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Group: 2 (Forms 3-5)
Topic: The Meaning of Freedom

I am up in the clouds, in the sky, like I've always wanted to be. I sail past the wind and air currents on giant clouds. And I don't even for a second acknowledge that there is land below the sky. For up here, surrounded by clouds and the secluded atmosphere, this is my land. As I gallivant around the sky, the cloud I'm on suddenly morphs into a humongous cumulonimbus cloud, charged with static electricity. A bolt of lightning follows, and suddenly my bottomless land of clouds up here caves in and I am yanked back down to earth by gravity. I am sinking at a rapid and unstoppable speed. I hit the ground just as the bolt of lightning crashes with a deafening clap of thunder —

I jolted up from my sleep in a rush. I sat up and recalled where my mind had travelled to in my slumber. It was scaring me, the amount of times I've had this dream. Not that I cared to remember. I tried fantasizing about my dream, how appealing the freedom was. Hastily, I broke myself out of my reverie. My despicable life lied ahead. I got up to the bathroom and washed myself. Studying my weary face in the mirror, I thought to myself: *This is you.* I started the day with a frown etched on my face.

I immediately went outside, to catch the view of the sunrise. And it never let me down. I gazed up with wonder at the radiant and resplendent sunrise. The sky was an explosion of colours of the dawn: red, orange and yellow. I looked to the east, where the Sun was rising. A few clouds were in its way, but that wouldn't stop the rays from touching the earth. I decided a while ago that I loved the sky. It was always beautiful, day or night, dawn or dusk. And the most significant part of all: it raised your hopes, leaving you vibrant instantly. It was perfect for someone like me; negative, and filled with hopelessness.

Truth be told, I've abhorred life for a long time. I hated that I existed in a world like this. I had a revelation some time back that this world is ugly and incorrigible. Humans are too cynical, deceitful. They lacked conscience but were completely unaware of it. Not that I'm a hypocrite, but at least I'm well aware of humans' sins and was despaired by it. I resented that I'm a cell, a tiny particle of the beings and similar species that have contaminated Earth. And while some are heartlessly annihilating our world, others are being helplessly passive about it. That is what disheartens me most. The fact of it made me crave freedom even more.

I had nothing to look forward to everyday. Except the occurrences of sunrise and sunset. As each day passed, my insatiable hatred towards the human race's actions grew, my feeling of forlornness and despondence multiplied, and my desire for freedom magnified. And the worst thing was that I could never let the pain out. I did once, out of desperation. And the reaction I received was persecution. I was bashed and degraded, and that served as a lesson for me. To keep it all inside and let the pain smoulder inside me.

I was nearing the brink of collapse. Collapsing and crumbling into a heap of helplessness and incurable dismay. So one day, after being put through the inescapable wringer that I could never express, I sat down with a wrenched heart, feeling lethargic. I was so desperate for freedom. So desperate that I resorted to believing with a twisted heart that the only way to achieve that was through death. So I closed my eyes and reveled in imagining the liberation of my soul through death. I genuinely fantasized, the process of my afflicted soul detaching itself from my scarred body, and ascending up to the clouds. The clouds and the blue atmosphere, my tranquil and secure haven. I felt myself fading away, but I didn't care. I needed this. I imagined opening my eyes to realize I'm up in the sky, far away from the deceit-infested land below that I hated wholeheartedly. I wanted to be up in the clouds, all and completely alone. Just as I realized I had been deluding myself and that this was futile, I opened my bloodshot eyes, and received an astounding revelation. A revelation so shocking that I myself believed it momentarily: I was in heaven, or so it seemed.

White clouds and sunlight surrounded me. I was flummoxed, and petrified to be honest. A small cumulus cloud floated past me, and out of curiosity I touched it. It felt real. I withdrew my hand, moist with water droplets. I swore I was not dreaming. I was standing on a patch of clouds. Above me was the atmosphere of Earth, blank, and impeccably free of any form of blemish. I was at a place where the clouds are the land and the atmosphere is the sky. A thought crossed my mind and I became frantic, assuming I was really dead. But I was proven wrong when I heard my own heartbeat. I wasn't dead, but how could I even be here? Then I realized this is the freedom I've always dreamed for. To be alone, withdrawn from everything. So I blocked out all my qualms. All my emotions evaporated, and I found myself enjoying that freedom that I've always been so deprived of.

I came to in a daze and fell from my posture on my bed. Sitting up, I tried to make sense of what had just happened. I was back in my room, where I had been earlier. I was alive and breathing, which I sometimes wished I was not. The clouds and the sky was gone, my blissful experience short-lived. I broke down and wept, thinking I would never be granted access to my beautiful haven again. Then slowly I started to fathom how it all clicked together. Before I was up in the clouds, I was sitting here satisfying my mind with morbid fantasies. It must've taken place for real. After thinking intensely, I came to the ultimate epiphany that, it was all the work of my mind's energy. I could be transported to wherever I imagined freedom to be, which, in my

case, was the sky. And when I returned, I would still have the memories. Vivid and memorable ones. I could be transported to my home of liberation through my spiritual form and only that. Nevertheless, it was an enriching experience and I've never felt more invigorated.

Ever since then, I've been visiting my secret sanctuary frequently. I've been up there so often, that it became like my second home. I've learnt how to be transported back to Earth whenever I felt like it, which was by using the reverse of the logic I had using to get there. Well, during the first few visits I rejoiced, thinking I had what I've been imploring for: The true meaning of freedom. Being up here with the serenity of the sky. But deep down in my heart, that didn't feel right. The time I had spent there had its effect on me. The lights of the sky, belonging to the massive Sun, had brightened me up. It had implanted a new sense of hope in me, which has radiated throughout me since. It was so luminous, that it had shrouded all of the darkness in me. I no longer felt miserable or desolated, and I no longer wanted to feel so. The sky saved me.

But the one thing that clashed with my new aura was the method I used to access my other realm. It could only be triggered by morbid thoughts and desires. And that didn't work for me anymore. So one day while up in the clouds, I pulled myself out of my quandary and decided I could never go back there, even if that meant losing the taste of freedom. Needless to say, I was depressed. But I promised myself never to forget it all.

Time passed, and gradually my lonesomeness grew. I was desperate, so desperate to fulfill my insatiable need for freedom, that I violated my vow— only to be crushed and crestfallen by the acknowledgment that I could no longer feel freedom. I had lost it, the ability. But before letting any pain sink into me, I tried another alternative. I was reluctant; but I had nothing left to lose. I closed my eyes, and concocted images, fantasies and authentic beliefs within me. I felt a glow inside me, and I looked around, not stunned to find that I was back, amidst the clouds. I had achieved enlightenment. Then I saw another figure ahead of me, and I knew in my heart that I was not alone.