

Independence or Inclusivity

Self-Reliance, the famous work of transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, is a text regarding the importance of independence. Throughout his writing, Emerson consistently asserts the value of listening to your thoughts and not allowing others to change your mind.

Independence is a beautiful thing, and one of the ideals behind the formation of this nation. It allows us to live the way we do, free to make our own choices about religion, speech, tradition, and general ways of life. Independence is something to be eternally grateful for.

Yet often we forget that independence does not mean exclusion or separation. To be independent, we need not remove ourselves from others. Ralph Waldo Emerson expresses the need for non-conformity, repeatedly delving into the importance of not allowing others to sway our beliefs. His fellow transcendentalists believed that knowledge came from an inner illumination, an insight bestowed at birth, a fire burning within our minds.

However, light from a flame can only be sustained with the help of oxygen or the energy from coal.

Other philosophers often believed in something beyond our mortal plane, maintaining the theory that our knowledge is based on a shadow of a reality more divine and unfathomable. If this is true, then the knowledge given to us at birth is likely only a glimpse of all there is to learn about this world.

Inclusivity is the tinder for the flame of intuition. It is the charcoal, wood, or hay - the substance that fuels the progression of our knowledge. Humans must most often be guided by that inner light, but our perception of the world is limited, and there is no shame in allowing another to ignite us. We cannot separate ourselves from those who are different. We sometimes need people from varying walks of life to shine their truth on us.

Chemist Rosalind Franklin was responsible for the research that guided many of the developments of her male colleagues, despite often being ridiculed as a woman in science. Though she passed before receiving any award, a fellow scientist credited her groundbreaking research in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Rosalind Franklin pioneered the developments that led to her colleagues' success, and they illuminated her skill when she couldn't herself. Independence is a value Franklin had to rely on when she felt alone, yet togetherness with those who were different from her helped burn her story into the history books.

Another woman carved into the country's history, African-American songwriter Ella Fitzgerald, was a great inspiration to Marilyn Monroe, who listened to Fitzgerald's music to better her singing. When the Mocambo Club refused Fitzgerald based on her appearance, Monroe offered to sit front-row if they permitted her friend to sing. Marilyn Monroe, as well as Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra, sat in on Fitzgerald's performance, which became monumental to her legacy as the "Queen of Jazz." Fitzgerald and Monroe, though different in the eyes of the era, acted as guiding lights during each other's time of need.

Self-reliance is empowering. Non-conformity is necessary for change. People must not forget, however, that America is built on diversity. When in need, we cannot stray from others' help, refuse to hear their opinions, or ignore their experiences. By combining the light within each of us, we create a more lively and powerful flame. This is the flame that burns in the heart of our country and lights our path toward a brighter future.