

Songs of the Sword

Kim Taylor ©1993

SONGS OF THE SWORD

These poems
found in a drawer
in my father's desk
Along with a photograph

a Japanese girl

My father was 17 when he joined the Lord Strathcona's Horse and was sent to Korea to fight. He was blown off of the top of his tank by a phosphorus shell, bits of which remained in his cheekbones all his life. The infantry at the bottom of the hill pulled him into the trench from three feet into no man's land where he had rolled. He said he woke up once in a Norwegian field hospital with a nurse bending over him, and then again in Japan.

My father never forgot the lessons learned in his war. Once only, I woke him up by grabbing his foot. He was out of bed and looking for the Chinese before I could even be startled. I woke him more gently after that.

My father always said I had a brother in Japan, and that when it came time for him to be shipped home he was given the choice of leaving his "soldier's wife" on his own two feet or in chains.

My father said that he was always proud of the fact that it took five military policemen to get him onto the boat.

My father had a desk in his room that was always covered in papers. In one of the drawers there were some small photographs, some negatives, a portrait photograph and these poems. The photographs were lost long ago.

THE USEFULNESS OF BOOKS

Clever sayings
while the sword pierces the heart
===

Where will you put this?
Self-help?
Martial arts?
Philosophy?
Is it filed alphabetically?
throw it away
===

If you are hungry
you must eat
To read about food is folly
===

Don't Read these thoughts
just read them
letting the eyes flow
over the lines
and forget them
===

To own a vast library
is to own expensive wallpaper

===

Clever words
are no help on the field

===

One of these little notes
will reveal the secret to you
And one of these notes
is a lie to be avoided

It's the same note

===

Be happy
if you learn one new thing
from a book

This is more than is usual

===

Modern students
buy books on gardening

It saves cleaning the fingernails

===

Honestly

There are people willing
to write books
telling you how to breathe

===

These words are loaned
on condition
That they are returned
without damage

===

Form and function are not two
Technique and principle are the same

How can Principle be learned
without mastering Technique

Stop reading and pick up the sword

===

One may read a book
on Swordsmanship
But one should not try
to fight with it

===

Looking back on your life
seeing
a hundred books
reading ten pages each

===

Once again
a book begins
With the warning
Do not look for Zen
in this book

Is this different
from the instructor
who tells you
Not to look for swordsmanship
with a sword in your hand
===

Reading technical manuals
the mind wanders
The body
wishing also to learn
===

Talk or practice

Choose

===

Endless reading

Always looking

searching for an answer

not even knowing the question

Constant input

Continuous distracting Noise

Sit

And look the other way

There

see

===

WHY STUDY BUDO

You study martial arts
for self defence
You know the feeling
in your hand
when you sleep on your arm.

===

An unexamined life
is not worth living
An examined life
is not Lived

===

A Masamune blade
in the Springfield museum
I stood looking at it
crying

===

Not everyone can hold a sword
but all can become swordsmen

How do you swing
the sword of no sword?

===

Pick up the sword
There is no place on earth
to set it down again

===

Although it is true
that a certain skill may be acquired
and a certain understanding achieved

It is no reason
To pick up the sword

===

The sword is still the sword
The draw the same as always
Better weapons
and more efficient deaths
are available

Why study this antiquity?

===

Can a man go beyond his limits
be as wise as a god
as strong as a lion
Zazen and Waza

===

SETSUNIN TO KATSUJIN KEN

It is easy to kill a man
Take a more difficult path
learn how to make a man Live
this is the warrior's way
===

Consider the warrior
and the soldier

One takes Life
while the other takes life
===

Anyone can kill
Killing is easy
with a little effort

Instead, study the sword
that gives life
===

Death is linear
You are born, you then die

Life is
===

No Right No Wrong
But what must be done
is done
===

The man who raises the sword
do defend himself
Is a common thing
a street fighter

The warrior raises the sword
to serve others
His own life lost
long ago
===

Fourteen hundred matches
in one week
Nowhere to run
No one to help
Life and Death become meaningless
Who is there to live?
Who to die?
===

Beginning the practice
so as to learn to fight

After several years work
forgetting what it is to fight
===

Raise the sword in anger
and open the gates of hell
Control your anger, bow to the way
and open the gates of heaven

===

Budo
The way of war
look deeper
split the words
The method of peace

===

LIFE AND DEATH

Concentration and compassion
Concentration and the will to win

A brave man or a coward
Will you choose life or death
===

Do you believe you can avoid
the choice of life-and-death

The heart beats, the lungs breath
===

To know that in this situation
the sword must be held thus
and the strike move thus

Is to be a man who will die
Not a man who has died
===

The nun Ryonen
disfigured her face with an iron
to be allowed to study Zen
Are you willing to kill yourself
to study the sword
===

When you find it easy to throw away your life
Begin to discard what is difficult to be rid of
Opinions, Anger, Desires, Possessions
Now the real work begins!

===

Working with half a heart
Sweating only lightly
Or working as if life itself
were in the balance
Slipping in your own blood
Mindful that each moment
may be the last

===

Life is not a gift
but a great debt
that must be repaid

Work hard on your life
to repay the debt

===

Are you ever more alive
than when you know you are dead

Is breath ever so sweet
as when you hold the sword

===

You receive a wound
and watch your life flow out
to be soaked into the mud
You know you well die

How is it different now
than when you tied your armour
===

There is only one fear

Understand that you are dead
so that you may be of service
===

Keep death in your mind

If, today, you are cut down
is there something left undone
something left unsaid

Put your affairs in order
===

Fear
ultimately
is the belief that you will die

Fear is overcome
when
you know that you will die
===

HOW TO STUDY

You want to become
The Swordsman?
Here is how

Do you understand?
===

Do not lay claim
to any special path
Look to your footing
===

Leave reason and madness at the edge of the mat
with your shoes
Here there must be no mind and no thought
only happy idiots
Do Not Think Of Leaving Your Thinking There!
Just come in, come in.
===

The man who works toward being
the supreme swordsman
Is always an unhappy one

The man who works toward being
is the supreme swordsman
===

You may debate the Original Source
And Form of Reality
You may debate the Meaning
Of the Sword

Or you could pick it up
===

Step onto the floor
Jump off a cliff
into water of uncertain depth
It is the same
===

A senior practices
techniques you've not been taught
Watch from the corner of your eye
Practice late at night
Don't let the instructor see!
===

Swordsmanship is not a set of tricks
to be learned
Swordsmanship is learned
when one trick is discovered
===

If you say you will do something
Then that is your life
Only death is an excuse
a poor one at that
===

Without reservations
or rational justification

You should sleep with your bokuto
If you would be as great
as Teshu
===

How many days have you left
How many hours, minutes
If you wish to die training
you have no time to waste
===

If, during practice
Your throat becomes too dry
to breath
Make some water
to drink

Water is water
You must practice hard
to drink deeply
===

Even if swordplay disappears
and none hold the sword anymore
Keep practising
===

A poet shapes reality
with his pen
A potter shapes reality
out of clay

Swing your sword!
===

Not finding a superior opponent
Not advancing
===

Starting the practice
with reason and goal in mind

Holding the sword
with thick gloves
a strike may be made
but at first contact
the sword drops from the hands

Take off the gloves
Practice only to practice
===

Do not Ask permission
to start training

You have begun
===

Practicing the Way
in the dojo
is easy

Practice the way
while you work
this is truly difficult
===

What do you practice for?

The practice
is to allow the practice
===

Believe nothing you are told
Have faith in nothing you read

You can smell the sweat
of a passing army
and know there will be a battle
===

When you enter the dojo
you must bow
Because it bothers you to do so

When it no longer bothers you
to bow
There is no need to bow

Bow anyway
===

ATTENTION

When you laid aside your sword
Was the handle to the north
or to the west?

If you cannot answer
You must study with Nan-in for six years
===

Even when alone
Handle the sword as if in a crowded room
What is learned on the path
Is not some kind of theatre
===

In the midst of an earthquake
Fire and debris all around
People screaming as they run by

Take this opportunity
To practice a little
===

Do you know when you will be struck down
No?
Then best keep the eyes open
Pay Attention!
===

You think
I am alone

The curve of your blade
Is the arch of a bridge
Walk mindfully
The pathway is narrow
The drop may take lifetimes

Have faith
There is a destination
===

If your teacher
changes the routine
and you don't notice
Perhaps you should seek another teacher
===

Watch your instructor
A thing demonstrated once
should not need reiteration
===

If during practice
You think of digging the garden
then put down the sword
and go pick up the shovel
===

That great lawyer Murphy
cannot enter a room
where what happens Happens

In the training hall
Pay attention
and refrain from planning
===

Why repeat a strike
thousands of times
Tie the sword
to a machine
and obtain the same result
with much greater accuracy

When cutting
keep in the mind, cutting
Do not try to compete
with machines
===

I know a man
who could name all the stars
and tell you all the names
of the birds
He carried his knowledge
like a favourite cat

One day he fell down a well
===

If you want to know
the quality of a sword
Don't look at the ore
it was made from
Don't investigate the humidity
of your next home

Look at the sword
===

SEEKING SENSEI

If you find a Master

Kill him

If you find a Grandmaster

Ignore him

If you find a student

learn

===

FROM PAN

These masters of old
could levitate
and leap thirty feet high

And they all had a staircase
in their home

===

Sometimes it is said
that the teacher
always reserves some techniques
Thus the student
is never quite as skilful

Is it any wonder
that the men of old
Killed tigers with a word
Ran down leopards
and flew
===

A master is a signpost
pointing to Your way

Stay out of his footsteps
they're full of shit
===

It is true
that no man needs a master
to understand the sword
But it is a rare man
who has that discipline and desire

The rest of us will gather
at a set time and place
and practice
===

You think you've found a teacher
who is willing to teach

You will learn the sword
from him

First, look at his hands
===

A teacher who will not scold
should be avoided
Kindness is seldom what it seems
===

One swordsman alone
cannot win the war
===

A child knows fear
if its parent is not present
When the parent dies
the child no longer fears

To be rid of fear
you must open your eyes
and accept responsibility
===

The great teachers
always seem to work together
one pushing
one pulling
Each contributing to the whole
their teachings mesh
in uncanny ways

Do you suppose
they call one another?

Nah
===

If your teacher is the greatest
in the world
How much greater you must be
than those students
of lesser men
===

A teacher is seldom found
in the classified ads
or on late night TV
A teacher is more often found
while gathering pebbles
or shopping for fish
===

Do not tout your teacher's greatness
lest in the crush
of new students
Your questions are lost

===

SENSEI

You have learned
Now you must teach

Payment due
===

What you learn
share
There are no secrets
===

How do you judge a student?
Watch the first step
into the training hall
===

The man who comes to the Hall
with no goal in mind
Is welcomed home
The man who arrives
with his destination firmly fixed
Must be helped to carry this baggage
===

Your instructor watches you
not seeing what you do
Looking for who
does this
===

You give something away
saying
Here is something of value
treasure it highly

Who do you think is keeping score?
===

A man may do good deeds
and incur scorn
for it seems he is a fool

That man may explain himself
to those who scorn
and become a fool
===

Lots of followers
and lots of fame
will make a man rich
Resulting in
lots of followers
and lots of fame
and lots of money
===

Is there something to be said
for chasing would-be students away
by various means
so that only those worthy remain
to be taught

No
Teach
they'll leave
===

A true student
seeks not to gain something
but only to discover
what is in himself

A true teacher
must know his art so well
that he does not give the student rules
but simply includes him
in the practice
===

No one ever learned the sword
by praising his instructor
===

You want to do
what I do
Feel what I feel?

You want to steal my life!
live your own!
===

An inheritance
a gift from an ancestor
who knew your name
Treat this waza with care
so that you
in your turn
may pass it on
===

KAMAE

Planting trees on a mountain
What ruler to use
To keep the sun from the ground
when they are grown

===

The pillar of your spine
Supports heaven and earth

You must move accordingly

===

See your opponent
standing opposite
And know
that you stand there too

===

Iai is not misnamed
What is your posture
What are you now
How can there be greater work
than this

===

PRACTICE

The practice of the sword
is the practice of the sword

Please don't discuss this
===

After 10,000 cuts
there is no cutting
===

A cedar root
 grown around a stone
Practice five minutes longer
 today
===

 To get from point A
 to point B
You must to go from point A
 to point B

 This is not always obvious
 ===

What is the difference
between cutting the target
and folding your hakama
===

Where is your training hall

Where are you now?

===

You think training is only for the Hall
Here is training you must undertake
at home

Treat your family as if you've just met them
every moment you are with them

This is very hard
try not to slouch

===

What kind of swordsman
do you wish to be
A good swordsman?
a bad one?
A master swordsman perhaps?

Go home
come back to practice
when you are alone

===

The study of the sword
is not a means to an end
The study of the sword
is swinging the sword

Swordsmen are simple people
===

You may study
or
You may study
to become the best

Choose!
===

The Universe is vast
and sufficient unto itself
Do you presume to expect something?
Will you adjust eternity
and set the rising of the sun
according to your slumber
===

Practice in the Way
is cleaning house
Do not become scattered
Start in one corner
and work outward from there
===

On the hottest day
practice
On the coldest day
practice

What difference can there be
===

When you can begin
to enjoy your art
and take delight
in practice
Begin to worry
===

PATIENCE

Here is comfort

You may leave the training hall
without looking back
It is still there
It will be there tomorrow
===

There is no end to this study
No certificate
No rank
There is only work
Daily practice
For the rest of your life
===

Just swing the sword
and have faith
Swordsmanship will come
Do not wait for it
===

You will be the last
to see your progress
along the way

How can you?
===

You are bored
You've done this
many times before

No
You think you are bored
You could not
have done this before
===

You must learn to wait
for your entire lifetime
before you make the next cut
===

You wish to get along
to the next technique
Instead
Be willing to stand
before a mountain
Until you can see the town
on the other side
===

Birth, death
Pain, pleasure
Effort and reward

All are present now
What is impatience
===

One may think
that one is educated
in four years of University

The great Teshu
took forty-five years
to learn how to cross two swords
===

You have no time
or the patience
To fold your Hakama
after practice?

Strange indeed!
===

What is the body?
What is the mind?
What is the pain of hard practice?

Who remembers the bitter cold of winter
when looking at spring flowers
===

How long?

Until you die!
===

Before 25
Thought is from the crotch
After 25
Thought comes from the mind

When ageless
No thought
===

MA

You yourself are time
There is no faster, no slower
Express time itself
and strike in full faith
===

Do not discriminate
between fast and slow
Only join the dance
and cut when cutting arises
===

What is it
that lies between one breath
and the next
except a lifetime
===

Choose your times
Yesterday, today and tomorrow
or Now and Forever
===

HONESTY

No lying
No trickery
A crooked sword
will never strike truly
===

It is not necessary
To be told right from wrong
This is already known

What is needed
Is the strength to choose
===

Look
Make no comment
Move
Make no judgment

Strike freely
===

SIMPLICITY

No wasted energy
No extra motion
The simplicity of a cut
is a private thing
===

When you finish a cut
Stop
You are finished
===

There are no secrets
to swordsmanship
Only constant practice

Give thanks for this
===

Expecting nothing
Desiring nothing
The strike is sufficient
===

What is the Way

It is simple

It is repetitive

===

First is concentration and will

then concentration

Finally, nothing is left

===

GENTLENESS

Be precise and gentle
with the sword
It is not an iron stick
to be batted about
===

In the dojo
you would not think
to hit a partner
through lack of control

What makes you think
you have the right
to lose control
outside the dojo?
===

DIGNITY

You must Hold the sword
It is not a toy
But an instrument of life itself
Hold it
As the Earth holds a mountain
A ponderous dignity
===

Of all the creatures on Earth
Only Man stands
with spine erect

Do not seek to be less
than you are
===

Standing like a mountain
Moving like a wave
at mid ocean
Rock/wave
===

Praised or not
Scorned or not
Swing your sword calmly

Hakuin became a father
and then a non-father
"Is that so?"

===

EFFORT

The harder you cut
the more you prevent yourself
from cutting

Stop fighting

===

Although you wish to practice
the cuts you have learned
And bring them to perfection
before moving on
You must not be so careless

Too much polishing
erases the pattern from the silver

===

To learn the deepest secrets

Shomen Uchi Komi for three years
Never step backward!

===

If the sword is too heavy
Swing one that is heavier
If this becomes too difficult
Swing your hara instead

===

To a child
this is exercise
You
You must fight for your life!
===

Such a great display!
All the cuts perfect
the body true
Such a lot of sweat!

Now please cut this string
===

To work so hard?
It's not possible
After all
I'm only human

The mile will never be run
in less than four minutes

Don't make yourself stupid
===

A child's balloon on the road
If it strikes down too heavily
it will break
===

With nose pressed
against the bark
It is hard to see the tree
Let's not talk about the forest
===

You talk and talk
of how
you really should
sit
in the morning and the evening

Decide
sit or don't sit
all this resolution
is confusing you
===

So Serious!
Such a mighty effort
and such a great frown

How can you not laugh with God
===

RIGHT EFFORT

You are bored
Practice is not interesting
You've done this before

Wake up!
You are dreaming
===

Do you study Zen
so that you can be a good swordsman

You are drinking water
so that you can become thirsty
===

You are too tired to practice

Coward!

Look at that child with a crooked leg
Watch her walk
===

Every cut

A new pencil
A clean piece of paper
===

If you wish to advance
you must practice
until you discover your Problem

Now you have a gem
that you must make vanish
===

There
In the pit of your stomach
An awareness of something wrong
What is it?
No words
No thoughts come
Only the belly-knowledge

Practice until your hands bleed
===

Practice for 1000 days
Don't miss a day!
Then face 200 opponents
Who cuts! Who is cut!
===

Winning and losing on the training floor
What matter which
Only push forward with the Hara
===

Swinging the sword
Your arms ache
Your hands sweat
Your legs shake
Things swim before your eyes
The lungs are on fire
Thinking!
Do you think you will die?

You will die
or
You will live

Now you are cutting
You are being cut
Cutting
===

Do not seek to be
as a little child
That self centred entity
that cannot see past its next desire

Become instead
a tree or a rock
Wet in the rain
Warm in the sun
===

Sweat in the eyes
Blood on the palms
Knees aching
on the unyielding floor
===

When entering the training hall
say
Come in! Come in!
There is always room for everyone
Today there is no room
for one more
===

When leaving the training hall
say
Sorry! Sorry!
I was here today
I hope not to be here tomorrow
===

You must practice
until the cuts
are no longer pleasing to you
Then you may start to work
===

Never say two things
when one will do
===

Why are you saving your energy
use it all
throw everything into your practice
Energy can't be lost
only changed
Create more!
===

Mushotoku
without goal
without desire for gain
Living now, fully
===

RIGHT SEEING

Who can suspect
the motives of a warrior
He has none
choosing to live in This world
===

The sword tip
Tracing the new moon

Listen!
Nothing to hear
===

You believe your stroke is good
will you stand
and strike Ai Uchi
Is your sword part of your life
===

Can you see the moon
In a breaking wave

Can you see a running wolf
In a still pond
===

Here is a secret
Determine your opponent's favourite place
And move into that place
===

Do not waste time
Seeing with the ears
and hearing with the eyes
Do not waste time
Seeing with the eyes
and hearing with the ears

The eyes see
The ears hear
===

A student
trying to watch the opponent
by the reflections in the sword

Suddenly without thinking
glancing up from the sword
the opponent is seen clearly

A swordsman appears
===

GRATITUDE

A man of little knowledge
makes up his own teachings

Do not spit on your ancestors
===

Do you wish to reward
your instructor

Surpass him
===

Welcome your clumsiness
Be thankful for harsh criticism
One who doesn't learn
doesn't grow
What doesn't grow
Withers
===

The way of the sword
is old and unchanging
It makes no allowance
for individual understanding

This is a great gift
Bow toward your benefactors
===

The instructor
will insist that you disappear
The way he shows you
is the only way he tolerates
Your opinion, your insight
your talents
are ridiculed and ignored

Remember to thank him
at the end of the class
===

There is nothing to gain
Nothing to achieve
Only the opportunity to work hard
and the risk of injury
===

Buddha is a poor god
He cannot afford to give you
what you ask for

Best not pray to him
===

Serve all your life
faithfully
and to your best ability

Your reward
is that you die alone
thankfully

===

AIKI

I am cut
and my opponent falls

I am cut at
and I fall
===

The instant that you say
"that is wrong"
Is the instant you put down your sword
===

Do not try so hard
to understand
Just listen to the sword
===

Are you swinging the sword
Is the sword swinging you?

Swinging
===

INTERPENETRATION IS NOT IT

You exist because of your practice
the sword in your hand is mind
your mind is the sword in your hand
===

You think you can have a match
with someone outside this hall?
How then can you think
that you are something other
than the sword in your hand?
===

If that is your sword
If that is your mind
If that is your life

Then tell me how you make love to your wife
When she is in another room
===

Right now
look about yourself
Look to the hall
the sword
your body

Look and see the place
where your body stops
and the hall begins

Can you see it!
Is it there to see!
===

What is between you and your opponent?
What separates you?
See it
What does it look like?
Say! Say!
===

It seems too hot to live
the breath heavy and short
In a few months
I will wear a sweater
===

ISSHIN

The swordsman
motionless
Waiting to cut
a water drop

An image of power
"sometimes I hit one"
===

Do not take your sword
out into the street
Do not take awareness
of swordsmanship
into your life
Instead
make Awareness
your lifestyle

This is the proper practice
of swordsmanship
outside the training hall
===

After so many years practice
It is very difficult
To put aside the techniques
So painfully earned

To wait with eyes open
===

It is easy to be
in two places at one time
But then
it is impossible to be wholly
in one place

This is called being half-hearted
===

Thinking of gardening
while swinging the sword
Listening to music
while stretching the muscles

One leg goes north
the other south
===

ZANSHIN

There is the watchfulness
of the sparrow, proud of itself
and the watchfulness
of the tiger, meekly walking

===

BREATHING

Empty lungs
Empty hara
the mind wanders lost

Full lungs
Full hara
the mind at home in the tanden

===

Breathing out
Breathing in
Change-over
Not breathing

===

HARA

Do not flap about
like a tree with a broken trunk
Place you mind in your hara
Return home

===

SUKI

High School Science
two flat plates and a drop of water,
and we lift an elephant
Introduce a gap
and the elephant falls
Think about this
and the sword falls from your hand
===

You must draw the sword
with reluctant power
Do not be eager
to kill
===

What is it that makes you desire
this extraordinary power
this supreme martial prowess
It is enough to practice
with your eyes open
===

When you feel successful
and proud of yourself
When you are satisfied
with your progress

Work harder
You're losing it
===

Never relax
Never waver

Or your brain will leak
out of your ears
And garbage
will replace it
===

You cannot see an opening
and strike the target

Opening/strike

Where was the target
===

Two swords striking sparks
Put your body
between the strike
and the spark

Say which is first
===

Wishing to strike an opponent
Without being struck

The mind travelling in two directions
A gap appears
===

A tiny wedge
will split a great log
If a small crack can be found

Where there is no gap
there is no room
for the sword to cleave
===

If you see an opening
take advantage!

There
a little more work
on yourself done

Perhaps one day
you will see an opening
in an opponent
===

In the game of Go
find the key point
and place a stone there
===

DELUSION

One can own a sword
and not be a swordsman
===

You think you are special
You have a unique insight

Ask the sword
===

So, after years of study
You are highly skilled
You have accomplished much

and You have missed the point
===

As soon as you hear yourself say
I think...
Close your mouth
===

Please don't confuse
Movies with life

And never forget
Actors aren't always on screen
===

The best swordsman
in the world

Is fly shit
on the mirror
===

Draw the sword
Is it coated with the day's dust?
Put it away
and wipe off the dust
===

Train ceaselessly
Advance fearlessly
Who can defeat you?
Only yourself
===

Many hours of practice
Suddenly the world is golden
the student a giant
striding across mountain tops
seeing to distant stars

The instructor calls
"Fool!
Stop amusing yourself
Return to your practice!"
===

Leave those bags by the door
They'll be there when you leave
if you still want them
In here you won't need them
Come in! Come in!
===

The favorite technique
and the one least liked
are equally disastrous
===

Be careful!
Oh so careful
when you think you are right
Look around quick!
you can catch sight
of many things
ego, desire, self love
so many sights to see
when you correct others
===

Have you achieved Nirvana
Have you had Satori
Can you gaze upon the Void

Merit badges
Certificates of participation

It is enough
that you forget who you are
===

FAME

The common man
spends his life working,
worrying toward notice
by other common men
Hoping that when he dies
some monument, some memory
will survive

The warrior lives his life
like a still pond
leaving no ripple
to mark his passing

Thoroughly ordinary
Extra ordinary
===

Karma
is not fate
it is cause
the sum of your actions
===

THE LOCATION OF PERFECTION

There is the mirror
Look
Behold the perfect man
===

Look up
What do you see?
Now look
What is there to see?
===

You don't train to become a swordsman

You are trained out of it

You must practice
to Remember swordsmanship
===

This is promised
by all the ancient masters

After long hard practice
and much spilled blood

You will gain nothing
you didn't already have
===

Each strike
is THE strike

There could be no other
perfect and entire
each in itself
===

The scholar lives
in his head
The feeling man
in his heart
and the physical man
lives rooted in the ground

The whole man
lives where it is appropriate
===

To practice zazen
is to make an extraordinary individual
an ordinary man
Oh blessed event!

===

THE EGO

Yes

You are an individual

Yes

There will never be another you

Yes

You really are the centre of the universe

So?

===

The sword you are using
may have outlived
generations of owners

Do you know their names?

===

To a novice

This is a sharp iron stick

To a student

This is the soul of the warrior

To a warrior

This is a sharp iron stick

===

Who is it that holds the sword?

I

understand the reason

For the question

The Answer!

===

Here you have walked
a little way
along a garden path

Do you turn and think
What a long way I have come

===

Man alone has consciousness
The sixth sense of thought
The wondrous ability to abstract

Poor lone abstract
Your sword cannot think
nor can it feel pain
Rejoin your sword
Cut yourself down!

===

It is the ego
Which leads the swordsman
to leave the camp and attack alone
Thus losing himself
and alerting the enemy

===

Who are you?
A Student
What does the A. stand for?
===

You wish to study
in your own way
at your own pace
Making allowances for your individual characteristics

Study something else
Here the sword is taught
===

The winter is cold
The summer hot
Regardless of our comfort
during practice
===

A swordsman has no need
to look like a swordsman
One who has no ego
is invisible
===

You have done this before
It is easy now

Begin the true work
Ask who does this
===

Can you cut
and forget what you have done
===

What you do is simple
Lift the blade
Lower the blade

How is it done
What is done
Who does this

Is this simple
===

With each cut
You lose a bit of yourself
Lift your blade again
===

Not one great swordsman
was ever killed
by a better technique
or a poorly timed block

They all slipped on a bit of mud
===

You place your life
or at least your skull
in the hands of this swordsman

He says stand still
and swings at your head
You do not flinch

Yet you resist bowing
to the dojo floor
or to the pictures on the wall

You know so much more than he?
that you can pick and choose
which of his instructions to follow
===

How much nicer to fight
the Skilful man
who is aware of his skill

How much louder he howls
===

Not
Why am I here
or
What am I to do here
But
What do you wish of me
===

You have no desire
to visit the swordsmen
who know more than you
You simply wish
to practice
working on your own

Is your ego
such a great master
Do you really know
what is best for you
===

You are so special
that God himself
has singled you out
for suffering?

This,
Here is what is,
Assent to it
Time does not heal
and comfort is a trap
===

What is this testing
for rank
this certificate
You are no better
for one scroll or another
more or less

But
It is the little death
that helps remind us
that soon we must die
===

As you watch the sword fall
knowing you will die
What importance
your schemes and dreams
What value
the dust you have accumulated
===

A bokuto breaks
a katana rusts away
Your body rots to dust
What of you
what material are you made of
how long will it last

Look into the void
say what you see
===

MUSHIN

If you wish to learn
the warrior way
Stop reading this

Go on
===

If you do not understand
your teacher's instructions

Consider

Were you thinking about
what he was saying?

Stop.
===

SWORDSMANSHIP

As you eat your dinner
a fly comes to your plate
you brush it away

Do you remember?
===

MUSHIN

If you have a question
Practice

If you don't understand
You have begun to learn
===

During practice
you must hold the form
in your mind
Without thinking
"this is next, then this"
Just hold the awareness
of the form
Any thoughts that arise
Are neither bad nor good
Let them go on their way
and come back to the form
===

Practicing on a floor
with four walls around
Where is the mind

The training hall falls away
the edge of a cliff
Where is the mind now
===

Questions
are for the feeble minded
Silence
is for the no minded
===

Where is your mind
apart from your body
Where is your ass
apart from the chair
===

A chameleon
who thinks about colour
is easily seen
===

MIRRORS

You see this sword
your body
And you work
Grinding, polishing
creating a mirror
flawless

Yet what is this
that has been accomplished
countless times before
A sword, a wielder
perfection of form?

What is the function of a mirror
===

A mirror covered in dust
cannot reflect the face

How can the mind
covered in thought
show the proper action
and the proper time
===

No assumption
No goal
No dust on the mirror
The sword moves freely
===

Two mirrors
are placed before each other
What is reflected between them?

With this mind
pick up the sword
===

FUDOSHIN

Look at the sword There
It has cut you Here
The mind stopped thus
the body stopped
===

Consider this point
Ah, the mind jumps around
dashing from this angle to that
look, look, look!
What have you seen
with your frantic motions?
Glance at this point
do not consider it
do not stop the mind
move on with your life
with an immovable mind
You have seen the same thing
===

If you concentrate on your tanden
your hands will be lonely and resentful
and your feet, being absent-minded
will stumble
Do not chain your mind
let go! let go!
===

You come to the training hall
thinking
I must move this way
and cut so
and finish thus

Throw down your sword
Run away
or you will lose your life
===

Practising a technique
the Hall is quiet
but for the sound of swords
cutting through air

Suddenly the instructor stamps
and shouts a kiai

Has the mind found a new home
moving from the tanden
to the throat?
===

Do not think of avoiding strikes
and dodging thrusts
Instead allow the body to move
avoiding strikes, dodging thrusts
Do not interfere with thought
===

Tanzan left the girl
beside the puddle
Are you still fighting your last match?
===

Each opinion
Each abstraction
Each thought of thought
Drives the sword further
from the hand

Beware!
The enemy is upon us!
===

When practice is finished
put down the sword
and leave the hall

Don't look back!
===

Not allowing the mind to stop
on the opponent's sword
or on the opponent's eyes
or in the hara

It is still a good idea
to pick up the sword
when leaving the house
===

SHOSHIN

The swordsman picks up his weapon
to do battle with many men,
And becomes stupid
thus he survives
===

Children are Taught
to Play at Swords

Before that?
===

The learned man
places thought between need and action
The beginner's mind
containing no accumulation of knowledge
simply perceives need and acts

Need/Action
===

Each time the sword is held
It must be the first time

No one is strong enough
to lift the sword
burdened with years of experience
===

How many times
has this stroke been made
How many different students
How many different Halls
lift the blade again
===

The juxtaposition
of the commonplace
with the unexpected image

A delightful talent
but now
the commonplace
seems unexpected

delightful
===

The beginner is blessed
by the need to struggle
with the smallest things
His mind is open
he has nothing to offer
but his efforts

When you have mastered an art
quickly begin another
before it's too late
===

HEIJISHIN

Here is the mind of the Swordsman
Pay attention!
Washing your face
Brushing your teeth
===

Before and after you learn
the great secret

The thumb bleeds from a cut
===

The sword
In front of your nose
Is as heavy
After you understand
what it is
===

Demonstrating before the emperor
Practising alone
No difference
===

SPONTANEOUS ACTION

The beginner picks up the sword
and fights with the mind
of the expert
Which will win the battle?
===

Your defence
Should follow an attack
For the same reasons
and in the same manner
That spring follows winter

Can you say why?
===

A spontaneous stroke
arises
after years of deliberation
===

Look to your opponent
see everything
Impress the sight upon the mind
so that all details are remembered

When this can be done
See beyond
See the meaning and intent
of what is perceived
===

Simply do
what needs to be done
for the sake of doing it

What need for a reason
===

Have you skills
so that you may use them
or not
as you choose

Or are there skills
simply in use
when needed
With your Self
left behind for chattering
===

THE VOID

It has been said
That if a man really Sees space
that infinite realm of stars
He will go mad
realizing his own size
the warrior is happy to be home
Pity the madman
drowning because he clutches
for flotsam that doesn't exist
the void is your home
Swim
===

Realize!
You are all dead

Best to give up thoughts of living
and get on with your practice
===

Hotai
With his bag and stick
and laughing children all around
Isn't he a fierce swordsman!
===

O-NAMI

The sword lifts and falls
like great waves
upon the shore
The mind casts about
eager, then anxious
then tired, then bored
and finally just
Waves
===

Anger, frustration
Fear and despair
Show where these come from
Point the sword at their source
===

There is only larger and smaller
In front and behind
There is no near or far
That is illusion
===

Look for yourself
When you raise your sword
It is gone into the void
but that void is not empty
for by searching it
or by creating movement
The sword reappears
===

What is at the centre
The point of your existence
Look!
Void
Empty
What is contained in this void
Look!
Infinite objects
===

Show me your limit
Show me the shell
that defines your ending
point to the boundary
Where is that which you
cannot go beyond
===

From void you are
Wave upon the sea
From void I am
===

Where are you!
Empty
Where are you!
Vastly filled
Infinitely varied
Infinite void
Containing all things

How can you be defeated
Who is there to defeat
Who to be defeated
Brief forms in the void

God plays hide and seek
You play hide and seek
===

Where are you?
quickly, look at yourself

Nothing
a void
a gap in the things you can see
===

Sit
Listen
When it is quiet enough
the universe will talk to you
===

All cultures
All religion
over all times
One secret
One insight

sit
===

MISSIONARY WORK

Convincing others of the Right Way
Oh pointless, pointless
===

The criticism of fools
is to be encouraged
But the methods of criticism
are too often the methods
of fools
===

Do not lead by example

be exemplary
===

The beginner wants to teach
While the swordsman wishes
only to learn
===

Amongst others
You must preach the way
Without resort to words
This requires unceasing practice
===

Not an example
but exemplary
Go about your business

===

Students are not sought out
and the way is not trumpeted aloud
Each man picks up the sword
from an inner need
not from any rational argument

===

The saint and the master
live not on a mountain
performing miracles
Such is for a child
minor amusements
The saint and the master
live here
with us
Wholly here

===

You tread the Way
and know its fruits
How will you tell others
of this wonderful thing

Will you stand before them
speaking of great insight
Will you present for them
demonstrations of your skill

Go home
help when help is needed
work hard on yourself
Those with eyes will see
===

This book was originally a bunch of pages that the reader had to make into a book. I include the instructions just for fun.

ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

To make this book you will need:

Thread
sewing needle
paper glue
boxboard or stiff paper

1. USING THE PAGE NUMBERS, ASSEMBLE EACH THREE SHEETS INTO A FOLD OF 12 PAGES.

2. FOLD THE SHEETS IN HALF AND CHECK THE PAGE ORDER.

3. FOR EACH FOLD, MARK THE BACK EDGE INTO ONE INCH SECTIONS STARTING 1/4 INCH FROM THE EDGE. THERE WILL BE 9 MARKS ALONG THE SPINE.

4. ON EACH MARK, PUNCH A HOLE THROUGH THE THREE SHEETS WITH A SEWING NEEDLE.

5. USING A DOUBLE PIECE OF THREAD 24 INCHES LONG, SEW UP THE FOLDS, START SEWING FROM THE INSIDE, TWO HOLES FROM THE EDGE. SEW OUT, RETURN TO THE EDGE HOLE AND SEW IN, THEN OUT THE BEGINNING HOLE AND WEAVE DOWN TO THE OPPOSITE EDGE. TIE THE LOOSE END TO THE THREAD LOOP AND PULL THE THREAD TIGHT.

NOW WEAVE BACK DOWN TO THE ORIGINAL HOLE, CREATING A CONTINUOUS LINE OF THREAD ON BOTH THE OUTSIDE AND THE INSIDE OF THE FOLDED EDGE. TIE THE NEEDLE END OF THE THREAD TO A LOOP. TRIM THE LOOSE ENDS.

6. ONCE ALL THE FOLDS ARE TIED TOGETHER, ASSEMBLE THEM INTO THEIR PROPER ORDER. 7. PASS A DOUBLE LOOP OF THREAD UNDER ALL THE THREAD LOOPS AT THE SPINE. AT EACH EDGE THIS LOOP WILL SIMPLY GO UNDER THE THREAD LOOPS. AT THE 7 INTERIOR HOLES, MAKE SURE THE THREAD PASSES AROUND THE HOLES AND UNDER THE THREAD LOOPS SO THAT THE HOLES ARE CIRCLED. THIS KEEPS THE THREAD IN ONE PLACE. PULL THE THREAD TIGHT AND TIE IT OFF. THIS ASSEMBLES THE BOOK AT THE SPINE.

8. IF YOU HAVE USED COLOURED THREAD AND HAVE DONE A NEAT JOB, THE SPINE WILL LOOK GOOD AND ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS PROVIDE STIFFENING FOR THE FRONT AND BACK COVER PAPER. CUT A PIECE OF BOXBOARD OR STIFF PAPER TO THE PROPER SIZE AND GLUE IT BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND PAGE AND BETWEEN THE LAST AND SECOND-LAST PAGE. THIS CREATES A STIFF COVER WITH EXPOSED STITCHING ON THE SPINE.

IF THE SPINE LOOKS MESSY, YOU CAN COVER IT WITH A STRIP OF CLOTH THAT IS GLUED TO TWO SEPARATE COVER PIECES. MAKE SURE THERE IS A SPACE THE THICKNESS OF THE SPINE BETWEEN THE TWO COVERS.

THIS COVER IS THEN FIXED ONTO THE BOOK BY GLUEING THE FIRST AND LAST PAGES ONTO THE INSIDE OF THE COVER PIECES. YOU CAN PUT GLUE DOWN THE BACK OF THE SPINE TO KEEP THE FOLDS MORE TIGHTLY TOGETHER IF YOU ARE COVERING THE SPINE WITH CLOTH.