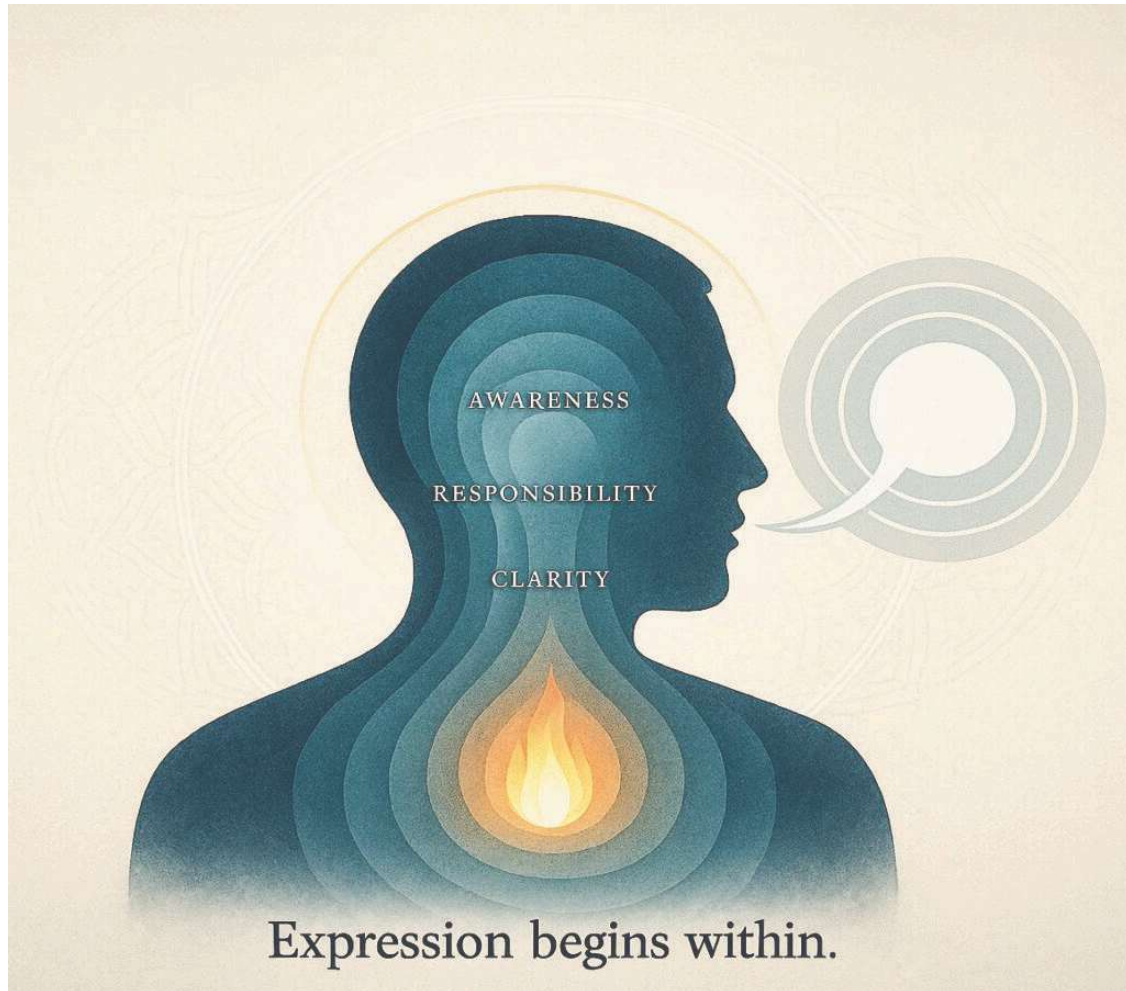


Freedom within: Reclaiming expression through inner clarity

By **Acharya Prashant** - April 27, 2025



When powerful narratives in all walks of life are seeking to monopolize public conversation and crowd out, or forcefully silence dissenting voices, freedom of expression becomes even more valuable. But with this liberty comes a set of questions: Are we truly expressing ourselves, or merely reacting? Are our statements a product of inner lucidity, or are they born of internal unrest?

Technology now gives us unprecedented power to communicate and connect. And this freedom comes with the responsibility of expressing from awareness and reality—not conditioning, misinformation, or chaos.

Freedom is Firstly Inner

We usually identify freedom with the external—freedom of speech, movement, or choice. All these are indeed valuable, but true freedom is internal.

Outer constraints are visible and easier to challenge. Inner constraints are more subtle. They manifest themselves as social norms, inherited assumptions, or the silent stories we tell ourselves. These inner shackles profoundly affect our thoughts, emotions, and

eventually, our self-expression.

Authentic expression starts with inner freedom. Without it, our words can be borrowed thoughts or confused projections. But if we are clear within, our words become authentic, inspiring—not just to others, but to us as well.

Expression as Discovery and Progress

Expression, whether through the written word, or voice, or the arts, reflects our inner life and helps us understand who we are. If expression is restricted, there can neither be debate, nor collaboration, nor clarification. Progress of all kinds would be stymied. Illiberal societies are marked by reluctance to speak out for fear of being criticized, cancelled, or even persecuted. This silencing deprives the citizens of the right to think and grow. When we offer areas that are safe for honest communication, people are able to begin the process of self-discovery through expression.

The Indian Constitution provides freedom of speech and expression under Article 19, pillars of our democracy cherished by thinkers and leaders across generations. Mahatma Gandhi had faith in the guiding spirit of truth, and George Orwell famously said, "Freedom means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

Responsibility: Truth Over Sensation

Exercising freedom requires sensitivity. Deep expression and superficial sensationalism differ by a hair's breadth. Humor, for instance, is compelling—it can elevate, or belittle. Freedom gives us the right to speak; responsibility educates us on when and how. As creators, professionals, or mere mortals, our primary responsibility is to stay in harmony with truth, not applause or trends.

Popularity might be fleeting, but truth has the strength to endure. Saying what is true, however unpopular, creates an infinitely deeper impact than being the current trend. There would always be a mob for every kind of content, but artists, leaders, and philosophers don't work for the mob—they guide it.

Of course, truth doesn't have to be burdensome. As George Bernard Shaw noted, "If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you." Truth, presented appropriately with sensitivity, humor, and compassion, can open minds and soften hearts. Watering down the message isn't the problem—it's the thought in the presentation.

Expression as Influence in Digital Age

In today's hyperconnected world, we can't help but be influenced. From memes to headlines, from ads to algorithms, we're constantly consuming content. The issue isn't whether or not we're being influenced, but if we have any idea how we're being influenced. Self-awareness is necessary here. Just as we need eyes to walk around the outer world, we need an 'inner eye' to watch our own thoughts, reactions, and assumptions. Only by gently watching ourselves can we see how fear, desire, and conditioning impact who we become. Much of today's digital content isn't designed for our liberation; it's optimized for engagement, control, or profit. But that doesn't mean sincere voices don't exist. They do, but they often get lost in the noise. Those who have cultivated inner clarity speak not to be noticed but out of a deep sense of love and responsibility. Their expression carries a quiet power—gentle yet transformative.

Stung by the many negatives of the digital explosion, sometimes we tend to romanticize the past. However, whether the past was 'better' is more about the individual than the era.

Human beings have always had inclinations toward destruction or distraction. In the past, destructive vices were not so readily accessible. Today, we live in an era of instant gratification—content, opinions, and amusement are at our fingertips. All this access can be overwhelming, especially when we lack inner clarity.

The cyber explosion is like water; it can feed or drown us, depending on how we deal with it. The question is: Do we consume content deliberately or mindlessly? Do we utilize it for wisdom or escapism?

Freedom Outside Requires Freedom Inside

We must staunchly defend the right to express ourselves freely to others, but we must also equally ask whether we are free from within. How can free speech emerge from a mind fettered and captivated by prejudices, beliefs, and unconscious instincts? Self-awareness is the sine qua non for freedom. When we are aware of our insecurities, see our emotional hot buttons, and examine our inspirations, our words start to become more conscious, not reactive or manufactured, but thoughtful and responsible. Only then can we say that our words are free.

Change is inside-out. When we grow in freedom from within, our words, actions, and choices begin to evoke change on the outside. When the flower blooms within, the fragrance spreads far and wide. Individual freedom then becomes a boon for the entire society, instead of just personal assertion or indulgence.

To sum up, true freedom of speech is not just the right to speak but also the responsibility to understand the source and purpose of our words. Only by cultivating awareness and speaking from a place of clarity can our expression be of true value to the world and ourselves. Expression, in such a context, is not a right. It is a sacred act. And as with every holy act, it must begin by looking within.

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