

A master carpenter once said that he had reduced the number of his tools, and those that were left were all he needed for the rest of his life. He never let anyone else use them, and he never used anyone else's tools. All of his implements fit into a single box. Working as a builder of temples and tea houses, he cut and planed all his joints by hand.

The master worked seven days a week. Out of those seven days, he spent fully half the time sharpening his tools, until the backs of the blades and the bevels of the blades met at angles so perfect that the edges narrowed to nothingness. In this way, the master worked with the edge of nonexistence.

Those who prefer expediency say that all this is a waste of time. We should just use a power saw, hack the piece of wood in half, bolt or nail the parts together, perhaps with a reinforcing angle of iron, and be done with it. It's a waste of time to spend half of one's energy doing something that doesn't even show in the final work.

But of course it does show. It shows in the beauty of the temple. It shows in the master, for when the master is sharpening, he is already building. When he is honing his blade, he is making his mind keen. In fact, his way of working is very fast, for by the time he has the wood in his hand, the cutting of the joints is a mere formality, and they fall away as simply as fruit falling from the tree.