By Mili Patel

“Schooling + Life Experiences + Making a Difference = Educated”

“Hinc lucem et pocula sacra.”

“From this place, we gain enlightenment and precious knowledge.”

This is the motto of the University of Cambridge. Going to university gives a person the opportunity to become exposed to different beliefs and perspectives. Throughout Educated by Tara Westover, Westover describes her childhood as being isolated from mainstream society and solely living life the way her father wanted her to. After going against her father’s wishes of pursuing schooling, she soon became exposed to different beliefs of the world through her formal education. An educated person is one who takes what they have learned through schooling and life experiences and uses it to make a difference, which is exactly what Tara Westover did.

The first step in becoming educated is having the ambition to learn. Westover’s desire to gain a better understanding of the world gave her the opportunity to be exposed to the different ideas of renowned individuals. Westover’s desire to pursue formal education and to learn began when she drove herself to a bookstore and bought an ACT study guide. As Westover began to study, she realized that she struggled with math and spent every moment trying to understand its concepts. Westover says, “Every night for a month I sat in the opera house ... and practiced the most basic operations ... while on the stage, characters recited their lines” (124).

Westover’s desire to learn proved that if one puts in the effort to learn, one will learn. Despite her struggle to understand mathematical concepts, Westover worked hard and stayed motivated to do well, which led her to obtain a score of 28 on the ACT and be enrolled at Brigham Young University. Brigham Young University introduced her to different learning opportunities, such as studying psychology, politics, philosophy and history.

One of the opportunities Brigham Young University introduced her to was studying abroad in Cambridge. Her supervisor at Cambridge University, Professor Steinberg, quickly became a mentor to Westover and helped her improve her writing by critiquing her grammar and content and exposing her to the works of America’s founding fathers. Westover “had to read [these] books differently, without giving [herself] over to either fear or adoration” (240). Westover learned to read texts without being biased toward any particular way of thinking, which allowed her to see different perspectives of the text that she might not have realized had she been
biased. This was extremely important as it allowed Westover to develop an unprejudiced view of the works, allowing her to write one of the best essays at Cambridge.

As Westover continued to be objective, she took several texts that she had already read and viewed them in a different light. In her youth, Westover had viewed Mormon scriptures as sacred, holy texts and she did not see them in any other way. Attending Brigham Young University and Cambridge University allowed her to be exposed to different works of literature and become aware that the texts could be interpreted in many different ways. She took what she had learned through university and applied it to Mormonism. She says, “I’d been surprised to discover echoes of Mormon theology in the great philosophers of the nineteenth century … [she began to] examine Mormonism not just as a religious movement, but as an intellectual one” (280). By viewing Mormonism in this way, she was able to take topics she learned as a child that were solely associated with the church and turn them into socio-political issues. To make a difference in the way that others viewed Mormonism, she wrote about this topic for her master’s thesis.

A person who takes everything that they have learned through schooling and life experiences and uses it to have a different outlook on the world is said to be educated. Schooling makes a person aware of the different beliefs in the world and it gives us the knowledge to understand those beliefs. However, a person must go beyond schooling and must apply what they’ve learned to make a difference in the world.

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