

# MANY FACES OF COURAGE AND ARTSAKH'S FUTURE

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**By Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles, 12 November 2020**

The *Laches* is a Socratic dialogue about courage written by his student Plato. Throughout the dialogue, two generals (Nicias and Laches) attempt to define the nature of courage while Socrates mediates and responds.

Gen. Laches states that all cases of courage are "a sort of endurance of the soul." Socrates disagrees and says that not every kind of endurance is courage. The general maintains that courage is seen in the brave (soldier, general) who stands up in battle and does not flee. Socrates asks if it is not possible to show courage in retreating and that, at times, by not fleeing in battles one shows not courage but foolishness.

Socrates defeats the generals' arguments and proves to them they do not know what courage is. In the end, Socrates suggests that the whole company should go back to school and that he will also do so himself.

We, the Armenians around the world, should go back to "school" as well.

When I read about the violence against the government of Prime Minister Pashinyan, the wise Socratic definition of courage resonated when he said that, at times, when not fleeing in battles one shows not courage but foolishness. The enemy was too strong and the fate of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) was in the balance.

Pashinyan signed an unfavorable and lopsided agreement for the sake of peace so as to reduce further losses. He agreed to give most of the Azerbaijani regions plus historical territories belonging to Armenians recaptured by Armenian soldiers during the 1991-1994 war with Azerbaijan. Altogether, 30 percent of Nagorno-Karabakh of some 12,000 square kilometers (4,600 sq. m.), 300 out of 900 rural settlements were lost including the crown jewel city of Shushi.

Some will consider the act cowardice. Others may look upon it as courage and prudence since the enemy was bigger and stronger than the Armenian brave soldiers had to face. The enemy was large for it consisted of Azerbaijan, Turkey, jihadist mercenaries, and Israeli-made weapons and advisors including the petro dollars of the adversary.

The enemy was stronger for its arsenal of warfare consisted of cutting edge military weapons and equipment whereas Armenian soldiers were armed with vintage Soviet Union era weapons suitable for a traditional face-to-face combat rather than conducting war from a distance, such as by using unmanned drones, which played havoc on our brave soldiers.

Our centuries-old friend, Russia, stood on the sideline. When the Armenians were outnumbered, outgunned, Russia pretended to have the morality of neutrality. Russia failed to come to the rescue when Armenia was subjected to aggression (shelling and bombing civilian targets and their infrastructure.)

The enemy also attacked the Republic of Armenia and yet the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), of which Armenia is a member, looked the other way. In July 2020, the Tavush province (marz) of Armenia was shelled; again on Sept, 27, 2020 Vardenis (a town in Armenia) was shelled. President Vladimir Putin of Russia hid behind lame excuses for not upholding the mission of CSTO to protect a member of the pact when it is attacked by external enemy forces.

Under the dire circumstances, Pashinyan did the right thing: instead of being foolishly courageous to stand and fight to the last Armenian soldier and thus compromise the chance to come back and defeat the enemy at a later date.

According to Socrates, Pashinyan made the right move to stop the hemorrhage of the Armenian soldiers fighting, albeit valiantly, with proverbial sticks and stones.

The 17 political organizations, storming the parliament and trying to oust the prime minister in the midst of war were not only shortsighted, but also lacked patriotism to show solidarity to win the war. Incidentally, most of those who complained about the prime minister were young people. Why were they not in the army to defend the motherland if they wanted to continue with the war? Why not go to the front and fight the enemy instead of fighting your own people?

Those 17 political organizations should also go back to school for they do not know what courage means. Too often, people mistakenly assume courage is pursuing the enemy or something without fear. Courage is not the absence of fear. As Socrates implies, courage is acknowledging fear and going forward with your eyes open. If you find the enemy overwhelming, do not get massacred. Retreat, regroup, re-strike when the time is right.

There are too many faces of courage, but we often break down courage into two types. The first type is the situational or circumstantial type of courage. When faced with a situation where there is one action that is universally agreed to be courageous, one can, if he is made of strong stuff, demonstrate courage in reacting to the situation correctly such as firing back or repelling the enemy. Let's assume you are a captain. If your regiment is about to charge onto a battlefield, you can demonstrate situational courage by joining the charge or by demonstrating situational cowardice by staying and hiding in the trenches when your soldiers face the enemy. Often, the situationally courageous hero will receive rewards and medals.

The second type of courage is moral courage. When faced with a situation where he is morally uncomfortable, the morally courageous hero speaks his or her mind about it, no matter what risks he puts himself into by doing so. For example, if there is a war going on, and you hold a leadership position (e.g., a prime minister) you can demonstrate moral courage by giving the order to stop the conflict when you see the enemy has the upper hand. On the other hand, you can demonstrate moral cowardice (i.e., apathy) by not stopping the killing of your soldiers by a superior enemy for fear of criticism from the opposition.

It is worth noting that the results of demonstrating moral courage are not nearly as favorable as

those of demonstrating situational courage. Often, the morally courageous hero will make people uncomfortable. These agitated people will react with insults, derision, and threats if the morally courageous hero refuses to abdicate. As a result, while the situational hero is universally praised by the people, the moral hero is often rejected as a scoundrel coward. The moral hero often finds himself in tension with the opinions of others. So does Pashinyan find himself in conflict with other political parties after signing to stop the war? According to Socrates definition of courage, both Pashinyan and President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan are moral heroes.

We can see courage in physical, social, intellectual and emotional situations. In other words, there are many faces of courage. Poets are perennially focused on the subject of courage because it touches us at our deepest core, moving us to the essence of what it means to be alive.

Requiring the resignation of the nation's leader is adding insult to injury. A lot is lost to the enemy. We do not want them to enjoy another loss from an implosion from within by creating a chaos at home.

A strong coalition of Armenia, Artsakh and Diaspora does not exist nor does a world organization representing the Armenian Diaspora. We have only to blame ourselves for lack of preparedness for such an onslaught of military push against Artsakh. Azerbaijan had given us ample warnings of their preparedness, of their resolve to take over Nagorno-Karabakh, of their almost-daily border clashes--and yet, the Armenians complacent based on their victory of the 1994 war.

Here are some ideas to alleviate the situation for the Republic of Armenia and for the Republic of Artsakh, to put us on the road to recovery. We all want to see the Phoenix bird fly again, and so here are some food for thought, not in any order of importance:

It is better to go back to "school" and correct our mistakes.

Let this be a great lesson for us to prepare for the future.

It is better to lose some than the whole.

It is better to retreat than be defeated or destroyed.

It is better to lose part than to lose the whole.

Retreat is not defeat.

We need to regroup.

Form a defense fund.

Learn to use mercenaries.

We need to produce arms.

The struggle is not over.

We have still part of Artsakh, the capital city of Stepanakert.

We are lucky to have a courageous Prime Minister such as Pashinyan.

We are equally happy to have a heroic President of Artsakh, Arayik Harutyunyan.

It is better to go back to regroup than face the enemy unprepared.

Work on recognition of Artsakh.

Stop wasting our time and energy by scapegoating.

Most importantly, let us thank the families of our fallen soldiers.

And show our appreciation of our war heroes for many years to come.

There are two sides to a story: sad side to learn from mistakes and happy side to celebrate and plan for the future to win. Let us be happy that we can still salvage the integrity of Artsakh in due time.

Courage is not all risky actions. It is the result of measured, timely, and appropriate actions. Each one of us can make a great difference. At times, it is very hard to see whether we are pursuing something with heroism versus reckless abandon. Let us consider ourselves courageous to face the future, to see the whole of Artsakh again as the beautiful garden of the Armenian nation with the blessing of Shushi overlooking Stepanakert from the top of the mountain.

## Comments



**Michael Tcholakian** - 2020-12-05 17:30:02

Dear Professor, I do agree with your thoughts about the situation in which we all were. It was not easy for anyone. What made us disheartened were the lies till the end -- Nov. 9th. Why the defense ministry speaker Arzrouni was telling "Յաղդելու ենք եւ Յաղթած ենք": Some were saying why he did not stop the war earlier. Well, we were trying but Azeris were refusing. We had no choice. We all know Pashinyan made some mistakes but we should not blame everything on him. And by the way, why a small nation like our Armenia, should have 17-19 parties. USA with 330 millions has only 2 main parties. Canada has 38 million people and has 3-5 Parties.



**Michael Tcholakian** - 2020-12-05 17:12:59

Dear Vartan, You are absolutely right. WE, the diaspora should be part of the collective to help our homeland. THEY, Hayasdansik, never accept that. No wonder here we are. They only want financial help and that is all. "Give us money and forget the rest. You cannot help us by your wisdom; we do not need that; we are smart enough." So and so forth... That's what we get.



**annie demirjian** - 2020-11-14 15:26:27

I would like to also add that the authority on "Why Nations Fail" is Daron Acemoglu, a prominent Armenian from Turkey who is world renown and teaches at MIT. He provides expert advice to governments and institutions around the world. Acemoglu is even consulted by Turkish institutions - academic, CSO, not to mention US, Canada, Europe. When I lectured on this subject in Armenia, no one asked 'Is Armenia a failed state? yes or no - what are the answers. After centuries of Ottoman and Soviet subjugation, nation building is not in our DNA and consulting experts is not a bad thing. Recognizing failure and understanding the symptoms of State Failure is the first step to building a resilient state. In my travels I have noticed that almost all former Soviet and Arab countries refuse to acknowledge and engage in a serious open dialogue about their nations' failure. This is also the curse of the traditional middle income countries- with an attitude that 'we know it all and outsiders have nothing to teach us.' Alas, this is why nations fail to learn from their own and others mistakes. But I would like to think that there is still hope for Armenia and especially when diaspora and Armenia come together to tackle the 21st century issues. Let's turn this tragedy into an opportunity for us. annie



**Jean Adjemian** – 2020-11-14 14:04:08

I can not thank you enough Professor A. Demirdjian for a most erudite, rational, comprehensive commentary of the signature and aftermath of our "defeat" in Artsakh.



**Annie Demirjian** – 2020-11-14 12:30:52

Thank you Prof. Demirjian for your thoughtful essay. Fully agree with you. I worked in Armenia at the highest level and I must say that our diaspora and Armenia differences are too wide and deep. The intelligentsia in Armenia doesn't know how to work with us and vice versa is also true. I agree, we need to regroup, and move forward. Learn from our mistakes - something our Diaspora and Armenia leadership (lots of male leadership) is incapable of doing. There are some fundamental questions we need to ask before moving forward - how do we effectively regroup and plan one path forward to deal with - economic, political, geopolitical, cultural issues. Immediately, how do we deal with the humanitarian crisis, relocating Artsakh Armenians back, other refugee issues. How do we work with the international community, and yes how do we prepare for the next military invasion, in a modern warfare. How do we deal with this dialogue? Where do we start in the Diaspora to help our countrymen and women in Armenia and Artsakh?



**Hovanes Boyadjian** – 2020-11-14 12:08:53

We now face disunity; a bigger danger than the enemy's military. The diaspora's real work must start NOW. First by standing with and supporting Pashinyan and when things calm down digging into our pockets and putting our efforts in making Armenia stand on its own feet. Without trust in the leadership financial help will be scant if any.



**Bernard Nazarian** – 2020-11-14 09:33:07

I'm a little confused the learned professor has not said a word about our courageous Prime Minister's equally courageous wife, Mrs Anna Hakobyan, and her "Erato" brigade who, apparently contrary to our PM's 'moral courage' position, have taken a contrary 'situational courage' position and are still bravely 'situationally' defending Artsakh. I also wish our learned professor would have dealt with all the army of incompetent and inexperienced young fools our courageous PM has appointed to key sensitive security, defence and diplomatic positions in the last critical 30 months period, which have rendered our country divided into two black and white camps internally, as well as internationally alienated and made us defenseless on all fronts. Can the learned professor please kindly explain and advise if these fools have achieved this great fit by having moral or situational courage? Thank you.



**darwin jamgochian** - 2020-11-14 08:49:35

Vartan is absolutely right. Since, independence, Armenia has been on the wrong track. Why aren't there Armenian bonds for sale to the diaspora? Why wasn't Richard Hovanissian's son allowed to run for public office? Why did Kocharyan and Sarkisian become multi millioaires?



**Vartan** - 2020-11-14 04:25:58

Unfortunately, since its independence Armenia has neglected the potential of its huge diaspora & has never used it. In your food for thought, this point has to be included in the list & probably should be one of the top points of importance.



**Ashot Baghdassarian** - 2020-11-14 03:01:20

Thank you Prof. Demirdjian for this short discourse on courage which will hopefully help us evaluate the many faces of the crisis that our people is going through. Excellent!