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Natural Dignity And The Mind's Arrow
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From a talk by Kobun Chino Roshi on July 8, 1987, during the Kyudo Intensive Seminar at Rocky Mountain Dharma Center.

Q: What is natural dignity in Kyudo?

Chino Roshi: The nature of "shahin" is the subject. What are the characteristics of shahin? How does practice achieve this shahin, whatever it is? (Laughter.) ["Sha" means "shoot"; "hin" means something like "dignity" or "noble nature polished out through practice".] It relates to the target. The target becomes a mirror, and my understanding is that this mirror target is the precise reflection of one's self, one's own form, which is called "shakei". ["Kei" means "form".]

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KEI
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Your body, limbs, the bow, string and arrow should all be in balanced harmony like a healthy family. The father is the bow strength pushed by your left side; the mother is the string tension pulled by your right side; the arrow is the child released to grow. You shoot, first, to give up the arrow to act in space and time; and second, to master the way of archery. In other words, you shoot so that archery mind has a visible manifestation in addition to cultivating invisible quality in your life.

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SHIN
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"Shashin". Shin is mind center and soul life, and those expanding meanings of this.

As Shibata Sensei has stated, you do not achieve shahin. What is polished out from within naturally unfolds as characteristics of your own life, as an archer's own life itself. These characteristics are seen not only during shooting but also as living proof in a person's appearance and how one's life is manifested from day to day. We can appreciate not only having such a developed practitioner among us, but also that there are practitioners who do not practice the way of archery and yet still can see and feel shahin.

For that old man who shot his ya into the rock, maybe it was his last ya and his last shot of the day, as Sensei explained.

In the story, the young archer on horseback was of a higher rank than the old man, who walked on foot according to the warriorship hierarchy. The two men's attitudes about the archery way were quite different. Sensei was talking about shashin, shahin, and shakei all together as the spirit of the archery

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way. When the old man pierced the rock with his last shot, that must have been his shashin, shahin, and shakei and also proof of his lifelong practice. He was beyond just shakei and shashin. To pierce a rock is so amazingly impossible. Yet the spirit arrow pierces anything.

Some texts talk about a famous Chinese archer called Gei [ga]. He never missed a target under any conditions even at 100 yards. The mechanism of shakei and training brings a person to such a stage. Beyond this though, to relate to your question of what do you actually learn and master from the archery way, is not just shakei and polishing out your own shashin or the flowering of your nature in the fruits of dignity. Dignity naturally accompanies high and noble accomplishment, yet there are even charismatic characteristics of merit in archery which show to others...

But the merit of the practice of archery which shows to others is the least proof of the archery way. Beyond this, what is kyudo actually aiming at?

This Gei and his teacher were so advanced in archery. Gei's teacher was about to die and there was no written proof of transmission to Gei. Without his teacher's written proof of Gei's completion of mastery, Gei's confirmation and ability to become independent of his teacher were not there. With Gei not having this transmission and independence, suffering in the archery way was very much upon him and his teacher. If you have some profession you experience this. A real teacher is actually fierce and liable to you in the end. You struggle when learning the process of technique, its strengths and quality. For the student, as long as the teacher is alive there is no ending of learning from the teacher. There is also no ending of teaching for the master. So it is very hard for the master to see his accomplished student, to whom there is nothing more to teach, still hanging around--as was the case with Gei. Day and night he and his master were like two wild dogs or something. Gei saw weak points, loose moments or gaps in his teacher. In Japanese this is called suki, meaning "gap" or "target".

The student was ready to shoot his teacher. A swordsman against an opponent sees like that. Two people who train so hard reach a point where there are always two swords in the dojo. This dynamic between them continued until one day each of them felt suki in the other. They shot at each other in the dark. In such an instance you really discover the meaning of your own purpose in life. What happened was that their arrows lodged

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into each other. As a result both of them gave up and said, all right, you can go...you can go...you can die any time, and good bye. (The student says to the master, "I've gotten everything possible from you so I don't need you anymore." The master is glad and relieved because he can die with his heritage passed on.)

not The teacher-student relationship is such--very intense. It's not necessarily criticism after criticism, but a learning--satisfactory learning--from each other. The student learns from the teacher and the teacher learns from the student, maybe even more than what the student learns. It's that kind of emerging energy. (Pause.)

not Sitting here today, I was looking back at my life and really feeling how poor a student I've been. I didn't go to see and visit my teacher after so much generosity and hospitality. I never wrote a thank-you note even. But it seems this shahin is felt by each other. Probably it's not necessary to talk about it. Each person realizes what the real teaching exchange is.

Student: A few years ago, I asked Sensei his advice about my practice. He said I should no longer shoot for myself, but I should begin to shoot for others...

CR: I knew you wanted to talk about that.

S: He didn't answer the same question today--I brought it up a couple of times even. I have my own interpretation of what that means, because obviously kyudo is such an individual practice, all by yourself. It's stressed that way. I wonder if you would help me out.

CR: I know what you meant by shooting the archery way for yourself and for others. I know especially shooting for others. I have a slight question about what it means and what you meant. It was a very strange thing to hear.

--Unless maybe you are talking about hunting and bringing food to the family or something. You think: "It's not for me--my part is very small." What is meant by shooting for others?

S: I thought that you could give me a clue...or because the form is form...a robot could do that...

CR: Oh yes! (Laughter.) I know your kind of honest question. A serious question it is. Why am I doing this? An advanced

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student always has this problem. (Laughter.) Like the notion of Mahayana and Bodhisattvayana--you are talking about the quality of the archery way.

S: I suppose I was getting to that.

CR: In the Hinayana way and the Mahayana way there are shakei, shashin, and shahin. All go together.

Why I say this is that while I was sitting here today and not only feeling myself a very poor archery practitioner...probably the laziest archer in the room (laughter)--I was questioning what I was doing all those years...playing around or something. It wasn't that I had some resistance. My fondness for the archery bow and arrow has existed since I was three years old. I was always shooting. So, in looking back and asking how did the archery bow and arrow fall into my hands--how did I pick it up? In what stage of life was I picked up by the archery way?

In noticing each long gap of actual practice, I see the archery way disappeared from my life for about ten years. In spirit, the archery way was always there, even when I didn't hold the bow and arrow and shoot.

Relating to Rick's question the very first day, or was it the second day?--It's not necessary at this point to see the bow as a weapon. By now we have gone beyond such a state so I can talk of how the mind's arrow goes in daily life. The mind's arrow functions the same in speed and exactness everyday. Thoughts are like arrows. You don't miss, you don't miss the target. Do you notice that? (Roshi looks around questioningly.) You don't.

(Note: Perhaps my typing error [?] of the previous draft might elucidate this ordinary inevitability--"exactmess". -SS)

All those years, even when I wasn't holding the bow and arrow, my mind was always in the archery way.

Those years there was a great dilemma in me. The dilemma was whether the archery way was different from zazen (sitting meditation) practice. There's no difference. Although I've devoted most of my life to this strange thing (zazen), my own root master has never taught me zazen. I began doing zazen while studying Buddhism and committed to it. I decided I would do nothing else but zazen in this life. Actually, the dilemma between archery and zazen ends when I choose one. The bow and arrow disappear when I do zazen, and when I am actually doing

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archery alone I do not have any sense of sitting at that time. I forget zazen, so to speak. Hmmm...you see how there could be a dilemma. But what I was learning from the zazen master was not zazen. He doesn't even do zazen anymore, but I do zazen and he always says, "Oh! Are you still sitting?" (Laughter.) And I say, "Yes, I'm still sitting."

This zen master lives in Japan and he is a real teacher of mine. In terms of teaching and being a teacher, constantly he is the one. When I see you individually like this, he always stands behind you. It's a big problem. (Roshi laughs.) It is a very odd and awful situation. Believe it or not, he is very ordinary. He never wanted to be in public. Maybe you might feel he is sort of a yogin. He lives so simply and quietly. Nobody notices he is a Zen master. When I think of him in terms of shahin, of what I learned and observed from him, it is only this: hin.

My master taught me one thing only. I can't say it very well in English: "Resemble me, not resemble me." That was the only teaching I got. Master your teacher's way, learn, and observe everything the master does and that people respond to him. In daily life you see everything of your teacher's life. As you observe your teacher's spirit of devotion to the way, you finally see everything. So if the master dies, you can stand as your own master.

This "resemble me, resemble me not"--it is awful. You are as if kicked out from around the house. You go, discover, and do something else. Something. You know this very well, I think. You have found this subject all your life through various states of meeting people, especially when you come close and penetrate other individuals. You might count at least twenty of them since your childhood. We might stop here--do we have more time?

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Kuden? Mysterious. I have always been interested in this thing, kuden. Do you know kuden? It's all oral transmission, not written, and usually it is only given once, and only to one person, not like this in public.

There is the question of the content of kuden. Again, if you look back into your life and see your deepest interest, and what you felt and put most of your energy into up to today, there is something you have learned from what you have been doing. Also, someone may have spoken something to you about what you were doing. For example, maybe you are a cook and had many teachers previously. There was one who taught you physically and one who let you see the cooking and one who gave you a lot of fine recipes. Teachers appear like that. But

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the root teacher, when he has absolute confidence in you, is the only one who can transmit and confirm you.

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This kyudo family--Heki Ryu Chiku Rin Ha ("Sun Setting Stream, Bamboo Grove Waves")--that we are part of, I don't know how many generations ago it began, and when was the Shikan-no-sho ("Four volumes of book") written? This is a textbook that was written by one of your ancestors. It goes from basic to really advanced. Many times it says to rely upon kuden, oral transmission. When you come to difficulties in the way of practice--the precise, individualized how and why--you struggle, asking yourself, "Where am I? I thought I had mastered that. What's supposed to happen? What am I supposed to discover from this action?" and so on.

At such times Sensei opens up to you, and there's no stinginess of his teaching to you. He does kuden. All the time I realize that, so I congratulate you many times about this: face to face transmission, bodily presence and participation. His whole body and mind, his presence, is like an arrow arriving from ancient times. This is a most wonderful thing you can rely upon and deeply appreciate.

Let's close, please. Thank you.

(Preliminary revision May 23, 1992 by SS in partial collaboration with KCOR. Prepared from transcription provided by DS. Intended for May 1992 Karne Choling Kyudo Seminar participants and friends only, until further revision.)

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