

## The Challenges of Kai

With the accomplishment of the five coordinations through a full draw we come to the space of Kai. When Kai is fulfilled the release can happen naturally. The actions of the previous coordinations are united in a crescendo from which the release occurs. With the release, the space of Zanshin becomes spontaneously present for the archer to recognize. The place and power of Kai should not be forgotten.

When Kai is activated by the shooter there is little or no visible movement. It is primarily the archer himself or herself who knows whether he or she engages Kai or not. We have a responsibility to fully engage Kai.

Over the years I've observed practitioners casually or unknowingly not engaging in this powerful coordination. Technical reasons, inexperience, feelings of hope or fear, lack of continuity of attention or many other distractions can prevent Kai from taking place. To face what *occurs* in Kai is an act of courage and honesty.

I remember Shibata sensei's remark about my Kai, and other students' Kai. He would watch us shoot and after the shot say "No Kai... no balance." That was it. He would walk away. We heard it over and over. Even without his words you would often know something was off in your form. Accepting his strong words you went back and shot again and again with determination to look into the question, What is balance? What is Kai? What is its feeling? Where have I missed it? If you don't examine what you are doing you stay lost in your own habits. When we take the words of our teacher seriously we open to objectively questioning and investigating what we do in the formation and execution of each shot.

When I take a position in the form I work toward an upright posture of stability and strength. I have come to see that unconscious habits take me away from what is needed to bring me back to balance.

The initial coordinations, up to Hikitori, establish and build a physical intensity. The completion of a full draw brings you to Kai, a place of no return. The shot has to be completed. In the space of three to fifteen seconds, even milliseconds, the space of Kai can be entered and engaged.

Simply questioning what is taking place in the body and mind helps one to recognize the fullness of balance or imbalance.

The juncture between full draw and release allows only a few moments of investigation. The strength of the five crosses merge into one cross. Tensions in the body, arms, or shoulders can be reduced by directing an attentive awareness toward them. Slackness in the hands, shoulders, or chest, as well as misalignment in the five crosses are other areas of possible neglect of fullness. All area of imbalance cannot be seen in a few shots. More and more practice is necessary.

One of kyudo's challenges is to enact this coordination with fullness and integrity.

It is said that to go from Kai to Hanare we give life to the words of a fundamental Buddhist teaching: "*era jori*" meaning that everything/everyone that meets must part. Hello means goodbye.

What is created has impermanence. This recognition changes us.

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Regarding your own sense of Kai I recommend that your practice investigates what takes place between a full draw and the release in each shot. Maybe you blank out in mind and vision, maybe your yumi is too strong and your struggle with it hurries you into an awkward shot, maybe the hope and desire of hitting the target or the fear or anticipation of failure cloud your attention, maybe you have pushed your energy too far in repeated shots and tiredness arises to diminish your strength and precision. Any of these and many other possible distractions need recognition.

For me this is where the work of kyudo lies - in shot after shot. I wish to recognize and appreciate these distractions. They show up like old friends, not enemies. If you brand them as obstacles and wish to change them, they stay around longer. Denying their existence and wishing to change them only enforces their life. Remember, in saying hello there is also goodbye.

*Don Symanski 2017*