

Hat, Mouse, Tortoise, Zen

by Ajay Nair

I wear this tall hat to work everyday. It's one of those hats that has a wide brim. It keeps the sun out. There's a zen saying - 'Hats that cover your head keep the sun out.' Actually, I made that up. I think zen sayings are cool and mysterious like beautiful flares in the sky. Another zen saying is 'The obstacle is the path'. I didn't make that up, I heard it in a movie. Movies don't lie to me.

I thought about this one for a long time. How is the obstacle the path? I concluded that it meant that you need to know how to jump if you want to move forward. I practise my jumping very seriously. Sometimes, I take a start and then take off. I am like an airplane then, only I don't fly nearly as much as I'd want. Sometimes, I just stand in one place and see how high I can jump. The other day, my pet-mouse who was sitting in the next room writing his book, came to see what all the thudding was about. He always investigates thuds. He saw me jump. He told me to keep it down. I said, 'Keep what down?'. He rolled his eyes, as he does when he is exasperated, and went back to his story. I bet he will make me meet a violent end in the story. Perhaps, with a knife. I will tell you more about my pet-mouse shortly.

The hat is not a metaphor, in case you were wondering. It's as real as ghosts.

I don't take it off even when I am working. The other day, I was typing out this letter on a piece of beautiful pink paper - the kind that's waxy but smells good - when a colleague sitting behind me told me to take my hat off because it was distracting him. His beer belly distracts me, but I don't ask him to take it off, do I? I swear I can sometimes hear beer slosh inside him. There's bacteria swimming there. I told him to mind his own business. He glared at

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me and then started crying. He asked me if I'd listen to his problems. He started talking about his wife being a slut. I told him to back off. I don't like that kind of language.

I sometimes make my pet-mouse and the hamster - who is not my pet, just a frequent visitor with an awesome body - race around the brim of my hat. It's usually a two-lap race though I am toying with the idea of extending the challenge to three rounds. I try to help my pet-mouse by dangling cheese from a piece of string in front of him. Or by making meow sounds. Sometimes, my pet-mouse wins, sometimes the hamster with the great body. Maybe my pet-mouse will learn the importance of having a fit body by looking at the hamster. Or maybe he will leave me for someone who doesn't make him run around a hat.

The pet-mouse and the hamster are both metaphors.

If I could be any animal, I'd choose to be a tortoise. I think tortoises have wise faces. I have never seen one but I am sure they do. The best part about being a tortoise is that whenever I feel the sun beating down on me, I can retract my head under my shell. I won't need my hat even. Then, my pet-mouse won't be able to nibble at me. The hamster won't be able to hump me. Nobody humps a shell.

Yes, I think I want to be a tortoise. I'd achieve true zen then.

