

The Knightly Art of Archery (*Die Ritterliche Kunst des Bogenschiessens*)

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I.

'The knightly art of archery': Is 'archery' not obviously a kind of sport, and 'art' therefore athletic technique? Do you not expect to hear of the prowess of skilled Japanese marksmen, heirs of a time-honoured and almost unbroken tradition in the use of bow and arrow? Indeed, modern weaponry superseded traditional military arms only a few generations ago in the Far East, but familiarity with their use did not fade; on the contrary, it has spread ever more widely since then. Do you then perhaps expect an account of the way archery is today, as almost a national sport in Japan?

Nothing could be further from the truth! The Japanese do not consider archery a sport, but, as odd as it may sound, a wholly spiritual process. [*'geistig' can be variously translated as 'spiritual', 'mental', or 'intellectual'. Herrigel certainly considers it as something more than a mere psychological attribute; In Zen in the Art of Archery, R.F.C. Hull translates this as 'religious'— ed.*] The 'art' of archery is not primarily physical, a technical skill whose measure is the hitting of the target, but rather an ability whose development is to be attained through purely spiritual exercises, and whose aim is a spiritual encounter: fundamentally, the archer takes aim at himself and perhaps successfully hits himself.

This undoubtedly sounds like a riddle. What? Is he telling us that archery, once pursued as a matter of life and death, is no longer even an active sport, but has become a spiritual exercise? What are bow and arrow and target for? Has the brave old art of archery, with its clear and straightforward purpose, been replaced entirely by something vague and ambiguous, if not openly incredible?

We must first realize that the peculiar spirit of this art has simply become more apparent now that it no longer needs to prove itself in mortal combat. This spirit was not incorporated into bow-shooting merely as an afterthought, but has been bound up with it since ancient times. Only recently has it become possible to cultivate this spirit in utter purity, and to allow it to emerge from obfuscation by any secondary objective. The art of archery remains a matter of life and death, without in the least losing its urgency, for

conflict still remains, though now of course it is the battle of the archer with himself. And it is precisely here that the real spirit of this art reveals itself. This inner conflict is the essential, powerful foundation of all outwardly directed conflict with an opponent. Since the latter is absent, the essence of archery has been reduced to its quintessence and made manifest.

If we inquire now after this innermost foundation of archery, of this conflict of the archer with himself, the answer must sound completely enigmatic. The struggle of the archer with himself is such that he aims at himself— and yet not at himself; that he occasionally hits upon himself— and then again does not hit upon himself; and consequently the essential foundation of archery is without foundation, bottomless, an abyss. To use an expression familiar to the Japanese masters: in archery, all depends on attaining an 'immovable center'. Then the art becomes artless, the shot becomes a non-shooting with bow and arrow, and non-shooting becomes shooting with neither bow nor arrow. For the Japanese, these paradoxes ring quite true and are self-evidently the crux of the matter. We, on the contrary, are baffled by them.

I would like to try to approach this from another perspective. It is no longer a secret to us Europeans that all of the Japanese arts reflect in their inner form a common root, Buddhism. This holds true for archery as it does for ink drawing, the tea ceremony, the art of the actor, flower arrangement, swordsmanship— only to name a few— and it implies first that all these art forms presuppose a certain spiritual attitude in their practitioners and cultivate this attitude more or less consciously, an attitude in its purest form characteristically Buddhist. Of course, it is not Buddhist in the larger sense. We are not concerned here with the speculative or reflective Buddhism which, through the available literature, is the only Buddhism known (and supposedly understood) in Europe, but with that Buddhism called Zen in Japan, which is not primarily speculation, but practice, meditative practice, where little value is placed on intellectually acquired knowledge thereof in order to inform the life therein with undiluted power.

Thus, archery is grounded in spiritual exercises, that is, precisely understood 'mystical' exercises, and consequently attaches significance not to the external bow and arrow, but to internal change within oneself. Bow and arrow are only a pretext for something that could also take place without them; they are only the means to an end, not the end itself. The goal to which this leads may be called 'unio mystica', union with the deity, effectively attaining Buddhahood. If we turn to elucidations by Japanese researchers to gain a deeper understanding, material is available. D.T. Suzuki for example has shown, in his *Essays in Zen Buddhism* [Suzuki, Daisetz T., *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series 1927— ed*], that Japanese culture and Zen are very closely knit; that the Japanese art forms, the spiritual attitude of the samurai, the Japanese lifestyle, the moral, practical, aesthetic, and to some extent the intellectual life of the Japanese cannot be understood without this Zen basis.

The writings of Suzuki and other Japanese scholars have found response in the American and European literature on Japan, but while our knowledge has considerably broadened, our wisdom has unfortunately not grown.

The Japanese lives-- whether he acknowledges this or not-- in the atmosphere and spirit of Zen, and so all is connected, inside and out, first and last, clear and distinct to him. Brief hints are sufficient for an apprentice to understand, mere indications are enough when he wants to express himself, because he has grown up at the heart of Zen and he has easy recourse to experienced teachers.

However, when he tries to make himself understood to Europeans, using familiar language, he forgets that they have another spiritual origin. He expects them not to absorb his words alone; but he knows too little about their way of thinking, he is far too little initiated into their viewpoint. For the Japanese, words are only the way to an idea which must be understood by reading between the lines; it is not expressed in a way that can be understood by all, but is only to be derived from experience. Therefore, his comments, taken literally, seem rudimentary or confusing to the European, who is used to logical intellection. Conversely, he must think us to be without intuition, if not without spirit, when we express ourselves, in spite of the sharp intellect he generously attributes to us.

In this attitude he is largely justified by American and European research to date on the topic of Buddhism, particularly Zen. Western researchers have had no choice but to keep to the texts, translating and commenting upon them, and editing them by standard philological methods. This done, they think they have understood these arcane texts, but all possibility for real communication is crushed by this word-fetish. They are immeasurably far from comprehending the untold depths of mystical being. They do not realize that in true mysticism, experience comes first, conscious retention of experience comes second, and interpretation and classification come last. There is no way to fully understand mysticism, except by becoming a mystic.

Consequently, there is no longer any point in simply startling you with paradoxical formulas or placating you with a mouthful of words. I want more: I want not just to incite, but also to excite you. [*The original German contrast is between 'anregen' and 'aufregen', more wordplay than substance-- ed.*] I want you to become aware that understanding the words of Buddhist writings, especially Zen Buddhist literature and writings on the Japanese arts, whose roots lie in Zen, does not bring you a step closer to the quintessence of Buddhism. I will present, not the essence of archery, but simply a brief graphic account of my almost six years of instruction in this art under one of the best teachers in Japan. I have taken care particularly to record in detail my inner opposition, especially my hypercritical attitude, which I had to overcome before I

succeeded in entering significantly into the spirit of this high art form. Possibly in this way I can reach your understanding. I admit that I cannot transmit with words the inner experiences on which all else depends; my narrative may require a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. But that is better than abandoning any attempt to understand the reality of this mystical art only because it seems such a steep and inaccessible road.

II.

Why I decided to study the art of archery requires some explanation. Even as a student I was interested in mysticism, especially German mysticism, and I sensed that I was missing something to fully understand it, a quiddity that I could not identify and about which I could find no information. I felt that I stood in front of a final gate, but lacked the key to it.

When I was offered work for a few years at Imperial Tohoku University [*in Sendai City, 300 km. north of Tokyo; R.F.C. Hull incorrectly credits Herrigel with teaching at the University of Tokyo— ed.*], I welcomed the opportunity of getting to know Japan and its fascinating people and above all of connecting with living Buddhism and discovering the key to 'detachment' [*'Abgeschiedenheit', usually translated as 'seclusion, solitude', here is closer to the more modern term, 'detachment' from the world of illusion. Hull translates this as 'introspective practice of mysticism'— ed.*]. Meister Eckhart highly values this detachment but he does not describe the way of attaining it. Soon after my arrival in Japan, I tried to realize my intention, but I was informed that direct access to the practice of mysticism was too difficult, in fact hopeless, for a European. It was recommended that I begin studying one of the Japanese arts, which all share in the spirit of Buddhism, yet are much more straightforward, allowing easier and more tangible access to understanding. My wife decided to study the arts of flower arrangement and ink drawing, while I felt more attracted to the art of archery where, as later became obvious, I wrongly assumed that my years of firearm practice would be helpful.

One of my Japanese colleagues had been studying archery for many years under the great Master [Kenzo] Awa, and I asked him to introduce me as a potential student, but the Master refused the request on the grounds that he had once let himself be tempted into teaching a foreigner, and it had been a bad experience. He was furthermore unwilling to make any concessions to his students, unlike teachers in Tokyo and other large cities, who were concerned with losing their foreign students if they overly importuned them with the real spirit of their art. Only when I vowed that a master with such a strict view of his art could treat me as his youngest pupil, because I wanted to learn not just the superficial handling of bow and arrow but the 'great teachings' of archery— only then was I accepted as a student, together with my wife, because women

in Japan also commonly study this art. And so began my rigorous instruction, in which my Japanese colleague participated as translator.

That the road toward artless art is not easy, we discovered in the first hour of study. Master Awa, asking us to watch him carefully, drew his bow and shot. It looked very beautiful and at the same time very effortless. Then he thrust a practice bow into my hands, remarking,

“Archery is not a sport and thus it does not exist to develop your physique. You cannot draw the bow using the strength of your arms, but you must learn to draw it spiritually, that is, with muscles completely loose and relaxed.”

At the first try, I noticed immediately that I needed considerable muscular strength to draw the bow. What is more, this bow was not held like an English sport bow at shoulder height, so that one can press oneself into it during the draw. The Japanese bow is raised so high that the hands are above the level of the archer's head; all pushing or pressing stops and the hands are instead pulled apart until the left or bow hand is at eye level, the left arm is straightened completely, and the hand of the bent right arm is above the right shoulder joint— in this way a considerable span is obtained. The archer then must remain sometime in this position before he can let the arrow go. Not only did my arms start to shake from the strain after a few seconds, but also my breathing became more laboured, so that I had to recover it when the arrow had been released. Repeatedly, day after day, drawing the bow remained a difficult strain and did not want to become 'spiritual' despite all my efforts. I consoled myself with the thought that the Master must be speaking cryptically, so that the student would not too soon discover there was some trick to drawing the bow which he would eventually learn.

I practiced incessantly, with German thoroughness, pondering the problem, testing what I had thought out then rejecting it as ineffective, but always expecting to surprise the Master one day with the solution to his conundrum. During the practice hours he watched me motionlessly with his deep, mild, and piercing eyes, praised my enthusiasm, criticized by expenditure of energy during the draw and the release, but otherwise let me alone to advance in my own way— until I had to admit one day that I was stuck. In this manner I became more open to further instruction.

The Master explained that I could not draw the bow correctly because I was inhaling with my lungs.

“Press your breath slowly downward at the drawing point so that the abdominal wall is tightly stretched; retain the breath there, without desperately pushing; inhale and exhale only as much as you really need. When you can breathe in this way, you will be able to draw the bow effortlessly with relaxed, unburdened arms, because you will have shifted

your energy center downward.”

To prove this, he drew his powerful bow and asked me to feel his arms: they were indeed as relaxed as if they were not performing any work at all.

In time I could do such unusual breathing better and better, and I had to admit that the drawing of the bow was becoming easier. Occasionally the Master would step behind me and feel my arm muscles; and only after they had become completely slackened was I allowed to release the arrow.

To arrive at the correct drawing of a bow after a year of practice is certainly no impressive achievement. But I was satisfied because, using the correct breathing method, I had also learned something else that I had not grasped until then: the patience not to run ahead of inner development, to leave things to their natural inertia, as it were. I also knew that I could now be given a new task, although I had convinced myself long before of its particular difficulty.

I had until now accomplished the shot by simply releasing the arrow. One should think about the following, though: the right hand is covered with a leather glove. The thumb is well-padded and is wrapped around the bowstring under the arrow and under the fingers. Index, middle and ring fingers rest over the thumb firmly [*Depending on the type of shooting glove, 2, 3 or all 4 fingers of the right hand may rest over the thumb-- ed.*] and also lend a steady support to the arrow. To release the shot, the fingers covering the thumb must open and free it. The power of the bowstring pulls the thumb out of its position and straightens it-- the string whizzes, the freed arrow hurries away. However, as often as I released the shot, I always gave a noticeable jerk. I could not but tear open thumb and fingers when I had to release my hand from the drawn bow.

That had to stop. There was no jerking when the Master released a shot; his hand opened suddenly without revealing how it occurred; it happened in a flash. I tried to imitate this, without success. And now no longer so keen to solve riddles by myself, I admitted to him that I could not advance further for the life of me.

“That, “he said, “is your main mistake, that you have such a good 'will'. You want to let the arrow go when you feel or think that it is time to do so; you deliberately open your right hand; in short, you are conscious of it. You must learn to be without purpose, to wait until the shot is released by itself.”

“But when I wait for that,” I retorted, “the shot is not released at all; I keep the bow drawn as long as I can; and if I did not at last let the arrow consciously go, then the drawn bow would pull my hands together so that there would be no shot at all.”

“When I told you to wait,” answered the Master, “it was perhaps expressed misleadingly. In all truth, you should neither wait nor think nor feel nor want: the artless art means that you become completely egoless, that you lose yourself. And when it comes quite naturally to you, that is, when it comes to Nothing completely, then you will be able to make the shot.”

I did not content myself with this, now that Master Awa had finally touched upon the topic which had been the precise reason I had chosen this art as a discipline.

“When I have come to a mere Nothing,” I asked, “who is doing the shooting then?”

“Once you have experienced who is shooting for you,” replied the Master, “you will need a teacher no longer. How should I explain in words to you, that which you will understand only after you have experienced it? Should I say the Buddha shoots? In this case, what use is all knowledge to you? Rather learn to concentrate yourself, to turn yourself from the outside inward and even to gradually lose sight of that!”

The Master indicated how this deep concentration could be reached: to keep oneself as quiet as possible and to compose oneself an hour before shooting, to settle oneself using proper breathing, to gradually turn off all impressions, then to draw the bow calmly and let everything else just happen. This way, one eventually reaches a condition approaching complete No-self-ness, and from there one may be able to pass over to the No-self. One is drawn back out of this state when the shot has been released, the tension has been dissipated, the endless energy has done its work.

We practiced for a long time with this in mind, at first to no effect. Every now and then, though, I had the impression that I had really reached the No-self when drawing the bow. But the longer I stood there with the drawn bow, the more I felt its strong tension, and I could not avoid thinking that it was now time that 'It' should shoot. And in the end I was still forced to open my hand consciously. Instead of letting the shot surprise me, I watched over it and I was aware of the moment the shot was fired. Days and months went by without having a single arrow released in the way it should be done. The Master did not lose patience; he reminded me that many of his students fared no better, even after many years of instruction.

He told me, “You try hard at being purposeless and so you are intentionally purposeless; this will not help you further.”

But when I replied that I should at least decide to be purposeless because I did not know how else I could instill purposelessness, the Master was at a loss and could not answer me. I later found out indirectly that he had bought some Japanese textbooks on philosophy, hoping that he would find in them a way to satisfy his indefatigable

inquisitor. But after reading awhile, he would shake his head and put them aside, thinking that he could now understand why nothing 'spiritually' correct could be expected of me, who occupied myself professionally with such things!

By now we were in our third year. The prospect of overcoming this hurdle had faded even more. In order to overcome my embarrassment, I told myself that the release of the shot was in truth only possible 'technically'; there should be a way of shooting whereby the shot 'purposelessly' happened. When the summer holiday started, I occupied myself completely with this problem. I concluded that the quality of the shot should depend on the way I release the fingers covering the bent thumb; and soon I discovered a clear and practical way: I told myself that if I subtly loosened and straightened the fingers, the moment should come when the thumb lost its wedged position and was therefore unexpectedly pulled out, releasing the string and arrow through no cause of my own. I practiced with this in mind and I was soon pleased to see that it was becoming an easier and more 'purposeless' release than before. I gradually acquired great technical accuracy in this way of shooting, so I was looking forward with confidence to resuming my lessons. Of course, in doing it this way, I had for the most part abandoned the prescribed exercises for concentration, which had been the reason I had wanted to learn archery in the first place. So it seemed that my fervent wish to become familiar with the mystic practice of detachment would remain unfulfilled. Did it make any sense to continue archery, which now was more a sport, a technical exercise? Should I not choose a different road for the sake of my original purpose?

The decision came faster and was certainly otherwise than I had expected. In my first lesson after the vacation, I released my new shot in front of the Master. In my judgement it was a great success. I was waiting for praise, but Master Awa said in the driest possible voice:

“Please, once more.”

The second shot seemed even better than the first to me. I proudly looked at the Master. Without saying a word, he came up to me, took the bow softly out of my hands, and stood it in a corner. wordlessly, he seated himself on his cushion and gazed straight ahead as if he were alone. I knew what this meant, and I left the dojo. The next day I was told that I had hurt him deeply with my wish to deceive him.

It was only after a long entreaty in which I was able to explain to him that there seemed to be no other way for me but the technical for something which remained 'spiritually' unattainable, he understood my misery and accepted my apology.

The most important exercises were thoroughly and constantly repeated until there was

no more doubt that I was blindly following his instruction. Perhaps one more year had gone by when I succeeded in the first shot which received his full approval. The spell was evidently broken. The good shots gradually dominated over the bad ones. But when I am asked how I finally managed to release a correct shot, I must answer that I do not know. The arrow went on its way without any help from me and without my being able to understand how it happened.

After another year, a day came when Master Awa considered it advisable to give me my final assignment: to shoot at the target. Until now a straw bale, at a distance of about two meters, had served as target, so that we inevitably hit it. Now we were put in front of the real target, sixty meters away from the archer [*The modern standard target range is 28 meters, while long-range targets are 55 m. or 90 m. The famous competition range at Sanjusangendo in Kyoto is, however, 60 meters. Hull inexplicably translates this as '60 feet'— ed.*], and the Master asked us just to repeat what we had learned up until then. Of course, I asked him immediately how I was supposed to aim the bow in order to hit the target.

The Master answered, “Don't concern yourself with the target. Shoot as before!”

“But I must aim if I want to hit,” I replied.

“No,” shouted the Master, “you should not aim! You may not think about the target, nor about hitting it, nor about anything else! Draw the bow and wait until the shot releases; let everything else happen, whichever way it happens.”

Having said this, he took his bow, drew, released, and the arrow sat in the center of the target.

Then he inquired, “Did you observe me well? Did you notice that I closed my eyes almost completely, like the Buddha of illustrations when he is completely withdrawn into himself? I close my eyes so that the target becomes less and less distinct, then it seems to come towards me and becomes one with me. One can accomplish this only in a state of deepest concentration. If the target is one with me, then it means that I am one with the Buddha and the arrow is in the unmoving center of Being as well as Non-being— and as a result is also in the middle of the target. It is in the center, this we can clearly see: it comes out of the center and goes into the center. Therefore, do not aim for the target, but for yourself, and then you will hit yourself, the Buddha and the target all at once.”

I tried to follow the Master's guidance, but I only partially succeeded. I could not lose the target completely from sight and consequently could not avoid aiming, yet my arrows always flew everywhere except into the target. It upset me because I was

accustomed to counting my 'hits' from the days when I shot firearms. That had a lasting effect on me, perhaps unconsciously: no matter how seriously I practiced, to my disappointment I could not hit the target. The Master reprimanded me because of my impatience.

“You should not worry about hitting,” he admonished, “or you will never learn to shoot spiritually. It is easy, through trial and error, to find a position of the bow that can bring lots of arrows into the neighborhood of the target; if you want to be such a technician, you do not really need me, a teacher of spiritual archery.”

Indeed, I did not want to become a technician and so I gave up looking for a position of the bow which would ensure accuracy. But neither did I become an archer in the spiritual sense. The fruitlessness of my most sustained efforts weighed heavily upon me. Should I give up now, just before the end? I knew that there were many people who practiced ten or twenty years and still remained students, but my stay in Japan was limited. I could not feel hopeful for the long run. And so one day I visited the Master and explained to him that I could not understand, could not learn, this hitting without aiming. He tried to reassure me, but I was so convinced of my incapacity that he did not succeed. Finally, he explained that my inhibition lay simply in my distrust. I would not let myself believe that the target could be hit without aiming at it. There was only one last remedy with which he might help me advance, a remedy he did not like to use. He asked me to come and see him that evening.

I arrived at nine and was brought in to him. He invited me to sit down, but did not look at me further. After a while he got up and gave me a sign to follow. We went into the large practice hall next to his house. He lit a mosquito candle, long and thin like a knitting needle [*A type of joss stick burnt to create repellent smoke. It smoulders rather than flames at its tip— ed.*], and thrust it into the sand in front of the target. Then we went to the shooting position. The Master stood so that the dojo light glared down on him, but the target remained in utter darkness, and the glowing tip of the mosquito candle was so faint that I could discern it only with difficulty. Still without speaking, the Master took his bow and two arrows. He shot the first arrow and from the sound of the impact I knew that it had found the target. The second arrow too hit audibly. The Master now asked me to go and look at both arrows. The first arrow was sunk into the very center of the target; the second had struck the end of the first and split it. I brought both arrows back. The Master looked at them pensively and said finally:

“You may not think it extraordinary that the first shot hit the center of the target, because I have practiced in this hall for a good thirty years and I should therefore know, in spite of total darkness, where my target is located. You may be right— but the second shot? That does not come from 'me' and neither have 'I' hit. And now, think this over: can one still aim in such darkness? Do you still want to cling to 'no hitting without aiming'? Let

us bow to the target as we do to the Buddha!”

I gave up all my doubts, my questions, my brooding. I continued to practice conscientiously without racking my brains about where it all would lead. I did not even worry anymore whether I would manage in my lifetime to become so unintentional that I could hit the target with certainty. I knew that it was no longer up to me. I hit the target occasionally without having aimed. The master remained unchanged in his judgment of my shots: he watched only the archer, never the target. Many a shot that missed the target he considered remarkable, because he could at least recognize my 'spiritual' form. When I began considering my hits as completely unimportant, I produced more shots that won the Master's full approval. I did not concern myself any longer with what happened around me during archery. I did not notice how many eyes were watching me. Even the Master's criticism or praise made less impression on me. I knew that I had experienced the feeling of 'It' shooting. This experience I could not lose, even if my hands should suddenly become unable to bend a bow.

One day, during our fifth year of instruction, the Master told us that we should take an examination. We passed this test successfully and received certificates indicating that we had progressed far enough to be able to practice without a teacher, that we had become teachers. We were of course students still, but with the possibility of someday becoming 'masters' of the artless art of archery.

When we left Japan, the Master presented me with his personal bow as a farewell gift. [*On Herrigel's death, this and his own bow were returned to Japan, and they now hang in the place of honor in the archery dojo at Engakuji Temple in Kamakura— ed.*]

III.

In passing, I want to mention that we also had the chance to become acquainted with the purest form of mystical meditation as practiced by Zen priests. Its goal is a 'hitting' without bow and arrow, exactly what the art of archery should lead to if properly done. Sinking into groundlessness, whether one becomes purposeless and ego-less while using bow and arrow, or whether one meditates, sitting like the Buddha, hands together, is really one and the same. The first method of meditation is easier to get at and easier to keep up, while the second method is more difficult, but also longer lasting. In any case, the crucial point for both is that the practitioner is calm, aimless, ego-less and not just deemed to be so; that when he has become Nothing, he really is annihilated and that he does not feel insignificant. Not only all thought and will, but also feeling is eliminated in real meditation. The mystical state, the being in Non-being, is totally unspeakable, unwritable, incomparable. One must experience it to know that words can only

paraphrase it, never describe it. One must have experienced it to know why Zen literature is teeming with paradoxes, why the Zen student is so long tortured with them that he finally gives up trying to get to the bottom of groundlessness through thinking. Then one understands that the concept of 'nothingness' plays a very crucial part in all mysticism and is the germ of utter fulfillment, of absolute mastery, of complete being.

This also explains why some odd ideas circulate in Europe about Buddhism and mysticism. They are convinced that meditation and detachment [p 208] rest upon auto-suggestion and must therefore be psychologically explicable; they research forms of ecstatic behavior in primitive peoples which they naively consider mystical or related to mysticism, and they are then satisfied with affirming that all mysticism is in some respects quite normal. Because they are naive in a non-mystical sense, it would be fruitless to try to explain to them that they venture upon questions which are not within their purview, with unsuitable methods and from a worm's-eye view. We must be wary of those who occupy themselves with texts and their exegeses, but who, beyond their purely philological work, cannot resist authoritatively judging everything found in these writings, offering thoroughly considered opinions which are supposedly irrefutably substantiated by their quotations.

Meanwhile, they think oddly enough that Buddhism is no more than the speculative Buddhism which they find accessible; they dismiss out of hand non-speculative Zen Buddhism, first of all because it offers no possibility for analysis by their methods. They look upon its seeming unintelligibility, which is an effect only of their own limitations (*das doch nur biographische Bedeutung besitzt*), as objectively real.

They overlook the fact that the roots of speculative Buddhism are to be found in the primary mystical experience, which they have not undergone. And because they have not, neither can they decide how real this mystical experience is, nor whether in many cases speculative concerns have been developed independently of this experience and obscure it. Clearly, the strength of Zen Buddhism is that it does not reject speculation, but remains aware of the great danger that speculation harbors. Therefore it emphasizes mystical experience as crucial and in this respect it clearly does not accept superficiality in its disciples.

I shall go into this no further here. It is more important to mention another widely held misconception which can indeed be refuted with fact. One always hears that mysticism, and in particular Buddhism, leads to a more passive and unworldly, more escapist or anti-worldly spiritual attitude. [p 209] We assign certain coincident manifestations of mysticism to mysticism as such. With aversion, we turn away from this venerable path of inactivity and praise our Faustian character. We forget that there was a great mystic in the history of German thought, Meister Eckhart, who preached alongside detachment the imperishable value of daily living. And whoever finds these teachings contradictory

should reflect that, much as he would like to, he cannot reproach the Japanese people, whose spiritual culture and way of life are so rooted in Zen Buddhism, with passiveness and a 'lethargic, irresponsible' escapism. The Japanese are so astonishingly active not because they are lukewarm Buddhists but because the vital, working Buddhism of Japan sanctions their activity.

Mysticism and escapism are found together without necessarily affecting each other, as is very tangibly demonstrated in the art of archery. Bending the bow is preceded by an introductory ceremony: punctuated by pauses and careful breaths, a specific series of movements is performed, bringing the archer gradually to face the target. When the archer begins to draw his bow, he is already concentrating, and it is possible for him to attain total absorption. As the bow is bent, the process of concentration is completed and deepens the longer the draw is sustained, so that all other things happen outside consciousness. The archer becomes re-aware only at the moment of the shot, not gradually but suddenly. With the hit, his familiar surroundings reappear. After having withdrawn from the world, he throws himself back into it with a force which goes through him and continues effective in the flying arrow. In this way 'Nothing' and 'something' [*The original German is 'Nichts und Etwas', the former translating variously as nothingness, emptiness or void, and the latter as something or entity— ed.*] are, in spite of all inner differences, closely connected for the archer, even dependent upon each other. The road from Something to Nothing always leads back to Something, not because the archer wishes to go back, but because he is 'thrown' back. And his immediate discovery of this experience cannot be interpreted through any speculation or deliberation, can at most be hinted at— but then by methods that are undeniably of purely speculative, and therefore doubtful, origin. There exists basically between the Nothing and the Something or, let us say for convenience, between divinity and worldly existence, the same indissoluble connection as between total rapture and clear 'I-consciousness'. The experience of being in Non-being becomes an experience of the 'I', only because the one who is enraptured in I-lessness is always thrown back into the I-being, the 'Perishing' in the 'Becoming', and he therefore experiences what has value far beyond the compass of his existence.

These are certainly points of departure for reflection, and are crucial for any true mystical speculation. They enter into the basic mystical experience. The way in which this is articulated and accentuated then in part depends on the intensity of the experience, and in part on the individuality of the person who undergoes the experience. The more this individuality has been infringed, the more it is affected by speculation, whose tool is thought and whose base is I-consciousness.

We should go no deeper here into the problems surrounding the essence of the mystical experience. Another point is pressing: as mentioned earlier, Buddhism has to a large degree determined and shaped Japanese culture and lifestyle; only indirectly, however,

because there have always been relatively few who have known enlightenment— and this through their arts. Every Japanese learns at least one art, be it only the art of brush writing, the foundation for ink drawing, and he practices this art throughout his life. Archery is taught as an elective course at all higher institutions, as is swordsmanship, so the number of people touched by its spirit is relatively great. Since all these arts have adopted the spirit of Buddhism, albeit in various shades and varieties suitable to their natures, is it surprising that its impact on the individual appears in a very clear and unequivocal fashion?

We often hear the view that through studying this art with great patience one acquires presence of mind, perseverance of purpose through unpremeditated action, self-assurance through an impersonal attitude. While that is true, it is only a side-effect which has so slight a connection with the core of Zen Buddhism that it could just as easily occur elsewhere and under completely different circumstances. Yet, even the impersonality of attitude, which in contrast to the occidental worship of the 'self' is so strongly characteristic of Japanese intellectual life, can be regarded as a fruit of Buddhism. Its roots are primarily to be found in the Japanese national spirit, indigenously occasioned and already strongly developed long before contact with Buddhism. When Buddhist influence began to be felt, the native character was fertile soil. The Japanese could not but regard Buddhism as suitable, as spiritually congenial, and so all that remained was to see this natural feature of the Japanese character sanctioned by Buddhism, and to sensibly subsume it from then on into an enduring harmony. The result has been far-reaching.

It is for the Japanese person obvious not only to fit himself smoothly into his appropriate position in society, but what is more to offer the sacrifice of his own existence with calm resignation. Here the fruit of Buddhist influence and of the implicit educational value of the arts founded upon it becomes clear: from this inner light, death, even self-immolation for the sake of the fatherland, gains its sublime consecration and loses all its terror. The absorption demanded by Buddhism and all real artistic endeavor implies, simply speaking, the ability to take leave of the world and of oneself, to become Nothing and because of that to be immensely fulfilled. When frequently practiced and actually experienced, not as a completely understood concept, not as a final conscious decision, but lived as true being in Non-being, it brings that calm security which little fears and consciously enters into death itself as into absorption. Then whether human existence is annihilated only for moments until countermanded, or forever, in both cases it remains rapture in the fulfillment of being in Non-being.

Herein also lies the root of that knightly spirit which the Japanese consider rightly to be theirs and whose purest symbol is the cherry blossom petal, which detaches itself in the rays of the morning sun: to be able to free oneself in such a way from existence, noiselessly and innerly unmoving, fulfills and reveals not the sole, but indeed the

ultimate significance of all existence, whose end glides subtly into the beginning.

This effort of mine to shine some light on the spirit of archery, even though it offers only scant indications, is an attempt to 'hit' the innermost being of mysticism.

(End)