

Kyudo - the Way of the Bow

Centuries ago in Japan, archery was regarded as the highest discipline of the Samurai warrior. Then, as the bow lost its significance as a weapon of war, and under the influence of Buddhism, Shinto, Daoism and Confucianism, Japanese archery evolved into Kyudo, the "Way of the Bow", a powerful and highly refined contemplative practice.

Kyudo, as taught by Kanjuro Shibata XX, is not a competitive sport and marksmanship is regarded as relatively unimportant. According to Shibata Sensei, a master of the Heki Ryu Bishu Chikurin-ha school of Kyudo, the ultimate goal of Kyudo is to polish the mind - the same as in sitting meditation.

"One is not polishing one's shooting style or technique, but the mind. The dignity of shooting is the important point. This is how Kyudo differs from the common approach to archery. In Kyudo there is no hope. Hope is not the point. The point is that through long and genuine practice your natural dignity as a human being comes out. This natural dignity is already in you, but it is covered up by a lot of obstacles. When they are cleared away, your natural dignity is allowed to shine forth" - Shibata Sensei.

Chogyam Trungpa the renowned Tibetan meditation master said, "Through Kyudo one can learn to live beyond hope and fear, how to be".

Kyudo - the Practice

The practice of Kyudo is deceptively simple. Students can receive instruction in the basic form, shichido, or seven coordinations, in as few as 5-6 classes or during a weekend intensive. After the initial training, practice begins by shooting at a straw target only two meters away. When a degree of proficiency is attained the practice expands to include 28 meter shooting.

Working with the precision of the form, a natural process gradually unfolds through



Kanjuro Shibata Sensei at Kai. (ca. 1990)

which the practitioner has the opportunity to see the mind more clearly. The target becomes a mirror which reflects the qualities of heart and mind at the moment of the arrow's release.

This distinguishes Kyudo from archery where simply hitting the target is the goal. Kyudo is "Standing meditation", and as such, is a true contemplative art.

To practice Kyudo in this way, one must have a good teacher. Kyudo cannot be learned from books.

The insight and guidance of a master or qualified teacher are invaluable as one progresses along the Kyudo path.

Men and women of all ages are able to practice Kyudo. Physical strength is not a factor. Children can begin at around eight years of age.

The Kyudo path is one of self-discovery and ultimately, self-realization. Although the path may be long, there are vast rewards along the way. It all begins with the first shot.