

The Boulder We All Carry

By Daniel Bahr

Queensborough Community College

10/30/23

The story of Sisyphus within Greek mythology is of a demi-god who cheats death twice, and because of his crimes against the gods, Sisyphus was condemned by Hades to roll a boulder up a mountain for all eternity. In his cleverness, Sisyphus does not have a single hope for his freedom; instead, he completely embraces the absurdity of his punishment and finds happiness in his eternal struggle to the heights. “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus). We may think that we are a long way from Sisyphus’s punishment, but that is far from the truth because, like Sisyphus, we all have been condemned to our own circumstances of suffering that are unique to all of us as individuals. By understanding that our struggle and suffering is part of the human condition, no matter who you are, we should hold ren for all individuals from every walk of life.

Suffering is the core reason behind the existence of ethics. If we did not suffer from negative feelings like pain, loss, and fear, there would be no logical sense to the practice of ethics. Through ethics, we develop moral principles that guide us to prevent another person from suffering. Ren is the love and compassion for others. The development of our ethics is only related to where we apply our ren, and thus, to the development of all individuals in society. Carlo Cipolla is an economist who has captured this concept in his sixty-page essay called “The Basic Laws of Stupidity” where he categorizes individuals by how they create losses or gains for others and themselves. “A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself deriving no gain and even possibly incurring loss” (Cipolla). Instead of being destructive in the way Cipolla describes, we should aim to create more win – win scenarios in our society. To create this scenario, we must apply ren to both ourselves and others. Cipolla would categorize this behavior as intelligent. By mindfully creating win – win situations through the application of ren we will have the least possible suffering and most

possible gains for all parties within society. This ethical framework not only reduces suffering but also creates a sense of connectedness and mutual well-being in our communities.

One may ask; how will alleviating the suffering of others help me achieve happiness? In response, I would like to introduce the thoughts of Victor. E. Frankl. "Happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself" (Frankl). By mistaking individualism with the origins of our happiness, we will lack the higher purpose and longevity of contributing to a higher cause, which is a community. The very question proposed is under the assumption that happiness is only related to the benefits of the self when that is not at all true. An international study was conducted by Kenneth. M. Kramer on the connection between community and happiness. He found "In sum, sense of community was the strongest predict of personal happiness... feelings of connectedness were associated with increased feelings of happiness in a large, diverse, global sample". Therefore, we must hold ren for the community and not exclusively for ourselves or others to be happy.

American society is not an ideal place to pursue my practice of ren because, to keep this practice, I must consider others as equal to myself. In American society, this characteristic is frequently absent and is instead the self as higher than the other. Some factors that have played into why this has become a development in America are things like racist roots, the spread of individualism, and unchecked emotional health. What has mainly caused this is the blind acceptance of hatred. Throughout the media and in real life, I have been exposed to interactions between many people, some of which are social conflicts. I have rarely in my life seen a conflict in which the hatred of initial individuals does not spread to the minds of targeted individuals to further cause conflict. As a society, we have been conditioned to respond to hatred with hatred;

this is stupidity, or in other words, a lose – lose situation. This is such a severe issue that, in my experience, holding ren for all individuals will isolate you from communities in most social contexts. Considering this, I have been using meditative practices to pursue my ren.

Many underestimate the power of meditative practices. Most do, in fact, have practices that resemble meditation, but even this is not enough. For me, meditation's purpose is to control my perspective. That can make a significant difference when you want to be different from others. I not only know from experience, but I have also watched other dedicated individuals push past their limits through the application of meditation. Most notable to me is Eddie Hall, who used a form of meditative practice to perceive his family in extremely dangerous scenarios to elicit a ren emotional response. Through his deep utilization of ren harnessed by his meditative practices, he had exerted his body to its physical limits to break the deadlift world record barrier of five hundred kilograms. Furthermore, this was believed to not be physically possible by human anatomy unless he had utilized meditative practices that activated fight-or-flight. The effectiveness that meditation has on controlling emotions is why I use it to pursue ren.

Like Sisyphus, we all face our unique struggles and suffering, and the practice of ren, based in empathy, ethics, and community, is a path to deeper and more meaningful happiness. By striving for win – win situations and embracing meditative practices to advance our ren, we can work towards a more compassionate and harmonious society where the pursuit of happiness extends beyond the self to benefit all individuals. In doing so we not only uplift ourselves but also contribute to the improvement and sustainability of the world we share.

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