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The Difficult Teacher

During my tenure working for Chaplain Zilvinas Jakstas at Larch Corrections Center (LCC), I endeavored to build myself up to the best of my ability; in so doing, I looked for opportunities that would not only repay my debt to society, but increase my self-confidence for successful reentry. However, even though one may look for opportunities to improve, sometimes people need to give the convicted another chance. In this vein, the old adage, "Seek and ye shall find," might readily apply in this instance. Chaplain Jakstas gave me an opportunity to serve God by working for him as a Chaplain's Clerk; in addition, I was honored to receive the position of Newsletter Editor under his supervision. This essay is partly a "thank you" to the Chaplain, as well as a lesson for those of us who run into difficult teachers.

Difficult teachers come in many forms: people, events, jobs, family, education, life trials. According to research, there are basically two kinds of people: Tabular and Graphical. Tabular people are those who work well with numbers and words; these people tend to say things such as, "Put all the graphs away, let me see the numbers." Graphical people are those who get immediately confused with numbers, symbols, and professional jargon (e.g. legal or scientific). These people tend to say things such as, "I can't make heads or tails of this contract, can you paint me a picture as to what is going on?" Many readers might well recognize such people as I've just described. Even my own children, one is graphical, one is tabular, and one is a mix (i.e. she's musical). Not everyone is as blessed.

The point here is that the following story was published in LCC's "I Hope" Newsletter (Minatani, 2018). From simple observation, many of the prison population at LCC seemed to be graphical people; many inmates were artists, loved tattoos, played cards well, and eschewed academics. The following story, "The Difficult Teacher," is a story based in part from a Chinese fable striving to tell people to keep driving on when the going gets tough. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, America is definitely going through some rough times. So I adapted the Chinese fable to a more applicable format for the said audience; in addition, I incorporated the Jewish myth of the Golem (a magical creature brought to life from the names of GOD). The golem myth holds a special character development philosophy of which I will not explore here. I hope you enjoy this short story. May it bring you to a point to take things easy, be able to laugh at the situation, and drive on. Without further ado, The Difficult Teacher.

A very long time ago, children were given over to master-teachers in various trades and professions. Why? They were given over to be an apprentice. This is a process of learning that can sometimes take between seven to ten years to complete!

Unfortunately, if you are the apprentice, your master-teacher becomes your new parent and you do not see your real parents until the apprenticeship is over and complete. Given this background, here is my story...

More than a few years ago, there was a boy named Jucado. He was the offspring of a very prominent family of fishermen. However, Jucado's parents wanted something more of their boy than he being a fisherman. Hence, some of the most acclaimed people in this land were bards who could play a great tune, weave a fantastic tale, and play chess with the best and brightest royalty. Jucado's parents thought to give him a fantastic career by apprenticing him to the best bard in the lands.

Jucado's father, Dogan went on a trip to visit the most acclaimed bard, Ponti the Magnificent! Of course, Jucado was dragged along in the hopes that Ponti would accept him as an apprentice. Along the way, Jucado was very disappointed in his parents, and told his father so. To Jucado, his parents were forgetting about him and giving him away, such as one would give away a pet, like a dog or a cat.

Dogan the father, told his son, "Unlike the dog or cat, you have no purpose! Cats can chase mice! Dogs can guard the house! You can do neither! So, I give you to Ponti. Maybe he can do something with you."

Into the land of Ren'a'do both Dogan and Jucado entered. As the miles to Ponti the Magnificent's abode drew closer, the more Jucado became nervous with anxiety, fear, and depression. What would the "master-teacher" teach him? Would he be beaten if he failed in his lessons? Would he finish the seven or ten years required, and the master-teacher not vouch for his skills? All Jucado's father would say is, "Probably. Still this is better than being a fisherman!"

As the wagon lurched toward the bard's place, a very strange musical instrument could be heard from within. Additionally, the singing voice of the Magnificent One (later, Jucado would be forced to call Ponti this name), was indeed music of magical qualities that entranced both Jucado and his father. In Ren'a'do, it is a well-known fact, especially amongst fisherman, that bards weave magic into their music and tales! This, Ponti the Magnificent, was certainly a bard of bards. Jucado would do well to study under this master-teacher, so exclaimed his father.

Upon knocking on the Magnificent One's door, abruptly stopping the magical music, a feeling of dread was quickly upon young Jucado. Ponti opening the door winced and wrinkled his nose at the brisk salutation of Dogan, that of his fishy fisherman's smell.

"Yes? Can you be helped?"

"Why yes, master bard. This is my son, Jucado. I'd like you'd to take him on as apprentice bard," said Dogan.

"Yes, I'm sure you do. Now, why would I do this?" exclaimed Ponti.

“He’s not good with a fish,” began Dogan.

“And father says I’m useless unlike a cat or a dog!” interrupted Jucado.

“Anyway, kind sir, maybe you can make something of him?” asked Dogan.

“I’m sure, counting your, how shall we say, expertise, you think I can do something with this one,” said Ponti. “Does he have ears on his back? Boys tend to listen best when they are beaten!”¹

“Ears on his back? Um, I do not think so. It’s not in our bloodline. Will you take him or no?” argued Dogan.

“If it is to be an apprenticeship of seven years, then no. If it be ten, then yes. It will take that long for the training,” said Ponti.

“Then it is to be ten. Goodbye, son!” said Dogan as he stepped up into the wagon.

“Come inside, young golem,” said Ponti.

“What is a golem, sir?” asked Jucado.

“Mythical creature. In your case, either unformed substance or a simpleton. I venture you are both!”

“Oh, that is good, right sir? Better to be both, rather than just one or the other!” said young Jucado. Dogan moved off with the wagon, and shook his head at his son’s answer.

Years later, to the tune of three, young Jucado travels along the road to escapism, impatience, dishonor, and failure. Quite a difficult road to travel in the dangerous lands of Ren’a’do, which is a druidic term for ‘bone forest.’ Why is Jucado on the road? He left his master-teacher Ponti. He ran away. The harshness of the lessons. The unbearable chores. The constant nagging. The condescension, even for a bard, intolerable. No more would he be an apprentice bard. Learning music. Learning song. Learning magic that tied the two together in bond. In his depression, he rested to the side of the road, pulling out his stringed instrument similar to our guitar, and began to play and sing.

Seemingly out of nowhere, an old gentleman approached young Jucado. “Young master, what is that song of which you sing?” asked the old man.

¹ An Egyptian Proverb, especially concerning Royal tutors and their princely charges.

“Sir, I am no master. For I have quit my apprenticeship. But to answer your question, it is a song I learned from my former master-teacher,” explained Jucado.

“Quit your apprenticeship? Why on earth would you do that? Listen to me young one. I am in the business of announcing the best talent in the land to aristocrats and royalty. They pay me to search out the best bards, minstrels, and musicians to play for them in their royal courts! Listening to you, having not finished your apprenticeship, I have heard no other bard, minstrel, or musician that can best your skills. You would do well to return to your master-teacher, and beg his forgiveness. Have him take you back! For if you do, you would be the best bard in this land, or any other!” told the old man. After his statement, the old man disappeared down the road.

Thinking long, hard, and contemplative, young Jucado thought over what the old man had said. Unbeknownst to Jucado, he had been walking as he meditated on the wisdom of the old man. By the time he came to the conclusion he should return to his master-teacher, he looked up and noticed he was at the doorstep of the Magnificent One.

“Golem?” said Ponti. “Your dinner waits, as does the cleaning of the music room.”

“Yes, during my leave I’ve done the same with my mind,” answered Jucado.

“Most golems have empty minds, anyway. Someday you shall be of the mythical and magical kind,” announced Ponti.

“How could I not, under the watchful eye of the Magnificent One?” said Jucado.

“True,” said the bard Ponti the Magnificent, “very true.”

And that, as they say, is the story. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did writing the story. Thank you to the APWA and Chaplain Zilvinas Jakstas.

Works Cited

Minatani, C. (2018, December 1). The Difficult Teacher. (Z. Jakstas, Ed.) *Larch Corrections Center "I Hope" Newsletter*(35).