

Ignorance In Swordsmanship (*Kenjutsu Fushiki Hen*)

Kimura Kyuhou

Preface

There is a natural path in the world, but people do not know it. If they knew it, they would, perhaps, be called sages. Perhaps spontaneity is what is also called energy in harmony with heaven. The swordsmanship that was passed down to me is called the Unchu-ryu; its ancestor was Itou Nyudo Kii Suketada of Oushuu Province who mastered the subtleties of the art of the spear, first disciplining himself in the *kuda yari*.* Subsequently the *naginata* was added by Ogasahara Naiki Sadaharu, the straight spear and cross-bladed spear by Torao Monemon Mitsuyasu, and these have been handed down through the generations. But the teachers of recent times, though they now bear illustrious titles, have yet to achieve the highest levels. My teacher embarked on this path and spent year after year in solitary training, concealing his heart and deepening his thinking. After many years he naturally achieved this level, after which he had developed such free-

* A type of spear that utilizes a short metal tube (*kuda*) through which the shaft slides.

dom that he was able to move as if his opponent was not there at all. Truly, it should be said that this famous teacher revived this school. Going to other provinces, he stimulated interest among many warriors: among a thousand students there were four or five who were capable of attaining these principles. I invited them to study with me, he said. Long ago, this style had the straight spear and cross-bladed spear added to it. Now it also includes the long sword. Our teachers' blessings have been passed down over the years, he told his students. It is my hope that this may be continued. Accordingly Rinjitsu entrusted it to his students. Thus he is the founder of the long sword style of this school.

I came into contact with my teacher about the time I entered manhood. I could not absorb all he had to teach. The technique was a mere drop in the ocean. One day, a visitor arrived and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the various schools. I was waiting in attendance beside them and listened, deeply impressed: I have set down the words here just as I heard them. However, I deeply regret that in my sixty years I have been unable to master the whole art. For this reason I have called this single volume that I have produced, "Ignorance in Swordsmanship." And so, to show my childish ignorance, I want to leave this to my descendants. It is my sole intention to continue the art that I received from my teacher. For those that hope to follow this art for their future happiness, if you examine this it should be of some little help. Though it brings death, it enhances life still more. This is something I aspire to myself. My teacher's family name was Hori; his personal name Rinjitsu and his title Kindayuu. He was a native of Nobeoka in Nisshyuu in Shikoku. His ancestors were lords of Arima, so from his youth, he was in service and went to Echizen, together with his lord. After some 66 or 67 years he died in the 5th year of Houreki (1755) on the 12th day of the 10th month. His disciples grieved as though they

had lost a parent. After his death he was given the posthumous name Toumon as a lay Buddhist of Ryushin-in temple.

Humbly written by the student Kimura Kyuhou
on the 12th day of the 10th month,
in the 1st year of Meiwa (1764).



The visitor said, “Master, you have distilled a single principle of swordsmanship from emptiness. Although what you say is quite right, it is said to be very advanced and difficult to achieve for the inexperienced. Though unusually talented individuals may make progress, in just perfecting a single principle, saying you need only discard what you have learned sounds like a monk on the road to enlightenment tampering with a sword; the clumsy motions of the mind won’t help attain this state. Since long ago, the great commanders watched the unsophisticated techniques of provincials, or military training, to no small effect. On the contrary, these esteemed figures said you should not rid yourself of this unsophistication. Similarly you should not ignore the shallows you cross to reach the depths, or tramp heedlessly over the foothills to reach the heights—just follow the principle. What you should do at first is simply apply yourself to what you have been taught and the principle will develop naturally.”

The master replied, “what you say is very reasonable. In terms of guiding the inexperienced, I do just as you say. However that may be, I don’t teach choreographed patterns. Therefore, among those who are unfamiliar with it, there are many who regard this as just a theoretical art. It is difficult for someone who has not entered the school to understand. With choreographed patterns, everyone performs moves that are pre-arranged—this is not realistic. Therefore, at the beginning,

while they do learn patterns for a while, I do not teach them for long. After that I instruct them realistically. If there is any divergence from principle in this technique, it is solely as a foundation for proceeding in the art based on the path of this single principle. It is not necessary to discard anything. Therefore we engage in practice with the bamboo sword, the spear, and the *naginata*. If you discard things, surely you could not practice with the spear, with the sword, and so on. You should be able to understand this. What are called techniques in the wider world are only pre-arranged set patterns. This school does not make use of such pre-arranged patterns, or learn set forms. The practical techniques that have been extracted from the principle are shown by utilizing the path of spontaneous response.

“First, when you start, there is an opening, which allows you to take the first steps to understanding the one principle. Gradually you are swept up in and comply with this principle, your mind becomes calm and you are filled with energy. In a natural progression, your fears drop away, then as you press forward into danger and you are forced to adopt all sorts of positions, cuts, and thrusts against your opponent, then I teach students techniques which incorporate the principle of emptiness, pressing forward, and then the principle of emptiness and the ‘moon in the water’ combine and they will come to understand how to read the opponent’s intention through emptiness. When they acquire this skill, they will be able to draw themselves into and blend with the opponent’s pressure. This is the heart of the Yagyū School. When they have perfected the initial points above and beyond this, delved deeply into the *shinjutsu* (techniques of the mind and spirit) they will have detachment from life and death, and techniques and theory will both have been discarded. When you have discarded techniques and theory, it is called *mushin* or ‘no-mind.’ When you achieve ‘no-mind’ the mind and body just

respond spontaneously as things happen. You can enter this state at will. Having already achieved technical and theoretical mastery, you will naturally come to be able to see the opponent's level clearly, his strengths and weaknesses and the path to victory. There is no situation nor class of men in all creation to which this way cannot be applied. Surely this is what the masters of ancient times possessed. Though this has not been made known to the public at large, if all things arise from it, cannot, therefore, the one principle be made clear? First learn the art of the spear, then discard everything—is this not the correct sequence?”

The visitor said, “there are undoubtedly other ways to achieve this advanced level. I'm not ready to accept what you said. All the various houses differentiate beginners from intermediate students by the number of patterns they know, and when they progress to an advanced level there are still many more advanced patterns for the sword. To start with, the teacher must not be humble. At first, if we discuss worldly matters, as one goes from a lowly samurai to a man of responsibility, often calling on magistrates, and then becoming a leader, paying close attention to issues of administration will certainly be of great benefit. However, after you thoroughly understand worldly duties, why should you not teach from established examples?”

The master answered, “your innocent belief in progressing from basic to difficult, which in swordsmanship means the use of choreographed set patterns, is quite reasonable, as it is the method adopted by the majority of teachers. Be that as it may, Kino Nyudo, the founder of this school, like Master Yagyū Munenori* of Washū and Miura Masanari† of Bushō,

* Yagyū Munenori (1571–1646): a famous master of the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū.

† Miura Masanari (fl.1680s): founder of the Mugan-ryū. His name is often written as Miura Masatame.

the founder of the Mugan style, honored his domain; and he too transcended various schools, old and new. Taking two or three disciples he went to spy on the various schools in Tobu. All of them employed paired kata and there were none who had achieved outstanding skill. Among those who showed little understanding were those orthodox teachers who created and taught choreographed patterns. Although it is said this makes it easy to understand and refine the principles of the style, the results should bear this out. They are unable to lead anyone to realization of the principle. After a certificate of accomplishment is awarded in a tradition where attainment is measured by progress in choreographed patterns, it is not likely that you will come to your senses. There is neither sign nor shape of the truth. Therefore there is no doubt of the difficulty in initiating someone who has achieved this level. And so, from the start, the beginners mind should be gradually developed allowing them to gain some sense of the principle: by means of the empty (*kyo*) they will develop the real (*jitsu*). At first they will sense the principle only dimly, like a thread or a mist, but accumulating insights, they will discover progress, achieving both technical and theoretical understanding. This is skill.

“Eventually you have thoroughly mastered the principle, reaching a state beyond the physical. This may be called the Great Ultimate, or the Limitless Great Path. It is this that the masters should be passing on. When you reach this level, you will be still and unmoving without straying into defensiveness; not relying on your eyes and ears, but feeling and responding directly, because this virtue embodies a divine ferocity. However, even if they are guided along the orthodox path, the experienced still have the natural human desire for victory and to avoid defeat. In a situation where they are taught only to win, the arrogance of human desire becomes ever more firmly entrenched, their appearance is strained, if I

am confused, my understanding is clouded; if I am angry, my compassion is lost; if I am frightened, my courage is broken; if I deceive, the truth is lost. This disturbance is as though a neighboring house has caught fire: you will certainly not come anywhere near a state of calm imperturbability. You will have spent a whole lifetime engaged in conflict. In principle, people with essentially the same nature should feel an affinity, so it is a sorry business if you think only of beating those you should love. If the true mind is clouded like this, instead of fostering malice, give up the drive to be first. You should simply adopt an underlying attitude of loyalty and filial respect. However accomplished you become in swordsmanship even if you learn enough to beat all the people in the world and though you may look violent, when you have a spirit of loyalty and filial respect, on finding yourself in a dangerous situation, you will, at once, forget old grudges and happily join forces, without the slightest attempt to slip out of it.

“But if you lack this kind of fidelity to principle, what use is it to habitually train yourself in the sword? Therefore Confucius said, ‘Should not a warrior treasure humility in all his actions?’ As a samurai departs from humility so should he forfeit the loyalty of his retainers. In such times of disturbance, the principle of fidelity appears and there will be no diminishing of military renown. The person who uses both normality and danger for the benefit of his country will surely be a valued warrior. All those who would do otherwise should be despised as brutes.

“To move on to your example of worldly affairs, even in the most extreme cases there are two alternative approaches. As you said, at first a person of some youth who has worked for ten years or so will first be a foot soldier, then a junior officer, a warrior, a leader of a troop, a general, a magistrate, a court official, and so on. Walking this single path to its end, he may later become a liege lord developing discernment in

matters high and low—you are probably of the opinion that this calm is particularly helpful in achieving victory. Those with superficial knowledge and shallow opinions all share this belief. This goes beyond the principle, but is of no practical use. On this path and others of similar nature, men progress from youth, receiving gradually weightier appointments, leading to positions as leaders and magistrates, till they grow old in the service of the province, though finding precious little profit in the service of the way, they are finally broken for the sake of the state. On top of which, when you look into each and every phenomenon one at a time, is there anyone capable of thoroughly grasping them all, even if they had one or two lifetimes at their disposal? But if a person willingly takes the path of understanding the universal principle, they should be able to understand by themselves without exhaustive investigation into each and every thing.

“When Zhuge Liang* left his hermitage he took the welfare of the nation into his hands; the founder of China,[†] aroused from his sleep pacified the kingdom and founded a dynasty that lasted for 200 years. There are many examples of this kind from Japan. If you find this great path, the extent of this superfluity naturally becomes clear. However, if you long to reach the state where you can understand all things through the thorough understanding of just one, taking the long way round is like ‘taking the narrow by-ways and stopping to smell the flowers.’ Someone else who had no liking for the practice of fixed choreographed patterns, Yagyu Munenori, likened them to the government. ‘As I lead the inexperienced, the foot hills are passed over and the heights are reached, which is to say, you attempt to stride forward along a straight path, without stopping midway—reaching the capital becomes your princi-

* Zhuge Liang (181–234): famous strategist from the period of the Three Kingdoms.

[†] The legendary Huang-di, or Yellow Emperor.

pal aim. It is as though you were the Shogun and possessed a jewel that gave you knowledge of the whole kingdom.'

"In the *Chapter on Government* in the *Analects of Confucius* it says, 'Suppose the North Star were to appear here: the other stars would all turn to face towards it.' If we apply this to the sword, around the central position are arrayed 80,000 swords. The center is the same 'level' as immovable. The Confucian teachings are also settled around the center. In the *Great Learning* it says, 'Virtue is made clear. This Great Ultimate appears at the beginning, pointing out to the novice scholar, who proceeds in his study from the bottom with this as the object, understanding of the status of things is achieved. Sincere in intention, of just mind, if the student is taught, he will be illuminated by the virtue of the target.'

"In swordsmanship, too, if the virtue of the universal principal is taught as a goal from the start, using this as a basis for practice, the universal principal of emptiness can be sought. Therefore, even in a dirty backstreet, the principle appears from material things; first comes the technique—the principle appears later. However, if you look at what you have achieved, the reverse is true, the technique arises from the theory. How can this be? For theory, if we substitute the principle that existed before the creation of Heaven and earth, the technique is equivalent to the 3 powers* that arose subsequently. However, the principle is the root; the technique is the end. If you reach the heights from the lowlands, the landscape you see on your journey, the produce, the geography, the character of the people and so forth, will be visible in their entirety. The mind that lags behind, finally coming to a halt, will certainly develop partialities on the journey. Not only that, the scenery you encounter will color the inner principles and knowledge, and later, as a teacher, these errors will be passed on to all

* Heaven, earth, and man.

your successive students, which must be the saddest thing of all."

The visitor said, "other schools talk a great deal about concepts such as selflessness, no-mind, simple mind and each school stresses its particular principle. Why surely this is no different from the level of beasts?"

The master replied, "if there were not two principles there should be no difference with the other schools. But, when it comes to what are called principles, though the mind understands, when they are spoken, they all sound equal—but when you have a weapon in your hands and test the principle, you cannot tell if it is true or false. Furthermore, each of the various schools has their own theory, not a few of which sound profound. So when they are differentiated like this, people are confused. The bounds placed upon these schools' principles limit them. In this respect, if you value the correct principle, none of the other schools will lead you there: their principles are one-sided and not completely rounded out. Thus they are minor arts. 'A refined man,' it is said, 'first sees all and remains impartial; the small man is biased and cannot see all.' Again to make a comparison, it's as if a group of blind men are assembled, taken to an elephant and asked to describe its form just from what they have felt. The one who felt its back says it's like a mat on the floor; the one who felt its tail says it's like a rope; the one who felt its tusk says it's like a horn, and the one who felt its leg says it's like a pillar. Because they're blind and their answers can't encompass the whole body—they just say what they felt. The principles of all the different schools when they talk about their advantages are, in fact, like this. Because the true principle is something we cannot see with our eyes, the various schools contain bias and so disagree with each other.

If you are aware of the huge difference in appearances occasioned by the flexibility of the principle, there will be nei-

ther disagreement nor confusion—thus all will be equal. As to being on the level of beasts, small people are only like small creatures of the fields, who all believe they will triumph over people of the same character. In fact, already debased and corrupted by the Tengu* world of vanity and lies, will they not become veritable beasts? If they don't leave behind these outer delusions they grasp so tenaciously, their bodies will become brutish. They will become so-called 'beasts in human form.' So how on earth can this kind of brute corrupt the mind of an upright person?"

The visitor said, "master, you said that experts will not argue because of their knowledge of the way. But the top student of Yagyū Munenori, the master of old, in works such as the *Honshiki Sanmondou*,[†] poured scorn on other schools. And more recently, Mugan Miura's descendant Otsuka Yoshioki, wrote the *Kenjutsu Ron*, in which he heaps ridicule on other styles. Now, what you have said is again the same. Is this not disagreement. Indeed, this is looking down on what others do while doing the same thing yourself. In fact is this not conceited and hypocritical?"

The master replied, "if you are yourself armed, how can you criticize others for doing the same? Therefore, in just a minute, I will disentangle the rights and wrongs of your question. The Yagyū or the Mugan schools surely have no wish to impugn any other worthy styles. But those who train in choreographed set patterns do not develop skill; mistaking the path, they gradually stray in the darkness. It's like looking for fish in a tree. After spending your whole life in persisting

* Tengu were supernatural beings said to live in the mountains. They were traditionally connected with asceticism and some of the schools of martial arts, but here the reference is to their role as agents of disorder and delusion as enemies of Buddhism.

[†] *Honshiki Sanmondou* (*Three Questions and Answers on Essential Knowledge*). Kimura published this work together with his own *Unchu-ryū Kenjutsu Youryou* (*Essentials of Unchu-ryū swordsmanship*) in 1752. The writer was probably Kimura Sukekurō Tomoshige (1580-1656).

in a mistake, you will sigh at what little you have seen of true virtue. This shows those people who are attached to the world. And again, it is in the axioms of my school,

You will differentiate between yourself and others for a short time only. Since you do not have skill in a reasonable and acceptable art mistakes will naturally be apparent in your performance.

“It’s just that when someone has explained the truth, you should not debate whether it’s right or wrong. Although it may be said that a lack of understanding resembles dispute, swordsmanship is a path in which discussion can never decide victory. In other schools there are, no doubt, masters too. In many schools, the masters of previous generations must have been highly skilled, however the succeeding generations produced unworthy teachers who, having mistaken the principle, could not contest without choreographed patterns and fixed movements. And further, among those who followed were many who were incompetent. Of the eighteen styles of Miura, none of his teachers showed conformity of theory and principle. In those days, a considerable number of teachers of other schools allowed me to visit, but I have yet to see one person who possesses real skill. I gained some understanding of people from these investigations, and concluded that masters in this world are rare. If theory and technique conform in neither scholarship nor art, what kind of benefits do they confer? What I say is not something I believed from the start; I just came to develop this negative point of view.”

The visitor said, “since long ago, many schools favored contests and a considerable number of swordsmen traveled the country in the course of their training. And men such as these were not inferior to Yagyū and Miura, yet somehow they remained obscure.”

The master answered, "those traveling around the country to advance their training should be seen as two kinds. One is the person who is devoted to martial arts, year after year learns the highest techniques yet even so has not realized the one principle of complete victory. There are famous teachers in neighboring provinces he wants to meet in order to learn those subtle techniques. People of this sort may fight contests with various schools in different provinces: they are not pleased when they win, but when they suffer defeat; they feel that by beating those inferior to them they gain nothing. They are happy to lose; it means they have found someone who can beat them. In other words, they embarked on their training to meet people who were superior to them in order to learn their advanced techniques. Eventually, on achieving this principle, they would feel great humility in having reached this level of achievement, and so do not seek to be widely known. Those with this true devotion will show this kind of gratitude.

"The other kind based on contests of two or three schools, proclaim their own speed, intelligence and ability while ridiculing those accomplished in the arts, desiring to beat those of other provinces and schools and establish a reputation. These people are the opposite of those I mentioned previously. They are pleased when they win, downcast when they lose—people like this deviate from virtue and never obtain the way. After all, anyone who bears grudges and seeks to harm others will, ourselves included, suffer a violent death. These people fit the way to match their art. They are not devoted to the truth. The beasts we mentioned before regard their art as a means of establishing a reputation. Surely an unskilled novice is superior to this. When you have reached the highest level of swordsmanship, even though you don't fight you achieve victory spontaneously. While winning through strategy without fighting is advanced, and fighting to achieve victory is the core, should not winning while teaching be considered the

lowest level? Because the principal is something that is insubstantial, even though it is before your very eyes, it is hard to see. That is why you see those who are devoted travel around the provinces. Once they discover the one principle, what good is traveling around the provinces? It is not necessary to wait for recognition from others, that is enough for them. It is like the saying, 'Poets know about famous places without leaving their dwellings.'"

The visitor then said, "master, what you have said is completely in the realm of mental and spiritual technique—it is not swordsmanship at all. Just training the spirit without trying to win is not the same thing as achieving enlightenment from studying the sutras and sacred writings. Through swordsmanship you can only gain an incomplete understanding."

The master replied, "although what we call 'single mindedness' may be inferior to full understanding, it's a state you can't achieve unless you practice the sword. Originally swords were not to be used as dangerous weapons. However, when used properly, they would help bring good fortune to society. So, in other words, by wielding a killing sword you have a sword of life. It is also true that swordsmanship is a minor art. How can it be a spiritual path? However you put it, I was born into a warrior family, so if I am to do my duty, practicing the arts of sword and spear, on reaching an understanding of the principle, the family arts will not be in vain. Furthermore, though lacking in academic talent, we put it into practice and were able to achieve the true way. In this way it becomes a major way. And so we ask what it is. Because there is an opponent with a sword in swordsmanship, when there are too many distracting signs, we blame the opponent. This sword wielding opponent is, in fact, a living book. At times like this, though swordsmanship seems like a spiritual path, it is actually very far from it. It is just that you are expanding it because you have reached a level where you can comprehend a spiritual path.

In general, if you practice them as ways, neither swordsmanship, academic studies, Shinto writings, nor Buddhist sutras will grant you spiritual realization. Through practicing these disciplines you will attain spiritual understanding only if you have reached the way.

“Although I am only dealing with swordsmanship, if you ignore the name it applies to all arts. Sunzi said, ‘To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the highest of achievements. When you can win without fighting, you will have acquired the principle of invincibility.’ Of course, if it does not contain an inner component, how can the virtue of all things be made clear? However skilled you become with the sword, if it is not under control when you meet the enemy your whole mind will be in confusion. Even the most basic things will slip from your grasp. With swordsmanship, what is most fundamental is that you should have knowledge of the sword at your waist. Why on earth would you not want to apply yourself to it? When your original mind is understood, you can treat life and death with equanimity. When meeting an opponent you will be as normal, your mental state will not collapse and, imitating nothing, you will be able to move freely. In general, in swordsmanship, thinking about defeating other people is the attitude of an inferior person. Indeed, it also equates to being defeated yourself. In this state, though you have a multitude of victories, they are all lucky wins. It is not what we call invincibility. Just discipline yourself in the principle with an unobstructed mind; the solitary person will certainly obtain invincibility.

“According to the reckoning of Heaven, we will die, but as if at ease, this death will have a proper beauty. The brave warrior will not forget to mourn the past; he who has become a warrior will achieve goodness through bravely facing life and death. Therefore great commanders, on facing death, do nothing unseemly. Composed, they face death with the same

grace they bring to elegant pursuits. Thus they exhibit *mushin* with regard to death, as well as to life. The brave, virtuous warrior, though he wishes to live, will not stain his virtue. By abandoning his body, he becomes virtuous. This is exactly the same as the sage who, treating life and death as equal, commits to the path of death when there is death, and when there is life, commits to the path of life. When this occurs, you can live freely and die at will."

The visitor said, "many schools practice adjusting the cutting distance and sometimes in the pre-arranged patterns there are two or three cuts. Also, without an attacker, measuring the distance ourselves we swing the sword one hundred or one thousand times in cutting practice every day. I have heard that without establishing the distance and cutting, swordsmanship is ineffective. Do you not do this in your style?"

In answer, the master said, "in my style from beginners to the inner levels, as long as you strike with the long sword, there is no occasion in which distance is not established. 'Distance' is the distance between us and the opponent; it is the theory of space. In my style, showing the principle of space is what is commonly known as 'distance.' But, when you have no attacking partner and just swing the sword alone, one or two thousand times, day after day, it is difficult to appreciate. And what's more, this is not distance. In deciding, will you determine the grip, or should you exclusively concentrate on the efficacy of the strike? If that is so, this is what you will surely do first. If you depart from this fixed distance, you will learn nothing. Again, it is extremely inadvisable to set your distance, and defend against the enemy's attacks like this. The distance I teach has no limit when it stretches; when it shortens, it is closer than a hair's breadth. Both stretching and closing, if you are close to the enemy or far it is the mastery of being neither too much nor too little. In this way, if the principle is without guile, we develop excess and insufficiency. If

you reach the level of ‘meeting the arrow with the sword,’ the term ‘distance’ is not used. Distance is the name given to the relationship of opposing objects. When you reach the level of no self, no enemy, you should understand that the intention of ‘distance’ is the same as confusion. What good will it do you to practice what other schools call ‘distance’ on your own, striking strongly enough to break through an iron wall, concentrating on the grip and effectiveness, if you are too close or too far? Surely it is hardly any use at all.”

The visitor said, “many other schools have traditions that are passed down orally. Why is it not so in your school, master?”

The master replied, “this is exactly what swordsmanship with choreographed patterns has in abundance. This way of transmitting teachings is good for beginners. It is difficult to use for intermediate to more advanced students. Why is it that these teachers strive so? It is not that they are bad, but rather again and again they hit on ideas to be more effective. If that’s the case, it’s obvious they derive these teachings completely from human understanding. The virtue of this school’s principle of appearing empty is connected to the spirit. It certainly cannot be achieved by means of the intellect. As for how to learn this, Sanskrit characters, *kuji* and *juji gohou*, *inmyou*’ and so on, were learnt from Buddhists and passed on to the disciples. But then, even if you believe this is unquestionably the correct theory, if there is someone, for example, who enjoys beating people, or uses this to harm people, or again, is greedy, this should not be done indiscriminately. Similarly, it can be exceedingly dangerous to entrust the higher levels of swordsmanship. In all events, this is the way such a school will decline in refinement. Therefore, when someone

* *Kuji* (9 character) and *juji* (10 character) *gohou*, and *inmyou* are all esoteric practices said to confer practical benefits on the practitioner, and utilized in some schools of martial arts.

has reached the more advanced levels without obtaining the level of the one principle of emptiness and the subtle spirit, they cannot teach this to their own students, and so they teach a number of choreographed patterns and forms over and over, and at the extreme level, pass on such things as curses in oral instruction. When they have finished learning and mastering these various things, there is nothing more. These schools will decline without fail.

“For example, if we take the government of a province, they seem bound to pass many laws. When the sage governs the world, we hear there are no more than three laws. It appears from the writings of the Yagyū school, that their teachings are as numerous as grains of sand on the beach, but after all though you can swallow all the water of the West River in a single gulp,* if you are forced to do everything the result will be very clumsy. So it is said, the ten thousand schools are all small streams. If only based on a single river, your view will be extremely limited when you debate the strengths and weaknesses of all the other schools. If you discipline yourself and desire the great waters of the West River quickly, you should swallow the water of all the many streams in a single gulp. If everything arose from a single thing, if you can grasp this original single thing, which is to be without desire, without ego, then you will have a clear understanding of all things.

“We have the sword of worship, of asceticism, and as spiritual armor. Beyond this, there are spells which cause fever, spirit possession by foxes, curses of stopping the blood, pulling out fish bones and all sorts of other curses besides; even if these have been of some help in the world and they might be good to know, how will they ever be of any help in swordsmanship? However doing these suspicious kinds of things and applying them to swordsmanship is a laughable notion.

* A reference to a Zen koan alluding to instantaneous enlightenment or intuitive understanding.

What is called wickedness is not the enemy of righteousness. Stick to the correct method: it is free of mystery. This form of wickedness cannot be used on those who hold to the truth: it is like ice melting in the sun. Those who have not clearly understood this principle are in a state of puzzlement and folly. Nevertheless, though disciples are in the midst of increasing folly, they faithfully receive instruction. This depends on faith in the unknown as well their desire for the benefits. In my school the passing on of handed down transmissions is not enough. Just doing is the transmission. Having embarked on the way, loyalty is the kind of attitude that will aid you.”

The guest said, “master, when you teach, you have said you dislike choreographed fixed patterns, though a critic might say for techniques when you are pressed close for example, you respond to the enemy’s position, his strikes and thrusts, and this too probably seems like an example of choreographed patterns. And so in such a *kamae* (guard), you should attack at an angle, and if you strike at an angle, you should respond like so, for that position there is this technique and its variations, there is undoubtedly all sorts of knowledge of this kind. So relying on choreographed patterns, guessing the enemy’s mind, is this not the way you teach the inexperienced?”

In answer the master said, “even though what you said is similar on the whole, the way I teach is very unusual. Many schools alike have upper, middle, and lower positions as well as *kamae* such as *aisute*, *seigan*, *setsukabuto** (helmet splitting), and so forth, to name but a few, and who knows how many variations there must be. And beyond this, I do not know the number of inner and outer refinements. Many other

* *Aisute*, *seigan*, *setsukabuto*: three different *kamae*: although *kamae* differ slightly from style to style, each school had *kamae* in which the sword was held in an upper, middle, and lower position. Here the terms denote a position facing the opponent side on, with the sword tip lowered, pointing to the rear; a standard position, with the sword held at roughly navel height, the tip pointing at the opponent; the sword raised, pointing upwards with the hands at head height.

schools have a liking for filling the mind with all sorts of these things, and for those aspects beyond the reach of conscious consideration they appear to use religious doctrines, *inmyou*, and so forth. This is a serious weakness in swordsmanship, the ultimate fallacy. When the mind is burdened like this, it is in a continual state of agitation. Afterwards, without the appearance of virtue, knowledge and insight conflict, and contrary to the intended purpose it becomes difficult to project the mind as it is. It is reflected at the moment glances are exchanged, but does nothing to decide victory and defeat; subsequently you will develop into someone of no great ability.

"In this world of violence and bloodshed, we have probably heard of such cases as revenge for lords or parents. This knowledge becomes the cloak of virtue. With this the mysterious spirit does not rise. In the *Six Classics** it says, 'Great Wisdom is not wise; great benevolence is not kind; great courage is not bold. Just following natural laws, natural wisdom, natural benevolence, natural bravery: if immense virtue, it cannot be seen by narrow-minded people. If you have this, it will be said, without wisdom, without benevolence, without courage.' *The Doctrine of the Mean*† states, 'The superior man is quiet and calm and waits for what life brings; the small-minded man walks in dangerous places seeking lucky chance.'

"When I guide, first I leave behind wisdom, when I show you what the principle of emptiness looks like, it proceeds from a natural level. As above, you wait for what comes, the opponent can take whatever *kamae* he may choose, using a method suited for that *kamae*, you strike from within the principle of emptiness. Again, even when the opponent changes, you don't use your faculties of careful discernment and consideration, just adapt to each change directly, not meeting the

* The six Confucian classics.

† *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*) is part of *The Book of Rites* (*Liji*) and is attributed to Zisi, the grandson of Confucius.

whites of his eyes even a little. Giving up the idea of judgment and analysis, adapting to the changes seems 'divine,' because it is a state of *mushin*, *muchaku*—no-mind, no-attachment, just the principle of emptiness—which allows your natural characteristics to shine in all directions. When you come to cross swords with the enemy, the time for thinking is already past. Thus, without judgement, becoming free, my students can take part in practice from when they are beginners. As the profound virtue described above develops, mental judgment is used less and less. As the opponent adopts different positions, your own body does not move: *hassou* is *hassou*, *seigan* is *seigan*, *sha* is *sha*;^{*} just seeing it as it is, without judgment. In harmony with the single principle, supported by virtue, when you are in *mushin*, the opponent finds himself unable to move or take the initiative. In this respect, those who act on the principle say it was clearly the work of something mysterious, 'I did not do it. And so, compared to other schools, the way I teach is quite unusual. And that is why those who are competitive as beginners do not value this school. There are many who give up practice voluntarily. It's a far cry from the study of choreographed patterns, in which spontaneity will not be achieved because the mind and the form are both already decided. In this school the form, the sword and the mind are not pre-set and so there is spontaneity. Those who have only technique without seeing the principle are like a dog which goes round and round the post it is chained to.'

The guest said, "the mind is the key to mastering the spirit of winning with one cut. You should not desire to depart from the mind. If you are in a state of no-mind, not using your mind, can this actually be swordsmanship?"

The master replied, "yes indeed. There is nothing other than the spirit of the single cut. That being the case, the mind

* These *kamae* correspond to the three mentioned above: *hassou* is an upper *kamae*, *sha* is an alternative term for *aisute*, a lower *kamae*.

that you speak of is ego. The non-mind that I refer to is the original mind. The original mind has no form, no color, no smell, and no shadow. This is *mushin*. In this original mind, the spirit in which inside and out are in perfect accord with the essential emptiness is also known as the single principle of the true ultimate. The ego has shadow and form, colored from its contact with the world. When you use the ego, you cannot exert yourself in all directions. When you use *mushin*, you return to the one principle, clear and pure, inside and outside, unstained by anything, untainted by the world.

"Laozi said, 'By virtue of this principle the heavens are thereby clear and pure; Earth is stable and the spirits divine. All in the world is constant because of it. Without it, the heavens would not be clear. If they were not clear, they would be split asunder. If the earth was not stable, it would warp and crack, if the spirits had no souls, they would be impotent; if the valleys were not fertile, they would become exhausted; if all creatures were not filled with the spirit of life, they would perish. If the kings and lords were not correct, they would stumble.' Swordsmanship that attains one-ness is a clear expression of the spirit. Therefore it responds to change freely, without hindrance. If this one-ness has not been obtained there is no strongly trained spirit. If there is no such spirit, the technique and the theory are both obscured. When they are obscured, he and I are not clearly differentiated. When they are not differentiated, they become two. When they are two, there is conflict. When there is conflict, there is victory and defeat. It is also said, 'The Tao produces one; one gives birth to two; two gives birth to three; and from three comes all creation. Everything returns to the one. The one is the Great Ultimate. Two is heaven and earth. Three is the three powers. All of these arise from the nothingness of the principle of the Great Ultimate Void. The ten thousand things begin with the Tao. The Tao is the source of all: surely this is the principle of

nature?" If that is so, if you do not attain this in your studies you will not master the subtleties of swordsmanship."

The visitor said, "essentially swordsmanship is victory and defeat. For example, if you attain one-ness, you do not heed victory. Discarding victory you achieve complete victory. I can't make head or tail of it."

The master replied, "In the *Laozi* it says, 'The virtuous do not display virtue; therefore they achieve virtue. Those of lesser virtue strive not to lose virtue, therefore they are not virtuous.' When swordsmanship gives up victory, it naturally achieves victory. It is when they cannot give up their attachment to winning that everyone suffers defeat. Giving up victory and emerging victorious is just bringing about the realization of the one principle through losing your ego. Not giving up victory is when you cling to your desires and preserve the sense of yourself.

"Again it says, 'Those of great virtue do nothing, yet nothing is left undone. Those of lesser virtue act, yet there is always something to be done.' If we take swordsmanship, a master has innumerable changes of technique, infinite variety, yet his mind is not limited to any particular form, he is simply in a state of *mushin*. Because he is in *mushin*, it is said he 'does' nothing. The range of inner and outer techniques of the opponent does not affect your mind. It also includes what in Shinto is called the Purification of the Six Roots of Perception. Although we refer to discarding these things in this school, when they are discarded, you do not lack in expertise. It corresponds to 'thus there is nothing that is not done.' The minds of those who are set on winning are full of the possibilities of what they were taught, initiation, and thoughts of Buddhist teaching. With all these things in their minds, when they come to take a position, are absolutely determined not to lose their chance of victory. Whereupon, frozen like statues, colored by the inner and outer possibilities of the enemy's disposition, hesitating

and unable to move freely, they are all defeated. When the mind is full, you cannot naturally reach the state of *mushin*, technique and theory will not transform, there will be no connection between myself and the opponent; when there is no connection between things they become separated and thus come into conflict, unable to obtain freedom.

"You should look at human affairs nowadays. Those who utilize gentleness are unopposed; those who have discovered the principle of the way have no enemies under heaven; they are always victorious no matter who they face, living in freedom. Again, those with a strong stubborn nature will be opposed, they will not be without enemies, will always suffer great defeats and will not be free. So, my master once said, 'This is an iron-clad law. What you put out you will get back. Be it for good or evil, however you act, you will reap the consequences thereof.' Furthermore, 'If transformation is nature, then not transforming is the self. Order is natural; disorder is based on the self. Therefore we hear the flexible are able to control the strong. Thus we should strike; thus we should win.'

"In the *Analects of Confucius* it says, 'When Jiangzi asked Confucius about politics, saying 'if we take the argument that killing the wicked will bring about goodness, what is your position on this?' Confucius demurred, 'what need is there to kill in the pursuit of politics? If I desire goodness, the people are already good. The superior man's virtue is the wind. The lesser man's virtue is the grass. The grass will bend if the wind blows upon it.' Thus is it not foolish to say that killing is necessary for victory in swordsmanship? Remote, immovable, when I embody virtue and principle, though it may be said I do not strive for victory, the enemy just falls. Great benevolence has no need to kill. People will be ruined by their own actions."

The visitor said, "I am altogether convinced. So swordsmanship should be as it is in these few schools, the Unchu-

ryu, Yagyu-ryu, and the Mugan-ryu. Study in other schools results in learning things that are dangerous."

The master said, "you are mistaken. If you take it as essentially one school, there is no distinction between oneself and others. If you extend the proceeding statement, with reference to one's own school, are not all the others mistaken? If that seems to be so, my judgement is not a public statement. It's just that Yagyu Munenori, Miura Masanari, and so on, in recent times are surpassed in great numbers by those with name and position, but when you look at them, they certainly don't know how to teach so that practice and principle are consistent. If this is so, they can only say they are close to the way. Whatever the school, it embodies the principle. Those who discover it should be thought of as possessing a treasure. They should be valued. Beyond this, wherever you look now, they would be despised and disliked by people who covet nothing but victory. There will be no end to this decline into corruption. Amongst followers of Confucius and Mengzi too, recent times have seen the rise of countless factions, departing from the path of morality, humanity, and justice, which have themselves just become words to be rearranged and played with. As the tip moves increasingly further from the point of origin, as the world of the sages becomes increasingly distant in time, so it comes to be like this. Our swordsmanship seems like this, too. If these people do not perish, they will simply split into innumerable styles, abandoning the virtue of the style, just devising choreographed patterns, which will be all that's left. Is it not tragic?"

The visitor said, "what you have said, master, I can completely understand. If that is so, as I have understood it, learning this art is difficult. Is this so?"

The master said, "traces of the principle are to be found throughout the whole of the written language. This is, in itself, not the correct principle at all. According to these traces,

you must understand that which leaves no trace. Is that not why Zen priests say you must understand it intuitively? That's why you must drop from your consciousness all that you have seen or heard, so the mind can unrestrainedly grasp the principle of the way. It is difficult for the mind to become like this, though there are many who have studied and learnt by heart the wisdom of the sutras of the sages. The reason there is no one who has discovered the way is that few people have reached the wisdom of the sages. Although it may come as a shock, it is this serious deficiency of the thinking mind that prevents the light of the spirit from opening."

The visitor said, "leaving aside the thinking mind, detaching ourselves from our crutch, we will not recognize it and take it up just by chance. How can we realize the correct principle?"

The master replied, "simple things are difficult if you are very busy. Therefore, as I explained before, from when you are a novice you are training to bring about the match of principle and practice. Even so, it may be difficult to realise it though you spend your whole life searching. You should not look to other people for the correct principle. As Confucius said, 'The superior man seeks for it in himself; the inferior man seeks for it in others.'"

The visitor said, "if this is so, does that mean the ultimate level in swordsmanship is not passed on?"

The master replied, "the ultimate level is something that the teacher should be sure to teach well. Of course it is something that must have been attained by the teachers themselves. As related above, they can then guide others. As with scholarship, if you haven't attained it yourself, you will not rise to the level of profound subtlety. Ascending to the mysteries yourself is, in the case of swordsmanship, also called 'the waters of the West River,' 'sword striking the arrow,' and '*mu ichi tou*' (not one sword). Though this may be so, teach-

ers and their students should continue to pass this down permanently. When choreographed set patterns are all that's left behind, those in the west will seek the principal in the east. In the present day, attitudes such as he is of a house of swordsmanship, this is a spear school, seem to proliferate. Virtue is not something which is transmitted through the generations. It is of this person, not of this house."

The visitor asked, "just what are the profound mysteries?"

The master replied, "they are unknowable."

The guest asked, "so, is that not ignorance?"

The master replied, "it is not. They can be known, and yet not understood."

The visitor asked, "how can this be so?"

The master replied, "though it is like knowing, it is not knowing. All I can say is they are beyond understanding."