

THE DESPERATE PRINCE
a story truthful enough

It is impossible to imagine a predicament more dire, more desperate than that faced by Arjuna in his chariot that fateful afternoon. He was not just any young man threatened by the bloody chaos of impending battle. He was suited perfectly to his task. A Prince of impeccable lineage and upbringing he was also the most proficient, deadly master of his trade. Arjuna was perhaps the most lethal warrior ever to bear arms. Such was his mastery that it was a foregone conclusion that if he bent his right arm with a living being in his vision, death would follow as surely and as swiftly as the lethal flight of that arrow from his fingertips.

Arjuna, then, was in the depths of the deepest despair. Out of his duty as a Prince, loyalty to his clan and love for his family he was to engage in deadly battle. No ordinary battle. For as Arjuna stood heavyhearted in his chariot, brothers and kinsmen to the left and right of him, he could see his enemies. Enemies he was impelled to select and kill. Enemies he loved no less than his allies alongside him. For facing him were not only his cousins, but his guru also stood amongst them.

Yet Arjuna was not alone in his chariot. He was accompanied by his charioteer. While he was to exercise his royal fingertips, someone must guide the horses. This was not the task of a Prince, nor even warrior: it belonged to a servant. Yet to the relief of our Prince, and the advantage of us all, this servant could not bear the despair of his master in silence. Casting aside the niceties of protocol he began to speak, and slowly the desperate clouds in Arjunas heart dispersed. So that, at the last our noble Prince was able to ride forth to his duty and kill whosoever chanced within his aim. For this impertinent

servant was none other than God incarnate.

Krishna spoke from his immaculate wisdom straight to the heart of the problem and explained to Arjuna the true nature of action. Arjuna knew from the Vedas, that nothing was more important than his Dharma, the sacred duty to which he had been born. Yet as he stood in his chariot he was overwhelmed with anxiety and doubt, he did not know what to do. If he went forth he would break his own heart, as he would break his royal and filial duty if he did not. Faced with this desperate choice he did not know what to do. He was faced, in a way that he never had been before, with the most fundamental question of being human: "what am i supposed to do now?"

Though not in such desperate circumstance, that is a question we all know well, and in many forms. How are we to know what is the path that we must tread through the unpredictable vicissitudes of life? How do we know if we are doing the right thing? To this line of questioning our divine charioteer gave the most liberating answer.

"My Prince" he declared, in differing and interwoven ways, "take not the fruits of your actions unto yourself. Give them back to me, to whom they belong. You are not the doer, but merely my instrument. The fruits of your actions belong not to you, no more than do your actions themselves. Take them not from me to whom they belong, and go forth, take aim and bring death to the field this day, just as i bring thousands of beings in and out of existence every moment with a heart as light and clear as day"

Understanding this at last our hero rode forth to his Dharma of fratricide with a heart light and clear. Just as we also are

invited to do the same in our 'own' lives. Knowing that the fruits of all our actions belong to God,¹ is to know that all our actions also belong to God. Knowing that all our actions belong to God is to know that we are not the doer; is to know that we are but his ordained instrument; we are the agents of His Will. We are brought to act by his power alone, for there is no other power than his: even as it functions in the winds of the air and currents of the ocean; even as it functions in the growth of a tree. the speed of a cheeta, it functions also in and as our body, mind, thoughts, desires and intentions.

The lightening of Arjuna's fingers on his arrow does not originate in a release of muscular contraction: that is where the action ends, its consequences begin. The shooting of an arrow begins long before the motor nerve loosens the fingers. Consider that those were not just any fingers. They were the fingers of a Prince whose birth and power permitted him the finest training as both warrior and prince. A training since childhood that had left Arjuna with an unerring eye, an imperturbable hand, a trained body that supported them impeccably.

But, a simple release of muscular contraction does not begin in the body. There must first be intent: to raise the bow, to fit the arrow, to kill. Killing is not an easy intention to summon, for the human heart is deeply sensitive to death. Yet Arjuna was a Prince. He had been well tutored. Not only in the Vedas and the seriousness of his sacred duty, but also in the niceties

¹ For those offended, confused or confirmed in their anthropomorphic beliefs by the word God, please substitute something else, such as the Indivisible Wholeness of Totality, Life As it Actually Is, Existence etc etc.

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of politics and the subtleties of the power that it was his to uphold. Arjuna knew how to deliberate, he knew how to choose, he knew how to decide: to do so was his destiny, his sacred duty.

Yet, that bountiful day, he learned something about choosing, about decision making that not even his guru could teach him. A lesson that had been left to God himself to deliver. Finally he learned that just as he was not the doer, nor was he the chooser, the decider, the deliberator, the thinker. For Krishna demonstrated to Arjuna that the world is nothing but the Body of God; that there is not an action nor its fruit that does not originate in and belong to God; that the world is the power of God in self expression; that nothing exists, nothing happens except as an expression of the power, the will, the grace of God.

In seeing this deeply Arjuna understood without any disturbing doubt that he was not the doer, the chooser, the decider, the thinker. He knew that he was but the vessel of the thinking, deciding, choosing that took place in and as if his mind. A vessel created, moved, controlled by the power of God. He knew at last that he was but the instrument of the actions that took place through his body: an instrument created, moved, controlled by the power and will of God.

No longer stealing these actions from his beloved Lord, he relinquished their fruits also, and rode forth with a light heart: to kill. He rode forth to fulfil his destiny, to uphold his dharma, knowing that within the inescapable presence of the power of God there was nothing he could do that he was not ordained to do, there was nothing he could do that was not destined for him to do. So he rode forth to the clamour and carnage of battle, as we can go forth likewise to face our own trials and

tribulations, with a light heart. A heart made light with the knowledge that as all actions, their fruits and their origins belong always and only to God, our Dharma can only be that which he ordains us to do, that which we actually do. For whatever we actually do, and whatever we actually leave undone, whatever we choose to do, whatever we decide to leave undone, we decide, we choose, we do or leave undone by the inescapable power of God alone, within which we are always and only the instruments of his will, the bearers of his grace. Escape from the grace and power of God is there none. As he desires we ponder and doubt, until at last as he wills we act on his behalf, unable ever to escape our destiny, our dharma.

For, if there is any truth in this beautiful and poignant story, if it was God in that chariot that afternoon, then there is no escape for us, his mortal instruments, from his divine will. If indeed we are but the instruments of God, there is nothing that we can do without his grace and honestly call our own. There is nothing that we can feel without his will, there is nothing that we can choose or do without the support of his power, the permission of his will. All that we do, all that we choose, all that we think, feel and desire comes to us from him: no matter how much it may seem otherwise, no matter how clearly it feels that we decide for ourselves, that we choose freely: we do not.

This was the gift, the understanding that Krishna, in his mercy, gave to Arjuna in his turbulence that fretful day. By showing to Arjuna the full majesty of his own power, and the boundless scope of his own presence, Krishna brought the troubled mind of our precocious Prince to a clear understanding of the nature of power, and the nature of action. Overcome by the might and glory of God's power so

clearly revealed, Arjuna was inescapably faced with the nature of his own instrumentality. In seeing clearly that he had no power of his own, that his every act and every decision were summoned and delivered by the power of God the deep doubts disturbing Arjuna dispelled: to be replaced with an imperturbable lightness of heart that allowed him to ride forth to kill his cousins without doubt, guilt or shame, fortified by the supreme knowledge that he was not the doer.

This, then, is our dharma: the actions that we actually take, the choices that we actually make, the decisions that we actually choose to fulfil. Escape from our dharma is there none. Our dharma is ordained by the will of God, whatever name or gender we may give him or her, or not. Our dharma is not determined by the legislative powers of man, nor by the contours of our own deliberations: but by divine dispensation. Our dharma is not what society says we must do, nor what the voices in our head tell we should do: but what Life bids us do. Our dharma is not what our parents tell us to do, nor what we would most like to do: but what Existence necessitates us to do. Our dharma is not what any mind says we should do, should have done, ought to do, ought to have done: but what we actually do.

No matter how insistently and clearly our minds, our parents, society urge us to a particular path of action, it can not come about without the support of the The Unstoppable Unfolding Of Existence As The Universe Just As It Is, theologically known as the Will or Grace of God. Whatever it is that we actually do, this is what God requires us to do. For we are not alone. No matter how often we may feel that we are. No matter how much we may think we are. God is always in the chariot. His hands are always on the reins of our life. He is guiding our chariot this way and that. We are neither the slaves of fate,

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nor masters of our destiny. We are instruments of divine creativity, bubbles bursting briefly on the cascading waters of life.

When we see this clearly we can surge forth to our life, our destiny like Arjuna: with a light heart. No matter how unclear our path. No matter how difficult our circumstances. No matter the carnage that we enter or leave behind us. We may be unable to see the way forward. We may not be able to make sense of the options with which we are faced. We may see no-one to stand beside and in support of us. We may well feel the reins trembling in our hands: but our hands are always, always moved by God.

