

Arjun was an intelligent pupil. He listened attentively, talked sparingly and observed closely. Once during a school recess he stopped in front of his teacher, looked into her eyes and asked:

“Can you teach me what is Truth?”

“What do you mean?”

“What we should believe.”

“Why do you want to know what to believe? What one person believes, another will disbelieve. Just observe and experience.”

“But I want to learn the real Truth.”

“Do you see that beautiful bougainvillea in the schoolyard? You see it parched and wilting. How about giving it some water with the hose?”

“I want to be a doctor or an engineer, but not a gardener.”

“A doctor must heal and an engineer must irrigate; so get started.”

Arjun did not know what that had to do with the Truth; but he liked his teacher and went out to water the plant. When he returned, he asked if she would have some time after school to instruct him in Truth. Glancing at the door, she replied:

“You see those hinges; they are loose. Go fetch a screwdriver and fasten them before the door comes dangling down over someone’s head.”

“That’s the handyman’s job.”

“It could be your job.”

“But I plan to study medicine or engineering.”

“In either profession you’ll be busy fixing things. Go practice now.”

Arjun knew where he could find tools. He came with a screwdriver and secured the door. The teacher rushed to the window and looked down at the playground, where she heard a child crying.

“That little girl has stepped on some brambles. Go and remove the thorn from her foot.”

“Her mother can do it; she must be around. I saw her clean the floor.”

“As a doctor, you have the right to heal her.”

Arjun felt challenged. So he went out to the little girl on the playground and gently removed the thorn from her heel. He felt that by obeying he would deserve to be taught what is Truth. But the teacher had other intents.

“Class is just about to start. I am going to have Mukhul sit next to you, so you can take him under your wings and make him feel that someone cares about him. Can you do that?”

“Why should I look after Mukhul? He is such a trouble-maker and always busy beating up others. No one likes him.”

“That’s exactly why he punches everyone. He feels lonely and disliked.”

“He deserves to be disliked. I don’t want him sitting next to me.”

“Give him a chance and he may turn a new leaf. I know you can do it. Doctors and engineers give difficult cases a chance to work.”

So Arjun stopped arguing and when class resumed even helped Mukhul by letting him look over his shoulder at his own notebook and whispering an occasional encouragement. The teacher observed and was pleased.

“When you go home tonight, you’ll be thinking of the wilting plant, the creaking door, the crying child and difficult Mukhul. Tomorrow we shall continue the conversation.”

“You mean, tomorrow you will tell me what is Truth?”

“We’ll see.”

Next morning Arjun arrived in class two hours late. The teacher waited till recess before asking what happened. The pupil replied:

“I am sorry, teacher. As I walked to school, I saw an old man lying on a wall by the roadside. He beckoned me to come and asked me to stay with him while he lay dying; he did not want to be alone.”

“And what did you do?”

“I could hear you say to me: If you want to become a doctor, you must be able to help people die well.”

“How did you help him?”

“I sang a song that came to mind at that moment: a prayer for rain. He smiled and asked me to sing it again. Then he asked me to massage his

arms and legs, because they were numb. And then he wanted to hear the song for the third time and died as I sang.”

“You tell me now: what is Truth?”, asked the teacher.

“What we do with our hands, feet and eyes and voice. I have been thinking: if we start seeing God in everything that lives, we would not need to ask that question.”

The teacher smiled approvingly and said nothing. Arjun was grateful that she led him to make this discovery without ever prodding him to believe or to disbelieve things over which many people argue.