

二 · Chapter 2 — The Nine Traditions

Nine cultures that never met, asked the same four questions about the fighting spirit.

Before we go inward, we go outward. This chapter does one thing: it takes the martial traditions where **combat and theology are inseparable**, reads their actual scriptures, and asks each of them the **same four questions**. Not my opinions — their words, pulled from the texts themselves:

- the *Tao Te Ching* and Sun Lutang's *Bagua* manual (Taoist China),
- the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Kalaripayattu / Vedic India),
- Rumi's *Mathnawi* and the *Zurkhaneh*'s Persia (Sufi Islam),
- Eugen Herrigel on **Kyudo** and the *Kojiki* (Zen & Shinto Japan),
- Morihei Ueshiba's *Art of Peace (Aikido)*,
- and the Liechtenauer sword-glosses (**HEMA**, Christian Europe).

The four questions are the beats every fighter — every *person* — actually faces:

① **Conquering the Ego** · ② **Answering your Calling** · ③ **Battling Fear** · ④ **Action vs. Non-Reaction**

Where nine unrelated cultures **agree**, we've found something universal. Where they **split**, we've found a door.

① Conquering the Ego

Six of the traditions say the same startling thing: **the small self is the enemy**.

- **Yoga (Kalaripayattu)** is the most blunt: *"All of us think 'I am the body,' and not the Self... This is the great delusion."* The ego is the root error.
- **Tao Te Ching**: *"Thirty spokes share the hub, but it is the empty center that makes the wheel work."* Become **empty** to become useful.
- **Bagua** (Sun Lutang): *"From a state of emptiness, spirit is generated."*
- **Kyudo**: at the highest level, *"the presence of an independent agent is not there."* The ego-archer vanishes; the shot releases *itself*.

- **Aikido:** *"Those who are enlightened never stop forging themselves."* The self is forged **away**.
- **Sufi (Rumi):** *"I did not see in myself strength and wisdom and righteousness, so I broke my weapons."* Humility — the dissolving of the *nafs*.

Where it splits: HEMA and the raw **Shinto** myth sit on the rim. The German masters open *"God have mercy on him"* and frame the sword as a knightly art under God — the self is **humbled by honor**, never metaphysically dissolved. The *Kojiki* deals in **purity, not no-self**.

What the overlay reveals: "Conquer the ego" has *two dialects* — **dissolve the self** (the mystic inner arts) and **humble the self** (the warrior-honor arts). But the deepest convergence is between traditions with **zero historical contact** — India, China, Persia, Japan all arriving, alone, at *the self is the obstacle*.

② Answering your Calling

Every tradition agrees the calling means **aligning with something larger than you** — but they name it differently.

- **Tao Te Ching:** follow the Way, *"the Mother of the universe,"* and *"use it effortlessly."*
- **Aikido:** *"Do not try to deny or oppose the cosmic order of things."*
- **Yoga:** the calling is *samadhi* — the end where *"all sorrows cease."*
- **Sufi (Rumi):** *"The one-way pull on the straight Path is better than the two ways of free-will... I belong entirely to God."*
- **Kyudo:** the calling is the discipline — *seisha seichu*, "correct shooting, correct hitting."
- **HEMA:** *"All fencing requires the help of the righteous God"* — a martial vocation, God-given.

Where it splits: cosmic **alignment** (Tao, Aikido, Yoga) versus personal **devotion** to a God (Rumi, HEMA). And the **Kojiki** gives the perfect cautionary tale: Susanowo *"did not rule the land entrusted to him"* — the god who **refuses his calling** and is expelled into exile. Forsaking the path has a price.

What the overlay reveals: the calling is never *self*-authored. It is always a **surrender to an order you did not invent** — the Tao, God, the cosmos, the entrusted duty. To find your calling is to stop negotiating with it.

③ Battling Fear

The inner arts share one cure for fear: **still the self, and fear has nothing to hold on to.**

- **Yoga** is almost clinical: fear is *"tremor of the body, irregular breathing"* — the symptom of a scattered mind; and *"concentration will bring perfect repose to mind and body."*
- **Tao Te Ching:** *"Empty your mind of all thoughts and your heart will embrace the tranquility of peace."*
- **Kyudo:** the master learns to accept emotional reactions *"so they do not have so much hold."*
- **Aikido:** *"The Art of Peace is the principle of nonresistance — because it is nonresistant, it is victorious from the beginning."* If you oppose nothing, there is nothing to fear.

Where it splits: the combative and devotional arts don't *dissolve* fear — they **overpower** it. **Bagua** rouses ferocity: postures carry *"the courage of closing in,"* the power to *"kill tigers or leopards."* **Sufism** answers fear with grace — *"'Fear ye not' is the hospitality offered to those who fear... they soothe his fearful heart."* **HEMA** answers it with faith plus preparation — God's help and a *"straight and healthy body."*

What the overlay reveals: two engines against fear — **quiet it** (empty the mind) or **burn through it** (rouse courage, trust God, lean on training). The inner arts still the storm; the outer arts ride it.

④ Action vs. Non-Reaction

Here — and *only* here — the nine traditions genuinely **disagree**. This is the fault line.

- **The yielding pole. Tao Te Ching:** *"Act by not acting; do by not doing... better to retreat a foot than to advance an inch."* **Aikido:** nonresistance and *"an unlimited*

set of responses." **Bagua**: *"neither disconnecting nor resisting, responding by staying centered."* **Kyudo**: the shot fires with no one firing it.

- **The seizing pole.** HEMA is the opposite doctrine: control the tempo — *"Principium et finis,"* the beginning, middle, and end — and strike with *"the frequens motus that paralyses your adversary."* Seize the initiative; own the timing.
- **The devotional synthesis.** Sufism refuses to let surrender mean passivity: *"'Whatever God wills comes to pass' does not signify 'be lazy'... it is an incitement to entire self-devotion and exertion."* Total action, offered up. **Yoga** agrees the stillness is *earned* by effort: *"renunciation is the power of battling against [the mind's waves], holding the mind in check."*

What the overlay reveals: the traditions converge on quieting the self (①③) and surrendering to a larger order (②) — but they **split on the trigger**. Do you *yield* until the moment moves through you, or do you *seize* the instant and impose it? Every tradition is right in its own arena, and none resolves the other.

That unresolved tension is the opening. It is precisely where a new art has to be built — at the balance point between the yield and the strike.

The shape of the overlap

Lay the four circles over one another and the picture is clear:

- **The ego and fear converge hardest.** Nine cultures, no contact, one verdict: **quiet the self, and fear loses its grip.** That is the universal core — the first, empirical law of the fighting spirit.
- **The calling converges too,** onto a single shape: *surrender to an order you didn't author.*
- **Action is where they part** — yield versus seize — and that gap is not a flaw in the map. It is the **empty center**, the door the next chapters walk through.

Which is the whole thesis of this book in one line: **you quiet the self to charge the spirit, and you fire it at the balance point between stillness and the strike.**

The circle widens

Two of the nine still wait at the edge of the lamplight — **Shaolin Kung Fu** (Chan Buddhism: the form as moving prayer, breaking the *illusion* of fatigue and limitation) and **Capoeira** (the Yoruba-Bantu *Axé*, the roda as a sacred vortex, the spirit charged by rhythm). They are next under the same lens, and I expect them to deepen the core rather than break it.