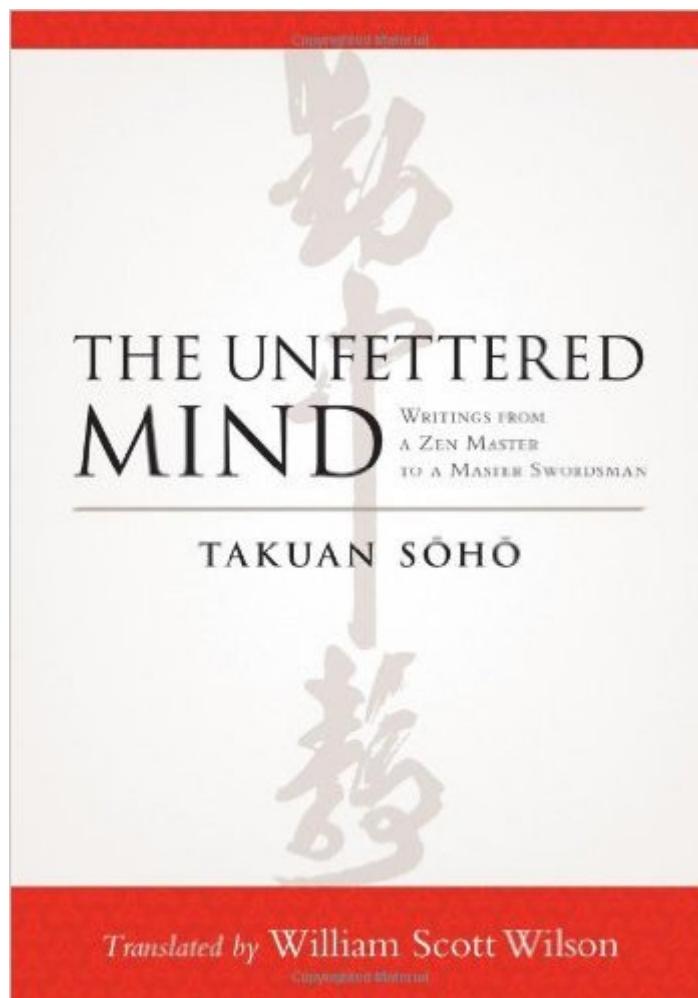


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# The Unfettered Mind: Writings From A Zen Master To A Master Swordsman



## Synopsis

This classic samurai-era text fused Japanese swordsmanship with Zen and influenced the direction that the art has taken ever since. Written by the seventeenth-century Zen master Takuan Soho (1573–1645), *The Unfettered Mind* is a book of advice on swordsmanship and the cultivation of right mind and intention. It was written as a guide for the samurai Yagyu Munenori, who was a great swordsman and rival to the legendary Miyamoto Musashi. Takuan was a giant in the history of Zen; he was also a gardener, calligrapher, poet, author, adviser to samurai and shoguns, and a pivotal figure in Zen painting. He was known for his brilliance and acerbic wit. In these succinct and pointed essays, Takuan is concerned primarily with understanding and refining the mind—“both generally and when faced with conflict. The *Unfettered Mind* was a major influence on the classic manifestos on swordsmanship that came after it, including Miyamoto Musashi’s *Book of Five Rings* and Yagyu Munenori’s *Life-Giving Sword*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Takuan’s voice in this work provides resonance for scholars and martial artists alike. For avid readers of the Zen tradition, this book offers both contrast and compliment to *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki. Most interesting I thought was his distinction between the “mind of principle” and the “mind of technique”. It stimulates meditation on our own day-to-day quality of thought and action.

I have been involved with the martial arts for over 25 years. Student, instructor, swordsman. I consider this book a reference tool and a source of inspiration. My copy is worn and tattered, what more can I say. I am sure that Musashi valued his friendship with the author. The insights into human nature and self improvement are timeless.

Takuan is one of my sources for inspiration, and I value this work. He was born during the Warring States period in 1573 into a Samurai family of the Miura clan, and entered a Jodo-sect Buddhist monastery when he was 10. He joined the Zen Rinzai sect when he was 14, and made history by becoming the abbot of Daitokuji, one of the major temples in Kyoto, at the young age of only 30. He was a prolific writer who composed over 6 major volumes, of which this is but a small fragment. The three works contained here were all written to great sword masters including Yagyu Munenori, and last piece was possibly to the head of the Itto school of swordsmanship, Ono Tadaaki. The purpose of these works is to unify the spirit of Zen with the spirit of the sword. To transcend the physical duel and have unbroken awareness of everything in the moment. This is not a book to read quickly and hope to find entertainment or a lesson in history. This is deep martial philosophy written by an absolute genius and master of some of the highest arts in ancient Japan. The book contains a few images of his art and calligraphy, but unless you know what to look for it is hard to see just how great his work is. I bought a repro scroll of his calligraphy when last I was in Japan. There is a standout quality about his style in that his scripting appears three dimensional. In fact, it is almost impossible for at least my mind to follow some of the path. Never seen anything like it. I own an original Tesshu who was a great master, but there is something unique and special about Takuan's style that suggests he may have indeed been operating on a whole different level. "The unfettered Mind" is very advanced stuff. This is not a casual read, and it will appeal to experienced martial artists willing to work with it and apply deep meditation to the many concepts that may not be apparent at first glance. This is one of the greats.

You might be someone who's down to earth, just like, figuring out how in someone's name some Japanese sword fighter is going to help you out in your daily life. Well, he isn't going to. What this book does teach you is to seek within yourself and return to your own core. As I'm not someone who meditates or does much spiritual enlightenment, this book still taught me a lot. As for the time of reading it, it takes you back into time and makes you think of certain things you might not have thought about all your life. So, if that's enlightenment, count me in. With only 92 real pages to read, this book still gives much value for its price. Most sentences are compressed with knowledge and

sometimes make you read them twice. Hey, that's 184 pages already then! Are you interested in gaining some spiritual thoughts and maybe some habits as well? Then read this book.

Takuan Soho has a book made of 3 parts, the first is a letter he wrote to a sword master about not "stopping the mind" and "the right mind" which basically amounts to "practice makes perfect" to the modern marital artist. I can't say that it went any further than that. The next section reminded me very strongly of Plato's republic, as Takuan Soho went into the nature of the world as it is, which is very much seen through the lense of his understanding (16th century Japanese science I guess) which is sometimes ridiculous, and of limited use. The third section is interesting, as he takes writing of various martial artists and interprets them or critiques them. This is useful for a modern martial artist, as we lack much of the historical and cultural context to interpret these directly from the translation. This section, along with the first are what makes the book worth reading. Still, I think that there are many more useful books out there for the martial artist to read before this one. Try Frederick Lovret's "Way and the Power", or Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" or Musashi's "A Book of Five Rings". All of these are much more useful.

The Buddhist approach to life has never made more sense than it did after reading this book. I'd previously dismissed the general Buddhist worldview as too nihilistic (nothing is important or matters, etc.), but that is not at all the case. Plus it gives an amazing perspective on the idea of clearing your mind - it's not something you force, and it doesn't mean making your mind empty, but rather allowing it to flow. The letters primarily deal with martial arts (sword fighting, specifically). I've found the advice to apply very well to my own marital arts study; I practice a Chinese one rather than a Japanese art, but it still holds true. But the advice there is not limited to martial arts only, and I find its lessons coming to mind in day-to-day life as well. It's extremely practical, and doesn't ask you to be some ancient priest on a mountaintop somewhere. The translation reads well (I don't speak Japanese, so can't speak to its accuracy), and the translator helpfully includes notes explaining some of the references and metaphors that Soho used, which really fleshes out the imagery and helps make things understandable. This is one of my favorite philosophical books that I've read to date.

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