



NOAA Teacher at Sea
Christopher Harvey
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 5 – July 4, 2006

Date: June 21, 2006

Time: 2:30 PM Hawaii

Location: En route to Maro Reef

Entry

“Accept something you cannot change, and you will feel *wetter*.”

- Taoist principle, modified

While working in the pit the last three days, I have noticed a peculiar anticipation out of which two Taoist principles emerge:

1. Do I look behind me in constant fear that the next swell will be the one that crashes over the side and drenches me?
2. Do I avoid getting wet at all costs, holding onto the comfort of dry boots and clothing for as long as possible?

A quick reminder of what the “pit” is. Along the port side (left) of the ship about halfway between bow and stern (right in the middle) there is a section of the ship designed for hauling in lobster traps and the catch from long line fishing. It is between 5 and 10 feet above the waterline and, at parts, very open to approaching waves. Depending on how much the ship rolls on the swells (rocks back and forth on its sides), and how large the swells are that day, it is possible to take large quantities of water into the pit.

Our first few days were very uneventful in that the ship did not roll very much because there were small, if any, swells in the Pacific. In such conditions, one could expect to remain rather dry and comfortable while working in the pit. However, since the swells have picked up, thus causing the ship to roll quite a bit, working in the pit has meant inevitable inundation from the sea. Herein lie the principles at hand.

1. The question of constantly turning one’s head in attempt to see whether the next approaching swell is large enough to get one soaking wet is really an issue of accepting the inevitable in a prescribed situation. When you consider the conditions that you are 1) working on a ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, 2) hauling in lobster traps from the bottom of the seafloor, 3) closer to the swells than anywhere else on the ship, you must accept the fact that at some point in the 8-9 hour day, you will be soaking wet. Yet some of us, myself included, find the temptation to look over our shoulders at times too much. It is not enough to see our partner’s eyes, which are facing the oncoming waves, grow larger and larger as a wave approaches. We must then turn ourselves to see what fate we, in fact, cannot change. I have saved a bit of

advice from a fortune cookie that I opened once in June 2001 (Yes, I remember the date because the advice has proven *that* important over time): “Accept something you cannot change, and you will feel better.” In this case I think the fortune should read, “Accept something you cannot change, and you will feel *wetter*.”

2. The question of avoiding getting wet at all costs is a simple extension of the first question. It is inevitable that one will be drenched by the end of the day when working in the pit. This is one fate, as reluctant as one might be, that is best admitted at the onset of work. It is true that wet boots are known for causing wrinkly toes. But if you seek the good in wrinkly toes, whatever that may be, then the anxiety of having them will be extinguished. One can then proceed to crack open traps with the peace inside that salt water can be the cure for the common soul, in addition to being the cure for the common scrape or cut. In fact, I find it quite a relief to stomp around in the seawater like a child dancing in the rain. Others might consider this childishness irrelevant to the job, when in fact remaining a child at heart is one of the best, if not *the* best, remedies for any ailment or anxiety.

As you can probably tell, I am at a loss of things to write about. Still I am known for finding obscure trivialities and then elaborating on them until they seem important! In any case, we have hauled in the last of the lobster traps at our Necker Island location, and are now underway further north and west towards Maro Reef. It is supposed to take us two days to get there, in which we are given a chance to get some solid rest and sleep. The last two weeks have been rather full of activity and I think it will be nice to have some time off.