

BY
Swami Shrihariprasad



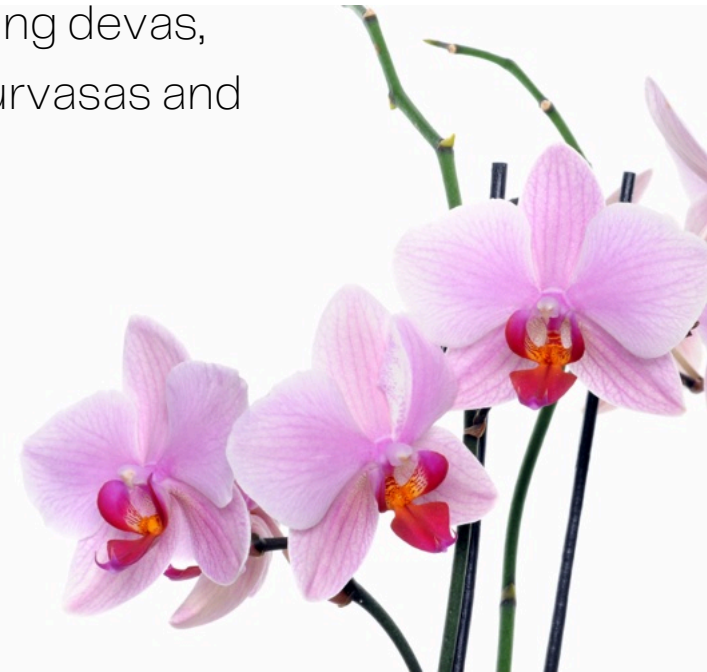
FREEDOM
IS NOT FOR FREE

If you can understand God's Will and Guru's commands, it is very good but even if you don't you must follow it with absolute faith, based on your knowledge that God does what is best for you.

- Sri Sathguru

In a human being is the whole universe

The Mahabharata is the most wonderful book in the world; there can be no doubt of its authenticity because it depicts people not as heroes or saints but as they are. The Rishi's faults are pointed out and the good points of even evil persons are mentioned. It is a retelling of what happened as it did happen. Which is why it is called an Itihasa. There is no one who is entirely bad, no one who has always been entirely good. In a human being is the whole universe, good bad and middling; clever mediocre and foolish. In him resides all the beings, including devas, asuras, Rakshasas and pisachas. In him are munis like Durvasas and noble beings like Uddalaka Aruni.



As an American poet wrote,
“Do I contradict myself?
Very well, I contradict myself
I am large, I contain multitudes.”



This is seen in the Mahabharata where nobody is a totally evil person or a totally good person. Even Duryodhana is not blindly judged. And this is one powerful reason to believe that the Mahabharata is an historical text and not a mythological fancy of an inspired Rishi. One such person is Drona the teacher of the Kuru family. Though he was dependent on the Kuru family, he did not hesitate to warn against the war and prophesied the defeat of the Kaurava faction led by Duryodhana. Both Drona and his son Asvathaman spoke in the assembly urging peace and Asvathaman's speech is noteworthy. After recapitulating all the favours he had received from the ruling family and his friendship with Duryodhana, he declared, “the faults of even a guru must be declared. Duryodhana did great evil in the game of dice and the kingdom must be returned to Yudhistira.”

However their knowledge of what was wrong did not make them abandon Duryodhana to his fate but though they advised him to do what was right they did not make it clear that their support to him was conditional upon his doing the right thing. Duryodhana, Dussasana, Karna and Sakuni knew that Drona would do what his son said and Asvathaman would ultimately side with them. A look at Drona's history from his early days shows that he had an urge to sit among the rich and famous, his leaving to Drupada's court is generally presumed to be at the urging of his wife who saw his son's distress at their poverty but he could have asked for assistance from many other places, he could have approached the king more diplomatically, after all, all Hindus know of another poverty stricken Brahmana who went to see a childhood friend who was a rich and powerful king. But Sudama who had twenty-eight children (Drona had only one) did not go seeking wealth. Subsequent to his humiliation by Drupada, he sought employment from the Kurus for the sake of his own advancement and to avenge his humiliation by Drupada.



Throughout his career one sees a strong sense of selfishness. His teaching of Arjuna is based on the hope that Arjuna would avenge the insult which he suffered. In all his life we see a thread of selfishness running through, nothing being done except in his or his family's interest.

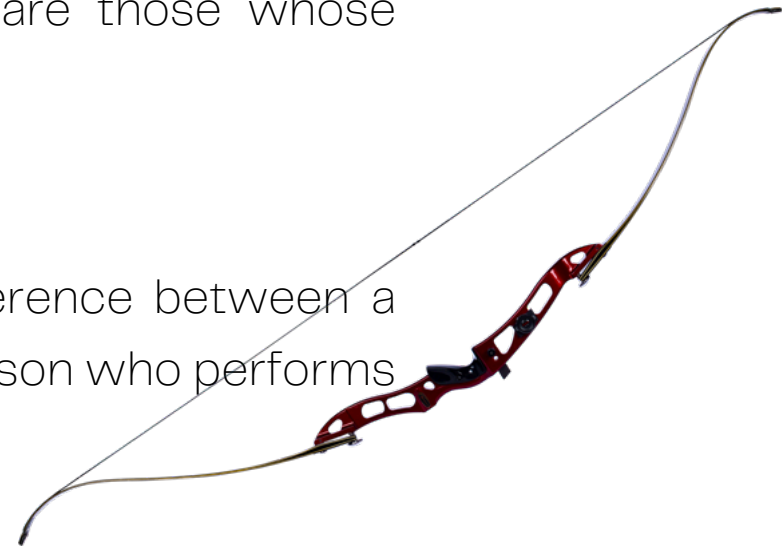
Such an attitude does not bring good to a person in the long run. Sri Krishna says in the Gita,

Durena hyavaram karma buddhi yogat dhananjaya
Buddhau saranamanviccha krpanaa phalahetava.

Work performed with desire is far inferior to that performed with the mind undisturbed by thought of results. Dhananjaya, take refuge in this Buddhi Yoga, which is evenness of mind. Pitiably are those whose actions are oriented to results.

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Drona and his disciple Arjuna clearly show the difference between a person who does an action for its own sake and a person who performs an action so that he may derive a benefit from it.



Dronacharya could have either told Arjuna to appreciate Ekalavya's archery and try to surpass it by his own efforts or he could have taught him further lessons of archery not known to Ekalavya. But he wanted to make the prince happy and make him happy immediately for Arjuna was the vehicle to the realization of all Drona's dreams.

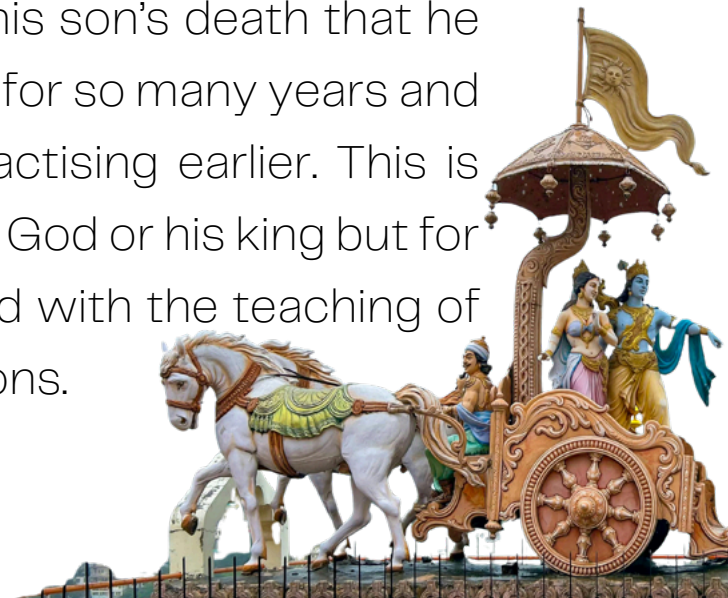
Another example of Drona's lack of commitment as a true teacher is his treatment of his disciples. His son Asvathaman was also a disciple of his. Now all Drona's life was wrapped up in Asvathaman; he went to Drupada's court especially for his son's sake. Asvathaman was basically an evil person though there were many good qualities in him. The Mahabharata says that Asvathaman was made up of portions of Mahadeva, Yama, Kama and Anger which merged into one and even as a boy excelled in all types of black magic. Drona was aware of his lack of ability in military matters but yet

wanted him to excel all his other disciples. When all the disciples went to collect water he gave Asvathaman a wide mouthed vessel and gave all the others narrow mouthed vessels. Asvathaman used to finish filling water much before the other disciples and in the time gap Drona used to teach him mantras. This was to enable him to stay ahead of the other disciples. Since Arjuna filled up his vessel with the help of the astra presided over by Varuna, he reached along with Asvathaman and learnt the mantras along with him. One such was the Brahma astra. Though he knew that Asvathaman did not have the requisite mental and moral qualifications to learn the Brahma astra mantras, out of paternal affection Drona taught it to him.



When Asvathaman used the Brahma astra to destroy the Pandavas and Arjuna also invoked the Brahma astra, the Rishi Vyasa asked them both to withdraw it, but Asvathaman could not do it. His directing it to the unborn child of Abhimanyu, his inability and unwillingness to withdraw it shows his unworthiness. Yet these important secrets were taught to him and which endangered the human race.

Thus despite Drona's high spiritual and occult abilities, he was tied by the bonds of attachment which ultimately destroyed him. Arjuna, on the other hand, though he suffered the same loss of a son, which Drona thought he had, did not lose heart. Though greatly angered, he relied entirely on the strength of Sri Krishna and his own hard work. Thus he was able to cross great hurdles and yet kill Jayadratha. But Drona was so dispirited by news of his son's death that he forgot his duty to the king whose employee he had been for so many years and took to the meditation which he should have been practising earlier. This is because his actions were fuelled not by a desire to serve God or his king but for self-aggrandisement. Arjuna on the other hand was filled with the teaching of Sri Krishna and served Him even through his military actions.



This is not because of the fact that he had just received the message of the Gita but because he was ready to receive the message of the Gita. It is only in fertile sand that a seed will grow. All Arjuna's life had been spent following the principles of Dharma. At no time did he or any of the Pandavas succumb to temptation. After they lost the kingdom, Duryodhana offered all the Pandavas their freedom or share in the kingdom if any of them said that Yudhistira had no right to stake them. . Bhima's reply is memorable. "The King had every right to stake us he is our King, our eldest brother and our Guru." When Arjuna went in search of Divine Astras, at the request of Indra he destroyed some evil beings called the Nivatakavachas. He stayed in Indraloka for sometime. Once when the Apsaras were dancing before Indra, Arjuna asked who was Urvashi. Thinking he was interested in her, Indra sent Urvashi to him. Arjuna courteously told her he was interested in her as she was his ancestor, being the wife of Pururavas. Urvashi told him that such bonds did not exist for Apsaras. He however insisted that he was not interested in her, which led her to curse him. But even this curse led to good as he was able to live as Brhannala in Virata's court without being recognized.



For a person who follows Dharma like as the Pole star never swerving from it, all misfortunes turn into good fortune but for this they have to work hard as avoiding evil and strictly following Dharma is no easy matter. The Rishis describe it as difficult as walking on a razors edge. When Yudhistira was a young king in Indraprastha, the rule was that when one of the brothers was with Draupadi, none of the others should enter. If anyone did enter they would have to go into exile for a year. However Arjuna had to enter once to take his weapons to help a Brahmana. Since it was for a noble purpose Yudhistira offered to forgive Arjuna's offence. Arjuna replied, "I have heard you say not to follow Dharma with pretences. I shall not waver from my Truth, I am armed with my Truth!". To such a person, who is filled with devotion, uprightness and a sense of Dharma, the way to God is clear. But to one whose spiritual quest is a mere show, an intellectual game the truth is far away.





Sri Sathguru says, "To get a job, even a peon's job, you have to possess certain qualifications. Then are there no qualifications to attain God which is the most wonderful thing in the Universe?"

Many teachers of spiritual life water down the ideal so that more people come to them so that their teaching is more acceptable to the masses, but in the end they are to use the Upanishadic expression, "blind leading the blind." Sri Sathguru once said, "The Highest wisdom is not something which can be easily attained; it needs hard work, discriminative insight and a firm resolve. People who do not have or want to have are just fooling themselves and wasting their time. It would be much better if they were sweeping the streets or ploughing the fields. At least they would be doing something, which would benefit the world."

The Atma, the Upanishads tell us, cannot be attained by just listening to the words of people who give lectures, it cannot be attained by giving them either,

nor by intellectual thought and reasoning.

Self is attained by those whom it chooses. And Sri Sathguru has in the passage cited above shown us who are chosen. In this arduous but fulfilling path, the only help is the Guru, Sri Sathguru says, "Like a father or a mother helps and teaches a child to walk holding its hand when necessary, removing its support to make it walk by itself, the Guru helps the disciple. His hand is there to help, for us to hold onto and to show us the right direction. But we must see it."



The Sastras have shown us that it is possible to attain freedom from thralldom even in this birth. The sight of sages like Sri Sathguru shows us that it can be attained and that the words of the Sastras are true. All that remains is for us to follow the path that they have shown us, but that can be only through hard work and sincerity. Freedom is not for free.

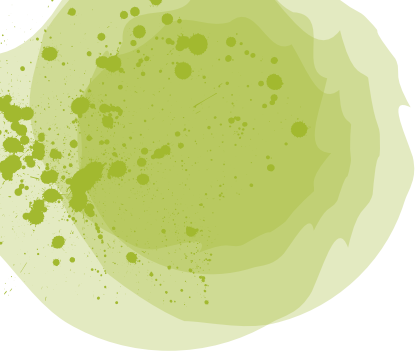
May Sri Sathguru at whose Lotus Feet this is placed grant us all the mind to follow the path that Sri Sathguru has shown us!

Sri Sathguru arpanamastu!



*The highest wisdom
is not something,
which can be easily
attained*





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