

Joan of Arc
Daughter of God
By Nakin Lenti

At age seventeen, Jehanne La Pucelle (1412-1431) or, Joan of Arc, as she is popularly known, claimed a mandate from God to liberate France from decades of English domination. Since the time of William the Conqueror in 1066, successive English kings, through intermarriage and inheritance, claimed sovereignty over large areas of France, which they used as their personal fiefdoms. The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) was an attempt by the English kings to unite France and England under their own crown. At a crucial time in French history she was able to unite the country and turn the tide of the Hundred Years' War decisively in France's favor.

She burst onto the scene quite suddenly, a simple illiterate farm girl of seventeen with no training except in the domestic arts of spinning and sewing, and vowed to succeed where other experienced military leaders had failed. Some viewed her as a foolish upstart, hopelessly naïve, or, possibly insane, in any case, not a person to be taken seriously. Others came to the conclusion, through signs and miracles, that perhaps she really was an instrument of the Divine and should be given a chance to prove herself. Either way she wouldn't be denied. She saw God as the Doer, and looked upon herself as a willing instrument in His hands no matter how outrageous it seemed to others.

In his book, *How to Be a True Channel*, Swami Kriyananda says, "Channeling is the transmitting of inspiration received from a source other than the ego." He says that the conscious preparation for one to become a channel may have taken place in a prior lifetime. Thus a peasant may receive the divine guidance to lead an army. Far from inviting such guidance, he may even reject it – at least at first. And yet he may go on to become one of the famous generals of history. Such was the case of Joan of Arc.

In her own words she said:

When I was thirteen, I heard a voice from God to help me to govern myself. The first time, I was terrified. I saw it many times before I knew that it was St. Michael. He told me that Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret would come to me, and that I must follow their counsel for it was at our Lord's command.

They told me that my king would be restored to his kingdom, despite his enemies. Twice and thrice a week the voice told me that I must depart and go into France and that I would raise the siege before Orleans. It told me to go to Vaucouleurs, to Robert de Baudricourt, captain of the town, who would give me men to go with me. And I answered the voice that I was a poor girl who knew nothing of riding and warfare.

For four years she kept silent about the voices until she felt certain that this was God's will. Robert de Baudricourt, though skeptical, at first, agreed to supply her with men and arms just as her counsel had predicted.

Meanwhile the military situation of the king and his supporters was growing more desperate by the day. France at this point was all but defeated. The King thought it just a matter of time before he would have to seek refuge with his allies in Scotland or Spain. In his desperation, perhaps, he was willing to listen to the maid or to anyone else who could help save his kingdom. Upon their first meeting she said to him:

I bring you news from God that our Lord will give you back your kingdom, bringing you to be crowned at Reims, and driving out your enemies. In this I am God's messenger. Set me bravely to work and I will raise the siege of Orleans.

After three weeks of hearings, the Church at Poitiers approved her claims and declared that she was neither witch nor a heretic. She was given troops to command and the rank of captain.

With God's guidance, Jehanne (Joan) led the troops to a decisive victory over the English at the battle of Orleans in May 1429 even though she was seriously wounded. This was followed by successive victories at Jargeau, Meung, Beaugency, Patay, and the capture of

Troyes thus opening the road to Reims where the French kings, traditionally, had been crowned for over a thousand years. Fear of her leadership was so formidable that at the battle of Patay most of the English troops fled the battlefield at her approach and eighteen hundred soldiers were captured. Under the banner of God and king, she gave new hope to a beaten and demoralized people. Everywhere she was hailed the savior of France, and given a place of honor next to the king during his coronation at Reims, July 17, 1429.

After five months of fighting, her impatience to finish the war brought Jehanne into conflict with Charles's hesitant nature and inept leadership as well as his treacherous advisors, who hated her. The plan was to attack Paris the day after the coronation and drive out the English before they had a chance to regroup. Charles, not really a military man, dithered for weeks believing he could negotiate a truce with the Burgundians, England's chief ally, without whom an English invasion was not possible.

They had no previous history of keeping their word with Charles. They thought him a fool and clearly were buying time for the English. Even though her Counsel assured her time and again that Paris would fall, she received no clear guidance on what her role, if any, should be. After weeks of delay in an abortive, half-hearted, attempt on the city, she was made the scapegoat for which the king and his advisors who were at fault for this defeat and she began to lose favor at court.

It wasn't until the following April that she was able to take the field again at which time her voices let it be known that she would be taken prisoner by the English, but they wouldn't say where or when. She pleaded with them, but they said:

It must be Jehanne. It is God's will and nothing can prevent it. Do not be downcast but hold onto your faith knowing that He will help you.

At the battle of Compiegne, she was captured by the Burgundians and later sold to the English for 20,000 pounds (several hundred thousand dollars in modern money).

No words can adequately describe Charles's ingratitude in leaving the maid to her fate. Had she become a liability because her insistence on war was at odds with his own ideas:

worthless treaties and negotiations? Had his treacherous advisors, Tremoille and Regnault, archbishop of Reims, finally succeeded in turning the king against her? We may never know. What we do know is that the English wanted her dead, and they were determined, at all costs, to take her life.

At the infamous trial in Rouen presided over by the unscrupulous Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, and a puppet of the Burgundian party, Joan stood accused of witchcraft and heresy, charges that she was cleared of in Poitiers less than year earlier. She was not allowed an advocate, and, though accused in an ecclesiastical court, she was illegally confined in a secular prison where she was kept chained by the neck, hands, and feet and allowed no spiritual privileges—Mass and Holy Communion.

Her accusers pressed her again and again with trick questions regarding her visions, but upon many points she refused to answer. Cauchon and his cohorts tried to browbeat her into submission by denying her food and sleep, but her attitude was always fearless and forthright.

In their demand that she submit to the “Church Militant”, she said:

I believe that our holy father the Pope of Rome, the bishops, and the other churchmen are there to guard the Christian faith and to punish those who are at fault. But as for me I will not submit myself in respect to my deeds, save to the church in Heaven alone—that is, to God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints in Paradise. I firmly believe that I have not been faulty in our Christian faith. Nor would I wish to be. I do no wrong to serve God.

After three months the examinations were terminated, and a summary of her misdeeds drawn up. Joan’s visions were declared to be “false and diabolical.” She was publicly admonished, threatened with torture, and, finally, on May 23, out of fear, she recanted saying, “I would rather sign it than burn. Now take me to your prison, and let me no longer be in the hands of the English.”

Five days later, admonished by her counsel and realizing that her enemies were determined to revenge themselves upon her, she said:

What I said, I said for fear of the fire. My voices have told me that I did a very wicked thing. They told me that God, by Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret, gave me to know the great pity of the treason that I consented to by making that abjuration to save my own life, and that I was damning myself to save myself.

On May 30, 1431, at age nineteen, she was burned at the stake bearing the signs of a savage beating she had received in prison. Her demeanor was such as to move her bitterest enemies to tears. She asked for a cross, which, after she embraced it, was held up before her while she called continuously upon the name of Jesus. "Until the last," declared, Manchon, the recorder at the trial, "she declared that her voices came from God and had not deceived her." After her death, her ashes were thrown into the Seine.