meticulously in the second-half of his book the “Philosophy of Spiritual Activity.” He explains the philosophical basis for this inner work that is a “path” that is active, disciplined, practiced, individualized and flexible. This sense free thinking is inwardly thinking about great thoughts and Steiner develops how this process reveals the Spirit-Self and leads to Freedom. This inner freedom is the same Joy Barfield experienced and the same Divinity, Infinity and Eternity that Nelson Mandela experienced. Possibly the most striking aspect of this revelatory process is coming to understand that some thoughts are spiritual realities/beings.

What is most amazing about Mandela is that he did this all on his own. Yes through terrible imprisonment he had a forced inner life. But he chose to work and to stay inwardly alive and to explore and memorize many great poems, scripture and quotes from great works. When I read *The Long Walk to Freedom* in 1994, I recognized in Mandela what he had achieved on his own. By that time, I had been studying and exploring Steiner, Barfield and Bellow’s work for 20 years. Mandela validated for me in a very deep way Steiner, Barfield and Bellow’s approach. I was quite taken when I discovered that Barfield’s and Bellow’s favorite meditation was:

More brilliant than the Sun ... as quoted above.

This was a meditation I had been working with for many years.

But now Mandela took me a giant step forward. His inner path confirmed my feeble attempts at a practiced path. Mandela became my mentor. I embraced him and welcomed him in with a bear hug. I was then fortunate to meet him in Minneapolis, MN and then go to South Africa to walk in his footsteps.^{40, 45} He inspired me in the practice of law for 35 years to as selflessly as possible stand in the shoes of others and give voice. Not my voice, but the voice of another.

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Mandela is freed from Victor Verster prison on February 11th 1990. He was in two different medium security prisons in or near Cape Town for about 8 years prior to his release. The Dutch government was meeting with and evaluating Mandela to determine if he could be trusted as a leader for them to discuss the future. The Dutch had no intention of freeing Mandela and immediately having free elections. The Dutch did not want to extend the equality of a one person one vote system to Black South Africa. They wanted a weighted vote for whites to enable white controlled government. Mandela refused to negotiate when he was not a free man. He was very careful with his words when confined so that he could

maintain his credibility with all black and brown South Africans that were still horribly suffering from apartheid.

Once freed, his meetings with De Klerk took on a new urgency. But De Klerk had other plans. He met with Mandela, but he had unleashed his goons to torture blacks until they agreed to do black on black violence. Typically, this method involved a gasoline-filled tire, provided by the government, that was laced over a victim's head and then set alight. This was then filmed by the government. It was put on South African news as well as World News. De Klerk would watch it with Mandela and use it to argue that Mandela's people were not ready for one person one vote. This was very painful for Mandela. He describes these four years when free from 90 to 94 as some of the very hardest of his life. Mandela accused De Klerk many times during those four years of being behind these murderous displays. No movement toward elections was occurring. De Klerk had clandestinely promised many whites that one person one vote would never occur. Mandela sat in discussion facing evil lies and still searching and looking for the good in the other.

After three years of these discussions the government murdered the young very popular leader Chris Haney. News of this murder reached Mandela in the early morning at his home in Qunu. He travelled immediately to Johannesburg.^{1, 2, 6} Violence was breaking out in the Country. Haney and other young leaders

respected Mandela but they wanted faster movement from the government and they demanded equality. While South Africa was in turmoil and the heat of violent revolution was rising the night after Haney's murder Mandela gave a speech in the large soccer/ football stadium in Johannesburg that was filled with very angry people. The speech was heard throughout South Africa and most of the world. Tutu and many others say that when Mandela gave his speech that night it was at that moment that Mandela became the President of South Africa.¹¹

Yet it was a full year later in 1994 when elections occurred with one person one vote. Mandela always true to the ANC mission and his colleagues was overwhelmingly elected. We all remember the lines of people waiting hours standing in the sun to vote for free and fair elections. Mandela's dream of a Rainbow Coalition came true. In the final months before the election, Lord Carrington and Henry Kissinger went to South Africa and attempted to reach a compromise with De Klerk, Mandela and the leader of the Zulus. The Zulu leader was demanding a separate area or state for his 25 million members of the Zulu tribe. Carrington and Kissinger left with no success saying they feared greater violence. Many white South Africans left the country. The final lasting agreement occurred when a leader from Kenya who was a Christian met with the head of the Zulus. This led to the topic of profound Christianity entering the discussions.⁹ A free country and free people were born out of a higher impulse the flame of which

Mandela had tended in himself for 27 years in prison and for the four years of very difficult negotiations. What an incredible inspiration! Hallelujah!!!

In Love seek the root of Truth
In Truth seek the root of Love
Thus speaks thy Higher Self
The fires glow transmutes wood into warming rays
Just as wisdom's resolving will
Changes outer work into abiding strength
So let thy work be the shadow of the flame
The Flame lit by thy Higher Self.⁵⁰



Introduction to Prompts

This paper covers a lot of ground. Numerous topics would justify a separate paper and treating all topics thoroughly could be a book. With that in mind, I thought it best to end with “prompts” that may assist with personal reflection or serve as questions for group discussion. As my website williamhenrymanning.com makes clear, I am available by email or phone for a personal or group discussion.

Prompts

1. How, if at all, can we translate lessons learned from this paper to today’s polarized world?
2. Should leaders of all political parties and leaders of all other institutions be asked if they have or are working to develop an inner life?
3. As you the reader reflect, are you compelled to examine your own inner life or path? Is it an open path? Is it working to further your life’s moral values and/or goals?
4. Are you generous? Are you kind? Who inspires you? Does this paper and presentation help you reflect on these questions?
5. Does this paper inspire you to go deeper, to Belong to the earth, to Belong to all life and all people as well as to find and experience Freedom and Joy in your Higher Spiritual Self?
6. Would you consider getting on your own path that would be active, disciplined, practiced, personalized and flexible?
7. If it took two or three or five years or more to be on a “Path” of working with “Sense Free Thinking” so that Joy, Freedom, Divinity, Infinity and Eternity would be revealed to you, would you be willing to put in the time and effort so possibly Grace could speak?

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