

Bushido: The Way of the Samurai (Square One Classics)

By Tsunetomo Yamamoto, Minoru Tanaka (translator)

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In eighteenth-century Japan, Tsunetomo Yamamoto created the *Hagakure*, a document that served as the basis for samurai warrior behavior. Its guiding principles greatly influenced the Japanese ruling class and shaped the underlying character of the Japanese psyche, from businessmen to soldiers. ***Bushido*** is the first English translation of this work. It provides a powerful message aimed at the mind and spirit of the samurai warrior. With ***Bushido***, one can better put into perspective Japan's historical path.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Tsunetomo Yamamoto, a highly respected samurai warrior, renounced the world and retired to a hermitage in 1700. There, a disciple recorded Yamamoto's thoughts on what it meant to be a Japanese warrior. His work, the *Hagakure,* served as the basis of *Bushido.*

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Author's Introduction

A Quiet Talk by Night

As a retainer to this Nabeshima clan, you must devote yourself toward the studies of your own country.1 But now, the need for this study has dropped from the eye of every samurai.

The general drift of clan studies is to trace the history of a particular clan back to its foundation. By following the general drift, we can credit the present prosperity of our household to its founders: To the benevolent and courageous mind of Gochyu;2 To the deeds and faith of Riso.3 For, by their virtue appeared (was born) Takanobu4 and Nippo Nabeshima.5 Due to their power and authority, our clan has been prosperous and secure, and it has had no equal up to the present time.

The samurais of this clan have completely forgotten to uphold this kind of cause. Instead, they value Buddhas belonging to other places. I, for my own part, am quite dissatisfied with this fact, since Confucius, Buddha, Kusunaki,6 and Shingen7 have never served our clan. It is needless to say that their teachings must inevitably fall short of the manners and customs of our own tradition.

Both at the time of plain clothes (peace) and the time of helmets and armor (war), it is sufficient for both high and low to revere the founders and their offspring so we can learn from their examples. Then we (present samurais of the clan) will be able to manage everything without fail.

As people are supposed to revere their respective idols and their principal images in their own way,8 then, as far as serving the Nabeshima clan is concerned, there is no need to learn any other branch of knowledge (other than the studies of our clan) at any other place.

Once you have mastered the practices and habits of our own clan, you may learn other ways as a pastime, for your own amusement. But, when you come to think of it, there is not a problem that cannot be solved with the help of this knowledge (of our own clan).

Those who neglect this study of our own country would not be able to give a word of reply to such questions (asked) by members of other clans, as: "What is the history of the Nabeshima clan?" or, "How was your clan established?" or, "You have been reputed to be the best spear-thrusters (warrior-samurais) in Japan; but what are the details of your distinguished military service?"

The duty of each member who serves this house is none other than that he should carry out his respective, official responsibility. However, most of the members, on the contrary, may find pleasure in other topics and dislike their own office. Consequently, they put the cart before the horse and blunder grossly.

The good examples of service are Nippo and Katsushige, the first Lord. During their time (of rule), each subject applied himself to performing his own duty. From the high, they sought for useful subjects; from the low, the samurais were eager to be of service. In this manner, the minds of the Lords and those of the samurais were connected; for this reason, the power of the household was cumulative and grew great.

The efforts, pains, and labor on the part of Nippo were too much to tell. He cut a bloody trail and frequently made himself ready for harakiri.9 But, by some wondrous chance, he finally succeeded in making his household stand on its own.

Likewise, Katsushige (later the first Lord) met with an occasion in which he came very close to harakiri; but he finally became the first Lord. He, in person, took the lead in the working of bow and arrow; the rule of the samurais in the house; the government of the country; and the administration of strategy points (fortresses). He even organized miscellaneous duties. He firmly believed in Buddha and the gods. After his retirement, he sat among wastepaper for the rest of his life and wrote a book. He said, “If I think little of the household that Nippo established, it would be quite irresponsible of me. I must take care that it goes on prosperously for the generations to come.

“Now that the time is peaceful and quiet, our society is on its way to becoming luxurious; it is unprepared for the ways of bow and arrow; it is becoming proud. Accordingly, there arise many blunders: the high and the low both get hard up, and this is a discredit to the clan both within and without. These kinds of blunders will undermine and overthrow the house.

“The veteran samurais have died out. The youth follow the trend of this day alone. So, if I could hand down something in writing, perhaps they might learn the tradition and the spirit of this clan by referring to the book.”

Of course, the book was intended to be a secret one. But I (i.e., the author of Hagakure) have heard elders speak about this book. The rumor is that it is a book on tactics called Kachikuchi (The Key to Victory) and it was orally passed on at the time of inheritance.

It is also said that two other books, Shichokakuchisho and Senkosan’iki10 were handed down, firsthand.

Katsushige also made notes on the following: on the customs of the house and on the disposition of affairs with the Shogunate (central government). He also made detailed rules about home administration. Boundless efforts they were! By his merits, the house can enjoy today’s security and everything looks quite auspicious.

Therefore, and this may sound very disrespectful, the present Lord (the fourth Lord, Yoshishige), by reminding himself of the endeavors and pains of the founder, Naoshige, and the first Lord, Katsushige, and also, by at least perusing the writings he inherited, would do well to strengthen his resolution to govern the state earnestly.

Since he has been flattered and indulged as a young Lord (successor) and has experienced no hardship and trials and has no knowledge of his own clan, and tends to have his own way in everything and neglects his own duty (as a Lord), a lot of unnecessary reformations have taken place in the last few years. The establishment of the clan has been weakened. Taking advantage of this situation, shrewd and smart

people with competitive minds, but without experience, have devised many ideas so as to insinuate themselves into the favor of the Lord, ideas whereby they act important and do what they like arbitrarily and make a mess of things. Here are some examples of the mess they have created: strife between the three branch families; establishment of new offices next in rank to the Chief Retainer's;11 employment of members of other clans; changes in the organization of the reserve samurais; exchange of residences; newly appointed elders corresponding in rank to the relatives of the Lord's family; the demolition of the villa, Koyoken, that Lord Katsushige constructed; revision of the criminal code; rearrangement of the status of shrines and temples; building of a new villa; reckless change in the formation of light-legged soldiers; arrangement and disposition of equipment; the destruction of the west villa, etc.

Every item is a failure as a result of the Lord's attempt to bring these new-fangled matters into effect. But, thanks to the firm establishment on the part of the founders, no instance of misrule has ever shaken the foundation (of our clan).

If only both the high and the low remain faithful to the directions of Lord Naoshige and Katsushige, the clan will be strongly and peacefully organized and governed in such a way that every member feels content, no matter how clumsily affairs may be carried on.

There has not been a foolish Lord in the clan, nor an evil Lord. And each has been counted as one of the best Lords in Japan. This is a miraculously fortunate family, thanks to the faith of each Lord.

No samurai has ever been driven out of this land; no outsiders have ever been accepted (or employed). Even if they (our samurais) did ronin,12 they were allowed to stay within the territory. And the sons and grandsons of samurais who were told to do harakiri were also allowed residence in this land.

Since you are born through some wondrous chance into the clan in which benevolence and loyalty are very deep, everyone?to say nothing of the farmers and merchants?is greatly indebted to the clan beyond any verbal description.

In view of this fact, be firmly resolved to offer yourself in your service so that you can make up for the favor

(privilege) of being a member of this clan. And if the Lord patronizes you, prove yourself useful by throwing away your self-mind. Even if you are ordered to do either ronin or harakiri, take it as a form of service and convince yourself that you shall inevitably die and be born again out of the depths of the mountains or from under the ground only in order to work for the clan. This is the first requirement of the Nabeshima samurais and the pith and marrow of us.

It is indeed inadequate for a monk [bonze], which I now am, to say that I have never looked forward to Nirvana.13 Only it is deeply engrained in my liver that I should be born again into this Nabeshima clan every time I have another incarnation so that I can do service to this clan.

For Nabeshima samurais, no spirit and no talent is necessary so long as you have the ambition to shoulder the whole clan by yourself, so to speak, to carry the burden alone, if necessary.

Can any individual be inferior to another individual? You cannot carry out your mastery (of service) if you are not proud. Your mastery will not bear fruit if you don't go about with the intention of securing the house on your own.

Perhaps, like hot water in a kettle, your resolution may become cooler. There is a way to keep it hot. Our unique vows are:

1. Never lag behind in the practice of Bushido.

2. Always be loyal and devoted in the service to your Lord.

3. Do your duty to your parents.

4. Stir up your compassion for all sentient beings in order to devote yourself to the service of others.

These are the keys. Recite these four vows while praying to the gods and Buddha. Then you will not run backwards, but you will be able to double your power and energy. You will go ahead inch by inch like a measuring worm. Even the Buddha and the gods decided on vows before they initiated their pursuits.

Users Review

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