

opposed to the shogun.

YAMAGA SOKŌ

The Way of the Samurai

The opening passage to *The Way of the Samurai (Shidō)*, which follows, lays the groundwork for Yamaga's exhaustive discussion of this subject as recorded by his disciples. Reflecting the general Neo-Confucian approach to ethics (compare, for example, Yamazaki Ansai's discussion of the guiding principles of Chu Hsi's own school), it is entitled "Establishing One's Fundamental Aim: Knowledge of One's Own Function." Here Yamaga stresses a correct understanding of one's place and function in a feudal society, and the application to it of Confucian ethics based on personal relationships.

[From *Yamaga Sokō bunshū*, pp. 45-48]

The master once said: The generation of all men and of all things in the universe is accomplished by means of the marvelous interaction of the two forces [yin and yang]. Man is the most highly endowed of all creatures, and all things culminate in man. Generation after generation men have taken their livelihood from tilling the soil, or devised and manufactured tools, or produced profit from mutual trade, so that peoples' needs were satisfied. Thus the occupations of farmer, artisan, and merchant necessarily grew up as complementary to one another. However, the samurai eats food without growing it, uses utensils without manufacturing them, and profits without buying or selling. What is the justification for this? When I reflect today on my pursuit in life [I realize that] I was born into a family whose ancestors for generations have been warriors, and whose pursuit is service at court. The samurai is one who does not cultivate, does not manufacture, and does not engage in trade, but it cannot be that he has no function at all as a samurai. He who satisfied his needs without performing any function at all would more properly be called an idler. Therefore one must devote all one's mind to the detailed examination of one's calling.

Human beings aside, does any creature in the land—bird or animal, lowly fish or insect, or insentient plant or tree—fulfill its nature by being idle? Birds and beasts fly and run to find their own food; fish and insects seek their food as they go about with one another; plants and trees put their roots ever deeper into the earth. None of them has any respite from seeking food, and none neglects for a day or an instant in a year its flying, running, or going about [for food]. All things are thus. Among

men, the farmers, artisans, and merchants also do the same. One who lives his whole life without working should be called a rebel against heaven. Hence we ask ourselves how it can be that the samurai should have no occupation; and it is only then as we inquire into the function of the samurai, that [the nature of] his calling becomes apparent. If one does not apprehend this by himself, one will depend on what others say or [understand] only what is shown in books. Since one will not then truly comprehend it with one's heart, one's purpose will not be firmly grounded. When one's purpose is not firmly grounded, owing to the long engrained bad habits of lethargy and vacillation hidden within, one will be inconstant and shallow. [In this condition] can the purpose of the samurai by any means mature? For this reason one must first establish the basic principle of the samurai. If one follows the suggestion of someone else or leaves matters to the shifting dictates of one's own heart, though one may, for example, achieve what one is about in a given instance, it is difficult for one to accomplish his purpose in any true sense.

If one deeply fixes his attention on what I have said and examines closely one's own function, it will become clear what the business of the samurai is. The business of the samurai consists in reflecting on his own station in life, in discharging loyal service to his master if he has one, in deepening his fidelity in associations with friends, and, with due consideration of his own position, in devoting himself to duty above all. However, in one's own life, one becomes unavoidably involved in obligations between father and child, older and younger brother, and husband and wife. Though these are also the fundamental moral obligations of everyone in the land, the farmers, artisans, and merchants have no leisure from their occupations, and so they cannot constantly act in accordance with them and fully exemplify the Way. The samurai dispenses with the business of the farmer, artisan, and merchant and confines himself to practicing this Way; should there be someone in the three classes of the common people who transgresses against these moral principles, the samurai summarily punishes him and thus upholds proper moral principles in the land. It would not do for the samurai to know the martial and civil virtues without manifesting them. Since this is the case, outwardly he stands in physical readiness for any call to service and inwardly he strives to fulfill the Way of the lord and subject, friend and friend, father and son, older and younger brother, and husband and wife.

Within his heart he keeps to the ways of peace, but without he keeps his weapons ready for use. The three classes of the common people make him their teacher and respect him. By following his teachings, they are enabled to understand what is fundamental and what is secondary.

Herein lies the Way of the samurai, the means by which he earns his clothing, food, and shelter; and by which his heart is put at ease, and he is enabled to pay back at length his obligation to his lord and the kindness of his parents. Were there no such duty, it would be as though one were to steal the kindness of one's parents, greedily devour the income of one's master, and make one's whole life a career of robbery and brigandage. This would be very grievous. Thus I say that one must first study in detail the duties of one's own station in life. Those who have no such understanding should immediately join one of the three classes of the common people; some should make their living by cultivating the fields, some should pass their lives as artisans, and some should devote themselves to buying and selling. Then the retribution of heaven will be light. But if perchance one should wish public service and desire to remain a samurai, he should sustain his life by performing menial functions, he should accept a small income, he should limit his obligation to his master, and he should do easy tasks [such as] gate-keeping and night-watch duty. This then is [the samurai's] calling. The man who takes or seeks the pay of a samurai and is covetous of salary without in the slightest degree comprehending his function must feel shame in his heart. Therefore I say that that which the samurai should take as his fundamental aim is to know his own function.

Short Preface to *The Essence of Confucianism*

In this preface to the *Seikyō yōroku* [lit. "The Essential Teachings of the Sages"] Yamaga's pupils explain the risks involved in publishing his work and the reasons why Yamaga nevertheless insisted on going ahead with it.

[From *Yamaga Sokō shū*, VI, 167-68]

The Sages lived far in the past and their precise teachings have gradually sunk into oblivion. The scholars of the Han, T'ang, Sung, and Ming dynasties have misled the world, piling confusion upon confusion. And if this has been true in China, how much the more has it been true in Japan.

Our teacher has made his appearance in this country when it is already

2,000 years since the time of the Sages. He has held high the way of the Duke of Chou and Confucius, and been the first to set forth their essential teachings. Whatever the problem—of the individual, of the family, the state, or the world—and whether it has concerned the arts of peace or the arts of war, his teaching has never failed to solve it and deal with it effectively. Truly the presence of such a teacher among us is a sign of the beneficial influences which emanate from our good government.

In order to keep his teaching in book form for posterity, but not knowing whether the general public would be allowed to share in its benefits, we, his disciples, made a collection of his sayings and then made this request of our master: "These writings should be kept secret and sacred to us; they should not be spread abroad among men. Your criticisms of Confucian scholarship in the Han, T'ang, Sung, and Ming dynasties run contrary to the prevailing view among scholars. Some readers might complain to the authorities about it."

The master answered, "Ah, you young men should know better. The Way is the Way of all the world; it cannot be kept to oneself. Instead, it should be made to permeate the whole world and to be practiced in all ages. If this book can help even a single man to stand on his own convictions, that will be a contribution to the moral uplift of our times. The noble man must sometimes give his life in the fulfillment of Humanity. Why should my writings be kept secret?"

"Moreover, to talk about the Way and mislead people concerning it is the greatest crime in the world. The textual commentators of the Han and T'ang, the metaphysicians of the Sung and Ming, who were so clever of speech and full of talk, wanted to clear up the confusion but only ended by making it worse. The Sages were left sitting in filth and mud—a dreadful spectacle!

"The Sages' scriptures are self-evident to all the world; there is no need for lengthy comment. And I, deficient in scholarship and no master of letters—how could I aspire to write a new commentary on these sacred texts, or engage in controversy with other scholars over them? And yet unless this is done, the filth and defilement of these other scholars cannot be cleansed away and the texts restored to their original purity.

"I am mindful of future generations and aware of my own shortcomings. Once my sayings are out in public, all the world will publicize them, condemn them, and criticize them. Should these reports, accusa-

tions, and criticisms contribute to the correction of my mistakes, it will be a great blessing to the Way. They say, 'A pig of a barbarian invites ridicule, the boastful ass is apt to fall on his own knee.' The weakness of us all lies in seeing only our own side and not seeing that of others—in the lack of openmindedness.

"Let me state again that I look up to the Duke of Chou and Confucius for guidance, but not to the Confucianists of the Han, T'ang, Sung, or Ming. What I aim to master is the teaching of the Sages, not the aberrant views of deviationists; in my work I occupy myself with everyday affairs, not with things fanciful and transcendental. In the pursuit of knowledge I want to be thoroughgoing; in action I want to leave no stone unturned. Even so, I am afraid that I am quick in speech but slow in action. The Way of the Sages is not one person's private possession. That which can be practiced by one individual, but not by all the world, is not the Way. My sole aim is to reveal it to the world and await the judgment of true gentlemen in the future."

We, his disciples, respectfully carrying out his wishes, have taken steps to print and publish this work. As for his basic discourses on the relationships between the lord and retainer, parent and child, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, and between friends, as well as concerning personal moral cultivation and the teachings of the Sages, readers are referred to the Master's *Classified Discourses (Gorui)*.

The Sage as the Moral Man

In this passage from Yamaga's *Takkyo dōmon* his view of Confucianism as essentially an ethical teaching is revealed in his conception of the sage, who possesses no supernatural powers or transcendent wisdom but simply fulfills the moral nature common to all men.

[From *Yamaga Sokō shū*, VI, 240-42]

In order to know what the real master of the Way is like, you should first have a very clear understanding of what the sage is like. The sage, according to the prevailing notion among conventional scholars, is one who has a mien of moral superiority—a distinctive personality, remarkably conspicuous in a crowd of men. His inner excellence being so eloquent of itself, the fact that he is no ordinary man is sensed immediately. Endowed as he is with supernatural and superhuman qualities,

his speech and conduct are anything but human. Amidst whatever sensations of sound or sight, his emotions remain unmoved just as if he were a dead tree or burnt ashes. To him personal gain and a fat salary are more fleeting attractions than a snowflake on a red-hot stove. And in scholarship, he is versed in almost everything. Therefore, when entrusted with the government of the land, he will sweep away in an instant evils that have festered and bred for years; sweet dewdrops will gather on earth, while [such lucky omens as] giraffes and phoenixes will be constant visitors; all the people will follow the Way, practicing humanity and righteousness. Just one interview with the sage, and a man of plain mediocrity will shine with intelligence; overnight he will become unselfish and pure in body and mind—or so it is thought.

Now this indicates a lack of real knowledge concerning the sages. Upon studying the utterances, the actions, and the political ordinances of the Duke of Chou and Confucius we find that they were not at all like this. The sage represents only the best of humankind and is not a bit different from other men. He is fully accomplished in those things which make a man a Man, is well-informed of things and affairs, and is not perplexed by them at all. As to his personality and character, he is warm, amicable, humble, frugal, and self-sacrificing. Toward the ruler he is a model of decorum; to parents he is filially pious in a wholesome measure. In liberal arts he can express himself well when writing; in military affairs he is preparedness itself, being warm-hearted but not hot-headed, commanding respect without being violent, working hard when at work but relaxing fully when at rest. He takes what is due to him, gives to others what is due them, is generous when liberality is called for, and sparing when to be sparing is in order. His sayings and actions are hard to characterize in simple terms. Those who do not know him well call him unselfish at the sight of his charity; but take him for a miser when he is sparing. They think him flattering when he is merely being polite, and consider him arrogant when he is not flattering. Their judgments fail because they are ignorant of what the sage is really like.

The sage is fully aware of Heaven's will, so he seeks that which ought to be sought, he plans for that which ought to be planned for, saves when it is proper to save, and is not concerned over personal success or failure. Contented with his own lot, he never deviates from the course of duty. Managing things well in the sphere which it is his responsibility

to administer, he never lets his plans or proposals overreach his own position. If questioned concerning the formalities to be observed in a given matter, he explains them in terms of basic principles. If questioned concerning the highest principles of duty to the state, he does not neglect their detailed application.

As to his everyday living, in clothing, in housing, utensils, and implements, he will spend when the expense is justified; he will be simple when simplicity is in order. Sometimes he will strive for the utmost in beauty, going to the limit of his resources, and at other times he will not so strain his resources. Thus, in all that he does, there is nothing strikingly different from what others do. If you get close to him, and try to live up to his teachings, you will undergo a change for the better day-by-day. If you do not live up to his teachings, he will not constrain you to adopt his ways. Only when an opportunity is presented for him to serve mankind and the world will he exert himself to the utmost.

From *An Autobiography in Exile*

In *An Autobiography in Exile* (*Haisho zampitsu*), the last of Yamaga's important works, he traces his own intellectual development from Neo-Confucianism through Taoism and Buddhism to his "rediscovery" of the authentic traditions of Confucianism and Shinto.

[From *Yamaga Sokō bunshū*, pp. 481-88]

I am taking this occasion to write down some of my views about learning. For a long time I have been fond of the study of foreign books. Though I am not acquainted with those writings which have reached this country only in recent years, still I have gone through all the books received from China a decade or more ago. I feel, therefore, that with things Chinese at least I am quite well acquainted.

I once thought that Japan was small and thus inferior in every way to China—that "only in China could a sage arise." This was not my idea alone; scholars of every age have thought so and devoted themselves to the study of Chinese. Only recently have I become aware of the serious errors in this view. We have "believed too much in what we heard and not enough in what our own eyes could see; we have ignored what is near at hand in our search for the distant." Truly this is without doubt the chronic weakness of our scholars. This point I tried to make clear in

my *True Facts Concerning the Central Kingdom (Chūchō Jijitsu)*. The following is a short summary of what I said there:

In Japan the one true imperial line, legitimate descendants of the Sun Goddess, has ruled from the divine ages down to the present time without the interruption of a single generation. The Fujiwara too, loyal vassals and supporters of the Throne, have survived, with men of every generation serving as premier or minister. Such unbroken succession has no doubt been due to the inability of rebels and traitors to succeed in treachery and intrigue; but has not this in turn been due to the wide prevalence in Japan of the cardinal virtues of humanity and righteousness?

From the divine ages on for seventeen generations there have been on the throne sovereigns of supreme virtue, supported by wise and eminent ministers, who have upheld the way of heaven-and-earth, who have set up the court administration and control over the provinces, who have laid down formal regulations for the four classes of people regarding the necessities of life—clothing, food, and dwelling, as well as the proper procedures for initiations, marriages, funerals, and festivals—so that in all these things the mean was achieved; and who have pointed out the respective paths of ruler and ruled, setting an example for all ages so that the people were at ease and the country at peace. Is not all this a manifestation of their heavenly virtues of supreme intelligence and holy wisdom?

No less deserving of mention is Japan's pursuit of the way of martial valor. The three kingdoms of Han¹ were conquered and made to bring tribute to the court. Korea was subjugated and its royal castle made to surrender.² Japanese military headquarters was established on foreign soil and Japanese military prestige was supreme over the four seas from the earliest times down to the present day. Our valor in war inspired fear in foreigners. As for invasion from abroad, foreigners never conquered us or even occupied or forced cession of our land. In fact, in the making of armor for man and horse, in the making and use of sword and spear, and again in military science, strategy and tactics, no other

¹ Three kingdoms of Han: means Korea. The name derives from three early kingdoms in South Korea known to Japanese as Ma-han, Mu-han, and Shin-han. The conquest of Korea referred to here is that of the Empress Jingō (r. c. 362-380). At the time of this invasion the three Kingdoms of Korea were Silla, Koguryo, and Paekche.

² Refers to the invasion of Korea by Hideyoshi in 1592.

country can equal us. Within the four seas, then, are we not supreme in military valor?

Wisdom, humanity, and valor are the three cardinal virtues of a sage. When even one of these three is lacking, a man falls short of being a sage. When we compare China and Japan with these virtues as criteria, we see that Japan greatly excels China in each of them and undoubtedly merits the name of Middle Kingdom far more than does China. This is no mere fancy of mine but a just estimate made by the world.

Prince Shōtoku was the only one throughout our history who did not esteem China too highly. He was aware of the fact that it was enough for Japan to be Japan. But the records were destroyed by fire at the time of the Iruka incident³ and all of his writings have been lost to later times.

Many paths to learning have existed in the past and present. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism each has its own basic principle. In my own case from boyhood to manhood I devoted myself to study of the Ch'eng-Chu system, and consequently my writings in those days were generally in accord with the Ch'eng-Chu system. Then in middle age I became interested in Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu and accepted as basic such mystical concepts as emptiness and nothingness. At the same time I developed a particular esteem also for Buddhism and visited the eminent masters of the five Zen monasteries, including even the Abbot Ingen, because of my eagerness to pursue the path to enlightenment.

While I was engaged in the study of the Ch'eng-Chu system, perhaps owing to my own ineptitude, I was too much given to the practice of sustained reverence and silent sitting and found myself becoming too taciturn and grave. In comparison with the Ch'eng-Chu system, however, the approach of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Zen proved far more full of life and freedom. The identification of human mental activity with the mystic activity of nature produced deep insight. From that point on I followed the impulse of my own nature; all was spontaneous. Heaven and earth might fail but as to the eternal and unchanging principle remaining in itself active and untrammelled, there would be no doubt.

³ Iruka incident: in 645 Nakatomi Kamatari and Prince Naka-No-Ōe (later Tenchi Tennō) brought about the death of Soga no Iruka and his father, Soga no Emishi, in a struggle over the imperial succession. Before his death Emishi is said to have burned most of the historical records compiled by his father Soga no Umako and Shōtoku Taishi in A.D. 620—probably the first histories written in Japan.

Nevertheless, when it came to everyday matters, there was still much that I did not comprehend. Thinking that this might again be due to my own ineptitude, I pursued this method all the more assiduously in the hope that I might improve. It might be, I thought, that daily affairs are of such slight importance that it is as well to let them take their own course. Still we find ourselves bound by the five obligations of human relationship and are so much involved in everyday affairs that we cannot go on thus—we are held in their grip. If we should make our abode under the trees or upon some rock in lonely solitude, scorning worldly honor and fame, we might be able to attain to an inexpressible state of unselfish purity and mystical freedom. But when it comes to the affairs of the world, of the state, and of the four classes of the people, needless to say we should be able to accomplish nothing in that manner. Even in minor matters, we should have less comprehension of things than the uneducated man in the street.

Some say that if the perfection of virtue (*jin*) could be fully realized in one's mind, all the things of this world and all the affairs of men would be taken care of; others say that if the compassion of Buddha were made the basic principle, all would work out for good in the three existences—past, present and future. All these ideas, however, serve only to keep learning apart from the real world. Whatever others may think, I myself cannot believe otherwise or accept that kind of learning as satisfactory. I have consulted both Confucianists and Buddhists on this question, made inquiry of persons reputed to be of eminent virtue, and carefully observed their methods and actions, only to find that they are not in accord with the real world. Their teaching goes one way and life another.

Shinto is the way of our own country but the early records of it are lost: what we know is fragmentary and incomplete. From it we might have obtained the guiding truths concerning the affairs of men and of the state, but after the Iruka incident the old records ceased to exist. I began to wonder about those studies and proceeded to read more widely and to ponder on what earlier scholars had left behind them; but on many points my doubts were not clarified. I thought that this might be due to misunderstanding on my part but for many years those doubts still remained unresolved. Then, early in the Kambun era [1661-1672], it occurred to me that my failure to comprehend might be due to the fact that I had been reading the scholars of the Han, T'ang, Sung, and

Ming. By going directly to the writings of the Duke of Chou and Confucius, and taking them as my model, the guiding lines of thought and study could be correctly ascertained. After that I ceased to make use of later writings, but day and night applied myself to the works of the sages. Then for the first time I understood clearly the guiding teachings of the sages and their underlying principle became firmly fixed in my mind.

When you try to cut paper straight without a ruler to guide your hand, try as you will, you cannot get it accurate. Even if you should manage to do it well yourself, you could not expect others to do so. But with the use of a ruler even a child can cut along the guiding line. Even though one person may be considerably less skilled than another, he can almost always follow the guiding line. In the system of the sages, likewise, if one acquires by careful reading a sort of guiding rule, one can understand the way of the sages in all things according to the degree of one's individual scholarship.

Now to learn the guiding principles of the sages neither language nor scholarship is needed, because [the thing is so simple that] if I am told about it today, I can understand what I am to do today. Neither the "moral training" nor the "sustained reverence" nor the "silent sitting" [of the Neo-Confucianists] is required. Even if one goes through strict discipline of both speech and act and carries in memory almost all the sayings of the sages, it is clear that these are merely digressive pursuits and do not follow the guiding principle of the sages. I can tell at once, when someone even so much as utters a word or a phrase, whether he understands the guiding principle of the sages, simply because I measure him by the use of my guiding rule. Even when it comes to things out of reach of sight and hearing, with this approach one can understand in at least five or seven cases out of ten; whereas those who pursue conventional or digressive studies may be unable to understand in even three cases out of ten. Of this I am certain. This is the reason why men of wide scholarship often become the laughingstock of the less educated. One cannot shape a bullet without a cast; one cannot cut paper without a ruler. Those who try labor in vain and struggle long and painfully to no avail. The more they pursue their studies, the more they become involved in ignorance.

Among the paths to learning there is one which exalts personal virtue

and cultivates benevolence through the intensive practice of moral training and silent sitting. There is another which involves personal cultivation, the guidance of others, and maintaining of peace and order in the world, and the winning of honor and fame. There is also that which arises from a love of books and stresses the writing of poetry or prose. Into these three classes scholars may be divided, each having his own attitude or approach.

As far as I can observe, however, it is difficult in our times for men to attain the degree of righteousness which prevailed in the days of the Yellow Emperor and the sage-kings Yao and Shun, such that rule by virtue alone was sufficient through its beneficent influence to keep the country under control without a word of command being given, or to make peace reign supreme within the four seas without any action from above, or to enable cultivation of the arts of peace so as to win without coercion the willing submission of any enemy. Even though we should take them as our model, no good result would come of it. Scholars who advocate such a course are lofty in their aims, but in the end they turn their backs upon the world and retire in solitude to commune only with the birds and the beasts. On the other hand, the love of books and the pursuit of writing are merely scholarly diversions; they are not matters of everyday concern. Writing is a corollary of learning and I do not cast any aspersions upon it. The writing of poetry and prose is something that should not be neglected "if one has spare time for them."⁴

To me, therefore, the guiding path to the teaching of the Sages is that which involves personal cultivation, the guidance of others, the maintaining of peace and order in the world, and the winning of honor and fame. I come from a samurai family and have the five obligations of human relationship which attach to my person and station. My own thought and conduct, as well as my five obligations in relations with others, are what I as a samurai must give first attention to. In addition, however, there are both major and minor matters to which the samurai must give his attention. In minor matters, such as dress, food, dwelling, and all implements and their uses, he must live up to the best samurai traditions of good form. This is particularly true in connection with training in the arts of war and with the manufacture and use of armor and horse trappings. Among major matters there are the maintenance of

⁴ Paraphrasing *Analects*, I, 6.

peace and order in the world; rites and festivals; the control of feudal states and districts; mountains and forests, seas and rivers, farms and rice fields, temples and shrines; and the disposition of suits and appeals among the four classes of people. In addition, there is military command and organization, strategy in war and tactics in battle, the quartering and provisioning of troops, and the building of fortifications—all those preparations for war which are the daily concern of generals and officers.

No matter how much training he undergoes, if the studies pursued by a samurai do not enable him to get results in all these fields, then they serve no useful purpose and fail to follow the guiding principle of the sages' teaching. For this reason thought and study will have to be given to these matters, and some research done into the records of history and of court procedure. Thus there will be less time for meditation, silent contemplation and quiet sitting. I do not mean, however, that we must have an exhaustive knowledge of all these numberless things. As I have pointed out elsewhere, we need only have a good understanding of the guide-rule provided by the sages' teaching and use it as a measure and standard. Then, whatever we see or hear can be comprehended in its true light. No matter what task presents itself, it may be clearly understood in terms of these aforementioned categories, and therefore no matter what befalls, we need not falter—we are on safe ground. Truly we find ourselves "with mind open and body free."⁵

If one follows this approach to learning, intelligence will renew itself, and virtue will of itself be heightened; humanity will be deepened and courage strengthened. Finally, one will attain to a state of mind in which success and fame are of no account, in which unselfishness and self-forgetfulness will be the rule. Thus one starts out with the idea of success and honor, but comes to the stage in which success and honor have no meaning and one simply goes on fulfilling the way by which man becomes truly man. The Book of Filial Piety says: "Cultivate yourself and follow the way; fame will be the natural outcome of filial piety."