

The Ripple Effect

The Master was walking through the fields one day when a young man, a troubled look upon his face, approached him.

"On such a beautiful day, it must be difficult to stay so serious," the Master said.

"Is it? I hadn't noticed," the young man said, turning to look around and notice his surroundings. His eyes scanned the landscape, but nothing seemed to register; his mind elsewhere. Watching intently, the Master continued to walk.

"Join me if you like." The Master walked to the edge of a still pond, framed by sycamore trees, their leaves golden orange and about to fall. "Please sit down," the Master invited, patting the ground next to him. Looking carefully before sitting, the young man brushed the ground to clear a space for himself.

"Now, find a small stone, please," the Master instructed.

"What?"

"A stone. Please find a small stone and throw it in the pond."

Searching around him, the young man grabbed a pebble and threw it as far as he could.

"Tell me what you see," the Master instructed.

Straining his eyes to not miss a single detail, the man looked at the water's surface. "I see ripples."

"Where did the ripples come from?"

"From the pebble I threw in the pond, Master."

"Please reach your hand into the water and stop the ripples," the Master asked. Not understanding, the young man stuck his hand in the water as a ripple neared, only to cause more ripples. The young man was now completely baffled. Where was this going? Had he made a mistake in seeking out the Master? After all he was not a student; perhaps he could not be helped? Puzzled, the young man waited.

"Were you able to stop the ripples with your hands?" the Master asked.

"No, of course not."

"Could you have stopped the ripples, then?"

"No, Master. I told you I only caused more ripples."

"What if you had stopped the pebble from entering the water to begin with?" The Master smiled such a beautiful smile; the young man could not be upset. "Next time you are unhappy with your life, catch the stone before it hits the water. Do not spend time trying to undo what you have done. Rather, change what you are going to do before you do it." The Master looked kindly upon the young man.

"But Master, how will I know what I am going to do before I do it?"

"Take the responsibility for living your own life. If you're working with a doctor to treat an illness, then ask the doctor to help you understand what caused the illness. Do not just treat the ripples. Keep asking questions."

The young man stopped, his mind reeling. "But I came to you to ask you for answers. Are you saying that I know the answers?"

"You may not know the answers right now, but if you ask the right questions, then you shall discover the answers."

"But what are the right questions, Master?"

"There are no wrong questions, only unasked ones. We must ask, for without asking, we cannot receive answers. But it is your responsibility to ask. No one else can do that for you."