

THE PARABLE OF THE BONSAI

by Virginia S. James, *Gifted Child Today* Nov/Dec. 1982.

"Once a gardener was given a handful of seeds which appeared to be beans of some sort. He planted the twenty seeds in pots of regular potting soil, in order to grow and care for them at home before they were to go outdoors. The pots were placed by a window where they all received good sunlight for a few hours every day. When the seeds sprouted, he tended them faithfully and tried to nurture them evenly so that the twenty young plants would grow just alike, as he wished. He had long years of training and experience in gardening.

It was not long, however, before something disturbed his attention. Nineteen of the young plants were growing in the expected way, but the twentieth plant was growing irregularly - fast at first, then more slowly than the others. And then, just as he had begun to think that there was something wrong with it, the plant had shown powerful new spurts of growth in different directions, and had quite a different appearance.

It seemed to be trying to reach the sun itself, so tall and strong did it now grow in its sunny window, although the vigour of its growth did make it a bit lopsided. It had thrust a stout tap root from the bottom of its pot, seeming to refuse the confines in which it had been placed, instead searching, reaching, stretching for more light, water, and nourishment than had been provided. Why was it so different?

The gardener studied its expanding leaves and the firm, brownish trunk which was so unlike a green and pliant bean stem. He considered its irrepressible growing tip. And the gardener realised that this was a tree seedling, not a bean plant. The little seeds had been so similar at the start that only by the unusual growth of this one had he learned the truth. He was nurturing nineteen beans which he wanted and could care for easily, and one tree!

But the gardener didn't really want a tree! To grow a tree properly would require adjustments of many kinds on his part, and it was a more long-term investment of money, planning, and care than he liked to anticipate. Furthermore, the value of a tree would not be evident for years, and the tree would surely outgrow the gardener's little pot one day soon. Couldn't he just take the easy way and keep the emerging tree right there in the flower pot, letting it do whatever it could? He could regularly snip any searching roots and outreaching branch tips in the ancient manner, and patiently train it to accept his sunlit window, pot of soil, and measured nutrients. He could make a bonsai tree, a perfect little well-pruned miniature!"

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