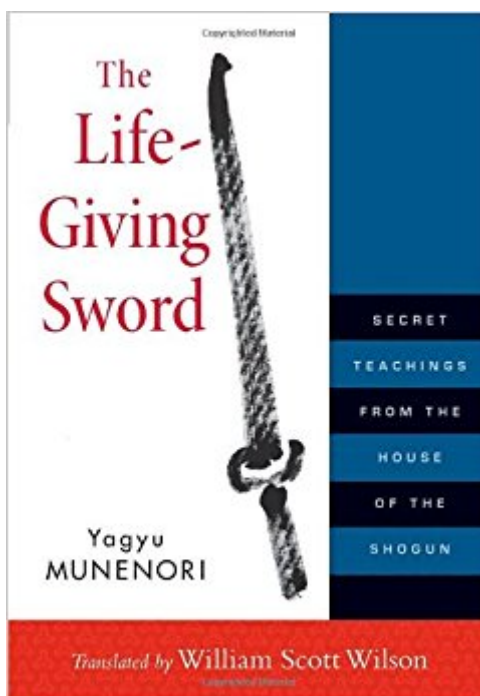


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# The Life-Giving Sword: Secret Teachings From The House Of The Shogun



## Synopsis

The legendary seventeenth-century swordsman Yagyu Munenori was the sword instructor and military and political adviser to two shoguns and was a rival to the great Miyamoto Musashi. Despite his martial ability and his political power, Munenori spent his life immersed in Zen teachings and practice. These teachings formed the framework for his deeply spiritual approach to sword fighting; Munenori saw in the practice of the sword a way to transform the student into a total human being. *The Life-Giving Sword* is Munenori's manifesto on his approach. His central themes are the "Life-Giving Sword" the idea of controlling one's opponent by spiritual readiness to fight rather than by actual fighting and "No Sword," which is the idea that the mind must be free of everything, even the sword itself, in order to get to the place of complete mastery. Munenori's ideas are essential reading for martial artists of all kinds and can be applied to business and human relations as well.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Just in time to capitalize on the cinematic vogue for samurai epics comes this new translation of a classic 17th-century Japanese swordsmanship manual. Heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, Munenori, a swordsmanship instructor to several Shoguns, downplays the training and extols the spiritual enlightenment and life lessons to be gained through martial arts. A few rules of thumb like "you attain the victory by having your opponent make the first move" and "it is dangerous to get any closer than one foot" could be useful in a sword fight, but actual combat maneuvers like Billowing

Clouds, Flower Wheel and Sword of Mystery must be learned through "oral transmission" since "they are difficult to express in written words." (A lengthy appendix taken from another source, containing period illustrations and detailed but still opaque instructions on fighting moves, confirms this insight.) Instead of specific routines, Munenori emphasizes the attainment of No-Mind, the Zen version of "flow" in which one's swordplay proceeds without self-conscious thought. The book's philosophy, it must be said, is also pretty difficult to express in written words, and is conveyed through poetic imagery ("with a pilfered glance, the dragonfly evades the shrike") and mystic paradoxes ("that which is called existence is nothing other than non-existence, and that which is called non-existence is none other than existence.") Munenori's rambling exposition of it may lead readers to conclude that, whatever wisdom comes of a lifetime of sword fighting, it doesn't impart a polished literary sensibility. Fortunately, Wilson, translator of several samurai works, includes a substantial biography of Munenori that illuminates the political and cultural background of the samurai ethos and clarifies Munenori's doctrines for novice readers. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

William Scott Wilson is the foremost translator into English of traditional Japanese texts on samurai culture. His best-selling translations include Hagakure and The Book of Five Rings.

The translation of Yagyu Munenori's *The Life-Giving Sword* by William Scott Wilson is an excellent companion text to Musashi's *Go Rin No Sho*. Like it, this text can - indeed must - be read a number of times, separated by deep reflection, if one is to grasp its deepest essence. Wilson's lengthy and excellent Introduction is a powerful preface to the text's primary writing. *Hagakure* is another text of this caliber that comes to mind. I happen to believe that the great truths in life were discovered long ago, and simply remain to be rediscovered and allowed to flow into today's contemporary circumstances. *The Life-Giving Sword* contains immutable truths that can move one's understanding toward the essence of combat/no-combat behavior. I found one passage in particular to be inspiring: "When you have run the length of various practices and none of those practices remain in your mind, that very lack of mind itself is the heart of 'all things'. When you have exhaustively learned the various practices and techniques and made great efforts in disciplined training, there will be action in your arms, legs, and body, but none in your mind; you will have distanced yourself from training, but will not be in opposition to it, and you will have freedom in whatever techniques you perform. You yourself will be unaware of where your mind is, and neither demons nor heresies will

be able to find it. Training is done for the purpose of reaching this state. With successful training, training falls away. This is the secret principle toward which all Ways progress! I believe that a reader who has many years of martial arts' study "under his belt" will feel a deep emotional and intellectual kinship with the words written so long ago by Munenori and so ably translated and back grounded by Author Wilson. Truly a teacher for the ages.

Tatty Munerori was really a master of life, this is one of those timeless works that will always give you wisdom every time you read it. It is best of read with the works of Takuan Soho (unfettered mind), Issai Chozanji (the demons sermon on martial arts and other tales), the book of five rings (Miyamoto Musashi) and Sun Tzu (the art of war). Timeless wisdom from a timeless master.

For anyone interested in the inner workings of the Japanese swordsmanship. Yagyu Munenori was a very interesting man - wise and skillful. He held a major administrative post by several Shoguns and was an accepted master and a personal fencing master to the Shogun. Even though now we may argue how important Zen Buddhism is to the study of the martial arts and swordsmanship in particular, at the time of writing of the treatise it was without a doubt that a practitioner had to study Zen along with the study of the bujutsu, or the martial art. Not just a resonance of fashion, the Zen philosophy and lifestyle that went a long with it held a special place in the hearts of the warrior class. Munenori was not an exeption but perhaps one of its greatest proponents. We must look deep into what this book has to offer, and although some of the technique descriptions are rather cryptic, which makes them kind of useless without an "oral transmission", others are clearly the work of a martial arts' quiet sage, and go far beyond "barbaric" strength. I am confident that this book will take up a special spot on your book shelf.

The documents that this translation is based from are absolutely essential to any swordsmanship enthusiast, and then it is from my favorite translator! As always, William Scot Wilson's work is exceptionally clear and readable, and then it is heavily supplemented with endnotes ( a ust if you want ot catch my attention)!

Just as described! Nice edition I'll keep always. Good reading nicely binde

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

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

Wilson is my favorite translator for all things Japanese historical. He has and researches a keen insight into all the books he translates and I find his translations most aligned with the principles of Bushido. If you're interested in these works for business strategy, etc: find another author. If you want the translation to reflect the true nature of budo in which these were written, then Wilson is your man.

Great book

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