



Absurd Heroism, by Margaret Wheatley

Consider Sisyphus. As described in both Greek and Roman mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to an eternity of futile and hopeless labor. He had to roll a rock to the top of the mountain, only to watch it tumble back down from its own weight and the natural force of gravity. Then he would roll it to the top again. Forever. The French existential philosopher Albert Camus wrote an essay about absurd heroism and the despair it caused entitled "The Myth of Sisyphus."

Sisyphus had no choice -- he had been condemned by the gods. But we do have a choice. We can notice the price we're paying for our absurd heroism, for believing that it's up to us. I hear so many people who want to take at least partial responsibility for this mess. Somewhat piously, as if summoning us to accountability, they say, "We need to accept responsibility that we created this" or "We created it, so we can change it." No we didn't. And no we can't. We participated with innumerable other players and causes and this is what emerged. We can't take credit for it, we can't blame ourselves and we can't put the burden of change on us. We're not Sisyphus, condemned to a fate of absurd heroism.

If Sisyphus had been a free agent, he would have noticed that gravity was the problem. We have to notice that emergence is the problem, as unchallengeable a force as gravity.

Let's fully face the brave new world that has emerged and put down our boulder -- the energy destroying belief that we can change the world. Let us walk away from that mountain of despair-inducing failures and focus instead on people in front of us, our colleagues, communities and families. Let us work together to embody the values that we treasure, and not worry about creating successful models that will transform other people. Let us focus on transforming ourselves to be little islands of good caring people, doing right work, assisting where we can, maintaining peace and sanity, people who have learned how to be gentle, decent and brave ... even as the dark ocean that has emerged continues to storm around us.