

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 25

Walk On

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As we took a long walk on the coastline near his home I caught myself reflecting on how all the years seemed to have passed by so quickly ever since that last lesson so many years ago. Leo-tai still had that same effortless stride that he'd made me keep up with so many times before . . . We walked a long time in companionable silence, surrounded by seagulls, wind, and waves.

When we finally stopped Leo-tai sat himself up on a comfortable-looking rock and I leaned up against an even bigger one. He crinkled up his eyes as he looked out to sea and I noticed for the first time that he looked tired. (How old was Leo-tai? I wondered; I'd never even asked.)

“Look at the waves,” he murmured. “Endlessly renewing themselves, endlessly feeding into each other. There's no end to them. No, just the renewal and withdrawal, over and over again.”

A seagull circled over the rocks.

“It is the cycle of the earth,” said Leo-tai. “We're here, we're gone. We are born and we die. The world keeps turning, but too slowly for our understanding.”

“I hope you're not intending to die any day soon,” I joked, a bit uneasily.

“Who knows? So much is not given to us to know. But, even if this should happen, Danielsan, it is not the end. It is only the beginning of something else, something different. This is why I never say good-bye.”

I was startled to realize that this was true. In all the years I'd known Leo-tai; he'd always just drifted off, or shut the door with a smile. I couldn't ever remember his saying, “Goodbye.”

Something about his tone made me glance at him again, was this the goodbye he never actually said? Was he going where someone else needed him more? It had been years

since we had trained together steadily, but he always seemed to be there, the voice on the end of a telephone, the letter from some place I'd never been, a presence by my shoulder, his teachings now always a part of me.

"Now," he said, once he was settled. "Tell me why you are sad."

"Sad? I don't think I'd call it being sad," I said. "Perhaps feeling a little lost— somewhat incomplete . . . yes—but not sad."

So much had changed. The military had put me in hot spots all over the world. I had seen enough. I was done with it. I had managed to walk away—unlike some of my friends, and life had dealt some devastating blows. I sensed that he could tell that I wasn't kidding, that I was really disillusioned with everything . . . Yet he at least was still the same, still watching me with that old, considering look in his eyes.

"You've become disillusioned." He said.

"That's an understatement." I replied.

"There came a point when it was clear to you that where you were no longer inspired you—and you realized that if you stood still, then that's where you would stay. What's wrong with choosing to not stand still? Congratulations. Some people live their whole lives in chains without realizing that they always held the key."

He looked at me and gently shook his head.

"Danielsan, who knows what awaits you, but never mind the uncertainty that occupies your thinking right now. Understand this. Life doesn't always go the way we want it to go. You dream your dreams, you work your goals, and still, life may not go as you have planned. But think about it, where would we be if we had not chosen a path, if we had put forth no effort into achieving a plan? In those cases I would say that one had no direction at all, and there is nothing good about that."

"Well, that's exactly how I feel right now." I told my old friend. "No direction at all."

"Maybe you feel that way, Danielsan, but I don't see it that way. If someone sets themselves free – from whatever; if someone picks themselves up after life hits them with a sucker punch, that is some direction, at least—wouldn't you agree? Picking yourself up or setting yourself free is direction. It is part of achieving something."

I dropped my sunglasses into place as the sun drooped down ahead of us.

"Please Leo-tai, can you just help me see your point?"

“I can. My point is that even though we may not understand it, sometimes life will put us on a new path, one that we would have never asked for, that we have never dreamed of, or ever imagined, . . . And after all, isn’t that what’s really happening to you?”

“Instead of over-analyzing and doubting the direction your life has taken, why not simply accept the fact that there is a new path that has been set before you right now? Stop the internal self-doubt. It only causes confusion. The fact is that whatever was—is no more. It’s gone. It’s in the past. And whatever is— well, isn’t that what really matters?”

I was listening—as I watched the waves and the seagulls.

“The past is gone my friend. You can look back on it but it’s only a reflection. The future lies ahead . . . but it’s a future that has not yet been realized. So in reality, today is all we have. And today is here. Why don’t you just start walking on your new path, one step at a time? Conjure up some new dreams, cast them out to the universe, keep your head up, have faith, and discover what lies ahead. Life itself has put you on this path. Just trust what is and be with it.”

Leo-tai continued.

“I believe that anyone who does this, Danielsan, soon finds the new path taking them in a most natural and comfortable direction. Embrace the new adventure; walk into it with strong self-belief and before long—I suspect— you will find the new direction rewarding, and amazing beyond anything that you could have ever imagined . . . Follow the path set before you; follow your destiny. The universe does not make mistakes; everyone is exactly where they need to be. You must remember this whenever it seems that the pattern of your life has lost its firmness of purpose. Always remember . . . you are exactly where you need to be, and then—” Leo-tai paused.

“And then what?” I asked him.

“And then my friend . . . you must walk on. You must simply — *walk on*.”

I let his words sink in. As the sun hazed into the sea, I remembered so many other sunset lessons over the years. Perhaps Leo-tai was remembering too, for he suddenly said, “From amongst all our lessons what one most important thing do you think I would always want you to remember, if there were one, what do you think it might be?”

So many things. I thought. I recalled the fight with the raccoons; the many mistakes I’d made; all the times he’d picked me up off of the floor, dusted me off, and started me over again. I thought hard. Learning to never give in; not allowing negativity; self-discipline; staying in the present; control of anger; control of fear; Imagineering; to believe in my dreams.

And then I remembered: “Self-belief is what gets everything going.”

“Self-Belief,” I told him. Our eyes met and he glowed back at me.

“Very good, Danielsan, you worried me sometimes, but not anymore,” he told me. “Now, you don’t worry me anymore.”

“Really?” I said.

“Well, come to think of it – no, not really, I take it back.”

“Too late, I already heard you say it,” I joked.

“So?”

“So that’s it, if I heard you say it, then it must be true, and you can’t take it back . . . Besides, I’ve got to get going and meet up with some people. It’s time for me to say goodbye.”

He looked at me. “Oh Danielsan, it’s never goodbye my friend,” Leo-tai reproved me, shaking his head, smiling as if he were still worried about me. “It’s never goodbye,” he told me as I watched him turn away – still smiling – and start his jog back along the surf.

As he jogged away, I watched him go; I let him go, a small figure, disappearing into the distance. I wondered if this might be the last time I would ever see my old friend—did he know it?—Today, I still wonder – but back then, I let him go.

And I reflected.

Once more and somehow—he had done it. What he told me, his insight that day, made sense. His lesson helped me.

And then, as he’d wanted me to . . .

And like we all must do, at one time or another . . .

We walk on.