

*With Allah's Name The Merciful Benefactor, The Merciful Redeemer*

Remaking the World One Word At A Time:

A Monumental Story of How An Enslaved People Were Revitalized by Words

*Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn,*

1. *From the evil of that which He has created,*
2. *And from the evil of intense darkness, when it comes,*
3. *And from the evil of those who cast (evil suggestions) in firm resolutions,*
4. *And from the evil of the envier when he envies.*

*(Al Qur'an Surah 113)*

Imagine being stripped of everything...your clothes, your family, your land, your home, your riches, your religion, your language, your dignity, and your identity. Imagine your own brother, whom you trust, selling you into a slavery so inconceivable and inhuman that even they could have never fathomed the nearly permanent, life destroying, and devastating consequences. Imagine the cold and piercing grip of metal shackles around your wrists, ankles, neck, and stomach as the hot iron burns and brands your skin like that of an animal from a herd. The frantic scream that follows. Seeing your brother whom you thought betrayed you deceived by the very stranger whom they placed their trust branded right next to you. Imagine being packed on a large wooden ship with little room to breathe and no room to maneuver. Uncertain of what lies ahead. Shipped to a land foreign to you and those lying next to you. Here on this land of estrangement you suffer a callous and implausible slavery. A slavery so vicious that the linguistic scholars had to rewrite its definition in the dictionary. It was unlike any that had ever been thought of, instituted, or enforced. Robbed not only physically, but mentally, religiously, spiritually and sexually; all the while being degraded to a status less than that of any animal. You undergo this brutal treatment day after day, year after year. For what seems like an eternity. The only thing that keeps you going is a constant prayer that one day, somehow things will change. This is the history of the gruesome birth of the African American people here in the colonies of North America. Over hundreds of years, millions and millions of Africans were sold, bred, raped, beat and killed. Engrained and enforced in the minds of these individuals via the bible and so called religious practices was the belief that they were less than human and the only reason God made them was to serve and worship the very people that enslaved and oppressed them.

This brings about the question of how such a wounded people was brought out of slavery and their spirit revitalized by words. This essay will explore the power of language—how words can be used in extreme and moderate measures to shape the minds of individuals to help them respond to certain life changing events.

Throughout slavery, African American men, women, and children were bred, born, and raised on plantations across America as if they were less than human and more like dogs, mules, and hogs. From birth they were forced to endure cruel and inhuman treatment. It was politically and constitutionally seen and accepted that they were only valued as three fifths of what whites recognized as being human. Whips, torture, beatings, and harsh words accompanied by brute force were used to break the will of the strong Africans and keep the vicious cycle of slavery in the Americas going for far too long. For four hundred years, African Americans were victims of inhumane and brutal enslavement. The impact of these dire circumstances on the minds and hearts of this people was so great that a mere document declaring the illegality of slavery was not enough and still is not enough to revitalize the people wounded and utterly broken by it. Upon the signing and issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, African Americans held in bondage in the American colonies were declared free and able to fight on either side of the Union. The adverse effects of slavery were so real though that some slaves did not know what to do with their physical freedom and thus decided to stay on the plantation and continue working for their former slave master. The slave mentality deeply-rooted during slavery lasted long after slavery was abolished in the American colonies.

The Nation of Islam crept into America in 1930 with a scheme to counter this issue, uplift African Americans, and combat the adverse effects of slavery by using a psychological exaggerated redefinition of this ex-slave. Employing the opposite extreme of that of their former oppressors and slave masters. Remnants of this exaggeration can be found in one of the fundamental teachings and ideologies of The Nation of Islam—the idea that the white man is the devil and African Americans are of a divine like nature. This overstatement of worth was used to bring African Americans from the extreme state of feeling inferior, benighted, and dejected to a state of disdain, comfort, and superiority that began to uplift the people. African Americans began to view their lives and shared experience through the lens of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's teachings. The Nation of Islam boosted the spirits of African Americans, and was the first widespread effort to establish a sense of community between the African American people. From this movement came many institutions and businesses funded completely by those from within the developing African American community—exemplifying what could be accomplished when a group of people ban together with a common vision in mind for the progression of their offspring. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was not only the leader of the Nation of Islam, but the face of the initial effort to revive the African American people.

While many great things transpired throughout his leadership, such as the spirits of the African Americans being raised and the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, even the Honorable Elijah Muhammad knew more work needed to be done before the African American people would be truly revitalized. He realized and accepted the fact that the Nation of Islam was not

enough to bring African Americans from a slave mentality to the forefront of society, and insisted that the movement end upon his death. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad saw the key to revitalization in his son, Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, whom was chosen by and named after the one he called his saviour. Imam Warith Deen Mohammed was chosen for a special purpose well before his birth on October 30, 1933. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was told by his savior that his unborn child would one day lead the community into the full freedom that almighty God had prepared and promised them. Forty years later, once he became a minister for the Nation of Islam, Imam Mohammed began to challenge his father's teachings that his saviour had informed him were "nearly" correct. Obviously, this was the key given for one who would wake up and recognize the contradiction of one who taught and praised the Qur'an and had lessons that confused its fundamental beliefs of the Nation of Islam. Even after being banished three times and brought back for consultation, Imam Mohammed never wavered in his stance against the teachings of Nation of Islam. He found solace and guidance in the book held on the highest shelf in the houses of each member of the Nation of Islam, The Holy Qur'an, and did something that they were instructed not to do—he opened it and began to read.

"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen."<sup>1</sup> Imam Mohammed as a young man sensed in his spirit the conflicts of the Nation of Islam's belief system and began to teach these new teachings that he confirmed and read in The Holy Qur'an to the followers of the Nation of Islam, and was soon banished from the community just to be brought back and banished again and again.

In the Imam's final return to his father's community he was asked to go out to the temple and teach. The tape of him preaching was rushed to his father for review. Those who just knew that the honorable Elijah Muhammad listening would surely cause another banishment were shocked to see the "Messenger" just pound the table and tell Sister Clara "The boy's got it...take that teaching all over the world...Isn't this what we have been praying for Clara?" (Siddeeq)<sup>2</sup>

Nearing the death of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, in interviews and table talks he told his son and those present that the Nation of Islam dies and goes to the grave with me. He also reaffirmed his instruction to his son to preach the gospel he had been teaching for years. Imam Muhammad came into leadership unofficially prior to his father's death in 1975, and was officially chosen and appointed by the entire community as the leader after the death of his father. By the way of the method of gradualism, he began to phase out the nationalistic demagoguery dictatorial tactics of the Nation of Islam and slowly began to move his followers to a clear understanding of the Qur'an and Al-Islam. The way he did this was with basic and simple

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 20:16

<sup>2</sup> Siddeeq, Muhammad. Personal Interview. 15 June 2017.

language that respected and uplifted the African American people without putting others down in the process. Imam Mohammed used the power of words to gradually bring the African American people, crippled by slavery, to a correct and proper understanding of Al-Islam. His teachings not only bettered the lives of each individual that listen to the call, but revitalized the African American people by moving them from two extreme exaggerations of their worth to a clear and honest understanding of who they are and why they are here.

Imam Mohammed used the Qur'an and Bible to shed light on the hearts and minds of the individuals among his following. From his following has come many African American leaders, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, teachers, and esteemed individuals that would have never before believed they were capable of doing the things they accomplished today. When I reflect on the history of the African American people, the state of the seemingly nonexistent African American community today, and the guidance Imam Mohammed brought to the African American Muslims that were shaped by the Nation of Islam; I see that we have the answers to the ever existent problems in our society today and those permeating around the world.

In the Qur'an, Allah says, "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity."<sup>3</sup> Imam Mohammed did not have a degree from a prestigious university or college. He received his education from the University of Islam, an educational institution established and run by the Nation of Islam. Despite that, he has impacted thousands of lives, done Dawah all around the world, and worked with renowned religious leaders along the way, such as the Honorable Chiara Lubich and Pope John Paul II to establish a more peaceful society.

I continue to ask myself how such a simple, common, man, with very little formal education, rose from an orphan people that underwent a very gruesome birth to such a high position of power and respect in society. The answer is that he was chosen—chosen for a purpose bigger than himself in much the same way that Prophet Muhammad was chosen to save his people. As a third generation African American Muslim, I have witnessed the power of Imam Mohammed's words and have watched as those words saved and uplifted individuals to degrees of honor because they simply listened to the call and heeded the message in his words. One such example is in the book written by Imam Michael Saahir, *The Man Behind The Men*. Here we witness four great men that have all but revolutionized the world, come into existence via of the wise leadership of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, a third grade dropout. Those men are Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Imam W.D. Mohammed, and Minister Louis Farrakhan.

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<sup>3</sup> Al Quran Yusuf Ali Translation 3:104

Imam Mohammed was chosen by Allah, the Creator, to free our minds and revitalize our souls after being deprecated, used, and mistreated to the point where we began to subconsciously hate and devalue ourselves. Imam Mohammed fulfilled his mission by teaching us, and now it is time for us to fulfill ours. The power of words is real, and we have not only witnessed that but inherited that power. How long will it take for us to realize the value of our inheritance and use it to free the rest of our people—African Americans and everyone else alike? I do not yet know the answer to that question, but will continue to share this monumental story until we as a people wake up to our mission. It is time for us to adamantly continue this effort to restore life and establish peace throughout the world using the very words God has given us through Imam Mohammed. I have come to the understanding that the pen is mightier than the sword, and words are thus more powerful than war.