



Zen in the Art  
of Archery

EUGEN HERRIGEL

With an introduction by D.T. SUZUKI

CLASSIC SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

## Zen in the Art of Archery

*Eugen Herrigel , D.T. Suzuki (Introduction) , Φο?βος Ι. Πιομπ?νος (Translator) , R.F.C. Hull (Translator)*

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**Zen in the Art of Archery** Eugen Herrigel , D.T. Suzuki (Introduction) , Φο?βος I. Πιομπ?νος (Translator) , R.F.C. Hull (Translator)

The path to achieving Zen (a balance between the body and the mind) is brilliantly explained by Professor Eugen Herrigel in this timeless account.

This book is the result of the author's six year quest to learn archery in the hands of Japanese Zen masters. It is an honest account of one man's journey to complete abandonment of 'the self' and the Western principles that we use to define ourselves. Professor Herrigel imparts knowledge from his experiences and guides the reader through physical and spiritual lessons in a clear and insightful way.

Mastering archery is not the key to achieving Zen, and this is not a practical guide to archery. It is more a guide to Zen principles and learning and perfect for practitioners and non-practitioners alike.

## Zen in the Art of Archery Details

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## From Reader Review Zen in the Art of Archery for online ebook

### Riku Sayuj says

Are we all such helpless and inexperienced beginners with not the slightest clue on how to correct our aims or on how to draw our bowstrings right?

This supposedly uplifting book has depressed me amidst its poetry and beauty into a realization that I will probably never 'correct my own stance' or 'let the arrow fall at the moment of highest tension', effortlessly hit any goal or even realize what the real goal is...

Why is there no art in life anymore? Isn't it all that should exist? Can we please ban money and all its accouterments and live by the High Arts; that might then bring some insipid meaning back to our lives?

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### Greg says

A painless book to read. I'm just not into the Zen thing. Reading this book made me realize that I never will be this type of person, I couldn't go through with the ssssssslllllloooooooooowwwwwww process of learning each step of something to perfection. I'm sure I'd be a better person if I could just be in this way, but I never will, just like I will never be an Astronaut or a Fireman, and that's okey dokey because the world needs anxiously high-strung neurotic people just as much as they need tranquil calm folks.

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### Nood-Lesse says

#### Il pub e i tiri con le frecce

Dopo quattro -sottolineo QUATTRO- anni di esercizio quotidiano a tendere la corda, l'allievo tedesco si rivolge al Sensei nipponico

*Questo mi spinse a chiedere al Maestro perché non ci avesse ancora spiegato come si mira. Ci deve pure essere, supponevo, un rapporto tra bersaglio e punta della freccia, e così un modo di mirare che renda possibile far centro. «Naturalmente c'è,» rispose il Maestro «e lei potrà trovare facilmente da sé l'impostatura adatta. Ma se anche poi ogni suo tiro colpisce il bersaglio lei non sarebbe che un virtuoso dell'arco, che può esibirsi. Per l'ambizioso, che conta quante volte fa centro, il bersaglio non è che un povero pezzo di carta che egli fa a pezzi.*

La mia condizione di occidentale etilico mal si coniuga con la pazienza orientale. La filosofia Zen mi infastidisce, ma da sempre mi attrae. L'alcool è la sostanza più incompatibile con questo tipo di filosofia, è una scorciatoia dannosa ed inutile che ad Oriente disprezzano. Ammiro l'applicazione ferrea del Maestro e la fedeltà canina dell'allievo, ma allo stesso tempo mi chiedo: se tiri la corda per quattro anni, non è che alla fine la corda si strappa? Se occorrono quattro anni per passare alla fase successiva in cui finalmente si prende la mira, quanti ne occorrono per arrivare all'ultimo grado della maestria, alla meta, al budda, alla pace dei sensi? Talvolta mi verrebbe da pensare che gli orientali si sentano immortali, oppure che passino tutta la vita a combattere la paura di morire e nei casi più favorevoli, una volta che ci sono riusciti, muoiano. Se chiedessi ad uno dei maestri che senso abbia passare la vita a cercare di colpire il proprio bersaglio interno mentre se ne mira uno di carta, potrebbe ribattere e invece il senso di 2 pinte di birra (+2 +2 +2.. con il passar di

settimane, mesi, anni)? Io sto sul confine fra serio e faceto, ma Eugen Herrigel era un professore di filosofia, uno seriamente interessato ad avvicinarsi allo Zen non speculativo, che prese lezioni d'arco quando venne a sapere che i maestri di questa disciplina avrebbero potuto introdurlo allo Zen "applicato".

*Soltanto quando gli assicurai solennemente che un maestro che prendeva tanto sul serio il suo compito avrebbe potuto trattarmi come il suo più giovane allievo, perché volevo apprendere quell'arte non per divertimento ma per amore della 'Grande Dottrina', mi accettò come allievo...*

Tanto distante da noi, quanto affascinante in alcuni passaggi. E' un libro breve che si legge in poche ore, si percepisce che abbia un senso ma ci si sente pigri ed impazienti per scoprirlo. Scusate mi suona il telefono...

-Ohilà Dragone! Al pub stasera..? Certo che sì!

-Ok..! Freccette alcoliche dopo il secondo giro, chi perde paga il terzo..

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### **Jan-Maat says**

[ see there is a logic of sorts (hide spoiler)]

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### **Juan says**

Ever since my early college days the abstraction apparatus known as western culture seemed to me a useful but essentially flawed way of understanding our place in the world. Zen, when I first met it, seemed to validate Rimbaud's "derrangement of the senses" and Blake's "path of excess" procedures. It gave a method, albeit a strange, incomprehensible one, to mysticism propounded by western artists. It would seem from Herrigel's book, that there is no one path to Zen and the absolute: archery will do as good as any other discipline. Archery, however, like swordsmanship are great metaphores for our culture, though. I think archery will do just fine as an art, and it relates deeply to the goals of writing.

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### **Berfin Kanat says**

Zen için harika bir ba?lang?ç, oldukça anla??l?r, bundan öte hissedilen bir kitap. Tekrar tekrar okunmas? gerekenlerden.

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### **Hákon Gunnarsson says**

I can't say I liked this one very much. I know it did have certain power when it was originally published. For example it may be worth pointing out how influential the title has been. Do you see any resemblance with the titles of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values and Zen in the Art of Writing? It was one of the earlier books to introduce zen to the west.

It is autobiographical in nature. The German professor Eugen Herrigel was interested in the occult, (as I think it is put in the book,) and when he got a chance to move to Japan he jumped at it so he could learn more about zen buddhism. In Japan he started to learn archery under the master Awa Kenzô. Herrigel stayed

in Japan from 1924 to 1929, and the book covers this period, mostly focusing on the time with Kenzô.

It just didn't teach me much about archery, nor zen to be honest. If you know nothing about either of those two subjects, you'll probably get more of an idea about zen than archery, but I still don't think it is among the more interesting books on the subject. Still it was an okay read. It was mostly the relationship between the two men that I felt was interesting.

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### **Adrian Colesberry says**

I read this book either immediately before or immediately after Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. I liked this book very much. The concept of relaxed attention was interesting to me. I remember that for the whole semester after reading this, I would hold books and papers and bags with the minimal amount of force needed to keep them from falling out of my hands, just like the archer should hold the bowstring with the minimal amount of force, waiting for the moment of effortless release.

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### **Marshall says**

A short and simple book about how Zen masters practice archery, and a memoir of the author's archery training in Japan. Become one with the bow, let the arrow shoot itself, that sort of thing. It's interesting to read a book about Zen when it was still very new in the West. It reminded me of An Experiment in Mindfulness. This may sound cheesy, but it also reminded me of the jedi in Star Wars. Probably the most intriguing part in this book is when the archery teacher shoots a perfect bulls-eye in the pitch dark, and then shoots a second arrow so consistently that it sliced through the first arrow.

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### **Kirtida Gautam says**

Books with Master and Pupil theme always work for me. I can hear all the variations of this myth and enjoy them. Again and again.

Yet, this book didn't work for me.

I failed to see a genuine learning in the voice of the author. It was almost caricaturish. Lately I have also become very sensitive to cultural appropriation, and I no longer enjoy reading books on Yog that are written by someone who can't read Sanskrit, or a book on Zen by someone who doesn't understand Japanese language.

Essence or what the author calls "It" in this book, is in roots.

Let the people from a culture tell their stories.

Let root be watered, and not fruits.

Please for heaven's sake, stop going to India, China, or Japan, learn a craft (or about a culture), and come back to Western countries to share the 'knowledge.'

If people born and raised in western countries truly want to bridge the cultural gape, they should create platform for indigenous people to tell the stories of their art and culture.

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## Eryk Banatt says

This book is what *The Inner Game of Tennis* would have been if it were much shorter, less repetitive, more interesting, harder to read, and told through the vehicle of one person's path to mastery of their craft. With regards to that book, this one is superior in pretty much every way, almost the point where I am embarrassed to have read *Inner Game* first.

I picked up this book on recommendation from a friend, and I was interested in how I would think of it since as a general rule I love works about mastery and usually dislike works about mysticism. To put it bluntly, I was initially much more interested in the Archery than I was in the Zen, and was at least tangentially curious on how these seemingly completely unrelated disciplines would intersect.

But after reading it, I would almost hesitate to say this book, or even really Zen as Herrigel describes it, contains much mysticism at all. Despite some of the language in this book being reverent on *the unknowable*, I think a lot of it might perhaps be better described as *the unconscious*. Herrigel's journey to mastery over the art of archery is one characterized by progressively growing more skilled at losing himself in the skill, in dissolving into the actions he's performing to the point where it's almost like he isn't doing anything at all. His master stresses this over and over - that any technical training available to Herrigel pales in comparison to the long-term gain that comes from abandoning himself to the skill.

*"I learned to lose myself so effortlessly in the breathing that I sometimes had the feeling that I myself was not breathing but, strange as this may sound, was being breathed"*

*"In the end, the pupil no longer knows which of the two, mind or hand, was responsible for the work"*

This flow state, where you aren't thinking but simply *doing*, in conscious thought as if doing for the first time, with the training and practice doing all the heavy lifting, is the skill that Herrigel develops in his many years exploring this art. This too, is where Archery finds its intersection with Zen - in the cultivation of a detached, egoless state; to think without thinking, to understand without understanding, to fire an arrow without firing it. These aren't riddles, although they seem like it at first glance. It's shockingly literal - *you*, as in, *your conscious mind* are pretty much doing nothing. The arrow fires when it is time for it to be fired, and your meddling with the biomechanics will only serve to get in the way (example: try thinking about every single muscle movement you make while shooting a basketball and then try shooting a basketball - you'll do horribly.)

*"What must I do, then?" I asked thoughtfully.*

*"You must learn to wait properly."*

*"And how does one learn that?"*

*"By letting go of yourself, leaving yourself everything yours behind you so decisively that nothing more is left of you but a purposeless tension."*

*"So I must become purposeless on purpose?" I heard myself say.*

*"No pupil has ever asked me that, so I don't know the right answer."*

*"And when do we begin these new exercises?"*

*"Wait until it is time."*

The thing I really appreciated about this short book was how demystifying it was about Zen and how real it was about mastery. Herrigel spends years on archery, hitting plateau after plateau, putting a monumental amount of work into it. You can feel his frustration every time he hits a wall, how much effort that he puts

into breaking past these walls, his satisfaction upon finally getting it, his confusion over what his master is asking of him, and the underlying struggle of wrapping his head around detachment. This format holds a huge advantage over something like *Inner Game* precisely because we can try feel what he feels, struggle when he struggles, and ultimately realize that we *just can't do it* unless we ourselves train.

The book offers some surprisingly practical advice on achieving mastery, which I think is safely generalizable to most skills. Near the end, he briefly explores swordplay through the same lens which also had a great deal of interesting ideas in it. Some of my favorite quotes from a practical perspective are below.

*"What are you thinking of? You know already that you should not grieve over bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good ones. You must free yourself from the buffettings of pleasure and pain, and learn to rise above them in easy equanimity, to rejoice as though not you but another had shot well. This, too, you must practice unceasingly. You cannot conceive how important it is."*

*"You must collect yourselves on your way here. Focus your minds on what happens in the practice hall. Walk past everything without noticing it, as if there were only one thing in the world that is important and real, and that is archery!"*

*"let's stop talking about it and go on practicing."*

*"The meditative repose in which he performs them gives him that vital loosening and equability of all his powers, that collectedness and presence of mind, without which no right work can be done"*

*"Bow, arrow, goal and ego, all melt into one another, so that I can no longer separate them. And even the need to separate has gone. For as soon as I take the bow and shoot, everything becomes so clear and straightforward and so ridiculously simple..."*

*"now at last, the bowstring has cut right through you."*

*"I must only warn you of one thing. You have become a different person in the course of these years. For this is what the art of archery means: a profound and far-reaching contest of the archer within himself."*

*"The more he tries to make the brilliance of his swordplay dependent on his own reflection, on the conscious utilization of his skill, on his fighting experience and tactics, the more he inhibits the free 'working of the heart'"*

*"This, then, is what counts: a lightning reaction which has no further need of conscious observation. In this respect at least the pupil makes himself independent of all conscious purpose. And that is a great gain."*

*"Like the beginner, the swordmaster is fearless, but, unlike him, he grows daily less and less accessible to fear."*

Overall a phenomenal read - i'd like to give it a 4.5/5 but since goodreads won't let me do that I'll round up to 5. Highly recommended.

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**Erik Graff says**

Many persons had recommended this little book over the years of high school and college, it being one of the canon of the counterculture like the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, the meditations of Alan Watts or the more scholarly essays of D.T. Suzuki. I resisted, partly because it was so popular, another herd-phenomenon, and partly because it was about archery of all things. But, seeing the thing and how short it was, I finally sat down and read the thing.

I'd read quite a bit about Zen Buddhism by this time, including the apparently much-contested representations of it by the aforementioned Watts and Suzuki, so the general idea was clear enough. Although archery is the instance, the point is to focus the mind/body on the matter at hand and not to be distracted by extraneous concerns. Since I spent (and spend) altogether too much time gnawing over the past or imagined futures, the attitude represented was therapeutic.

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### **trivialchemy says**

I was surprised that I enjoyed this book fairly well. My dad -- who believes that I am an incorrigible materialist, simply because he has wacky pseudo-scientific ideas about quantum mechanics that I am constantly forced to rebut -- sneaked this into my bag when I left after Christmas vacation. But I was having trouble finding something to read last night and I picked it up and was done before I knew it.

It's really not as much la-la and hand-waving as I anticipated. I did cringe every time Herrigel refers to being something and not-something, or focusing and not-focusing, or the Karate-kid mumbo jumbo of 'not hitting the target, but hitting oneself become one with the target' kind of thing. Or "I found I was not breathing, but being breathed." But the Eastern mysticism aside, it is altogether a rewarding meditation on concentration, focus, and dedication to a task.

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### **Emanuele says**

Ohmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

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### **Foad says**

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