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A Great Fish
by David M. Valadez

Deshi: I often think about quitting my training. How can I address that feeling?

Sensei: By having it. One feels cold, one feels hot, one feels hungry, one feels sad, one feels happy - one trains.

Deshi: How can I drop this will to no longer commit to the training? I do not see in you such fluctuation in determination, and I do not think that all of your determination can be accounted for by the circumstances you have built around yourself.

Sensei: That is a better question. You may want to begin to reflect upon this by asking yourself another: Have you ever really begun training?

Deshi: Well, I come to class as much as I can. I attend nearly every class. I have been doing so now for over five years.

Sensei: Is class all there is to training?

Deshi: No. Class is a small aspect of training - ultimately.

Sensei: Yes - that is correct. Training is like the ocean. While its breadth can be known, its depths remain a mystery to most, if not all. Few travel there, few are able to, few need to. We are air breathers when we first come to training. We are not of the sea. That is to say, the life of training is foreign to us. We enter it as alien to it. We swim around and have fun in it, like bathers do at a popular beach site. This is how most ever come to face training - as bathers. It is something they do on the side, as entertainment, as a like, as a spare-time activity. Both their time spent at the beach, and the time spent away from the beach, are marked by how alien they are to the environment that is the sea. It is impossible for these people to stay at the water's edge for long. For if they should, they will burn, as their skin is not geared toward that kind of exposure to the sun. And they will starve and be plagued by thirst as well. As much as they are attracted to the waters of the great ocean, they are more repulsed by it in the end - they must leave. Next, others come to the great ocean with great technologies - things by which they can remain alien to the sea but also by which they can address the "mis-match" between them and the great waters. They can stay for longer periods. They bring protectorants for their skin, and other things by which they can carry on their backs the type of fuel their lungs require. As such, they can go deeper into the waters. However, this equipment and added technique amplify their alien nature to the water. In other words, it is clearer by their longer

exposure and by the greater depths they achieve, that they do not belong in the ocean - because the things they use to accomplish such achievements are more foreign to the sea than they are in and of themselves. Next, some come to the ocean and after time they adapt. They become like the great sea mammals. They can dive to relatively great depths, and stay within the waters for most of their lives. Some must leave to replenish themselves and/or their kind. And some never leave the great waters but to come up for air. Fluidly they move along the depths, and they look to be of the sea, but they are not. Deep they can dive, and long they can stay at such depths, but always they must return to the sun and to the air that eternally calls them. Training for them is a matter of up and down, in and out, increases and decreases, on and off, etc. They feel they need the sea, but too much sea and they will die - they will cease to exist. Lastly, others come to training like the great fish of the sea. They are of it, they breathe of it. They are nourished by it, and in the end, they will nourish the sea in return. Of all of these creatures that nourish and/or replenish themselves by the great ocean, only this last one resembles he/she that has finally began to train.

Deshi: Am I to determine which creature I am?

Sensei: No, you are to determine which creature you want to be.

Deshi: Of course, I long to be the last one.

Sensei: Then since you cannot determine how to bring yourself to the sea, you must determine how to bring the sea to you.

Deshi: By making every aspect of my life an aspect of training. By living with purposefulness, discipline, and commitment in every breath. By never turning from truth, honor, integrity. By practicing wisdom and compassion in all things. By demanding fearlessness of myself when it is not naturally mine to have. By having nothing be "too small," "too outside," "too far down the road," that I cannot equally apply the tenets of the Way to it. And by dying having done all of these things thusly.

Sensei: A great fish swims past me!