

**EXCERPTS FROM HAGAKURE (IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES):**  
**ON DEATH**  
**ON LIVING IN THE MOMENT**  
**ON THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD RETAINER**  
**ON SPEAKING**  
**ON THE TEACHINGS OF YAMAMOTO JIN'EMON**

### Introduction

After the unification of Japan in 1590 and the establishment of the Tokugawa Shōgunate in 1600, the samurai (warriors) remained at the top of the social scale but had fewer and fewer chances to prove their valor in battle. As opportunities to fight decreased, and samurai were employed in peacetime government positions, more attention was given to the values that defined their class. One of the most important was the loyalty samurai owed to the lord they served. In fact, the word *samurai* itself comes from a verb that means “to serve.”

The lord or other high-ranking members of a clan often wrote out codes of behavior for the clan retainers. Among them, a work called *Hagakure*, or “hidden leaves,” has come to be seen as the one that best describes *bushidō*, “the way of the samurai.” It was written down in the early eighteenth century by a young samurai named Tashirō Tsuramoto (1678-1748), who was recording the wisdom he had learned over seven years of talks with an older, retired samurai of the Nabeshima clan named Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659-1719). Yamamoto Tsunetomo’s ideas were expressed in conversations with his young disciple and so the resulting book is not a systematic code of rules. But some ideas are repeated often enough to be seen as essential to his thought. The selections below are grouped by theme.

### Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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

##### *Death*

###### *From the 1st Chapter*

The Way of the Samurai is found in death. When it comes to either/or, there is only the quick choice of death. It is not particularly difficult. Be determined and advance. To say that dying without reaching one’s aim is to die a dog’s death is the frivolous way of sophisticates. When pressed with the choice of life or death, it is not necessary to gain one’s aim.

We all want to live. And in large part we make our logic according to what we like. But not having attained our aim and continuing to live is cowardice. This is a thin dangerous line. To die without gaining one’s aim is a dog’s death and fanaticism. But there is no shame in this.

## Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

### EXCERPTS FROM HAGAKURE (IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES): ON DEATH, LIVING IN THE MOMENT, SPEAKING, ETC.

This is the substance of the Way of the Samurai. If by setting ones heart right every morning and evening, one is able to live as though his body were already dead, he gains freedom in the Way. His whole life will be without blame, and he will succeed in his calling.

#### *Living in the Moment*

##### *From the 2nd Chapter*

There is surely nothing other than the single purpose of the present moment. A man's whole life is a succession of moment after moment. If one fully understands the present moment, there will be nothing else to do, and nothing else to pursue. Live being true to the single purpose of the moment.

Everyone lets the present moment slip by, then looks for it as though he thought it were somewhere else. No one seems to notice this fact. But grasping this firmly, one must pile experience upon experience. And once one has come to this understanding he will be a different person from that point on, though he may not always bear it in mind.

When one understands this settling into single-mindedness well, his affairs will thin out. Loyalty is also contained within this single-mindedness.

##### *From the 11th Chapter*

Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears and swords, being carried away by surging waves, being thrown into the midst of a great fire, being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake, falling from thousand-foot cliffs, dying of disease or committing *seppuku* [ritual suicide] at the death of one's master. And every day without fail one should consider himself as dead.

There is a saying of the elders that goes, "Step from under the eaves and you're a dead man. Leave the gate and the enemy is waiting." This is not a matter of being careful. It is to consider oneself as dead beforehand.

#### *A Good Retainer*

##### *From the 11th Chapter*

Nakano Jin'emon constantly said, "A person who serves when treated kindly by the master is not a retainer. But one who serves when the master is being heartless and unreasonable is a retainer. You should understand this principle well."

When Hotta Kaga no kami Masamori was a page to the shōgun, he was so headstrong that the shōgun wished to test what was at the bottom of his heart. To do this, the shōgun heated a pair of tongs and placed them in the hearth. Masamori's custom was to go to the other side of the hearth, take the tongs, and greet the master. This time, when he unsuspectingly picked up the tongs, his hands were immediately burned. As he did obeisance in his usual manner, however, the shōgun quickly got up and took the tongs from him.

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**EXCERPTS FROM HAGAKURE (IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES):  
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*From the 1st Chapter*

A man is a good retainer to the extent that he earnestly places importance in his master. This is the highest sort of retainer. If one is born into a prominent family that goes back for generations, it is sufficient to deeply consider the matter of obligation to one's ancestors, to lay down one's body and mind, and to earnestly esteem one's master. It is further good fortune if, more than this, one had wisdom and talent and can use them appropriately. But even a person who is good for nothing and exceedingly clumsy will be a reliable retainer if only he has the determination to think earnestly of his master. Having only wisdom and talent is the lowest tier of usefulness.

*From the 11th Chapter*

A certain general said, "For soldiers other than officers, if they would test their armor, they should test only the front. Furthermore, while ornamentation on armor is unnecessary, one should be very careful about the appearance of his helmet. It is something that accompanies his head to the enemy's camp."

*Speaking*

*From the 2nd Chapter*

At times of great trouble or disaster, one word will suffice. At times of happiness, too, one word will be enough. And when meeting or talking with others, one word will do. One should think well and then speak. This is clear and firm, and one should learn it with no doubts. It is a matter of pouring forth one's whole effort and having the correct attitude previously. This is very difficult to explain but is something that everyone should work on in his heart. If a person has not learned this in his heart, it is not likely that he will understand it.

*From the 11th Chapter*

The essentials of speaking are in not speaking at all. If you think that you can finish something without speaking, finish it without saying a single word. If there is something that cannot be accomplished without speaking, one should speak with few words, in a way that will accord well with reason.

To open one's mouth indiscriminately brings shame, and there are many times when people will turn their backs on such a person.

*The Teachings of Yamamoto Jin'emon*

*From the 11th Chapter*

These are the teachings of Yamamoto Jin'emon:

Singlemindedness is all-powerful.

Tether even a roasted chicken.

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**EXCERPTS FROM HAGAKURE (IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES):  
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Continue to spur a running horse.

A man who will criticize you openly carries no connivance.

A man exists for a generation, but his name lasts to the end of time.

Money is a thing that will be there when asked for. A good man is not so easily found.

Walk with a real man one hundred years and he'll tell you at least seven lies.

To ask when you already know is politeness. To ask when you don't know is the rule.

Wrap your intentions in needles of pine.

One should not open his mouth wide or yawn in front of another. Do this behind your fan or sleeve.

A straw hat or helmet should be worn tilted toward the front.

**Questions:**

1. What did it mean to a samurai to live as though already dead? How does it relate to "being true to the single purpose of the moment"? How would it help make a man brave? loyal?
2. How does this samurai attitude toward death compare to the Buddhist doctrine of nonattachment? How do the ultimate goals of the two ways of thinking differ?
3. Why is "a person who serves when treated kindly by the master not a retainer"? What does this attitude tell you about the value of loyalty as practiced by a retainer? As received by a master? How does the story of Hotta Masamori illustrate this? Why are wisdom and talent the "lowest tier of usefulness"?
4. Why should soldiers test only the front of their armor? Why does it matter how the helmet looks when a dead warrior's head is brought back to the enemy's camp?
5. Does the emphasis on speaking seldom and using few words relate to the attitude toward death? Toward singlemindedness?
6. How is shame experienced? What connection does it have to loyalty?
7. How do you explain the inclusion of matters of etiquette ("One should not open his mouth wide ... etc.") in the way of the samurai? Similarly, how would you explain the inclusion of matters of dress?