

Daring to Live as a Warrior



In various ancient civilizations, we find the Archetype of the Warrior as an inspiration for human beings to overcome the challenges of life. Today, most of us are not physically engaged on battlefields, as warriors fighting with swords and spears, with our lives on the line. Nevertheless, the challenges we face in our day-to-day lives are our battlefields, difficult and complex to overcome, our just and noble causes. Almost every day, we face ethical dilemmas; we struggle between our selfish tendency and altruistic nature, and encounter the difficulty of leading ourselves against our vices and limitations. Emerging victorious in these battles is difficult, perhaps even rare. But usually we don't even like to face the challenges as doing so would involve pain and suffering, out of our comfort zone. But why are we here as human beings, if not to grow by overcoming such challenges? The glory of being human perhaps lies in constantly overcoming obstacles and pushing beyond our limitations to realise what we might be truly capable of.

It is worth taking inspiration from a historical figure, Spartan Warrior-King Leonidas, who showed the world what it really means to be a Warrior. Born in 540BC, Leonidas is best known for his leadership of 300 Spartan warriors, at the Battle of Thermopylae in defence against a vast invading Persian Army. In exchange for submitting to the will of the Persian Emperor, Leonidas was promised Earth and Water for the survival of his people. However, choosing instead to preserve the dignity and freedom of his people, he heroically led the insignificant Spartan army against impossible odds and although he lost the battle, and his life, he demonstrated a victory of the human spirit, and he forged his place on the leaves of history. And this is a wonderful example for us. Our daily challenges, no matter how small in comparison, are our great battles; be it the struggle to make a living, to get along with others, to work with discipline and order, or even to find and follow a purpose of life, etc. How might we emerge victorious in these battles, with the honour and values of a warrior?

What is a Warrior? Never fighting for the sake of a fight, a Warrior fights for principles, for just and difficult causes. Across traditions, the warrior's code of conduct consists of virtues like

Courage, Righteousness, Justice, Benevolence, and Duty. A warrior aspires to live, and dares to die, for Truth, loyal to his ethical code regardless of the severity of circumstances. Rather than escape from an obstacle or an enemy a warrior penetrates through, transforming challenges into opportunities to overcome and grow, transcending what appear to be limitations. One might even say that a warrior is unafraid of defeat as long as he fights with courage to honour the just cause at hand thereby realizing his true potential. His victory therefore lies not in the result of the battle, but in his approach and his attitude to facing challenges, not as a victim, but as an adventurer seeking the horizons that lie beyond the known world.

The lesson we can learn from Leonidas is to disallow fragility when we are faced with the inevitable challenges of life. There are a great variety of expressions of fragility: laziness, procrastination, fear, anxiety, etc. Rather than looking at the circumstances as opportunities for growth, we look for ways to escape and avoid them by running away. Are we able to stand for truth in our actions and choices, in the way that we conduct ourselves, despite fear or discomfort? Many a times, we submit to our circumstances without making any effort to rise above them, hoping to somehow survive, and make it through one more day, one more challenge, with the minimum amount of effort and discomfort. But is submission to mediocrity, what it means to live? To me, this is to become a slave of our limitations and survive for the sake of survival, rather than to live with the freedom of becoming what one might wish to be.

From Leonidas, we can learn that the solution to fight our fragilities lies in the force of Will. Within us, we have many voices: the body demands the fulfilment of its needs, the emotions crave stimulation, the intellect insists on conditioned opinions, and perhaps dreams and aspirations softly whisper the search of Truth or Beauty. We don't always know which voice to follow. Voices which are driven by our lower nature (fear, anxiety, etc.) are usually strong and make us fragile, or cloud our thinking with doubts, paralysing our actions. Here, our Will can enable us to remain loyal to what is right, despite the weaknesses and distractions. To exercise the force of Will means to choose a value or virtue, over comfort. It means to take initiative, because by itself, nothing will change and we will continue to suffer. Instead we need to remember who we are, our dreams, our inner search. Traditions repeatedly suggest that as human beings, we naturally possess Will, and are equipped to find solutions to cut through obstacles and challenges to move forward. But to express it requires daily work, like building a muscle; the more we exercise it, the stronger it will become.

Perhaps, the intensity of a given challenge only shows that we are worthy to face what life demands from us. We can therefore aspire to act and live with freedom, inner strength and objectivity than submit to survival driven by fear, insecurity and judgements of others. Let us cultivate an attitude of a warrior, with love and service to a higher cause in our heart, and the courage to lead by example for others who are struggling through similar battles. The more we dare and overcome our challenges, the more we become warriors, facing life with joy and the natural pride of living with freedom, facing challenges as the inner war continues. Let us rise again after our defeats, and learn from our experiences to continue walking forward, to discover who we really are and what we are capable of. Not to fight means to never know my own potential, which might cause more suffering than the challenge of going through the battle. For in the end, what mattered most to King Leonidas perhaps, was but the glory of following a noble cause, with freedom.