

**A Survivor's Manual for Solitary Confinement:
Self-Destruction to the Reconstruction of Self**

My Path to Redemption

By Kijana Tashiri Askari

2011

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I've been in prison for the past 20 years, 17 of which has been consecutively spent in the security housing unit (e.g. "the SHU") which is a euphemism for solitary confinement. However, 20 years prior to my current incarceration, I had also served previous stints in prison, amidst several stints in and out of juvenile hall and the California Youth Authority (CYA). Essentially, a Brotha had embarked upon a path of self-destruction, through the multitude of crimes that I was committing in the community, which were largely against the people of the community and their property. But it wasn't until the year of 1991/1992, while a Brotha was housed in administrative segregation (e.g. "solitary confinement") for a manufacturing weapons charge, is when I finally had a serious talk with myself and said: "Self, what is wrong with this picture?"

Because here we are, with the gear shift stuck in neutral, and we're not making any real progress, with regards to doing or achieving anything of real significance with our lives. And from the look of things, matters will not be getting any better, no time soon, as I was no longer armed with the ability to act upon my negative emotional impulses, as my physical being had been restricted in practically every extreme, due to one's isolated confines.

So during the course of introspecting self, I had to honestly ask: "Self, what benefit, if any, would we have in continuing down this path of self-destruction?" As the solace of my solitude in solitary confinement now enabled me to realize, that my self-destructive ways were only creating a negative burden upon myself from the perspective of harming and preying upon the communities via committing acts of senseless crime/violence on the community, that perpetuated a "domino effect" upon the people and their families within our community. Because up until that point in my life, I had lacked a complete and true understanding, that prisons were an extension of every poor community within the free societies of the world. But what actually formulates the construct of a community? A community is defined as:

"A social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common political background, and/or cultural and historical heritage."

Thus affirming, that to harm my community is to harm myself.

So it was right there, during the year of 1991/1992, where I said: "Self, we cannot live like this anymore, as I know that life has got to have more to offer, than all of the negativities that we have experienced/endured thus far."

Hence, the origins of my path to redemption via the reconstruction of my self-destructive ways, as I've now caught a glimpse of my true humanity. How to go about this redemption process was a whole different story in and of itself. So I had to first find out, what does redemption mean, so that I could constitute the application of redemption within my day to day endeavors, to thus manifest a concrete example of redemption. Redemption is defined as:

“The salvation of, and the atonement for, guilt; to make amends for; or to make up for.”

Being that it was I, as an individual who was literally terrorizing the community and the people that lived in them, the path of redemption had to start and begin with me, from the perspective of community healing, building and restoration; meaning, that I had to seriously change my attitude, values and the way that I thought and viewed matters, to thus effectuate change in my behavior as it pertains to being a productive member in the community.

Shortly thereafter, I was then released from administrative segregation, and was placed back into the general population mainline at New Folsom state prison, where my path to redemption continued. It didn't take long for my captors, and their crew of counter-intelligence agents, to now recognize my political transition into a revolutionary, albeit I was still in the embryo stage of development. But nonetheless, in August of 1994, as a Brotha was commemorating my ancestor's historical legacy of struggle against U.\$ imperialism, I was abducted from the mainline under the façade of me organizing prisoners to commit a physical assault upon unidentified prisoners, which subsequently lead me to being relegated to indeterminate SHU status, as an alleged prison gang member.

Once I was sent to the SHU, my path of redemption continued, via the on-going transformation of uprooting the negative weeds of self-destruction that had been planted in my mind and thus my actions. Hence, it was also necessary for me to start re-harvesting my mind with a crop of new ideas, because truthfully speaking, you are what you think and believe in. So I began to study and read, any and all books, newspapers, magazines, etc. that I could get my hands on.

In solitary confinement, we're not provided with any community based material resources, so I made it my business to constructively utilize any and all community contacts that I had, such as family/friends, in order to negate this void and aid my transition to new redemptive heights. When asking my family/friends to send me money for canteen, I would make the necessary sacrifices by not putting in for a full canteen draw, so that I would always have money to buy books, newspapers, or magazines with, or I would ask my family/friends to use a portion of the money that they intended to send me, to instead buy me some reading materials, so as to keep the mind stimulated with new and positive ideas. Because it didn't take long before I realized that access to information is the crucible that sustains/nurtures our humanity, and thus empowers us as individuals. Because knowledge is power!

Hence, my humanity was further redeemed/restored as I elevated my state of consciousness through the reading of books like:

A Taste of Power, by Elaine Brown

Women, Race and Class, by Angela Davis

The Spirit of Man, by Iyanla Vanzant

The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, by Amy Jacques Garvey.

The Destruction of The Black Civilization, by Chancellor Williams

Vision for Black Men, by Na'im Akbar

The African Origin of Civilization, by Cheikh A. Diop

The mis-Education of the Negro, by Carter G. Woodson

Black Men; Obsolete, Single, Dangerous, by Haki R. Madhubuti

The Wretched of the Earth, by Frantz Fanon

Just to name a few. These beautiful New Afrikan Black Sistas/Brothas, shined a ray of light on the historical materialism, as to the atrocities, that the U.\$ imperialists were, and remain committing against the Nation of New Afrikan Black People, which only reaffirmed my commitment in serving and aiding all oppressed people.

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 2600 and 2601, we prisoners are allowed to share reading materials with one another, and I would encourage this practice, as it gives you access to more positive information and allows you to build upon a sense of community in your locality, with and in addition to, the possibility of sharing and developing positive ideas with each other from this practice. But in addition to this, the newspapers/magazines also gave me another medium, as to how to stay connected to the community, to thus negate my isolation from being held in solitary confinement (e.g. "the SHU"), as the newspapers/magazines contain information/addresses about various community resources, events, organizations and programs that I was now able to reach out to and get involved with.

Through initiating and developing the necessary discipline, character and resolve so as to remain steadfast/committed to the practice of studying and reading any and all books, newspapers, magazines, etc. that I could get my hands on, I was then able to discover a new found ability to write about all of the things that I had been reading and studying. In other words, one constructive outlet repeated another medium for me to not only sustain my humanity, but to also express my humanity, while relegated to indefinite solitary confinement status. And before you knew it, I no longer had the time or desire to either think, act or behave in a negative and self-destructive manner, as my thoughts were, and remain, focused on the positive reconstruction of self via my path to redemption.

There is a positive to every negative, but the individual just has to take the time to identify the positive in every perceived negative situation, because the negative only exists when you allow it to. You always have the option of turning sour lemons in to lemonade by disciplining yourself to

the practice of reading, writing and studying, as it gives you a real purpose; allows you to use your inner creativity; it redefines your faith in self, so that you can become a better person in the interest of the community; as every process of change starts with the individual and thus the community. It also gives you a new self-determination that would enable you to help save/rebuild our communities that we once took part in terrorizing through our self-destructive ways; and it also provides you with several additional principle variables of character building, which you may not have been aware of prior to this transition.

Our struggle for New Afrikan Black Liberation must be defined and constructed under qualitatively developed principles, that will ensure/sustain our propagated existence, as a nation of New Afrikan Black People that are struggling for real freedom!! Here is a core listing of principles that we must continue to build upon and utilize as our guide, so that our ultimate goal of real freedom is achieved:

* Our goal is to unify ourselves politically, socially and culturally, economically, etc. and to maintain unity from this perspective, through the re-construction of our family and community values.

* Our self-determination is our ability to define our propagated existence for the sole purpose of redeeming ourselves and thus our communities.

* Our goal is to establish a mode of collective work and responsibility in our communities, by functioning as a collective body with one voice, and to thus make the problems of each Sista/Brotha in our community our problem, so that we can work together as a community by finding/developing community based solutions for our problems.

* Our goal as a community, is to establish a functional model of cooperative economics, which entails pooling our resources together, so that we can build our own institutions of business and thereby shop at, and buy from, our own stores, food markets, etc.

* Our purpose is to make our collective vocation the building of our community, to restore our humanity back to traditional greatness, and to create a social climate where each member of the community can consciously contribute to the rebuilding of our community. Our inner creativity is to do as much as we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it, which will test and enhance our creativity.

* Our faith is to believe with our hearts that our every action will be a manifestation of righteousness, which will be guided by our humanity and love for the people in our community.

Here are a few questions to test and advance your understanding on the materialism of what you just read in this pamphlet. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, as Freedom Is A Constant Struggle!!

1. What does Unity mean to you?

2. What have you determined yourself to do or become?

3. What does Community mean to you?
4. What does Redemption mean to you?
5. How can you redeem yourself for the sake of redeeming your community?
6. What is your purpose in life?
7. Who or what do you have faith in?
8. Have you identified your inner creative self yet? If so, what is it? And how can you apply it?

For additional reading of my pamphlets and initiatives, you may write to:

South Chicago ABC Zine Distro
C/o Anthony Rayson
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430

Ask for the following pamphlets and initiatives:

The Series, Volumes # 1-4

Evidence of Corruption, Genocide and Neo-Colonialism

The New Afrikan Anti-Alcohol Initiative 101

New Afrikan Physical Fitness 101

The New Afrikan Domestic Crisis Intervention

Chief Facilitators and Supporters

Chief Administrator: Ms. Hannah Bastienne

<http://www.myspace.com./dare2struggle>

Midwest Regional Facilitator/Coordinator:

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Southern California Facilitator/Coordinator:

University of California Riverside
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Northern California Facilitator/Coordinator:

Legal Services for Prisoners With Children
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The Struggle Continues !!!

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