



OUR ETHICAL ESSENCE

CUNY Ethics and Morality Contest:
Virtue

QueensBorough Community College CUNY

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In today's modern society the simplicity of the concept of virtue is easily overlooked and often ignored. The busyness of people's lives has gotten the best of them and pushed us to forget our basic moral principles. These important moral principles known as virtues are expressed to create a stronger connection between man. Accepting the use of these morals and applying them to our everyday lives can vastly increase our communication skills and our understanding and acceptance of certain relationships between one another. To some the principle of morality is easy to comprehend, but for others it comes at a price: more difficulty to understand and less willingness to accept. The significance of teaching morality in American education can open a window to a newer aspect of how we view our lives and create a more "people-person" sociable individual.

Righteousness, otherwise known as "Yi", is a virtue defined as "the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations. Righteousness is not an abstract notion but rather consists in doing what is just and right in all relationships" (Qtd. In Szubin and Jacobs). In other words, righteousness is not a concrete definition but flexible in the manner in which it can be displayed. Righteousness can be more easily explained as an intangible asset in our lives. We cannot physically mold and shape our sense of righteous morals, but they can be developed and taught. Since righteousness is not an acquired characteristic and it is learned, it is important to emphasize the teaching of this moral virtue along with the many others that exist. In the end righteousness comes down to making the correct moral decision in any situation and the long term reward is a positive energy that reflects back to one's social life.

While the previous definition tends toward abstraction, it may be beneficial to view righteousness in its tangible, everyday form. From my personal experience practicing the virtue of righteousness always felt suitable. The righteous man does not only put the virtue into play once or a few times but instead righteousness co-exists with the everyday life. And for me that's exactly

how I interpreted it. I specifically notice the virtue come more into play ever since I got accepted to work in a Work Study program for the college I attend, Queensborough CC. I'm currently a peer mentor in a Foreign Language Computer Lab on campus. I help students every day in areas ranging from simple computer problems, general questions, homework to even sometimes assisting them on making a schedule for the upcoming semester. I'm not trained to help students with homework because of the variety of different languages; however, if I do see a student struggling on a Spanish assignment I am glad to help. To relate to this, I recently helped a struggling student with a Spanish assignment. Like any other student not from Hispanic descent it would make sense for this to get difficult for him. For me coming from parents who speak primarily Spanish and very little English I saw the work as easy. I helped the student slowly and we finished a couple of assignments and prepared him for his next Spanish class which was about to start soon.

For me helping the student with the assignment came easily and wasn't much for me, but for him it helped enormously, enough to where the student came back to me and showed me his assignment grade which received the grade letter A. The personal reward which I received came from the inside, the satisfaction of knowing I helped one student in an area which he would have otherwise severely struggled in. Just like the student I helped, I receive the same satisfaction helping people every day, whether it's from answering a student's question to when I am outside of school and helping a stranger when they need it the most. "Righteousness brings satisfaction that goes much deeper than the satisfaction of having gone along with temporary, fleeting gratification." (Qtd. In Ng, Petkau). The outcome of my satisfaction was different. I didn't expect a reward for my actions as it wasn't done for something in return, it came naturally. My mindset wasn't "I'll help this person because I have to and hopefully I can get something out of it" but instead, "I'll help this person because I want to"

I felt a personal connection with the virtue I chose and saw it was important to practice and emphasize for a few reasons. The context of New York City's frantic pace where time is money can have a huge factor on how people can forget basic moral principles. New York by many is seen as a "Babylon" like society where its every man for themselves, competing against one another for a better position. In a sense there's some truth to that: as humans we've been so caught up with ourselves we forget the importance of social interactions. My decision to practice this virtue revolved around the idea of positive change. If I can make someone's day in this big city we live in, maybe the favor will be returned to someone else. Being born and raised in Queens, New York, I understand the sense of loneliness this big city can portray. "Loneliness can have different shapes and colors; it doesn't mean you're spending most of your time alone in your room. You could be out partying or living a very busy lifestyle studying or working and still feel lonely. It goes deeper than physical solitude," (Qtd. In Bologna).

It's easier to sit back and do nothing but that is not the path of the righteous. Being righteous does not mean being "self-righteous". "The confusion comes when, although each of us must come to an honest assessment as to whether or not we are indeed personally righteous in practice, we are simultaneously preconditioned to presume that any thought or perception of righteousness in ourselves is "self-righteous" and consequently moralistically sanctimonious or Pharisaical". (Qtd in P. Shelly, Chapter 11). A self-righteous individual feels worried about their persona and often does the right thing because they feel obligated to. The righteous person, on the other hand distributes unconditional positive regard and worries more about others than themselves.

The difficulties I encountered while practicing this virtue didn't come from the virtue itself, but instead from my sense of shyness. Growing up I've always been that quiet kid who took a while to get comfortable enough to speak in the classroom. Over the past years however the more

positive interactions I have with people the more I see myself emerging from my shell. It can be scary being nice and caring to someone you might not know anything about; however, with the virtue I practiced, righteousness, I made the effort to do so whenever possible. I didn't let my shyness get in the way and I quickly learned speaking up and doing the right thing outweighs not doing anything at all. In the beginning I worried a bit about how people would portray me as: a "goody two-shoes", a person who because I worry a lot about doing the right thing I would be seen as not "cool". This was easy to dismiss as time went on because the older I became the less I cared about my personal image. Overcoming this and practicing this virtue of righteousness was very beneficial to my life as it connected other virtues together.

The society in which we live in today revolves heavily around the virtues and our moral principles. These virtues such as righteousness incorporate other virtues as well. The practice of virtues and implementing them into your everyday social life is a crucial beneficial way to help the society revolve more around us humans. "In the Greek, righteousness is translated from the word *dikaiosyne*, meaning integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling and acting," (Qtd in Smith). These virtues such as righteousness should be emphasized into American Education as they do play a beneficial role in the understanding of our lives.

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