

# The Book of Five Rings — Wedd & Claude Opus 4 Translation, 2026

## The Book of Five Rings

*Go Rin No Sho* (五輪書)

*By Miyamoto Musashi Written in 1645, Reigando Cave, Kumamoto*

*Translated by Adrian Wedd and Claude Opus 4 (Anthropic), 2026 Produced for Wolf Clan Zen Do Kai Martial Arts*

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### Translator's Note

This is an original English translation of Miyamoto Musashi's *Go Rin No Sho*, translated from the classical Japanese original text, which is in the public domain. It was produced for the Wolf Clan Zen Do Kai martial arts club using Claude Opus 4 (claude-opus-4-6), a large language model by Anthropic, directed and reviewed by Adrian Wedd.

This translation aims for directness over literary flourish. Musashi wrote as a swordsman setting down practical knowledge at the end of his life — not as a poet or philosopher. This translation tries to preserve that martial clarity in modern English.

No existing English translation was used as a source. Readers pursuing academic study should consult scholarly editions and commentaries, such as those by Kamata Shigeo and Shimada Kenji (Iwanami Shoten), or the English translations by William Scott Wilson (Shambhala, 2002) or Thomas Cleary (Shambhala, 1993).

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### Introduction (序)

I have devoted myself to the Way of Strategy from my youth. I fought my first duel at the age of thirteen. My opponent was a martial artist of the Shinto school named Arima Kihei, and I defeated him. At sixteen I defeated a powerful warrior named Tadashima Akiyama. At twenty-one I went up to the capital and fought duels with various strategists, never once failing to win.

After that I travelled through many provinces, crossing swords with practitioners of every school. I fought more than sixty duels and never lost. All of this took place between my thirteenth and twenty-ninth years.

When I reached thirty, I looked back and reflected. My victories were not because I had mastered strategy. Perhaps it was natural ability in the martial arts. Perhaps the other schools were lacking. Or perhaps I had grasped some principle of Heaven without fully understanding it myself. Whatever the reason, I had not yet reached the deepest level.

From then on I trained further, seeking the deeper principle day and night. Around the age of fifty, I finally came to understand the Way of Strategy naturally.

Since that time I have lived without following any particular Way exclusively. With the broad principle of strategy as my foundation, I have practised many arts and skills — and in all of them I have needed no teacher. In writing this book I use no old sayings from Buddhism or Confucianism, no old war chronicles or military treatises. I take up my brush to explain the true spirit of my school, the Niten Ichi-ryū (日天一人流), as it truly is, using the Way of Heaven and the goddess Kannon as my mirror.

It is now the night of the tenth day of the tenth month, at the hour of the Tiger. I begin to write.

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## **The Book of Earth**

日天一人流 — *Chi No Maki*

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Strategy is the craft of the warrior. Commanders must practise it. Soldiers must know it. In the present day there is no warrior who truly understands the Way of Strategy.

First, let me explain what the Way means. In Buddhism there is the Way of saving all beings. In Confucianism there is the Way of learning. In medicine there is the Way of healing. Poets study the Way of poetry. Others follow the Way of tea, the Way of archery, and many other arts and skills. Each person practises what suits their inclination.

It is said that the Way of the warrior is a dual way — the Way of the brush and the Way of the sword — and a warrior should be capable in both. Even if he has no natural talent for these things, a warrior should practise both as well as he can. A warrior's resolve must be to die in battle. This is not unique to the warrior — a monk, a woman, a farmer, anyone may choose to die for duty or honour. But the warrior is distinguished by studying strategy to overcome others in combat. Whether defeating one man or defeating five, the principle is the same. From this, one can expand the principle and understand the strategy of ten thousand against ten thousand.

In my school of strategy, the Way is practised through direct experience in combat. You must train constantly, refining body and mind through daily practice, until the principles of strategy become second nature.

The Way of Strategy is not found in any single domain. It is a broad Way. Let me describe how I see the various paths that people follow.

## **On the Ways of Various Arts**

Think of society as having four classes: warrior, farmer, artisan, merchant.

The farmer's way is to attend to the seasons, watching spring planting and autumn harvest. This is the farmer's Way.

The merchant's way is in trade — whether making sake or producing any other goods — he profits according to quality and seizes opportunities. This is the merchant's Way.

The warrior must understand both his own weapons and the qualities of each weapon. This is the warrior's duty. If a warrior does not understand weapons and their uses, this shows a lack of cultivation in the warrior class.

The artisan's way — take a carpenter as example. The carpenter uses plans and follows measurements, working diligently throughout to produce a finished building. This is the artisan's Way.

These four Ways are like this. Let me now speak of strategy through the comparison with carpentry.

Considering the comparison to the carpenter: there is the construction of houses, the choice of timber, the design and planning, the raising of the structure — these are what a carpenter knows. The carpenter learns the plans, understands the full design, and then does the work. This is the Way of carpentry.

When a carpenter has thoroughly learned his craft, understands measurements accurately, and masters all aspects of construction, he can become a master carpenter and take on his own projects.

The master carpenter must know the quality of timber — straight grain, warped grain, strong wood, weak wood — and use each piece according to its nature. Some timbers are beautiful on the surface but rotten inside; these should be identified and set aside. This is the important work of the master carpenter.

He assigns his workers according to ability: floor work, doors and sliding screens, thresholds, lintels, ceilings, and so on. Those with lesser skills work on floor joists. Those with even less skill cut wedges. If the master evaluates his workers well, the work proceeds smoothly.

The master carpenter must understand: which work will turn out well, which adequately, which poorly. He must know his workers' skill levels and spirit, give encouragement when needed, and understand what is and is not possible. This is the principle of the master carpenter.

The principle of strategy is exactly the same. The warrior who would be a general must know the terrain, the spirit of his troops, the strength and weakness of units, and deploy everything according to its nature. He must inspire his soldiers. This is the same as the master carpenter.

### **On the Way of Strategy**

Like a carpenter who sharpens his own tools and carries them in his toolbox, the warrior must maintain his weapons and carry them properly.

The carpenter plans the whole building, knows the specifications, and then gets to work — this is his Way. Study your own Way carefully. Learn the ways of all professions. This is important for a warrior.

## **On the Comparison with Carpentry and Strategy**

I compare the commander to a master carpenter. The warrior must understand the Way in the same manner. A carpenter studies the art of construction. He prepares proper plans, and that is his life's work. It is the same for the warrior and the Way of Strategy.

If you wish to learn the Way of Strategy, reflect deeply on the points I describe in this book. The teacher is the needle, the student is the thread. You must practise constantly.

## **On This Book of Five Rings**

I have divided the Way of my school into five books, naming them after the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and the Void. I do this to explain the different aspects of strategy clearly.

The Book of Earth sets out the broad view of my school. It is difficult to attain the true Way through swordsmanship alone. You must understand the large from the small, the shallow from the deep. It is like laying a straight road across rough ground. This is why I call the first book Earth.

The Book of Water explains the methods of my school. Water takes the shape of its vessel — sometimes a trickle, sometimes a vast sea. Water has a clear blue-green colour. Using this purity as a metaphor, I record the techniques of my school in this book.

When you can defeat one man in combat, you can defeat any man in the world. The spirit of defeating one man is the same as defeating ten million. The strategist expands the small to the large, like building a great statue from a small model. I cannot write down every detail — this is the principle of strategy. From one thing, know ten thousand things.

The Book of Fire deals with combat. Fire can be small or raging. The spirit of battle is the same whether the fight involves one man or ten thousand. You must observe carefully: see the large broadly, see the small in fine detail. The things that happen quickly must be perceived slowly; the things that happen slowly must be perceived quickly. This is the essence of the Book of Fire.

The Book of Wind describes other schools. Without knowing others, you cannot truly know yourself. In practising any Way, if your mind deviates even slightly, you may think you are on the true path while actually straying far from it. When you look at things from a slightly wrong angle, the distortion compounds. You must examine this carefully. Other schools treat strategy as mere swordsmanship — this is not unreasonable, but my Way of Strategy is something quite different. I record the methods of other schools in the Book of Wind so that people may understand them clearly.

The Book of the Void. What I call the Void is where there is nothing. It is beyond human knowledge. Of course, the Void is nothing. By knowing what exists, you know what does not exist. This is the Void.

People mistakenly view the Void as something unknowable. This is not the true Void. It is merely confusion. In the Way of Strategy, too, those who practise the warrior's Way but lose the true path — they may think they are in the Way, but their minds have drifted and, seen from the straight path of truth, they have strayed into a wrong way. You must understand this thoroughly.

## **On Knowing the Way of Strategy**

In my school, the long sword is the foundation of strategy. I call it the Way of the Long Sword (□ □ □ □ — Tachi no Michi). This is because it is by the long sword that the warrior wins. The

details will be explained in the second book.

There are those who think that strategy exists only in swordsmanship, but my strategy cannot be understood through swordsmanship alone. I have considered the Ways of other schools. Some emphasize heavy, large swords in the belief that a larger weapon gives advantage. Others prefer short swords, emphasizing speed and agility. Some schools teach many techniques for the long sword and call the positions of the sword “stances” or “postures.” All of this is surface-level and does not reach the true Way.

In this book I will show the shortcomings of other schools. You must study diligently and distinguish truth from falsehood.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF MY SCHOOL — TWO SWORDS

The warriors of our school carry two swords at the waist. In my school I call the Way “Niten Ichi-ryū” — “Two Heavens as One.” There is no reason a warrior who carries two swords should not use both. The spear, the halberd, and other weapons are typically held in both hands. But the long sword and the short sword can each be held in one hand. Using the long sword with two hands is not good when fighting on horseback, when running over rough ground, through swamps, deep fields, steep slopes, or in a crowded melee. When you hold a bow, a spear, or another weapon in one hand, the sword must be used with one hand. Therefore I teach wielding the long sword with one hand.

A heavy sword is difficult to wield with one hand — but through training, you will gain the skill. When you first take up two swords, the long sword will feel heavy and hard to swing. But everything is like this at first. A bow is hard to draw at first. A halberd is hard to swing at first. With practice in each weapon, you develop strength and ease. The long sword becomes easier to wield as you train with it.

The Way of the long sword is not about swinging it quickly. This will be explained in the Book of Water. The long sword is best used in open spaces; the short sword is best in confined spaces. This is the first principle of my school.

In my school, I want people to win with two swords — so from the beginning, I teach the long sword to be held in one hand. Most people fear a large weapon. My teaching is: start with what is difficult, and it becomes natural.

Let me be clear about this. A spear or halberd cannot be swung fast. The sword is inherently faster. If two men clash and one thrusts with a spear while the other slashes with a sword — the swordsman does not wait for the spear. He attacks in the gap. You must understand this through practice.

If you train with two swords constantly, you will naturally develop the ability to use either hand with the long sword. This is the purpose of my school.

### **On Knowing the Advantages of Weapons**

In strategy, you must understand the advantage of each weapon and use it appropriately. The long sword is best in open areas. The short sword is best in tight spaces. Regardless of the weapon, excessive preference for one over another is wrong.

If you prefer only the long sword, you will not be able to fight effectively in close quarters. If you prefer only the short sword, you will lack reach in open combat. You must use each weapon for

what it does best.

The long sword and short sword should not be swung in confined spaces. There should be no thought of “cutting down” the opponent with excessive force. If you think only of cutting, you will be unable to cut effectively. If you think only of killing, you will be unable to kill. Everything must flow naturally.

The long sword is generally considered the first weapon, but its advantage depends on circumstances. In tight places — indoors, in a crowd — it becomes cumbersome. In such circumstances, do not be attached to the long sword; the short sword will serve better. My school teaches adaptability.

Beyond the sword, know the advantages of other weapons. The bow is useful at the start of battle and in open field engagements. The spear is for the field of battle. The halberd (naginata) is inferior to the spear in the field because the spear is more aggressive — it is the weapon of attack, while the halberd is the weapon of defence. Among two warriors of equal skill, the one with the spear has a slight advantage.

However, all weapons have their limits. The bow is useless in a siege defence when the enemy is close. In today’s world, all weapons have become more decorative than practical. A weapon that is not useful in real combat is worthless.

From the perspective of my school: it does not matter which weapon you hold. You should not prefer any single weapon. The key is to use everything according to the situation, for the purpose of victory.

Preferring one weapon over others is wrong. It is the same as preferring one thing in life — you end up limited. Consider this carefully.

### **On Timing in Strategy**

Timing exists in everything. In strategy, timing is fundamental, and you cannot master it without extensive training.

Timing is present in the world in many forms: in music, in dancing, in the martial arts. In all the arts and skills, timing is essential. There is also timing in the Void.

In the life of a warrior, there is timing in his rise and decline, in harmony and discord. In commerce, there is timing in the rise and fall of capital. Everything involves timing. You must discern good timing from bad timing. This is critical.

In strategy, there are several kinds of timing. From the start, you must understand the timing that suits you and the timing that does not suit you. Among the large and small matters, the fast and slow timings, you must know: the timing of the gap, the timing of the pause, the timing that runs counter. These are the most important things in strategy. If you do not understand the timing of the gap, your strategy will be unreliable.

In a fight, know the enemy’s timing: his speed, his rhythm. Strike where his timing breaks. This is the key.

In all five books I write mainly about timing. You must train and reflect to understand it.

## Outline of This Book

If you practise the Way of Strategy as I describe it, day and night, your spirit will naturally broaden. I spread my strategy to the world through this book — strategy for individuals and strategy for armies.

This is the first time I have written down the Way of my school. As I write now, I set my own mind in order. There is no precedent to follow; I write from my own long experience and understanding.

It is difficult to express the true Way clearly in words. But even the difficult parts — you must grasp the meaning behind the words. Read what is written here and take it to heart.

I caution against casual reading. Do not just think, “That makes sense,” and move on. Do not pick up only the parts that interest you. Instead, get to the core of what I am saying and absorb it into your daily training. Make these principles your own by constant practice. Do not rush. Study each principle carefully. Fight, reflect, find the Way. This takes time.

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## The Book of Water

□ □ □ — *Mizu No Maki*

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Water is the model for the spirit of my school. The spirit takes the shape of water. Water can be a tiny stream or a great ocean. Its colour is a deep blue-green. Using this purity, I record the methods of Niten Ichi-ryū.

If you master swordsmanship, you can defeat one man or one hundred men with equal confidence. The strategy for a hundred men is the same as for one man. You must distinguish the large scale from the small. What can be seen broadly and at a distance is the large scale. What is near and in fine detail is the small scale. But both proceed from the same principle.

The essence of strategy is like water: deep, clear, undisturbed. You must understand this thoroughly.

## Mental Bearing in Strategy

In strategy, your mental state should not differ from your everyday state. In everyday life and in combat, your mind should be the same — calm, broad, direct. Do not let it tense up, and do not let it go slack. Do not lean to one side. Keep the mind centred, moving smoothly, never stopping for even a moment.

When the body is still, the mind is not still. When the body moves quickly, the mind does not move quickly. The mind is not dragged by the body, and the body is not dragged by the mind. Pay attention to the mind, not the body. Let the mind be full but not excessive, the surface calm but the depths rich.

Consider this: a person of small mind cannot understand a person of broad mind. A slow person cannot understand a quick person. You must cultivate a broad and direct mind through daily training.

In strategy the mind must be distributed broadly. This is important. Distribute your attention widely and use your judgement precisely. In calm and in chaos, your mind should be the same. Observe this carefully and train accordingly.

### **The Gaze in Strategy**

The eyes should look broadly, taking in the whole. There are two kinds of seeing: perception (kan, 観) and sight (ken, 見). Perception is strong; sight is weak. See what is far as though it were near. See what is near as though it were far. This is critical in strategy.

Know the enemy's sword without looking at it. This takes great practice. This way of seeing applies both in individual combat and in large-scale battle. See both sides simultaneously without moving the eyes back and forth.

These things cannot be mastered quickly. Remember what I have written here. Keep this gaze at all times, in every situation. Train until it is natural.

### **Holding the Long Sword**

Grip the long sword with a loose feeling in the thumb and index finger, with the middle finger neither too tight nor too loose, and tighten the ring finger and little finger. There should be no "dead hand" — a hand with no intent behind it is useless.

When you take up the sword, your intent must be to cut the enemy. When you cut, your grip should not change. When you parry, deflect, strike, or press the enemy's sword, only the thumb and index finger should adjust slightly. The overall feeling of the grip must remain the same.

Whether cutting in practice or in real combat, the grip must always carry the intent to cut. Your hand should not stiffen.

If the hand freezes on the grip, you are already dead. A frozen hand is a dead hand. A living hand is flexible but firm. Understand this well.

### **Footwork**

In footwork, the toes should be lifted slightly while pressing down firmly with the heels. The steps may be large or small, fast or slow, but they should always feel like ordinary walking. I reject three kinds of footwork: jumping steps, floating steps, and stamping steps.

In my school I teach what I call "paired footwork" (歩 歩 歩 歩 — In-Yō no Ashi). This means you never move with the same foot twice in succession. Whether cutting, pulling back, or meeting a cut, you step right-left-right or left-right-left, always alternating. Never land on the same foot twice. You must practise this thoroughly.

### **The Five Stances**

The five stances (立 立 立 立 立 — Itsutsu no Kamae) are: upper stance, middle stance, lower stance, left-side stance, and right-side stance.

Although I divide the stances into five, the sole purpose of each is to cut the enemy. There are only five stances, but each one exists to cut.

The middle stance (□ □ — Chūdan): face the enemy with the tip of the sword aimed at his face. When he comes, meet him and press your sword against his. When he strikes, deflect his sword to the right, and when your deflection returns, leave the tip where it stopped. When he strikes again, strike down from below and take the upper position. This is the middle stance.

The upper stance (□ □ — Jōdan): as the enemy comes in, strike him from above. If he avoids your cut, hold your sword where it stopped and cut upward as he comes again. The timing may repeat. This is the upper stance.

The lower stance (□ □ — Gedan): as the enemy comes, strike upward from below into his hands. When he tries to knock your sword down, cut his arms from below and then shift to the upper stance in one motion. This is the lower stance.

The left-side stance (□ □ — Hidari Waki): as the enemy comes, strike upward from the left into his arms or hands. When he tries to knock your sword down, cut through his attack using the path of your upward stroke, then shift your sword position to take the advantage. This is the left-side stance.

The right-side stance (□ □ — Migi Waki): hold the sword on the right side. As the enemy comes, bring the sword up from the lower right to the upper left. This is the right-side stance.

These five stances are the foundation. From any of them, the purpose is the same: to cut the enemy. In my school, there are not many stances beyond these five. Whatever the stance, do not think of it as a posture to hold. Think of it as a position from which to cut.

Whether the engagement is large-scale or small, whichever stance gives you the best position to cut is the correct one. The upper and middle stances are strong and stable. The lower, left, and right stances are adaptive. The upper and middle stances are the core. This will become clear through training.

## **The Way of the Long Sword**

Understanding the Way of the long sword means that you can wield the sword you normally carry with only two fingers. When you know the path of the sword, you can swing it easily.

Trying to swing the long sword quickly is not the Way. The sword is not a fan. If you try to swing it quickly, it will not cut. The long sword must be swung on its correct path.

When you swing the long sword, swing it broadly. When you swing the short sword, swing it compactly. This is the Way.

In my school, the long sword is swung on a broad, straight path. This is because if you try to cut quickly with a contracted swing, the sword will not follow the true path. Quick, narrow cuts are “fan-swinging” — useless for real cutting.

If you swing the long sword broadly on the correct path, with proper timing, cutting becomes easy. If you try to swing quickly with tension, the path will be wrong and the cut will fail.

The path of the long sword is simple: swing it in the direction that allows a clean cut. This must be trained through practice.

## The Five Approaches

The five approaches (五ノアプローチ — Itsutsu no Omote) are five methods of using the long sword.

First approach: from the middle stance, direct the sword at the enemy's face. When the swords meet, press in along the top of his sword. When he strikes, deflect with your sword and let the tip remain where it stops. When he strikes again, strike his hands from below. This is the first approach.

These five approaches are difficult to understand through writing alone. You must practise the five approaches with sword in hand. Through these five paths of the sword, you will come to understand the Way of my school. You will be able to respond to any attack in any of ten thousand ways. There are no techniques beyond these five in my school — but from these five, everything flows.

Second approach: from the upper stance, cut the enemy in a single motion at the moment he attacks. If you miss, hold the sword where it stops, and when the enemy comes again, cut upward from that position. Repeat if necessary.

In this approach, there are many variations of timing and spirit. If you practise this approach and understand it, you can win in any of the five ways. Train constantly.

Third approach: from the lower stance, when the enemy approaches, strike up from below into his hands. As you strike upward, he will try to knock your sword down — at that moment, cut his upper arms with the feeling of following through across. Cutting from the lower stance means to cut at whatever presents itself as the enemy comes forward.

Fourth approach: from the left-side stance, strike the enemy's hands from below as he attacks. When he tries to knock down your upward-striking sword, redirect the path of your blade to cut across his arms, swinging through on the line of his attack.

Understanding the path of the sword and cutting with conviction — this is what is learned from this approach.

Fifth approach: from the right-side stance, swing the sword from lower right to upper left as the enemy comes in. Then, from the upper position, cut straight down.

This approach is essential for understanding the path of the sword clearly. If you master this approach, you can wield a heavy sword with ease.

I will not write down every detail of these five approaches. You must take up the sword and train. Through these five ways of cutting, you will come to know the paths of the sword, and you will be able to respond to any attack. There are no other stances or approaches in Niten Ichi-ryū beyond these. Train diligently.

### ON THE TEACHING OF “STANCE — NO STANCE”

“Stance — no stance” (立無立 — Kamae Ate Kamae Nashi) means this: the long sword should not be held in a fixed position. Nevertheless, the five stances exist as reference points for cutting.

When you take up the long sword, your intent should be to cut the enemy regardless of the stance you are in. Whether you block, parry, strike, press, or touch the enemy's sword, everything must contain the intent to cut.

If you think about blocking, your intent shifts to blocking, and you cannot cut. If you think about parrying, your intent shifts to parrying, and you cannot cut. Everything must carry the intent to cut the enemy. Consider this carefully.

In large-scale strategy, the disposition of your forces is your stance. Everything in the disposition must carry the intent to win the battle. Think about this well.

### **On Cutting in One Beat**

“Cutting in one beat” (一ノ拍子切 — Ichi Byōshi no Uchi) means to cut the enemy in a single motion, before he can react — before he decides to pull back, before he decides to deflect, before he decides to strike. The timing of this cut is “one beat” — you perceive the opening and your body responds instantly.

You must train this until the cut occurs without conscious thought. To strike in one beat takes extensive practice. Master it, and you will win with devastating speed.

### **On the Two-Beat Attack**

If the enemy is quick and you cannot cut in one beat, use two beats. First, feint or threaten — as he reacts, cut in the gap of his reaction. This is the two-beat attack.

This is difficult to achieve just by reading about it. When you understand the underlying timing, you will suddenly comprehend it.

### **On Cutting Without Thought**

When you and the enemy strike at the same moment, your body should cut without your mind directing it. This is “cutting without thought” (無心無念切 — Munen Musō no Uchi). It is the most important cut. It appears constantly in training. Study it well.

### **On the Flowing Water Cut**

The “flowing water cut” (流水切 — Ryūsui no Uchi) is used when you are locked with the enemy in a contest of swords, both pressing and striving. When you are pressing against each other, do not try to slash or pull back or force through. Instead, with the feeling of water flowing, cut smoothly and deeply in a large, slow, certain motion. When you cut with the feeling of flowing water, the cut finds its mark easily. You must discern this through training.

### **On the Chance Hit**

In a situation where the enemy pulls back and tries to break free or deflect, tense your body and your mind and, from this tension, let the sword fly — striking with your hands, your body, and your spirit in one explosive release. This cut will often land when others fail. Train this timing well. The chance hit is useful in many situations.

### **On the Spark-And-Stone Cut**

The “spark-and-stone cut” (□ □ □ □ □ — Sekka no Uchi) is to strike without raising your hands at all, without waiting, as fast as flint striking steel creates a spark. This requires: your body must be ready, your spirit must be engaged, and you must strike the instant you perceive the opening, with no windup and no hesitation. This is extraordinarily fast. You must train it thoroughly.

### **On the Red Leaves Cut**

The “red leaves cut” (□ □ □ □ □ — Momiji no Uchi) is to knock the enemy’s sword down and take control. When the enemy is in front of you in any stance, holding his sword ready to strike, parry, or deflect — you strike his sword with the feeling of “cutting without thought” and, with the momentum of your steady strike, force his sword down. If you practise this striking-down motion, the enemy’s sword will inevitably fall. Train this thoroughly.

### **On Replacing the Body with the Sword**

This principle means that you do not move the body first and then cut. Rather, you cut, and the body follows the cut. If you cut, your body must follow the path of the cut naturally. Sometimes the body moves first and the sword follows; but typically, the body should be still while the sword cuts. Study this carefully.

### **On Striking and Cutting**

Striking and cutting are two different things. The intent to strike is tentative. The intent to cut is decisive. Striking is touching. Cutting is decisive action. You must understand this distinction.

If you strike the enemy — even on the hands, the legs — that is only a strike. It leads to nothing. Cutting means to drive through with your whole spirit. When you cut, the enemy is finished. This is what cutting means. Train this distinction well.

### **On the Body of the Short-Armed Monkey**

The “body of the short-armed monkey” (□ □ □ □ □ □ — Tanwan no Saru no Mi) is the principle of not extending your arms. When you engage the enemy, you must get in close without reaching out. If you think about reaching for the enemy, your body will lean forward and you will be vulnerable. Get your whole body in close — this is the principle of the short-armed monkey. Train this.

### **On the Sticky Body**

The “sticky body” (□ □ □ □ — Shikkō no Mi) is to close the distance and press your body against the enemy so that there is no gap between you. When you close in, press with your head, your body, your legs — press in strongly. Most people advance their face and feet but let their body hang back. You must press in with your whole body, leaving no gap. Consider this and train it.

### **On the Contest of Height**

The “contest of height” (□ □ □ □ — Takekurabe) means this: when you close in on the enemy, do not shrink your body. Extend your legs, extend your hips, extend your neck. Press in face to

face, and make yourself seem as tall as possible. Compare your height to his. The feeling is of stretching up and pressing in with conviction. Train this well.

### **On the Door Slam**

“The door slam” (□ □ □ □ □ □ — Tobira wo Fumu) means: when you close in on the enemy, use the moment of impact to drive him back with your body. Turn your face slightly aside, press your left shoulder forward, and slam into his chest. Drive in with the feeling of bouncing him backwards, hitting as hard as you can on the in-breath. If you master this timing, you can send a man flying a great distance. Train until you can kill with the body slam.

### **On the Three Initiatives**

There are three initiatives: attacking first, waiting for the enemy to attack first, and attacking simultaneously.

When you attack first, this is called “Ken no Sen” (□ □ □ ) — seizing the initiative.

When you wait for the enemy to attack and then respond, this is called “Tai no Sen” (□ □ □ ) — waiting for the initiative.

When you and the enemy attack at the same time, this is called “Tai-Tai no Sen” (□ □ □ □ ) — simultaneous initiative.

These are the only three timings that begin a fight. Because all fighting starts with one of these three, I call them the three initiatives. Getting the initiative is the most important thing in strategy. The details of the three initiatives vary with circumstances. I will not write down every variation — you must sense the moment, seize the initiative, and win. This is the first principle of strategy.

### **On Holding Down the Pillow**

“Holding down the pillow” (□ □ □ □ □ □ — Makura wo Osaeru) means not allowing the enemy to raise his head. In combat, it is bad to be led around by the enemy. You want to lead the enemy around. But the enemy also wants to lead you. Neither can lead the other unless one gains control.

In strategy, the way to control the enemy is to strike at whatever he attempts before he can execute it. When he tries to cut, stop the cut at the “cu-” before it becomes a full action. When he tries to jump, stop him at the “ju-.” When he tries to thrust, stop him at the “th-.”

The idea is the same: whatever the enemy tries to do, suppress it at the inception. Let him do nothing. This is the essence of strategy.

But if you focus only on suppressing the enemy, you become reactive. The true way is: you follow the path of strategy, you act according to the principles, and you suppress the enemy’s initiatives as a natural consequence of your own actions.

In large-scale strategy, this means attacking the enemy’s plans before they form. Read his intentions and nullify them. This is the general’s primary responsibility.

Train this principle diligently.

## **On Crossing a Ford**

“Crossing a ford” (□ □ □ □ — Watari wo Kosu) means this: even in sea travel, there are places called fords — narrow straits where the current runs and the tides are known. When crossing such a ford, you use the currents and the wind, and if conditions are right, you do not even need to row.

In strategy, “crossing the ford” means recognizing the critical moment in combat and seizing it. When the enemy falters, when a gap appears, you cross at that point — decisively. If you miss the moment, you are lost.

In large-scale battle, this means sensing when the enemy’s spirit has broken and pressing the advantage. When you cross the ford, the enemy cannot recover.

Knowing the ford: in individual combat, as the fight progresses, you must find the enemy’s rhythm, find where he weakens, and drive through that point. This is crossing the ford.

## **On Knowing the State of Things**

Knowing the state of things means: in large-scale battle, knowing whether the enemy is flourishing or declining, understanding the spirit of his troops, grasping his tactical situation, and deploying your forces to seize the advantage according to the principles of strategy.

In individual combat, knowing the state of things means perceiving the enemy’s school, reading his character, finding his strengths and weaknesses, doing the unexpected, knowing his rhythms, and seizing the initiative.

If your wisdom is strong, you will see the state of all things clearly. When you have mastered strategy, you can read the enemy’s mind and find many ways to win. Train diligently.

## **On Becoming the Enemy**

“Becoming the enemy” means to put yourself in the enemy’s position. When you look at it from his perspective, a thief barricaded in a house sees the whole world as his enemy. But from the outside, the thief is just one cornered man.

In strategy, if you think of the enemy as a powerful, dangerous opponent, you will become cautious and hesitant. But if you consider his position, he may feel just as threatened by you. Put yourself in his shoes, and the situation becomes clear.

In large-scale battle, it is the same. The enemy may seem strong, but his troops may be anxious, his position may be weak. If you understand his situation from his own perspective, you will find the way to win. Consider this deeply.

## **On Releasing Four Hands**

“Releasing four hands” (□ □ □ □ □ — Yotsu-de wo Hanasu) applies when both you and the enemy have the same intent and the fight reaches a deadlock. When this happens, abandon your current approach immediately. Find a completely different way to win.

In large-scale battle, when things reach a stalemate of “four hands” — when neither side can advance — you must change your strategy entirely and win by an unexpected means.

In individual combat, when the fight becomes a deadlock, change your approach immediately and win by adapting to the new situation. This is essential.

### **On Moving the Shadow**

“Moving the shadow” (影を動かす — Kage wo Ugokasu) is used when you cannot read the enemy’s intent. Make a strong feint, and the enemy will reveal his strategy by his reaction. Once you see his response, you know his intent, and you can defeat him with the appropriate technique. This is detailed work and must be trained.

### **On Suppressing the Shadow**

When the enemy is about to act and you can see his intent clearly, suppress his action forcefully. Show the spirit of stopping his technique in its tracks. The enemy’s intent will shift, and you attack in that moment of confusion. This is “suppressing the shadow.” The details require training.

### **On Infection**

Many things can be infectious. Yawning is infectious. Sleepiness is infectious. In strategy, when the enemy is agitated, you remain perfectly calm. Show your calmness clearly. The enemy will be infected by your calm and will relax his guard. The moment he softens, attack with full force — fast, strong, and without warning.

Similarly, you can infect the enemy with boredom, with carelessness, with weakness. Read the situation and infect him with whatever serves you. This is an important principle.

### **On Causing Loss of Balance**

There are many ways to cause loss of balance. Surprise the enemy. Overwhelm him. Frighten him. Create confusion. Exploit the moment when he is uncertain and has lost his rhythm.

In large-scale battle, you must read the enemy’s timing, attack at the unexpected moment, and seize the advantage while he is off balance. If you miss this moment, it is difficult to create another. Study this carefully.

### **On Frightening**

Many things cause fright. People are frightened by the unexpected. In strategy, frighten the enemy by doing the unexpected — suddenly attacking from a different angle, making your forces appear larger than they are, attacking from the flank, attacking at an unexpected time. Seize the advantage in the moment of fright. This applies in individual combat as well — frighten with the body, frighten with the sword, frighten with the voice. Attack in the gap of his fright. Train this thoroughly.

### **On Soaking In**

When you engage the enemy closely and the fight becomes tangled, if you find you are not gaining the advantage, merge with the enemy. In the midst of merging, find the way to win. This applies both in individual combat and large-scale battle. Consider it well.

## **On the Corner**

The corner (□ □ □ □ □ — Kado ni Ataru) means: when something is strong, you do not push against it directly. You attack the corner. In strategy, when the enemy's front is strong, attack his corners. Once the corner collapses, the whole structure weakens. Even as the corners crumble, you must keep pressing, never letting the enemy regroup. Study this principle of attacking corners.

## **On Throwing Into Confusion**

Throwing the enemy into confusion means: as you fight, identify the enemy's intent and use your skill in strategy to confuse him. Make him uncertain of his rhythm and purpose, show him one thing and do another, make him hesitate between fast and slow.

When the enemy is confused, you can win at your leisure. Confusion is the basis of many victories. Study it deeply.

## **On Three Shouts**

The three shouts (□ □ □ □ — Mitsu no Koe) are: the shout before, the shout during, and the shout after.

The shout before: before engaging, shout strongly. The shout before battle should be loud and forceful.

The shout during: during combat, shout from the depths of your belly, low and sustained.

The shout after: after you have won, shout loudly and powerfully.

These are the three shouts. The shout is used to set the rhythm, to intimidate, and to claim victory. In large-scale battle, at the start you shout as loudly as possible. During battle, the shout is rhythmic and deep. After victory, the shout is strong and triumphant.

## **On Mixing In**

In battle, when the two sides have clashed and you cannot see how things are going, "mixing in" means to merge with the enemy, find the rhythm in the chaos, and identify the moment of advantage. In both large-scale and individual combat, this is essential. Study it.

## **On Crushing**

Crushing (□ □ □ — Hishigu) means to regard the enemy as weak and yourself as strong, and to overwhelm him utterly. In large-scale battle, when the enemy is few or when his spirit falters, pile on without mercy, crush him completely. If your crushing is half-hearted, the enemy may recover. Crush with the fist of your entire spirit.

In individual combat, when the enemy is inferior or when his rhythm breaks, do not give him a moment to breathe. Crush him before he can recover. The worst thing is to let a crushed enemy revive. Consider this carefully.

## **On the Mountain-Sea Change**

The “mountain-sea change” (山 海 易 易 — Sankai no Kawari) means: in a fight, do not use the same technique repeatedly. Using the same technique once is acceptable. Using it twice may work. But never use it a third time. If you try a technique and the enemy does not react, change immediately.

If you attack with “mountain” and it does not work, attack with “sea.” If “sea” fails, attack with “mountain.” This is the meaning of the mountain-sea change. Study it.

## **On Collapsing the Foundation**

“Collapsing the foundation” (土 崩 易 易 — Soko wo Nuku) means: when you fight the enemy using the principles of strategy and his spirit begins to crumble, you must demolish him completely. If the demolition is not thorough, he may retain some will to fight. When you collapse his foundation, his spirit will never recover. Study this well.

Collapsing the foundation applies whether you use the sword, the body, or the mind. There are many ways to achieve it. When the enemy’s foundation is collapsed, you need not keep your guard. When it is not yet collapsed, you must remain vigilant. If the enemy retains any will, his foundation has not collapsed. Train this principle of complete demolition.

## **On Renewal**

Renewal (易 易 易 易 — Arata ni Naru) means: when a fight becomes deadlocked and both sides are stagnant, discard everything you are doing. Start fresh, find a new rhythm, and win from the new beginning.

Any time you feel stuck with the enemy — in spirit, in technique, in rhythm — renew yourself instantly. Find new energy in the reset. This is renewal.

In large-scale battle, renewal means recognizing when a battle has gone stale and immediately changing your tactics. Using the power of strategic timing, you find a way to win. Study this well.

## **On Rat’s Head, Ox’s Neck**

“Rat’s head, ox’s neck” (鼠 頭 牛 頸 — Sotō Gyūshu) means: when fighting, if you become mired in small details, you have a “rat’s head.” The principle is: whenever you are absorbed in small things, suddenly shift to thinking on the large scale. This shifting between the large and the small is a fundamental principle of strategy. The warrior must cultivate this in daily life. Do not forget it in combat.

## **On the Commander Knowing His Troops**

“The commander knowing his troops” (易 易 易 易 — Shō wo Shiru) is a principle of strategy that applies to all combat. Having mastered the Way of Strategy, consider all your enemies as your own troops. Understand that you can make them do as you wish, move them as you wish. You are the commander; they are the troops. Study this.

## On Releasing the Hilt

“Releasing the hilt” (□ □ □ □ — Tsuka wo Hanasu) has many meanings. It can mean winning without a sword. It can mean not winning with a sword. The various meanings cannot all be written down, but you must train them.

## On the Body of a Rock

“The body of a rock” (□ □ □ — Iwao no Mi) means: when you have mastered the Way of Strategy, you instantly become like a massive boulder — immovable, unassailable, unshakeable. Nothing can move you. Nothing can touch you.

I transmit this orally.

Everything I have written above represents the constant practice of swordsmanship in my school. This is the first time I have recorded these principles. Because I am writing these things down for the first time, the order may seem confused and it is difficult to express every detail precisely.

However, for those who wish to learn this Way, the following principles will serve as guides:

First: think of what is right and true. Second: practise and cultivate the Way. Third: become acquainted with the arts broadly. Fourth: know the Ways of all professions. Fifth: understand the difference between gain and loss in worldly matters. Sixth: develop intuitive judgement and understanding for all things. Seventh: perceive those things which cannot be seen. Eighth: pay attention even to small things. Ninth: do not do anything which is of no use.

These principles must be developed through daily training in strategy. In this Way alone, you must develop a broad enough spirit to see strategy on a grand scale. You must forge your wisdom and your will, sharpen your perception of justice, and distinguish the true from the false in all things.

When you have trained broadly and deeply, and when you can see things from a tranquil place — then you will understand the true nature of strategy.

Strategy is different from other things. On the battlefield, even when pressed and alone, the one who has mastered these principles will not lose. Train constantly.

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## The Book of Fire

□ □ □ — *Hi No Maki*

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In this book I write about combat. Fire is fierce, whether small or large, and the spirit of battle is the same regardless of scale. The large can be seen easily; the small is difficult to perceive. Large groups cannot change direction quickly, while a single person can change in an instant — so the small is harder to predict. You must understand this.

The matters in this book concern individual combat, but the principles must be applied to large-scale strategy as well. Strategy is like fire: it changes moment to moment, and you must perceive each change with precision. Study this book and train diligently.

## **On the Advantage of Location**

In combat, take the position where the sun is behind you. If this is not possible, keep the sun to your right. Indoors, take the position where the light comes from behind you or from your right.

Make sure there is nothing behind you that will restrict your movement. Keep your left side open and your right side drawn back. At night, if you can see the enemy, take the position with fire or light behind you.

“Looking down on the enemy” means taking higher ground. Indoors, consider the seat of honour as the high ground.

When the fight begins, drive the enemy to your left. Force him toward difficult ground — toward obstacles, walls, or other impediments behind him or to his side. When you drive the enemy toward difficult ground, do not let him see the terrain. Force him back without giving him the chance to look around.

Indoors, force the enemy toward thresholds, doorframes, doors, verandas, pillars, or any other obstacle. In every case, force the enemy toward disadvantageous ground. Take advantage of the terrain and win.

You must research this thoroughly.

## **On the Three Initiatives in Detail**

Seizing the initiative has been mentioned before. Because the initiative is the most important thing in combat, I explain it again here.

“Ken no Sen” — attack initiative: when you decide to attack, remain calm on the surface and attack suddenly. Attack strongly and quickly from the start, holding nothing back. Or, make your spirit fierce, accelerate your rhythm slightly beyond the enemy’s, and overwhelm him with speed. Or, empty your mind, resolve to fight from start to finish, and drive in with a hard, direct spirit. These are all Ken no Sen.

“Tai no Sen” — waiting initiative: when the enemy attacks, remain unmoved in body and spirit. Show an opening to draw his attack. When he commits, dodge aside strongly, and as his momentum carries him forward, attack from the opening. Or, when the enemy attacks, attack more strongly into his attack. The timing shifts and you win. This is Tai no Sen.

“Tai-Tai no Sen” — simultaneous initiative: when the enemy attacks quickly, you respond calmly and strongly. When the enemy attacks quietly and cautiously, respond with a swift, sharp attack, close the distance quickly, and the moment you read his intention, strike decisively and win. This is Tai-Tai no Sen.

These three cannot all be written down in full detail. You must feel the moment, read the enemy’s intent, and use your training in strategy to seize the initiative and win. The initiative is always the starting point.

## **On Holding Down the Pillow (Continued)**

Holding down the pillow, as I stated in the Book of Water, means to not let the enemy raise his head.

In combat, being led around by the enemy is the worst situation. You must lead, and you must use every principle of strategy to control the fight. But the enemy is also trained and also thinks. You cannot control him if you only think about controlling him.

The method is: suppress whatever the enemy tries. When he tries to strike, suppress his strike. When he tries to move, block his movement. When he tries to disengage, prevent his retreat. This is holding down the pillow.

The critical point is: do not chase after the enemy's actions. Instead, act first according to the principles of strategy, and the suppression of the enemy follows as a natural consequence.

In large-scale battle, predict what the enemy will do and prevent it before he acts. If you suppress the enemy's initiatives consistently, you control the rhythm of the battle, and from there, victory is straightforward.

This requires deep training. Study it well.

### **On Crossing a Ford (Continued)**

I have explained crossing a ford in the Book of Water. The principle applies here again.

In combat, the enemy will have strong moments and weak moments, fast rhythms and slow rhythms. Know the ford — the moment of transition — and strike then.

If you are a skilled boatman, you know the tides and currents, you know the condition of your vessel, and you use the wind. Even without favorable wind, you can cross a narrow strait by rowing. With this same spirit, in battle, you must know the enemy's condition and your own, and cross the ford of combat at the decisive moment.

In large-scale battle, crossing the ford means knowing the enemy's capability, knowing your own strength, and attacking at the weak point with all your force. It is the same as a skilled boatman crossing dangerous waters.

When you have crossed the ford, you can relax. The enemy's spirit will be broken. Study this well.

### **On Knowing the State of the Enemy**

In combat, you must perceive the enemy's state. Is he confused? Is he committed? Is he hesitating? Is his spirit rising or falling? Does he intend to attack or defend?

Knowing the enemy's state is not a matter of the eyes alone. When your strategy is advanced, you can read the enemy's mind. The Way of Strategy is the Way of reading people.

In large-scale battle, you must read the enemy's state. Is his army confident or anxious? Is he following a plan or improvising? Is his formation strong or hollow? Read these things and act accordingly.

When you can read the state of things, you can determine the enemy's intentions and win easily. Study this.

## **On Treading Down the Sword**

“Treading down the sword” (踏下劍 — Ken wo Fumu) means: when the enemy strikes at you, you “tread down” his attack with your feet. The idea is that you never simply receive an attack. When the enemy cuts, you step on the cut — you close the distance at the moment of his attack so that his technique cannot develop fully. When you tread down his attack, he cannot strike again easily.

“Treading down” applies not only to the feet but to the body and the spirit as well. The principle is: tread on the enemy’s action at its inception. Strike or thrust immediately after treading down, so that the enemy cannot recover.

The meaning of “treading” is to close in directly, without hesitation. Train this thoroughly.

## **On Knowing the Moment of Collapse**

In combat, the enemy collapses in many ways. His rhythm may collapse, his spirit may collapse, or his technique may collapse. You must perceive the moment of collapse and attack so that he cannot recover.

If you miss the moment of collapse, the enemy may rally. Strike at the moment he breaks and drive through completely.

In large-scale battle, read the timing of the enemy’s collapse. When his formation breaks, when his soldiers hesitate, when his orders are confused — that is the moment to press with everything you have. If you let the moment pass, the enemy may recover his spirit. Observe and strike. Study this carefully.

## **On Becoming the Enemy (Continued)**

I have explained becoming the enemy in the Book of Water. Here I say more.

People tend to think of their enemy as strong and formidable. But put yourself in his position. If he is trapped in a castle with a strong force outside, he may be terrified. If he is outnumbered, he may feel desperate. If his best warriors have fallen, his spirit may be broken.

Do not assume the enemy is strong. He may feel far weaker than he appears. In individual combat, if you see a strong man before you, consider: he may be uncertain inside. Once you understand his inner state, you can defeat him easily.

Study this principle in all situations.

## **On Releasing Four Hands (Continued)**

When a fight deadlocks, you must change your approach completely. I repeat this here because it is critical.

In large-scale battle, when neither side can break through, continuing with the same approach is futile. You must find a completely new way to win — change the angle of attack, introduce a new tactic, shift the rhythm of the battle entirely.

This principle is fundamental. Without it, battles drag on with no result. Study it well.

### **On Moving the Shadow (Continued)**

When you cannot read the enemy's strength, feint with a strong attack and observe his reaction. Once you see his response, you know his capability and his intent. Then you can defeat him using the appropriate strategy.

If you attack without reading the enemy, you may be countered. Always read first, then act. This principle applies at all scales. Study it.

### **On the Transferred Spirit**

You can transfer many states to the enemy. Boredom, restlessness, fear, hesitation — all can be transferred.

In combat, transfer the feeling of “this is tedious and pointless.” When the enemy absorbs this feeling, his spirit weakens. In that moment, attack with a completely different and fierce spirit. This is transferring the spirit.

In large-scale battle, transfer a sense of hesitation or confusion to the enemy's forces. When the enemy hesitates, attack instantly and win. Study this principle.

### **On Causing Intoxication**

You can intoxicate the enemy through rhythm. Intoxication comes when you create a rhythm that lulls the enemy into complacency. Rock him with a predictable rhythm, then suddenly break it. In the moment he is disoriented, attack with full force.

This applies in both individual and large-scale combat. The rhythms that intoxicate and the timing of the attack that follows — these must be trained through experience. Study well.

### **On the Body Blow**

A body blow (□ □ □ □ — Tai-atari) means to close in on the enemy and strike him with your body. Turn your face slightly aside, thrust your left shoulder forward, and strike his chest. Drive in with all your force on an in-breath, with the feeling of bouncing him off his feet. If you train this body blow timing, you can send a man staggering back and even kill him with the impact. Train thoroughly.

### **On Three Parries**

When you attack the enemy, he will try to parry your sword. When he parries, use the parry to create an opening. As his sword deflects yours, redirect your blade to his body. Or, use the moment of his parry to change your angle and strike from the opposite side. Or, use a short, sharp strike directly after the parry, before he can recover.

These three responses to a parry are essential. In each case, the key is: when your attack is deflected, do not pull back. Use the deflection to find a new path to the enemy. Study this.

### **On Stabbing at the Face**

“Stabbing at the face” (□ □ □ □ — Omote wo Sasu) means: when facing the enemy, keep the intent of directing your sword tip at his face. If your sword is always pointed at his face, the enemy

must lean back and create distance. When his body leans back, his spirit follows — he retreats internally. Many opportunities open when the enemy leans back.

In large-scale battle, the same principle applies: direct pressure at the enemy's centre, and he will lean back. When he leans back, attack his weakened flanks. Study this.

### **On Stabbing at the Heart**

“Stabbing at the heart” (□ □ □ □ — Mune wo Sasu) is used when the space above and to the sides is restricted — when you cannot cut from above or sweep from the sides. In such situations, direct your thrust at the enemy's chest. Present the back of the blade to the enemy's sword to prevent a deflection, and drive the point straight at his body. This technique is especially useful in tight spaces and when tired. Consider it well.

### **On the Shout**

The “shout” (□ — Katsu) is used at the moment you press the enemy. When you attack from below and the enemy tries to counter, strike at his lower body with the sword and at the same time issue a sharp shout. After the shout and strike, follow through with a cut from above. The shout and the strike happen in one rhythm — shout-strike-cut. Train this timing.

### **On the Slap-Aside**

The “slap-aside” (□ □ □ □ — Hari-uke) means: when you clash swords with the enemy and you are pressed together, use the flat of your blade to slap his sword aside, then immediately strike. The slap-aside is not a parry — it is a way to clear the enemy's weapon from the line and open a path for your cut. The key is that the slap and the follow-up strike are almost simultaneous. Study this.

### **On Many Against One**

Fighting many enemies at once. When you face many opponents, draw both swords — the long and the short. Spread your arms wide to the left and right. The key is: do not let the enemies surround you. When they attack, meet whichever one comes first. Watch the whole group. Do not wait for one to finish before dealing with the next. Read which enemies will attack first and which will hang back. Engage the aggressive ones while watching the cautious ones.

The feeling should be: attack, sweep through, attack again. If you try to deal with them one at a time while others surround you, you will lose. Keep moving. Keep attacking. Drive them into a line rather than letting them form a circle around you. When they bunch up, strike through the group without pause.

When you have driven them together, do not give them room to spread out again. Keep pressing. But do not flail wildly — cut with control, in rhythm, and do not let the enemy dictate the terms.

Train this frequently.

## **On the Advantage in Combat**

The advantage in combat is understood through the Way of Strategy. It cannot be fully written down. You must train and learn to win in any situation. The foundation is: the sword work of my school reveals the true Way of Strategy. Train accordingly.

## **On the Single Cut**

With the “single cut” (□ □ □ □ □ — Hitotsu no Uchi) you can achieve certain victory. Without deep study of strategy, this is difficult to understand. If you train well, strategy will come naturally, and you will be able to win at will. Study diligently.

## **On Direct Communication**

The spirit of “direct communication” (□ □ — Jikitsū) is this: when you have truly mastered the Way of my school, you can read the enemy’s intent directly and defeat him with a single motion of your body and spirit. The path between perception and action has no gap. This is direct communication.

You must train extensively. I transmit this in person.

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## **The Book of Wind**

□ □ □ — *Kaze No Maki*

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In this Book of Wind I record the methods of other schools of strategy. I do this because: without knowing others, you cannot know yourself.

When people practise various Ways, each believes their own way is correct. But if you do not know the broad view, if you have not mastered the true principle, then your way — however polished on the surface — will be crooked at its core. The crookedness will not be apparent in daily practice, but under the pressure of real combat, it reveals itself.

When the way is not true, it corrupts the whole of one’s practice. As the rot spreads, the Way dies.

If you do not study other schools, you cannot understand the superiority of my school. Therefore I describe the methods of other schools here.

There are many schools. Some are old and well known, some new and popular. I will write about their general tendencies without naming specific schools. Each person can observe and identify the patterns I describe.

The main failings I observe in other schools:

## **On Using an Extra-Long Sword**

Some schools favour extra-long swords. From the perspective of my strategy, I regard these schools as weak. Their reasoning is: if your sword is longer, you can strike the enemy from a distance where he cannot reach you.

This preference for a longer sword comes from a weak spirit — from wanting to win from a safe distance without closing in. This is why I call it a weak approach.

Consider: when you are grappling with an enemy at close range, the longer the sword, the more difficult it is to cut. The long sword cannot be used freely. It becomes a burden. Surely it is better to have a sword you can use in any situation than one that only works at a distance.

Those who prefer the extra-long sword will argue their case, but it is the reasoning of people who do not know the true Way. Is it true that longer is always better? Are they going to attach a spear shaft to their sword?

In a confined space — indoors, in a crowd — a long sword is a disadvantage. Those who rely on length are limited to one approach. They have abandoned the broad view of strategy.

Some people lack natural strength and may find a standard sword difficult. I am not criticizing this. But the strategic choice to extend the sword deliberately to gain distance advantage — this is wrong.

Look at it practically: if you extend your weapon, the enemy can too. In the end, length gives no true advantage. Those who rely on a shorter sword at close range can move inside the reach of a longer sword and fight at advantage. Consider this carefully.

### **On Using Great Force with the Sword**

You should not speak of strong or weak cuts. If you cut with the intent of cutting strongly, your technique becomes rough and you cannot win.

Even when striking an enemy wearing armour, you should not try to cut with deliberate force. My school never thinks of cutting strongly or weakly. The only thought is: to kill the enemy. If you put excessive force into the cut, you lose control. If the cut misses, the excess force carries you off balance.

The swords of others become wild and uncontrolled when force is applied. Consider: you cannot kill a man by the strength of your cut alone. If you slash at a man with brute force and happen to kill him — that was luck, not skill. If you meet a skilled opponent, brute force will not work.

In my school, the sword is swung on its correct path with no excessive force. The body is relaxed, the spirit is settled, and the cut is natural and lethal. Forcing the sword with muscular effort is wrong. Study this.

In large-scale strategy, preferring to win through sheer numerical strength or brute force is the same error. If both sides try to win through force alone, the result is mutual destruction. This is not the Way.

In my school, we win through wisdom and strategy, not through brute strength. There are many ways to win. Consider this.

### **On the Use of the Short Sword**

Trying to win with a short sword alone is not the true Way. Since ancient times, the long sword and the short sword have been distinguished. Strong warriors can wield a long sword as easily as a short one — so there is no reason to prefer the shorter weapon.

With a short sword, it is difficult to attack in open spaces. When facing multiple enemies, the short sword is a disadvantage.

Those who use the short sword must look for opportunities to close in, grapple, and cut at close range. But focusing on closing in causes them to neglect the broader principles of strategy. Their Way becomes narrow.

Using a short sword defensively while waiting for an opening — this is also weak. The short sword is a weapon of opportunity; it is not a foundation for strategy.

If you are a strong warrior, you should want a long weapon that lets you control the space. There is no advantage in deliberately choosing a short weapon. Study this well.

### **On Schools That Teach Many Sword Techniques**

Teaching a great number of techniques for the long sword is a form of commercializing the Way. These schools create many “secret” techniques to impress students. This is wrong.

The reason is this: there are not many different ways to cut a man. Whether the swordsman is a master, a student, a woman, or a child, the ways to strike and cut are limited. Beyond cutting, thrusting, and slashing, there is nothing else. Since the purpose is the same, elaborate technical variations are unnecessary.

However, depending on the situation — low ceilings, confined spaces, narrow passages — you may need to adjust your body position to cut effectively. These adjustments are practical and necessary. But to create “secret techniques” from such adjustments and give them mysterious names is misleading.

In my school, there are five approaches, and they cover every situation. Positions, timing, spirit — these are how you adapt, not by memorizing dozens of named techniques.

Schools that proliferate techniques are selling the Way. They cannot understand the true essence. Study this carefully.

### **On Emphasis On Stance**

Placing too much emphasis on stance is wrong. Stances exist only to be used in the absence of an enemy. Creating fixed rules of stance — “this position is best,” “this position is correct” — without considering the enemy’s actions is useless.

In combat, you must take whatever position gives you the best opportunity to cut the enemy. Your stance must adapt to the terrain, the light, the space, and the enemy’s actions. A fixed stance is a dead stance.

Whether you take a higher or lower position depends on the situation. The upper and middle positions are strong; the lower and side positions are adaptive. A fixed attachment to any stance prevents you from responding freely.

In my school, there is “stance — no stance.” The sword is in the position from which you will cut. Whatever position that is, it is correct.

The first thing in strategy is: when the enemy cuts, you win. When the enemy thrusts, you win. Everything else flows from this. Study it.

## **On Fixing the Gaze**

Some schools teach fixing the gaze on the enemy's sword, or on his hands, or on his face. If you fix your gaze on any one point, your perception narrows and you lose the broad view.

In games like ball-catching, a skilled player does not watch the ball constantly. He perceives it broadly and catches it easily. People who are accustomed to their art can see many things at once — a juggler does not need to stare at each object.

In strategy, through daily training in combat, you become accustomed to the enemy's speed, distance, and rhythm. You perceive his intentions without focusing on any one point. The gaze in strategy is broad. As I have written: perception (kan) is strong; sight (ken) is weak.

See the distant as close, and the close as distant. Know the enemy's sword without looking at it. This is the core of the gaze in strategy. The principle is the same whether for individual or large-scale combat. See broadly, not narrowly. Study this carefully.

## **On Footwork in Other Schools**

Various schools teach special footwork: "floating steps," "jumping steps," "stamping steps," "crow steps," and many others. From the perspective of my strategy, all of these are wrong.

I reject floating steps because in combat, the feet must be grounded and firm. I reject jumping steps because jumping commits you to a single direction. I reject stamping steps because stamping is a habit with no strategic purpose.

There are many other kinds of special footwork, but I reject them all. In my school, footwork is: walk as you normally walk. Move your feet in paired steps, right and left, without favouring either foot. When you cut, when you pull back, when you press in — step naturally. Never jump, never stamp, never float.

The most important point about footwork is: never let a single foot bear your weight stationary for too long. Always be in motion, always balanced. This is the footwork of strategy. Study it.

## **On Speed in Other Schools**

Speed is not the Way. Some schools emphasize speed above all else, teaching students to cut quickly and move quickly. This is mistaken.

In the Way of Strategy, there is no inherent advantage to speed. Speed without proper timing is useless. Experts in any field do not appear to rush, and yet they are never late.

Consider: on the road, a trained courier may cover ten or twelve leagues in a day, but he does not run wildly from dawn to dusk. An untrained man who runs will not keep up over the full distance.

In combat, trying to cut quickly leads to wild, uncontrolled swings. The cut must follow the correct path. If you try to do everything quickly, your rhythm breaks and you cannot win.

In large-scale battle, the spirit of rushing leads to disaster. The feeling should be: hold the enemy down, prevent him from acting, and when the moment comes, act decisively. There is no need for haste.

The truly skilled person appears unhurried. He is never late because his timing is correct. Rushing is the sign of someone who has not mastered the Way.

In my school, the spirit is not “fast” — it is “direct.” The shortest path between perception and action is not about speed. It is about eliminating hesitation and unnecessary motion. Study this important distinction.

### **On “Inner” and “Outer” Teachings**

Some schools divide their teachings into “outer” (□ □ — shokyū, for beginners) and “inner” (□ □ — ōgi, secret or advanced). They teach basic techniques to new students and reserve “true” techniques for advanced ones.

This approach is wrong. In real combat, do you use “beginner” techniques on weak enemies and “advanced” techniques on strong ones? Of course not. Everything you know, you use. The division into “inner” and “outer” is a commercial trick to retain students and create a sense of mystery.

In my school, there is no division between basic and advanced. All students learn the same Way. Progress depends on the student’s own nature and effort. There is nothing hidden.

The habit of withholding the “true teaching” makes the student dependent on the teacher and clouds the Way. This is harmful. Study this and avoid it.

### **On This Summary of Other Schools**

I have written the above about other schools in general terms. I have not named specific schools or identified specific teachers. This is deliberate.

When people hear criticism of a named school, they become defensive. When people hear criticism of their own teacher, they stop listening. This is natural but unproductive.

What I have described are patterns of error that repeat across many schools. Any honest student of the Way can observe these patterns in their own training and make corrections.

The purpose of studying other schools is not to disparage them. It is to understand the broad landscape of strategy and to confirm where the true Way lies. In all things, truth is truth; error is error. The Way cannot be found through any single school alone.

My school, Niten Ichi-ryū, is different from others. Other schools present swordsmanship as the Way. My school uses swordsmanship as the foundation but opens onto a broader Way — the Way of Strategy itself, which encompasses all combat, all arts, and all of life.

This is the meaning of the Book of Wind.

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### **The Book of The Void**

□ □ □ — *Kū No Maki*

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I write of the Way of Strategy of Niten Ichi-ryū in the Book of the Void.

What I call the Void is where there is nothing to be known. Of course, the Void is nothing. By knowing what exists, you can know what does not exist. That is the Void.

In the world, people look at things in the wrong way. They think that what they do not understand must be the Void. But this is not the true Void. It is mere confusion.

In the Way of Strategy as well: the warrior practises the Way of the Sword and learns the principles of combat. But if his mind does not truly understand the Way, even though he practises daily, his spirit drifts from the true path. If his spirit is not straight, his technique may seem correct, but in fact it has strayed. Seen from the true Way, this drift is clear.

The true Way of Strategy is straight and honest. You must pursue the true spirit, practise the true Way, keep your mind broad, polish your wisdom, sharpen your discernment, and see the world clearly.

When there is no confusion or shadow in the mind — when the clouds of bewilderment have cleared completely — that is the true Void.

As long as you do not know the true Way, you may think you are following it — whether through Buddhist faith, worldly learning, or any other practice — but if your mind is crooked and your perception skewed, seen from the straight Way of the world, your path has bent. Recognise this.

Hold your spirit straight. Keep strategy as your foundation. Practise the Way broadly. Judge all things accurately and clearly. Polish the two layers of your mind: perception and will. Sharpen the two eyes of your gaze: the broad eye and the fine eye. When there is not the slightest cloud or shadow, when your mind is completely open — that is the true Void.

Until you know the true Way, you may think your understanding is correct and your actions right. But examine yourself honestly against the straight Way and the broad world, and you will see that your mind has been warped by personal bias, that your eyes have been distorted by personal perspective.

Knowing this, make honesty your foundation, make truth your Way, practise strategy in its fullest sense, and think clearly and openly. Then you will come to regard the Void as the Way, and the Way as the Void.

In the Void there is good. There is no evil.

Wisdom exists. Logic exists. The Way exists. The mind is empty.

— *Twelfth day of the fifth month, second year of Shōhō [1645]*

*Shinmen Musashi To Terao Magonojō*

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END