

Alan Watts on Learning

If you want to be an expert archer, you must shoot before you think. Otherwise it will be too late. You do not aim and then shoot - it's all one action - you have to act and decide simultaneously. But how can anyone do that ? That is the question. How can I decide not to decide ? There is no way out of that bind.

Try as you may, you go on and on, try as Heracles released the bow string without thinking first to release it. But then, strangely enough, one day, the thing happened - he did it. And this is involved in our learning of almost all techniques - that we work and work to achieve that final point of perfection - it doesn't come, it doesn't come and one day it happens.

What is the reason for that ? It is not that we have practiced so often that it suddenly becomes perfect - it is much more subtle than that. What happens is that we practice so often that we find out we cannot do it. And it happens at that moment we know we cannot do it. When you reach a certain point of despair - when you know *you* are that one weird child who will never be able to swim - at that moment you are swimming.

Because the desperation and the total inability to do it at all has brought you to that point that we call "don't care". You stop trying. You arrive at the insight - that your will doesn't have any part to play at all. You have overcome the illusion of having a separate ego. It can come only when an attempt to act from the ego-center has been revealed to be completely futile.

- Alan Watts (verbatim transcription from a lecture)