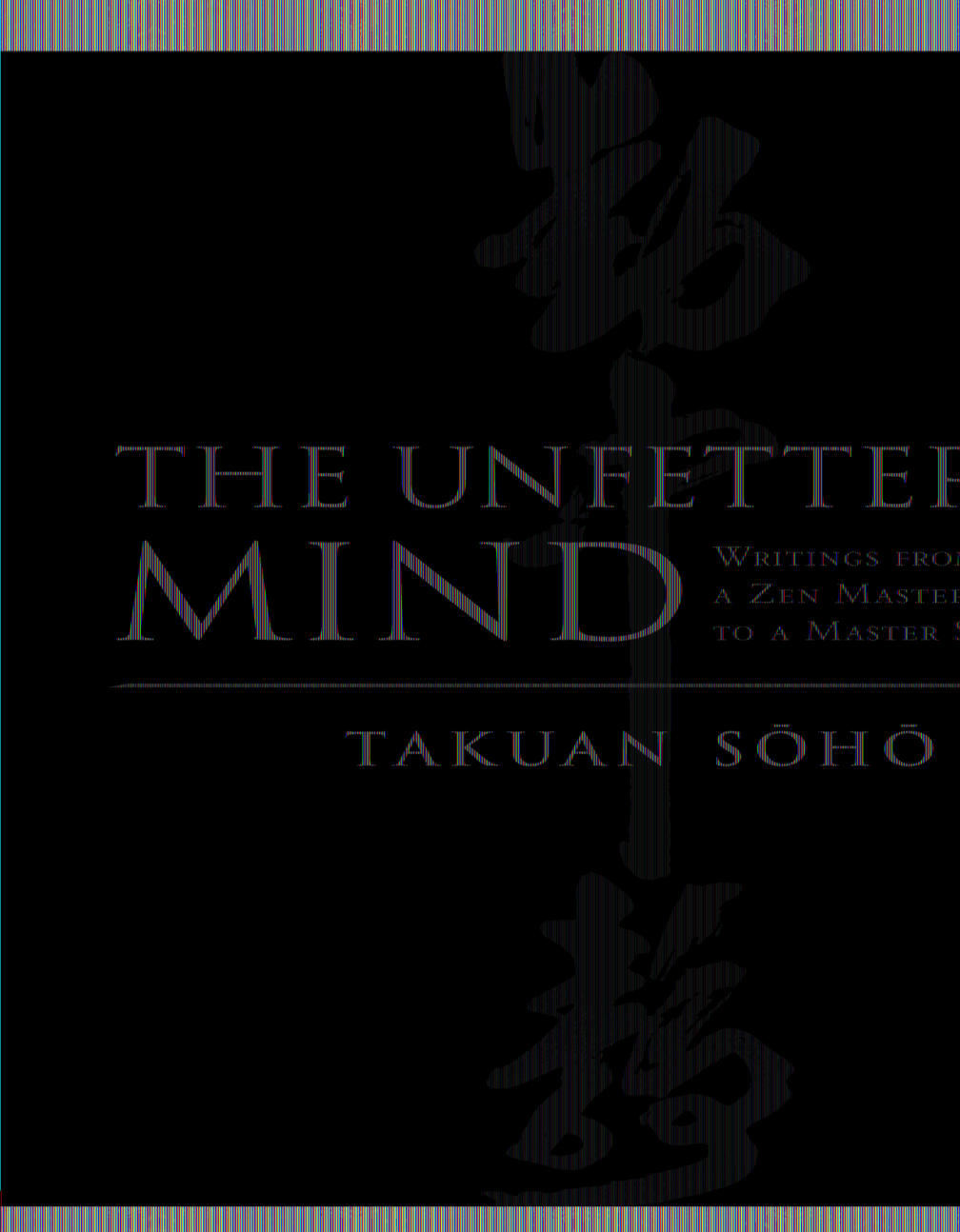

THE UNFETTERED MIND

Writings from a Zen Master to a Master S

TAKUAN SŌHŌ

Translated by William Scott W

The Unfettered Mind

Writings from a Zen Master to a Master Swordsman

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Translated by William Scott Wilson

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Frontispiece: "Ichi" by Takuan Sōhō.
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Dedicated to

Gary Miller Haskins

PREFACE

The sword, which we in the West are encouraged to beat into plowshares, and the correct techniques and mentality for using it are the main topics of the three essays presented here. The essays, two of which were letters to master swordsmen, were written by a Zen monk, Takuan Sōhō, whose vow was the enlightenment and salvation of all sentient beings. What business a priest of Buddhism had with an instrument of destruction and advice on how to become more proficient with it is unlikely to be immediately clear to the Western reader.

The sword and the spirit have long been closely associated by the Japanese. In both history and mythology, the sword figures as an instrument of life and death, of purity and honor, of authority and even of divinity. Historically, it was possession of the iron sword that helped secure the islands for the migrants from the Asian

mainland in the second and third centuries CE, the success of that conquest raising the sword to an object of ceremony as well as one of victory. Mythologically, it was the sword found within the Yamata no Orochi, a dragonlike serpent killed by the god of storms, that was to become one of the Three Imperial Regalia, symbols of power and purity revered by the Japanese for nearly two millenia. Practically, it has been the samurai class, with the sword on one side and the spiritual on the other, that has been the inspiration for many of the country's lasting values.

This association was not dimmed by the conversion of the samurai to other occupations a little over a century ago. Even today, the infrequent forging of a new Japanese sword takes place in a highly spiritual atmosphere. The work itself is preceded by prayers to the proper divinities and the performance of purification rites, and is executed while wearing ceremonial robes without and maintaining a reverential frame of mind within. The owner of the sword is expected to respond to his good fortune in a like mentality; and, indeed, when the Japanese businessman finds a quiet moment at home to unwrap, unsheathe, and lightly powder his sword against rust, it is considered to be

an exercise in meditation, not the idle admiration of a work of art.

The sword, the spiritual exercise, and the unfettered mind are the pivots upon which these essays turn. With effort and patience, the writer reminds us, they should become one. We are to practice, practice with whatever we may have at hand, until the enemies of our own anger, hesitation, and greed are cut down with the celerity and decisiveness of the stroke of a sword.

There are several editions of the works included here, but they seem to be without significant differences. I have based these translations on the texts given in *Nihon no Zen Goroku, Vol. 13,* which in turn uses those found in *Takuan Oshō Zenshō* published by the Takuan Oshō Zenshō Kankō Kai.

In appreciation I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Agnes Youngblood, who helped me through parts of the translation where I had the most difficulty; John Siscoe for his encouragement and suggestions; and Prof. Jay Rubin and Teruko Chin of the University of Washington for helping me with background material over a distance of four thousand miles and a few inches of snow. Any and all mistakes are my own.

INTRODUCTION

Takuan Sōhō was Zen monk, calligrapher, painter, poet, gardener, tea master, and, perhaps, inventor of the pickle that even today retains his name. His writings were prodigious (the collected works fill six volumes), and are a source of guidance and inspiration to the Japanese people today, as they have been for three and a half centuries. Adviser and confidant to high and low, he seems to have moved freely through almost every stratum of society, instructing both shogun and emperor and, as legend has it, being friend and teacher to the swordsman/artist Miyamoto Musashi. He seems to have remained unaffected by his fame and popularity, and at the approach of death he instructed his disciples, "Bury my body in the mountain behind the temple, cover it with dirt, and go home. Read no sutras, hold no ceremony. Receive no gifts from either monk or laity. Let the monks wear their robes, eat their meals and carry

on as on normal days." At his final moment, he wrote the Chinese character for *yume* ("dream"), put down the brush, and died.

Takuan was born in 1573 in the village of Izushi in the province of Tajima, an area of deep snows and mountain mists. Izushi is a village ancient enough to be mentioned in both of the early histories of Japan, the *Kojiki* (712 CE) and the *Nihon-gi* (720 CE), and the countryside around it is sprinkled with relics of earlier ages, as well as ancient burial mounds and pottery shards of extreme antiquity. Although born into a samurai family of the Miura clan at the culmination of 150 years of civil strife, Takuan entered a monastery at the age of ten to study the Jōdo sect of Buddhism, moving on to practice the Rinzai sect of Zen at the age of fourteen and becoming the abbot of the Daitokuji, a major Zen temple in Kyoto, at the unprecedented age of thirty-five.

In 1629, Takuan became involved in what was referred to as the "Purple Robe Affair," in which he opposed the shogunate's decision to cancel the emperor's power to make appointments to high ecclesiastical ranks and offices. For his opposition, he was banished to what is now Yamagata Prefecture, and it was in this far northern hinterland where

the first and the last of the three essays in this volume were written. He was included in the general amnesty upon the shogun's death, and returned to Kyoto in 1632. During the following years he befriended and taught Zen to the abdicated but still influential emperor, Go-Mizunoo. He also so impressed the new shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, who constantly sought his friendship, that Iemitsu had the Tōkaiji built in 1638 for Takuan. And, while friendly to both shogun and emperor, he adamantly steered clear of the political quarrels that so often embroiled the shogunate and the chrysanthemum throne.

To the end, Takuan is said to have followed his own independent, eccentric, and sometimes bitter way. His strength and angularity are apparent in his calligraphy and painting as well as in the following essays, and it is interesting that we can, perhaps, have a taste of the man's character by simply sampling a dish of *takuanzuke,* a pickle made from the giant Japanese radish.

His life may be summed up by his own admonition, "If you follow the present-day world, you will turn your back on the Way; if you would not turn your back on the Way, do not follow the world."

It is said that Takuan sought to infuse the spirit of Zen

into every aspect of life that caught his interest, such things as calligraphy, poetry, gardening, and the arts in general. This he also did with the art of the sword. Living during the last days of the violent feudal strife which culminated, essentially, with the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Takuan was acquainted not only with the peace and sublimity of the artist and tea master, but also with the confrontation—victory and defeat—of the warrior and general. Among the latter were such disparate figures as Ishida Mitsunari, a powerful general who supported Toyotomi Hideyoshi; Kuroda Nagamasa, a Christian daimyo who engineered Mitsunari's downfall; and, especially, his friend Yagyū Munenori, head of the Yagyū Shinkage school of swordsmanship and teacher to two generations of shoguns. To these men and these times, Takuan addressed himself no less than to others.

Of the three essays included in this translation, two were letters: *Fudōhishinmyōroku*, "The Mysterious Record of Immovable Wisdom," written to Yagyū Munenori; and *Taiaki*, "Annals of the Sword Taia," written perhaps to Munenori or possibly to Ono Tadaaki, head of the Ittō school of swordsmanship and also an official instructor to the shogun's family and close retainers. The circumstances of how they came to be written are unclear, although the

frank advice and rather Confucian admonishment to Munenori at the end of *Fudōhishinmyōroku* adds another interesting if somewhat puzzling dimension to this work.

As a whole, all three are addressed to the samurai class, and all three seek to unify the spirit of Zen with the spirit of the sword. The advice given is a blend of the practical, technical, and philosophical aspects of confrontation. Individually and broadly speaking, one could say that *Fudōhishinmyōroku* deals not only with technique, but with how the self is related to the Self during confrontation and how an individual may become a unified whole. *Taiaki,* on the other hand, deals more with the psychological aspects of the relationship between the self and the other. Between these, *Reirōshū*, "The Clear Sound of Jewels," deals with the fundamental nature of the human being, with how a swordsman, daimyo—or any person, for that matter—can know the difference between what is right and what is mere selfishness, and can understand the basic question of knowing when and how to die.

All three essays turn the individual to knowledge of himself, and hence to the art of life.

Swordsmanship as an expression of technique alone and meditative Zen had long existed in Japan, Zen having

become firmly established around the end of the twelfth century. With Takuan they achieved a true coalescence, and his writings and opinions about the sword have been extraordinarily influential on the direction that the art of Japanese swordsmanship has taken from that day to the present, for it is an art still fervently practiced, and it reflects a significant spectrum of the Japanese outlook on life. Firmly establishing the unity of Zen and the sword, Takuan's thoughts have influenced the writings of the great masters of the time and produced a spinoff of documents that continue to be read and applied, such as the *Heihō Kadensho* of Yagyū Munenori and the *Gorin no Sho* of Miyamoto Musashi. The styles of these men differed, but their conclusions weave together a lofty level of insight and understanding, whether it be expressed as the "freedom and spontaneity" of Musashi, the "ordinary mind that knows no rules" of Munenori, or the "unfettered mind" of Takuan.

For Takuan, the culmination was not one of death and destruction, but rather of enlightenment and salvation. Confrontation, in the "right" mind, would not only give life, but give it more abundantly.

THE MYSTERIOUS RECORD OF IMMOVABLE WISDOM

The affliction of abiding in ignorance

The term *ignorance* means the absence of enlightenment. Which is to say, delusion.

Abiding place means the place where the mind stops.

In the practice of Buddhism, there are said to be fifty-two stages, and within these fifty-two, the place where the mind stops at one thing is called the *abiding place*. Abiding signifies stopping, and *stopping* means the mind is being detained by some matter, which may be any matter at all.

To speak in terms of your own martial art, when you first notice the sword that is moving to strike you, if you think of meeting that sword just as it is, your mind will

stop at the sword in just that position, your own movements will be undone, and you will be cut down by your opponent. This is what *stopping* means.

Although you see the sword that moves to strike you, if your mind is not detained by it and you meet the rhythm of the advancing sword, if you do not think of striking your opponent and no thoughts or judgments remain, if the instant you see the swinging sword your mind is not the least bit detained and you move straight in and wrench the sword away from him, the sword that was going to cut you down will become your own, and, contrarily, will be the sword that cuts down your opponent.

In Zen this is called "Grabbing the spear and, contrariwise, piercing the man who had come to pierce you." The spear is a weapon. The heart of this is that the sword you wrest from your adversary becomes the sword that cuts him down. This is what you, in your style, call "No-Sword."

Whether by the strike of the enemy or your own thrust, whether by the man who strikes or the sword that strikes, whether by position or rhythm, if your mind is diverted in any way, your actions will falter, and this can mean that you will be cut down.

If you place yourself before your opponent, your mind will be taken by him. You should not place your mind

within yourself. Bracing the mind in the body is something done only at the inception of training, when one is a beginner.

The mind can be taken by the sword. If you put your mind in the rhythm of the contest, your mind can be taken by that as well. If you place your mind in your own sword, your mind can be taken by your own sword. Your mind stopping at any of these places, you become an empty shell. You surely recall such situations yourself. They can be said to apply to Buddhism.

In Buddhism, we call this stopping of the mind *delusion*. Thus we say, "The affliction of abiding in ignorance."

The immovable wisdom of all buddhas

Immovable means unmoving.

Wisdom means the wisdom of intelligence.

Although wisdom is called immovable, this does not signify any insentient thing, like wood or stone. It moves as the mind is wont to move: forward or back, to the left, to the right, in the ten directions, and to the eight points; and the mind that does not stop at all is called *immovable wisdom*.

Fudō Myōō grasps a sword in his right hand and holds a rope in his left hand.[1] He bares his teeth and his eyes flash

with anger. His form stands firmly, ready to defeat the evil spirits that would obstruct the Buddhist Law. This is not hidden in any country anywhere. His form is made in the shape of a protector of Buddhism, while his embodiment is that of immovable wisdom. This is what is shown to living things.

Seeing this form, the ordinary man becomes afraid and has no thoughts of becoming an enemy of Buddhism. The man who is close to enlightenment understands that this manifests immovable wisdom and clears away all delusion. For the man who can make his immovable wisdom apparent and who is able to physically practice this mental dharma as well as Fudō Myōō, the evil spirits will no longer proliferate. This is the purpose of Fudō Myōō's tidings.

What is called Fudō Myōō is said to be one's unmoving mind and an unvacillating body. *Unvacillating* means not being detained by anything.

Glancing at something and not stopping the mind is called *immovable.* This is because when the mind stops at something, as the breast is filled with various judgments, there are various movements within it. When its movements cease, the stopping mind moves, but does not move at all.

If ten men, each with a sword, come at you with swords slashing, if you parry each sword without stopping the mind

at each action, and go from one to the next, you will not be lacking in a proper action for every one of the ten.

Although the mind act ten times against ten men, if it does not halt at even one of them and you react to one after another, will proper action be lacking?

But if the mind stops before one of these men, though you parry his striking sword, when the next man comes, the right action will have slipped away.

Considering that the Thousand-Armed Kannon has one thousand arms on its one body, if the mind stops at the one holding a bow, the other nine hundred and ninety-nine will be useless.[2] It is because the mind is not detained at one place that all the arms are useful.

As for Kannon, to what purpose would it have a thousand arms attached to one body? This form is made with the intent of pointing out to men that if their immovable wisdom is let go, even if a body have a thousand arms, every one will be of use.

When facing a single tree, if you look at a single one of its red leaves, you will not see all the others. When the eye is not set on any one leaf, and you face the tree with nothing at all in mind, any number of leaves are visible to the eye without limit. But if a single leaf holds the eye, it will be as if the remaining leaves were not there.

The ignorance and afflictions of the beginning, abiding place and the immovable wisdom that comes later become one. The function of the intellect disappears, and one ends in a state of No-Mind-No-Thought. If one reaches the deepest point, arms, legs, and body remember what to do, but the mind does not enter into this at all.

The Buddhist priest Bukkoku wrote:[4]

Although it does not
    mindfully keep guard,
In the small mountain fields
    the scarecrow
    does not stand in vain.

Everything is like this.

To make a scarecrow for the mountain fields, one fashions a human figure and puts in its hands a bow and arrow. The birds and beasts see this and flee. Although this figure has absolutely no mind, if the deer become frightened and run away, insofar as it has fulfilled its function, it has not been created in vain.

This is an example of the behavior of the people who have reached the depths of any Way. While hands, feet, and body may move, the mind does not stop anyplace at all, and