

## EXCERPTS FROM HAGAKURE (IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES)

### Introduction

*Hagakure (In the Shadow of Leaves)* has come to be known as a foundational text of *bushidō*, the “way of the warrior.” Dictated between 1709 and 1716 by a retired samurai, Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659-1719), to a young retainer, Tashirō Tsuramoto (1678-1748), *Hagakure* was less a rigorous philosophical exposition than the spirited reflections of a seasoned warrior. Although it became well known in the 1930s, when a young generation of nationalists embraced the supposed spirit of *bushidō*, *Hagakure* was not widely circulated in the Tokugawa period beyond Saga domain on the southern island of Kyushu, Yamamoto Tsunetomo’s home.

### Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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#### *Excerpts from Hagakure (In the Shadow of Leaves)*

I have found that the Way of the samurai is death. This means that when you are compelled to choose between life and death, you must quickly choose death. There is nothing more to it than that. You just make up your mind and go forward. The idea that to die without accomplishing your purpose is undignified and meaningless, just dying like a dog, is the pretentious *bushidō* of the city slickers of Kyoto and Osaka. In a situation when you have to choose between life and death, there is no way to make sure that your purpose will be accomplished. All of us prefer life over death, and you can always find more reasons for choosing what you like over what you dislike. If you fail and you survive, you are a coward. This is a perilous situation to be in. If you fail and you die, people may say your death was meaningless or that you were crazy, but there will be no shame. Such is the power of the martial way. When every morning and every evening you die anew, constantly making yourself one with death, you will obtain freedom in the martial way, and you will be able to fulfill your calling throughout your life without falling into error.

A man of service (*hōkōnin*) is a person who thinks fervently and intently of his lord from the bottom of his heart and regards his lord as more important than anything else. This is to be a retainer of the highest type. You should be grateful to be born in a clan that has established a glorious name for many generations and for the boundless favor received from the ancestors of the clan, [and you should] just throw away your body and mind in a single-minded devotion to the service of your lord. On top of this, if you also have wisdom, arts, and skills and make

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yourself useful in such ways as these permit, that is even better. However, even if a humble bloke who cannot make himself useful at all, who is clumsy and unskilled at everything, is determined to cherish his lord fervently and exclusively, he can be a reliable retainer. The retainer who tries to make himself useful only in accordance with his wisdom and skills is of a lower order. [part 1, nos. 2-3]

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*Bushidō* is nothing but charging forward, without hesitation, unto death (*shinigurui*). A *bushi* in this state of mind is difficult to kill even if he is attacked by twenty or thirty people. This is what Lord Naoshige<sup>1</sup> used to say, too. In a normal state of mind, you cannot accomplish a great task. You must become like a person crazed (*kichigai*) and throw yourself into it as if there were no turning back (*shinigurui*). Moreover, in the Way of the martial arts, as soon as discriminating thoughts (*funbetsu*) arise, you will already have fallen behind. There is no need to think of loyalty and filial piety. In *bushidō* there is nothing but *shinigurui*. Loyalty and filial piety are already fully present on their own accord in the state of *shinigurui*. [part 1, no. 113]

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There is really nothing other than the thought that is right before you at this very moment. Life is just a concatenation of one thought-moment after another. If one truly realizes this, then there is nothing else to be in a hurry about, nothing else that one must seek. Living is just a matter of holding on to this thought-moment right here and now and getting on with it. But everyone seems to forget this, seeking and grasping for this and that as if there were something somewhere else but missing what is right there in front of their eyes. Actually, it takes many years of practice and experience before one becomes able to stay with this present moment without drifting away. However, if you attain that state of mind just once, even if you cannot hold onto it for very long, you will find that you have a different attitude toward life. For once you really understand that everything comes down to this one thought-moment right here and now. You will know that there are not many things you need to be concerned about. All that we know of as loyalty and integrity are present completely in this one thought-moment. [part 2, no. 17]

[Hagakure, in NST, vol. 26; BS]

**Questions:**

1. What values does Yamamoto Tsunetomo consider most important for a warrior?

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<sup>1</sup> Nabeshima Naoshige (1538–1618), Mitsushige's grandfather, was a famous general and the founder of the daimyō house of Saga domain. He won great merit in Hideyoshi's Korean campaigns in the 1590s and was enfeoffed by Ieyasu with the domain of Saga in 1601.

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2. What kind of education do you think the author of *Hagakure* would have recommended for samurai?
3. What philosophical or religious influences can you find in this text? Is this a Confucian perspective?
4. How would you compare and contrast the model of samurai values presented in *Hagakure* with that outlined by Yamaga Sokō in “Establishing One’s Fundamental Aim”? How do you think samurai readers at the time would have felt about these two very different texts?