

A Compassionate Hero: A Confluence of the Mind and Heart

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Compassion comes from the heart. Determination comes from the mind.

What defines a hero? Not all heroes are young people dressed in suits with long red capes. A hero is someone who is empathic, determined, compassionate, and has risked something for others. Perspectives on a hero differ for each person, but my hero is Mother Teresa. In 1910 in Skopje, Albania, a savior was born. Born with the name Agnes, this girl was uncertain of what she should grow up to be. But, when she was seventeen, she decided that she would be a nun. Agnes left for India to join the Sisters of Loreto, which was a missionary order of nuns. She served with the Sisters during her training in Darjeeling, a hill station in Eastern India, for seventeen years. During this time, she chose a new name, Sister Teresa. Later, her name was changed to Mother Teresa. She took her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience of life. When Mother Teresa was on a train traveling in India, a striking realization came over her. She felt that her life's mission was to serve the poorest of the poor. With only the Pope's blessing to guide her, Mother Teresa descended into the pain and agony of Calcutta, India. Seeing that this city was probably one of the poorest, she began the Sisters of Charity.

How was Mother Teresa empathic and determined, and did she put others before herself? Many events justify that she had all of these traits. When young Agnes decided that she would be a nun and help the poor, she not only sacrificed a comfortable dwelling with her family, but also accepted a hard living condition. In Calcutta, Mother Teresa once took a

woman, half-eaten by ants and rats to a nearby hospital, but the doctors refused to take care of her, even when she pleaded. She then set her mind on helping the wounded woman. She obtained two unused rooms of a temple, originally dedicated to the Goddess Kali, to setup a hospital to care for people who could not find hospitality. She called it the “Nirmal Hriday,” which means “pure heart.” Doesn’t this show how empathic and determined someone could be?

Compassion is love from the heart. Mother Teresa took the route of compassion and saved many lives in Calcutta. She understood the pain of others who lived with sorrow and misery every day and worked to help them. Even if people died in her presence, they died feeling loved. In 1979, she received the Nobel Peace Prize because “the most wretched have received compassion without condensation” from her. She donated all of her money to the poor. Because of all of this, Mother Teresa is my compassionate hero.

I would like to follow Mother Teresa’s footsteps to help other people. I see myself as a peacemaker when I am an adult. I feel empathic towards the innocent people who are suffering today because of all of the war and terrorism in the Middle East. This could be said more specifically as Palestine and Israel. Starting in the 1880’s, Zionist migration to Palestine began. Zionism is the belief that Jews should have a place to call their own, or a hometown. In 1948, a war between the Palestinians and Jews broke out. The Jewish eventually won and claimed Palestine as theirs, which they renamed, Israel. As this was happening, Palestinians were being pushed or escaped into the Occupied Territories, Gaza Strip and West Bank. Sixty percent of the Palestinians completely fled to Jordan and other neighboring countries to stay out of harm. The Jewish claimed Jerusalem as their capitol. Jerusalem is sacred to many religions. Muslims believe that Mohammed flew up to heaven from Jerusalem. Christians believe that Jesus lived and died in Jerusalem. The Jews have a holy wall in Israel. But, all of these citizens believed only in their own religious faiths without accepting the others, which

made them go to war. The first Intifada was started when an Israeli driver hit Palestinians, killing them. No one knew whether it was intentional or not, but the Palestinians believed that it was, and went to war with the Israelis. Ever since then, the conflict became worse.

Hamas, a radical group of Palestinians that live in Gaza Strip, are repeatedly sending rockets into Israel, and also harming and threatening the lives of ordinary citizens. The Israelis continuously send tanks into the Occupied Territories, where the Palestinians live. To complicate matters even more, Intifada II is still going on. Many people hope for a solution to be found to this problem. A solution will definitely be found soon, but it will not be easy. As a peacemaker, I could help by finding many people with different religious backgrounds and educating them about how we can show compassion to others. Then, I would like to meet with the Palestinian's Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, the Israeli's President, Shimon Peres, and with the other people who believe in finding a solution. Using compassion towards different religions, we would discuss the issues facing the Middle East and how we could solve them.

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict is a very challenging conflict to understand. I have never been to the Middle East. I am not a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim. But I want to help our world and create a better nation. I understand that this is a very risky place to go because of the bombings and acts of terrorism. I believe in what the Nobel Peace Prize winner, the 14th Dalai Lama once stated, "Genuine harmony must come from the heart. It cannot come from the barrel of a gun." He considers compassion to be "the core of all of the religions, all our humanities, and all our existence." I can use compassion to understand the problem, but I must also use determination to solve the conflict. Compassion comes from the heart. Determination comes from the mind.

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