

DI AND LIH

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DI AND LIH

There were once two brothers who had quite different ways of responding to the challenges of life. Let us call one, Do It, and the other, Let It Happen. Or, Di and Lih.

Di was an engineering type. If there was a shortage of water, he would build a little wooden aqueduct to bring water from a distant lake to the house. If he was bothered by mosquitoes, he would drain the nearby swamp and spray the air with a poison that would get rid of them. Disgusted by the smell of the outhouse, he invented a system that flushed fresh water through a toilet to carry sewage deep into the ground, where natural processes broke it down into safe, organic material.

He was not one to put up with anything that could be improved. He was, in fact, contemptuous of people who allowed themselves through ignorance or inertia to suffer anything that could be eliminated through the application of rational thought. Ultimately, the two causes of suffering that he set himself to eliminate were death and pain.

Since his improvements were much in demand by a suffering populace, he quickly got rich producing and selling them in large quantities. And then very rich. And then very, very rich.

Lih was a philosophical type. If there was a

shortage of water, he trained himself to endure thirst and thought it a fine opportunity to detach himself from animal desires. If he was bothered by mosquitoes he took a walk up a hill which was dry and not populated by them so thickly. When the smell of the outhouse became unbearable, he filled over the hole with dirt and dug a new one.

Since forbearance and detachment from desire are not products one can easily market, Lih was poor, living off only the meager tuition that a few students paid for the privilege of living with him. (He taught not by words but by example.) To him, death and pain were events he spent his whole life preparing himself to experience with grace.

One day Di came to visit Lih. Since their ways of living were so different, they had seen little of each other since childhood, and Di was shocked by Lih's primitive style of life.

"Why are you punishing yourself like this?" he demanded. "What are you trying to prove?"

Lih smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry my house doesn't please you," he said. "I hope you won't be too uncomfortable here."

"You!" Di insisted. "I'm talking about you! How many people that you know still have an outhouse in the back yard? And why do you depend on that tired old well when over 200 million cubic feet of fresh water lie just over the hill? And these mosquitoes!" (Slap!) "Why don't you do something about them?"

Lih shrugged with an embarrassed smile and

blushed with shame. Yes, it did seem stupid to suffer for nothing when everyone else so easily made life more comfortable and convenient.

Within weeks, Lih returned the visit, anxious to learn about his brother's way of life. He spent three days in Di's mansion, and at the end of his stay Di asked him how he had enjoyed himself.

"The birds," he said enigmatically. "I missed the birds."

"What are you talking about?" his brother exclaimed. "What birds?"

"You have no birds," Lih said, shaking his head. "And no fish. Your pond is all choked with algae."

"Well," Di grumbled. "Don't you worry. Something can be done about that, too."

"No," Lih said. "Please. Don't do anything more." And he returned home.

He thought for a long time about what he had learned at Di's house. It had been very pleasant to sit on a clean toilet seat with no smells. To drink all the water one wanted and even to spill out the water one didn't want. To walk anywhere in the evening without being eaten alive.

Very pleasant, indeed.

Hard, in fact, to give up, once the knack for giving things up had atrophied from disuse.

Further, it was clear to Lih that not many people could live the way he did. In a large city, for example, outhouses and wells were impractical.

Lih was very perturbed. For all his training in acceptance, he found his nights broken by worry. What could be done? Simply "letting it happen" was no longer possible, since the result of undoing Di's modifications would be a holocaust of death and disease. On the other hand, Di's method of "doing it" continued to be very dangerous.

Di was not the person to solve the problems he had created. His way of responding to the challenges of life was in fact the essential problem: all else were symptoms. His reliance on rational thought, driven by expediency and greed, had destroyed the gorgeous tapestry of life and death which had surrounded our senses in glory.

Finally, Lih wrote a poem, which he sent to Di and which is reproduced here. It is, understand, not a solution to any problem but rather another way of responding to the challenges of life, neither Di's nor Lih's but something else. A sort of environmental jujitsu.

The poem went like this:

*A stone,
Having reached the Earth,
Fell back up towards whence it came.*