BACCALAUREAT

ANGLAIS LV1 - SERIE S - SESSION 2008

Oral du second groupe

TEXT 7

The Long Walk to Freedom

The following text is the very end of Nelson Mandela’s 750-page autobiography. It took him nearly 20 years to write it.

I was born with a hunger to be free. I was born free – free in every way that I could

know. Free to run in the fields nears my mother’s hut, free to swim in the clear stream that

ran through my village, free to roast mealies1 under the stars and ride the broad backs of

slow-moving bulls. As long as I obeyed my father and abided by2 the customs of my tribe, I

was not troubled by the laws of man or God.

It was only when I began to learn that my boyhood freedom was an illusion, when I

discovered as a young man that my freedom had already been taken from me, that I began

to hunger for it. At first, as a student, I wanted freedom only for myself, the transitory

freedoms of being able to stay out at night in Johannesburg. I yearned3 for the basic and

honourable freedoms of achieving my potential, of earning my keep, of marrying and having

a family –the freedom not to be obstructed in a lawful life.

But then I slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were

not free. I saw that it was not just my freedom that was curtailed4, but the freedom of

everyone who looked like I did. That is when I joined the African National Congress, and that

is when the hunger for my own freedom became the greater hunger for the freedom of my

people. It was the desire for the freedom of my people to live their lives with dignity and selfrespect

that animated my life, that transformed a frightened young man into a bold one, that

drove a law-abiding attorney to become a criminal, that turned a family-loving husband into a

man without a home, that forced a life-loving man to live like a monk5. I am no more

virtuous or self-sacrificing than the next man, but I found that I could not even enjoy the

poor and limited freedom I was allowed when I knew my people were not free. Freedom is

indivisible; the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on

all of my people were the chains on me.

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own

1 mealies : corn

2 abide(by) : obey

3 yearn (for) : have a strong desire

4 curtail : reduce

5 monk : moine

people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I

knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man

who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars

of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else’s

freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed

and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the

oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that is not the case. The

truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right

not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a

longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but

to live in a way that respects and enhances6 the freedom of others. The true test of our

devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter. I have made

missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one

only finds there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a

view from the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come.

But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not

linger7, for my long walk is not yet ended.

Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (1995)

6 enhance : reinforce

7 linger