

The Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela:

I heard the audio version of Nelson Mandela's autobiography which has been read beautifully by Michael Boatman. He has been able to bring out the emotional rainbow of the story very effectively through his voice which sounds almost as if Mandela himself is reading his own book.

Nelson Mandela is undoubtedly an inspiring figure of recent history. He has several very striking qualities. He demonstrates tremendous courage through his unremitting opposition to oppression and by rebelling (by speaking out or through peaceful resistance) against every instance of injustice. To the very end of his struggle against apartheid he does not compromise on principles and values that he felt were fundamental and inviolable. For example, his refusal to disown the communist party (as one of ANC's partners in the struggle) despite insistent pressure from the government during final negotiations shows his firm belief that commitment to a loyal friend was far more important than a short-term gain – even one as significant as the dismantling of apartheid.

Nelson Mandela clearly demonstrates the subtle difference between forgiveness and fighting injustice. For him, there is no forgiveness for injustice committed against his people and his country, but, he is ready to forgive the suffering inflicted on him personally. He is able to forget personal pain quite easily.

He appears all throughout his life to be generally immune to such maladies as anger, vengefulness, bigotry, and tendency to generalize. He seems to have a problem-solving attitude which shows up frequently through his insistence on moving forward rather than analyzing past events and playing the blame game. He was able to differentiate easily between a few white men who inflicted pain on him and his people, and the general white populace – which may have been ignorant but was not malicious. In fact, his ability to win the confidence of the white minority might have been one of the biggest factors that contributed to the eventual liquidation of apartheid in South Africa.

His knowledge of the law and legal matters appears to have come handy to him throughout his struggles against the government's arbitrary actions as well as the injustices committed routinely in the prison system.

He appears to be an intelligent and flexible person who was able to adapt his own principles and rules to situations and people based on their merit, instead of being stiff

and dogmatic about them. For example, he knew when to set aside the "democratic" practice of involving everyone in negotiations for the sake of making faster progress.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison, and yet, all that seems to have changed in him when he leaves prison is his age. His sense of humor and his interest in life, his country, and people were undiminished. He comes out with no anger, depression, mental degradation, or anything like that. This indicates a highly evolved spiritual frame of mind. (Nothing to do with religion: he doesn't come across as a particularly religious person.)

Mandela seems to be a very articulate person. He is not only able to formulate his complex thoughts clearly and succinctly, but also express them well - especially in writing since he appears to have prepared all his speeches and legal defenses in writing first.

Mandela's personal views about religion and morality appear to be quite advanced and modern. He seems to have trusted his gut feeling and instincts more than any foregoing rules of morality or ethics. His views about non-violence, for example, were not fanatical. They changed throughout his life, although he had deep respect for the non-violent movements of Gandhi and King. His separation from Winnie is another example. He realized the fatigue that had developed in their relationship after his long prison term and was able to move on and later even marry another woman without any moralistic confusion in his mind.

All in all, a very interesting life to read about and learn from!

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