

THE VOICE THE TALIBAN FEARED

LESSONS FROM MALALA YOUSAFZAI: THE GIRL WHO WAS SHOT BY THE TALIBAN



The Nobel Peace Prize winner says she is also a normal teenager going to school and fighting with her brothers at home. Source: National Geographic Channel

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“We liked to be known as the clever girls. When we decorated our hands with henna for holidays and weddings, we drew calculus and chemical formulae instead of flowers and butterflies.” —Malala Yousafzai

WHEN I think about the time when I was 16, and compared it the 16-year-old life of Malala Yousafzai... Well, let's just say I was nowhere close to a Nobel Peace Prize. This year, she will celebrate her 18th birthday. While her life as an activist for education seems far off from what we could ever experience, there are a few characteristics Malala practises which developed her life from an ordinary Pakistani girl, to the household name that changed the lives of thousands. Here are the top five practices:

1 BELIEF The quote, *“One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world,”* is a famous line from Yousafzai's speech addressing the United Nations (UN) on her 16th Birthday, but I prefer this quote instead:

“When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.”
 Malala set herself apart from the others because of her sheer belief in the power of one individual. What can one do when your village is terrorised by the Taliban? Where distant gunshots and bombs are the ambiance of a weekday afternoon? Streets are patrolled by men with heavy artillery, and women, much less girls are given lesser thought than anyone or anything else. Malala wrote,

and Malala spoke. With those two actions, she changed the course of not just her village in Swat but the nation of Pakistan forever.

2 RESILIENCE *“The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born.”* —Malala at her address to the UN Youth Assembly just eight months after she was shot by the Taliban

Resilience is defined as the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape or the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. I don't know about you, but even my worst days or lowest points in life look like rainbow and butterflies compared to being shot in the head on the way to school.

In the months after the shocking attack, Malala fought back and hard. In her speech, *“Out of that silence came thousands of voices...”* her resilience brought back the fight for education even stronger than it had been before. And to stand in front of the world, a hundred times more assured of her course after the leader of the Taliban put a price on her head, that is the true definition of resilience.

3 UNYIELDING PASSION The older we get, the more afraid we are to speak. The most admirable thing about young activists is their flippant attitude towards accidentally offending people in power.

When Malala met with Barack Obama, she immediately questioned his position in regards to the drone attacks launch by the US against countries like Pakistan. She spoke of eradication of terrorism through education instead of war. When she met with Goodluck Jonathan, former

president of Nigeria, she wasted no time in bringing up the issue of girls being abducted by Boko Haram and what his plans were on bringing them home.

Malala's unyielding passion for her cause gives her a straightforward approach to what must be done. She doesn't beat around the bush, or worry about offending sensitive attitudes—a characteristic that is rarely seen in even the bravest of world leaders. Malala dives into the heart of the problem, and forces the conversation about the elephant in the room.

4 HUMILITY In the movie, *He Named Me Malala*, Yousafzai opens up about her doubts. *“I am only a teenager,”* she says, questioning what she can do for the families of the abducted Nigerian girls.

For such a strong voice, Malala shows her humility through the words she sings to the world. Her messages speak of not herself as the change, but the importance of education in creating people who can make a change. Her speeches focus on the possibilities of the future, and the attitude we must have to achieve it. Her demands are for reform, and when meeting world leaders, her one condition is that they must sit and hear what needs to be said not of herself, but of her cause and the fight for education.

Monetary prizes awarded to her are either directly funnelled into building schools for girls and women in need of education, or transferred to families back home in Swat to help sustain businesses and fund families. Malala's cause has never once been about her, but for what education can do for ordinary people like her.

5 PEACE Probably the most mind-blowing quote from Malala came from her interview with Jon Stewart on the Daily Show:

“I used to think that the Talib would come, and he would just kill me. But then I said, ‘If he comes, what would you do, Malala?’ then I would reply to myself, ‘Malala, just take a shoe and hit him.’”

“But then I said, ‘If you hit a Talib with your shoe, then there would be no difference between you and the Talib. You must not treat others with cruelty and that much harshly, you must fight others but through peace and through dialogue and through education.’”

“Then I said I will tell him how important education is and that ‘I even want education for your children as well.’ And I will tell him, ‘That’s what I want to tell you, now do what you want.’”

Her choice to not only forgive, but to love her enemy enough to hope to extend the gift of education towards him and his family, shook Stewart so much his jaw dropped.

There is a spirit of peace that only arises in a person once they have fully accepted their purpose in life. Malala embodies that idea of peace as a testament to her cause. This characteristic is probably the most important fire that she brings to her fight. The most powerful warriors are the most peaceful ones.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Five characteristics of Malala cause an unstoppable wave of conversations in education. Five simple attitudes changed an individual in a war-torn country, and they made her the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner in history.

In every challenge that we face, it is not the difficulty of the challenge that defines our future, but the attitude we have towards it that changes our destiny.

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