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Sword and Spirit:
Bushido in Practice from the Late Sengoku Era through the Edo Period

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Sword and Spirit: Bushido in Practice from the late Sengoku era through the Edo period

By Joe Lovatt

The Samurai possessed a strict code of ethics known as Bushido (the way of the warrior), which allowed them to become some of the greatest warrior the world has ever known. However, there were different embodiments of this system, personifications that two Samurai themselves have documented in two of the most well known books ever written by Samurai; *The Book of Five Rings* by Miyamoto Musashi and *Hagakure*, by Yamamoto Tsunetomo. Bushido has usually been considered an ethical code that was set to a certain standard, just as the ten commandments are. This analysis suggests that it was in fact not a set of moral laws, but that bushido was embodied differently by every Samurai. Bushido was ultimately a guideline, just like rules in religion. It was a path that one was to adhere to as well as they could, but history has made it clear that it depended upon the circumstances in which a Samurai lived; the life of a Samurai in the twelfth century would filled with fighting for their master and practical use of the code; far different from that of a Samurai living during the first half of the 1800's, who would be keeping track of the business operations of their master instead of fighting. Because of these differing conditions, Bushido has changed constantly through time, proving that they Way of the Warrior was far more than an established ideal; it was a deeply personal code.

Bushido's derivative word, *bushi*, was the original term for the upper warrior classes. The spiritual aspects of it arose from two main sources: Buddhism and Shintoism.

Buddhism provided the necessary components for bravery in the face of death. Buddhism furnished a sense of calm trust in fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable, that stoic composure in sight of danger or calamity, that disdain of life and friendliness with death.¹

Zen Buddhism, another integral part of Bushido, took hold with the Samurai after its introduction to Japan in the twelfth century. From its teachings Samurai learned how to meditate; employing this technique would help the attempt to reach enlightenment.

Shintoism supplied the ideals in Bushido that Buddhism was unable to provide, rounding out the code of ethics. Such loyalty to the sovereign, such reverence for ancestral memory, and such filial piety as are not taught by any other creed, were inculcated by the Shinto doctrines, imparting passivity to the otherwise arrogant character of the Samurai.²

Selfless devotion and a welcoming of death seem very courageous, but there was more to Bushido than displaying bravery in the field and mediation. Benevolence was another component, emphasizing feeling for others and love for the human soul. Samurai were also to be polite and respectful, as were all Japanese; they are customs that those in Japan still take very seriously. They were always to seek the truth, justice and hold their duty to their master as their greatest responsibility. Bushido also dictated that Samurai be educated men of culture, capable of appreciating fine art, or the simple pleasure of a cup of tea. Controlling ones emotions at all times was paramount, most of all when faced with the action of Seppuku (ritualistic suicide). A death poem would first be written, after which the warrior who was to die would kneel down on both knees and cut their abdomen open, after which another Samurai would cut the head off of the one engaged in the suicide. What dishonored them could range from loosing a battle for their master to being humiliated; the thing they all shared in common was that their blood was meant to

cleanse their failure and restore their lost honor. Other parts of the bushido philosophy cover methods of raising kids, what one's appearance should be, grooming and, most of all, constant preparation for death. One might say that death is at the very center of bushido as the overall purpose to die a good, honorable death with one's honor intact.

Bushido was institutionalized under the Tokugawa regime, and it became law for only Samurai to be able to carry weapons in public. The Bushido code consisted of these seven virtues; rectitude, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honor and loyalty, and were put into law as such. Samurai also began to have more in common bureaucratic nobles than the lifestyle of a warrior, leading to differing views of the warrior code. They were basically paid to draw calligraphy and drink; their swords became symbols of power instead of actual weapons. Samurai still possessed the rights of the military class, and although they still retained the right to cut down a commoner if they disrespected them, how often that actually happened remains a mystery. The government also made *Daimyos* reduce the size of their armies, and thus created the social problem of the *Ronin*; unemployed Samurai that would wander the country and cause trouble. Although institutional Bushido would come to an end in 1873 as a result of the Meiji Restoration, the concept of Bushido lived on through World War II into today, as several Japanese businessmen employ it. Some of them have taken the approach that "business is war", and have adjusted their tactics to fit those ramifications.

The approach taken in this analysis is to compare and contrast the differing views of Musashi and Tsunetomo, thus proving bushido's adjustability. The books which they authored reveal their beliefs regarding bushido, and those beliefs are very different. Miyamoto Musashi was a man of action; he fought in battles and had several duels.

Yamamoto Tsunetomo was a man of study; he was never in a duel or a battle, instead leading the life of a bureaucrat. Their different experiences shaped their views of bushido, as did the different eras that they lived in. The Sengoku era was a time of war, bloodshed and violence; Musashi lived through all of this and his views of are understandably different than Tsunetomo, who lived during the peaceful reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In addition to these differences, the key component to the difference in attitude regarding bushido is that of service to a master. Miyamoto Musashi never had a master to serve, resulting in him being a fiercely independent warrior. Without a master, Musashi was free to interpret bushido by himself. Yamamoto Tsunetomo on the other hand had served a master for all of his life until that master died, resulting in an intensely devout sense of duty. Without the need to fight, the bureaucratic Tsunetomo followed the established idealized code of bushido exactly, and without any real world experience in battle, the bushido code placed into law would be far easier to follow.

Sword- The Life of Miyamoto Musashi

Arguably the most well known Samurai of all time, Miyamoto Musashi is also the author of *The Book of Five Rings*, which details different aspects of tactics, philosophy and strategy that he found to be the most useful. Musashi, who fought his first duel at thirteen (and won), traveled all over Japan engaging opponents in duels, and he never lost a match. Living from 1584 to 1645, he participated in battles of the *Sengoku* era opposing the Tokugawa clan, after which he understandably decided to keep a low profile. He lived most of his life in squalor and filth, because one could be caught without a sword while

bathing, but nonetheless crafted a distinctive style of fighting that is still studied in great detail to this very day. The book which he authored is centered on single combat or one engaging multiple enemies; there is no advice on how to be a great leader like there is in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

The Book of Five Rings guides its readers through five different chapters pertaining to five different symbolic elements; earth, water, fire, wind and the book of no-thingness. Interestingly enough, the idea of the five rings is also prevalent in Esoteric Buddhism. Musashi was not a follower of any one religion as he states that he wasn't a particularly religious person, but knew of Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism, as well as being aware of their tenets. He was, however, a huge proponent of meditation, which is mentioned several times in *The Book of Five Rings* as a method to gain a deeper understanding of his teachings, and is a component of Zen Buddhism, which is also a large component of later bushido. In the doctrine of Shingon Buddhism, it is claimed that the esoteric teachings weren't instructed to humans by the founder of Buddhism, Gautama, but by the universal Buddha; existence itself. This Buddha is known as Vairocana, and author William Scott Wilson explains the representation of him very well:

Vairocana is manifested in a number of artistic forms, but in Japan he is often represented by the five-tiered stone pagoda, or *sotoba*, also called the *gorinto*, or Tower of Five Rings (*Gorin no sho* is the Japanese title of Musashi's book; *sho* means book). This *gorinto* is usually constructed as follows: a square stone at the bottom represents the Earth Element, or stability and the fundamental element of being; next, a round stone represents the Water Element, or permeation and vacuity; a triangular stone represents the Fire Element, or purity and perfect activity; a crescent-shaped stone represents the Wind Element, or growth and perfect awareness; and, at the top, a stone in the shape of a mani-jewel (wish-fulfilling gem) represents the Void Element, or space.³

Even though he wasn't a devout Buddhist, it's obvious that the beliefs and practices had some influence on him. All of the elements in the book line up exactly with the form of Vairocana that is prevalent in Japan.

The Book of earth is the introduction to Musashi's methods, and details strategy, the ability to lead (not being a leader or the actions they should take), and ways of training, always with an emphasis on studying and practice; the constant strive for perfection. The "Way" of different paths of life are explained, as Musashi explains that a craftsman must know the quality of materials of the materials he uses, just as a warrior must know his weapons and how to properly use them. Although he never directly refers to Bushido, he does mention the "Way of the warrior" and explains it very well, stating that a warrior needs to have an understanding of the peaceful arts as well as the killing arts. Musashi believed that a warrior should study every weapon, not just their preferred one. In doing this, a warrior will be able to engage an enemy of any kind and still remain victorious. The warrior, however, understands that the end result of any study is a kind of death, transcendent, not necessarily a physical death, before the achievement of perfection. Although no warrior will ever be able to be without error in any one weapon, there is no evidence in the writing that the Way of bushido is ultimately a way of death.

Once again, Wilson makes things very clearly.

Musashi, however, completely rejected this concept. For him, the Way of the Warrior was to wear two swords into battle, to be able to use those swords well, and to defeat the enemy. Death would eventually come to everyone, and resolve in the face of death was not the crucial point distinguishing the samurai from other classes in society.⁴

Every weapon is also explained to have its own “spirit”; every weapon needs to be used in the right place to truly be efficient and enable the wielder to fully harness its attributes in battle.

Thirdly, the Book of water is primarily concerned with the strategy of sword combat; how one should stand, hold a sword, look at an enemy and proper footwork. Some different environments of combat such as indoors or outdoors are addressed, and details about which direction one should face or where one should place themselves is explained. In great detail five different positions of attack inform the reader of where to strike and the corresponding attacks, as well as how to engage more than one enemy in combat. One thing stressed is the proper mindset that must be held in a fight in addition to the right technique.

Regardless of combat circumstances, you must always remain calm. Calmness is attained through meditation and belief in your own skills. It is not to be confused with egotistical technique, which generally fails under intense combat situations. Do not try to use techniques that do not fit the situation.⁵

Through out the book of water issues such as belief, spirituality and one’s own outlook on life are addressed. Two tenets of bushido are touched on constantly, those being courage and honor. If a warrior doesn’t possess the proper mindset for all of these things in the Way of the warrior, they will surely fail. At the end of the section, it is stressed that the main purpose of the book of water is to teach the reader how to become a warrior using Musashi’s method of strategy. If one does not understand every line in it, the strategy won’t work for them; one has got to understand the five approaches and five strategies for combat because they’re the principals of his strategy and combat. They will work regardless if someone is fighting one person or several. Musashi’s opinion of what bushido really entails is then revealed on the last page, stating that a warrior needs to

remember that they must kill the enemy, because not doing so is not the Way of the warrior.

The Book of Fire details different methods of fighting, but not in step by step instructions like the book of Water. Instructions of how to assess a situation to one's advantage are given, as are some specifics for certain situations. Musashi suggests that a warrior needs to be able to use everything to their advantage all of the time; he suggests keeping the sun behind oneself in outdoor bouts as to quell an enemy's sight and perceptive capabilities. The misconception that some people possess about Samurai winning a fight or fighting to the death is completely dispelled in this chapter, because Musashi explains that there is nothing wrong with escaping from combat if you are overwhelmed and honestly can't win the fight. In the book *The Samurai and the Sacred*, author Stephen Turnbull explains that Samurai without a master didn't see bushido as a binding death contract. The ability to gain the right location in battle is revealed to be crucial. There are three strategies to controlling an enemy, and while they are all explained, what they boil down to is to attack to keep them off balance, thus making them defensive, step back from their attack and draw them in, or when both of you attack, be the one stronger in spirit. This is the essence of fighting, and there is nothing else to it. Advantage is never to be given, and if it happens, you die. Spirit is a major part of this, as most of the teaching in this chapter is more about psychological warfare instead of straightforward fighting techniques. The concept of using screams in combat to scare the living daylights out of an enemy is detailed, and Musashi's explanation is much more practical than the average impression seems to be:

There are only three times when you can scream fiercely in combat: before, during and after. Shouting and screaming are the same as long as they fulfill their

purpose, which is to terrify the enemy. At the beginning of a battle, you should shout to unsettle the enemy. During the battle, you should shout during each attack to maintain your own resoluteness of spirit. After you have slain the enemy, you should shout to indicate your winning resolve to honor the “spirit of the thing itself.” Never shout before or after a particular technique is executed, but rather at the moment you are making a strike. This helps to maintain rhythm. The shout and the strike are not two different things.⁶

Feigning weakness is also explained in detail as a means to open up a weakness in the enemy. A warrior needs to manipulate an enemy into sensing that they are in control, and at the right time strike a crippling blow. It’s also explained how to execute this method against a large group of enemies, most likely by exploiting a weak spot and infiltrating into the core of a group to defeat the leader of the group. The book of fire is a change from the previous two books in that there isn’t much about bushido. He made a subtle shift here, however, demonstrating that geographical advantages are psychological, and he quickly moved to an emphasis on psychological techniques that continues throughout the chapter.⁷

The book of Wind discusses the different attitudes of different schools of fighting during Musashi’s lifetime. It is the only chapter of the book that doesn’t really contain too much relevant information for modern times, only that a warrior must understand the way of an enemy as much as possible. From the very beginning, Musashi explains that his school is different; he casts out the flashy uniforms in favor of comfort, the exact form of a technique in favor of realistic technique that can be employed in his school’s strategy. Bushido is clearly addressed as well, though as the Way of the warrior again. Bushido isn’t about attending a prestigious martial arts school that has a long line of high status students. A school like this is only trying to use the sword as a way in which it can make money; this is in no way, shape or form the Way of the warrior. Some schools used

to use certain kinds of tricks to get Samurai to study at their schools during the late Sengoku era and the earlier half of the Edo in which Musashi lived through. These tricks, such as the use of an extra long sword to keep an enemy at bay, or use of fancy foot work and twirls greatly angered him. He also points out that some schools suggest switching hands with regard to weapon use, and flat out says it's stupid. The wisdom of his experience is hard to understand sometimes, but in a section entitled *The Strong Sword Spirit and the Weak Sword Spirit in other schools*, the real truth to his strategy speaks volumes;

Your strength is not your own, nor is your speed. Forcing yourself to cut more strongly than is necessary will result in a possible loss of control of your weapon. Attempting to strike overly fast can also cause you to lose your balance. Strategy is based on quickness and not speed, power not strength.⁸

Musashi was the ultimate fighter of his time, and also addressed false attitudes. He indicates that they work very well when there are no enemies around, but in battle they will quickly get you killed. All of the falseness of the styles that existed during his lifetime are clearly explained. Thus, in exposing the faults of other styles, Musashi criticized hypocrisy, the kind of thinking that limits the martial arts to sword technique and, most importantly, the deep attachment to form and equipment that could scotch a student's freedom of movement and mind.⁹ In the conclusion of the book of wind, Musashi states that every man has his own path and that it is up to them what that path will be, indicating that he also believed in free will, somewhat negating the notion of loyalty to a master. Musashi made his own success; he didn't do it in the name of anyone except for himself. If it weren't for his philosophical summing up during the end, it would also seem that Miyamoto didn't really possess much concern for the respect virtue

of bushido, though his reasons for his opinions are thoroughly explained to come off much less harsh than is initially perceived.

The Book of nothing is the shortest chapter in the manuscript, but it is the deepest and most intellectually intense chapter of the entire work. There is no mention of any techniques, no talk of tactics and certainly nothing pertaining to physical warfare of any kind at all. The true mindset of Musashi is revealed, that being his Way of strategy. Philosophically, all views of the universe are explained clearly, yet at the same time mystically; this allows the reader to embrace his teachings in what ever art it is that they choose and ultimately in almost any walk of life. The will of existence is empty; it is no one thing at all. Man is unable to understand existence in its entirety; everything exists, but at the same time nothing does. Knowing means existing, and therefore if something is not known to you, it doesn't exist. If a person is a music enthusiast and extremely enjoy one genre of music more than any other and have never heard of a style of music that exists half way across the world (and never will), it doesn't exist to them. Sometimes people look at the world without the right level of perception and don't understand what they see; they think that it's a place of nothingness, and it's not the right way to think. People that study strategy and don't comprehend nothingness don't really understand that their craft isn't right; everything is revealed to them as they want it to be, by their own designations.

In order to understand Musashi's strategy, one has to study as many different forms of the martial arts as possible and never stray from that path. Through diligent practice every single day, true nothingness will be revealed to the student as the "spirit of the thing itself". The way of the warrior, therefore, is only attained through constant

practice. When the student really understands the universe in contrast to their art (killing, painting, or music) and that art in relation to the universe, they will come to understand nothingness. This is a difficult concept to grasp at first, but when it comes down to it, it's really quite simple, don't take anything for granted, and don't put an emphasis on the things of men, because in the end, they really don't matter.

No matter how hard one studies, if they do not embrace their chosen art completely they will never be one with existence, and the "spirit of the thing itself" will never be found by them. Nothing is as it seems, but looking at things without involving any emotion will allow you to know your place. The art is more important than the artist; looking at life with a broader perspective lets one know this. Again one of the tenets of bushido is shown that it doesn't necessarily apply to every Samurai, that tenet being rectitude. There is virtue in the universe, but students shouldn't confuse it with the difference between good and evil. The Way of the warrior is then summed up to be one thing: nothingness, although it shouldn't be thought of as a "thing" because it would then be conceptualized, and therefore wouldn't be no-thing. There is nothing outside of one's self that will ever enable anyone to become better, faster, wealthier, more intelligent or stronger. Everything is within one's self; everything exists. Never pursue anything outside of yourself.

Understanding what exists allows you to understand that which does not, meaning that even though it is not possible to know that which doesn't exist, there are limitless possibilities in the universe. The way of the warrior possesses no such thing as thought, what is meant by this is that the spirit of nothingness requires one to rely on nothing except for the warrior's mind. Once again, the insight of Zen thinking is explained to inform that

conceptual thinking needs to be halted. One needs to quit thinking about what they “feel” is right or wrong. Because the universe is nothingness, there isn’t any reason to try to attempt at perfection. Perfection is all there and realizing this allows you to understand Musashi’s Way of strategy as well as the Way of the warrior. Then you can forget about it and just be it. Simply be; YOU are the Spirit of the Thing itself!¹⁰

Miyamoto Musashi believed that self actualization was the path of bushido. The seven virtues that would be institutionalized under the Tokugawa regime had their place in his personal philosophy and outlook on life, but it is clear that there were parts of the code that he thought in complete opposite fashion. Bushido wasn’t a large part of Musashi’s life; he never became a retainer to a master nor dishonored himself and therefore didn’t have to really ever consider *seppuku*. Although he came to great fame during his lifetime and had disciples, he was a loner. His independence allowed him to become greater than anyone else had ever been, or would ever be. Musashi eventually crafted his own code of ethics; his own bushido. His tenets were comprised of honest thinking, forging one’s self in the Way (of the warrior), touching on all of the arts, knowing the Ways of all jobs/crafts, knowing the benefits and drawbacks of everything, crafting a perceptive eye in every matter, understanding that which can’t be seen by the eye, paying attention to everything (even small things), and not to involve one’s self with the impractical. Is all of this possible? For your average person, it’s probably not, but it was for Miyamoto Musashi.

Spirit- The Life of Yamamoto Tsunetomo

Fourteen years after Musashi's death, a Samurai by the name of Yamamoto Tsunetomo was born. Tsunetomo went into service as a retainer for Nabeshima Mitsushige as a child and served his master faithfully for thirty years. On the 16th of May 1700, Mitsushige died aged sixty nine years, and Tsunetomo, being one of his closest retainers, wished to follow his master into death by committing seppuku. However, decrees from his own fief and by the recent law the Tokugawa regime had past forbade him from taking this action. Yamamoto was extremely dissatisfied with his master's successor as well, and this led him to apply for permission to retire from the way of the samurai and become a Buddhist priest. His request was granted, and so during the summer he moved to an out of the way location named Kurotsuchibaru (twelve kilometers or so north of Saga Castle), living there as somewhat of a recluse. Ten years later Tsunetomo began to be visited by a young samurai by the name of Tashiro Tsuramoto. This young man had been released from his service as a scribe a year earlier, and his reasons for visiting Tsunetomo are unknown, but their conversations lasted for seven full years.

These conversations were recorded by the young Tsuramoto and were compiled as a book with the title of *Hagakure* on the tenth of September, 1716. Three years after this, Tsunemoto died at the age of sixty one. *Hagakure* has also come to be known as the Book of the Samurai; Tsunemoto's views of the Way of the warrior and bushido are given very clearly, but it isn't a clearly formatted text such as the *Book of Five Rings* is, very clearly explained by the translator:

To speak of *Hagakure* it is perhaps best to state first what it is not: that is, a well-thought-out philosophy, either in the sense of containing a closely reasoned or logical argument, or in terms of subject matter. On the contrary, it contains an antiintellectual or antischolastic bent throughout, and being a record of a seven-

year-span of conversations, the subject matter varies considerably, ranging from the author's deepest feelings concerning the Way of the Samurai to discussions on the implements of the Tea Ceremony or how a certain mansion acquired its name.¹¹

This also allows the reader to more easily understand Tsunetomo's views on whatever it is he's offering his opinions or his explanations of things. Whatever is read isn't in the form of cryptic philosophy; one gets the feeling that during his lifetime Yamamoto was a fairly straightforward person. No doubt intellectually capable as well as a deeply emotional person, it is clear that the author was a rare Samurai, one that may have been capable of taking action in an era when the warrior class had become little more than bureaucrats.

The time period in which Tsunetomo lived was considerably different than that of Musashi. The Tokugawa shogunate had been in power for more than 50 years when Tsunemoto was born (1659), and Japan had been almost completely closed off from the outside world since 1635. Thus, Samurai hadn't been real warriors for 116 years when *Hagakure* was put together. Yamamoto Tsunetomo never once participated in a battle either, it is perhaps this reason why his ideals are held with such reverence; it is much easier for one who has never seen death in war first hand to claim that it is great. Musashi had seen battle, had killed many men and therefore would have seen the tenets of bushido in a more realistic light than Tsunetomo and the Samurai of his time ever could have. The samurai had to reconceive their role as something more than that of valorous fighting men when the Tokugawa peace settled on the land and the warrior of necessity needed to become an administrator, a bookkeeper, or a secretary as well.¹² The mighty warriors had become a shadow of their former selves. Working in an office everyday is far different than training for battle. Without constant maintenance, a sword will rust and become

useless, just as a warrior working outside of their element will lose their skills when not required to fight.

Perhaps *Hagakure*'s most famous passage is found in the very beginning of the book, and shows Tsunetomo's true attitude towards life, "The Way of the Samurai is found in death."¹³ He explains that there should be no choice between life and death; that death is the most courageous thing that the warrior can do, and that being able to live as though they're already dead enables them live in freedom of the Way. This is a great insight to Tsunetomo's overwhelming belief that a Samurai needs to be ready to give their life at any time for their master. In contrast to Musashi, whose belief was similar in regards of being ready to fight without concern for one's life, Tsunetomo puts the position of serving a master above all. Tsunetomo had a master to serve and did so for thirty years; Musashi was a loner and never was obligated to serve anyone but himself. Both of these Samurai possessed similar views, in that a warrior should be ready for battle and death at all times, but there is an obvious split in each Samurai's view of bushido; Tsunetomo believed that one should fight with the intention of defending one's master no matter what the outcome may be, Musashi believed that one should fight to win with nothing more in mind than to kill the enemy. These two Samurai from different ages obviously have much different opinions regarding battle, again probably having to do with real world experience verses self righteous ideology.

Despite a complete lack of real battle experience, Tsunetomo still embodied the notion of a noble samurai. It is made obvious that he was quite the decent judge of character and the way in which human beings would behave, no doubt aiding him as a bureaucratic warrior of the Edo period. He was all too aware of the differences in his time

with the times of the Samurai's past, and this pained him to see people behaving in the ways they had begun to. Tsunetomo stated that people who were called "clever" would embellish themselves using superficial wisdom just to deceive others. He thought that because of this reason that they were inferior to unperceptive people; a dull-witted person was and still is direct. This hints very heavily at Tsunetomo's belief in the bushido tenets of benevolence and respect; people that flaunt their knowledge only to seem better than others are neither kind nor respectful. Tsunetomo obviously took the tenets of bushido very strictly instead of just as guidelines. As stated earlier, his judge of human behavior was also quite developed, showing his belief in the tenet of morality.

People will become your enemies if you become eminent too quickly in life, and you will be ineffectual. Rising slowly in the world, people will be your allies and your happiness will be assured. In the long run, whether you are fast or slow, as long as you have people's understanding there will be no danger. It is said that fortune that is urged upon you from others is the most effective.¹⁴

The principal of loyalty in bushido is also tied into Yamamoto's morals, as this knowledge reveals how people must be dealt with in order to assure the safety of one's master. A good retainer knows how to read people and how to react to each person's disposition and method of thought. Samurai must be good, but they also must know how to deal with those at the other end of the spectrum. This attitude echoes a deep understanding of the way that people behave, in accordance with the role of the Samurai during these peaceful times under the Tokugawa Shogunate.¹⁵

Yamamoto Tsunetomo's view of bushido has been revealed to be much more in line with the views of hardcore followers, but his true view of it is much more simple than most Samurai would admit bushido to be.

Lord Nabeshima Naoshige once said: "Bushido comes down to death. Even tens of people cannot kill such a person." Great things cannot be achieved by merely

being earnest. A man must become a fanatic to the extreme of being obsessed by death... The martial arts require only an obsession with death. Both loyalty and filial piety, the two other major samurai virtues, are included within this.¹⁶

This is in complete disagreement with Musashi's view of being a Samurai. Defeating the enemy is all that really mattered to Musashi, and that the ability to show determination when in danger of dying wasn't the crucial point of being a Samurai. Tsunetomo thought otherwise, although he didn't have any experience with the matter at all. In the battle of Sekigahara, Miyamoto Musashi would have seen regular conscripts showing courageous amounts of resolve in the face of death; not just the upper Samurai class. The distinguishing trait of snobbery had obviously permeated its way into the attitude of Samurai during the peace that ensued after the Tokugawa unified Japan. While Tsunetomo himself may have been a bit easier at heart than other Samurai of his time, on account of his ability to deal with difficult people, his opinions dictate a strict, albeit simple, code of bushido. This clearly illustrates a yearning within Yamamoto; he took these principles as his own because of his desire to be part of the Samurai of old, the true warrior class that would decide their fate on the battlefield just as Musashi had done, instead of keeping track of books or appointments. Tsunetomo would have been very pleased with the attitudes and actions of the Imperial forces of Japan during the Second World War, for they followed the same path of service until the death for their master, Japan itself, as he had in regards to his master. The Banzai charges of the Imperial Army would have made Tsunetomo very happy as well; their charge directly into American forces was favored over surrender to the enemy, and was a psychological shock to those on the receiving end. It is also very easy to see that he also would have regarded the

Kamikaze pilots of the era as true followers of bushido; they were performing the ultimate act of *seppuku* in service to the land of the rising sun.

In all of Tsunetomo's serious deliberations on what it means to be a Samurai or what bushido truly is, it's clear that he has an uncanny fascination with death. Perhaps this wasn't so much a fascination as it was an obsession, one that he derived from the government forbidding the act of *seppuku* on himself. It's all too clear that the only thing he wanted to do when his master died was follow him into the afterlife. The bond between himself and his master was everything to him, and he believed it with all his heart. Loyalty is said to be important in the pledge between lord and retainer. Though it may seem unobtainable, it is right before your eyes. If a samurai sets themselves to being a good retainer, at that very moment they will become one. Even when he simplified it to the main points, it's clear that he cared about his master more than anyone. Being a retainer isn't anything other than being a supporter of a master, trusting all matters of good and evil to that master, and the renouncing self-interest. Is it possible that because he couldn't take his own life that, even as a Buddhist monk, he led a sad and empty life wishing for his own death after his master died? The evidence supporting this is insurmountable; the constant statements declaring that Samurai should always live in the way of death, the strict views concerning bushido, even his disdain for what Samurai had become.

Even when there were instances of Samurai fulfilling the duty to their master, a grumpy Tsunetomo found a way to put them down. On April 21, 1701 a *daimyo* by the name of Asano Naganori was mistreated very badly by a morally corrupt and rude court official of the Tokugawa Shogunate. After drawing a dagger and striking the official in

the face inside Edo castle (which was completely forbidden, even unsheathing a sword was forbidden), Asano was restrained by the guards. Although the wound to the court official wasn't serious, Naganori was ordered to commit seppuku, his lands confiscated and his family ruined. His retainers then became *Ronin*, but these samurai would not desert their master. They carefully planned revenge on the court official and two years later stormed his house, killed him and presented his head at the grave of their master, completing their revenge. Afterwards they all committed seppuku. This is regarded in Japanese history as one of the ultimate acts of loyalty, as well as bushido. Tsunetomo had a quite different view of their actions.

Concerning the night assault of Lord Asano's *ronin*, the fact that they did not commit seppuku at the Sengakuji was an error, for there was a long delay between the time their lord was struck down and the time when they struck down the enemy. If Lord Kira (the court official) had died of illness within that period, it would have been extremely regrettable... Above all the Way of the Samurai should be in being aware that you do not know what is going to happen next, and in querying every item day and night... A real man does not think of victory or defeat. He plunges recklessly towards an irrational death. By doing this, you will awaken from your dreams.¹⁷

It is really hard not to notice that Tsunetomo contradicts his views on the importance of retainers in this passage. Somehow his mainstay position of complete support and loyalty to a master is only effective if retainers take instant action. Wasn't the fact alone that the *ronin* of Asano carefully planned revenge for two years to make sure that it was successful an extremely loyal act? The act would have failed instantly if they had taken immediate action, and failure was obviously much more insulting to Samurai of action and not words. Again, it's hard not to draw a Musashi connection from this; Musashi was a Samurai of action and believed that failure was the worst thing that could befall a warrior. Defeat isn't the Way of the Warrior, victory is; otherwise there is no point in

fighting at all. One would think that Tsunetomo himself would carry this view as well since his own master-retainer bond was so important in his life. He believed to the end that remembering one's master was the most fundamental thing for a retainer, so it doesn't make sense that there would be a time limit when it came to ensuring the honor of one's master. This is echoed by Daido Yuzan, another Samurai from the Edo period and author of *The Code of the Warrior*:

And even when out of their lord's sight and in private, there must be no relaxation and no light and shade in the loyalty and filial duty of a warrior. Wherever he may be lying down or sleeping, his feet and his weapons must never for an instant be pointing in the direction of his lord's presence. And should he hear any talk about his lord, or should anything about him escape his own lips, if he is lying down he must spring up, or if he is sitting at ease he must straighten himself up, for that is the Way of the Samurai.¹⁸

If a Samurai has as true devotion as Asano's *ronin*, they live the Way more than most, no matter if they took a little time to honor their master. They fought and they won; nothing would make a master happier.

Tsunetomo had become an extreme rarity in the later years of his life. A religious monk that wanted nothing more than to die and would have taken his own life, except for his undefeatable self control. Perhaps it was his old age and these circumstances that caused him to become extremely bitter and develop his views on life the way that he did. It is hard not to sympathize with him; he longed endlessly for the days of his and the Samurai's youth. Back in his earlier years he had a master to faithfully serve. Realizing that his caste was also a shadow of its former self would have been an equally dismaying fact of life, and the further it progressed into an administrative position and away from that of a military position would no doubt also have tugged heavily on his heart and his pride. In the last section of *Hagakure*, Tsunetomo's views of life are laid out in a

somewhat generalized fashion, and what he reveals seems quite shallow compared to a former Samurai of action. He understandably takes extreme pride in his clan's accomplishments (boasting almost overbearingly about them), but then states that education in foreign religions is wrong. In fact, his tone seems disdainful towards any learning that wouldn't directly benefit a retainer's clan, stating that for a Samurai employed as a retainer, there shouldn't be anything else on their mind besides doing their job. It is also discovered in this section that his unwavering loyalty to his master was built into his clan as part of its ethos. Yamamoto's enthusiasm is clearly stated, as he thought that "The wonder of being born into a clan with such a deep pledge between master and servant is an inexpressible blessing, passed down through the ages, for both farmer and townsman."¹⁹ At the very end of the book it's explained that the only way for one person to be inferior to another unless they have great discipline, which requires great pride. This is the key to his entire outlook on life as well as bushido; he *thinks* he's better than most people but doesn't have any way to prove it. Nonetheless, the ways in which he keeps the enthusiasm necessary to continue on are to never be outdone in the Way of the Samurai, to be of good use to one's master, to be respectful to one's parents, and (a bit contradictory perhaps) to summon great compassion and act for the sake of mankind. Even in a last boast he stays true to his code of bushido, which wasn't necessarily possible or appropriate for every Samurai, but it worked very well for him.

From the examination of *The Book of Five Rings* and *Hagakure*, it's clear that bushido wasn't a code set in stone; it was an adjustable code of ethics. Miyamoto Musashi and Yamamoto Tsunetomo were accomplished individuals, but more than anything they embody the over all Spirit of the Samurai in their own times. The Sengoku

era called for Samurai to take to heart the real life experience that they earned in war; during battles they would have witnessed events that altered their perceptions of everything. Bloodshed and violence have a tendency to change a man; during the heat of battle rules become guidelines and sometimes those guidelines get thrown out the window. The only thing that matters is surviving, and while the Samurai were renowned for being able to keep their composure in the face of certain death, they also knew that dying without achieving anything was pointless. Therefore they fought with a purpose; to win, keeping in mind that death was just a moment away. This provided them with the necessary sense of serenity to balance out the power of war.²⁰

Once peace was established by the Tokugawa clan, the alteration of bushido into a practical code all but disappeared. Without confrontation and transformed into statesmen, Samurai began to regard the system as unchangeable, and the passing of it into law furthered this perception. Without war, there is no need for the warrior. Idealized Samurai with no actual combat experience did little more than practice calligraphy and overindulge in alcohol, all the while casting judgment on the other classes of people. It was far easier for someone to declare that to live as a Samurai is to live the way of death when they are never faced with death at all. Of course, there were exceptions to this, such as Lord Asano's *ronin* avenging his death, but more noble and courageous men were far outnumbered during the changing times of the Edo period. No matter how noble a Samurai's words, if his mettle had never been tested, he is no different than anyone in the modern world. Their power had overshadowed their tranquility.

The Way of the Warrior quietly declined throughout the Edo period of Japan, leading the eventual extinction of the Samurai, though the ideals of bushido would live

on in some form or another. In 1873 the class was officially abolished, the right to carry swords in public as well as the right to cut down disrespectful peasants repealed, and for the first time in over a thousand years, there was no warrior class in Japan. The Meiji Restoration allowed the Emperor to reclaim total power instead of being a mere figurehead as he was during the reign of the Shoguns, and under his leadership it was decided that a conscript Army of modern standards was needed in favor of the warrior class. Many Samurai chose to enter the military and became officers of merit, allowing the spirit of bushido to live on in the military, though clearly adapted to fit the standards of the time. Bushido is one of the prime sources of Japan's ferocity and extremity during the Second World War; death in service of the country was seen as the greatest glory that one could achieve. After the defeat of Japan, bushido was once again altered to fit the circumstances of the country, as it had no military and no means to make war. In fact, Japan had renounced war completely. Many Japanese businessmen know the saying "business is war" all too well and have adapted bushido ethics into their business tactics, which explains how Japanese companies such as Toyota and Sony have been able to do so well. The ancient origins of the warrior codes have been drastically altered through time, but are still in use today. The spirit of bushido is ultimately the spirit of Japan and the Japanese people; it's what has allowed them to become one of the most unique countries in Asia. Thanks to the bushido code, the whole world knows of Japan's traditions. The Way of the Warrior will never disappear from the Land of the Rising Sun.

¹ Inazō Nitobe, *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan* (Rutland, Vt: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1969), 12.

² Inazō, 5.

³ William Scott Wilson, *The Lone Samurai: the Life of Miyamoto Musashi* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 2004), 159-160.

⁴ Wilson, 162.

⁵ Musashi, 34.

⁶ Musashi, 72

⁷ Sinclair, Clive. *Samurai: the weapons and spirit of the Japanese warrior*. (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2001), 155.

⁸ Musashi, 74.

⁹ Friday, Karl F. *Legacies of the Sword: the Kasima-Shinry and samurai martial culture*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 157.

¹⁰ Musashi, 106.

¹¹ Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure: the Book of the Samurai*, trans. William (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1979).

¹² Winston L King, *Zen and the way of the sword: arming the samurai psyche* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 123-124.

¹³ Tsunetomo, 17.

¹⁴ Tsunetomo, 165.

¹⁵ Screech, Timon. *The Shogun's painted culture: fear and creativity in the Japanese states, 1760-1829*. (London: Reaktion, 2000), 98.

¹⁶ Tsunetomo, 66-67.

¹⁷ Tsunetomo, 29-30.

¹⁸ Yuzan Daidoji, *Code of the samurai: a modern translation of the Bushido shoshinshu*, trans. Thomas F Cleary and Oscar Ratti (Boston: Tuttle publishing, 1999), 36-37.

¹⁹ Tsunetomo, 100.

²⁰ Vaporis, Constantine Nomikos. *Tour of dut: samurai, military service in Edo, and the culture of early modern Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 209.

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