



The Fish on the Camel, by Gail Gustafson

As Hafiz says, "First, The fish needs to say, "Something ain't right about this Camel ride" And I'm Feeling so damn Thirsty."

Most of us come to practice meditation for exactly what Hafiz points to in this poem. We get an inkling that something just isn't right about our lives. We cannot exactly say what it is that isn't right. All the externals may look great, yet the fish on the camel feels that it is not in its natural environment, and it is thirsty. There is a yearning to connect to something deeper or higher or different. Is there something beyond being thirsty on this camel? This thirst, this niggling feeling, becomes the initiator to start seeking. What we seek is not yet known. This is how the path begins & continues; following a feeling and seeking something that will start to quench that thirst.

In my own life, I came to practice through this kind of seeking. In 1986, I was a dancer -training and auditioning in that competitive world. I had studied with the "greats" of my time: Martha Graham, Trisha Brown, Laura Dean, etc. I landed a coveted position with a prestigious dance company. I was filled with the sense that I had "made it". In the third week of rehearsals it dawned on me, I was at the top of the world & yet I was "feeling so damn thirsty". "Something wasn't right. All the glamour was not touching what I was seeking.

I did something crazy. I resigned. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I knew I could not continue on the camel ride. I spent many gloomy weeks doing my usual ritual of movement classes. Technique was no longer fulfilling, other dancers avoided me & my internal critics had a heyday. Then it dawned on me: though I did not yet know what I was seeking, I did have the use of a large old room at a local church in exchange for caring for their altar. For three hours daily, for one year, I locked myself in the empty room, with the intention to move, listen & engage what I was seeking.

For a year I listened. Sometimes I was inspired by movement, often I laid on the floor wide awake. At times my mind drove me crazy and periodically there was complete peace. After a year, I said goodbye to this practice & sought a teacher who would be able to engage what I now knew & guide me in ways to follow what I yet did not know. It took a few years to find such a teacher. When I found one, my heart spun; like a compass that has finally found north, like a dog, who finally understands that a person's language means something & the

possibility of a whole new world awakens. And so it has continued for me. I practice, I reach impassés, I listen, I contemplate the seeking heart and a new teacher appears. This is why many practice meditation, to learn to engage what we seek.

Meditation practice is not about ignoring some part of your life. It starts like the fish on the camel; recognizing something isn't quite right. Then it proceeds to asking your questions, engaging your seeking heart and learning tools to bring this heart into your life.

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