

Spiritual *Kurukshetra*, An Unceasing and Unseen Warfare

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Recently, we heard about the unfortunate news of highly educated youngsters, from different parts of the world, travelling to a particular place, to be part of the ruthless fight for the establishment of a religious kingdom. Fanatic leaders of the so-called religious affiliations and extremists in politics are also inspiring many to fight against other fellow citizens. But, enlightened *gurus* of all ages teach that our fight is not against other humans, but, against our own destructive and dehumanising thoughts which is known as unseen warfare.

The *Kurukshetra* war in the Epic *Mahabharata* is interpreted by many as a symbolic depiction of the fight between good and evil in our minds. Originally the concept of *Jihad* in Islam was exclusively a spiritual struggle against evil. Unseen warfare or spiritual fight against negative thoughts and passions is a prominent theme in ancient Christian tradition. The focus of the Gospel teachings on the thoughts and desires behind human deeds, and the need for purification of heart, the core of human being, is very important. St. Paul's exhortation to bring every thought in to captivity to the obedience of Christ mentioned in II Corinthians 10: 15 is key to the theme of spiritual warfare.

Let us understand our real enemies as pride, hatred, lust and despair, which come to our mind either through our sense experience or through our memories. Pride has its associates like hypocrisy, untruthfulness, desire for self-glorification and luxury, superiority complex, arrogance, insulting attitude to others, jealousy, disobedience and disrespect to the parents and gurus, fanaticism and communalism. Hatred has its associates like false accusations, unjust criticism, backbiting, prejudice, anger, spiritual mental and physical harassment to others, and revengeful violence of all kinds. Lust has its associates like obsession with pornography, all kinds of sexual immorality, greed, addiction to luxury, gluttony, alcoholism, substance abuse, stealing and selfie culture. Frustration and accompanied thoughts or moods like anxiety, lethargy, hopelessness, lack of faith, stress, thoughts and acts of suicide etc. are also very negative. These four major kinds of enemies attack almost all humans. These enemies, if unchecked, can ruin the purity and integrity of our inner being, suppressing our human potential and possibilities. Being the victims of these enemies would mean to be a curse to the world around us.

Since these negative and destructive thoughts come to mind like suicide bombers or terrorists, unceasing watchfulness and scanning against them are recommended by the enlightened minds. They understand the teaching "keep your heart with all watchfulness" in Proverbs 4:22 in this sense. In the borders of all countries and at the entrance of all important institutions all over the world, soldiers or security guards stand keenly watching for any movement from enemies or unwanted intruders. Certain others keenly observe whether there is any enemy movement by looking at radars and surveillance machines. Likewise, keen observation and watchfulness in our mind with regard to the thoughts arise in mind are essential. When there is no light there, we may embrace enemy as our friends. As *Mahabharata* symbolically presents the union of the blind Dhritharashtra and Gandhari who blind folded herself deliberately producing hundred and one evildoers. It must be noted that the names of many of them start with the sound 'du' (Duryodhana,

Dussasana, Dusaha etc..) indicating *dusht* or evil. Likewise, if the mind is corrupt and blind, soul can also be suppressed and the union of them produce evil deeds.

When Arjuna, the most glorious warrior in the epic *Mahabharata*, was discouraged by his compassion to the Gurus and relatives on the other side of the battlefield, Krishna inspires him to fight mercilessly with detachment. Jesus' teaching 'if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away' (Matthew 18:9) also emphasises the mercilessness in spiritual or unseen warfare. Spiritual warriors are in a do or die situation. We are in a do or die situation in our unseen warfare.¹ Use of powerful weapons of the word of God, Lent and fasting, prayer and worship, meditative reading of the lives and teachings of saints are also very important to ensure victory in this warfare. St. Paul advises us to take the sword of the word of God in this fight (Ephesians 6:17).

Alliance with mighty kingdoms to fight against powerful enemies is the war tactic of all ages. In modern period, world witnessed this, when Kuwait sought the help of USA for being liberated from Iraq who conquered Kuwait. During the Pakistan war in 1971, India ensured the support of USSR. The greatest alliance which ensures victory in spiritual warfare is constant communion and trust in God Almighty. Arjuna and his brothers became victorious in Kurukshetra, the Mahabharata war, due to his unique charioteer Krishna. This is a beautiful presentation of the victory in spiritual warfare with the Divine help. Like *Kurukshetra*, wars in Old Testament can also be interpreted symbolically. Then the message 'Lord shall fight for you' (Exodus 14:14) is relevant in relation to the spiritual warfare. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are assisting and empowering those who believe and seek Divine help against the evil one or enslaving thoughts. Jesus Christ went out and overcame all temptations we face, all those spiritual enemies and became victorious. The One who boldly said during the temptation, 'Satan, depart from me' is with us. He is living forever to help us in our spiritual struggles². Those who humble themselves and surrender to the Lord, become victorious and further strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Unceasing union with Jesus, through prayers like Jesus prayer and sacraments, empower us to overcome thoughts of pride, hatred, lust and despair. The sixteenth century Venetian priest Lorenzo Scupoli rightly says 'Lord's desire to save you is greater than that of your enemies' desire to destroy you. Hence, fight and never weary of the labours of this warfare.'³ Above all, it is the help and support of God Almighty, who is open to all who humbly seek Divine assistance that gives victory in this warfare. The help of Christ, who had gone through all human temptations and passions and became victorious, is always available to us in this spiritual struggle. As night vanishes at the sunrise, dehumanising passions flee and vanish at the rise of genuine love of God.

Enlightened minds also remind us to fight against evil thoughts and destroy them at the very beginning itself. Otherwise, they will grow and destroy us and others around us. Abba Dorotheos of Gaza says "Do not allow a passion to harden into a habit. We must go on fighting and praying to God, night and day so that we do not fall into temptation."⁴ He explains this insight with the story of a *Guru* asking his disciple to uproot a grass, then a plant and then a big tree while they were walking together. By noticing the difficulty or impossibility of the disciple to uproot the tree, the *Guru* advises to uproot sins when they are very small. Delayed and reconciling approach to misguiding and damaging thoughts will be destructive later on (James 1:14, 15). The Chinese

classic work *The Art of War* clearly says that ‘‘Rapidity is the essence of War’’⁵ Rapid movement like a thunder bolt against the enemies is very decisive in spiritual warfare also. Many spiritual authors remind us that evil thoughts need to be destroyed when they are small thoughts against the saving rock, Jesus Christ.⁶

Blocking the roads which bring food stuff and weapons to the enemy soldiers is a key strategy to victory in war. Likewise, a planned attack against the breeding grounds of negative and destructive thoughts is very significant in spiritual warfare. Occasional repentance and confessions must be supported with initiative to avoid or destroy the sources. Using just mosquito bats inside the house, while doing nothing for the nearby defiled small pond which breeds mosquitoes abundantly, is the foolishness of the superficial spirituality. ‘‘Whatever one sows, that will he also reap’’ (Galatians 6:7). In present times, end of many sinful pipelines from all over the world, which develop many unnecessary thoughts are opened to our senses through Internet. Those who have no self control, discerning power or spiritual maturity are becoming victims and losing their lives. Such people may think of inner spiritual warfare as a foolish concept. But, God who renews all, gives hope to progress in unseen warfare, by cutting off all supply lines and supporting sources of sinful desires and thoughts.

Suppression of enemies or end of a war is not a guarantee that there will not be any attacks in future. Enemies will come again to attack and the war becomes a continuous process. This is an accepted fact in spiritual warfare. Hence, spiritual gurus teach us to take unseen warfare till the last breath of life. They warn us against vacation from this war. ‘‘If you give up, and go after worldly pleasures and then come back, then the fight will be incomparably harder, more acute, more painful and in addition less successful’’⁷. Most of the saintly followers of Christ have exhorted us about the need of unceasing repentance. The spiritual counsels of Mark, a fifth century monk in Asia Minor guide us thus: ‘‘Just as we eat and drink and speak and hear, so too by nature ought we to repent.’’⁸ Mark the Monk beautifully describes that repentance is perfected through three virtues: subjugating thoughts, praying without ceasing (I Thess.5.17), and patiently enduring afflictions that occur.⁹

The sacrament of baptism in the orthodox Christian tradition is an initiation in to this lifelong warfare. Just before anointing the candidate with the Holy Oil in baptism, the chief celebrant recites a prayer thus: ‘‘Lord, let your servant who has been counted among your soldiers ... may not be seized by the hostile armies.’’ Yes, we have been called in Christ to fight against evil in mind and also in society, unceasingly with the power of the Holy Spirit. The beautiful picture of St. George in a soldier’s dress killing a monster with a lance can be interpreted as a meaningful representation of the unseen spiritual warfare of each one of us. It must be noted that during the baptismal service the symbolic crown is removed by giving the hope that it will be awarded again at the end, if the candidate takes the spiritual war seriously and successfully throughout his or her life.

Many, who have evaluated the Second World War, think that a major reason for the defeat of Germany was due to its under-estimation of the red army of Russia. Many are defeated in life either because they underestimate the dehumanizing and misguiding thoughts or because they are ignorant of such enemies. Once destructive habits have been developed, there is no space for

discernment of thoughts because thoughts form in mind and immediately and automatically they are translated into actions. Even in such cases, there is hope with sincere repentance and special help of the Lord. In normal spiritual warfare an unceasing watchfulness and mercilessness with regard to sinful thoughts and attack against them with the spiritual weapons by the help of God guarantee success and peace.

Unseen Warfare is an unceasing warfare. War with our thoughts prevents us from warring with others. Spiritual warfare is a secret of our inner peace and also that of enthusiasm for good works for the well being of family life, Church, society and non-human creation. Unlike other wars, unseen warfare, if taken seriously, is rewarding; it protects life, contributes to the progress towards perfection and to peace in mind and the world. Victory in this by the help of our Eternal Helper leads us to further glorious heights of life.

Endnotes

¹ The famous Chinese war specialist Sun Tzu wrote 2500 Years ago in his famous book ‘The Art of War’ thus, “Throw your soldiers into positions whence there is no escape, and they will prefer death to flight. If they will face death, there is nothing they may not achieve. Officers and men alike will put forth their uttermost strength” Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, xi.23, (London: Mobius Book, 2006) p. 77)

² John 16:33, Revelation 3:21, Hebrew 2:18

³ Unseen Warfare, the *Spiritual Combat* and *Path to paradise* written by Lorenzo Scupoli edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood 1987) p.115

⁴ Abba Dorotheos, *Writings and Spiritual Teachings* (Idukki : Udhanashram Editions , 2010) p. 275

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, xi.19, (London: Mobius Book, 2006) p.74

⁶ Psalm 137:9

⁷ Unseen Warfare, the *Spiritual Combat* and *Path to paradise* written by Lorenzo Scupoli edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood 1987) p.115

⁸ Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood 2009) p. 161

⁹ Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood 2009) p. 154