

## Freedom: right or responsibility?

During a recent trip to the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia during the 250 years celebration, I got an opportunity to see up, close, and in person, the many artifacts. While checking out various artifacts from the Stamp Act protests to the Bill of Rights, I realized that freedom isn't a gift handed down from 1776. Though The Declaration of Independence had declared that "all men are created equal," yet the Constitution of 1787 permitted slavery to continue. In February 1861, Abraham Lincoln stood in Independence Hall and told the gathered crowd that he would rather be "assassinated on this spot" than surrender the principle of equality laid down in the Declaration. Many like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman worked relentlessly to ensure slavery was ended. I realized the people whose names we know—Lincoln, Douglass, Tubman—and the countless unnamed others didn't fight for a perfect nation. They fought for a nation worth perfecting. In my opinion, the freedom that all take for granted today was selflessly fought for by those who knew they wouldn't live to reap the benefits of it. All the delegates who gathered to form the declaration of independence must've debated, brainstormed, & strategized for countless hours to choose each word carefully so as to encompass all in the nation in an unbiased manner.

Freedom, in general is described as a right that each person is entitled to, and the U. S. Constitution claims that individuals are entitled to freedoms like speech, religion, and expression. A right is not something you have to justify to someone else before you're allowed to exercise it. You don't have to earn the right to speak your mind, or worship who you choose. It allows you to pursue your own goals and identities. This is why the 'rights' are 'recognized' by the constitution, and not 'granted'.

Freedom as a responsibility that must be carried out with caution. When individuals act without any care or concern for those around them, it can result in harm, and chaos thereby disrupting the harmony, and instead hampering the development of a society for the betterment of the nation as a whole. Hence individuals must consider how their actions affect others in community they live in. A person should have self-restraint, respect, and understanding of societal norms. For example, citizens in a democracy have the freedom to vote, but they should also be responsible enough to stay informed of who and why they want to vote for, and participate thoughtfully. Likewise, freedom of speech definitely does not give anyone the right to hate speech, or to bully someone else, or bring their morale down just because you can. If I draw a Venn diagram with "rights" in one circle, and "responsibilities" as the other circle, the area of intersection of these circles showcases the freedom we can enjoy where in people understand and uphold both their rights and their responsibilities for the betterment of society.

In the end freedom is not just a right or only a responsibility; it is both. These are like the 2 ends of a seesaw. One side cannot be up, and the other side cannot be down. There has to be a

balance of both. Rights provide the foundation that allows individuals to live freely, while responsibilities ensure that this freedom does not trespass upon others. A society that values freedom must balance these two aspects, recognizing that one cannot exist meaningfully without another. These are 2 sides of a coin, or 2 different angles of the same view. We have to remember that each generation had to fight for freedom in some form or another. It is our duty to ensure the coming generation is aware of the delicate balance one should maintain to be able to live in peace and harmony with the collective goal for the entire nation to advance. When I stepped out of the constitution center, walked past the crowds, the flags, and the 250 years of celebration banners, and the national flag flying high, I realized that freedom is a framework with a constant scope for improvement. Each generation will have their own viewpoints of what freedom means to them, they will definitely have a conflict of opinions, and this is because they did not live through what the previous generation lived through, the struggles and sacrifices made to achieve that freedom. It then becomes the responsibility of the educators, the historians, & the family to remind the young generation of these sacrifices. In the end, the two constant factors that will always remain are – the rights of each person, and the responsibility with which the person has to practice those rights. It is to be understood that rights are respected and responsibilities are acknowledged. **Freedom, rights, and responsibilities are intertwined. You simply cannot opt for one over the other.**