



## opinion: i am not samurai

by Scot Combs

I am not Samurai. It has taken years for me to be able to say that with complete understanding of what it is that I'm saying. For the longest time I felt the Samurai tradition was bound to karate the way Buddha is bound to Buddhism or Jesus to Christianity. Upon further study, discussion with people who know more than me and reflection I can say with full clarity..."I am not Samurai".

The Samurai tradition is long and storied. It is true the Samurai code, with its strong moral component could be a good thing on an individual level. Samurai recognized the importance of something greater than self. Philosophers and theologians would agree this is a good thing as well.

But it is also true that Samurai represent Japan's feudal system, often arbitrary and brutal. There was little personal freedom and restricted movement between the classes of society. If you were born a peasant, you would most likely die a peasant. You were nothing more than a pawn to be played in a chess match between the Shogun and his potential enemies.

Samurai may have seen themselves as protectors of the people, but after unification, against whom were they defending? Once Japan was unified the Shogun and his Samurai ruled as dictator and conquering army subjugating the people and removing all means by which the population might revolt; the weapons ban of the Tokugawa era comes to mind.

When their time was over, they fought fiercely to retain power. This begs several questions. Under what moral or legal authority did they fight? Does anyone have the right to command the populace without the consent of the populace? If one can argue that the natural state for people is freedom, and a feudal system is inconsistent with freedom; then one may conclude that Samurai fought to maintain their power - and that alone.

The code also refers to a certain warrior mindset that has always left me ill at ease. In civilian society there simply isn't an enemy around every corner just waiting for me to let my guard down so they can pounce and take my possessions, family and power. While I must be constantly aware of my surroundings and the moods and attitudes of the people around me, it is unreasonable to view everyone outside of my sphere as military combatants. That mindset eventually leads to a state of constant hyper-vigilance and paranoia that isn't good for me or the society at large.

I am not Samurai. I am a citizen who will fiercely defend himself, his family and other innocents when threatened with immediate, unlawful force.

I suggest we take the best of the Samurai code and use it to define and enrich our lives. Further, I suggest we take the militarism and warrior mentality of Samurai and set them aside; they are not relevant to living as a civilian in society.

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