

# SWORD SAINT: Warrior of a Different Breed

**When you understand yourself  
and you understand the enemy  
you cannot be defeated.**

I hear the slow friction. A blade drawn from the scabbard, long and gleaming, laden with a meditative intent and certainty, quite unlike the swift and unruly draw of eager opponents. In the following flash of steel and blood, the events of lifetimes explode in minds—then fade, and the world, for better or worse, is a different place.

Doubtless the inundation of pointless violence or destruction for the sake of entertainment has given valid warfare a bum-rap. Valid warfare—where justice is satisfied and the innocent are protected, where the sword becomes what's known as *katsujinken*, a means to give life.

The aura of the battle, and glory of the sword, first enraptured me as a boy growing up in a land where samurai once trod. My heroes were figures like *Kozure Okami*, the child-accompanied “Lone Wolf” or *Zato Ichi*, the super-human-sensed blind swordsman. Of course my blades were wood and plastic, till the day I found a real, and well rusted sword in a bamboo thicket, and was certain I had “arrived”. Of course, my battles existed uniquely in my imagination, but as I grew I learned that battles of the mind, the ones where no molecular-steel can clash, are altogether as real as those that are visible—maybe even more so.

Battles not of flesh and blood but of attitude, desire, motive, volition, and even more so against unseen, dark entities, continuously rage in a war that only a sixth sense can perceive—a war that is at the core of all life, a battle of spirit and eternity—the ramifications of which, only some day we will realize.

A recent discovery has given me a sobering estimation of my flimsy stance as a warrior. It comes from a quite unanticipated source, a Japanese swordsman who lived over 350 years ago. I have read many works on the warring arts, both classical and contemporary, but Miyamoto Musashi's Book of Five Rings had a

very different effect on me, an effect strangely similar to devotional reading. Strange indeed, in that the book is focused entirely on how to kill another man. Although this was not particularly on my list of things to do, I did see a natural and easy translation of what he taught, into the realm of spirit. This was the very place I was at each and every day, in the thick of war, and Musashi's warrior spirit smacked me to wake up and reposition.

Regarded as *kensei* (sword saint) and perhaps the greatest swordsman in Japan, Miyamoto Musashi was also a master of over nine weapons and formalized the technique of *nitten ichi* (two heavens as one) which consisted of wielding two swords simultaneously (with a mere two finger grip on each!). He lived a life dominated by solitude and endless training, seeking to maximize the potential of *bushido*, "Just as one man can beat ten, so a hundred can beat a thousand, and a thousand can beat ten thousand. In my strategy, one man is the same as ten-thousand." In the following paragraphs I have aimed to distill several of Musashi's unique characteristics as they apply to the battle in a nether realm, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but with cosmic powers over this present darkness.

## BOLD ADVANCE

"Go straight into the heart of the enemy."

A warrior is anything but a passive being, he is intent-ful and undistracted. Musashi was known for an intensely direct advance in battle. When faced with one opponent, he unleashed a torrent of force immediately into the enemy's face. Each blow embodied full force, and the fewest exertions possible, "Always maintain the attitude of defeating the enemy with one strike." When faced with numerous opponents he would take on the strongest first, cutting down their hero, then wrapping up the rest. In this way the energy for his best fight was reserved for the most critical clash, and the ramifications of the first victory insured each remaining opponent was already beaten in their heart—now they also had to fight with the fear that they were about to die. For Musashi, there was no showing-off, no cat-and-mouse. The goal was clear and simple, "Attack with one purpose and one purpose only—to destroy the enemy."

Musashi's challenge to me is potent. I would prefer not confront. Perhaps it's a lack of affirmations in life, a lack of realized identity, or maybe just having grown

up in a Japan where the straight-on approach was to be avoided at most any cost. This tendency carries over into daily labors as well. The temptation is to do an inconspicuous work at least in the sense that it attracts little attention and opposition from the enemy. But life is short, the need is great, and the God to whom we're allied is enormous. In examining Musashi's boldness I'm encouraged to look at my world and ask, "What is the biggest challenge to be beaten? The most dangerous territory to be taken? The gnarliest enemy to be slain?"

## BIG SPIRIT

You first beat the enemy with your spirit and then  
you beat the enemy with your hands or your sword.

Musashi was of such big spirit that legends surrounded him, "He can fly, he can walk on water, he can stomach a bowl full of *natto* (not actually that one, and for the record, I do like *natto*)" Perhaps it was only one of those may-the-force-be-with-you approaches, but Musashi makes an interesting instruction, to be "one with the supreme power before going into battle". This preparation enabled Musashi to remain calm whatever the crisis of combat might be, or how many opponents might assail him, and simultaneously enabled him to assert raw power, "Each and every attack you make must be done with full force and authority. You cannot attack half-heartedly." When Musashi stood before an opponent, even before he drew his sword, one can imagine authority pulsating from him. He was well prepared for the moment, had lived for it, and would live beyond it. Perhaps this being prepared, this having connected with power beforehand, aided him in piercing the enemy, even before the first sword thrust, "Drive your spirit through the enemy's spirit." The true warrior's spirit is such that it radiates through, even beyond, the enemy, "Your eyes should be fixed on no-thing. Your stare should be unfixed. When I fight another man, I look through him and think only of making the hit...Look through the enemy, look through his heart, look beyond his very being...Always look to the mountain beyond."

Such a spirit must surely have disarmed many a foe. Before weapons actually engaged, perhaps even before they were drawn, the victory was settled. No blood need be shed, and things had been accomplished, and a new way had taken over. "Sometimes you can win by your presence alone. Other times you can win simply by letting the enemy know your intentions...It is possible to win a fight without ever having to go into combat."

## BROAD APPROACH

You must always be prepared to deal with every situation,  
regardless of how you are equipped.

Japan's greatest swordsman? But then not always a sword. Musashi was a proponent of "use whatever means", this unorthodox approach included a punch, a kick, a shove in addition to the long sword, the short sword, or for that matter two swords at once. This seems like a carry over from Musashi's life prior to his up-side-the-head training under the renown priest Takuan Soho. Musashi's earlier life had been wild, defiant, and undisciplined and his manner with the sword had no better. Survival meant throwing in whatever means to make up for his inelegant hacking.

Musashi embraced a myriad of approaches and viewed being attached to a particular method as a weakness, a lethal weakness that could be utilized by one's foe. An effective warrior need employ many approaches, never getting caught up in one, "Never permit yourself to become entangled in the small points of combat. Expand your spirit and see both the large and small. Do not become stricken with a single-minded attitude. This is fatal."

"The warrior must never close his mind to the possibility of other possibilities." In battle, far too much is at stake, a closed approach means one poor choice, one poor choice means forfeiture, in other words; defeat and death, or perhaps even worse. In an effort to open the mind and see connections and relations Musashi studied broadly, calligraphy, sculpture, and zen philosophy, "To learn the sword, study the guitar. To learn the fist, study commerce. To only study the sword will make you narrow-minded...One thing does one thing, two things do four things."

Imagine, the battle is fierce and the battle is fast. Your blade clashes against the opponents—over and over—you are grid-locked, there is no progress, at this rate there will be no victory, too much vitality is being wasted on a single foe, and many wait behind him for their chance. Musashi's direction here would be simple. Change. Change your structure. Change your rhythm. Change whatever, and then change it again, "In every situation you must be flexible enough to change the entire structure of your attack...shift into any other mode of combat without having to make a conscious decision...change your method of attack...without

hesitation. Change your timing, change your rhythm, change your approach...as you change your technique in the midst of battle, you are essentially becoming better able to kill because your spirit is not being forced into any one position.”

For me the heart of the broad approach is not only experience in many fields and being opened to complexity and variety and interconnections, but to continually open to the free flow of the Wind. I believe a great warrior is one who is not only has depth and breadth in heart, mind, and weaponry, but stay open, waiting in a sense, for the Wind to blow, “Consider the use of ‘empty hands’ to be the ultimate physical weapon. Now consider the use of ‘empty mind’.” An “empty mind” creates space for something bigger, much bigger. Nothing can escape the Wind. It goes anywhere. It shakes anything. It changes everything.

I have seen many a warrior whose vision was wounded long ago, I have seen those whose passion was sorely slain, those who retreated severely wounded, and have even witnessed those mortally wounded. I am sobered. This is no game. This is no time for showing off or play. Far too much is at stake—at a bare minimum, one’s survival, but then what about victory, and eternity, and what about glory?

But I also see a breed of warriors who send waves of terror in the enemy camp. They know who they are, and their opponents know they know. Where they tread, earthquakes rumble, things begin to shake. It’s to these saints, Musashi’s counsel ripples through the centuries, “Focus your concentration on only one thing—making the “hit”. Narrow your eyes slightly and ever so subtly flare your nostrils. Always fight with your spine erect and unbent. Keep your shoulders relaxed and lowered. Tighten your abdominal muscles and root yourself into the ground...slowly work your way toward the enemy.”

It’s to such saints as these, that all direct their hope.