

# SPIRITUAL ARCHERY: HITTING THE MARK

by Alan Senior

‘Take the bow, place on it the arrow – sharpened by devotion. Draw it with a thought directed to *that which is* and hit the mark. OM is the bow, the Self is the arrow, Brahman is the aim. As the arrow merges with the target, you will become one with Brahman. Know him alone as the Self. Meditate on the Self as OM and cross beyond the sea of darkness.’ (*Mundaka Upanishad*)

In the Bhagavad-Gita we read of Arjuna, prince of India, possessing a special gift from the gods – his bow called Gandiva, with which he has become a superb archer. In fact he can use this wonderful bow with both his left and right hand; thus he is called ‘thou both-handed’ by Krishna. Elsewhere, in Greek mythology, we hear of Ulysses and Artemis possessing marvellous bows which sometimes have magical or spiritual qualities.

Archery has often been called a ‘spiritual skill’ to express beauty and truth, and the bow has retained a deep historical and cultural significance for the Japanese people in war *and* peace, where it is seen as a symbolic and aesthetic object. The practice of *Kyudo* – the Way of the Bow – provides a path for personal growth and the transcendence of individual limitations, together with respect for others. In confronting one’s desires and negative thoughts the real challenge is seen to lie, not in the manipulation of the bow, but in the perfecting of oneself. In other words, skill must be accompanied by an understanding of spiritual energy and as technique grows, so does one’s body-mind awareness... a harmonious working together of bow, body and spirit. *Kyudo* archers search for truth with sincerity, courage, patience, alertness and commitment. If a beginner does not search for truth, he does not study *Kyudo*.

This recognition of the need to create a sense of ‘centredness’ was why two great Western teachers, W.Q. Judge and Nicholas Roerich, practised the skill of archery in order to concentrate the mind, the eye and the body. In an article called ‘Hit the Mark’ Judge said: “... *those who truly seek wisdom are archers trying to hit the mark. This is spiritual archery... The eye must not wander from the target, for, if it does, the arrow will fly wide or fall short of its goal. So if we start out to reach the goal of wisdom, the mind and heart must not be permitted to wander, for the path is narrow and the wanderings of a day may cause us years of effort to find the road again.*”

In archery, spiritual and non-spiritual, we may not possess the wonderful bows of a Ulysses, an Artemis or an Arjuna, but the quality of our bow can make a great difference to the result. To become a true archer we must know our bow intimately – its pressure points, length and draw weight, the parts that need care when stringing and unstringing it. We are our own bow and if we do not possess the qualities and aims to work diligently on ourselves then, like the arrow, we will fall short of the target. As Judge says, *“the string of the bow must always be strung tight; and this, in spiritual archery, is the fixed determination to always strive for the goal... When the arrow is aimed and loosed it must be slightly raised to allow for the trajectory, for if not it will fall short. This corresponds... with one of the necessities of our human constitution, in that we must have a high mental and spiritual aim if we are to hit high, (allowing) for the trajectory that comes about from the limitations of our nature.”*

The *Kyudo* masters stress that at higher levels of practice the archer attempts a full draw and release, where the expansion of energy reaches its highest point in a spontaneous and natural action. This is the moment when the archer’s physical, mental and spiritual stability is fully tested and where he is most vulnerable... the moment when the target becomes the mirror of the archer’s soul. In another sense the arrow is the ‘winged soul’ of the archer, who has been trapped in the confines of matter and duality. In yet another sense it is a ‘standing meditation’; when you shoot, you see the reflection of your mind, as in a mirror. The target is the mirror and you are releasing the ego.

To achieve one’s goal is to be complete. When you reach the level of the higher mind, then everything else misses the mark (which was the original meaning of sinning) and is seen as secondary. In Britain today our political leaders perpetually speak of ‘meeting targets’, whether in hospitals, schools or industry. If society could but realise that there is only one real target, that of self-transformation, then most of the problems in our strife-torn world would disappear as people discovered the answer to the mystery of existence. Meanwhile, everything continually goes wrong in the world, which remains in a state of confusion, because mankind fails to realise this truth and will stay incomplete, unable to ‘hit the mark’.

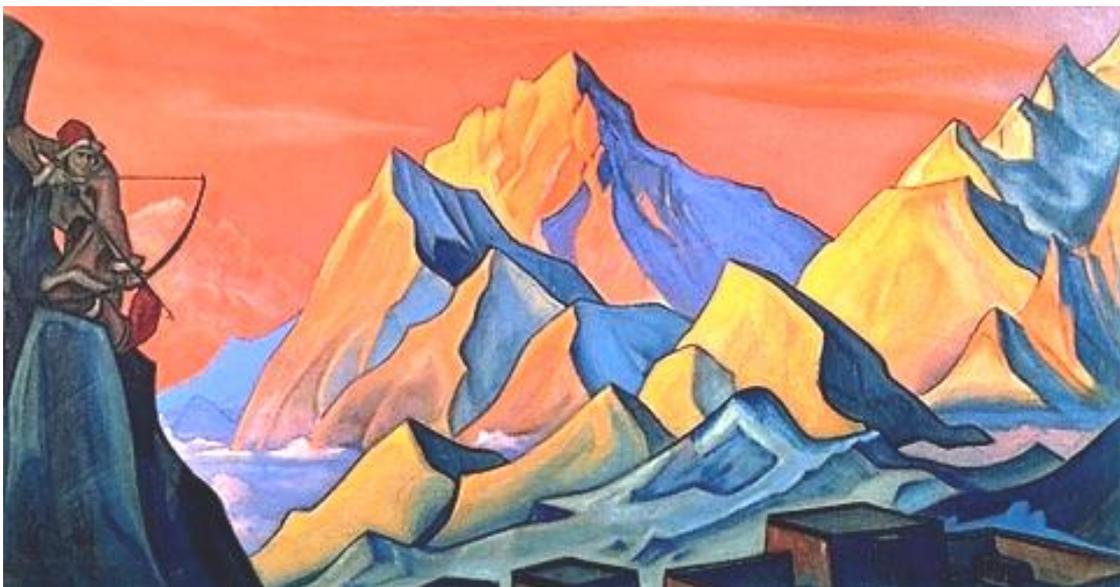
So, to be ‘on target’ another kind of thinking is necessary for the attainment of *unity with all that is*. *“Let us hit the mark, O friend,”* Judge urges us, *“and that mark is indestructible, the highest spiritual life we are at any time capable of.”* A frequent theme in Nicholas Roerich’s paintings was ‘Message from Shambhala’. Is it not fitting that these messages from the Masters, given to aid, instruct and inspire erring humanity should be sent via archer-messengers? But, for these to ‘hit the mark’, mankind must respond with ‘ears to hear’, then act rightly in compliance with the highest teaching.



W.Q. Judge



Nicholas Roerich



'Message from Shambhala' – Nicholas Roerich