

Compassion

Elie Weisel, a famous writer and holocaust survivor, wrote once that “...it is possible to dream exalted dreams of compassion...” In this quote he speaks of being able to adopt an optimistic attitude and hope even when the current situation prompts for misery and collapse of morale. Being a survivor of the Holocaust and inmate of Buchenwald and Auschwitz, Weisel knew first hand the horrors of the world and how the indifference of citizens enabled leaders to commit unimaginable crimes. Nevertheless he saw hope through compassion. From the haunting personal stories of Holocaust survivors, compassion stands as their saving grace. Whether it be a sympathetic guard or a passerby willing to give extra food, people proved that they had the capacity to step beyond the societal and political mandate of the times and help those in need.

When asked “What is right?” Plato said: “Justice is nothing else than the interest of the strongest.” From this it can be derived that what is deemed right is decided by the person or group who hold the most power. To most, power without compassion is fatal. Compassion is a common ground humans can connect on and understand each other through. Once you place yourself into someone else’s life and see past their eyelashes, you can see everything and know anything. Humans need that to survive. They need other people to understand and support them. In the deepest places the human mind can go, connection with other people and empathy acts as a buoy to pull them to the surface rather than a weight to drag them down. It is a platform that unites and bridges differences. It is a compass that points to what is truly “right.”

Without compassion, how would the world function? What kind of world would that be? Unfortunately, there is a plethora of historical examples such as genocides, civil wars and wars of power that shows us exactly what that world look like: a world in which torture, slavery, lack of nationality, and exile are the norm. Though empathy does not warrant a place in a law book, it is exactly what makes citizens aware of the consequences of ruthless leaders and games of power.

At the present, the refugee crisis can be a perfect example of the ability compassion holds to change the world. Those who are fleeing their country of origin are supported and embraced into safety by those who can think outside of regulations and treaties. They find it in themselves to step into the worn shoes of the immigrants, to feel how it is to hike up a heavy bag filled with anything they could grab, and grab a loved one's hand before continuing on a journey away from the devastation that they had to leave behind. It would be easy to change the radio station, look away from newspapers and ignore the crisis. It would be easy for countries to

stick stubbornly to their laws of immigration. However, the news are full of stories of people transcending this. People that find ways to help. People that either remember their own ancestor's struggles or people that look at their children and can not imagine such a future for them. It is compassion that raises against indifference and brutality.

The Holocaust, along with its horrors, brought a light to the duality of human nature: people were willing to empathize and help through compassion, yet others were willing to ignore the unjust suffering of others. Reverting back to what Plato said, at the time compassion for the Jewish population did not lie in the interest of the strongest. Quite the contrary. Breaking from the restraints of what was taught to them and succumbing to the natural human instinct of empathy was not only the saving grace for the Jewish people but the saving grace of the society as a whole. Humans, to maintain a fair and healthy equilibrium as a society need compassion to prevail.