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THE BOOK OF  
FIVE RINGS

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*Miyamoto Musashi*

TRANSLATED FROM  
THE JAPANESE BY

*Thomas Cleary*

INCLUDING

*The Book of Family Traditions  
on the Art of War*

by Yagyū Munenori



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ment, or even with a Buddhist spirit. One prominent reason for this was that the Buddhists were kept busy, not only trying to civilize the samurai, but also trying to clean up after them and their follies. Buddhism was burdened with the tasks of burying the dead, taking in and raising the many children orphaned by war or poverty or cast off as bastards, and sheltering abused and abandoned wives.

In the relationship between Zen and the samurai, therefore, the teacher should not be assessed by the level of the student. If martial arts were really considered the highest form of study in Japan, as has been suggested by some apologists, Zen masters would have been the students of the warriors, and not the other way around.

The prolonged domination of Japan by the martial caste was an anomaly in human affairs, as reflected by its discord with both native Japanese and greater East Asian sociopolitical ideals. Because of the way martial rule was established by power, it was fated to bend social and philosophical ideals to its own purposes, rather than submit itself completely to the judgment and guidance of the traditional religions and philosophies it professed to uphold.

## THE BOOK OF FIVE RINGS

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*Miyamoto Musashi*

## P R E F A C E

**T**HE SCIENCE OF MARTIAL ARTS called the Individual School of Two Skies is something that I have spent many years refining. Now, wishing to reveal it in a book for the first time, I have ascended Mount Iwato in Higo province of Kyūshū. Bowing to Heaven, paying respects to Kannon, I face the Buddha. I am Shinmen Musashi no Kami, Fujiwara no Genshin, a warrior born in the province of Harima, now sixty years old.

I have set my mind on the science of martial arts since my youth long ago. I was thirteen years old when I had my first duel. On that occasion I won over my opponent, a martial artist named Arima Kihei of the New School of Accuracy. At sixteen years of age I beat a powerful martial artist called Akiyama of Tajima province. When I was twenty-one, I went to the capital city and met martial artists from all over the country. Although I engaged in numerous duels, never did I fail to attain victory.

After that, I traveled from province to province, meeting martial artists of the various schools. Although I duelled more than sixty times, never once did I lose. That all took place between the time I was thirteen years old and the time I was twenty-nine.

When I had passed the age of thirty and reflected on my experiences, I realized that I had not been victorious because of consummate attainment of martial arts. Perhaps it was because I had an inherent skill for the science and had not deviated from natural principles. It may also have been due to shortcomings in the martial arts of other schools. In any case, I subsequently practiced day and night in order to attain an even deeper principle, and spontaneously came upon the science of martial arts. I was about fifty years old at that time.

Since then I have passed the time with no science into which to inquire. Trusting in the advantage of military science, as I turn it into the sciences of all arts and skills, I have no teacher in anything.

Now, in composing this book, I have not borrowed the old sayings of Buddhism or Confucianism, nor do I make use of old stories from military records or books on military science. With Heaven and Kannon for mirrors, I take up the brush and begin to write, at 4:00 A.M. on the night of the tenth day of the tenth month, 1643.

## *The Earth Scroll*

**M**ARTIAL ARTS are the warrior's way of life. Commanders in particular should practice these arts, and soldiers must also know this way of life. In the present day there are no warriors with certain knowledge of the way of martial arts.

First let us illustrate the idea of a way of life. Buddhism is a way of helping people, Confucianism is a way of reforming culture. For the physician, healing is a way of life; a poet teaches the art of poetry. Others pursue fortune-telling, archery, or various other arts and crafts. People practice the ways to which they are inclined, developing individual preferences. Few people are fond of the martial way of life.

First of all, the way of warriors means familiarity with both cultural and martial arts. Even if they are clumsy at this, individual warriors should strengthen their own martial arts as much as is practical in their circumstances.

People usually think that all warriors think about is being ready to die. As far as the way of death is

concerned, it is not limited to warriors. Mendicants, women, farmers, and even those below them know their duty, are ashamed to neglect it, and resign themselves to death; there is no distinction in this respect. The martial way of life practiced by warriors is based on excelling others in anything and everything. Whether by victory in an individual duel or by winning a battle with several people, one thinks of serving the interests of one's employer, of serving one's own interests, of becoming well known and socially established. This is all possible by the power of martial arts.

Yet there will be people in the world who think that even if you learn martial arts, this will not prove useful when a real need arises. Regarding that concern, the true science of martial arts means practicing them in such a way that they will be useful at any time, and to teach them in such a way that they will be useful in all things.

### *On the Science of Martial Arts*

In China and Japan, practitioners of this science have been referred to as masters of martial arts. Warriors should not fail to learn this science.

People who make a living as martial artists these days only deal with swordsmanship. The priests of the Kashima and Kantori shrines in Hitachi province have established such schools, claiming their teachings to have been transmitted from the gods, and travel around

from province to province passing them on to people; but this is actually a recent phenomenon.

Among the arts and crafts spoken of since ancient times, the so-called "art of the advantage" has been included as a craft; so once we are talking about the art of the advantage, it cannot be limited to swordsmanship alone. Even swordsmanship itself can hardly be known by considering only how to win by the art of the sword alone; without question it is impossible to master military science thereby.

As I see society, people make the arts into commercial products; they think of themselves as commodities, and also make implements as items of commerce. Distinguishing the superficial and the substantial, I find this attitude has less reality than decoration.

The field of martial arts is particularly rife with flamboyant showmanship, with commercial popularization and profiteering on the part of both those who teach the science and those who study it. The result of this must be, as someone said, that "amateuristic martial arts are a source of serious wounds."

Generally speaking, there are four walks of life: the ways of the knight, the farmer, the artisan, and the merchant.

First is the way of the farmer. Farmers prepare all sorts of agricultural tools and spend the years constantly attending to the changes in the four seasons. This is the way of the farmer.

Second is the way of the merchant. Those who manufacture wine obtain the various implements required and make a living from the profit they gain according to quality. Whatever the business, merchants make a living from the profits they earn according to their particular status. This is the way of the merchant.

Third, in regard to the warrior knight, that path involves constructing all sorts of weapons and understanding the various properties of weapons. This is imperative for warriors; failure to master weaponry and comprehend the specific advantages of each weapon would seem to indicate a lack of cultivation in a member of a warrior house.

Fourth is the way of the artisan. In terms of the way of the carpenter, this involves skillful construction of all sorts of tools, knowing how to use each tool skillfully, drawing up plans correctly by means of the square and the ruler, making a living by diligent practice of the craft.

These are the four walks of life, of knights, farmers, artisans, and merchants. I will illustrate the science of martial arts by likening it to the way of the carpenter.

The carpenter is used as a metaphor in reference to the notion of a house. We speak of aristocratic houses, military houses, houses of the arts; we speak of a house collapsing or a house continuing; and we speak of such and such a tradition, style, or "house." Since we use the expression "house," therefore, I have employed the way of the master carpenter as a metaphor.

The word for carpenter is written with characters meaning "great skill" or "master plan." Since the science of martial arts involves great skill and master planning, I am writing about it in terms of comparison with carpentry.

If you want to learn the science of martial arts, meditate on this book; let the teacher be the needle, let the student be the thread, and practice unremittingly.

### *Likening the Science of Martial Arts to Carpentry*

As the master carpenter is the overall organizer and director of the carpenters, it is the duty of the master carpenter to understand the regulations of the country, find out the regulations of the locality, and attend to the regulations of the master carpenter's own establishment.

The master carpenter, knowing the measurements and designs of all sorts of structures, employs people to build houses. In this respect, the master carpenter is the same as the master warrior.

When sorting out timber for building a house, that which is straight, free from knots, and of good appearance can be used for front pillars. That which has some knots but is straight and strong can be used for rear pillars. That which is somewhat weak yet has no knots and looks good is variously used for door sills, lintels, doors, and screens. That which is knotted and crooked