

Ralph waldo emerson- self reliance assignment

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One of the primary issues that Emerson tried to convey was that one must allow what they believe is true for themselves and not listen to what other people think. He states, " It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps perfect sweetness the independence of solitude(Emerson 151). " One of the definitions of the word " world" is " human society. " The word " opinion" means " a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter. By putting these words together, Emerson is implying that the " world's opinion" is the general point of view accepted by most of society. Emerson also uses the word, " solitude" which means, " the quality or state of being alone or remote from society. " By also using the word " solitude" in this sentence, he shows a contrast between the majority (society), and the individual. What Emerson suggests is that if one can live in a world full of people who think a certain way because they were taught to believe that way, but still hold your own ground and follow what you believe, you are a great person.

Douglass also believes in following what is true for oneself despite what people around him think. This is evident when he says, " But I should be false to the earliest sentiments of my soul, if I suppressed the opinion. I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and incur my own abhorrence (Douglass 75). " The word " true" means " being that which is the case rather than what is manifest or assumed," and the word " false" means " inconsistent with the facts. Douglass uses both of these words to convey the fact that he would rather believe his own thoughts and suffer the wrath of society rather than to

be disloyal to his own heart. He goes so far as to say that if he were to lie to himself, he would “ incur his own abhorrence,” which quite simply means that he would absolutely loathe himself. This shows that being “ true” to oneself was just as big an issue to Douglass as it was to Emerson. As imperative as individualism was to Emerson, developing one’s soul was even more so.

The process in developing one’s soul was just as important. He states, “ But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future (Emerson 157). ” The word “ heedless” means “ carelessly” and by using the word “ riches” Emerson means nature. What he meant by using these words together was that men forget about the beauty in nature because we see it all too often to notice it.

Men are too wrapped up in their lives and thinking about the future that they overlook the splendor that nature has to offer. He also states, “ These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today (Emerson 157). ” With this, Emerson is trying to convey the fact that God is present in nature and all its beauty. Although Douglass’ desire to develop the mind was strong, he didn’t always have it. It wasn’t until Mr.. Laud had chastised Mrs.. Laud for teaching him the alphabets that he really felt the aspiration to read.

Douglass said, “ That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with

a desire and determination to learn (Douglass 79). " It was at this point in his life, because Mr.. Laud was so against him doing so, that Douglass really dug deep into himself and was indomitably set on learning to read. It increased Douglass' yearn for knowledge cause it made him wonder what Mr.. Laud could possibly be hiding behind what he so desperately wanted to keep from slaves in general.

What Emerson strove so hard to make others realize was that developing the soul was the key to unification with God. He implied that God was all around and that all it took was a little time to settle down and realize nature in its glory. He also suggested that separating oneself from society and its thoughts would do the individual good because then the mind could be cleared. He states, " But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation (Emerson 159). The word " spiritual" literally means " concerned with religious values," and the word " elevation" means " to improve morally, intellectually or culturally. By using these words together, Emerson connotes that separating oneself should deal with religious values, not just to get away from the world, and when one succeeds in doing so, they will develop a state of mind that is one with God.

Developing ones soul means letting God into your life and realizing that his presence isn't only for the afterlife, but also for the present. Douglass in time learned how to read and write and in so doing, found out the arid truth of his condition. If he had never learned to read, he never would have had the knowledge of the wrongdoings of the slaveholders.

He states, " The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder (Douglass 84). " This implies <https://assignbuster.com/ralph-waldo-emerson-self-reliance-assignment/>

that because of Douglass' ability to read, he can see the malicious behavior of his masters towards him as being morally wrong and hypocritical seeing as how most of them practice Christianity. He now knew that his people weren't meant to live the lives they were deliberately given. Mr. Laud was correct when he said, "it would do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy (Douglass 78). Learning how to read was as big a step towards freedom for Douglass as it was back. It made him aware of the circumstances but it also made him realize how difficult it would be for him to ever find himself a free man. However, knowledge overpowers ignorance in the sense that his masters could never take his ability to read away from him and because Douglass now knew his condition, he knew that he deserved a better life. Both Emerson and Douglass had a huge impact on those who read their work. Their messages were both similar and different in their own ways.