

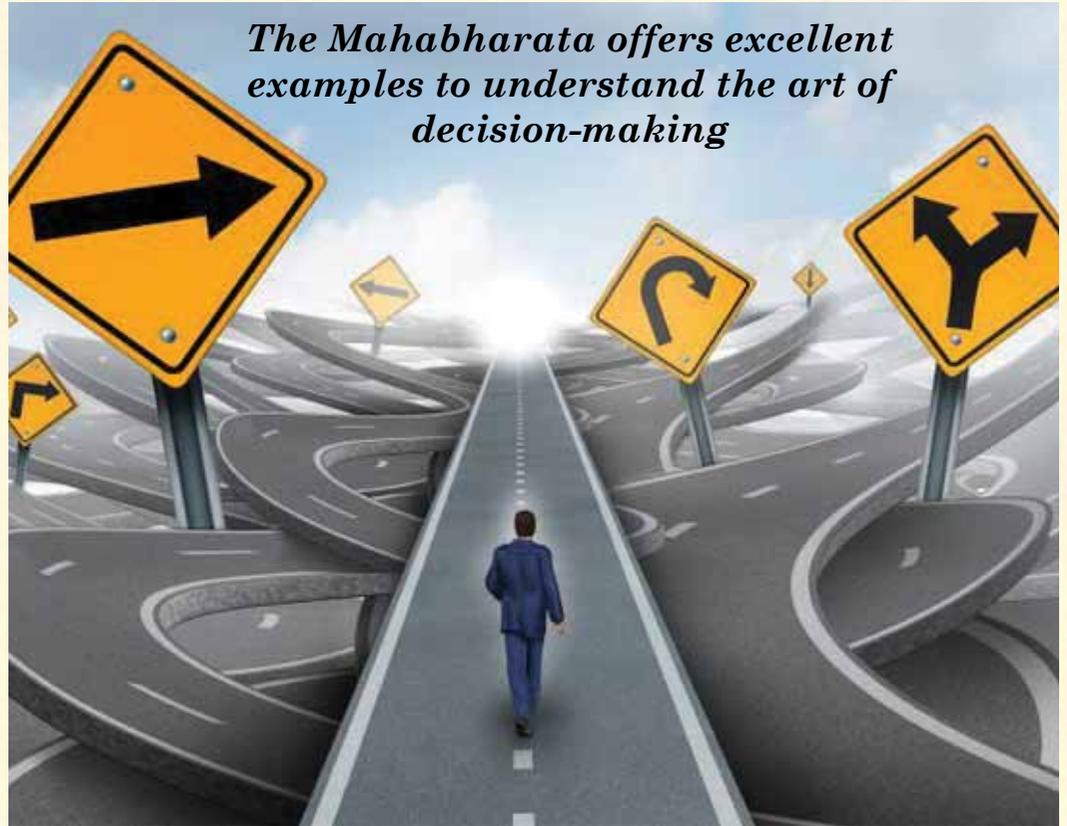
GIVE THOUGHT



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EPIC DECISIONS

The Mahabharata offers excellent examples to understand the art of decision-making



Is decision-making a feeling-based art, or a logic-based science? When decisions are based on feelings and love is based on logic, both tend to meet with disappointments.

What is more important than knowing how to make good decisions is knowing when to make those decisions. And what's more important than knowing when to make decisions is knowing when not to make them!

Here are seven circumstances in the Mahabharata that reveal when and how decisions ought not to be made.

Fear-driven decisions: The tortoise shell protects as long as it is above the animal, but as soon as the tortoise flips over, the shell is rather useless and the tortoise flaps around helplessly.

Similarly, a person who takes decisions out of fear flaps around, and takes stubborn, abrupt steps.

In the Mahabharata, Ashwatthama - when cornered by the Pandavas - took the most foolish decision of unleashing the deadly Brahmastra capable of destroying the whole world. This decision stemmed from his intense

fear and need for his own security. The Brahmastra was meant to obscure his fear and create fear and insecurity for the Pandavas, which ultimately backfired.

Affinity-driven decisions: A cloth hung on a hook, takes shelter from it. The same hook tears the cloth, when it is pulled away forcefully. Just like the cloth, those who take decisions based on unnatural affinity to people they are hooked to, get torn apart!

In the Mahabharata, since all of Karna's decisions were based on his assumed affinity to his friend Duryodhana, he was torn apart between his loyalty to dharma and friendship. The hook of friendship gripped him tightly and when decisions had to be taken, his dharma was torn apart.

Grief-driven decisions: A drop of ink spreads on and pervades through blotting paper. Similarly, grief too begins with a drop. But when it falls onto the blotting paper of the uncontrolled mind, it percolates into

every aspect of life.

In the Mahabharata, Gandhari made two decisions blinded by extreme grief, and ended up with large-scale destruction.

The first instance was when she realised that Kunti gave birth to a son before her. She struck her womb in envy, resulting in her hundred sons carrying the spirit of envy in their lives. The second was when she felt that Krsna was the cause of her children's death, and cursed his Yadu dynasty to destruction.

Joy-driven decisions: When a hilarious joke triggers uncontrollable laughter, at some point tears roll out from the eyes. The tears indicate that one has gone out of balance. Just like the body has a check and balance mechanism, life should also be based on a similar mechanism. Often the most crucial decisions of life are taken on a high, when there is too much joy or success. When one's head is in the clouds, it is difficult to judge ground realities.

In the Mahabharata, the king of

Virata was happy beyond imagination on hearing that his son Uttara had defeated all the Kauravas alone in a battle. His joy was so overwhelming that he disregarded and even humiliated Yudhishtira. When decisions are taken in a fit of joy, they bring sorrow.

Anxiety-driven decisions: When running for life, will one even have the desire to eat or drink, let alone the ability to do it? Just like one must have a stable body to relish the joy of tasty food and drink, a stable mind is a prerequisite to relish the satisfaction of tastefully taken decisions.

In the Mahabharata, all of Bhishma's decisions were anxiety-driven. His anxiousness to protect the throne of Hastinapur led him to take many wrong decisions. More than that, his anxiety made him unable to take decisions sometimes.

Opinion-driven decisions: Others' opinions are like sticky notes put on the walls of our minds. But before we use those opinions in our decision-making, we should establish clarity in our hearts by developing the skill of personal discrimination.

When dharma becomes the foundation of the heart, clarity becomes the background on which others' opinions can be judged.

In the Mahabharata, Duryodhana's opinion was constantly moulded by his uncle Shakuni towards the systematic destruction of the dynasty. Since Duryodhana did not have proper clarity of the background of dharma, he blindly followed his uncle, not seeing his dubious agenda and the deep ditch he was shoving him into. But though Krsna also moulded Arjuna's opinion, the latter used dharma's clarity lens to analyse every strategy the former suggested.

Only when one finds an opinion coming his way that stands the test of clarity based on principles and is not driven by the personal agenda of the advisor, should one consider the advice.

Weakness-driven decisions: A weak person uses a stick to balance himself and the stick becomes his life support. Instead, if he uses that stick to hit people around him, his weakness becomes his malevolence. When decisions are taken focusing on weaknesses, we only over-sympathise with our disability rather than what is right.

In the Mahabharata, Dhritarashtra had one weakness - his blindness. All his decisions were based on his meditations and frustrations about this weakness. Each time he made a decision, he always brought out his stick of weakness and lashed out at others, reflecting his vicious mind. When your weakness becomes your malevolence, instead of attracting sympathy you attract apathy into your life. Mahabharata is all about the science of decision-making; the greatest secrets of good and bad decision-making and their repercussions are placed in front of us. When the Pandavas had to take a decision whether to fight the war or not, they consulted Krsna and all their friends, carefully weighing the advantages of the war and its consequences. Their personal

understanding of dharma and selfless guidance from genuine friends without hidden agendas helped them take good decisions. When Duryodhana had to take a decision about the gambling match, he kept it a secret and consulted only the scheming Shakuni. His personal lack of understanding of dharma and self-centred guidance drove him to take bad decisions that resulted in short-term gain and long-term loss.

In conclusion, good decisions are natural outcomes of stable minds using stable intelligence in stable situations with the desire to have stability internally and externally, thereby choosing a stable path. A stable mind is free from the influence of debilitating emotions like fear, unnatural affinity, grief, anxiety, etc. When your intelligence is unstable, the mind is unstable, the situation is unstable, and people who are guiding you are unstable, how can stable decisions be made?

Making timely decisions is a critical skill. Equally critical is the decision of not making a decision.

Fear drives you to take abrupt steps out of insecurity, which ultimately backfire. Decisions based on extreme affinity tear you away from the path of dharma. Grief makes you blind, and decisions made in grief can end up causing large-scale destruction; whereas decisions coming from joy are unbalanced, unchecked, and can result in sorrow.

Anxiety leads to ineffective and untimely decisions causing all-round instability. Decisions

based on others' opinions imply lack of clarity. Clarity comes from the understanding of dharma and only opinions that stand the test of principles should be considered.

Decisions stemming from one's weaknesses reflect self-sympathy rather than what is right. Such decisions bring in apathy.

Only a stable mind, free from fear, anger, grief, and other emotions, is qualified to make positive and progressive decisions. ■

