



国際大山空手道連盟総本部

**World Oyama Karate**

**Honbu Newsletter** Issue 19 - November, 2008

# 五輪書

**Book of Five Rings**

By Miyamoto Musashi

Translated By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

# 地の巻

*Chi no Maki*

*(Book of Earth) - Part 2*



*Musashi vs. Kojirō. This famous fight took place on the island of GAN RYU JIMA. Most scholars believe that this was Musashi's last fight.*

## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

**In China and Japan, practitioners of *Hei Ho* (Winning Strategy) have been known as masters of strategy. Warriors must understand the way of *Hei Ho*.**

Remember that when Musashi wrote *A Book of Five Rings*, Japan had emerged from a period of inter-provincial warfare and become unified under a single ruler. In other words, it was a time of peace. In this passage, Musashi admonishes present-day samurai as he did in the previous section (“No samurai today understands the true meaning of *Hei Ho*.”). He tells the samurai that they must still understand and study *Hei Ho* even in times of peace.

**Recently, some men have been making a name for themselves as strategists, but most of them are merely sword-fencers. The attendants of the Kashima Kantori shrines in Hitachi province received teachings from the gods, and made schools based on this instruction, travelling the country and teaching others. This is the recent definition of strategy.**

Before I explain this section, I want to give you a little background information. I agree with most scholars’ opinion that the history of swordsmanship in Japan is marked by three stages: **JUTSU—GEI—DO**. *Jutsu* means “Technique/Practical Usage”. *Gei* means “Art”. This isn’t art for the sake of beauty, but more in the sense of “skill”. It was competitive art with the purpose of determining who had the best form. *Do* means “Way of Life”.

During the period of inter-provincial war preceding Musashi’s publication, fighting with a sword was known as *KEN JUTSU*. During wartime, sword fighting was a means to destroy and kill the enemy (*Jutsu*). People who fought with the sword were preoccupied with survival. They weren’t concerned with the finer details of how they wielded their weapon, just so long as they could effectively kill the enemy and survive.

In the middle Edo period, when Musashi wrote this book, Japan was at a time of peace. Since there was no more war, the focus of swordsmanship shifted from practical usage (killing) to artistry in the execution of technique (*Gei*). Practitioners concerned themselves

with who had the better skill, who was the better martial artist. Most people came to equate *Hei Ho* with the art of swordsmanship.

At the end of the Edo period, when Japan isolated itself from the outside world, the sword became a way of life (*Do*). The art of swordsmanship extended beyond technique and skill of execution. It became infused with philosophy and principles that dictated a certain lifestyle. Even today, the art of swordsmanship is still referred to as *KEN DO*. So the sword’s place in society changed over time as Japan moved from a state of war towards one of peace.

During battle, heavy swords were used, some requiring four or more people to wield them. Their sole purpose was destruction. Swords in Europe developed similarly. The heavy broadsword, designed for hacking, was replaced over the centuries by more ornate, lighter models which were designed for dueling. In the *Jutsu* stage, it didn’t matter if a person fought “dirty” or “clean”. It was kill or be killed, so one used whatever means available to win. But when society moved towards peace, lots of rules and conventions were placed on sword fighting. This wasn’t unlike the evolution of a “gentleman’s duel” in Europe and the Americas.

Now back to the passage. Musashi says that *Hei Ho* (Winning Strategy) isn’t just about sword fighting, even though most people believe it to be so. In an indirect way, he says that many of the guys going around claiming to be masters and setting up sword-fighting schools are frauds. In an earlier passage that we discussed in the last newsletter, Musashi says that when it comes to being victorious in battle, you can’t count on religion or philosophy. While he respects others’ religious beliefs, Musashi says that when it comes to *Hei Ho*, a practical, scientific approach (such as the one he lays out in this book) is the only sure way to victory.

That’s why this book has appealed to people of all religions and backgrounds since the day it was written. Even after all the developments of different philosophies and trends of human behavior, this book rings as true today as it did when it first appeared. Musashi relies on a purely practical and scientific approach. Philosophies and lifestyles change overtime, but 1 + 1 will always equal 2.



# 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued



During the Meiji Period, which began in 1896, all policeman as well as soldiers were required to train in *GEKI KEN* (Swordfighting).

Most translations of *A Book of Five Rings* miss this point. Many translators have a pre-conceived notion of samurai as being very philosophical and spiritual. So they try to read in all sorts of Zen ideology into their translation. One popular American translation says that Musashi met and was influenced by TAKUAN, a famous Zen monk. This account is historically inaccurate; they never met. (This fictional relationship was made popular in Eiji Yoshikawa's biographical novel, *Musashi*).

So, Musashi says that Winning Strategy doesn't come from religion, philosophy, mysticism, or anything else like that. Yet, here are these men setting up schools around the country, claiming that they either received their sword-fighting instruction directly from the gods, or studied under someone who did. Some claimed that their fighting style came directly from *Kappa* (mythical creatures that live at the bottom of the ocean). Others claimed to have learned directly from *Tengu* (mythical human-like creatures with a large nose and wings that live on mountain tops). Sword-fighting instructors used the images of gods to impress potential students and give credibility to their schools.

Not only in Musashi's time, but throughout human his-

tory and in almost every culture, people have invoked the name of God, gods and spirits to justify their actions and influence people's perceptions. Even now we still have some televangelists (not all) who claim to have a direct pathway to God, that they can give you eternal salvation if you just send in a donation. All you hear from them is, "Send your check now! We need your money! God wants your money!" For Musashi, these sword instructors were on the same level as crooked televangelists.

**In the olden days, strategy was grouped among the Ten Abilities and Seven arts as a gainful practice. Strategy was certainly an art, but was not limited to sword-fencing. The true value of sword-fencing extends beyond the confines of swordsmanship.**

"Gainful Practice" can also be understood as a vocation, the path to which someone adheres to make their living in the world. Musashi says that while *Hei Ho* (Strategy) is one of these vocations, it isn't limited to just swordsmanship. If you only study the sword, you'll never understand the value of the sword and its place in the larger picture of fighting strategy. If war



## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

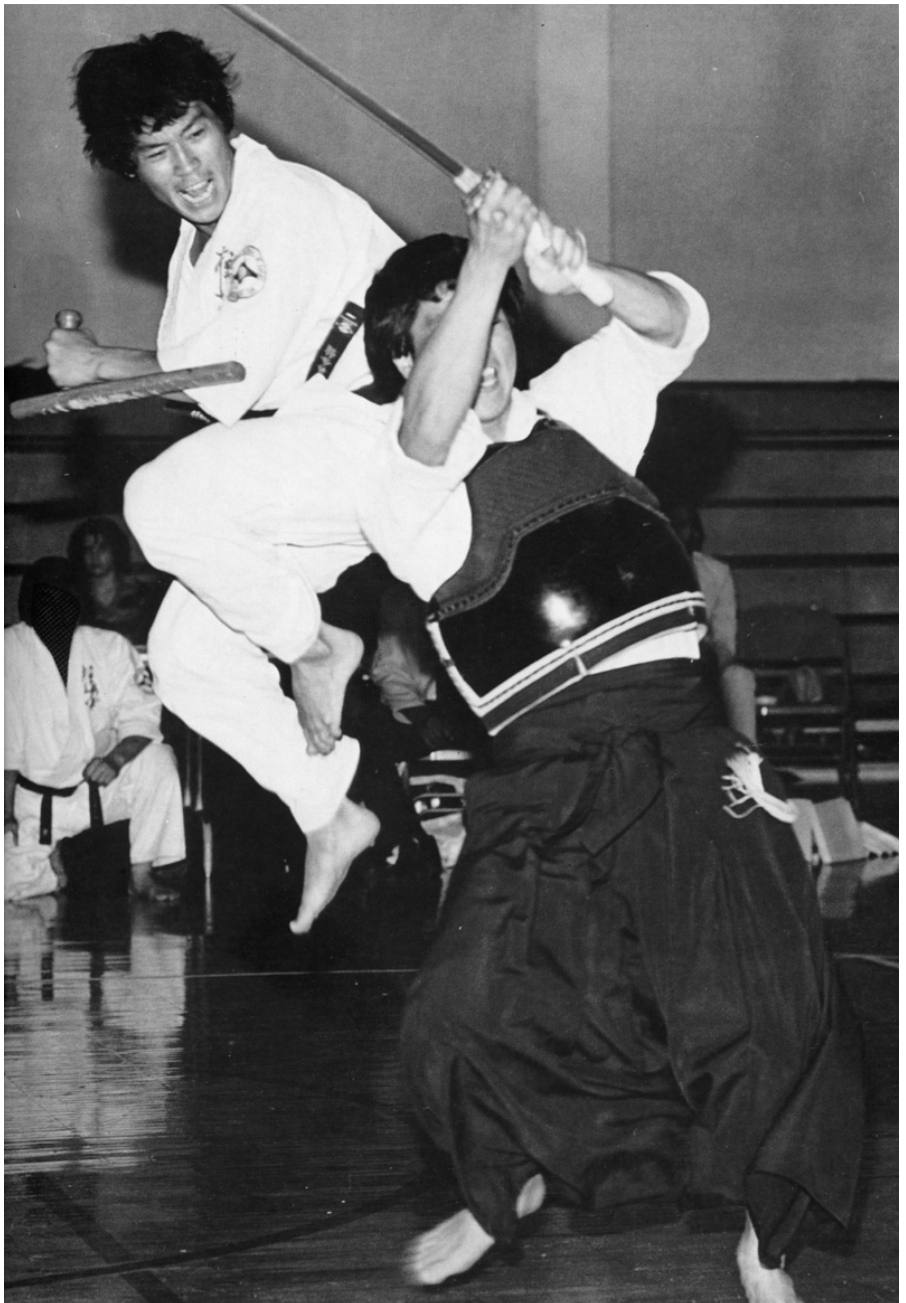
suddenly breaks out, and you only know how to fight with a sword, you're going to lose. You have to study all aspects of fighting strategy so that you can understand the strengths and weaknesses of any particular weapon.

Musashi lived from 1584 – 1645. As I mentioned before, most of this period was one in which Japan was moving toward peace and stability. The era of inter-provincial warfare before this time saw great strides in the development of weaponry and techniques for both armed and hand-to-hand combat. During battle, soldiers wore helmets and heavy armor. This meant that power, not artistry, was important for winning. Strategy was about how to get the upper-hand and destroy the enemy. One common method was to first fire arrows from a far distance, then send in the horseman, followed by foot soldiers. This strategy wasn't unique to Japan. In battles in ancient Greece and Europe, armies would first attack with projectiles (arrows, catapults, cannons in later years) to clear out as many targets as possible, and then send in mounted soldiers, and save the foot soldiers for the end. Even now, we first conduct airstrikes or fire long-range missiles before sending in tanks and foot patrols.

The point of all this is to say that in war, Samurai had to understand *all* aspects of battle, not just one particular weapon. Musashi makes the point that if you want to understand *Hei Ho*, you can't just limit your focus to one weapon. If you do, you'll never understand it.

I think the reason he makes this point is that he's experienced actual war in his early years (The Battle of *Seki Ga Hara*). However most of the present-day samurai have never done any real fighting. They just think that fancy swordsmanship is all that *Hei Ho* is about. I think this must've really frustrated Musashi and made him want to grab them and shout, "Wake up! You need to see things more deeply!"

**Out in the world we see arts for sale. Men use equipment to sell themselves. As if with a plant, the nut has become less than the flower. In this type of Way of strategy, both the instructor and the student are concerned with coloring and showing off their technique, trying to augment the flower. They talk about "This Dojo" and "That Dojo". They are concerned with profit. The saying that "Immature strategy is the cause of grief," is certainly true.**



Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama and Shihan M. Miura. Razor-sharp sword vs. wooden tonfa.



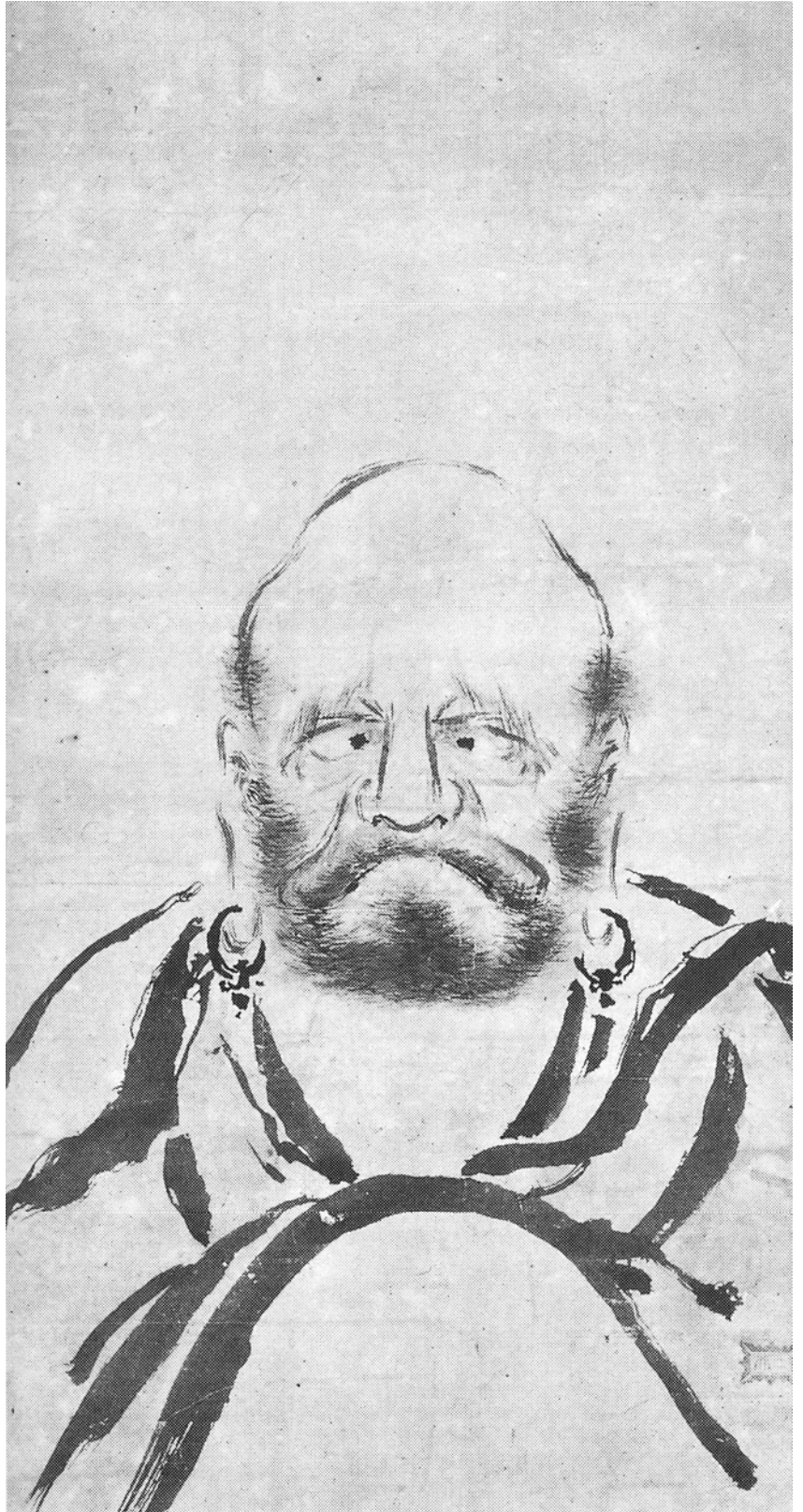
## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

In this passage, Musashi talks about people who sell goods and services being only concerned about making a profit, not about the quality of what they produce. Take for example a person who makes and sells knives. The purpose of a knife is to be easy to handle and cut well. However, the knife maker Musashi refers to makes what looks like a knife, but isn't balanced correctly or cut well at all. Nevertheless, he sells it. He's only worried that it *looks* like a good knife, not if it *actually is*. There are countless of similar examples. Even now we still buy things that break or wear-out before they're supposed to, or products that are faulty and hazardous and have to be recalled.

Musashi also expresses this sentiment when discussing the "nut and the flower". People are more concerned with appearance (flower), than substance and quality (nut). The *Hei Ho* "masters" and their schools are like a peach tree. Before an actual peach is produced, there is a flower. These schools are like a peach tree that produces lots of flowers, seeming to promise lots of fruit. In the end, however, only a very few peaches are produced.

These words were written well before the age of radio, TV, and the internet. But even in Musashi's time, just as now, it seems that image is everything. I talked once with a master from another style about Kata competitions. He told me that whenever he sends students to compete, they have to know gymnastics. They have to be able to flip around and execute all sorts of flashy movements. If they don't, they have no chance of winning. We just laughed at the absurdity of it.

I believe that Karate is *Hei Ho*. But if you look around today, there seems to be a lot of unnecessary stuff added to it just for the sake of making it flashy and impressive. Especially when it comes to weapons training. I've seen countless *bo* Katas that look more like a baton twirling routine than a fighting strategy. It's important that we see



**Musashi really enjoyed drawing and painting DARUMA (Buddhist Monks). This is one of his more well-known paintings.**



# 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

beyond the flash to what the true value is.

Most Karate styles don't practice with contact. They train by just punching, blocking, and kicking the air. I

believe that you have to practice all basic techniques until the point of contact. If you don't, you'll never learn anything. A technique may look powerful and dynamic, but until you practice making contact with it, you'll never fully understand how to use it in a real fight. Real training isn't about having pretty form. It's about sweat, sweat, and more sweat. Don't talk about it—shut your mouth and do it!

I used the same "nut and flower" excerpt when writing the introduction to *Perfect Karate*. All World Oyama Karate students above orange belt should have this book. When I came to the U.S. over 30 years ago, I really started to become serious about Karate. My mind woke up. I wondered why, at that time, we told students that punching and kicking the air was *Kihon* (Basic Technique) training. I looked at my students' faces. Some of them had very intense and tough expressions, but their fists were loose when punching, or they didn't show a good *chusoku* when doing front snap kick. What were they doing? I wasn't teaching an acting class!

So I started looking at other sports. They all practiced with contact. I came up with the idea that *Kihon* training should be done with 1 breath for 1 technique, making contact with each one. I was the first person to implement that type of training. I'm really proud of that point and the World Oyama Karate style. When you execute 1 technique in 1 breath with contact, you can immediately feel how your upper body, legs, shoulders, everything is used for effective execution. You begin to realize that some stances or *kamae* (body posture) fit better with certain techniques than others. For example, a strong hand



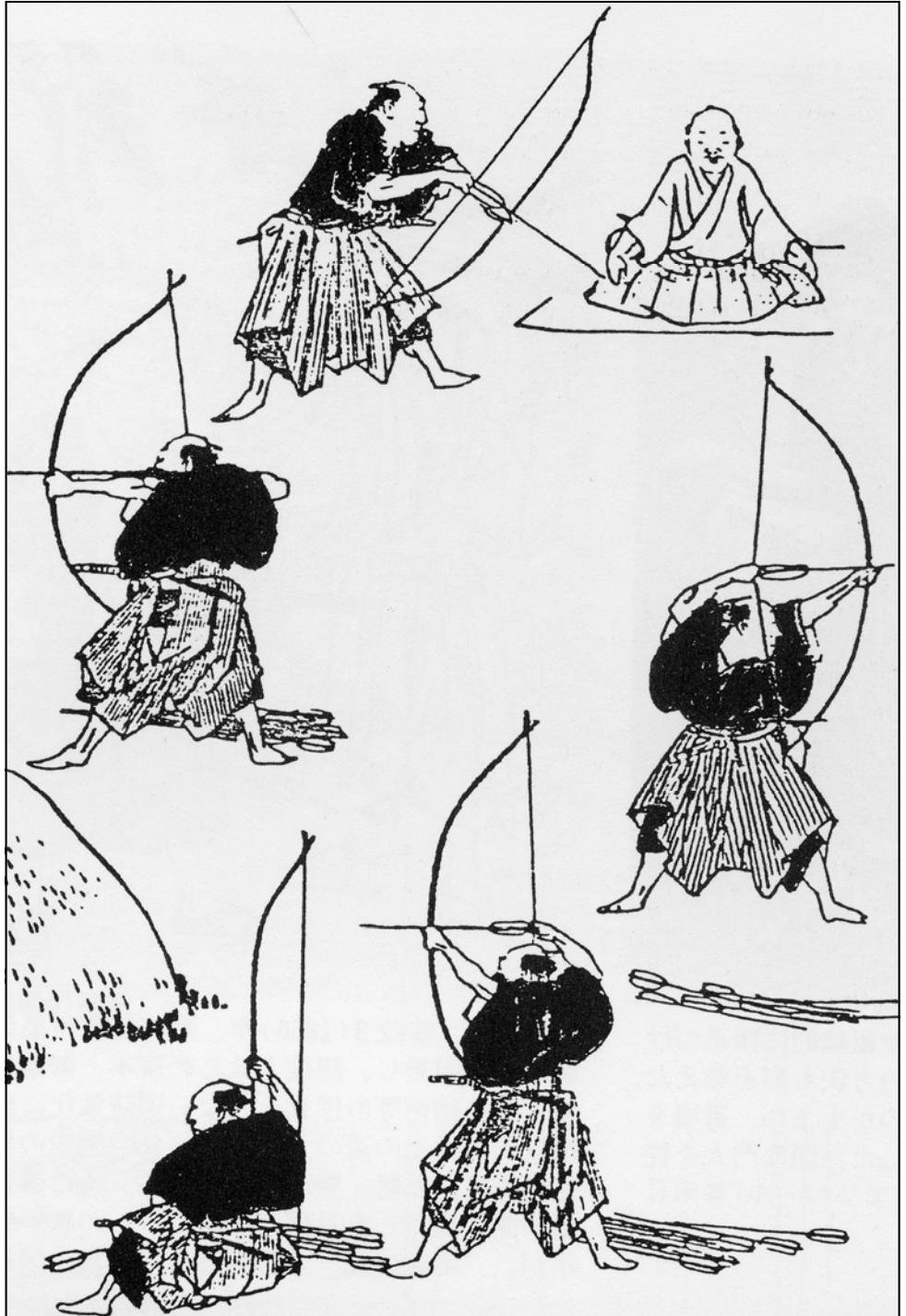
The introduction of the rifle dramatically changed Japanese warfare strategy. Most historians agree that *ODA NOBUNAGA* is responsible for bringing the rifle to Japan. At the battle of *NAGA SHINO* (1575), *NOBUNAGA* fought the army of General *TAKEDA*, who had a very powerful cavalry regimen. As *TAKEDA*'s troops advanced, *NOBUNAGA* set up 3,000 riflemen, in three tiers of 1,000 each. They fired in succession, so that as one tier fired, the others loaded—like a conveyer belt of bullets. *NOBUNAGA*'s victory changed the history of Japan and made the whole country take notice.

## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

technique requires you to make good use of the lower body (hips, legs, knees, etc.). This means that a wider stance with lower center of gravity will allow you to produce more power. Kick techniques need require you to shift your weight from one foot to the other. If your stance is too wide, your timing will be too slow to be effective, so a shorter stance is better.

These practitioners in Musashi's day weren't concerned with really understanding *Hei Ho*. They said they were, but in reality, they were just concerned with making money and opening a bunch of schools. They didn't care whether or not what they taught would really be effective in actual combat. If they showed off their fancy techniques, they could attract students. Students wanted to study under these flashy "masters" so they could learn the same things and impress the people around them. But what about when it came time to put their training to the test? What if they faced a situation in which their lives depended on their technique? If they'd focused their training on artistry, not practical application, if they just practiced for the sake of image, not for the sake of defeating an opponent, then they'd be in real trouble. That's what is expressed in the line, "Immature strategy is the cause of grief".

It's amazing to me how Musashi's observations about these types of schools are still relevant today. There are still many martial arts schools that promise quick results, seeming to hand out black belts left and right. They're preoccupied with making money and creating shortcuts for students to progress quickly. Even with all of our technological and scientific improvements, we're still at the same



Before the introduction of rifles to Japanese warfare, archers were essential in fighting strategy. Use of archers allowed an army to inflict damage to an opponent from a far distance.

place we were four hundred years ago.

Every month I receive martial arts business magazines in the mail. I never signed up for any of them, but somehow they find their way to the dojo mail box, and



## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

soon after that into the dojo trash can. They have cover articles with titles such as, “Increase Your Enrollment by 100 Students This Month!” “Learn How to Earn Ten Times Your Yearly Income!” and so on. All these publications make a very sleek presentation...but that’s all it is—presentation.

In a way, these highly-commercialized martial arts schools and organizations are impressive. Quite a few years ago, I had a couple *uchi deshi* (apprentices) studying under me who wanted to open their own dojos in the future. They wanted to be able to reach out and appeal to students of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. I told them that when it came to the business side of running a dojo, I was pretty old-fashioned. I said they should look at other schools to learn how to make money. It was said as a joke, but really I was curious.



**ODA NOBUNAGA (1534 - 1582).** He was a pioneer in modernizing and unifying Japan. He is well-known for advancing military technology with the implementation of firearms. He was assassinated at HONO JI Temple.

So, these three *uchi deshi* went to a local martial arts school that had grown up quickly in the past couple years. They sat in on one of the children’s classes. The training area wasn’t that big, but there were about 30 kids in the class, with one instructor. They were between the ages 3 – 6. From the beginning of class, all the students wore headgear, chest protectors, shin and instep protectors, and gloves. You could hardly see the dogi!

Class started with all the kids sitting on the floor in three rows. The instructor began lecturing. Five minutes passed, and the instructor was still talking. Parents looking on nodded their heads in approval, but the kids started getting restless, poking each other, pulling at their protective gear. After about fifteen minutes, the

instructor finally shouted, “Alright, everybody up!”

The kids were supposed to answer, “Yes sir!” and jump up, but some of them had trouble moving off the floor. As the students practiced punching and kicking, they never made any contact. “Then why do they have to wear all that armor?” the *uchi deshi* thought.

After a little while, they all sat down again and listened to the instructor. The class was forty-five minutes, but half of that time was spent just talking and listening. After class, one of the *uchi deshi* asked a student, “So, how was class?”

The kid answered, “Good sweat!” But he wasn’t sweaty at all.



## 五輪書 **Book of Five Rings ... Continued**

“Where’s the sweat?” the *uchi deshi* asked.

“Well, it’s dry now.”

“Oh, I see. So did you learn something?”

“Yes sir!”

“What?”

“Um...well...lots of stuff.”

“Oh, OK.” After all their training, the kids could answer, “Yes sir!” in a loud voice when called on, but that was about it.

I have another story about these types of martial arts schools. A couple years ago I was at the hospital for some routine tests. When I was laying on the examination table, a technician came in and began hooking me up to all this equipment. So, there I was, almost naked, unable to move, with wires running from my chest, head, arm, everywhere. He said to me, “Mr. Oyama, it’s great to meet you. I know about your Karate organization. You have a great reputation.”

“Oh, thank you.”

Then he spoke with some pride in his voice. “Actually, my son’s a black belt.”

“Oh, really? That’s great.”

“Yeah, he’s seven years old.”

“Oh, I see.” I almost told him that there’s a difference between a children’s black belt, and an adult’s. But I bit my tongue. “How long has he been training?”

“He started when he was five. He goes twice a week.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Yeah, at his last promotion he got his 3<sup>rd</sup> degree black belt.”

“Oh,” was all I said. But inside, I wanted to scream. *Are you kidding me!? Are you sure you’re qualified to*

*work at this hospital? What kind of common sense have you got? Seven years old and a 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree Black Belt after training twice a week for two years—give me a break! Look, just don’t kill me OK? Let me get through this exam in one piece.*

I wondered what both he and his son knew about sweating and sacrificing to reach a goal. What did they know about hard training, fighting yourself, struggling, losing and bouncing back, pushing forward even when you want to give up? Anyway, I’ve always told *uchi deshi* that they need to learn business, but not sacrifice the core principles and foundation of their training. Training begins with sweat, sweat, and more sweat. Action, not talk! You have to train the body. Don’t think about it, don’t talk about it, just do it! When you sweat and push yourself physically, only then will you reach your limit and be forced to dig deep down into your gut and decide if you’re gonna give up or keep going. When you push yourself to the point of failure, are you gonna get up and try again, or walk away and take the easy out?

I guess if you don’t care about your soul or hold strongly to any convictions, the “belt-selling business” is a good way to make a living. Spend about 80% of class time preaching morality, and spiritual cultivation, and whatever time is left over punching and kicking the air. Pat your students on the back and every year, give ‘em a new black belt and a higher rank.

We’ve made great scientific and technological progress since Musashi’s time. But human nature is still the same. As long as we have a body, we need to train and push the physical.

**There are four Ways that men pass through life: as samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants.**

**The Way of the farmer is to use agricultural equipment. He watches with careful attention the changing of the seasons.**

**Second is the Way of the Merchant. The wine maker acquires ingredients and puts them to use in order to make a living. A merchant must always live by taking profit. That is the Way of the merchant.**

## 五輪書 *Book of Five Rings ... Continued*



**TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI (1537 - 1598).** Toyotomi was born as a lowly farmer, but ascended the ranks to serve as a general under *Nobunaga*, and later became ruler of a unified Japan.

**Thirdly is the samurai, bearing the weaponry of his Way. A warrior's Way is to master the virtue of his weapons. If he dislikes strategy, he cannot appreciate the value of his weaponry, so does it not follow that he should study strategy?**

**Fourthly is the Way of the artisan. The Way of the carpenter is to become proficient in the usage of his tools. He must first lay his plans with correct measure and create his work according to plan. Thus he goes through life. These are the four Ways of the samurai, farmer, artisan, and merchant.**

In order to fully understand this passage, you first need

to look at the historical context. As Japan moved towards becoming a unified country, a class system was established in order to more easily control society. Originally, farmers and samurai were the same people. In every village, the farmers had weapons and were entrusted to protect their families and the food and people of the village, much like the militiamen of early colonial America.

ODA NOBU-NAGA began unifying Japan under a single government. Among the generals in his command were TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI and IE YASU TOKUGAWA. When NOBU-NAGA was assassinated, TOYOTOMI took over. He began implementing the class system on the Japanese people. When TOKUGAWA came to power later, he more strictly enforced this division of the classes. It was in this era that Musashi lived.

shi lived.

*A Book of Five Rings* doesn't go into any details as to why society is divided into classes. Musashi makes the point that regardless of which of the four Ways a person adheres to, they should do the best job they can.

The Way of the farmer is to produce food. This means that he has to know how to effectively use his equipment, handle the changing of the seasons, use fertilizers, rotate his crops from season to season, how to deal with all kinds of weather.

The second Way is that of the merchant. Musashi uses the example of a wine seller. To be successful, he has to know how to make good *sake* (rice wine). He must be able to identify and acquire good ingredients and be skilled in his brewing process. Beyond that, he must



## 五輪書 Book of Five Rings ... Continued

know how to sell his product, build his business and make a profit.

The Way of the samurai is the third classification. In times of war, he must know how to use lots of different types of weapons. He must understand the good and bad points of each one, understand their limitations and how to use them in an effective fighting strategy.

Artisans are the fourth classification of society. Carpentry in Musashi's time encompassed a wider range of fields than it does today. Most all of the buildings were made out of wood, so some carpenters were also architects while others were just builders. So, rather than just constructing things out of wood, a carpenter also had to be able to make exact measurements, draw up blueprints, and construct buildings according to plan.

**Although it may seem strange, I will compare the Way of the carpenter to *Hei Ho*. The point of connection is to houses. "House" has a couple different meanings. There are houses of the nobility, houses of warriors, the Four Houses, decline of houses, thriving of houses, style of house, tradition of a house, and the name of a house. A carpenter uses a master plan in building, and the Way of strategy is comparable in that there is a plan of campaign. If you want to learn the strategy of war, ponder over this book. The teacher is like a needle, the disciple is the thread. You must practice constantly.**

Musashi compares winning strategy to building a



**TOKUGAWA IE YASU (1543 - 1616).** Tokugawa also served as a general under Nobunaga. After the death of Toyotomi, he took over as ruler of Japan. He is responsible for beginning an isolation of Japan that lasted nearly 300 years.

house. It seems like he should just begin illustrating his point. However, he takes the time to point out that the word "house" itself can have different meanings. One definition of "house" is that of lineage and ancestry. (The "Four Houses" he refers to are the four branches of the Fujiwara family that dominated Japan in the Heian period). The other meaning of "house" is a building. Musashi wants the reader to understand that he is referring to the creation of actual buildings when he compares houses to *Hei Ho*.

The fact that Musashi takes time to make this clarification shows that he's spent a lot of time looking at this point from all angles. He foresees that some people might get confused on this point.



國際大山空手道連盟

最高師範 大山泰彦

# KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP

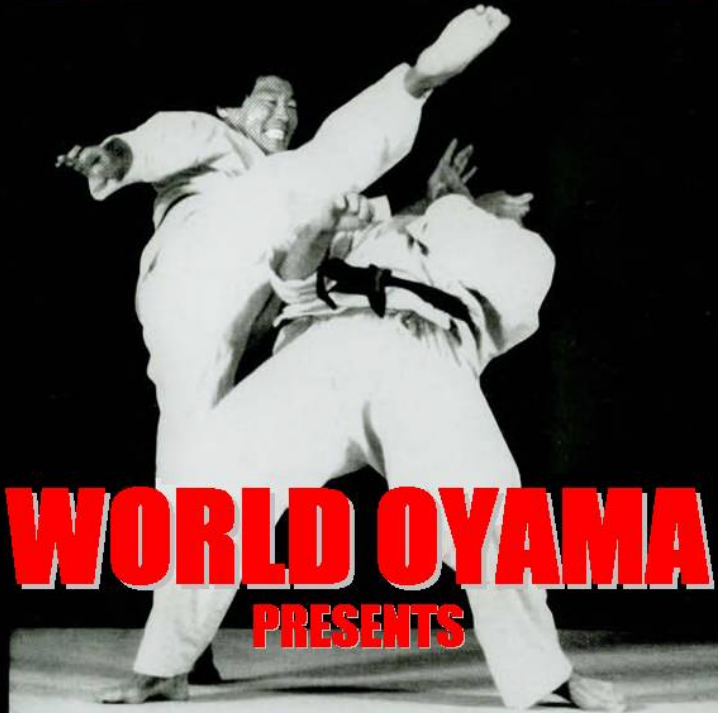
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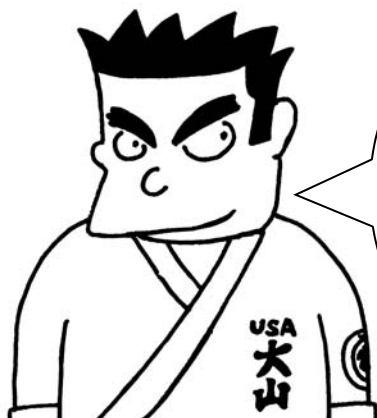
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