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In Some Dojo... by David M. Valadez

In some dojo, one can come to get in shape, to end a life of sedation, to bring physical well-being back into one's body, to heal and/or strengthen old injuries, and to prolong life through physical health. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, the body is developed as a necessary tool to the paths of right action, right thought, and right speech. The body is crafted as a vessel is crafted - one in which the spirit of the practitioner can be witnessed, reached, and fulfilled.

In some dojo, one can learn to defend themselves from an infinite amount of violent encounters. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, violence is seen as a problematic - one that can only be solved after the apex of expertise in violence has been reached; a problematic that is solved only past the fear of inadequacy and insecurity; a problematic that is solved via an understanding of what violence is and/or can be. It is through the study of violence – set up as a problem - that one travels from expertise, to understanding, to the reconciliation of non-violence.

In some dojo, one can socio-politically benefit from the knowledge of others – gaining legitimacy, association, and justification through lineage. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, one faces one's teacher and one's practice with nothing in between. The hand of the institution is absent and all that one is left with is that which one brings to the dojo and that which one takes from the dojo.

In some dojo, one can come to gain confidence through an inner surety of possessing whatever may be necessary for a specific situation. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, one gains confidence from purifying one's capacity to lack anything. This confidence is made possible by the cultivation of non-attachment: a cultivated disposition that neither is in need of something or found wanting of anything.

In some dojo, one can gain a sense of the holy or the divine. With that sense, they can always speak with soft voices and beautiful words in the making of their point and in their dealings with others. They can bring a sense of bliss to their lives as life's rhythm becomes as monotone as their voices. That is not our dojo. In our dojo, the holy comes from an eruption of the sacred into every aspect of one's being. That eruption is present in all words, in all moods, in all states of our humanity. It generates a commonality with all of humankind, not a choreographed difference of preferred reactions. It does not seek to subtract from us aspects that are central to being human for the fear that we may act commonly in the face of Life's complexity.

In some dojo, a clear and strict hierarchy is used to teach one respect and the responsibility of earning and holding respect. Social harmony is brought about by a willful cooperation of all parties in a military model of interpersonal relations. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, the hierarchy is Confucian. It is not

militaristic. It is also not based upon the current senpai/kohai structures you see in Japan today. The Confucian hierarchy is open only to the historian that uncovers it - it is gone from the modern landscape. Through it, the deshi who is first, serves. It is because they serve, that they are first. Through it, the deshi learns not the responsibility of earning and holding respect but rather how to carry the weight of pure humility and how to settle the terror of action-based compassion. Through it, respect is neither sought for nor even given but remains present nonetheless because there is no greater responsibility or honor than serving one's fellow Man according the Way.

In some dojo, a person's individuality can be addressed in such a way that it is sure to blossom into something grand and beautiful - something desired for. One's personal potential is never stifled by the personality whims of one's instructor, by the prejudices of one's tradition, or by the restrictions of history upon one's dojo. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, a person never holds any risk of losing their individuality - such a thing is understood to be impossible. One's tradition, one's teacher, and one's dojo are used as a viewing glass with which to see oneself more clearly or for the first time. These things make up a lens that allows us to see ourselves separate from the truth games that make up the herd-mentalities that surround us, that are bombarding us through various discourses by which we come to understand and relate to our given environments (e.g. rich/poor; sad/happy; wise/ignorant; high/low; right/wrong; powerful/weak; etc.). These things also aid us in gaining perspective upon the greatest expression of the herd-mentality: the myth of the individual.

In some dojo, a person can train in such a way that they come to gain a sense of feeling good - feeling good about themselves, about their body, about their life. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, pleasure is not the governing factor for well-being. Rather, wisdom and compassion are balanced upon an ever-measuring scale so that good spreads out before us but with no sense of delectation or the gluttony that usually accompanies its presence.

In some dojo, a teacher assists you along at your own pace, and according to your own desires for training. This is not our dojo. In our dojo, a teacher is a mirror - nothing more, nothing less. Preferences toward training play no role in the reflection cast or in the assistance gained from said added perspective. The mirror casts only what is put before it and in that way our desires toward training become irrelevant but for the need they generate in terms of reconciliation.