

The Collective Voice

“Can one thing stand still and move at the same time in the same part of itself?” said the Voice, and the question puzzled him. That’s not what he had expected the Voice to say today. Their conversations usually revolved around human values and virtues, the good and the bad, and the need to discern something through the mind while recognizing that the heart *knows*, a concept he had never really fully grasped ... until yesterday.

This morning he had managed to leave the camp before dawn without being spotted by other soldiers and, more importantly, by the enemy. He was now sitting alone on the verge of a precipice, facing five huge cedars, and the boulder he was leaning against was cool against his back. This pause was sorely needed. Eyes closed, he could feel the morning breeze flirting with his hair and hear the faint sounds of branches trembling in the wind high above. All his senses were fully awake. This was indeed a blessed moment, considering the agitation the hours before had brought. Soon the sun would rise behind him in the forest and would transform the land into an inferno, this being the hot season in Chalcidice.

“My comrades won’t be able to hold out one more day on the battleground if we keep getting scorched like yesterday,” he thought to himself. During yesterday’s confrontation, most soldiers had had to slow down in the middle of the field to catch their

breath. Their equipment was too heavy. They were thirsty. This whole masquerade had become unbearable, but of course the generals didn't seem to care. Yet, heat or no heat, he knew that defeat awaited them today, and he was concerned. Not fearful, but truly concerned. Today's combat would surely be as brutal as yesterday's and as emotionally charged, for a routed army was never pleasant to watch. "What am I to do?" he wondered. No sooner had the question crossed his mind than the Voice spoke again, but he chose to remain silent. All he really wanted was for the war to go away, as far away as possible, if only for a little while. "Hmm," he sighed.

As a hoplite, he knew himself to be in good shape—well, fit enough by his own standards—but his anxiety level had reached its limit. Every part of his body was telling him he needed a break, some sort of a shift, and that shift had come the day before on the battlefield, as he was about to charge and kill. The Voice had called out loud and clear, "All his Holy!"

He had fallen to his knees, his whole body shaking as if struck by lightning. He could still remember and feel the vibrations running through his limbs. But, paradoxically, that powerful surge had brought stillness and clarity to his mind, and the rock that had blocked the entrance to his heart for so long had finally lifted, leaving a burning sensation in his chest, and an uplifting emotion brought tears to his eyes. The heavy armour forged by fear over the years had dropped, and all he could feel was the unthinkable: love for the enemy. And, in that moment, there was the realization that everyone had a right to be, that everything came from the Divine. If that wasn't peace, he didn't know what peace was.

Eyes closed, still shaken by the fact that he had managed to survive that battle without killing or injuring a soul, he let himself be transported by the scents of the warm soil and the songs of the birds, and tapped into the energy of his surroundings. “What a joy.” Dropping his guard further, he began to doze off, but the Voice reminded him softly of the task ahead. “Oh, mighty Voice, what would I do without you?” he thought.

He opened his eyes and looked up, contemplating the height of the majestic cedars against the sky. Though the boulder stood strong against his back, he felt he was merging with the biggest tree. “What is there to see from up there?” he wondered, and was immediately transported to the treetops. But the Voice brought him back down to earth again, and he realized that he could not afford to lose track of reality today. Hours had passed since he had been sitting on the cliff, and he knew he would soon have to return to the camp. “One doesn’t go relieve oneself in the bushes for hours,” would say Alcibiades, his fellow brother in arms. But before leaving, he knew he had to find out what had happened, to understand, and he asked the Voice, “What happened to me yesterday on the battlefield?”

“You were graced with a rare glimpse into the frequency of love at its highest level in a human being, to experience how it truly feels,” said the Voice.

“What do you mean by the *frequency* of love? I don’t understand what you say.”

“Love is a huge divine wave that ebbs and flows. It’s not an emotion. You’ll have the chance to contemplate that concept at length if you wish in this lifetime.”

“What? I’m not to die on the battlefield today? Is that what you’re saying?”

“If you’re prudent, like we know you can be, you’ll come out of this war alive.”

“Did you just say *we*? You never said *we* before. Who are you?”

“We are part of a collective that is here to help you discern your true self, and we say to you that—as you get to know yourself better—you can open a path for many people to discernment as well, and help them learn how to know themselves better if you wish.”

“If I wish?”

“Yes, if you wish. You have free will. You’re allowed to say *no*. Yesterday you experienced the power of love, and the peace and rise in consciousness it brings. Cast your mind back to all the events that came about to protect you in action. See the images unfolding in your head. Many gifts came with that wave you felt. It is all part of the Spirit of Love. Weren’t you able to fly high in the sky moments ago to gaze at the horizon?”

Indeed, he had had a look at the valley from above the trees for a split second. The vantage point from where he was sitting was fine—that he knew because he had chosen this spot wisely—but the vista encountered from above had been simply spectacular. Up there, he had seen the unseeable from his hiding place: the glow just before sunrise.

“But how am I to accomplish all of this?” he asked the Voice. I’m only a hoplite. I can barely read and write.”

“True, but you know how to talk brilliantly and sensibly to people,” said the Voice. “You do it all the time in Athens, and here with the soldiers, and they listen.”

Silence followed, and he remained pensive. With the sun fully risen, he knew he had to go back, but still he lingered. After a little while he replied, “And if I say *no*?”

“There will be other lifetimes for you to learn, and someone else will take this mission. There’s always someone else,” said the Voice.

He didn't like that answer, for he had a strong inclination for missions. The simple thought of being replaced by someone else didn't please him. Missions threw him into competitiveness and fierceness, and he liked that. He thrived on that. He knew he had a keen sense of justice, and could rely on perseverance and persuasion like none other, but above all, he really relished battles of the mind. Indeed, the Voice's answer did not agree with him at all! But as he was trying to formulate his next question, he heard the sound of footsteps approaching. Freezing on the spot, he wondered what to do next. Moments later, another voice whispered from behind, "Still there?"

Surprised, he looked about for the familiar voice in the underbrush and replied, "Alcibiades, what are you doing here? I thought we'd agreed you would remain at the camp in case... Besides, how did you know I was here?"

"You're predictable," said Alcibiades, chuckling.

Not good, he thought.

"There have been new developments," added his friend. "Come with me. I'll explain on the way down."

He got up and stretched, but as soon as he looked at Alcibiades, a long chain of images started unfolding in his mind, events occurring so quickly that he could barely keep up with the flow. But the last picture was clear: both he and Alcibiades were lying dead on the ground in a pool of blood. He then *knew* what he had to do, and in his mind he shouted as loud as he could to the Voice, "Yes, I will do it!" And in that very moment, Socrates saw in the void the whole collective smile.