

JUSTICE
A WORD WORTH A THOUSAND PICTURES
A PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH IN THE MOVIE ‘THE HURRICANE’
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In 1966, boxing legend Rubin “Hurricane” Carter was accused, tried and sentenced for murders he did not commit. Thirty-four years later, at the recent Golden Globe Awards, Denzel Washington wins Best Actor for portraying Rubin in the film *The Hurricane*, and, in accepting the award, brings Rubin on stage and says to the audience, “This man is love.”

Rubin’s life story serves as an intriguing standard for evaluating our own battles with injustice and, in particular, our current united struggle against enemies of peace. For in the “Hurricane” history, we see the decisive impact of youth, who, impassioned by the need for justice, stand up where others have fallen and catalyze victory.

During the early years of his lifelong prison sentence, Rubin’s plight caught the attention of thousands of people. Many celebrities — Muhammed Ali, Bob Dylan and others — joined what became a campaign for justice. Yet, despite the surge of public support, no progress was made in the court system. Rubin’s sentence stayed, and the tide of enthusiasm and protests ebbed. People lost zeal for Rubin’s case.

Then, in 1980, a nearly illiterate 16-year-old, Lesra Martin, bought and read Rubin’s autobiography. Actually, he devoured it. Lesra was so inspired by Rubin’s story that he initiated a friendship with Rubin, first as pen pals, then face to face as comrades. The two of them shared a profound kinship. Rubin found in Lesra a revitalized energy and Lesra found in Rubin a source of wisdom and pride and, fatefully, inspiration.

Lesra would in turn inspire three of his guardians to take up the fight for justice in Rubin’s case. They moved from Canada to New Jersey and launched a new campaign. After a decade long moratorium, Rubin’s lawyers were met by this posse of Canadians. In one of the film’s pivotal scenes, the lawyer tells the young supporters that many people have come and gone in this fight — students and celebrities — but no one stood beyond the first few rounds. Why? Because this is a gradual and unglamorous struggle. And this struggle needs someone to see it all the way to the finish.

Especially for those of us who toil hard for kosen-rufu, these lines the lawyer-character delivers resonate with truth. At times our activities are unglamorous. Certain campaigns can be mundane or even – let’s face it – torturous, but the point is not to luxuriate in a warm and fuzzy struggle. The point is that victory requires fighters who are unflagged by the grueling nature of the fight.

Thanks to the energy of Lesra and his guardians, Rubin’s case saw a new judge and —get this — a new court, a Federal one. The legal loopholes still foreshadowed a defeat, but Rubin was convinced that under the eye of humanity, the facts of the case, the truth, would shine forth. Indeed, they did. In 1985, Rubin’s case was deemed “racist” and he was freed.

Of all the people who allied themselves with Rubin’s campaign, the youth would ultimately be the ones to send the battle to its victory. They trudged forward, undaunted by the adversaries who oozed up, who made shameless attempts to cuss

them off the course of virtuous action. In a scene late in the film, the key perpetrator of corruption sets himself right in Lesra's face and barks empty threats. It was laughable. In fact, at a superficial glance, the scene, which in real life never happened, comes across as bad filmmaking. Here's this outrageously dumb villain! But with deeper thought, the scene can be quite insightful. In reality, opponents of justice nearing defeat will make exactly such irrational moves.

Consider the case of the chief priest in Argentina. The local youth division firmly resolved to abolish the hidden evils of the Nikken sect. The priest subsequently exposed himself in a critical blunder. He publicly labeled Mother Theresa a "devil." Of all people to insult! Such action is tough to fathom. This caused such a public outcry that the priest was forced to leave the country. In the battle between corruption and justice, authoritarians will inevitably make bad decisions and truth will shine forth.

This March is a significant month to fight for justice. All over the nation, introductory youth meetings will be held to commemorate March 16. And on March 21, a verdict will be given for the Seattle Incident trial, a case about false accusations by authorities against a relatively powerless individual and the search for truth. Our efforts to propagate Buddhism will serve as concrete steps toward creating happiness and precluding the spread of falsehood. As youth stand up, the defeat of injustice will follow!