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Heroism in Action

What makes a person a hero? As a child this was a simple question to answer; a hero was someone who wears a cape, fights the bad guys, and saves the city. But as more people become publicly recognized as heroic, the term becomes more general and its definition becomes unclear.  Webster's dictionary defines heroism as, “conduct especially as exhibited in fulfilling a high purpose or attaining a noble end”. This definition helps us to get the general goal of a hero's life. It is to get an end result that is better than the current one, providing more utility to a number of people than before.  Through real life examples as well as the explanation of what morals are, we find that it is the right set of morals and consistent determination that can help to identify a true “hero”.

Heroism manifests itself in many shapes and forms, but what truly defines a hero is their moral compass. Everyone has their own sense of morals stemming from their upbringings, but what is defined as “good” in society is not always determined in black or white terms. The ability to take action to allow people to feel genuine respect and peace is almost always moral, but there is always someone on the other side to face the repercussions. A situation where a person does something bad with selfish intentions or harmful intentions are examples of immoral actions.  An example of this is the extermination of the Jewish people in the Holocaust by Adolf Hitler. This was a case of a bad person doing something that he justified with the reasoning that it strengthened his fellow German people.  This, however, cannot justify his actions in the laws of the land nor make them moral, although he may have seen it this way. Personal morals have been a widely discussed topic on which make a person a hero, but overall a hero must be moral with thoroughly good intentions even if it means the sacrificing of his or her well being.

Morals are a driving force behind the actions of an individual but sheer bravery is necessary trait.  On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks was told to stand and give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger because the white section was filled.  She refused and was arrested, and without knowing at the time became a hero and an international icon in the fight against Racial Segregation.  Parks was not the first colored person to resist bus segregation, but her bravery and unyielding determination gave huge momentum to the Civil Rights movement and turned her into a hero that day.  Parks was true to her morals even in the face of adversity, and proved that heroism can be found in unlikely places.

Heroes tend to be nuanced by the infinite perspectives from which their heroism is viewed. Rosa Parks was loved as a hero by African Americans and Civil Rights activists, but was hated for defying a “natural order” by others.  Hitler was hailed as a hero by his loyal German people but was feared and loathed as a villain by many others.  When thinking of iconic heros such as Batman and Spider-Man you find a common set of morals. There is justice, intelligence, bravery, and selflessness that establish the foundation of what makes a hero.  Every day these morals are expressed by the most common of men, but it is determination that turns a man with good morals into hero. If their act brings a high amount of utility to others in a selfless act, they are a hero in that moment, but it is the continued practice of these morals combined with uncompromising determination that separates a hero from a man.