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Book of Five Rings
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The book that I was given upon receiving my black belt was the Book of Five Rings. This book is the book of strategy of Miyamoto Musashi and is written by a tenth degree black belt, Stephen F. Kaufman. The Book of Five Rings is broken up into five different sections, explaining the various teachings and ways of Musashi. The five sections flow into one another and are separated into five books; the books of Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and No-Thing.

The Book of Earth lays the foundation of what the other four books are about and describes the “way” of a warrior’s strategy. It also states that in understanding the truth of self, one must search within and ask about their lifestyle. One also must study more than one method of fighting, such as wielding the sword, because then they will become close-minded. One needs to study the different aspects about the topic in question. The enemy is not frightened by the appearance of the warrior, but what is inside of him. His mind, heart, and spirit. If one knows the way of his enemy, then one is ready, but if he does not, then the enemy will overcome him. Weapons give the warrior an advantage in strategy. This is because every weapon has its own spirit and is used in a particular manor. Once one knows when and where to use a specific weapon, then one knows the spirit of each weapon. There are nine things that the warrior must always think about. They are to think honestly, have constant training, be familiar with all arts, understanding the Way, know the difference of right and wrong, understand everything, see the unseen, overlook nothing, and do not waste time. In conclusion of the Book of Earth, one must know how to control themselves before one can control another.



The next book in the Book of Five Rings is the Book of Water. This section describes how water erodes away things until they are no more. One must be physically and mentally strong. When one understands themselves and one’s enemy, then one cannot be defeated. If one is a warrior, then one needs form, balance, perception, and sight. Sight is physical and a warrior must be prepared to lose it. In the Book of Water, the author



states, “The martial arts are not a game to see who is stronger and who is faster. You must mean it when you strike at the enemy (...) The only reason to draw your sword is to cut the enemy down.”(Kaufman 30-31). In attacking the enemy, one has five choices. They are upper, middle, lower, right, and left. Attack with power, not strength. Only when he is sure of himself, the enemy will attack. When one attacks, and focuses on destroying the enemy, this is the only way to hope for perfection. Creating diversions in one’s attack leads to the destruction of the enemy. If one is more than arm’s distance away from the enemy, then he is not sure of his own abilities. There are techniques of a warrior. They are not to lose composure, do not let the enemy separate from you, and do not grapple with the enemy. If stabbing at the enemy, aim for vital areas such as the heart and the face. If the enemy surrounds you, one must constantly move around to give them little room to fight. One will destroy them very quickly this way. Practice regularly and the art will become one with your spirit.

The third book is the Book of Fire. This book explains techniques of fighting. Training develops abilities and enables one to act. When fighting, keep the sun behind

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you to keep the enemy from seeing, and a door behind you for a means of escape. Always keep the enemy on the defense. Always remain calm and never be overwhelmed while fighting. If you do not lead the enemy, then he will lead you. One always needs to know when the right time it is to go into battle. If you and your enemy have the same spirit and power, then one needs to change approach, rhythm, and timing. If you can see what the enemy is thinking, then one can destroy them easily. Scare the enemy using one’s voice, body, and sword. By feinting and striking, one will confuse, and in turn, defeat the enemy. Only depend on yourself to defeat the enemy. In understanding the Way, one can take all forms including a feather, a board, and water. Through these forms, one will have the essence of all.

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The next book is the Book of Wind. This describes the strategies, teachings, and traditions of the past and present. The length of a weapon determines the security of combat for the wielder. Power and quickness, not strength and speed are the basis of strategy. To win a fight, you must rely on intelligence and control the enemy. Even without going into

combat there is a way of winning the fight. You should stare broadly. Rhythm is based on the enemy's rhythm, but one must have quickness.

The final book in the Book of Five Rings is the Book of No-Thing. This book describes the similarities between strategy and nature. You must never veer from your course and one must study all the martial arts he can. Never take anything for granted. Everything is inside of yourself, nothing outside. "You are the spirit of the Thing itself".

In conclusion, the Book of Five Rings is a perfect marriage between the mind, body, and spirit. The book motivates the student by instilling philosophies that can be applied to the techniques taught in class for a complete training. At New Wave, lessons focus on philosophy, history, and training. In retrospect, after reading the book, I more clearly understand the journey. I also have a further appreciation of the dedication and passion required in martial arts.