

Hannah Oman

Avatar: The Last Airbender

“Good times become good memories, but bad times become good lessons,” (“Uncle Iroh Quotes”, 2023) stated the character Uncle Iroh in the series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Many characters have touched my life through films and books, stepping out of the page or screen to grip my thoughts and emotions. Often it is their triumphs that endear them to me or allow me to learn from them. Many times, however, it is the characters’ inward battles which they do not overcome that form “good lessons.” One protagonist that has impacted me in this way is from the aforementioned series, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and her name is Katara.

When friends introduced me to this series last year, Katara quickly became one of my favorite characters on account of her gentle empathy and fiercely persevering attitude. Her powers in her fictional world entailed significant pressure to protect those she cared about. The sense of pressure is familiar to me, since I have experienced self-imposed pressure to perform well in academia out of gratitude to those who have generously made opportunities possible for me. Katara’s urgent life-versus-death trials are more difficult to fathom, but her spirit of steadfastness even when those around her were disintegrating internally reaffirmed the kind of person I desire to be to those around me. However, I was impacted more deeply by her struggle against her inner hatred of the man who murdered her mother.

Her bitterness towards this man was well-masked for much of the show, reminding me of the ease with which many of us can tuck our uglier passions behind a carefully-constructed, highly-convincing façade. When Katara confronted the murderer, she faced her own darkness and victoriously decided to spare his life. However, she failed to overcome her hatred, admitting to her friend, “I didn't forgive him. I'll never forgive him” (“Avatar: The Last Airbender”). This lack of forgiveness drove a knife into me, since I believed she would discover complete healing. Her rejection of forgiveness implied continued misery over her mother’s death and illustrated the uselessness of revenge. I was convicted to realize that I cannot equate lack of spiteful actions with forgiveness; forgiveness is something which must occur in the deep places, a decision which no other human can view or alter. I am reminded of the following declaration by G.K. Chesterton: “Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen” (Chesterton, 33). Revenge is self-harm, and it never provides anything beyond a simple weakness. True power is found in release and not a white-knuckle grip on the past. The effect of this story was a deeper awe in my mindset towards the beauty of forgiveness, although it was not demonstrated in this instance, in addition to a determination to pursue it more wholeheartedly towards those who bring me pain. Katara has eloquently penned her mark into my own story.

Works Cited

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