Hagakure: Selected Passages — Wedd & Claude Opus 4 Translation, 2026

Hagakure

□ □ — *Hidden by the Leaves*

Yamamoto Tsunetomo Dictated to Tashiro Tsuramoto, c. 1709–1716

Translated by Adrian Wedd and Claude Opus 4 (Anthropic), 2026 Produced for Wolf Clan Zen Do Kai Martial Arts

Selected Passages

Translator's Note

This is an original English translation of selected passages from the Hagakure, translated from the classical Japanese original text, which is in the public domain. It was produced for the Wolf Clan Zen Do Kai martial arts club using Claude Opus 4 (claude-opus-4-6), a large language model by Anthropic, directed and reviewed by Adrian Wedd.

No existing English translation was used as a source. Readers pursuing academic study should consult scholarly editions, particularly the English translation by William Scott Wilson (Shambhala, 2012).

The full Hagakure contains over 1,300 passages across eleven books, dictated by the retired samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo to a younger scribe, Tashiro Tsuramoto, over approximately seven years. The passages range from profound meditations on duty and death to practical advice on etiquette, anecdotes about the samurai of the Nabeshima domain, and observations on daily life.

Tsunetomo was born in 1659 and served as a retainer of Nabeshima Mitsushige, the third lord of the Saga domain. When Mitsushige died in 1700, Tsunetomo wished to follow him in death through the practice of junshi (ritual suicide upon the death of one's lord), but the practice had been officially prohibited by the Tokugawa shogunate. Instead, Tsunetomo became a Buddhist monk and withdrew to a hermitage in the mountains. There, beginning around 1709, the young samurai Tashiro Tsuramoto visited him regularly and recorded his recollections, opinions, and stories. The resulting manuscript was never intended for publication — Tsunetomo reportedly asked that it be burned after his death. It survived, was copied by hand, and circulated within the Nabeshima domain for generations.

This selection focuses on the passages most relevant to martial arts philosophy and the warrior's Way. The passages have been organised thematically rather than in their original sequence across the eleven books.

The Way of the Warrior

I have discovered that the Way of the warrior is death.

In a situation where there are two options, life or death, one simply chooses death. There is nothing more to it. You settle yourself and push forward. To say that dying without accomplishing your aim is a futile death, the stuff of frivolity — that is the calculating Way of the merchants of Kamigata. To make the proper judgement in a situation where the choice is between life and death is nearly impossible. We all want to live. And so it is natural that a person finds reasons to go on living. But if you live without having achieved your purpose, you are a coward. This is a crucial point.

If you die without achieving your aim, it may be a death of fanaticism and futility — but there is no dishonour in it. This is the essence of the warrior's Way. If you settle yourself each morning and each evening with the thought that you are already dead, if you can live as though your body were already a corpse, you will gain freedom in the Way. Your entire life will proceed without fault, and you will succeed in your calling.

The Way of the warrior has been misunderstood. It is not a matter of cutting people down whenever the opportunity arises. Neither is it merely a technique for avoiding being cut down. Most of all, it is a Way of being useful to one's lord, of being useful to oneself, of putting value on one's own name, and of never failing to meet any situation. If a warrior considers only how to kill and how to avoid being killed, he has reduced the Way to mere butchery. The true warrior considers how to live rightly so that when death comes — as it will — his life has been of genuine use.

A warrior is someone who has cast aside his own life and placed it in the hands of his lord. With that fundamental commitment made, all else follows — the wise and the foolish, the skilled and the unskilled, the brave and the cowardly. If fifty or a hundred people who have made this resolution stood together, no enemy could withstand them. Even a warrior of modest talent becomes formidable once he has genuinely abandoned concern for his own survival. The difficulty lies not in the abandoning itself but in maintaining it day after day, when there is no battle and no crisis, when the temptation is to slip back into comfort and self-preservation.

There is a saying: "When you leave your gate, you face an enemy." This is not merely a matter of being cautious. It means that when you go out, you should carry yourself with the same bearing as if you were meeting a foe. If you are careless and absent-minded, your horse may stumble, and someone may attack you from behind. A certain retainer in the Nabeshima domain was once struck from behind while walking home from a gathering, because he had been drinking and was not paying attention to his surroundings. He survived, but the shame of having been caught unaware was far worse than the wound itself. From that day on, he walked as though enemies were hiding behind every wall, and he was never surprised again.

Bushido — the Way of the warrior — is to find a way to die. If you are confronted with two paths and you cannot determine which is the path of death, choose either one and push forward. It is not especially difficult. Firm up your gut and move ahead. To hesitate and say, “But what if I choose the wrong way to die?” — that is the logic of those in Kamigata, and it will not do. No one who sets out to do something can be certain of the outcome. But if one simply resolves to die, there is nothing to deliberate. A warrior who has settled this in his mind beforehand will not hesitate when the moment comes. He will move forward as naturally as water flowing downhill, because there is no internal resistance left.

The warrior’s Way is one of desperation. Ten men or more cannot kill such a desperate man. Extraordinary feats are accomplished only by men who are desperate. If you set your mind firmly in the midst of each day, thinking “Now I must die, now I must die,” and live as though already dead, you will gain freedom in the Way and fulfil your duties without fault for your entire life. There was a retainer called Shida Kichinosuke who demonstrated this principle during a border skirmish. Surrounded by seven men and already wounded in the shoulder, he fought with the ferocity of a man who had nothing left to lose. He cut down three and scattered the rest. When asked afterward how he had managed it, he said simply: “I was already dead. Dead men have nothing to fear.”

It is said that the Way of the warrior is twofold: the pen and the sword. A samurai should exert himself in both. This is the established rule. Even a man who has no natural talent for either should strive to study. In times of peace, the pen takes precedence. In times of crisis, the sword. But one who neglects either of them has no right to call himself a warrior. Lord Naoshige himself was accomplished in both. He could compose a verse and draw a battle plan with equal skill. He once said: “The pen and the sword are like the two wings of a bird. A bird with one wing cannot fly.” Those who dismiss learning as unfit for a warrior have not understood the Way at all.

The Way of the warrior differs from other Ways in that the companions of other Ways are able to discuss their own art, while warriors cannot. The tea master can speak of tea. The poet can speak of verse. But the Way of the warrior is the Way of death, and it would be ugly to speak of killing and dying as though boasting of skill. For this reason, warriors have always been reticent about their own experiences. A man who has genuinely faced death does not speak of it lightly. Those who speak of it most freely are usually those who have faced it least.

There is nothing more important to a warrior than the Way. Once you have understood this, you must set about practising it diligently every single day. Not when it is convenient. Not when you feel inspired. Every day, without exception, whether you are well or ill, whether you are eager or reluctant. The Way does not care about your mood. It cares only about your commitment.

In the old days, people would say: “A samurai who has never been tested by battle is like a man who has never crossed a river — you cannot know whether he can swim.” It is true that real battle is the ultimate test. But even in times of peace, a warrior who has cultivated the proper spirit and is ready at any moment to give his life is no different from one who has seen battle. The readiness

itself is the thing. A man may live his entire life without seeing combat and still be a complete warrior, if his preparation has been genuine.

When the domain was at peace and young retainers had no opportunity for battle, old Yamamoto Jin'emon would say: "It is precisely in peaceful times that the warrior must be most vigilant. In war, the danger is obvious and keeps you sharp. In peace, the danger is invisible — it is the slow erosion of the warrior spirit by comfort and complacency. More samurai have been ruined by peace than by war." He would then make the young men drill until they could barely stand, to burn the softness out of them.

I have noticed that the warriors of recent generations are inferior to those of the past. This is not because men themselves have changed, but because the times have changed. In the old days, a samurai from the age of twelve or thirteen was brought to the training hall and taught by men who had seen real combat. He absorbed their spirit along with their technique. Today's warriors are trained by men who have trained with men who have trained — each generation further removed from the reality of battle. The technique remains, but the spirit thins with each passing. This is why it is essential to study the records of the old warriors and to keep their example alive in our hearts.

A warrior of the Nabeshima domain should know the history and traditions of his clan. He should be able to recite the great deeds of the former lords, the stories of retainers who distinguished themselves, the lessons of past failures. This is not idle knowledge. It is the foundation upon which the clan's spirit rests. A warrior who does not know where he comes from cannot know where he is going.

Resolve and Single-Mindedness

In a matter of great importance, the resolution should be made within the space of seven breaths. Lord Takanobu said this. If you spend too long deliberating, you will arrive at the wrong conclusion. When the stakes are highest, the mind must be clear and the decision instant. Hesitation in a crisis is worse than a wrong decision, because hesitation means no decision at all, and no decision in a crisis is always the worst outcome.

Lord Naoshige once said: "Matters of great consequence should be dealt with lightly." And Master Ittei added: "Matters of small consequence should be dealt with seriously." Among matters of great consequence, there are no more than two or three. They can be considered in advance. To deliberate while the matter is upon you is to lose the moment. If you have prepared your mind beforehand and weighed the pros and cons, you can resolve the matter within seven breaths. It comes down to having the right mental set and determination in advance. The man who has already considered the great questions of his life — for whom he will die, what he will not compromise, what he will sacrifice everything to achieve — has done his deliberating before the moment arrives. When the moment comes, he acts from prepared ground.

When the time comes and you must act, act swiftly and with total commitment. There is a proverb: "A swift hawk hides its talons." When a warrior has decided on a course of action, he must carry

it out with reckless abandon. There is no room for half-measures or for looking back once the decision has been made. I have seen retainers lose everything because they acted with hesitation. There was a man called Fukuchi Rokuroemon who was ordered to carry an important message during a dispute between clans. He set out immediately but then began to worry about what would happen if the message was poorly received, and he slowed his pace. By the time he arrived, the situation had already resolved itself — badly — and his delay was noted. He was not punished, but his reputation never recovered. Swift action, even if imperfect, would have served him better than cautious delay.

A certain man said: “I knew the outcome of the battle before it began. Victory is won by the side that is more determined.” This may sound simple, but it is the truth. The warrior who enters a fight having already made peace with death cannot be defeated in spirit. Even if his body is struck down, his resolve remains unbroken. I have heard the same principle expressed by an old swordsman who said: “When two swordsmen of equal skill meet, the one who has already decided to die will win. When two swordsmen of unequal skill meet, the less skilled one who has decided to die may still win, because the more skilled one is fighting to survive, and survival makes a man cautious.”

Once you have made up your mind, do not listen to those who would dissuade you. Once you have started, do not stop. This applies equally to great ventures and to small tasks. A man who is easily swayed and who abandons his plans halfway is a man of no account. There was a retainer who decided to build a memorial shrine for his late master. Others told him it was a waste of time, that the clan had more pressing needs, that the master would not have wanted it. He ignored them all and completed the shrine, and it stands to this day. The men who advised him to stop are all forgotten. His devotion is remembered.

There are times when a matter must be dealt with immediately, and times when patience serves better. But a warrior must not confuse patience with indecision. Patience is choosing the right moment to strike. Indecision is failing to strike at all. The patient warrior watches, waits, and acts when the moment is right. The indecisive warrior watches, waits, and never acts. The difference between them is not visible from the outside. It is entirely internal — a matter of intention.

If a warrior is not absolutely resolved, he will waver. If he wavers, his actions will be slow. If his actions are slow, he will accomplish nothing. Resolution is like the foundation of a building. If the foundation is solid, the building can withstand storms. If the foundation is weak, even a light wind will bring it down. All of a warrior’s virtues rest upon the foundation of absolute resolve.

Yamamoto Jin’emon always said: “It is not enough simply to say you will not retreat. You must actually plant your feet and determine that here, on this spot, is where you will die.” He also said: “The word ‘win’ is insufficient. What matters is to win ahead of time.” This means that the battle is won or lost in the mind before the first blow is struck. Jin’emon would demonstrate this to the young warriors by telling them to stand in a spot and declare that they would not move from it, no matter what. Then he would rush at them with a practice sword. Those who had made the declaration with their mouths but not their hearts would flinch and step back. Those who had truly resolved would

hold their ground, even when the blow was coming straight for their heads. “There,” he would say to the ones who held their ground. “That is resolve. Your feet knew what your mouth was saying.”

There is a principle: “Pursue a cornered rat.” A man who has been backed into a corner will fight with extraordinary ferocity. The lesson for the warrior is twofold: first, never assume a weakened enemy is defeated; second, if you yourself are cornered, fight as though you are already dead, and you may yet prevail. I heard of an incident during the campaigns of the early lords where a single ashigaru foot soldier, cornered in a burned-out storehouse, held off six mounted warriors for the better part of an hour. He had nowhere to run and knew he would die, and this knowledge made him fight with an energy that none of the six could match. They eventually killed him, but he took three of them with him. The commander who witnessed this said: “Give me fifty men with that spirit and I will take any castle in the land.”

Even in trivial matters, a person who gives up partway reveals his nature. He will do the same in matters of consequence. A warrior must finish what he begins, whether the task is great or small. I once knew a retainer who could not finish a single poem he started. He would write a line or two and then abandon it. He treated letters the same way — half-written and set aside. When a genuine crisis came and he was given responsibility for a diplomatic matter, he handled it exactly as he handled everything else: he began with energy, lost interest halfway through, and left the matter unresolved. The matter had to be taken up by another retainer, and the first man’s reputation was finished.

Lord Naoshige said: “The Way of the warrior is one of reckless determination. A handful of men who share this determination can accomplish what a hundred cautious men cannot.” He proved this during his own campaigns. With a force greatly outnumbered, he attacked without hesitation and routed an enemy that should have overwhelmed him. When his retainers expressed amazement, he said: “They had numbers. We had resolve. Resolve always wins.”

A man who has mastered an art reveals it in his every action. When a warrior has truly internalised the resolve to die, it shows in his face, in his speech, and in every gesture. There is a stillness about him that others recognise, even if they cannot name what they see. You cannot fake this. I have seen men try to cultivate an air of menace or an appearance of readiness, but it is always obvious to those who know the real thing. The genuine article has a quality of ease about it — the man is resolved, and because he is resolved, he is relaxed. It is the unresolved man who is tense.

There was a young retainer who was ordered to deliver a reprimand to a senior retainer who had behaved dishonourably. The young man was terrified. The senior retainer was powerful and had a fearsome temper. He asked an older warrior for advice. The old man said: “Before you go, decide that you are going to die in that room. Once you have decided that, go in and say what needs to be said. If the man attacks you, so be it. But you will find that a man who has decided to die speaks with an authority that cannot be ignored. The senior retainer will hear you, because he will sense that you are not bluffing.” The young man followed this advice. He went in, delivered the reprimand

clearly and without trembling, and the senior retainer, though furious, accepted it. Afterward the young man said his legs had been shaking the entire time, but his voice had been steady.

When Lord Mitsushige was young, the monk Kaion gave him this teaching: "You will face many difficulties in your life. When they come, do not wish they were otherwise. Take each difficulty straight on, as a warrior charges into the enemy line. If you spend your life wishing things were different, you will waste every moment you have. The difficulty is the opportunity. Charge into it." Mitsushige reportedly carried this teaching with him his entire life and would repeat it to his retainers in times of crisis.

Service and Loyalty

A retainer should give his opinions to his lord, correct his errors, and serve him faithfully. This is the highest form of loyalty. To see your lord's faults and say nothing — to think only of your own comfort and standing — that is disloyalty, no matter how well you carry out your other duties. There are many retainers who believe that loyalty means obedience in all things, but this is the loyalty of a servant, not of a samurai. The samurai's loyalty is of a higher kind: he serves not only his lord's wishes but his lord's true interests, even when the two are in conflict.

The relationship between lord and retainer is like the relationship between parent and child. A retainer should think of his lord's interests before his own, just as a parent thinks of the child's welfare. But a retainer who merely flatters his lord and agrees with everything is no better than a servant who lets his master walk into the fire. A parent who never corrects a child produces a spoiled and useless adult. A retainer who never corrects his lord produces a spoiled and useless leader. This is not disrespect. It is the deepest form of devotion.

If your lord is in the wrong, you must speak, even at the risk of your life. If you fail to speak and allow your lord to continue in error, you have failed in your duty. But the manner of speaking is important. You must choose the right time, the right place, and the right words. A good retainer does not humiliate his lord before others. He finds a quiet moment, approaches with respect, and speaks his truth firmly but gently. There was a retainer called Ishida Ittei who was known for his ability to correct his lord without causing offence. His method was this: he would first acknowledge the lord's reasoning, showing that he understood why the lord had arrived at his decision. Then he would present the alternative view, not as his own opinion, but as something he had heard others say, so that the lord could consider it without feeling challenged. Finally, he would leave the decision entirely in the lord's hands, saying: "Whatever you decide, I will support you fully." More often than not, the lord would change his mind, believing he had arrived at the new decision on his own. This is the art of counsel at its finest.

When I was young, I kept a notebook that I called "Things to be Corrected." Every day I would write down the mistakes I had made and the ways I had fallen short. There was never a day with fewer than twenty or thirty entries. Eventually the entries became fewer, but there were always things to write down. I came to see that there is no end to the need for self-correction. This is the foundation of service — to hold yourself to a higher standard than you hold anyone else. A retainer

who demands perfection from others but tolerates imperfection in himself has the matter exactly backwards.

There is a saying among retainers: “If you have not earned the right to give counsel, your counsel is worthless.” This means that you must first demonstrate your competence and loyalty through action before you presume to advise. A retainer who offers opinions without having first proven himself is merely arrogant. I knew a young retainer who arrived at his post full of ideas about how things should be improved. He spoke freely to anyone who would listen, criticising the established methods and proposing his own alternatives. Within a month, every senior retainer despised him. Not because his ideas were bad — some of them were quite good — but because he had not yet done anything to earn the right to criticise. He should have spent his first year working harder than anyone else, demonstrating his competence through action. Then, when he offered his opinions, they would have been heard with respect.

A retainer who serves only when it suits him, who is loyal in prosperity and absent in hardship, is not a retainer at all. True loyalty is revealed in difficult times. When your lord’s fortunes decline, when the domain faces crisis, when the task is thankless — that is when the genuine retainer steps forward. There was a retainer in the time of Lord Katsushige who remained at his post during a severe famine, distributing his own rice to the lord’s tenants and eating wild roots himself. Others had fled or pleaded for reassignment. This man stayed, grew thin, and kept the district together through the worst of it. When the famine ended, Lord Katsushige summoned him personally and said: “I have a hundred retainers who serve me well in good times. You are the one who serves me in bad times. You are worth more to me than all of them combined.”

To serve well, one must understand that service is not servility. The samurai does not serve because he is weak. He serves because he has chosen to place something greater than himself at the centre of his life. The retainer who serves with pride in his heart is far superior to the one who serves reluctantly. There is a world of difference between a man who says “I serve because I must” and a man who says “I serve because it is my Way.” The first man does his duty. The second man embodies his duty. Others can see the difference, even if they cannot explain it.

Lord Naoshige said: “A retainer is a man who supports his lord, just as a fan is a thing that lends the wind. Though a fan is insignificant on its own, it is indispensable when the heat becomes unbearable.” A warrior should consider himself in this way. Do not think that because your role is small, it is unimportant. The great battles are won by lords and generals, but they are made possible by the retainers who carried messages, maintained weapons, kept watch through the night, and performed a thousand tasks that no one remembers. Every one of those tasks was essential.

Do not think of your own glory. If you serve well, your name will be remembered. If you seek glory for its own sake, your service will suffer, and you will be remembered for your vanity rather than your deeds. I have observed that the retainers whose names are most honoured in the records of the domain are not the ones who sought fame. They are the ones who served diligently, year after

year, without any thought of recognition. Their glory found them. The men who chased after glory usually caught only disgrace.

I was once told by an older samurai: “You will serve many tasks in your life, and most of them will seem mundane. Attend to each one as though the reputation of your lord depends on it, because in truth, it does. The great battles are rare. The daily tasks are constant. And it is in the daily tasks that a retainer reveals his true quality.” He then told me about a retainer who had been assigned to oversee the maintenance of a bridge. It was a dull task, beneath the dignity of a warrior, or so most people thought. But this retainer maintained the bridge with such care that when the lord’s procession crossed it during a heavy rain, the bridge held firm while others in the district washed away. The lord asked who was responsible for the bridge’s maintenance and commended the retainer publicly. A small duty, performed excellently, had accomplished what years of ordinary service could not.

When assigned a task that seems beneath you, carry it out with the same spirit as if you were leading men into battle. The warrior’s Way makes no distinction between high duties and low duties. There is only duty, performed well or poorly. The man who does menial work with a warrior’s spirit elevates the work. The man who does important work with a reluctant spirit degrades it.

A certain retainer said: “A man should not think in terms of what his lord can do for him, but only of what he can do for his lord. The moment a retainer begins calculating his own advantage, he has already betrayed the bond.” This is a hard teaching, especially for young warriors who have not yet acquired the habit of service. But it is the truth. The retainer who serves with calculation serves only himself. And the irony is that the retainer who serves without calculation — who gives himself entirely to his lord’s interests — is the one who ultimately receives the greatest rewards, because his lord sees his sincerity and values it above all else.

When Lord Mitsushige was still young, Tsunetomo served as his personal attendant. During this time, he observed that the young lord had a tendency to make promises he could not keep, out of a desire to be liked. Tsunetomo waited for a private moment and said: “My lord, a promise unkept does more damage than a refusal given honestly. If you cannot do a thing, say so plainly. The men will respect your honesty more than they resent your refusal. But if you promise and fail to deliver, they will lose trust, and once trust is lost, it is nearly impossible to rebuild.” The young lord took this counsel seriously and became known in later years for his directness — a quality his retainers valued greatly.

There was a retainer called Nakano Takumi who served with such devotion that he never once took a day of leisure in thirty years of service. When asked if he did not feel the need for rest, he said: “My lord does not rest from being lord. Why should I rest from being his retainer?” This may seem extreme, but it illustrates the principle. The retainer who views service as something separate from life — something to be balanced against leisure and personal pursuits — has not yet understood the Way. Service is not a part of the warrior’s life. It is his life.

Daily Conduct

A warrior's appearance should be beyond reproach. Your clothing, your grooming, your bearing — all these communicate your readiness. If you are careless in appearance, you are advertising to the world that your spirit is also careless. Even when you have no audience, maintain your appearance as if you might be summoned before your lord at any moment. The old warriors understood this. They did not dress well to impress others. They dressed well because a warrior who lets his appearance slide has begun to let everything slide.

It is said that a warrior should take care of his appearance. He should bathe each morning, shave the top of his head carefully, apply lotion to his hands and feet, trim his nails, file them with pumice, and attend to his grooming with care. He should not be negligent in any of these things. Though this may seem excessive, consider: if a warrior is killed in battle, and the enemy examines his body, it would be shameful for him to appear unkempt. A warrior who takes care of his person demonstrates that he is prepared for death at all times. For this reason, even old retainers urged young samurai to be fastidious in their grooming. If your body may be seen by the enemy, let it reflect well upon you and upon your lord. There is a story about a warrior in the early campaigns who was killed in a skirmish. When the enemy stripped his armor, they found that he was wearing a fine undergarment, his nails were clean, and he had a sachet of incense tucked into his sash. The enemy commander is reported to have said: "This was a warrior who was prepared for his death. His lord trained his men well." The story reached the Nabeshima domain and was told to young samurai as an example. Even in death, that warrior served his lord's reputation.

A warrior should maintain a calm and composed countenance at all times. Whether in the midst of joy or sorrow, whether things go well or badly, the warrior's face should reflect nothing but steady resolve. If you display your emotions openly, people will see your weaknesses and take advantage of them. This does not mean that a warrior should feel nothing. He feels everything. But he governs the display of his feelings as he governs every other aspect of his conduct — deliberately and with awareness.

There is a saying: "Never show the bottom of your feet." This means: do not reveal your inner thoughts carelessly. Even with close companions, a warrior should not speak loosely about his fears, his grudges, or his ambitions. The world is full of people who will use such knowledge against you. I learned this lesson early when I confided a frustration about a senior retainer to someone I thought was a friend. Within two days, my words had reached the senior retainer, distorted beyond recognition, and I had to spend the next month repairing the damage. After that, I kept my own counsel on all sensitive matters.

When speaking, be direct and economical. A warrior who talks too much reveals too much. Say what must be said, then say no more. Unnecessary speech is a weakness. There is a further point: a man who speaks at length gives the impression that he is uncertain of his own position and is trying to convince himself as much as his listener. The man who speaks briefly and with conviction gives the impression of absolute certainty, even when he is not entirely sure. In matters of leadership, this distinction is crucial.

When you are with others, let your speech be considerate and your manner courteous. Even if the other person is of lower rank, do not behave arrogantly. Arrogance is a disease of the spirit. The warrior who treats everyone — high or low — with the same basic respect demonstrates his inner strength. It takes no courage to bully a subordinate. It takes real character to treat him with dignity. Lord Naoshige was known for this quality. He spoke to his lowest servants with the same courtesy he showed to visiting lords. When asked about this, he said: “A man who is courteous only to those who can help him is not courteous at all. He is merely calculating.”

If you yawn in the presence of others, you reveal that your spirit is slack. If you are tired, keep it to yourself. Push through your exhaustion in silence. A warrior who complains of tiredness, hunger, or cold is advertising his weakness. There was a young retainer who was criticized by his seniors for sleeping late on a morning when the domain was preparing for an important ceremony. He defended himself by saying he had been up late studying. An older warrior cut him short: “I do not care what you were doing last night. What I see this morning is a man who was not at his post when he was needed. Your excuses are your business. Your duties are mine.” The young man was ashamed and never slept late again.

When sitting, sit with a straight back and your hands properly placed. When walking, walk with purpose and awareness. When standing, stand as though rooted. In all things, your body should reflect the disciplined state of your mind. I have noticed that you can tell a great deal about a man’s character from the way he sits. A man who slouches and fidgets has a mind that slouches and fidgets. A man who sits still and straight has a mind that is ordered and ready.

It is a good practice to carry a supply of medicine on your person, along with paper and writing materials, and anything else that may be of use. You cannot predict when such things will be needed. The warrior who anticipates necessity and prepares for it demonstrates the quality of readiness, which is the warrior’s first virtue after resolve. I also recommend carrying a small amount of dried rice and a cord of suitable length. These may seem unnecessary in peacetime, but the habit of preparedness extends beyond the practical items themselves — it cultivates the mindset of a man who is always ready for whatever comes.

When greeting someone, look them in the eye. Give your attention fully to the person before you. This is not merely good manners. It is training for the warrior’s mind, which must be fully present in each moment. A man who greets you while looking elsewhere has told you, without meaning to, that you are not important to him. Even if this is true, it is unwise to communicate it.

Eat in moderation. Drink in moderation. A warrior who cannot govern his appetites cannot govern himself. Excessive eating dulls the body. Excessive drinking clouds the judgement. Both lead to carelessness, and carelessness is fatal. At drinking gatherings, there is a particular danger. The atmosphere is convivial, the companions are agreeable, and one cup follows another without notice. Then a man says something he should not say, or behaves in a way that shames him when

he remembers it the next morning — if he remembers it at all. Better to drink less than everyone else. Let others think you unsociable. That is a small price for keeping your reputation intact.

There is a proper way to conduct yourself at a drinking party. Sit in a place where you can observe everyone without being the centre of attention. Drink slowly and eat between cups. Do not match others cup for cup — set your own pace. If a companion becomes drunk and begins to speak improperly, do not join him. If he directs his drunken words at you, deflect them calmly without escalating the situation. If he becomes aggressive, guide him outside with a minimum of fuss. Never strike a drunk man, even if he strikes you first, unless your life is genuinely in danger. The morning after, he will remember what happened, and if you handled the situation with composure, he will be ashamed and grateful. If you struck him back, he will be only vengeful. I have seen more careers ruined by incidents at drinking parties than by failures in battle.

One should rise early. A warrior who sleeps until mid-morning has already wasted the best part of the day. Rise before dawn, wash, dress, and prepare your mind for whatever the day may bring. The hour before sunrise is a valuable time. The world is quiet. The mind is clear. Use this time for contemplation, for planning, or for training. Once the household wakes and the day's duties begin, you will not find such stillness again until nightfall.

When walking at night, a warrior should keep his hand on his sword and walk with deliberate awareness. Even in your own domain, do not assume that you are safe. The habit of readiness must extend to every hour of every day. There is a story about a retainer who was attacked by a wild boar while walking home through his own garden at night. Because he had his hand on his sword and was paying attention to the sounds around him, he was able to draw and cut the beast before it reached him. Another man, walking the same path without attention, would have been gored before he could react.

A warrior should not burden others with his problems. If you are experiencing difficulty, deal with it yourself or seek counsel from one trusted person. To broadcast your troubles is to invite contempt and to burden your companions with matters that are your own responsibility. There is a further consideration: the more people who know about your difficulties, the more people will form opinions about how you should handle them, and unsolicited opinions are more hindrance than help.

There is a proper way to give a gift and a proper way to receive one. When giving, give generously and without any expectation of return. When receiving, receive with gratitude and without false modesty. To refuse a gift or to belittle it is an insult to the giver. Similarly, to give a gift and then mention it afterward is to cheapen the gesture. Once given, the gift should never be spoken of again by the giver.

When attending a gathering, arrive on time. To arrive late is to show disrespect for everyone who arrived before you. If circumstances make you late, acknowledge it honestly and without elaborate excuses. A simple "I apologize for the delay" is sufficient. The man who launches into a long

explanation of why he is late is drawing more attention to his failure than a brief acknowledgement would have done.

Keep your living quarters clean and in good order. The state of your surroundings reflects the state of your mind. Disorder in your home leads to disorder in your thoughts. I have noticed that retainers who maintain orderly quarters tend to perform their duties more effectively than those who live in disarray. This is not coincidence. The habit of order in one area of life creates the habit of order in all areas.

When writing a letter, take your time and choose your words with care. A letter, unlike spoken words, endures. It can be read and re-read, shared with others, and kept for years. Write as though your letter will be read aloud in a public assembly, because it may well be. Letters of business should be clear and concise. Letters of condolence should be warm and sincere, but brief — the bereaved person does not want to read a long letter. Letters of congratulation should be generous in spirit. In all cases, check your letter for errors before sending it. A letter with sloppy writing or careless mistakes reflects poorly on the sender.

When managing retainers of your own, be firm but fair. Assign tasks clearly, so there is no ambiguity about what is expected. Check the work when it is done, so your retainers know that standards will be maintained. Praise good work openly. Correct poor work privately. Never humiliate a subordinate in front of others — this breeds resentment, not improvement. And never play favorites. If your retainers see that advancement depends on merit rather than on personal connections, they will strive to improve. If they see that advancement depends on flattery, they will become flatterers, and you will be surrounded by useless men.

Courage and Composure

There is surely nothing other than the single purpose of the present moment. A man's entire life is a succession of moment after moment. Once you understand this, there is nothing else you need to do, and nothing else you need to pursue. Simply live being true to the single purpose of the moment. Everyone lets the present moment slip by and then searches for it as though it were somewhere else. No one seems to have noticed this. But once you fix your attention on this principle, you will be able to hear the words of others clearly and to give each moment its full due.

The warrior and the cherry blossom share the same nature. The cherry blossom is beautiful because it falls at the height of its beauty, without clinging to the branch. A warrior must live the same way — ready to fall in full bloom, without hesitation, without regret. A blossom that withers on the branch has missed its moment. So too the warrior who clings to life past the point of honour.

Among all flowers, the cherry blossom is supreme, and among all men, the warrior is supreme. The reason is the same: both are willing to let go at the moment of their greatest beauty. Other flowers wither slowly and cling to the stem. Other men cling to life long past the point where life has meaning. The cherry blossom falls while it is still perfect, and the wind carries it away. That image should be before the warrior's eyes always. It does not mean he should seek death. It means he

should live so fully that when death comes, he is at his peak — not diminished by compromise, not worn down by cowardice, not withered by years of avoiding the things he knew he should do. The falling blossom does not look back at the branch. Neither should the warrior look back at the life he is leaving.

There is a difference between bravery and recklessness. The brave warrior keeps his composure. The reckless warrior loses his head. Bravery is acting calmly in the face of danger. Recklessness is acting without thought in the face of danger. The outcomes may sometimes look the same, but the inner states are entirely different. The brave warrior knows what he is doing and why. The reckless warrior is simply reacting. In the long run, the brave warrior survives more often, because his actions are guided by awareness rather than by impulse.

If you are struck by a sudden crisis, do not react immediately. Pause. Take one breath. Then act. In that single breath lies the difference between a wise response and a disastrous one. The warrior who masters this small pause has mastered much. There was a retainer who received word that his son had been killed in a skirmish. His hands clenched and his face went white. But he took one breath, unclenched his hands, and said calmly: “Tell me the details.” He dealt with every necessary matter — the recovery of the body, the notification of the family, the arrangements for the funeral — before he allowed himself to grieve. Afterward, a companion said to him: “I do not know how you did that.” He replied: “I did not do it. The training did it. I have been taking that one breath before acting for thirty years. My body does it now whether I want it to or not.”

It is said that great courage is calm. If you watch a man of true courage in a moment of danger, you will see that his face does not change colour, his hands do not tremble, and his voice does not waver. He has already accepted whatever may come. There is nothing left to fear. This calm is not indifference. The calm warrior cares deeply about the outcome. But he has separated his caring from his fear, and it is fear that produces the visible signs of agitation. Strip away the fear and what remains is clarity — clear eyes, steady hands, a mind that can assess the situation without distortion.

Fear is natural. Every man feels it. The warrior is not a man without fear. He is a man who acts despite his fear. The untested youth who boasts that he has never been afraid has simply never been in real danger. But the veteran who admits his fear and acts regardless — that is the true warrior. There is no shame in fear. There is great shame in letting fear govern your actions. A certain old warrior used to tell the young retainers: “If you are not afraid, you are either a liar or a fool. The warrior’s discipline is not the absence of fear. It is the governance of fear.”

When facing an opponent, do not think about winning. Do not think about not losing. Do not think about anything. Simply be present, as fully and completely as you can. The warrior who is not thinking is the warrior who cannot be read, predicted, or defeated. This is the state that the swordsmen call “no-mind.” It is not emptiness in the sense of blankness. It is emptiness in the sense that the mind is free of fixed intentions. A mind full of plans is rigid and slow. A mind

empty of plans is fluid and fast. It responds to what is happening rather than to what it expected to happen.

If a warrior is wounded in battle, he should not show it if he can avoid it. Bind the wound and continue. If you cry out, you give heart to your enemies and take it from your allies. Even a serious wound should be borne in silence if possible. There will be time for pain later. There was a warrior called Oki Hyobu who took an arrow through his thigh during a siege. He broke off the shaft, wrapped the wound with a strip of cloth, and continued directing his men for the rest of the day. It was not until the battle ended that anyone noticed the blood soaking through his trousers. When the field surgeon removed the arrowhead, Oki did not flinch. He had decided before the battle that no wound would make him cry out, and his body honored the decision.

A certain retainer, when asked how he remained so calm during the siege, replied: “I was not calm. I was terrified. But I had made a decision long before the battle began — that I would not allow my fear to show on my face or in my actions. When you have made such a decision firmly enough, your body obeys, even when your spirit is shaking.” He went on to say: “The trick is not to make the decision in the moment of danger. By then it is too late. You make the decision years before, in the quiet of your own room, and you renew it every morning. When the crisis comes, the decision is already made. You do not have to think about it. Your body remembers.”

The warrior should cultivate a fierce expression and a gentle heart. A fierce expression keeps enemies at a distance. A gentle heart keeps allies close. But if the two are reversed — if you have a gentle expression and a fierce heart — you will attract enemies and repel allies. I have known warriors who appeared soft and approachable but were cruel and calculating underneath. Everyone eventually saw through the mask, and these men ended their days with no one willing to stand beside them.

When insulted, a warrior must not fly into rage. A warrior who can be provoked by words can be controlled by anyone with a sharp tongue. Let the insult pass like wind through the trees. If action is required, take it calmly and deliberately. If no action is required, let it go. There was a samurai who was insulted at a tea ceremony by a man who was jealous of his position. The insult was delivered loudly, so that everyone present could hear. The samurai said nothing. He continued drinking his tea as though nothing had happened. The other guests watched in amazement. Later, one of them asked: “Why did you not respond? Your honour was at stake.” The samurai replied: “My honour is in my conduct, not in another man’s words. He made himself look small. If I had responded, I would have made myself look small as well. As it stands, everyone in that room now knows who has composure and who does not.” The insult was forgotten within a week. The samurai’s composure was remembered for years.

A certain old samurai said: “In my youth, I spent my time correcting my weaknesses. Now I spend my time building on my strengths. Both are necessary, but a young man does not realise that his strengths matter more than his weaknesses. The enemy will not exploit your strength — he will look for your weakness. So a young warrior should certainly shore up his weaknesses. But in time,

he must learn to trust his strength and act from it." This is sound advice. I would add only that there are some weaknesses so fundamental that they must be addressed first — cowardice, laziness, and dishonesty chief among them. Once these are dealt with, the warrior can turn his attention to cultivating his natural strengths.

Do not look back once you have committed to action. Looking back invites doubt, and doubt destroys composure. Whatever has happened before this moment is past. Whatever may happen after this moment is not yet. This moment is all there is, and in this moment, the warrior acts. I heard an account of a swordsman who lost a duel because, at the crucial moment, he thought of his wife and children. The thought lasted only an instant, but it was enough. His opponent struck in that instant and killed him. The lesson is stark: in the moment of action, there can be nothing in your mind except the action itself.

During the siege of a certain castle, a warrior was ordered to lead the assault on the gate. The gate was heavily defended and the chances of survival were small. The warrior received the order, bowed, and said: "I have been waiting for this." He charged the gate with such ferocity that the defenders fell back, and the gate was taken. The warrior survived, though badly wounded. When asked about his words, he said: "I meant them literally. I had spent twenty years preparing for a moment like that. When it came, I was grateful for the chance to show what my preparation was worth."

There was a warrior who was known for his ability to remain calm even when others panicked. Once, during an earthquake that destroyed several buildings in the castle town, he walked calmly through the chaos, directing people to safety and organizing the response. When the shaking stopped, he was the only man whose voice had not risen. Someone asked him: "Were you not afraid?" He said: "I was afraid. But I have spent my life practising being useful in a crisis. Fear is one thing. Usefulness is another. They can exist at the same time."

When a companion falls in battle, you must not stop to mourn him. There will be time for mourning later. In the moment, your duty is to the living — to the men who are still fighting, to the mission that is still underway. Grief is a luxury that the warrior must defer until the crisis has passed. This sounds cold, but it is the opposite of cold. It is the discipline that keeps the survivors alive. A man who stops to grieve in the middle of battle puts everyone around him at risk.

Wisdom and Judgement

There is a proper way to give counsel. First, you must determine whether the other person is willing to receive it. If he is not willing, your words will be wasted and you will only earn his resentment. Second, you must build a relationship of trust before offering correction. If the other person does not trust your motives, he will reject even the soundest advice. Third, you must offer your counsel privately, never in front of others. Public correction humiliates, and humiliation breeds hatred, not improvement. Fourth, begin with genuine praise before turning to the matter that needs correction. This opens the other person's spirit to what you have to say. If you follow these principles, your counsel will be heard and acted upon.

To give counsel well requires first that you become a person worth listening to. No one heeds the advice of a man they do not respect. You earn the right to give counsel through years of competent service and honest dealing. Then, when you speak, your words carry weight — not because of their cleverness, but because of the reputation of the man who speaks them.

To give counsel that humiliates the person receiving it is not counsel at all. It is cruelty disguised as helpfulness. The purpose of counsel is to improve, not to wound. A man who gives advice in a way that shames the recipient cares more about displaying his own superiority than about helping. I once heard a senior retainer correct a junior in front of an entire assembly. The correction was factually accurate, but the manner of delivery was devastating. The junior retainer's face burned with shame, and from that day forward he would not speak in assemblies at all, even when his contribution would have been valuable. The senior retainer had won a small victory of vanity and lost a valuable subordinate in the process.

It is foolish to give counsel to a person who will not listen. You waste your breath and earn an enemy. Better to wait until the person comes to you of his own accord. Then your words will fall on prepared ground. There is a story about a certain retainer who repeatedly tried to advise a colleague about a course of action that was clearly leading to disaster. The colleague ignored him each time, growing more hostile with each attempt. Eventually the retainer stopped trying. When the disaster came, the colleague turned to him and said: "Why did you not warn me?" The retainer replied: "I warned you seven times. You did not want to hear it. A man cannot be given wisdom against his will."

A warrior should keep his own counsel on most matters. Seek advice from one or two trusted people on questions of real importance. But do not go around asking everyone for their opinion. The man who consults widely before acting will hear so many different views that he will be unable to act at all. Moreover, the act of asking many people creates the impression that you are uncertain, and uncertainty in a warrior invites contempt.

Lord Naoshige said: "There are two things a warrior must guard against: the resentment of the capable, and the ingratitude of the incapable. When you promote a capable man, others of equal ability will resent being passed over. When you help an incapable man, he will forget your kindness the moment he no longer needs you." This is one of the most practical observations in the whole of the Nabeshima teachings. I have seen both patterns play out repeatedly in my years of service. The only mitigation is transparency: promote openly, explain your reasons clearly, and do not expect gratitude from anyone.

Wisdom is not the same as cleverness. The clever man finds a way around obstacles. The wise man understands which obstacles must be faced directly. A warrior who is merely clever will eventually outsmart himself. A warrior who is wise will know when cleverness serves and when it does not. Cleverness without wisdom produces men who can solve problems but who create larger ones in the process. Wisdom without cleverness produces men who understand what should be

done but lack the ingenuity to do it. The ideal is to possess both, but if you can have only one, choose wisdom.

Do not be quick to judge others. You see their actions, but you do not see their circumstances. The man who appears to be a coward may be carrying a burden you know nothing about. The man who appears to be a fool may understand things you have not considered. Judge yourself strictly. Judge others generously. This is not weakness. It is the discipline of a man who knows that his own perception is limited and that the full truth of another man's situation is rarely visible from the outside.

An old samurai once told me: "You learn more from a defeat than from a victory. When you win, you assume you did everything right. When you lose, you are forced to examine what went wrong. The warrior who has never been defeated is the warrior who has never been tested." I would add: the warrior who has been defeated and has learned from it is more dangerous than the warrior who has never known defeat. The undefeated warrior carries arrogance into battle. The defeated warrior carries knowledge.

It is a mistake to think that a leader must always be strong and decisive. There are times when a wise leader says: "I do not know." There are times when a wise leader asks for help. The leader who pretends to know everything loses the respect of those who can see through the pretence. True authority comes from competence and honesty, not from the appearance of infallibility. Lord Naoshige understood this. When faced with a problem he did not understand, he would summon the man who understood it best and say: "Explain this to me as though I were a child." He was not ashamed to learn, even from men far below his rank. His retainers respected him more for this, not less.

In evaluating a man's character, watch what he does when he thinks no one is observing. His behaviour in public is performance. His behaviour in private is truth. I was told by my teacher that if you want to know whether a young warrior has genuine character, watch him when the senior retainers leave the room. If he maintains his discipline and continues his work, he has character. If he immediately relaxes, gossips, or shirks, he is performing for an audience and has nothing real underneath.

When you have made a mistake, admit it quickly and fully. Do not make excuses. Do not shift blame. Do not minimise. A single honest admission of error earns more respect than a hundred clever justifications. The warrior who cannot own his mistakes cannot learn from them. There was a retainer who made a serious error in the accounts he managed. Rather than trying to cover it up, he went directly to his superior and said: "I have made this error. Here is what happened. Here is what I should have done differently. I accept whatever consequences follow." The superior was so impressed by the directness that he gave the retainer a lighter punishment than he otherwise would have. The retainer's reputation actually improved, because men who knew about the incident remembered not the error but the honesty with which he handled it.

There is a saying: “The wise falcon hides its talons.” A truly capable warrior does not advertise his abilities. He carries them quietly and deploys them only when necessary. The man who boasts of his skills is usually compensating for their absence. I have noticed that the most dangerous swordsmen are the ones who say the least about their art. They have no need to announce themselves. Their skill is evident to anyone who watches them move — in the way they walk, the way they sit, the way their eyes take in a room. The man who talks at length about his prowess is still trying to convince himself.

When faced with a difficult decision, consider what a man you admire would do in the same situation. This is not a substitute for your own judgement, but it can illuminate options you might otherwise overlook. Choose a model of conduct and measure yourself against it — but do not mistake the model for perfection. Every man you admire has flaws you cannot see. The point of the model is not to become someone else. It is to raise the standard by which you judge your own actions.

Lord Naoshige said: “A man who knows little yet thinks he knows much is dangerous. A man who knows much yet thinks he knows little is valuable.” Overconfidence is a greater peril than ignorance, because the overconfident man acts without caution. The ignorant man, if he is aware of his ignorance, will at least proceed carefully. The overconfident man charges forward with the certainty that he is right, and when he falls into the pit, he drags others in with him.

There is a story about two retainers who were asked to judge a dispute. The first gave his verdict immediately and with great certainty. The second asked to think about it overnight. The next morning, the second retainer gave a more considered judgement that proved correct. When asked why he had waited, he said: “The first answer that comes to mind is usually the product of emotion, not reason. I wanted to let my emotions settle before deciding.” In most matters, the second retainer’s approach is wiser. But in matters where delay means death, you must train yourself to act well even on the first impulse — and that is what the discipline of the seven breaths is for. The seven breaths are not seven breaths of hesitation. They are seven breaths of concentrated focus, in which the trained mind strips away emotion and arrives at the essential truth of the situation. A man who has practised this discipline can reach in seven breaths the same clarity that the untrained man needs a night’s sleep to achieve.

There was a retainer called Yamamoto Gorozaemon who was known for his sound judgement. When asked how he had developed this quality, he said: “By making many bad judgements and studying each one carefully afterward. I kept a record of every important decision I made and its outcome. When a decision proved wrong, I would go back and examine what I had been thinking at the time, what information I had ignored, what emotions had influenced me. Over many years, patterns emerged. I noticed that my worst decisions were always made when I was angry, tired, or trying to impress someone. Once I understood this, I learned to recognise those states and to delay important decisions until they had passed.”

When you hear two sides of a dispute, do not assume the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Sometimes one side is simply right and the other is simply wrong. The habit of splitting the difference is the habit of a lazy mind. Investigate thoroughly, listen carefully, and then judge on the merits. If the truth lies in the middle, you will find it there. If it lies entirely on one side, you should have the courage to say so.

Training and Self-Cultivation

A warrior must never say, "I have learned enough." The moment you believe your training is complete, your decline begins. There is no ceiling to what can be mastered. Even the greatest swordsman continues to practise until the day he dies. I knew an old swordsman who still rose at dawn to practise his cuts, even though his hands were gnarled with age and his legs trembled beneath him. When a young man asked him why he still trained, the old man said: "Because I am not yet good enough." He had been practising for over fifty years.

There is a saying: "Learning is a lifelong pursuit, with no final destination." This is especially true for the warrior, who must cultivate not only physical skill but also the mind and the spirit. A warrior who trains only his body is half a warrior. A warrior who trains only his mind is the other half. The complete warrior neglects neither. The old masters understood this, which is why the training halls of the past always included study of the classics alongside physical practice. A warrior who cannot read history is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. A warrior who can read history but cannot swing a sword is doomed to be killed before he can apply what he has learned.

In the old days, a certain swordsman was asked: "When will I have mastered the sword?" The swordsman replied: "Perhaps never. But if you practise every day without fail, you will be closer tomorrow than you are today. That is enough." The student was dissatisfied with this answer and went to another teacher, who told him the same thing. He went to a third, who said: "You will have mastered the sword when you stop asking that question." The student finally understood. Mastery is not a destination you arrive at. It is a direction you travel in. The question "When will I arrive?" reveals that you have not yet understood the journey.

A warrior should study widely. Read. Listen to those who have experience. Observe the world carefully. But remember that all study is preparation. The test comes when you must act, and in that moment, you rely on what your training has made instinctive. A man who has studied much but practised little will find his knowledge useless when the moment comes. Knowledge that has not been absorbed into the body through repeated practice remains merely intellectual — it is available to the conscious mind but not to the trained reflexes that govern action in a crisis.

Young warriors often make the mistake of thinking that only the dramatic moments matter — the battles, the duels, the moments of glory. But the warrior is shaped far more by the mundane daily discipline: rising early, training when you do not feel like training, attending to tedious duties without complaint. The dramatic moments are rare. The daily discipline is constant, and it is there that character is forged. I have seen warriors who were brilliant in the training hall but useless in daily life — they could not manage their finances, could not maintain their equipment, could not

keep appointments. Their brilliance was narrow and ultimately worthless, because a warrior must function in all areas of life, not only in the areas he finds exciting.

It is better to practise one technique a thousand times than to practise a thousand techniques once each. Mastery comes from repetition, not from novelty. The warrior who knows a few things deeply will defeat the warrior who knows many things shallowly. There was an old swordsman in the Nabeshima domain who knew only five techniques. Young warriors would mock him for the narrowness of his skill. But in matches, no one could defeat him. His five techniques had been practised so many thousands of times that they were flawless — the timing, the distance, the angle of the blade, all perfected beyond what any amount of talent could achieve without repetition. He would say: “A man with one sharp sword is more dangerous than a man with twenty dull ones.”

An old retainer once said: “When I was young, I was eager to learn new things. Now that I am old, I spend my time refining what I already know. Both approaches have value, but I wish I had begun refining earlier.” There is a natural arc to training. In youth, you cast a wide net — you explore many skills, many ideas, many approaches. This is proper. But at a certain point, you must begin to narrow your focus and deepen your skill in the areas that matter most. The danger is continuing to cast the wide net past the point where it is useful, because the pursuit of novelty is more enjoyable than the hard work of deepening.

When you train, train as though your life depends on it — because one day, it will. The man who trains casually will fight casually. The man who trains with intensity will fight with intensity. Your body does not distinguish between practice and reality. What you do in training is what you will do under pressure. If you practise cutting with full commitment, you will cut with full commitment when the time comes. If you practise cutting with half-hearted swings, you will swing half-heartedly when your life is at stake. There is no switch you can flip in the moment of crisis that transforms a casual practitioner into a fierce warrior. You fight the way you train. Always.

There is a tendency among warriors to judge their progress against others. This is a mistake. Your only true opponent is the man you were yesterday. If you are better today than you were yesterday, you have succeeded. If you are the same, you have failed. What others are doing is irrelevant to your own path. I have seen young warriors destroy themselves with comparison — seeing a companion advance more quickly, they become discouraged and either give up or train recklessly trying to catch up. Both responses are wrong. The companion’s progress has nothing to do with yours. Walk your own path at your own pace, and concern yourself only with the question: am I better than I was?

Do not be discouraged by slow progress. The bamboo grows slowly for years, building its root system underground. Then one spring, it shoots upward with astonishing speed. Training is the same. You may practise for months or years without visible improvement, and then suddenly find that you have advanced greatly. The invisible work was not wasted. It was essential. The roots were growing. I experienced this myself during my training. For two years, I felt that I was making no progress at all in calligraphy. My teacher said nothing encouraging — he simply corrected my

work day after day. Then one morning I picked up the brush and the characters flowed from it as they never had before. Two years of invisible preparation had come to fruition in a single moment.

A warrior should have two qualities above all: the desire to improve and the willingness to endure discomfort. Without the desire to improve, he will stagnate. Without the willingness to endure discomfort, he will abandon his training at the first difficulty. Both are necessary. Neither alone is sufficient. I have seen men with tremendous desire who could not tolerate discomfort. They would train furiously for a week and then quit when their muscles ached. And I have seen men with great endurance who had no desire to improve. They would show up every day and go through the motions without ever pushing themselves. Neither type advances.

When corrected by a teacher or a senior, accept the correction with gratitude, not resentment. The man who corrects you is giving you a gift. He is spending his time and energy to make you better. To resent correction is to reject improvement. To welcome correction is to hasten your progress. I have noticed that the warriors who advance most quickly are not the most talented. They are the ones who accept correction most readily. They do not argue. They do not make excuses. They hear the correction, nod, and immediately try to apply it. Their progress, over time, is remarkable.

Lord Yagyu once said: “I do not know the secret of defeating others. I only know the secret of defeating myself.” This is the essence of training. The warrior’s greatest opponent is his own laziness, his own impatience, his own pride. Conquer these, and external opponents become manageable. The man who cannot get out of bed on a cold morning has already been defeated — not by an enemy, but by himself. The man who loses his temper when corrected has been defeated by his own pride. These small defeats accumulate, and eventually they define the man. Win the small battles against yourself, and the large battles against others will take care of themselves.

It is unwise to announce your intentions. If you say, “I am going to achieve this,” and then fail, you look foolish. If you achieve it, you are merely doing what you said you would. Better to train in silence and let your results speak. The warrior who trains quietly and produces results commands more respect than the one who makes grand pronouncements and falls short. There is a further danger in announcing your intentions: you may confuse the announcement with the accomplishment. The mind that has declared a goal feels a sense of satisfaction, as though something has already been achieved. But nothing has been achieved. Only the intention has been stated. The work remains entirely undone.

A warrior should study the arts — poetry, calligraphy, music, the tea ceremony. These are not distractions from the Way. They refine the spirit, sharpen perception, and cultivate the ability to focus deeply on a single task. The warrior who knows only the sword has a narrow mind. The warrior who knows the sword and the arts has a broad mind and can adapt to any situation. Moreover, the discipline required to master any art — the patience, the attention to detail, the willingness to repeat the same action thousands of times — is the same discipline required to master the Way. A man who has mastered calligraphy has learned something about mastering the sword, even though the two arts seem unrelated.

In training, there are plateaus — long periods where you feel you are making no progress at all. These are the most dangerous times, because it is during plateaus that most people give up. The warrior must understand that plateaus are a natural part of growth. Push through them. The breakthrough will come if you do not stop. I have seen it happen a hundred times: a warrior struggles on a plateau for months, then one day something shifts and he advances to a new level. If he had stopped during the plateau, he would never have reached that level. The warriors who achieve mastery are not the most talented. They are the ones who did not stop during the plateaus.

When training with a partner, give your full effort. Do not hold back out of courtesy or friendship. A partner who gives you less than his best is not helping you — he is cheating you of the training you need. Likewise, do not take offence when your partner trains hard against you. He is honouring you by giving you his best. The training hall is not a social gathering. It is a place where warriors prepare for the reality of combat, and reality does not hold back out of politeness.

There was an old saying in the domain: “A warrior who does not train today has stolen from himself tomorrow.” The meaning is this: every day of training is an investment in your future capability. Every day missed is a withdrawal from that account. Miss enough days and the account is empty. When the crisis comes, you will reach for resources that are not there, because you spent them on comfort and leisure instead of depositing them through training.

Death and Impermanence

Every morning, a warrior should settle his mind and contemplate death. He should picture himself struck by arrows, cut down by swords, swallowed by surging waves, thrown into a great fire, struck by lightning, crushed in the collapse of a building, falling from a great cliff, dying of disease, or taking his own life upon the death of his lord. Every morning, without fail, he should consider himself already dead.

There is a saying of the elders: “Step out beyond your own gate, and you are among the dead.” This is not pessimism. This is freedom. The warrior who has already died in his mind has nothing left to fear. He can act without hesitation, speak without calculation, and live without regret. This practice is the foundation of everything else in the Way. Without it, all other disciplines are merely techniques. With it, even a man of limited ability becomes formidable, because he has freed himself from the one thing that makes all men weak: the fear of losing what they have.

The warrior who thinks, “I still have time,” is the warrior who wastes his life. Treat every day as though it is your last, and you will find that you accomplish in a single day what others spread across a month. I once asked an old retainer how he had managed to accomplish so much in his career. He said: “I have lived every day since I was twenty-five as though I would not see tomorrow. That was the day my closest friend was killed in a skirmish — a young man, healthy, full of plans for the future. He was dead before noon. From that day, I never put off until tomorrow what I could do today, because I knew that tomorrow might not come.”

Human life is truly fleeting. It is foolish to live with constant anxiety and to spend one's time doing unpleasant things. This being so, one should pursue only those things that one can devote oneself to wholeheartedly. But people misunderstand this. They think pursuing what they enjoy means indulgence. That is not what I mean. In the shadow of death, one should choose the highest path. When you know that life is short, you do not waste it on petty resentments, trivial ambitions, or meaningless quarrels. You devote yourself to the things that matter: your duty, your training, the people who depend on you. Indulgence is not the opposite of anxiety. Purpose is the opposite of anxiety. The man who has a clear purpose does not waste time on indulgence, and he does not waste time on anxiety either.

We are all walking towards death. The only question is whether we walk with awareness or without it. The warrior walks with awareness. He does not pretend that death will not come. He does not busy himself with distractions to avoid thinking about it. He faces it squarely, every morning, and by doing so, he is freed to live fully. This awareness changes everything. It changes the way you spend your time, the way you treat other people, the things you choose to care about. A man who is aware of death does not waste his hours on gossip, grudges, or the accumulation of things he cannot take with him.

There was a retainer who said: "When I was young, I feared death above all things. Then one day during a battle, my horse was killed beneath me and I lay on the ground with the enemy all around. I thought: this is it. And at that moment, something changed. The fear went away. Not gradually — instantly. From that day forward, I was never afraid of dying. Not because I am brave, but because I had already experienced the moment and found that it was not as terrible as I had imagined." He went on to say: "The fear of death is always worse than death itself. We build it up in our minds into something monstrous. But the moment itself, when it comes, is simple. It is just a moment, like any other. The terror is in the anticipation, not in the thing itself."

All things are impermanent. Your possessions, your reputation, your body, your life — all of these will pass away. The warrior who clings to any of them has built his house on sand. Set your heart on the things that endure: duty, honour, the quality of your actions. These will outlast you. The great warriors of the past are remembered not for what they owned or how long they lived but for what they did and how they conducted themselves. Your reputation is the only thing that survives you, and even that fades in time. But the example you set may endure for generations, passed down in stories and teachings long after your name is forgotten.

When a warrior dies, it is desirable that his death is not unsightly. The last moments of a man's life reveal his true character. Die cleanly, without complaint, without unseemly struggle. Your death is the final statement of your life. Make it worthy. There are many stories in the records of the domain about warriors who faced death with extraordinary composure. One was told that he had a fatal illness and would die within the month. He thanked the physician for the information, went home, settled all his affairs, wrote letters to everyone he wished to address, and spent his remaining days training as usual. On the morning of his death, he rose, dressed in formal attire, sat in the proper position, and died sitting upright. His attendants did not even realize he had passed until they came to bring him tea.

A certain old retainer told me: “Young men think they are immortal. That is why they waste time, procrastinate, and put off important matters until tomorrow. An old man knows better. He knows that tomorrow is a gift that may not come. If young men could borrow an old man’s understanding of death for just one week, they would accomplish more in those seven days than in all the years that came before.” I believe this is true. The sense of urgency that comes from an awareness of death is the most powerful motivating force I have ever encountered. It makes all other motivations — ambition, pride, even duty — seem pale by comparison.

It is said that the essence of the warrior’s Way can be found in death. This does not mean that the warrior should seek death or welcome it eagerly. It means that by fully accepting the reality of death, the warrior is freed from the hesitation, the calculation, and the cowardice that plague those who cling to life. When there is nothing left to lose, there is nothing left to fear. And when there is nothing left to fear, the warrior can act with perfect clarity. This is the practical benefit of the death meditation: not morbidity, not resignation, but clarity.

Consider the morning dew on the grass. It sparkles in the sunlight, beautiful and brilliant. By midday, it is gone. Human life is the same. We shine for a brief moment and then disappear. Understanding this is not cause for sadness. It is cause for urgency. Do not waste your brief shining on things unworthy of you. I am now an old man living in retirement, and I can tell you that the years pass with a speed that would terrify a young man if he could truly grasp it. What seems like an unlimited future when you are twenty reveals itself as a brief flash when you are sixty. Use the time you have. You have less of it than you think.

There is a story of a samurai who was asked on his deathbed whether he had any regrets. He said: “I regret nothing I did. I regret only the things I failed to do because I was afraid.” This should be the measure by which every warrior evaluates his day. At nightfall, ask yourself: did I hold back today because of fear? If so, tomorrow you must do better. Do not let the accumulation of small cowardices define your life. Each time you hold back when you should act, the habit of holding back grows stronger. Each time you act despite your fear, the habit of courage grows stronger. You are building one habit or the other with every choice you make.

When a companion dies, honour his memory by living more fully. Do not wallow in grief. The dead have no use for your tears. They would rather you took the time you might spend mourning and used it to act with purpose and integrity. Grieve briefly and privately, then return to your duties with renewed determination. There is a story about a warrior whose closest companion was killed beside him in battle. He wrapped the body in his own cloak, marked the spot, and continued fighting. That night, after the battle was won, he returned to the spot, carried the body home, and arranged a proper funeral. Then he sat alone through the night and wept. In the morning, he was at his post as usual. That is the warrior’s way of grieving: not the suppression of grief, but the governance of it.

The warrior who is prepared for death each morning is also the warrior who takes the greatest joy in life. This is the paradox at the heart of the Way. Those who accept death most fully are those who live most intensely. They savour each moment because they know it may be their last. They act with energy because they know their time is limited. They treat others with kindness because they know that every encounter may be the final one. The man who avoids thinking about death does not live more joyfully. He lives with an undercurrent of anxiety that he cannot name, because he is always running from the one thing he cannot escape.

A master swordsman was once asked how he could fight with such calm when his life hung in the balance. He replied: “My life does not hang in the balance. I gave it away years ago. When you fight to preserve something you have already surrendered, there is no tension, no anxiety. The blade moves freely because there is nothing binding it.” This is the ultimate expression of the death meditation applied to combat. The swordsman who has surrendered his life does not fight to survive. He fights because fighting is what he was trained to do. The outcome is irrelevant. The fight itself is everything. And paradoxically, this state of total detachment from the outcome often produces the best outcome, because the swordsman’s movements are unhindered by fear.

There was a saying in the Nabeshima domain: “A samurai’s life is like the cherry blossom. Even at its most glorious, the blossom is ready to fall.” This is not melancholy. It is pride. The cherry blossom does not apologise for its brief life. It blooms with everything it has, and when the wind comes, it lets go. That is the Way. The blossom that clings to the branch past its time becomes brown and ugly. The blossom that falls at its peak is remembered as beautiful. So it is with warriors. The warrior who dies at the height of his powers, in service to his lord, having lived with complete commitment — his name endures. The warrior who clings to life, compromising and retreating, preserving himself at the expense of his honour — his name is forgotten, or worse, remembered with contempt.

Do not mistake the contemplation of death for morbidity. The warrior who thinks about death every morning is not gloomy. He is the most alive person in the room. He has perspective that others lack. He knows what matters and what does not. He does not waste his energy on things that will mean nothing when the end comes. This clarity is the great gift of the warrior’s Way. I have lived by this practice for many years, and I can say that it has not made me sad or fearful. It has made me grateful — grateful for every morning I wake, for every meal I eat, for every conversation I have with a friend. When you know that each of these things may be the last, you experience them with a vividness that the complacent man can never know.

Additional Passages

A warrior must never show exhaustion. When your companions are weary, they look to you for strength. If you too appear weary, their spirits will fail. Even if your legs are shaking and your lungs are burning, keep your face composed and your posture erect. After the others have rested, then you may rest — in private, where no one can see. This principle applies not only in battle but in daily life. A warrior who visibly struggles with ordinary tasks cannot inspire confidence in extraordinary ones.

It is said that the Way lies in training. This is so, but it is only half the truth. The Way also lies in living. A man who trains diligently for two hours each day but lives carelessly for the remaining twenty-two has missed the point entirely. The Way is not something you do at certain times. It is something you are at all times. A warrior's bearing in the training hall should be the same as his bearing in the marketplace, at the dinner table, and on the road. If there is a difference, then the bearing in the training hall is performance, and the bearing outside it is truth.

When you hear gossip about someone, do not repeat it. If the gossip is false, you spread a lie. If the gossip is true, you spread a truth that was not yours to share. In either case, you have acted dishonourably. The warrior keeps his own counsel and does not participate in the small cruelties of rumour. I would add that gossip reveals more about the speaker than about the subject. The man who gossips about others' failings is usually trying to distract attention from his own.

When someone speaks, listen with your full attention. Do not think about what you will say next. Do not compose your reply while the other person is still speaking. This is not merely courtesy. It is training for the warrior's mind, which must learn to be fully present rather than always racing ahead to the next thing. I have noticed that the best leaders in the domain are without exception the best listeners. They hear not only the words but the meaning behind the words, the hesitation, the emphasis, the things left unsaid. This skill is developed only through practice — through the discipline of giving another person your full, undivided attention, over and over again, until it becomes natural.

A certain warrior was famous for his unshakeable calm. Someone asked him: "How did you develop this quality?" He replied: "By deciding, thirty years ago, that I would not permit any external event to disturb my inner composure. At first it was difficult. I failed many times. But over the years, it became a habit, and now I could not be disturbed even if I tried." He then said something I have never forgotten: "People think that composure is a feeling. It is not. It is a decision. You decide to be composed, and then you practise the decision until it becomes part of you. The feeling follows the decision, not the other way around."

There is a teaching: "See first with your mind, then with your eyes." This means that before you look at a situation, you should prepare your mind to see clearly. If your mind is cluttered with assumptions, opinions, and preconceptions, your eyes will see only what your mind expects to see. Clear the mind first. Then look. This principle applies to the assessment of enemies, the evaluation of terrain, and the judgement of men's characters. In all cases, the first task is to empty the mind of what it thinks it knows, so that it can be filled with what is actually there.

A warrior does not complain. Not about the weather, not about the food, not about his superiors, not about his circumstances. Not because complaining is impolite, but because it is useless. Complaining changes nothing and wastes energy that could be spent on action. If a thing can be changed, change it. If it cannot be changed, endure it silently. These are the only two options

available to a warrior. There is no third option of complaining about it, because complaining is neither changing nor enduring — it is simply making noise, and noise without purpose is beneath a warrior's dignity.

It is unwise to speak badly of others, even when the criticism is deserved. Words travel. They are heard by people you did not intend to hear them. They are repeated in contexts you did not foresee. And eventually, they return to the person you spoke about, distorted and enlarged. Better to say nothing at all, or if you must speak, speak directly to the person concerned. I have seen more feuds, more broken alliances, and more ruined careers caused by careless speech than by deliberate malice. A single careless word can undo a decade of careful service.

When you find yourself in agreement with the majority, pause and reconsider. This is not because the majority is always wrong. It is because the warrior must think for himself. If your agreement is genuine and considered, it stands. If your agreement is merely the comfortable path of following others, it is weakness. The warrior's duty is to arrive at his own judgement, even when that judgement happens to align with everyone else's. The process matters as much as the conclusion.

A retainer once asked: "What is the most important quality in a warrior?" The answer given was: "That he cares more about the outcome than about his own comfort." This single quality, fully developed, encompasses everything else — courage, discipline, loyalty, and skill. All of these are simply manifestations of placing the mission above the self. The warrior who cares more about the outcome will be courageous, because courage is required to achieve difficult outcomes. He will be disciplined, because discipline is required to maintain focus on the outcome. He will be loyal, because loyalty is required to serve the larger purpose. And he will be skilled, because skill is required to produce the desired result.

There is a story about a young samurai who complained to his teacher that he was not improving quickly enough. The teacher said: "You are improving exactly as quickly as your effort deserves. If you want faster progress, train harder. If you are unwilling to train harder, accept your current pace without complaint. But do not ask the river to flow faster while standing on the bank." The teacher then added: "I will tell you a secret. There is no such thing as fast progress. There is only consistent effort over time. The warriors who seem to progress quickly are not more talented than you. They are simply more consistent. They train every day without fail, while you train when you feel like it. Over months and years, that difference in consistency produces what looks like a difference in talent. But it is not talent. It is habit."

When drinking with companions, a warrior should know his limits and stop before he reaches them. Nothing ruins a man's reputation faster than drunken behaviour. The man who was dignified and respected at the beginning of the evening becomes a figure of contempt by the end of it. And the things said and done while drunk cannot be unsaid or undone. Guard your sobriety as you would guard your sword. There is a further danger in drinking: it loosens the tongue. Things that a sober warrior would never say — about his lord, about his companions, about his private resentments — come pouring out when the sake flows. The next morning, the words cannot be recalled, but the

damage they caused remains. I have known retainers who lost their positions because of a single evening's drinking. The sake lasted one night. The consequences lasted a lifetime.

It is the custom when setting out on a journey to announce your departure clearly and to arrange your affairs as though you may not return. This is not superstition. It is the warrior's habit of readiness applied to the ordinary circumstances of life. Settle your debts, complete your duties, leave clear instructions, and set out with a clear mind. A warrior should be able to depart at any moment — whether on a journey, or from this life — without leaving a mess behind him for others to clean up.

There is a certain spirit in a man who is ready. You can see it in the way he enters a room, the way he sits, the way his eyes move. Other men sense this spirit without being able to name it, and they defer to it instinctively. This spirit cannot be faked. It comes only from genuine preparation — physical, mental, and spiritual. I have seen men try to imitate it through posture and expression, but the imitation is always detectable. The genuine article comes from within, and no amount of external mimicry can reproduce what is produced by years of disciplined preparation.

A warrior should not be excessively attached to his own opinions. Rigidity of mind is a form of weakness. The water that flows around obstacles reaches the sea. The water that insists on a single course dries up in the riverbed. Be firm in your principles but flexible in your methods. This distinction is crucial. Principles do not change — honour, duty, loyalty, courage. Methods must change constantly, adapting to circumstances. The warrior who confuses the two, treating methods as principles or principles as methods, will either break when he should bend or bend when he should hold firm.

There is nothing wrong with making mistakes, provided you recognise them and correct them. The warrior who makes no mistakes is either lying or doing nothing of consequence. But the warrior who makes the same mistake twice has revealed a dangerous flaw: he is not paying attention. The first time is learning. The second time is negligence. There is no excuse for the third time.

An old retainer said: "The secret of a long life of service is this: do your duty each day, take care of your health, and do not make enemies unnecessarily. The first ensures that you are useful. The second ensures that you are able. The third ensures that you are not destroyed before your time." This is plain advice, without any poetry or grandeur, and that is precisely what makes it valuable. The grand teachings about death and honour are important, but this old retainer's simple formula kept more warriors in service and out of trouble than all the lofty philosophies combined.

The bonds between warriors who have trained together are unlike any other bonds. They have shared hardship, pushed each other beyond their limits, seen each other at their worst, and helped each other recover. These bonds should be honoured and maintained. The warrior who forgets his training companions has forgotten a part of himself. When you encounter a former training

companion after years apart, the bond is still there — forged not in pleasant conversation but in shared suffering and mutual effort. No other kind of bond is as durable.

A warrior should take care when crossing a threshold. Pause at the doorway. Adjust your eyes to the light or the darkness beyond. Enter with awareness. This small habit has saved many lives. But more than that, it is a metaphor for all transitions. Whenever you move from one state to another — from peace to conflict, from solitude to company, from rest to action — pause, adjust, and enter with full awareness. The moment of transition is the moment of greatest vulnerability, and the warrior who hurries through it without attention is inviting disaster.

There was a story told among the retainers about a ronin who spent seventeen years planning to avenge his murdered master. During those years, he lived in poverty and disgrace. He took menial work, endured insults, and was mocked by other samurai who did not know his purpose. Several times he had the opportunity to strike at his master's killer, but the circumstances were not right — the man was too well guarded, or witnesses were present who would have prevented escape. Each time, the ronin withdrew and waited. After seventeen years, the opportunity came. The killer, grown old and careless, was walking with only one attendant on a country road. The ronin stepped out, announced who he was and why he had come, and killed the man in a single cut. Then he took the head to his master's grave and placed it there as an offering. When asked afterward whether seventeen years of misery had been worth it, he said: "Every moment of those seventeen years was worth it. A man who cannot endure hardship in service of his duty does not deserve to call himself a samurai." The story was told to remind young warriors that true resolve is measured not in moments but in years, and that patience in service of a righteous purpose is itself a form of courage.

Lord Naoshige had many sayings that were recorded and passed down through the domain. Among the most important were these: "An ancestor is someone you should strive to surpass, not someone you should merely imitate." And: "The arts of peace and the arts of war are like the two wheels of a cart — the cart cannot move with only one." And: "A warrior who cannot control his tongue cannot control anything else." And: "Do not depend on the approval of others. If you know in your heart that your action was right, that is sufficient." These sayings were taught to every retainer in the Nabeshima domain, and they formed the practical foundation of the clan's values. Naoshige was not a philosopher. He was a practical man who had fought real battles and led real men. His sayings carry the weight of experience, not merely of thought.

I have observed that the decline of warrior virtues in our time has a single root cause: comfort. The warriors of the old days lived hard lives. They faced real danger, real hunger, real cold. These hardships forged their character as a hammer forges a blade. Today's warriors live in comfort. They eat well. They sleep in warm rooms. They face no danger more pressing than a bureaucratic dispute. And so their characters soften, as a blade softens when it is never used. The remedy is deliberate hardship. A warrior who lives in comfort must impose hardship upon himself — through rigorous training, through voluntary austerity, through the refusal to make excuses for himself. The old warriors had hardship thrust upon them. We must choose it voluntarily. The result is the same, but the choosing requires a different kind of strength.

There was a retainer who served three generations of lords with such devotion that when he finally retired, the current lord said: “I am losing the most valuable man in the domain.” The retainer was not especially talented. He was not a great swordsman or a brilliant strategist. His value was simpler than that: he showed up every day, he did his duty without complaint, he never sought recognition, and he never gave less than his best. Over forty years of service, this consistency produced something that no amount of talent could match. His lord trusted him absolutely, because forty years of reliable service is the only evidence of trustworthiness that cannot be faked.

A warrior should not fear growing old. Old age brings wisdom that youth cannot possess, because wisdom requires experience, and experience requires time. The old warrior who has maintained his discipline is a formidable figure — not because his body is strong, but because his mind is sharp and his character is proven. Young warriors would do well to seek out such men and listen to them carefully. The old warriors will not be here forever, and when they are gone, their knowledge goes with them unless someone has taken the trouble to learn it.

This is the essence of what I have learned in my years of service and reflection: the Way of the warrior is simple, though not easy. Live as though you are already dead. Serve your lord with complete devotion. Train every day without fail. Conduct yourself with honour in all things. Accept death when it comes, without complaint and without regret. These five principles, fully embraced and consistently practiced, are sufficient. Everything else is commentary.

End of Selected Passages