

III.

In passing, I want to mention that we also had the chance to become acquainted with the purest form of mystical meditation as practiced by Zen priests. Its goal is a 'hitting' without bow and arrow, exactly what the art of archery should lead to if properly done. Sinking into groundlessness, whether one becomes purposeless and ego-less while using bow and arrow, or whether one meditates, sitting like the Buddha, hands together, is really one and the same. The first method of meditation is easier to get at and easier to keep up, while the second method is more difficult, but also longer lasting. In any case, the crucial point for both is that the practitioner is calm, aimless, ego-less and not just deemed to be so; that when he has become Nothing, he really is annihilated and that he does not feel insignificant. Not only all thought and will, but also feeling is eliminated in real meditation. The mystical state, the being in Non-being, is totally unspeakable, unwritable, incomparable. One must experience it to know that words can only paraphrase it, never describe it. One must have experienced it to know why Zen literature is teeming with paradoxes, why the Zen student is so long tortured with them that he finally gives up trying to get to the bottom of groundlessness through thinking. Then one understands that the concept of 'nothingness' plays a very crucial part in all mysticism and is the germ of utter fulfillment, of absolute mastery, of complete being.

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

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

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

I shall go into this no further here. It is more important to mention another widely held misconception which can indeed be refuted with fact. One always hears that mysticism, and in particular Buddhism, leads to a more passive and unworldly, more escapist or anti-worldly spiritual attitude. [p 209] We assign certain coincident manifestations of mysticism to mysticism as such. With aversion, we turn away from this venerable path of inactivity and praise our Faustian character. We forget that there was a great mystic in the history of German thought, Meister Eckhart, who preached alongside detachment the imperishable value of daily living. And whoever finds these teachings contradictory should reflect that, much as he would like to, he cannot reproach the Japanese people, whose spiritual culture and way of life are so rooted in Zen Buddhism, with passiveness and a 'lethargic, irresponsible' escapism. The Japanese are so astonishingly active not because they are lukewarm Buddhists but because the vital, working Buddhism of Japan sanctions their activity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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