Zen Bow, Zen Arrow

THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF AWA KENZO, THE ARCHERY MASTER FROM *ZEN IN THE ART OF ARCHERY*

JOHN STEVENS

“An interesting and enlightening study by John Stevens.”—*The Japan Times*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Here are the inspirational life and teachings of Awa Kenzo (1880–1939), the Zen and kyudo (archery) master who gained worldwide renown after the publication of Eugen Herrigel’s cult classic *Zen in the Art of Archery* in 1953. Kenzo lived and taught at a pivotal time in Japan’s history, when martial arts were practiced primarily for self-cultivation, and his wise and penetrating instructions for practice (and life)—including aphorisms, poetry, instructional lists, and calligraphy—are infused with the spirit of Zen. Kenzo uses the metaphor of the bow and arrow to challenge the practitioner to look deeply into his or her own true nature.

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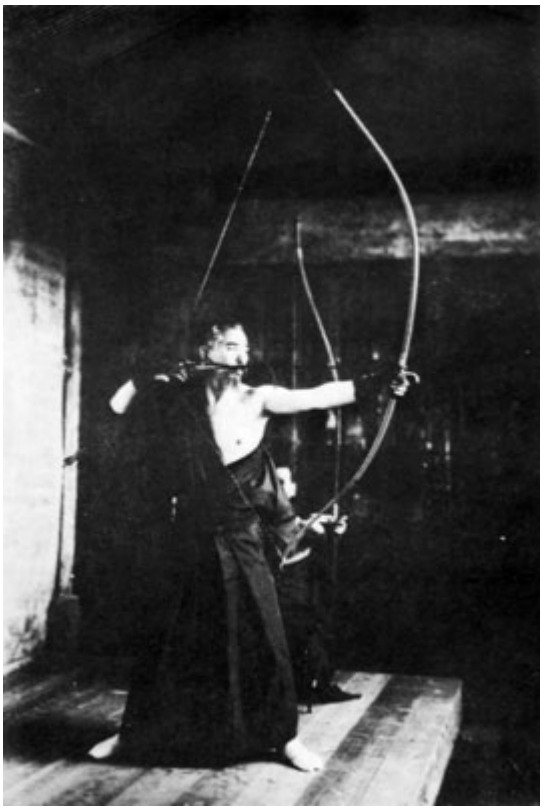

Master Zen Archer Awa Kenzo (1880–1939). Photo taken in 1932 or 1933. Courtesy of the Abe Family.

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SHAMBHALA • Boston & London • 2012

Shambhala Publications, Inc.
Horticultural Hall
300 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115
www.shambhala.com

Cover design by Jonathan Sainsbury
Cover art: “Shigong and the Bow” by Sengai. Reproduced with permission of Idemitsu Museum of Arts.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Stevens, John, 1947–
Zen bow, Zen arrow: the life and teachings of Awa Kenzo, the archery master from Zen in the art of archery / John Stevens.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
eISBN 978-0-8348-2723-3
ISBN: 978-1-59030-442-6 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Awa, Kenzo, 1880–1939. 2. Archers—Japan—Biography. 3. Awa, Kenzo, 1880–1939—Quotations. 4. Martial arts—Religious aspects—Zen Buddhism. I. Title.
GV1186.A93S74 2007
799.3′2092—dc22
[B]
2006029737

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Preface

WHEN I FIRST CAME TO JAPAN, I trained in aikido and karate at the Sendai Municipal Martial Arts Complex. The tatami-mat dojo on the first floor was for judo and aikido; the wooden-floor dojo on the second was for kendo, karate, and the like. On the roof was an archery dojo. I had my hands full with aikido and karate, training at least three hours a day (and doing Zen meditation every morning), but every year at the complex the city sponsored intensive one-week seminars in all the different martial arts, taught by the best instructors, to give martial artists an opportunity to experience other disciplines.

I had always been interested in *kyudo,* Japanese archery, and knew about Awa Kenzo from Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery.* I decided to enroll in the *kyudo* workshop. Several of the older instructors had been Kenzo's students in their youth, and we (about fifteen participants, all from other martial arts backgrounds) basically followed Kenzo's teaching style. Initially we practiced drawing an imaginary bow with a device that was like a giant rubber band. After some practice of the most basic moves, we were allowed to hold a bow and arrow and shoot into the *makiwara,* the big straw bundle positioned a few feet in front of us. Great emphasis was placed on breathing from the *tanden,* the psycho-physical center of a human being that is about two inches below the navel. We were instructed to keep the "breath of heaven and earth" in the pit of our stomachs for as long as possible. Once, during the seminar, an instructor, a disciple of Kenzo, hit me full-strength in my stomach as he shouted, "Keep your breath in your *tanden*." It is a testament to my hard training in aikido and karate that I barely felt the blow. (The

instructor hit no one else, so I presume he knew that I could take it. Or maybe he just wanted to test the foreigner.)

The training was greatly speeded up—normally one would spend months shooting at the *makiwara* before being allowed on the range. We had a dress rehearsal the night before our "graduation" the next day. My first shot went straight into the ground. I somehow managed to hit the roof with my next, shattering the arrow.

The following day, we had to shoot two arrows in the presence of our instructors. I was fine with the ritual movements made before actually shooting, having had a lot of experience in martial arts etiquette. I got into position, and notched the arrow. I was breathing deeply, trying to follow the teachers' instructions in my head. I remember there was an exquisite tension as the bow was stretched to the full extent. I do not know how long I stood there. Hitting the target was the last thing on my mind. I was not aiming, I was not even aware of my body.

Suddenly the arrow was gone. It flew straight and true, right into the heart of the target. It felt as if it had flown from my core, magically making contact with the target. The twang of the bowstring, the *whoosh* of the arrow whistling in the air, and the sound of the strike on the target was an electrifying thrill. Kenzo wrote, "From a state of calm release an arrow that shakes heaven and causes the earth to quake," and "The sound of the arrow hitting the target should simultaneously hit the center of your being." That is exactly what I had done and experienced, totally unintended, a wondrous epiphany of beginner's mind. *Zanshin,* "the mind that lingers," is a very important concept in all the Japanese martial arts, kyudo especially. I knew how to remain in the posture of *zanshin* from my practice of other martial arts, but this time I really felt *zanshin* throughout my entire being. I must confess that the sensation was tremendously erotic. I do not know how long I was in *zanshin*. I did not shoot the second arrow. I withdrew from the shooting area, bowed deeply to the instructors, placed my bow on the rack and my arrow in the stand, and departed. I never shot another arrow—I knew that it would take twenty more years to attain that precious state again, and I decided to savor that experience of "one shot, one life" forever.

John Stevens
Sendai, 2006

Introduction

ZEN IN THE ART OF ARCHERY, by Eugen Herrigel, is likely the most popular book about Japanese culture in general, and *budo* (martial arts) in particular, of all time, read by all kinds of people, for all kinds of reasons, in many languages—the little book has even been translated into Japanese.[1] This tale of a well-meaning but confused and puzzled Westerner obtaining enlightenment after a long and difficult apprenticeship under a wise Asian master, in this case Awa Kenzo (1880–1939), has become an international cultural icon. *Zen in the Art of Archery* has inspired many (including the author) to visit Japan on a similar quest in other realms of endeavor, not just the martial arts. Results of such quests have been mixed: some found exactly what they were looking for; others were bitterly disappointed; many gave up trying midway. Nonetheless the romantic appeal of *Zen in the Art of Archery* continues to inspire us.[2]

I have lived in Sendai, the site where most of the events in *Zen in the Art of Archery* took place, for more than thirty years. I first heard the name of Awa Kenzo soon after I arrived, and I received instruction and heard about Kenzo's teachings from several of his direct disciples. I know well most of the places mentioned in that book.

While working on this book, I was struck by how similar Kenzo's life and teaching is to that of Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969), the founder of aikido.[3] Both were visionaries, as well as being revolutionaries in the realm of the martial arts. After many personal struggles and hardship, both established new and progressive systems—Daishado-kyo by Kenzo, aikido by Morihei. Both had profound enlightenment experiences in their early forties. Both stressed the importance of *misogi,* "purification of body and mind," in

their arts. They were both internationalists, and saw their teachings spread to the far corners of the globe. In many ways this book of teachings by Kenzo complements the teachings of Morihei compiled in *The Art of Peace.*

Most of the material presented here is based on the truly exhaustive study on Kenzo and his teachings published by Sakurai Yasunosuke in 1981.[4] In addition to containing an overwhelming record of Kenzo's words and deeds, Sakurai expounds on many tangential aspects of Japanese and world culture. Kenzo himself left more than nine hundred pages of journal notes, and had comments and opinions on many topical matters that are of limited interest. Thus, I have selected the teachings of Kenzo that are most inspiring and instructive with the most universal application, and translated them in what I consider an appropriate idiom, similar to the approach I used in translating Morihei's words in *The Art of Peace*. When the words *Bow* or *Shoot* are capitalized, they symbolize the philosophical Way of practice; lower-case *bow* or *shoot* refers to the ordinary instrument and action used in archery.

All names and ages are given Japanese style, family name first, and age is calculated as a person being "one year old" at birth.

Awa Kenzo in his late fifties (in 1936 or 1937). Courtesy of Sendai Second Higher School Archery Club.

ONE

The Life of Awa Kenzo

AWA KENZO WAS BORN ON APRIL 4, 1880, in the village of Yokawa (present-day Kawakita-machi), in the northern part of Miyagi Prefecture, about sixty miles from the castle town of Sendai. He was the first son of Sato Denzaemon and his wife, Shun. The Sato family was comparatively prosperous; they operated a factory that provided commercial yeast used in the fermentation of sake and soy-based foods, they had some farmland, and they also had several tenants on their property. Kenzo had an older sister, and eventually a younger sister, and three younger brothers.

Not much is known about Kenzo's childhood, but he was apparently quite mischievous—his nickname was the "Little Demon." One stunt he used to play was to hide high in a tree and urinate on passersby. Kenzo attended primary school and learned the Chinese classics with a Buddhist priest at a temple school, but he was mostly self-taught. He must have been a very good student because he opened his own tiny Academy of Chinese Learning in 1897 at the tender age of eighteen.

Although the eldest son usually inherited the family business, Kenzo's older sister's husband was designated the heir of the Sato family. Consequently Kenzo moved to the port city of Ishinomaki in 1899, and married into the Awa family, owners of a yeast-brewing factory. Kenzo's seventeen-year-old wife's name was Awa Fusa.

It was here in Ishinomaki that Kenzo began the practice of *kyujutsu,* the art of Japanese archery. Kenzo also began to familiarize himself with other *bujutsu* (martial arts) during this time—swordsmanship, jujitsu, spear fighting, and so on. In 1900 Kenzo enrolled in the archery dojo of Kimura Tatsugoro. (Tatsugoro was

actually more of a master of fire-arms—he loved to hunt with a musket—than a master of archery.) The style of archery taught at the Kimura Dojo was Heki Ryu Sekka Ha. Here is a quote from one of the dojo training manuals: “If your inner spirit is right, your outer form will be correct; foster your innate virtue, and study this Way deeply.”

In 1902 the impetuous Kenzo opened his own dojo, the Kobukan, near his home in Ishinomaki. Instruction was offered in archery, swordsmanship, jujitsu, *naginata,* and the other martial arts. Apparently Kenzo had received a teaching license in archery from the Kimura dojo in a very short time. Also, Ishinomaki was a port town, full of rough and unruly young men; Kenzo believed a dojo could channel their energy into more productive pursuits.

For the next few years Kenzo taught and intensely practiced martial arts. (Kenzo may have received *aiki-jutsu* instruction from the dreaded Daito-ryu master Takeda Sokaku, teacher of Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of aikido; Sokaku was teaching in Sendai at this time.) Kenzo and his wife had two sons, both of whom died soon after birth. During the same period, he lost one natural and two adoptive parents. In 1906, Katsu, his first daughter was born. The following year the town of Ishinomaki was consumed by a conflagration, and the Awa family lost everything.

In an attempt to start anew, thirty-year-old Kenzo, his wife, and five-year-old daughter moved, in 1909, to Sendai, the capital of Miyagi Prefecture and the main city in northern Japan, to open an archery dojo. Kenzo had an extraordinary natural talent regarding the technical elements of drawing the bow and shooting an arrow. He was becoming known as a “one hundred shots, one hundred bull’s-eyes” archer. He was full of confidence that he would succeed as an archery instructor in Sendai.

However, although the Date clan, the samurai rulers of Sendai for more than 250 years, had been ardent supporters of the martial arts —it is believed that the Date clan had more martial arts systems than any other domain in Japan—such disciplines were no longer in favor in Sendai after the collapse of the old regime in 1868. Kenzo was often the only one in the dojo. Kenzo’s family lived in a small, run-down four-and-a-half tatami-mat hut next to the dojo. A second

daughter, Mitsu, was born that year. There was little to eat. Times were hard. Kenzo wrote in his diary:

> There must be a way for human beings to transform the worst suffering into bliss; then there is no more suffering. There must be a way for human beings to transform poverty into pleasure; then there is no more poverty.

Kenzo and his family persevered. A highly regarded master archer named Honda Toshizane had been invited to Sendai to teach at Tohoku University. Kenzo went to train at Honda's dojo. It is not clear how much Kenzo actually studied with Toshizane, or what he learned from the master, but in 1910, Kenzo made his mark at his first appearance at the grand All-Japan Martial Arts Demonstration in Kyoto. The following year Kenzo placed first at national tournament in Tokyo. During this period of increasing national re-nown, Kenzo secured instructor positions at several institutes of higher learning in Sendai, and his situation improved.

Here is a description from Sakurai's book of Kenzo in those early days in Sendai:

> Kenzo Sensei had just been appointed archery instructor at our school. Archery was not very popular at the time, and Sensei lived in a tiny little house with his family. Sensei had a strict demeanor, and he used a huge, very strong bow. He made a bull's-eye with almost every shot. The zip of his arrows in flight was extraordinary. Sensei was tremendously powerful physically. He frequently left bruises on our bodies where he had merely touched us while instructing. During that period, Sensei stressed technique much more than philosophy; he was very critical regarding our posture, insisting that our form be perfect. He demanded that we learn the basics, to be solid as a rock; we were never to be afraid of, or shrink before, a challenge. Our goal was to hit the center of the target. All of us competed intensely.

Kenzo continued to appear at various demonstrations and tournaments across Japan, and by 1917, at the age of thirty-eight,

he was widely recognized as the best shooter in the country.

In 1918 Kenzo opened a new dojo in Sendai. Kenzo began to change. He wrote in his journal, “For twenty years I have been shooting with the bow, but recently I have begun to understand how to really Shoot.” Reminiscent of Yamaoka Tesshu calling his style of swordsmanship the “No-Sword School,” Kenzo took such pen names as Musen (“No-arrow”), Mugen (“No-bowstring”), and Mukyu (“No-bow”), and began to meditate deeply on the true meaning of archery. Although he never explicitly stated, “I attained enlightenment,” it is clear from Kenzo’s journals that in his forty-first year he had a profound awakening, a “great explosion,” one moonlit night when he was in the dojo. The resonance of the release of the arrow and the sound of it hitting the target seemed to reverberate through heaven and earth. Rainbows appeared, and Kenzo, in a state of rapture, felt himself explode into a million pieces. He sensed that his arrow had flown leagues and leagues to the very end of the universe. Time and space disappeared.

Kenzo had been calling his new system Shado, the “Shooting Way.” He was emphasizing the notions of “Shoot without shooting,” “Shoot in harmony with the universe,” “One shot, one life,” and “Within each shot see your nature.” (These concepts will be presented in detail in chapter 2.) He dismissed the established system of technical archery as a “heredity disease” that still looked upon the bow and arrow as a mere weapon, and the target as a safe substitute for a human enemy. Kenzo argued that in today’s world the true purpose of archery is to perfect the human spirit. Kenzo called his new system Daishado-kyo, “the Great Shooting Way Teaching.” Here is an out-line of the principles of Kenzo’s Great Shooting Way Teaching:

Trust in the practice of the Way of the Bow.
Archery is not an art, it is a Way.
When you practice the Way, it is not just training in technique; it is spiritual forging.
Forging your spirit is to become empty, and to focus on your center.

To become empty is to become one with the divine—this is the Way.
To attain the Way is to manifest the Way.
The Way of the Bow is to manifest your self Buddha-nature and arrive at the ultimate.

There was tremendous opposition to Kenzo's innovations, both from some of his own students and from other outside archers. Impatient students, many of whom were scientifically trained physicians, engineers, researchers, and lawyers, found his explanations too spiritual, too mystical. They complained that Kenzo was always telling them that if their form and mind were correct, it did not matter if they hit the target. But Kenzo himself always hit it—and isn't making a bull's-eye the purpose of all this training? Some thought Kenzo was founding a new religion, a cult, and compared him to the controversial Deguchi Onisaburo, the cofounder of Omoto-kyo (which at that time was being suppressed by the government.)[1] Similar to Ueshiba Morihei, who said, "My teaching of aikido is not a religion; it brings all religions to fruition," Kenzo refuted his critics: "The Way of the Bow is not a religion. It is the teaching of Great Nature, a state of mind that transcends religion."

Another problem, it must be said, was Kenzo's domineering personality. He was an impatient, critical, and demanding teacher who sometimes drove students away. The situation got so bad that stones were thrown at him by some of his opponents during several of his public performances. In the midst of all this controversy, Eugen Herrigel petitioned Kenzo to allow him to learn archery. The intriguing tale of Herrigel's apprenticeship as related in the little book *Zen in the Art of Archery* is cherished by generations of readers, and does not need to be repeated here.

Although Kenzo seems to have had genuine affection for Herrigel and approved of Herrigel's writings, he had an otherwise low opinion of foreigners and Western culture: "Western culture is too materialistic, and foreigners have no tradition of practicing the Way." Here is more on Kenzo and his teaching methods:

It is said that Kenzo was a demon in the dojo. He would immediately sense any relaxation in a student's attention, and his

consequent ear-shattering shout of admonishment (*kiai, katsu*) was like the roar of a lion. Students reported being literally bowled over by a Kenzo shout that caught them off guard. (He would shout even during big demonstrations if he felt his students were not performing properly.) Kenzo's shouts could literally take one's breath away. Once, twenty or so convicts escaped from a nearby Sendai jail when there was a fire on the premises. Five or six of the escapees made the mistake of trying to hide in Awa's dojo. One shout from Kenzo threw the hardened criminals into a panic, and they ran, terrified, from the building.[2]

Early almost every morning or evening, students came to Kenzo's dojo on their own to practice. Kenzo was always serious about teaching, and stressed putting strength into the *tanden* (the psycho-physical center of the human being located about two inches below the navel) and using Zen breathing methods. He would place an arrow against a student's *tanden* and press against the student's lower back with his hand, instructing him or her to "Breathe from here with an 'A' [alpha, in] and 'UN' [omega, out] rhythm." (This is exactly what one of Kenzo's disciples told me when I practiced archery.) He never missed a day of teaching, regardless of the weather, and would often sit for hours in the dojo watching and instructing, even if it was freezing cold or stifling hot.

Kenzo, like many old-time masters, particularly favored winter training. (The belief was, "That is when your senses are the sharpest.") In the coldest part of the year martial arts training was often conducted under waterfalls or in the ocean. In Kenzo's dojo—only the actual shooting area was covered, and the snow and cold blew in from the exposed range—the *misogi* (purification) training was done every winter for ten days to one month. Students would shoot continually from 5:00 to 7:00 in the morning and from 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening every day of the training period.

In examinations, candidates for promotion shot two arrows for each round. Kenzo and usually two of his senior instructors were the judges. The junior judges made comments on technique—for example, "the release was not stable" or "the left hand position was not good." Kenzo, however, evaluated their characters with descriptions such as "needs more depth," "too timid," or "trying too

hard to hit the target." During one examination several students who were all close friends took the test together. The first time out, they marched into the dojo boldly, and shot with confidence. Kenzo shouted, "Where did you learn to shoot like barbarians?" Before coming out again, they said among themselves, "This time we will be more flexible and graceful." When they began to shoot, Kenzo roared, "Who taught you to shoot like wimps?" Finally, they said, "All right, this time we shoot for ourselves. We will forget about everything, forget about Awa Sensei, and fill ourselves with the spirit of heaven and earth." Out they went, in a kind of reverie. When they began to shoot, Kenzo nodded his head and said, "Good!"

Unlike students of other teachers' students, who referred to themselves as coming from the "same gate" or the "same clan," Kenzo's students said that they were from the "same boat." A boat is a metaphor for the teaching of Buddhism that carries one from this shore of illusion to that shore of enlightenment; it also has the same connotation as the English expression "We are all in the same boat," that is to say "in a very difficult situation."

Although his disciples trained very hard, Kenzo was rarely satisfied with their performance—"Do it again" was his main advice. However, every Friday after training, Kenzo would treat them all to soba, buckwheat noodles. For poor, nearly starving students, such a treat was like a gift from heaven, and many never forgot the delicious taste of those noodles that they ate with Kenzo.

Kenzo once had the students gather in a garden to demonstrate that a *kiai* (*ki* concentration) did not have to be a loud shout to be effective. A *makiwara* was set up. Kenzo held a sword. He took a deep breath, raised the sword, and in flash split the very thick bundle in two. He did not appear to use his strength at all—there was only a barely perceptible *fun* sound emanating from Kenzo's noise. Kenzo asked two of his students who had experience in kendo to try. A new *makiwara* was set up. The first student struck it with all his might. The sword bounced off the *makiwara,* barely making a dent in it. After seeing that brute strength was not the correct approach, the next student fared better, cutting about 90 percent through the *makiwara,* and earning Kenzo's praise.

On another occasion, at a large training seminar held in Fukushima City in 1925, Kenzo shot an arrow cleanly through a light bulb without shattering the glass. Kenzo hit the filament in the center of the lamp, and the glass remained intact save for the entry and exit holes of the arrow. Kenzo never mentioned the amazing feat, but the stunned crowd of archers soon spread the astonishing story all over Japan.

Kenzo had another talented disciple, Yoshida Yoshiyasu, who accomplished the exact opposite. At a national archery contest held in Nikko in August 1941, Yoshida shot an arrow cleanly through a samurai helmet that was thought to be impenetrable. Yoshida wrote in his memoirs, “As I drew the bow, I chanted the name of the god of Nikko. With a single mind, I felt no pressure from the bow, no difficulty in breathing, and I was not concerned with my surroundings —I was in state of deep meditation. Suddenly I felt engulfed in a spiritual cloud and the arrow was gone. I heard it hit the helmet. When I looked at the helmet, my arrow had pierced one side and emerged from the other.” Later in that year Yoshida shot an arrow through a thick iron plate. Kenzo, who had recognized Yoshida’s talent from the beginning, encouraged him to aim high, and use such challenges—which Kenzo usually discouraged—to deepen his spirit and bring out the force of his character. (After accomplishing such feats, Yoshida publicly thanked Kenzo for his teachings.) Yoshida, who was Kenzo’s first representative in Tokyo, went on to establish the Shobo Ryu of Archery, teaching that archery was “standing Zen,” and eventually opened a Zen Bow Dojo in Chiba Prefecture. Yoshida’s method of gripping the bow (*tenouchi*) was especially esteemed, and he said, “All of my strength comes from my little finger.”[3]

Kenzo had a precious sword that he sometimes showed to his students. When one young student named Sakurai saw the sword, Kenzo said with a smile, “I can see from the sparkle in your eyes that you would really like to have this sword.” A few days later after practice, Kenzo called Sakurai aside. “Come to the dojo alone tomorrow night. We will have a fight to the finish. If you beat me, you can have the sword.” Sakurai was terrified. He knew nothing about sword fighting, while Sakurai had seen what Kenzo had done with a

sword to the *makiwara*. There was no way that Sakurai could beat Kenzo, and even if he could, it was unthinkable that he would injure or kill his teacher. Nevertheless Sakurai bravely showed up the next night, not knowing what to expect. Sakurai sat down, and Kenzo came in. Kenzo picked up the sword, calmly swung it once, and gave it to Sakurai. Sakurai took the sword home, wrapped it up, and slept with it.

Kenzo had a female student named Nishimura Chiyoko. He treated her no differently than the men trainees, which is to say strictly. One day Kenzo said to her, “A large bird just flew by. Come and see me.” She did, not without trepidation. She was relieved when Kenzo presented her with a beautiful bird feather. “Use this to feather your next arrow,” he told her.

Once, Kenzo was teaching archery at a seminar in a neighboring prefecture. A young swordsman came to watch. Kenzo said, “Why don’t you give it a try?” The swordsman picked up the bow and arrow, and actually was able to get off a shot. “Well done!” Kenzo said. “I will give you a second Dan certificate.” The swordsman (and Kenzo’s students) were greatly surprised, since that is a fairly advanced rank. “I know nothing about archery,” the swordsman protested. “You will learn,” Kenzo told him. And he did, eventually becoming a master instructor. Conversely, once a conceited student named Takeda was proudly demonstrating his prowess for Kenzo. Takeda expertly shot an arrow right into the center of the target. Instead of praising him, Kenzo took Takeda’s bow and said, “You had better stop practicing archery.” Takeda was dumbstruck for several weeks, but then he went to apologize to Kenzo. “You have great potential,” Kenzo told Takeda, “but the way in which you draw your bow reveals your character, and you must not show off. Using the bow and arrow simply as tools to hit the center of a target is no big deal.[4] You must hit the center of yourself. That is the reason I took away your bow.” After being chastised like this by Kenzo, Takeda came to the dojo every morning at 5:00 just to shoot, persisting like this for several years until he graduated.

Later on near the end of his life, Kenzo and two of his students visited Umeji Kenran, an archer in Osaka who identified the Bow and Zen even more closely than Kenzo did. Kenran had actually received

certification from the Zen master Shaku Soen (who introduced Rinzai Zen Buddhism to the United States in 1893), and in his dojo archery practice alternated with formal *zazen*. After chatting for a while, Kenzo and Kenran and their students went into the dojo to shoot. Everyone shot as one would expect from expert archers, except Kenran. Every arrow Kenran shot completely missed the target. And not only that, his arrows wobbled woefully in the air, something only seen in beginners. Kenran seemed blissfully unconcerned with his performance. It was if Kenzo and Kenran were acting out the Zen story of two groups of archers arguing. One group maintained that their teacher was the best in the land: “Our master can hit the target even with his eyes closed shut [like Kenzo].” “No, our master is much better,” the other group countered. “He cannot hit it even with his eyes wide open [like Kenran].” However, just as they were about to finish, Kenran said, “Let me take one more shot.” He hit the center of the target with the arrow, straight and true. “Nice performance,” Kenzo (sarcastically?) complimented Kenran.[5]

On occasion, archers from other schools would come to Kenzo’s dojo to argue with him about his controversial ideas. Kenzo would listen politely, usually not saying anything. After his visitor finished the tirade, Kenzo would calmly take the aggressor into the dojo and demonstrate for him. Almost always the former opponent became Kenzo’s student.

His wife, Fusa, was a pillar of support for Kenzo during the worst years of deprivation and during the years when her husband was being scorned and criticized. They practiced the Way of the Bow together. She taught when Kenzo was not able to be in the dojo. (Some students actually preferred to study with the gentle and understanding Fusa rather than the severe, gruff Kenzo.) It is said that Fusa used to critique Kenzo’s performance when it was just the two of them in the dojo, and that she was the only person who could give Kenzo advice he would actually listen to. She died just two months after he did.

In 1929 Kenzo fell gravely ill with kidney disease and was told he would be dead within the year. He ignored his doctors’ advice and his wife’s entreaties and shot at least one or two arrows every day, even when he was at his worst. Kenzo did not die—he believed he

cured himself with deep-breathing exercises, and apparently had another enlightenment experience during his sickness—but he never really recovered. However, he continued to teach and write, made as many appearances in the dojo as he could, and even traveled to other parts of Japan when he felt up to it. Kenzo's Daishado-kyo organization had grown to ninety-seven branches all over Japan with over fourteen thousand students enrolled. Kenzo was very scrupulous about his teaching duties. If for some reason, illness or travel, Kenzo did not actually teach, he would not accept the pay or else give it to the students so that they could have a feast.

His daughter, Katsu, was killed in a mysterious accident in Manchuria in 1934, another sad event in Kenzo's life. In 1938 Kenzo fell seriously ill again. He still managed to teach periodically, but he was mostly bedridden. In winter one day, Kenzo was up and around when he met two of his disciples, who were also medical students. Bright red drops suddenly appeared on the snow. Kenzo was urinating blood. "This too is practice," Kenzo said to the students.

Kenzo died on March 1, 1939. He was sixty years old.

"The Bow and Zen Are One." This can also be translated as "Zen in the Art of Archery." The fan is dated Showa Fire Rat Year, Autumn (1936) and signed "Koko," one of Kenzo's pen names, meaning "Great Swan." Courtesy of the Komatsu Family Collection.

TWO

The Teachings of Awa Kenzo

THE TEACHINGS PRESENTED HERE augment and expand on what Kenzo taught to Eugen Herrigel. The bow and arrow as a weapon of the spirit has a long history in both the East and the West, and Kenzo brought the tradition to full fruition. Confucius, who is often mentioned in Kenzo's journals, learned archery as one of the Six Arts—rites, music, charioteering, calligraphy, mathematics, and archery. In the Analects (3:16) it says, "When an archer misses the center of the target, he reflects and seeks the cause of the failure within himself."

Kenzo was also familiar with the "Ten Commandments" of Chinese archery by the Song Dynasty author Chen Yuanliang:

> Aim with your mind, shoot with your hands.
> Do not let your mind wander.
> Do not let worries distract you.
> Do not be in a hurry.
> Do not be intoxicated.
> Do not be hungry.
> Do not overeat.
> Do not be angry.
> Do shoot when you lack enthusiasm.
> Do not shoot obsessively.
> Do not compete with others.
> When you hit the target, do not be elated; when you miss, do not be crestfallen. Concentrate naturally on the target and use your mind to shoot. In your daily life as well, always aim for the center and avoid extremes in all activities.

As a prince, Buddha's name was Siddhartha, which can be translated into English as "He who has accomplished his aim." There

are many stories of Siddhartha's prowess at archery contained throughout the Buddhist canons of Asia—in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. For example, Siddhartha won his future wife's heart by performing twelve amazing feats of archery. Among other things, he was said to have been able to draw a bow no one else could (he broke all the other bows given to him). Accounts have Siddhartha shooting an arrow through a row of seven or eight trees to hit an animal (a tiger or boar) hiding behind the last one, or shooting five arrows in the sky to bring down five flying ravens. Siddhartha, it is said, used "the bow of meditative concentration" to draw the "arrow of wisdom."

In the iconography of Buddhist protective deities, the bow and arrow are standard equipment. The bow and arrow has many uses: to shoot demons and negative energy, to keep danger and temptations at bay, to transfix false views, to shoot straight into the heart of evildoers through a combination of wisdom and energy.

The tantric *mahasiddha* Saraha ("The Archer") is closely associated with archery. He was converted to Buddhism after observing a dakini in disguise "Looking neither to the right nor to the left, wholly concentrated on making an arrow." This, he realized, was symbolic of her nondual awareness; Saraha took the woman as his consort, and became an arrow maker himself. Their arrow making was transformed into the "straight way" of kundalini yoga, which pierces duality.

Korean traditional archers strive to "Have a straight mind in a straight body" when they shoot. In Japan the Shinto gods and goddesses are often portrayed with a bow and arrow. Amaterasu, the sun goddess, was said to carry a bow along with quivers containing five hundred or a thousand arrows. (In Western mythology, Amaterasu's counterpart is the sun god, Apollo, also an unerring archer. Apollo is often depicted as naked save for his bow, arrow, and quiver.) Even today Shinto shamans and mountain wizards shoot arrows or twang their bows (that sound was considered talismanic) at the beginning of sacred ceremonies.

The bow and arrow is also a weapon of love. Two very powerful deities of transformed passion and intense desire for awakening are the Japanese Aizen Myo-o (male) and the Tibetan Kurukulla (female). Both are armed with a bow and arrow just like the Hindu god of love, Kama (his bow is made of sugarcane, the string consists of buzzing bees, and he shoots flower-tipped arrows), and the Western god Cupid.

The Prophet Muhammad was an archer who promoted the practice of the bow and arrow among his followers. He said to take up the bow to drive away worry and sorrow (Hadith 36). Muhammad also believed that Allah gave mankind three pastimes to enjoy: “Horseracing, shooting with the bow, and making love with your wife.” (Hadith 38). Pious Muslim archers utter “God is Great” when they release the shot.[1]

In his teachings, Kenzo refers to “enlightenment” in two ways. The first way is *kensho,* a Zen phrase that means “See your nature.” It can also be translated as “Look into your nature,” or simply “Realization.” The second half of the phrase, commonly used as an inscription on paintings of Daruma, the Grand Patriarch of Zen, is *jobutsu,* “Become Buddha.” From the Zen standpoint, *kensho* is a profound experience of insight that transforms a person. (Whether this happens suddenly or gradually has been a matter of contention for centuries in Zen circles.) *Kensho* has the connotation of one being actively engaged in some discipline that fosters such insight—usually construed as *zazen,* formal meditation, but in Kenzo’s case he stated unequivocally, “With each shot see your nature.”

“How does an archer shoot with no release?” was the koan, a Zen puzzle, Kenzo gave to his students. Each shot should bring you closer to enlightenment, or ideally be a manifestation your inner Buddha-nature.

The other word that Kenzo used and that I have translated as “enlightenment” is *satori*. This can be translated literally as (*sa*) “distinctions” (*tori*) “remove”—that is, to remove all artificially constructed distinctions such as “mind/body,” “self/other,” “correct/incorrect,” “archer/bow,” “arrow/target,” and so on. In short, satori is “to transcend dualities.” One very common misinterpretation of the concepts of *kensho* and satori is that such (supposed) experiences make one omniscient, morally perfect (according to standards set by society), beyond temptation, not troubled by the ordinary affairs of life, and politically correct. While I hope no one is made worse by having *kensho,* it is a fact that nearly everyone, including those with experiences of satori, operate on the two-truths principle espoused by Buddhists. There is a relative, culturally conditioned truth that is messy and muddled and where we dwell most of the time, and an absolute truth that is true, good, and beautiful, and that can be glimpsed and acted upon on certain occasions. It is from this level of truth—*kensho,*

satori, enlightenment, whatever it is called—that all the glories of human culture emanate. This is the level where all of us are at our best. This is the "enlightenment" that Kenzo sought and realized; it is what he wanted to impart to his students.

Awa Kenzo poised to release a shot. Photo taken in 1927. Courtesy of the Satte Tatsuji Family.

The First Principle is to awaken oneself. Once that is realized you can accomplish anything with ease.

• • •

If you are upset or nervous, that is proof you lack something. Do not be sad or gloomy—foster virtue, feel compassion, and you can save even devils.

• • •

Gratitude will make you brave.

• • •

Strong people are optimists; weak people are pessimists.

• • •

When you shoot, you shoot for thousands; it is not just a contest. Your practice is to take on the universe. Your opponents are manifold.

• • •

Shoot with your character.

• • •

Continue to progress, do not stagnate. Consider a spinning top. It moves around a stable center. It spins and spins until finally falling over, exhausted.

• • •

Cut open a cherry tree. There is nothing there, so where do the blossoms come from? The ocean has wave after wave, but nothing solid you can hold in your hands.

• • •

Every human being is different; express that difference when you shoot. Shoot in a state of purity, in harmony with heaven and earth.

• • •

Learn from a teacher everything he or she has, all the way—that is the real secret of training that will give you great results.

• • •

Make every shot anew.

• • •

Half-hearted training will never do; half-baked philosophy is of no value. Be sincere and creative in all that you attempt. Establish yourself physically and spiritually.

• • •

When you understand what your shortcomings are and act upon correcting them, that is being a Buddha.

• • •

Buddhism is emptiness; the no hindrance of emptiness gives you freedom.

• • •

Breath is more precious than gold. Breath is like silk threads: sometimes thick, sometimes thin.

• • •

The in- and out-breath are the coming and going of life and death.

• • •

In the beginning, if you forget about focusing on your breath, you will easily lose concentration. Always keep your breath in your center.

• • •

From birth your life is a preparation for death. If you are born, you will die. Your life and death are a treasure. Shoot within the realm of life and death.

• • •

Death may be close at hand; death may be far off. Transcend death with no-thought, no-idea. Do what you need to do, with no regret.

• • •

Aim at the target with your belly.

• • •

Self-reflection encourages great bravery.
Rationalization is your greatest enemy.

• • •

Material possessions you hold to be valuable are your enemies. Come with nothing when you shoot.

• • •

The Bow becomes oneself. To learn about the Bow is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget the self. To forget self is to realize that all things, in the universe are you. From the beginning, heaven and earth are you, from start to finish. We are all from the same source, one with the cosmos.

• • •

To see your true nature in each shot is the Great Way of Peace. This is all you need.

• • •

With no set form, pull the bow. Release the arrow with no intent. Each shot reveals your character, it shows who you are, what you can do. Each shot must be sincere, use it to foster mind power, bring *ki* into your *tanden,* and polish your inner heart.

• • •

Fostering the spirit is painful, hard work; shoot each shot as if your life depended on it.

• • •

Be in the dojo wherever you are. It is your choice—live like a sage, or exist like a fool.

• • •

Use the Bow to dispel all evil, within and without.

• • •

An arrow that is full is not shot, not released, but contains the perfection of heaven and earth; that arrow is without limit.

• • •

Manifest great deeds by breaking the rules.

• • •

The essence of Buddhism is not meditation or liberation from samsara. It is *kensho,* “seeing into your nature.”

• • •

You and your bow must come together as one; that act is divine. This unity of instrument and oneself is divine. There is no bow, no arrow, no you; yes and no are one.

• • •

Each shot shows what you have suffered through, what you have practiced.

• • •

If your heart is true, your bow will be glorious. Your body and mind reflects the unity between heaven and earth, the Way and its Virtue.

• • •

Do your best at each and everything. That is the key to success. Learn one thing well and you will learn how to understand ten thousand things. Ten thousand things are one; this is the secret place of understanding you must find. Then everything is mysterious and wonderful.

• • •

Everyone tries to shoot naturally, but nearly all practitioners have some kind of strategy, some kind of shallow, artificial, calculating technical trick that they rely on when they shoot. Technical tricks ultimately lead nowhere. Shoot without shooting.

• • •

Breathe in a circle. Belly breath is healthy. Chest breath is ordinary. Shoulder breath is sick.

• • •

If you train with the Bow every day, you have a new life everyday.

• • •

Genius is nothing but great effort applied.

• • •

Gods are created in the country; people are made in big cities.

• • •

Masters do not rely on subterfuge.

• • •

Buddha is Compassion.
Confucius is Humanity.
Christ is Love.

• • •

Confucius practiced the Way of the Bow to demonstrate how a cultured person acts. Confucius was not concerned with hitting the target one hundred times out of one hundred shots. He was demonstrating how one hundred shots can be one hundred perfections of character.

• • •

Confucius and Buddha never equivocated.

• • •

Hitting a target with an arrow is a small vehicle; attaining enlightenment with an arrow is a big vehicle.

• • •

Shooting is to study the mind. Throw away form to understand form. Throw away mind to grasp mind. Utilize nothing to create something, and use that something to shoot an arrow.

• • •

Bow and Being must be one. One shot is one life. Within each shot see your nature. Open heaven and earth and set your being there.

• • •

A practitioner must be:
Unshakable in intent,
Fearless in Spirit,
Full of compassion.

• • •

Enlightenment is a state of single-mindedness—that is, a mind that is like a bright mirror, as polished as the finest gem.

• • •

Draw the Bow that has no form.

• • •

Each shot can make you or break you; each shot reveals you as a living buddha or bumbling fool.

• • •

One shot, one life is an offering to the gods.

• • •

Your character is given to you at birth. Your life unfolds as you grow. That unfolding can be fulfilled by practicing the Way.

• • •

The two greatest virtues: self-control and returning kindness.

• • •

Let nothing bind you. Transcend right and wrong, good and bad. Move on like a solitary lion. Make heaven and earth your dwelling. Renew! Renew!

• • •

Heaven and earth is a big human being. A human being is a small heaven and earth. Buddha is space. Space has no obstacles. It is freedom.

• • •

The basis of our Great Way is nature. We often hear talk of becoming one with nature. Every religion teaches this. If you can truly comprehend nature, then the Bow will be easy to master.

• • •

The Bow is in fact a gift from the gods. Right from the beginning it has been an instrument of purification.

• • •

Think of experience as something divine; we teach based on experience. Experience allows us to speak with authority. You must trust experience as something divine.

• • •

Winning and losing is not a matter of book learning; it is a matter of how much belly you have.

• • •

Do not be vague. Make your intentions as clear as a bell. Praise others for their sincere words.

• • •

Within the great distress of life, a true master remains at ease.

• • •

Rather than feeling pity about a situation, act!

• • •

No matter what the art, the most important thing is to establish who you really are. That is, move from the ego-centered self to the absolute self.

• • •

One who reveres nature and the way it functions understands how the gods work.

• • •

“Destroy evil” means to make the evil in your heart submit.

• • •

Forge your spirit through actual practice and experience. Your spirit is not your slave. It needs nourishment.

• • •

If your emotions are channeled properly, perverse thoughts disappear. When perverse thoughts are gone, you are in a state of sincerity. In a state of sincerity you will perceive the light of the gods.

• • •

The High Plain of Heaven is your belly.

• • •

In the dojo, aim for truth.
At home, aim for harmony.
At work, aim for progress.
Among friends, aim for trust.
In the world, aim for sincerity.

• • •

With no target,
With no arrow to draw,
Shoot:
Not in the middle,
Not outside.

• • •

My moon-mind is clear
All clouds
Have been dispersed—
At the gate of liberation
Wind rustles the pines.

• • •

The twang of the Bow
Resounds deep
In my belly
This moonlit
Night.

A body
Perfectly tuned
Felt deep in my belly
This moonlit

Night.

• • •

Mount Sumeru in India,
The Five Peaks in China,
Mount Fuji here in Japan,
All smile together
When spring comes.

• • •

Given this day,
Right now
To ponder;
Yesterday will not return,
Who knows about tomorrow?

• • •

The bow fully drawn,
The arrow ready
To confront
A raging
Blizzard.

• • •

Plum blossoms
Only
Quivered by
The arrow’s
Breeze.

• • •

Set your mind,
Stop your mind,
With no mind,
With your Mind

Shine!

• • •

Even when troubled
Maintain the spirit
Of the Bow and Arrow
And it will heal
Your sickness!

• • •

The Divine Catalpa Bow—
Draw it with all your might,
But with a mind
That does not aim
At the target.

• • •

If your mind
Targets your soul,
You can abandon the ego with no self,
And make
Each day anew.

• • •

Shatter heaven and earth,
Shatter your ego,
Stillness
Within movement:
The wings of a phoenix.

• • •

The string of the Bow
That shoots an arrow
That does not hit
The Target
Resounds for ten thousand generations.

• • •

No one stumbles
All the way to the top
Of Mount Fuji.
Single-mindedly go forward,
Sweeping aside the pebbles along the path.

• • •

The arrow flies,
The mind lingers:
A cuckoo cries.

• • •

Vanish
Vanity,
And there you are.

• • •

Splendor in Eight Directions,
Delighting in the natural beauty all around us,
Trying to tread the direct and true road
Without malicious or misguided thoughts.
Sitting grandly, with no illusion, looking for our true face,
Sincerely, with no scheming.
Far beyond the taunts of the world,
Avoiding foul water that will make you sick.
The wind howls, but the unobstructed bright moon
Remains settled, illuminating all.
Thunder resounds in the distance.
As the night grows deeper,
Our resolve to save others and expand virtue grows.

• • •

When two swords cross,
There is nowhere to escape!

The Bow is the perfection of heaven and earth.
Hitting the middle of the target is not required,
Hitting the center is base.
Hitting it one hundred times out of a hundred times [without trying] is noble—
But there is still more to achieve!

• • •

Without obstruction, without strain, shoot naturally without form, without a trace, full of heaven and earth, with universal energy in your belly.

• • •

If you look at the target as your enemy, you will never make progress. The target is a reference point, not your opponent.

• • •

Shoot within a circle. It is not possible to see how you shoot, but you will know intuitively when a shot was “unreleased.”

• • •

Non-thinking is where Buddha dwells. That is where we want to go.

• • •

Human beings always cling to things. Practice begins when you stop clinging.

• • •

Problems with society are not a matter of misguided ideas; such problems are due to diseases of the spirit.

• • •

Levels in Shooting
Wanting to quickly shoot
Feeling the pain of drawing the bow

Drawing it with all one's might
Becoming less dependent on technique
Being able to draw the bow easily
Concern about hitting the target
Achieving the limit of technical ability
Cleansing of body and mind
Confronting life and death
Developing tremendous resolve
No regret
True emptiness, no thought
YES! The arrow flies from your center full of spiritual energy

• • •

Ten Faults

1. Concern about the speed of the arrow
2. Attachment to set patterns
3. Fixation on theory
4. Concern about the quality of the bow and arrow
5. Worry about results
6. Concern about being skillful
7. Worry about what others think
8. Trying to be enlightened
9. Being self-satisfied
10. Shooting as amusing diversion

• • •

What to Look for in Shooting

Ideal form
Unimpeded release
Alert posture
Egoless execution
Unshakable posture
Concentration of spirit
Forging of the *tanden*
Instantaneous shot
One hundred shots one hundred bull's-eyes [technical perfection]

Proper breathing
Self-perception
Clarity
Utmost sincerity
Utmost bravery
Activation of the life force
Unification

• • •

Enlightenment
Abandon your ego and gaze at the moon
While gazing at the moon take one step forward
Shoot with the Self

• • •

To remain centered within the marvelous realm of Shooting.
To dwell within the marvelous realm of Shooting.
To never stray from the marvelous realm of Shooting.

• • •

True awakening is to have all one's senses united with nature, free of obstruction, and linked to heaven and earth.

• • •

The passions themselves are enlightenment. The entire body is purified. Following enlightenment, you want to practice more and more. That is an expression of the marvelous state of Shooting.

• • •

One day of effort is one day of bliss;
One day of sloth is a hundred years of regret.

• • •

True art makes you want to bow your head in reverence.

• • •

The Bow

Art	Way
Sport	Discipline
Instrument	Sacred Implement
False	True
Technique	Enlightenment
Off the mark	On Target

• • •

Ten Levels of Shooting

1. Training in form
2. Forging the body
3. Learning how to release
4. Breathing properly
5. Relaxation
6. Fostering vital energy (*ki*)
7. Projecting vital energy
8. Unity between mind and body (harmony)
9. Seeing your nature (enlightenment)
10. A shadowless moon-mind

• • •

To decrease thought is to increase spirit.
To decrease overexertion is to increase strength.
To decrease words is to foster vital energy.

• • •

Your grip should be like autumn leaves blown by a storm.

• • •

When the bow is fully drawn, there is nothing. It is like water flowing.

• • •

Meditation in stillness: express it as meditation in motion. No-mind is yes-mind; no-consciousness is yes-consciousness. No-illusion is no-obstruction is no-mind. That is where the bow becomes fully drawn. It feels like an imminent explosion of the life force, yet perfectly controlled.

• • •

If you just aim and shoot, you will not be making progress, even if you hit the center of the target every time. There is a spiritual rhythm in shooting emanating from breath and the concentration of spirit. You must liberate yourself from the desire to rely on your strength, to shoot the arrow, and to hit the target.

• • •

Shoot:
with the body,
with technique,
with consciousness,
with the mind,
with no-shooting.

• • •

Shoot with great wisdom.
Shoot with great compassion.

• • •

Shooting does separate exercise, ethics, philosophy, and religion. It gathers all things in one simple act of shooting.

• • •

Shoot with mystery, serenity, profundity, and clarity.

• • •

Harmonize warmth, strength, nobility, expansiveness, wisdom, and stillness when you Shoot.

• • •

As you draw the Bow, let go of all your desires, and manifest your inner nature. Your real nature is the Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature has no increase, no decrease, no birth, no death. When the Bow is fully drawn, you and the bow should be one. You and your spirit should be one as you face the target. This is the state of “Within each shot see your nature.”

• • •

Shooting reveals how much trust you have in the Way.

• • •

Shooting is rooted in nature. You are a miniature universe, everything —heaven and earth, the stars, the sun, rivers and valleys—are within you. Trust in this truth when you shoot. Shoot in harmony with the four seasons.

• • •

When you truly Shoot, you are perfectly revealed, your actions are complete, and that is so beautiful.

• • •

Our Way is ultimately a solitary pursuit. It is based on establishing your true self, and only you can do that. You must break out of your shell on your own. We are looking to Shoot straight, free of distractions.

• • •

If you want to win, practice virtue. If you win with virtue, your opponent buries himself. That is the true victory. Trying to win by relying on technique is a great mistake. If you want to emerge victorious, penetrate the mysteries of Shooting. Give up dissipation, forge your

spirit, overcome sloth and pride. In Shooting, respect and being high-minded are the keys.

• • •

Do not focus on the center of the target. The sound of the arrow hitting the target should simultaneously hit the center of your being. That instant is a divine, mystical experience.

• • •

Aim high from the center. Take one step at a time. Look under your feet. With your entire being shoot one arrow. Unify yourself with the divine, practice naturally. Be full of gratitude.

• • •

We are soldiers of the spirit—even our opponents. When you face opposition, make it go where you want; then you can control it.

• • •

Arouse the mind without letting it settle anywhere. This is the key to all the arts. It is the depth and mystery of an art that makes it interesting to practice.

• • •

To really progress, you need to liberate yourself from grasping, sexual addiction, the desire for fame, worry, contention, and the like. That will allow you to see your true self. With the great teaching within, you can help save the world.

• • •

Our ultimate teaching: Shoot the big Bow in whatever you do.

• • •

Master Kenzo shooting an arrow outside his dojo in Sendai in 1931 or 1932. Courtesy of Sendai Second Higher School Archery Club.

THREE

Tales of the Bow

I

The Monk Archer Sekkyo

One day a hunter was chasing after a herd of deer when he came upon the great Zen master Baso.

He yelled to Baso, “Hey you, any deer pass by?

Baso said, “Who are you?”

“A hunter,” he replied.

“Are you good with a bow and arrow?” Baso wanted to know.

“I am a hunter, so I have to be,” he replied.

“How many deer can you hit with one arrow?” Baso asked.

“One deer for one shot,” the hunter replied.

“Then you are not much of a shot,” the master commented.

“Do *you* know how to shoot?” the hunter shot back.

“Yes, I do,” Baso said.

“How many deer can you shoot with one arrow?” the hunter demanded.

“The entire herd with one shot,” Baso told him.

“They are sentient beings, so why kill them all? One should be enough,” the hunter said.

“If that is the way you think, why don’t you shoot yourself?”

“How can I do that?” the hunter asked with surprise.

Baso suddenly shouted, “This guy’s ignorance and base passions are now gone!”

The hunter had a great realization. He broke his bow and arrows, shaved his head, became a disciple, and eventually one of Baso’s

Dharma-heirs.

The ex-hunter was known as Zen Master Sekkyo.

Sekkyo had a new bow and arrow made, but this time he used the weapon to test prospective students. As soon as a person came to ask to become his student, Sekkyo pulled out his bow and arrow, aimed it directly at the candidate's chest, and shouted, "Stop or I'll shoot!"

The students would run away in terror, but one day a monk named Sanpei appeared. When Sekkyo aimed his arrow at Sanpei's heart and shouted, "Look! An arrow," Sanpei calmly pulled aside his robe, exposed his chest, and said, "Is this the arrow that kills, or the arrow that gives life?" Sekkyo plucked the bowstring three times in response. Sanpei bowed three times.

Sekkyo said, "For thirty years, I have been waiting with my bow and arrow; today I have managed to shoot half a man!" Sekkyo broke his bow and arrows, once and for all.[1]

II

Joshu's Bull's-eye

When Joshu went to visit Master Dogo, Dogo exclaimed, "An arrow from Nansen has come!" Joshu said, "Look, an arrow." Dogo yelled, "Missed the mark!" Joshu shouted, "Bull's-eye!"[2]

III

The Daoist Archer

Yang aspired to be the greatest archer in China. He went to study under Wei, the top master of the time. Wei told him, "First learn how not to blink."

Yang returned home and crept under his wife's loom. He was determined to lie there while she worked the treadle across the loom, up and down, directly in front of his eyes. Yang spent two years doing this. Now nothing could make him blink—a blow to the eyes, a spark from a fire, a speck of dust, a splash of water. Even when he

slept Wang's eyes remained open and small spiders would weave tiny webs between his eyelashes.

Yang went to see Master Wei, and told him of his accomplishment. "Good," the master said. "Now learn how to look."

Yang went to his garden and searched for a tiny insect. He found a barely perceptible bug, and placed it on a plant in his study. Yang placed the plant on the opposite side of the room, and stared it for an hour each day. At first, he could not really discern anything, but after a few months he could clearly see the insect and the marks on its body. After three years of such training, the insect looked as big as a horse. Yang grabbed his bow, and used a slender arrow to shoot the insect right off the leaf without disturbing the plant at all.

Yang reported this feat to Master Wei. "Good. Now let's see you shoot a willow branch a hundred paces away." Yang hit the willow branch right in the center. Thereafter Yang could hit any type of target at which he aimed.

However, Yang was still not satisfied. He wanted to test his skill against that of his master. One day, Yang caught sight of Master Wei walking across a field in the distance. In an instant, Yang had taken aim and released an arrow. Wei sensed what was happening and immediately countered with a shot of his own. The arrows collided in mid-air, falling harmlessly to the ground. Yang shot every arrow in his quiver, but Master Wei continued to neutralize each one. Finally, however, Wei was out of arrows, and Yang thought he had the master at last. Before Yang's final arrow reached his heart, Wei managed to break off a twig from a nearby tree and deflect the oncom-ing arrow.

When Yang saw that feat, he was stricken with remorse. The magnanimous Wei forgave him. "Your technical skill is superior but your mind needs more training. You must seek out Master Kan."

Wei did not know if Master Kan was still alive, but knew that he had been living on Mt. Ho. Yang made his way to Mt. Ho with great difficulty and was told that there was an old man known as Kan living in a hermitage high in the mountains.

When Yang reached the hermitage, he encountered a venerable old man who appeared just like a Daoist Immortal. Yang impetuously

shot a slew of arrows at a passing flock of birds; five came hurtling down to earth.

Master Kan smiled, “So you know how to shoot with a bow and arrow. But do you know how to shoot without shooting? Let me show you.”

Yang was taken to the rockiest, most dangerous place on the mountain, and was ordered to shoot by master Kan. The terrified Yang could not get off a single shot.

Master Kan told Yang, “I will now show you real archery.”

“But you do not have a bow,” Yang protested.

“A bow?” Kan laughed. “Who needs a bow to practice archery?”

Kan pretended to draw a bow and release an imaginary arrow at a bird flying high above. Yang heard a distinctive twang; the bird fell like a stone from the sky. Kan was nonplussed.

Yang stayed with master Kan for ten years. Yang descended the mountain with nothing in his hands. When asked to demonstrate archery, Yang replied, “The ultimate in shooting is not to shoot.”

Thereafter, Yang was never seen holding a bow or shooting an arrow, but birds and wild animals never approached his hut, and any thief who attempted to break in was repelled by a sudden blast of wind.

After years of living quietly in the village, Yang peacefully left this life. In his last year, Yang visited one of his friends and said, “Tell me, what is that instrument on your table?”

“Why master,” the startled friend replied, “That is a bow used to shoot these arrows.”

“Is that right?” ancient Yang smiled blissfully. “I had forgotten.”[3]

Awa Kenzo in zanshin, a state of deep concentration, after the release of the arrow. Courtesy of the Abe Family.

Notes

Introduction

1. Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery,* trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953). Although this translation from the German has been criticized for not reproducing Herrigel's ideas as accurately as possible and there are several big errors—the most glaring being the erroneous statement that Herrigel taught at Tokyo University when it was actually Tohoku University in Sendai—this is the edition that readers know and love. A posthumous work by Herrigel (edited in part by Alan Watts), entitled *The Method of Zen,* was published in 1960, also by Pantheon Books. There is nothing in it about Zen archery, but Herrigel's comments on Zen painting are good. Herrigel's wife, Gustie L. Herrigel, practiced archery alongside her husband—and, according to my sources in Sendai, was a bit miffed she did not receive a higher rank from Kenzo. She published a book called *Zen in the Art of Flower Arrangement* (New York: Souvenir Press, 1999).

2. Recently, small-fry academics (the same pedants who claim that D. T. Suzuki did not really understand Zen) have criticized what they call the "myth" of *Zen in the Art of Archery.* They state that most modern archers in Japan practice archery with no reference to Zen. This is news? They maintain that Awa Kenzo is not typical of Japanese master archers. No surprise there either, and in fact most readers realize that Kenzo was the exception, not the rule for martial arts teachers. Of course, Kenzo was not at all representative of Japanese archers—he was one of a kind, someone who epitomized the best of that particular tradition. And of course, many would oppose his innovations—in Kenzo's case he had rocks thrown at him

during demonstrations—just as they would oppose other great masters. But despite the many who opposed Awa, his organization eventually had more than fourteen thousand members all over Japan, so it was perfectly understandable for Herrigel to believe that Kenzo was teaching him true archery and to present him as perhaps the most important archery instructor in the country.

More preposterous is the argument that Kenzo's understanding of Zen was faulty because, it seems, Kenzo never did formal meditation or was certified by a Zen teacher. This is a gross misunderstanding of what Zen is meant to be. Right from the beginning of the Zen tradition, Zen has never been strictly a matter of formal seated meditation or certification from an "official" organization. Zen history is replete with examples of eccentric monks, zany laymen and women, Zen grannies, vagabonds, and other outsiders who had an intuitive understanding of Zen completely independent of formal meditation practices or study at a monastic institution. It is ridiculous to contend that Kenzo did not understand Zen (or even archery itself) simply because he was not associated with any Zen teacher or organization. Kenzo's understanding of Zen was as profound, and his enlightenment experience as deep, as anyone's during that period. Even more bizarre is the claim that Awa was not teaching Herrigel Zen in the art of archery. This is despite such explicit statements by Kenzo as "When the Bow and the self are one, that is Zen" and "In the full draw of the Bow your mind should be in the same state as in Zen meditation." Since Kenzo often brushed calligraphy that read, "The Bow and Zen Are One," and laced his talks and writings with Zen expressions, it is perfectly natural that Herrigel would entitle his book *Zen in the Art of the Archery.* What else would he have called it? Furthermore, Herrigel did not use the expression "Zen in the Art of Archery" just because he was a foreigner. Yoshida Yoshiyasu (1891–1985), perhaps Kenzo's most talented Japanese disciple, opened a "Zen Bow Dojo," and said about Kenzo almost exactly the same things as Herrigel. (Having said all this, Kenzo's interpretation emphasized Zen as meaning "complete integration" rather than "formal meditation," and he had quite a bit of samurai-flavored Confucianism included in his teachings.)

The most ludicrous—and racist—argument is that Herrigel totally misunderstood what Kenzo was saying to him because of the language barrier. (I half expect a Japanese researcher to argue that because Herrigel had a German brain, he was genetically unable to understand the words emanating from Kenzo's Japanese brain.) To be sure, Kenzo the philosopher of the Great Doctrine, as Herrigel calls Kenzo's teaching in the book, was not easy to understand, even for his closest Japanese disciples, especially since he was not a very good speaker, plus he had a thick Tohoku accent. However, Awa's other students largely stayed away when Herrigel and his wife came to practice so that the master could give them his full attention. Herrigel was an intelligent man, and after five years he likely understood Kenzo's Japanese quite well. (Among foreigners in Sendai, there is a saying that the quickest way to learn Japanese is to study a martial art.) Kenzo learned a little German, so they surely communicated quite well, and both certainly understood one another's body language. Furthermore, Kenzo promoted Herrigel to fifth Dan, a very high rank for the time, and gave the German one of his bows, something Kenzo would never have done if he thought the person had missed the mark, literally and figuratively. As we shall understand from chapter 2 of this book, Herrigel, in general, presented Kenzo's philosophy well and accurately, and there was little misunderstanding or misinterpretation on Herrigel's part. It is his critics who are way off target.

Herrigel's later Nazi politics are troubling, and there may be other problems with his overall approach, but the real hero of *Zen in the Art of Archery* is Awa Kenzo, and his teaching still serves us well.

By the way, there was a much earlier account of Japanese archery titled *The Fundamentals of Japanese Archery,* published by the American William R. B. Archer in 1937. The original edition was handwritten and nicely illustrated. It is much more low-key and far less dramatic than Herrigel's book, but it makes essentially the same points: "Sitting refers to the erect yet easy posture used by Buddhist monks in the practice of meditation" and "Deep breathing, similar to that practiced by Buddhist monks in meditation, to settle and calm the nerves." And again, "This emphasis on breathing as a method of concentration and at the same time quieting one's nervous energies

reflects the influence of the Zen or meditation sect of Buddhism." Acker includes a long and accurate description of the practice of the Japanese Ways, including the Way of the Bow of course. He also refers to Japanese tantra—"One should think of oneself as being like Vairocana Buddha, calm and without fear, and feel as though one were standing like him in the center of the universe"—and Indian philosophy. He also wrote, "The archer's breathing seems to have the mystic power of the utterance of the syllable Om" (this last he wrote in Devanagari script in the manuscript). He also includes a quote from Odysseus in the original Greek. All in all, Archer's book is remarkable, and well in keeping with the true spirit of *Zen in the Art of Archery.*

3. For the life and teaching of Ueshiba Morihei, see *Invincible Warrior: A Pictorial Biography of Ueshiba Morihei* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), *The Essence of Aikido: Spiritual Teachings of Morihei Ueshiba* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1999), and *The Art of Peace* (Boston: Shambhala Classics, Shambhala Publications, 1992)—all by John Stevens. As far as I have determined, neither master made mention of the other. However, it seems possible that their paths crossed at one of the big martial arts demonstrations held in Kyoto or Tokyo. Also, both Kenzo and Morihei gave lessons at the Nakano Spy School in Tokyo, so perhaps they were known to each other from that connection. Kenzo, by the way, was an ardent admirer of Yamaoka Tesshu (see John Stevens, *The Sword of No-Sword: Life of the Master Warrior Tesshu* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001]), often mentioning Tesshu in his notes. Morihei gave seminars at a dojo run by Tesshu's disciples, so there is a common thread that ties the three masters together.

4. Sakurai Yasunosuke, *Awa Kenzo: Oi naru sha no michi no oshie* [Awa Kenzo: The Teaching of the Greater and Greater Shooting Way]. Sendai, Japan: Awa Kenzo Sensei Shoten Hyakunensai Jikko Iinkai, 1981. This huge volume was published in Sendai on the hundredth anniversary of Awa Kenzo's birth. Sakurai's enthusiasm and devotion for his teacher is admirable, but he often got carried away and included too much extra material. Some of his

interpretations, too, are open to question, but that is to be expected with such a controversial and complex figure as Kenzo.

Chapter 1

1. Interestingly, Onisaburo was the guru of Ueshiba Morihei. Onisaburo himself practiced archery, not from the Zen perspective, but as an aspect of Shinto shamanism.

2. Heki Danjo Masastsugi (c. 1440), founder of the Heki School, was reputed to be able to overcome enemies with his battle cry alone. At a battle at Uchino, not one arrow had to be shot because Heki's tremendous *kiai* put the enemy to flight. See Felix Hoff, *Kyudo: The Way of the Bow* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002).

3. From *Kyu no michi: shoboryu nyumon,* a collection of Yoshida's teachings, edited by his students.

4. Nor, even, is splitting an arrow. Competition archers, hunters, and trick shots regularly report the splitting of an arrow. Although few do it in near-total darkness, like Kenzo, splitting an arrow is akin to a golfer scoring a hole in one at a long distance. Howard Hill (1900–75), the famous American archer who performed the splitting-the-arrow stunt (in one take) in the movie *The Adventures of Robin Hood,* was said to be able to split arrows with amazing frequency. (Hill was also famed for killing an elephant with a bow and arrow.) There is even a report of a Native American named Tahan splitting a bullet at thirty-five yards. A companion challenged him to hit a knot on a tree with his 3030 rifle. Tahan did so, and was dared to do it again. This time it looked like he missed. However, Tahan went to the knot and dug out two bullets that were wedged one on top of the other in a single hole. (Reginald and Gladys Laubin, *American Indian Archery*, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.) There is a humorous story in E. J. Harrison's *The Fighting Spirit of Japan* (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1982), pp. 25–26. He writes that at a public archery range in Yokohama, one of his foreign colleagues, while smoking a cigar, fitting the arrow on the wrong side, and holding the bow in an incorrect position, almost always got

closer to hitting the bull's-eye than the Japanese shooters, who scrupulously observed the proper etiquette.

Kenzo's point was that even the best shot was not as important as the spirit behind the shot. Zen will make you a better shooter in the sense of perfecting your character and improving your equanimity, but it may not—and should not be expected to—improve your chances of hitting the target. The latter belongs to the technical realm, and depends mostly on natural ability.

5. This account was given by one of Kenran's disciples, who made it seem as if Kenran was the teacher and Kenzo was the student, when actually Kenzo was Kenran's superior in age and experience. So it is difficult to tell how accurate it is—but it is still a good story, especially if we interpret Kenzo's statement as meaning, "Nice try, but you did not fool me one bit."

Chapter 2

1. Katib Abdullah Effendi and Mustafa Kani, *Sacred Archery—The Forty Prophetic Traditions* (Cornwall, Eng.: Himma Press, 2005).

Chapter 3

1. The masters' names in Chinese are Mazu (Baso), 709–88; Shigong (Sekkyo), dates unknown; Sanping (Sanpei), 781–872. Shigong's name in Japanese is sometimes given as Shakkyo. See *The Blue Cliff Record* (Hekigan-roku)*,* eighty-first case commentary. There is a very famous painting of the Sekkyo-Sanpei encounter by Kano Motonobu in the Daisen'in subtemple of Daitokuji in Kyoto.

2. Joshu (778–897) in Chinese is Zhaozhou. He is most famous for his reply to the question "Does this dog have the Buddha-nature?" Joshu's reply was, "*MU*! (No)." Dogo (769–835) is Daowu in Chinese. Nansen (748–834) is called Nanquan in Chinese; he is the notorious master who sliced the cat in two when his monks could not give him a word of Zen. This exchange is from *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu,* trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), p. 76.

3. Based on various Daoist legends and the short story *The Expert* by Nakashima Ton.

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