

Installment eight: Orange: Offer fair and kind treatment to all people
We affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations

Our story thus far...

In hopes of fulfilling an ancient prophecy, a young boy named Jared, his best friend Delia, and a funny-looking magical being named Lou are traveling to the Land of Dreams to face the Mirror of Justice. This is the second of seven key tasks that must be completed in order to bring peace and prosperity to a war-torn world.

Continued...

They had climbed high into the mountains when Lou announced one evening, "From here on, you're on your own, Jared."

"On my own?" Jared asked. "But what am I supposed to do?"

"Have you ever heard of a vision quest?" asked Lou.

"No," answered Jared.

"Well, when a person gets to be about your age, he or she has to go out into the wild, without food, or shelter, or company, for three days. It's a rite of passage, and if you do it right, a dream or a vision or a sign will come to you that will have great meaning."

"Okay, then," said Jared. He stood up and slung his backpack on.

"Wait," said Lou. "I'm afraid you can't take that with you. It's got to be just you. We'll wait here and keep your things safe."

"Can't I bring anything? Nothing at all? To pass the time, or to keep me warm at night?"

"No. Not if it's to be a true vision quest. When you get there, you have to just sit, and be alone with yourself."

Reluctantly, Jared handed his backpack to Delia, and with one final hug for each of his friends, he headed off. "See you in three days," he called back, just before vanishing over the crest of the hill.

Jared walked for several hours until he found a somewhat sheltered spot with water near by. Then he sat down and tried to do as Lou had instructed. It was really hard. He got distracted a lot. A bug would crawl on him. Then his nose would itch. Then he'd get thirsty, or he'd get a cramp and need to stand up and walk around for a bit.

The second day was only a little better than the first. Now he was really, really hungry, and his empty stomach distracted him, too. Every few minutes, his stomach would growl or a cloud would pass over the sun or he'd get frustrated and need to stretch.

By the third day, he was terrified he would fail at this task. Nothing special had happened, and his discomfort kept him from feeling peaceful or focused or anything other than lonely and afraid. He finally fell into a restless sleep.

In his dream, he found himself suspended high in the air, with clouds obscuring his view of the ground, but with a sure sense that should he fall, he would not survive. A disembodied voice boomed, "So here you are. Are you ready to face the Mirror of Justice? I rather think not."

"I am," said Jared. "Though I'm awfully scared."

"Fear is the luxury of an untrained mind!" boomed the voice. Then, "behold, the mirror."

Suspended in front of Jared was an oval shaped, normal looking mirror. He saw his own pale, freckled face. His own messy hair. He had a smudge of dirt on his cheek, which he tried to rub off. As he did, the images in the mirror began to swirl. Suddenly, he was watching an exchange between himself and Delia, a few weeks earlier.

"...It's my job to save the whole world! You...you just have to tag along. You don't even have anything important to do, like Lou does, showing the way," Jared saw himself saying.

Jared winced. Even to his own ears, he sounded like a spoiled brat. "Look at you. You weren't even fair to your own best friend. What kind of a champion are you?" the voice boomed. Jared's heart sank, and he felt the rest of him begin to sink, as well. Panicked, he looked down. Swirling clouds covered his feet, and they were moving up his legs toward his knees.

"But I apologized! I made it up to her! She forgave me!"

"You realized on your own that you had been unfair?" the voice asked.

Jared was tempted to lie and say "yes." He felt the word on the tip of his tongue....but he couldn't. "No," he answered. "My friend Lou had to help me understand what I'd done. He told me to walk a mile in her shoes, and when I did, I felt terrible. That's when I apologized."

Jared closed his eyes, expecting to plummet toward the earth. When he didn't, his eyes flew open. Clouds covered him to mid thigh, but he was steady. He looked up into the mirror again. This time, he watched as he entered the miserable little town where the people were so frightened by Lord Benedict and his mercenaries that they wouldn't even come out of their homes. He heard his speech, his pep talk, where he tried to give hope

to the poor, ragged people. He watched as he and his friends were captured and dragged off by mercenaries.

“Here you spoke out of turn, and your friends almost paid the price,” the voice boomed. “Surely it would have been wiser to keep a low profile?”

“Maybe,” said Jared, and felt himself sink a little lower. Now the clouds reached to his belly button. “I just couldn’t stay silent. What Lord Benedict had done was so wrong! I couldn’t right the wrong, at least not just then, but I could give the people a little bit of hope, to make it easier for them to keep on trying.”

The scene in the mirror changed. Jared watched as some of the braver villagers stood up to the mercenaries, only to be captured and dragged off, their belongings confiscated, their crops burned. “Do you see what you have done?” the voice boomed.

Jared wanted to cry. It looked like he’d only managed to make things worse. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I hate to see people suffering because of me.”

However, the voice continued in a kinder voice. “No, Jared. They suffer not because of you, but because of Benedict’s greed. Your words gave them the courage to stand up to the mercenaries. If you keep watching, you will see how more and more people resisted Benedict’s rule. In the end, so many people were imprisoned that Benedict had no one to work the fields. He had to parley with the peasants, and has lifted some of his harsher rules.”

Jared looked up, hopeful. Perhaps he had made a difference! “Then I did the right thing?”

“Yes,” said the voice, “you did...then. But only a few days later...”

The scene in the mirror changed again. This time, it showed he and Delia by the river, doing the dishes after their meal with the two runaway children. “...We have a job to do. I’m as sad as you are to hear their story, but we’ve got important places to go, important things to do, and I’m worried we’re running out of time,” he heard himself saying.

“But we did help them! We did!” he cried out, as the clouds climbed a few more inches.

“You were not so much a part of that “we” at the time...” the voice continued, and Jared again heard his own voice speaking words he was not proud of.

“...We lost precious time... I mean, the little guy was cute and all, but what does he have to do with us, really? I think it was bad luck they found us...”

Ashamed, Jared bowed his head and saw the clouds continuing to rise. He was up to his neck, now. His heart was pounding. He expected to start falling any second now. He felt panicked, terrified, he couldn’t think straight...

He remembered the words the voice had spoken earlier. “Fear is the luxury of an untrained mind,” and he tried to calm his fears so that he could think again.

“Listen,” he said, “I’m only twelve. I’m still learning. I’m not here for my own sake. I’m not looking for riches or fame or fortune. I’m here because I want to help. I want the world to be a better, safer place...not just for me, but for everybody. If I seem a little selfish sometimes, well, I don’t want to be that way. I’m trying to change. Is there anything I can say or do to convince you to let me pass this trial?”

Jared waited. The voice was silent. He felt the cold wetness of the cloud penetrating his thin pants. He closed his eyes, and this time focused on his longing for peace for the world, for everybody, not just himself. After a time he opened his eyes.

The clouds had vanished, and he still hovered in mid air. Opposite him, beating his wings slowly to stay aloft, an amber colored dragon hovered. Unlike the gigantic dragon Krasnova, this dragon was smaller than the ones Jared had read about-- about the size a horse...with wings twice the length of its body.

“Yantarov,” Jared thought he recognized this voice as Krasnova’s, “He is a boy. Give him a break.”

“Humph,” said the booming voice. “I will reserve judgment.”

Then he addressed Jared directly. “Boy, you are safe for now. I withhold my judgment, and my blessing, and I give you instead the opportunity to prove yourself in the days and weeks to come.”

“Thank you,” said Jared, bowing his head.

“You’ve always been a tough cookie,” he heard Krasnova say wryly, as the scene with the amber dragon faded, and he found himself back on the side of the mountain, with dawn beginning to break. He felt a new weight around his neck, and reached up to find, hung on a leather thong, a small, tear-drop shaped piece of amber, with a tiny insect trapped inside. It felt warm against his skin.

“Thank you,” he said again, holding it reverently. “I’ll remember.”

He stood up and walked back down the hill to where his friends were waiting for him, humbled, but with a heart full of gratitude and love.

Dragon Task: Acting with justice, equity, and compassion means that we are called to do lots of things we might rather not do. We share our things, we help people who are having a hard time, and we care when bad things happen, even if we can’t do anything about it. This week, talk about times when you’ve done these things, and times when you haven’t. How were they different?

