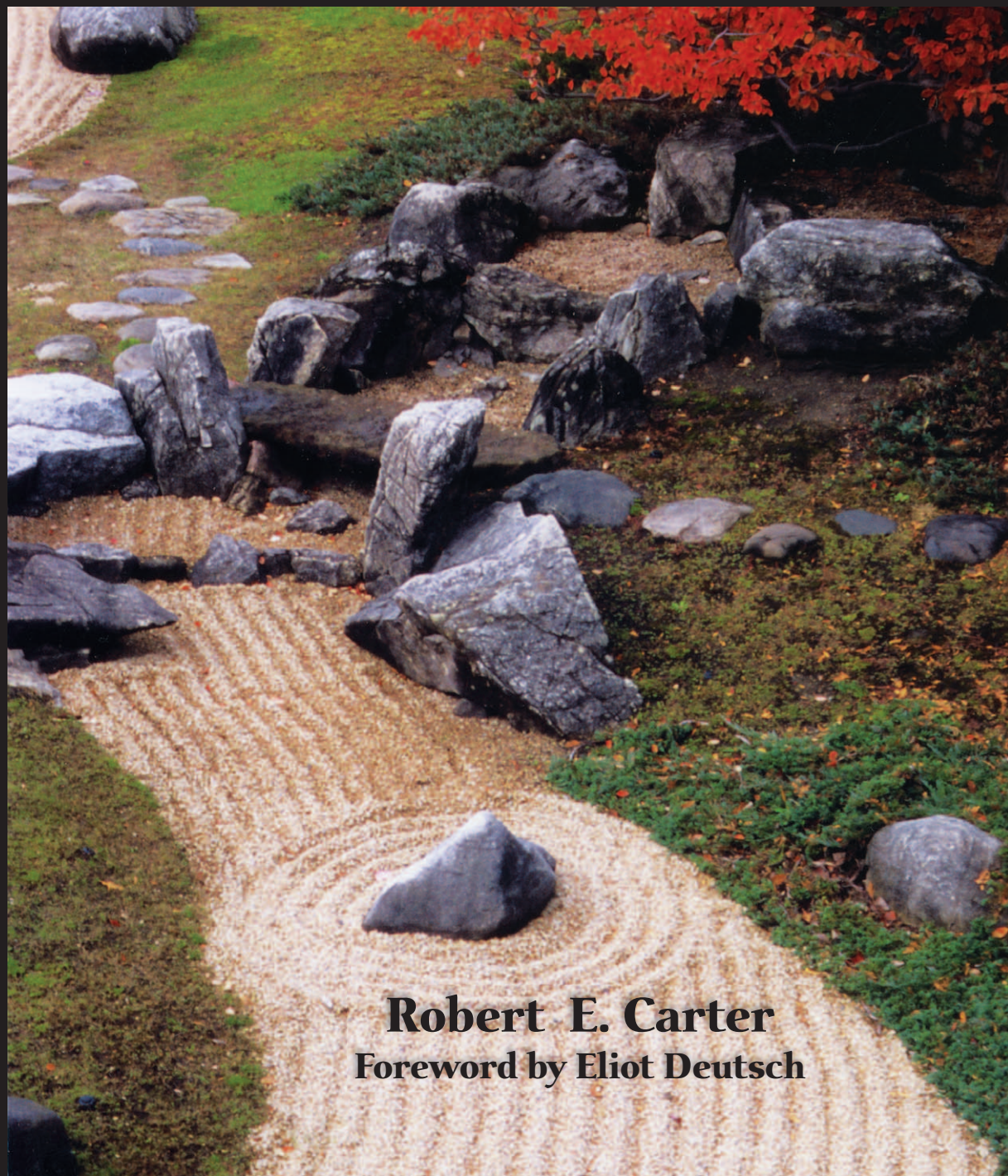


The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation



Robert E. Carter
Foreword by Eliot Deutsch

The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation

This page intentionally left blank.

The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation

Robert E. Carter

Foreword by
Eliot Deutsch

State University of New York Press

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 2008 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production by Diane Ganeles
Marketing by Anne M. Valentine

The cover photo is a partial view of Masuno Shunmyo's "Zen Garden" at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, Canada. It is called *WAKEI NO NIWA*, which means to understand and respect all cultures. The photo was taken by Robert E. Carter.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carter, Robert Edgar, 1937–

The Japanese arts and self-cultivation / Robert E. Carter ; foreword by
Eliot Deutsch.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7914-7253-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7914-7254-5
(pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Arts, Japanese. 2. Spirituality—Japan. 3. Japan—
Civilization—Philosophy. I. Title.

NX584.C36 2007
700.952—dc22

2006101108

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedicated to my beloved family:

*Deanie
Scott
Meredith
Rob
and Emerson*

This page intentionally left blank.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Eliot Deutsch	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
CHAPTER ONE: Self-Cultivation	7
The Bodymind	8
Unification of Body and Mind	10
Enlightenment	13
Meditation as a Path	15
The Resultant Transformation	16
<i>Ki</i>	17
A Brief Map	18
CHAPTER TWO: <i>Aikidō</i> —The Way of Peace	21
The Beginnings	22
<i>Aikidō</i> : One and Not One	27
<i>Aikidō</i> and <i>Budō</i>	30
A Spiritual Way	31
<i>Aikidō</i> and Ethics	33
The Value and Worth of the Other	37
<i>Aikidō</i> and Sports	39
Yagyū	42
Letting Go of the Ego	46
CHAPTER THREE: Landscape Gardening as	
Interconnectedness	51
Prelude	51
The Shintō Influence	54
The Buddhist Influence	57
Zen-Inspired Gardens	59

Masuno's Gardens	62
I and Thou	66
The Ethics of Gardens	70
CHAPTER FOUR: The Way of Tea (<i>Chadō</i>)—To Live without Contrivance	75
Background to the Way of Tea	76
<i>Wabi</i>	80
Zen and Pure Land	85
From Sen no Rikyū to Sen Genshitsu XV	90
<i>Furyu</i>	92
The Lineage	92
Beyond Language	94
CHAPTER FIVE: The Way of Flowers (<i>Ikebana</i>)—Eternity Is in the Moment	97
Introduction	97
Zen and <i>Ikebana</i>	100
Ikenobo	101
Shintō and <i>Ikebana</i>	102
The <i>Kōan</i> of Living by Dying and Dying by Living	103
Reflections of a Pioneer	108
The Principle of Three	111
A Culture of Flowers	113
CHAPTER SIX: The Way of Pottery—Beauty Is in the Abdomen	117
Introduction	117
Non-Dualistic Awareness	121
Hamada: Teacher and Collector	124
. . . and Ethics?	127
Summary	131
CONCLUSION	135
Ethics and Self-Transformation	136
The Train to Takayama	139
Attitudes Revisited	143
Glossary	147
References	155
Index	163

FOREWORD

Robert E. Carter has written an extremely informative and subtle account of the role of the arts in the Japanese tradition as they relate primarily to the ethical orientation and religious values of the Japanese people. The work is written with great clarity and exhibits a sensitive understanding of and often very original take on what for many Westerners is a culture buried in exquisite obscurities. Without in any way denying the profound mysteries that inform traditional Japanese art, Carter makes perfectly clear and evident the integral way in which the training in any of the arts is at the same time the crafting of a certain ethical attitude that informs one's entire manner of being in the world.

The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation is aimed primarily for nonspecialists in Japanese culture. Nevertheless, the work presents a number of insightful interpretations of key Japanese aesthetic and metaphysical concepts, such as *yūgen* and *ki*, that a specialist can fruitfully engage. One of the most effective achievements of Carter's work, I believe, is the way in which he is able to explicate and weave together philosophical background notions with detailed descriptions of the intricacies of the various arts that he explored. The first chapter of the book is devoted to a careful philosophical discussion of, for example, the meaning of the idea of the "bodymind," (the functional inseparability of the mental and the physical), *shugyō*, or continual practice and training, and theories of artistry.

Carter interprets the meaning of the various arts in Japan as Ways (*dō*) or disciplines involving a self-cultivating practice that aims to achieve a form of *satori* or enlightenment, one that will allow for a certain openness and ethical sensitivity to others and to the world. Carter characterizes ethics (in "the broadest sense") as "those attitudes which are significant in the way one lives one's

life, both alone and with others.” In moral education, he writes, “one learns the rules early on, but as one matures as a person, it is not the rules that keep one on the ethical path, it is the transformation that has taken place in one’s personality that now spontaneously responds to situations with a benevolent heart.” This path of moral development parallels, in aesthetic terms, exactly the training and development of the master artist. This is not surprising as the aesthetic and the ethical are, for Carter, intimately interrelated.

In Western philosophical aesthetics, Kant perhaps came closest to the East Asian understanding of the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical when he insisted that aesthetic sensitivity toward the beautiful could lead quite naturally to the kind of impartiality he thought was required for the ethical. But how incredible it would be to imagine Kant closing a chapter on landscape gardening with a section entitled “The Ethics of Gardens.” Carter would likely, and I believe rightly, say, “Too bad for Kant!”

The artistic practices or Ways that Carter focuses on in his work are *aikidō*, understood not so much as a martial art, but as a practice seeking harmony and peace; landscape gardening which is a way of attaining a sense of interconnectedness with and respect for all things; the Zen-influenced Tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and pottery, with also numerous references to poetry and painting, all of which are regarded as disciplines that strengthen the bodymind and transform the artist into a whole person.

Carter’s work is indeed a celebration of the spiritual possibilities of art and is written in a manner that is at once philosophically sophisticated and personally engaging. He relates many interviews he had with master artists in Japan, experiences he had on trains where his fellow passengers guide him to the beauty of what can be seen in the passing countryside, and so on.

I first read the manuscript of *The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation* with an eye to preparing this foreword. I intend now to read the book a second time for the sheer joy of doing so.

—ELIOT DEUTSCH

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the Japan Foundation for a Fellowship that took me to Japan to consult with various artists and philosophers about their life's work. Trent University's Research Committee has also supported the research and writing of this book, for which I offer my thanks.

To the following persons who gave of their time to respond to my queries about their art and themselves, I offer my heartfelt thanks: Tohei Shinichi, Deputy President, Ki no Kenyukai International, Clayton Naluai (Lokahi Ki Aikidō, Honolulu), Christopher Curtis and Suzuki Shinichi (Maui Ki Aikidō Society), and David E. Shaner, seventh dan (*aikidō*) and Okuden (*ki*), Chief Instructor, Eastern Ki Federation and Gordon Poteat Professor of Philosophy and Asian Studies, Furman University, for *aikidō*; Masuno Shunmyo and Masuno Yoshihiko (Kenko-ji Temple, Yokohama) and Allen M. Reid, University of Ottawa, for landscape gardening; Dr. Sen Genshitsu (Urasenke School of Tea, Kyoto) and Teruko Sofu Shin (Toronto) for the Way of Tea; Inoue Manji (Arita, Kyushu), potter and Living National Treasure; Miura Eiko, international teacher, and Kenneth Jones, Section Chief, International Events, Ikenobo Headquarters in Kyoto, for the Ikenobo School of Flower Arranging; Hata Masataka (Shoyeido Incense Company, Kyoto) for the Way of Incense (*kodō*); in *Yagyū*, Hashimoto-sensei, head priest of Hotokuzen-ji, Hasegawa Hideko (*Bōjutsu* master), and Ichiba Tomiko (Naginata master); Dr. Motoyama Hiroshi, *Shintō* priest and founder of the California Institute for Human Sciences (CIHS); H. E. Davey (Director of the Sennin Foundation Center for Japanese Cultural Arts, San Francisco); and Professor Yuasa Yasuo, (Professor of Japanology and Director of International Studies at Obirin University, Tokyo) regarding the theory of self-cultivation

and many other matters. These grand people, and many others who helped during my stay in Japan, have been central in bringing my work to this tentative conclusion.

Several individuals also helped enormously as interpreters and translators: Professor Reiko Aiura of Shiga University; Professor Emeritus Toshi Hisama, now retired from Kansai Gaidai University, in Kyushu; Professor Yasuhiro Enomoto, Professor of Linguistics, Kansai Gaidai University; Hiroshi Canbara, graduate student at Kansai Gaidai; Kaori Maruya, graduate student at Kansai Gaidai; and Vlad Tokan, of the Urasenke School of Tea. All of these people made clear what might otherwise have remained obscure.

To Professor Eliot Deutsch, Chair of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, I owe a special thanks for having undertaken to write the foreword to this book. His work spans Eastern and Western philosophy, and aesthetics and ethics, to metaphysics and epistemology. I was hopeful that he would agree to write the foreword, for his broad understanding of comparative philosophy, art, and life made him the ideal person to set the stage for my study.

Finally, my thanks to my wife, Deanie LaChance, teacher and family therapist, and Professor Sean Kane of Trent University, a specialist in English and Cultural Studies, for reading this manuscript and making countless suggestions for improvement. Jerry Larock, a former student and a black belt martial artist, read the manuscript several times, making countless suggestions and numerous corrections, and helped with the index. Their insight has made of this book far more than it might have been without their critical input. Please know how much I appreciate the hours given to this project.

Introduction

Art, philosophy, and religion are intertwined in Japanese culture, entangled like grapevines on an old wooden trellis. This book attempts to capture something of the complexity of this intertwining, and to relate it to ethics: how it is learned, and how it is lived. There is very little systematic writing in Japan about Japanese ethics and the ethical. This is because Japanese ethics is usually studied as an aspect of Buddhist or Confucian thought. The indigenous religion, Shintō, in which so much of Japanese cultural expression has its grounding, is for the most part ignored altogether with respect to the study of ethics, because it has no texts and no teachings to draw upon. Stuart Picken observes that “Shintō is indeed a religion that is ‘caught’ rather than ‘taught,’ its insights ‘perceived’ before they are ‘believed,’ its basic concepts ‘felt’ rather than ‘thought’” (Picken 1994, 45). And some of those basic concepts and attitudes that are taken in with one’s mother’s milk, so to speak, inform ethics in Japan. They are taught indirectly rather than directly, “caught” rather than “taught,” emulated rather than theorized about or memorized as rules to assiduously follow.

Japanese ethics, then, is derived from Shintō, Buddhist, and Confucian sources, and as will be seen, from Zen Buddhism as well, the distinctively Japanese form of Buddhism. In a previous book, I investigated the details of these influences on ethics in Japan (Carter 2001). What I briefly explored in that study was how ethics was not taught simply in the temples, in the schools,

A NOTE TO THE READER: All quotations without source, year, and page number are from interviews with masters and teachers which I conducted in Japan in September and October of 2003. The context makes clear who is speaking.

and in the home, but also through the remarkably distinctive arts of Japan, including the martial arts. Consequently, my working hypothesis for this book was that ethics is primarily taught through the various arts, and is not learned as an abstract theory, or as a series of rules to remember. Even today, young women in Japan still study at least one of the arts, even if only briefly. Many young men and an increasing number of women are involved in the martial arts. But whether most engage in the practice of the arts or not, the influence of the arts on Japanese culture remains strong. Nō drama, flower arranging, the Tea ceremony, the many martial arts, poetry (especially haiku poetry), pottery, landscape gardening and design, *sumi-e* painting, paper making, the incense ceremony, calligraphy, and even traditional dance and music, among other forms, continue to exert strong influence on the culture in films, literature, on television, and through numerous demonstrations attracting large crowds. The interest in these arts has certainly declined in recent years, with the possible exception of the martial arts. Nonetheless, many of these arts are once more being taught as part of the school curriculum. Each has strong instructional centers, and even universities where “masters” are on hand to model the aims and achievements of the art. As well, the tradition of selecting “Living National Treasures” further ties the arts to Japanese culture. No more than seventy Living National Treasures are designated at any one time, each artist demonstrating the highest excellence in his or her art or craft, while apprenticing at least three novices to ensure that the artistic skills and basic outlooks are handed on. To anyone interested in one of the arts, the name of a Living National Treasure representing that art is virtually a household name. In fact, they have something of the standing that is attached to sports heroes, Hollywood stars, or pop culture idols.

Some years ago, I journeyed to the pottery town of Mashiko to visit the potter Hamada Shoji,¹ himself a Living National Treasure. I arrived in the town, quite early in the morning. Hamada’s rural compound was several kilometers from the station, and I asked a taxi driver to take me there, and was about to hand him the map

1. Readers should be aware that I will adhere to the Far Eastern tradition of placing the surname first, followed by the personal name or names. On occasion I will break this rule when an individual is already well known in the West by his surname placed last.

that had been prepared for me, identifying the complex route to his pottery. Excitedly, the white-gloved driver exclaimed “Hamada!” in a loud voice, and then bowed deeply, showing respect for this potter of renown, even here in Mashiko where everybody is a potter. He waved off the written directions, opened the door of the taxi for me, and we set off to find Hamada’s residence and pottery. When we arrived, the staff member who greeted me was also greeted with respect, and I left my driver continuing to bow to me, to the staff member and to the yet-invisible Hamada as we made our way to his studio. I have had similar experiences when inquiring about other highly respected artists in Japan. An aura of respect and awe surrounds them, even when they are merely mentioned by name.

The arts of Japan contribute in hundreds of subtle ways to the transmission of Japanese culture, remaining collectively a significant repository of culture and tradition. However, the repository contains not only artistic themes and skills but philosophical understanding. By “philosophical understanding” I mean the proper attitudinal stances to be taken in the living of one’s life and in the religious practices that are meant to lead to self-transformation, and ethical teachings concerning how one should relate to other people, to nature, and to the cosmos. The great difference that needs to be understood is that these artistic “Ways” (Japanese *dō*) are unlike sports, or hobbies, or even vocational and commercial activities as we know them in the West. Each of the arts is a pathway, a road, which is what *dō* means, from the Chinese *tao* or *dao*, and it also signifies a way of life, as in *aikidō*, *judō*, *chadō*, and so forth. None of these is to be understood and undertaken merely as entertainment or distraction: they are all ways of self-development, leading to a transformation of who a person is. In short, each of these arts, if seriously engaged in, is itself enlightenment in some form.

The word commonly associated with the required lifelong practice of a “Way” is *shugyō*.² It is never a casual undertaking but an ultimately serious journey as some form of spiritual awakening,

2. *Shugyō* is a term that applies to rigorous, dedicated, long-term or life-long practice. *Keiko* refers to shorter-term practice, or even a single session, and while it may demand the “total exertion” that Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253) refers to when he demands the full use of all of one’s dimensions, body, mind, and spirit, it need not. *Shugyō*, by definition, is always a sustained and spiritual undertaking stretching over a lifetime.

or realization. There is nothing like this understanding in the West, which does not employ its arts and crafts, or its sports, to teach the deepest religious and ethical truths of its culture. Some of the latter are found in sports, as in the values called sportsmanship, or being a team player, and so on, but Westerners do not engage in sports to achieve spiritual self-transformation. In contrast, the Japanese arts are intended to immerse one in the highest achievements, the most noble aspirations, and the meditational techniques needed to take one to these heights and ideals through diligent and lifelong practice. Rather than taking the “average” as the standard in assessing what human beings are capable of, “the traditional Eastern pattern of thinking takes as its standard people who have acquired a higher capacity than the average person through rigorous training” (Yuasa 1993, 61). This approach seeks out ways of restoring the original mind-body unity by investigating “exceptional cases such as, for example, a genius or the masters of various disciplines” (Yuasa 1993, 61). This results in a change in meaning, for the “normal” is no longer based on a large number of cases, or the majority, so that whatever does not fit the “norm” is “abnormal.” Instead, the large majority come to be thought of as “abnormal,” and the exceptional are the ones who provide the standard of what human beings are capable of becoming. However, to become what we are capable of becoming requires diligent and long-term practice: *shugyō*. The arts are designed to lead an individual to realize Buddhahood, or to release one’s *kami*-nature, the divine potential that is to be found in the depths of each and every individual who cares to discover it. Religion, philosophy, aesthetics, culture, and ethics are all interconnected here. The practice of a Japanese art is in all respects transformative. Each art is designed to make one a different person, a better person (that is to say, one closer to the standard), and one is able to practice what has come to be understood. True understanding is never just theory in Japan, but everyday practice.

However, while ethics in the Japanese sense is an ever-present theme of this book, weaving in and out of discussions of the arts themselves, the “ethics” depicted is not “ethics” in the modern Western sense. Ethics in modern and contemporary Western philosophy has been a search for the criterion or criteria of right and wrong actions. For the most part, at least until quite recently, the old Aristotelian sense of ethics as character develop-

ment has been pushed aside, and “meta-ethical” questions about the meaning of terms such as “good” and “bad,” “right” and “wrong,” “action” and “intention” have taken center stage. Consequentialists of various stripes (who hold that it is the *consequences* of actions that determine rightness and wrongness), and deontologists (who hold that certain *kinds* of actions are right or wrong, such as promise keeping) have battled it out in an attempt to discern that criterion or criteria by means of which correct ethical decision making can occur.

By contrast, ethics in Japan has rarely dealt with such matters and instead has focused on the development of character and of the whole person. Correct ethical action most often grows out of concrete, physical training, or repetition, and is best described as a cluster of attitudes about who one is in the world and how to properly and effectively interact with others. Ethics is not a theoretical, intellectual “meta” search, but a way of walking (or being) in the world. It is a recognition that we are not only inextricably intertwined with others but with the entire cosmos. This “declaration of interdependence” is the basis of all ethical action: if I am one with my brothers and sisters, then it is as unthinkable to do any of them harm intentionally as it is to do harm to myself. Enlightenment is the experience of this oneness, and enlightenment is inevitably the “goal” that is sought in the various practices. Enlightenment is an important realization along the pathways of diligent practice, but all along the path, glimpses of the unfolding of enlightenment are present. Enlightenment is not separate from practice, but is everywhere present, even though it is, at the same time, an achievement (or a series of achievements) that offers a level of realization not heretofore fully comprehended. In this way, ethics in Japan is not separate from the arts, or from the practice of religion, or from the everyday living of one’s life. Ethics is a way of being in the world, a comprehensive sense of the oneness of things that yields a joy in living as fully as possible with others and in nature.

In what follows I examine several of the arts and attempt to draw out the teachings that most relate to ethics, understood in the Japanese sense. By that I mean those attitudes that are significant in the way one lives one’s life, both alone and with others. It will be difficult to strictly brand any of these ways as utilitarian, or deontological, or virtues oriented, although one might do

this in something of a casual way. Instead, what will emerge is a picture of a human being that is capable of the highest interpersonal ideals, while at the same time living a life of personal joy and fulfillment. When I asked a teaching master of tea what she learned from making tea, she replied, "I have learned to be happy, everyday, all day." The look on her face, and the fact that she was still teaching well into her declining years, convinced me of the authenticity of her claim.

There is a favorite Zen story of an arrogant man who comes to a Zen master for instruction, making clear what it is that he needs in no uncertain terms. The Zen master, having invited him to tea, continues to pour tea into his cup long after it is full. The prospective student complains that the cup is already full, and the master responds that like the tea bowl, one who is already full will be quite unable to learn anything. In ethics, too, one who is full will be unable to respond to the other, whether person or thing, by listening carefully before acting. Being empty is the first step in being truly open to the other, and being open to the other is to be unified with the other by being the other alone, for a moment, in the forgetting of oneself and attending fully to that other. Perhaps this is the heart of ethics in Japan: they teach how to be in the world, alone and with others, becoming the other, in the moment, in the now, in this place where the world is just now unfolding. And this is what the arts teach, in so many different ways, but with astounding ability and patience.

CHAPTER ONE

Self-Cultivation

Whenever one looks at ideas and concepts translated from another culture, the seemingly familiar language may contain implications that are quite different from one's own tradition. Surely one must ask how many of our assumptions must be jettisoned if genuine understanding is to be achieved. Furthermore, how is it possible to know whether one has, in fact, abandoned one's own presuppositions such that one is actually grasping the intended meanings in translation? The strength of our own presuppositions may actually override the genuine differences in play. Difficult as it may be to "read" another culture, the struggle to clarify can move us closer to grasping cultural differences, as well as similarities. An open-minded approach yields something of a fusion of horizons, at the very least, whereby one is forever changed by differences in approach, meaning, and life stance. To the extent that each of us will allow, our horizon of understanding merges with that of another culture resulting in a new and exciting way of looking at both their horizon and our own.

In engaging in the cross-cultural dialogue of this study, there are five key concepts that require some clarification to bring us as close as possible to speaking the same language, with minimal distortion. These five concepts are: (1) the bodymind and the unification of mind and body; (2) enlightenment; (3) meditation; (4) self-transformation (self-cultivation); and (5), *ki* energy. There is an excellent illustration of the importance of striving to ensure that the words in one cultural language are correctly translated into the appropriate words of another culture in the following dialogue that I had with Masuno Shunmyo, a Zen Buddhist landscape architect. The subject matter seemed straightforward enough, for it concerned the nature of the "mind."