

Zen and the Art of Archery and the art of acting (not to mention the art of teaching acting)

I came across a blogpost discussing a book I have not read, called *Zen and the Art of Archery*. I found this from the blog post very resonant:



What Zen instructs is that learning is not about the outward manifestation of a skill, but the inward journey through the self. On several occasions the Master leaves Herrigel to struggle hopelessly and heroically with the fiendish difficulties of drawing a bow correctly, only giving him helpful hints when he has reached the point of desperation. Why won't he tell him these things earlier? Herrigel asks. Because he has to exhaust all the possibilities for himself before he would

be ready to take in what the Master has to say. And isn't this the truth? How many times have I told students what they need to do, only to be met with blank stares or the insincere gestures of over-anxious acceptance. The truth only makes sense when we are ready to hear it, and not a moment before. We have to work things out for ourselves. It takes Herrigel a further two or three years to figure out the 'right' moment to loose his arrow, the moment when his hand will fall easily away from the bowstring, without jerking backwards. The long process to reach this point not only teaches him much that is wordless about feeling the task in hand, but it prepares him for the understanding that mastering an art like this is a spiritual activity, not one governed by tricks and predicated

on the easy joy of achievement.

I especially like this part:

The truth only makes sense when we are ready to hear it.

There is a Zen parable about a teacher and a student. The teacher is pouring tea. He pours the tea until the cup overflows, and keeps pouring. The student, astonished, asks "Master, what are you doing?" The teacher replies "This cup is like your mind. How can I put anything into it when it is already full?"

Students who come to the class with genuine curiosity and eagerness to learn, and who are prepared for, and undeterred by, difficulty and failure, are the ones who succeed and are the most rewarding to teach, and the ones who make the most progress.

Andrew Wood Acting Studio