

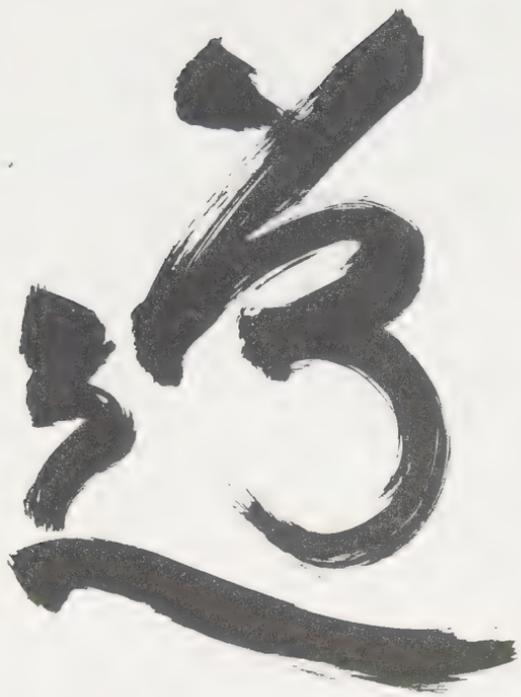
SWORD AND BRUSH

THE SPIRIT OF THE MARTIAL ARTS

Dave Lowry



SHAMBHALA
Boston & London
1995



1 DO: THE WAY

道 The Way, at the beginning, is obscure. Even the initiatory steps are wreathed in mist. The heights toward which the path leads apparently are closed within clouds, which seem, from a perspective below them, beyond penetration. And that is for the best, for to see too clearly what lies ahead would be altogether too intimidating. The sobering realizations come only in retrospect: the traveler on such a Way has left behind a familiar and comfortable place; he has entered a journey more challenging, more rewarding than ever he could have imagined at the start. Further along he comes to see that his Way is to a destination still utterly unfathomable yet intensely attractive to him.

It is not a physical transportation, this Way, though rare is the bugeisha who finds he can travel its length without leaving home. The Way is a journey of the mind and the spirit and,

ultimately, the soul. The engineering of the Way is a contribution of the Taoists, those ancestral savants of China whose philosophy of the Tao—Do in Japanese—urged a life attuned to the currents of nature. Under the calligrapher's brush, *Do* is written as a compound character. The strokes for “principal” or “main” are joined with those of the radical for “movement.” Hence, Do is an “important road,” a Way to follow in harmony and synchronization with the vicissitudes the universe provides, a path along which to discover for oneself the essentials of a worthwhile life.

In this sense, the traces of the Way are very old. It took form the first time an individual engaged in some activity with a consciousness beyond the utilitarian, past the restrictions of the ego. True, the Do may produce art. It may be of practical value. But the attainment of the Way is in the *process*. It is doing a thing not for the sake of doing it; it is doing a thing because the doing releases us from certain constraints of the limited self: narcissism, self-centeredness, preoccupation with the fears and worries and doubts that diminish us in daily life. The Way draws us into the domain of the potential self: self-realization, self-cultivation, and self-perfection.

The Do is both singular and universal; it is open to all with the resolve and inclination to walk it. Those who do, however, take a variety of disciplines in approaching it, for the Do extrapolates from the specific to the general. Tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardening—each is a route of the Way. The route chosen by the bugeisha is the martial Way. While the particular form the Do takes does not matter, the Do of the bugeisha brings him into a most immediate confrontation with the elemental struggles of reality: life and death, pain and comfort, temporal matters and matters of the soul. The martial Way requires moral stamina along with visceral and emotional courage. It demands a social conscience as well as physical endur-

ance. To be sure, each of these qualities will be tested on the journey. They may, as well, be purified and fortified in the process. But they must be present in the individual in some degree from the onset if he expects to journey very far.

As a traveler of the Way, the bugeisha is oriented by a compass sensitive to the very center of Japan's traditional culture. The geography of this culture is the landscape upon which all the Ways of Japan have been laid and paved. The extent to which the bugeisha will familiarize and adapt himself to the landmarks of this culture will have much to do with the success of his passage.

An individual embarking on the martial Way must be brave and virtuous. He must possess a sense of commitment and a sensitivity to the values of the past. In spite of having these laudable character traits, the would-be bugeisha will also have inner uncertainties, including a suspicion something is missing in his life, something vital. And so he sets off on a path to mysterious destinations. He does so in spite of observations by others that such a Way is naive, outmoded, or idealistic. He goes because he knows others have gone before, because the unchanging direction of the Way attracts and calls to him. He goes because he is compelled. He has set out on a journey of a lifetime because he senses that, as the kanji for Do reveals, this road is the principal one for him. This Way is the one to lead him to a place very much worth the going.