
Posture and effort in archery

By Consol Bofill

Part One

Beyond the sportive achievement, archery can be experienced as a transcendental, immanent, fundamental experience. It is then presented as something that happens by itself, generating a feeling of ease, lightness and - at the same time - fullness and perfection. The whole process (taking up the bow, preparing to shoot, looking at the target, releasing the arrow) requires an attitude and a disposition that are not always possible to reach and accessible for the person who is shooting, as they depend more on his/her own "self-image" than on the acquisition of a technique or skill.

"Each one of us speaks, moves, thinks and feels differently and, in each case, in accordance with the self-image that each of us has built up over the years".

It is not uncommon that after several years of archery practice, having acquired a sound technical knowledge, the archer finds himself in situations that are beyond him, even if he respects all the instructions and recommendations. He feels everything that needs to be done, takes the correct posture, takes the bow and follows all the steps until the arrow is released, but many things happen then ... except those he was expecting. This concerns less what could happen in relation to the result of the shot towards the target than the reactions of the body, the mind, the emotions, how the archer feels. Something then prevents him from following the precise indications received, in spite of all the effort he makes: there is something that resists, there is something that eludes his understanding and his will.

And often, this is because it's not a question of "doing" something, but more of "stopping doing" it, so as not to interfere with the expression of genuine self-regulation, or (and this is the same thing) so that something can happen (in reality), going beyond the limits of what is possible.

"Transforming impossibility in possibility, possibility in ease, ease in elegance".

Our self-image develops from early childhood, through the relationships with the outside world and with ourselves. It responds to a determined conception of the Ego, the fruit of a historic-cultural context. The way we act and the development of our own potential, the way we effectively involve ourselves and develop our personal possibilities in all facets of our being, depend to a large extent on our personal self-image (feeling of self, self-awareness, beliefs about the self...), as they draw the limits that we discover in our movements, in our posture and - in general - in communication with our environment.

Paying attention to one's own difficulties or limits in action, posture, relationships, etc. is a path that highlights the beliefs to which one responds, with all the clichés that condition the perception of our self. The self-image is before, at the center and after all doing, conceiving, deciding. It is a construction on which the human being is completely dependent, because - when it is unconscious - it prevents us from living, thinking, deciding by ourselves, leaving the space open to the fact of "being lived", being thought, being directed by another will.

From a fully conscious attitude, the bow, the arrow, the target and the person establish a dialogue, which opens up to another space where there is no longer any differentiation, which forms the same reality ... as in zazen where the relationship between posture and reality, the person and the outside, is constantly recreated, a relationship crossed by fleeting events and innumerable micro-movements which generate a kind of complicity between tranquillity and dynamism. The way in which the person perceives himself changes, he's recognizing himself in the relationship with the bow and what it is asking for, while at the same time he's broadening his self-awareness and discovering himself as "other" in each new encounter.

Part Two

Nowadays, there are few objections to the fact that mind and body act as the same biological and functional unit, expressing the same conflicts in different ways. Conflicts are only the expression of opposite while simultaneous directions of movement and prevent any appropriation, clichés nowadays that do not allow for the expression of something important: the fact of connecting with one's own center, the axis of stability around which movement and action, thought and feeling are organized, the axis around which the person finds balance, developing one's own potential, just like a true spontaneous expression of the essential aspects in archery. Appropriation is not in essence a function of the will. It is not a question of doing, but of letting go, in order to be able to feel, perceive and act by oneself.

In general, it happens that we know too much, that we have too many certainties, an accumulation of experiences ... And then we draw conclusions, which interferes with the development of an authentic (singular, clean, real) experience. Often, we act by imposing a discipline on ourselves, to reach our objectives as an act of will, in order to "be", in opposition to the reality of "what is", to the concrete reality of each moment. Thanks to the strength of this will, we may sometimes reach the goal, but we must ask ourselves at the expense of what? What are we abandoning by this process and what are the consequences?

The effort we develop is only in direct proportion to the resistance that reality exerts (for example, when we stretch the bow at the moment of letting the arrow go...) and this generates conflict. Such resistance is part of one's own habits and of neuromuscular patterns that develop contradictory forces and useless tensions. The result is the distancing from our objective, whatever it may be. Thus, sometimes perhaps, we can reach our goal, but at the expense of the real, full and joyful experience of what we are doing, and of the possibility of learning to improve our own capacity.

In the middle of the last century, the physicist Moshe Feldenkrais wondered about the conditions under which a person could learn more easily and satisfactorily. He found the answer in a law discovered in the 19th century in the field of psychophysics: "*the Weber-Fechner's law*" of "law of small perceptible differences". When the level of effort is decreased, the ability to refine the kinaesthetic sensations is increased and consequently, the ability to perceive differences in internal connections and to perceive unknown and unconscious aspects in the physical organization of movement and action is increased. In this way, we perceive old habits (neuromuscular, mental, emotional, postural), which highlight places of resistance. And then we can recover lost functions throughout the educational process, accidents of life, etc.,

focusing effectively on our own objectives and, in short, improving the quality of our life, enjoying and gaining autonomy.

Penetrating and refining self-awareness (or auto-awareness) through attention, instead of forcing a result by exerting violence on one's own balance and interfering in an organic process of self-regulation, makes it possible to perceive the tensions, blockages and areas of conflict that make action difficult, as well as the damage we do to ourselves with certain habits, then rejecting them viscerally, not by force of will, but by welcoming and respecting what we perceive, by opening a space for some changes to occur within ourselves, through a deep understanding of what is happening.

In archery as in zazen, posture is the foundation, along with breathing and attitude... A posture which, far from imposing itself as an external requirement, is deployed within us as an immanent force and balance which spreads from the unity of being, welcomed in a contemplative attitude, welcoming "what is", offering itself to the bare experience and the pure future.

Beauty, fascination in front of a world in constant renewal, a world always different, in a game of creative potential and learning for the human being, who - like the baby - deploys his curiosity in front of a changing reality, always to be discovered, always **new**, giving then an echo to Reality, intangible and elusive.