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All of Mankind
by David M. Valadez

Deshi: Sensei, you say our relationship is at the heart of training - that it is even at the front, middle, and end of training. That if we cannot find ourselves a teacher, that so important is the sensei/deshi relationship that we should seek out a disciple of our own. Yet, I look at my training and I have to say that our relationship is not at the heart of it. In fact, I often move clear of you. I find myself avoiding you in many ways. I tell myself how I have lived already a life filled with experiences. I tell myself how it is impossible for you to be right about everything - that what is right must come to me by statistical probability alone, at some time. I tell myself how you are just a man like any other. I look to find in you contradictions, inconsistencies, and failings- things by which I can turn away from you. In my relationship with you, I move between guilt and unquestioning loyalty - but always I pass right by you, as fast as I can.

Sensei: It is true. Things are as you described them. Nevertheless, here you are, so there is more that you have not said - more that you do not give us credit for. After all, there are other places that you and I can be - right now at this very moment. Yet, here we are, sitting in front of each other.

Deshi: Sensei, I am plagued by two great knowings - and when I am sad, or mad, or at a loss, I blame you for both of them. There is the knowing of what should be done, and there is the knowing that I am not doing what should be done. When I look deeper at these things, I can see the heart of things that I have wished to avoid all of my life. I catch glimpses of the heart that lies at the center of my relationship with my father and with my mother, at the center of my relationship with my children, at the center of my relationship with Truth, at the center of my relationship with God, and at the center of my relationship with myself. You sit there before me unperturbed, but I have seen the sadness and the joy in your eyes - when we deshi have turned from the Way and when we have walked onward upon its path.

Sensei: As you say, I am a Man.

Deshi: A man I have never met before and perhaps will never meet again. You say you are a mirror, that you reflect. But at times you feel like a light, a burning fire, a glare of heat. If still then I can face you, what do I see? Only that look now, or that sadness or that joy, that you hold in your eyes for those able to see it.

Sensei: As I said, just a Man.

Deshi: How do I relate to that? How do I relate to you?

Sensei: It should be obvious - as a human to a human.

Deshi: We are not the same.

Sensei: From one point of view - we are not the same. That is what gives this relationship its spiritual potency. From another point of view - we are one. That too is what gives this relationship its spiritual potency. Can you see us as the Same - as meeting in the One that is greater than both of us?

Deshi: Are you saying that I should be like you - that I should copy you and mimic you - be a clone of you?

Sensei: Who would want to do that?! I am only a man. Only the weak of mind would believe such a thing desirable or even possible. Seek rather to be the same as the One. There we will meet in harmony, and what glares and burns now will warm and nurture then - will warm and nurture both of us - will warm and nurture all of Mankind.

Deshi: Is this One in you? Or are you in this One?

Sensei: Wrong questions. Rather, is this One is us? Are we in this One? Training starts and stops here. What will you decide?

Deshi: For us?

Sensei: For all of Mankind.