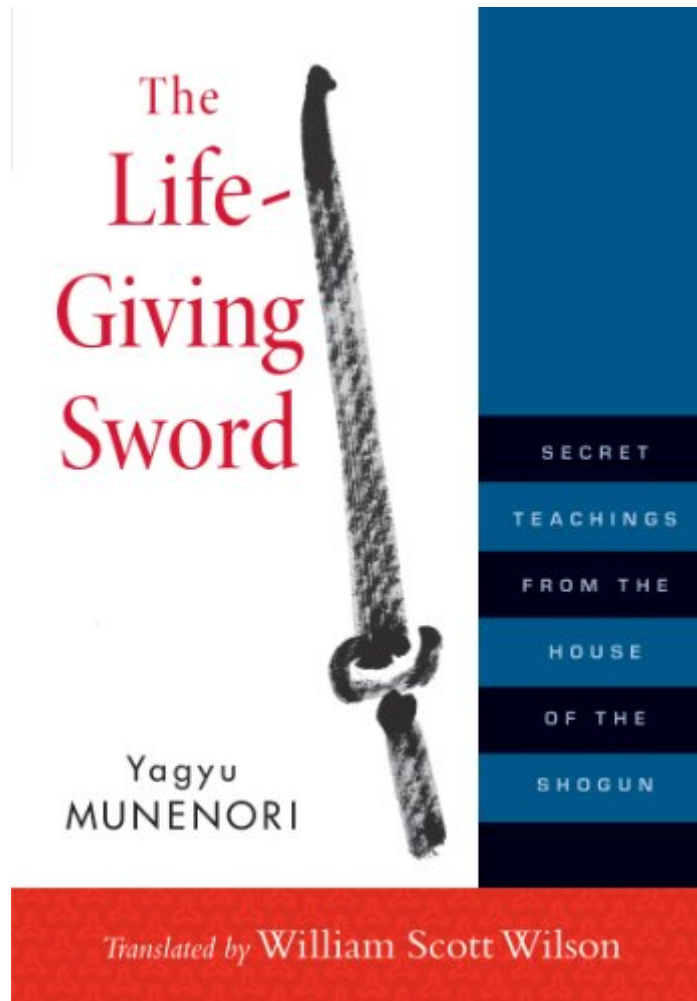


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The Life-Giving Sword: Secret Teachings From The House Of The Shogun



Synopsis

The legendary seventeenth-century swordsman Yagyu Munenori was the sword instructor and military and political adviser to two shoguns and a great rival to Miyamoto Musashi. Despite his martial ability and his political power, Munenori's life was spent immersed in Zen teachings. These teachings formed the framework for his deeply spiritual approach to sword fighting. Munenori saw in the practice of the sword a way to transform the student into a total human being. The Life-Giving Sword is Munenori's manifesto on his approach. His central themes are the "life-giving sword" and the idea of controlling one's opponent by spiritual readiness to fight rather than by actual fighting and "No Sword," which is the idea that the mind must be free of everything, even the sword itself, in order to get to the place of complete mastery. Munenori's ideas are applicable not only to martial arts but to business and human relations as well.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who looks to a book to learn how to swing a sword will forever be disappointed. Those of us who have actually taken the time train in the sword know that direct transmission is the only way (yes, the schools still exist -- go find one). What this book presents (along with some very good subtle

sword pointers) is the proper mental attitude you must gain in order to progress on the path. Mr. Wilson does a wonderful job translating a difficult text. If you are serious about sword, get this book AND go find a teacher ...

Munenori's book is a classic work of Japanese literature that explores the Way of the sword through what we in the west might call a philosophical approach. Yet, I don't think the distinction between the physical style and philosophical approach would be separate categories to Munenori. His book sets out to present the Way as a total approach of mind, body, and spirit, and not merely the development of each independently. Reading the book in any other way will probably make it fairly disappointing. The other thing to remember about this book is it's a classic by one of the most influential sword instructors of his era. In that respect, the book is rich with perspective on early 17th century Japanese culture. Particularly interesting are the reprinted plates in the back of the book showing the original inked pages of technique. As other viewers pointed out, this is not a book for someone simply learning to wield a sword. Instead, Munenori's book is a fascinating account of swordsmanship that gives the reader insight not only to the richness of the Way, but also wonderful insight on a fascinating historical figure. Highly recommended for those interested in Japanese culture, history of samurai, and the feudal era.

Mr. Yagyu Munenori had a crystal clear mind so grounded in Zen, his writings amazingly show how Mankind has taken a big step back in being grounded in the "Now." I find his words so comforting, and when applied to the practice of the sword, they manifest themselves physically into action. It is one thing to seek enlightenment through books, but it seems only through physical experience can true manifestation of that knowledge be put to use. I love how you learn to throw away the mind, "No Mind" and live in the freedom of your actions. If your mind lingers anywhere, it becomes trapped. I see this "sickness" of the trapped mind everywhere today in people. They are trapped in the past, or a future of which they dream, and are looking forward to a reality that does not exist. They are not "here" when you speak to them. Their mind is caught in a dream, like a lotus eater, glassy eyed and harried. Other than children and animals, it's very hard these days to find people who are absorbed in the present moment. No future, no past, only living for that moment. This book is like a soothing ointment to straighten jagged thoughts of delusion. A must read.

The book starts with a short biography of the author, Yagyu Munenori, that sets the times that he was writing in. This was needed and very well done. The heart of the book Yagyu Munenori's

philosophy is also very interesting and good. This book, like Musashi's Book of Five Rings, is about more than how to use a Japanese sword. It has similar implications to business and life in general. I highly recommend it.

The translation of Yagyu Munenori's The Life-Giving Sword by William Scott Wilson is an excellent companion text to Musashi's Go Rin No Sho. Like it, this text can - indeed must - be read a number of times, separated by deep reflection, if one is to grasp its deepest essence. Wilson's lengthy and excellent Introduction is a powerful preface to the text's primary writing. Hagakure is another text of this caliber that comes to mind. I happen to believe that the great truths in life were discovered long ago, and simply remain to be rediscovered and allowed to flow into today's contemporary circumstances. The Life-Giving Sword contains immutable truths that can move ones understanding toward the essence of combat/no-combat behavior. I found one passage in particular to be inspiring: "When you have run the length of various practices and none of those practices remain in your mind, that very lack of mind itself is the heart of "all things". When you have exhaustively learned the various practices and techniques and made great efforts in disciplined training, there will be action in your arms, legs, and body, but none in your mind; you will have distanced yourself from training, but will not be in opposition to it, and you will have freedom in whatever techniques you perform. You yourself will be unaware of where your mind is, and neither demons nor heresies will be able to find it. Training is done for the purpose of reaching this state. With successful training, training falls away. This is the secret principle toward which all Ways progress. I believe that a reader who has many years of martial arts' study "under his belt" will feel a deep emotional and intellectual kinship with the words written so long ago by Munenori and so ably translated and back grounded by Author Wilson. Truly a teacher for the ages.

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