

The Meaning of Bushido

For a long time, I wondered what I could write that should be put on the site. I realized the other day what I should write about when someone mentioned that chivalry is dead. This may be true in the western world, but for the Japanese, their form of Chivalry is very much alive. This code is called Bushido.

Bushido comes from two root words. *Bushi* which means 'warrior', and *Do* which means 'way'. Therefore, translated *Bushido* is 'The way of the Warrior'. The word *Bushi* can be broken down even more in the word *Bu* meaning 'to stop'. The literal definition of *bu* is that which prohibits violence and subdues weapons. The other word that makes up the rest of the word *bushido* is *shi*. *Shi* literally means, he who occupies his rank by means of learning. Yet, even those who were Bushis often carried weapons. Therefore, the word *bushi* seems to mean 'Those who keep peace, either by literary or military means'. So the whole word *Bushido* means "The way of those who keep peace, either by literary or military means".

Bushido is actually a combination of many precepts from many different institutions. What Bushido is, is basically, a system of moral principles. Those who were taught the code were expected to live according to it. Bushido follows a basic framework that consists of *chi* (wisdom), *jin* (benevolence), and *yu* (courage). There are a few main sources for the code of Bushido. The First source is that of Buddhism. In Buddhism there are three basic tenets: Sense of Calm, trust in fate, submission to the inevitable, disdain of life couple to friendliness with death, and a stoic composure in the face of calamity. Zen is another source of Bushido. Zen applies contemplation and a constant strive for achievement of excellence so as to reach a level of thought beyond the range of verbal expression. Shintoism is also a source of Bushido. In Shintoism, one tries to be devoid of sin. It is said "That the human heart...when perfectly placid and clear, reflects the very image of a Deity". Confucius is the final origin of Bushido. Confucius said that there were five moral relationships: Master-Servant, Father-Son, Husband-Wife, Older-Younger Brother, and Friend-Friend. The combinations of the aforementioned aspects provide the basis for Bushido.

Bushido in the modern day world is still practiced. Although, not in its purest form, Bushido of today draws many parallels to the Bushido practiced 800 years ago. The first aspect of Bushido is Rectitude. That is, the duty of an individual to courageously use correct judgment for an ennobling cause. Those who were given the title of *Gishi* or 'a man of rectitude' were men who had mastered the art of rectitude. Those who were masters of rectitude were said to also have valor. The next aspect of Bushido is courage. Courage is not merely bravery, but doing what is right, when it is right to do so. Anyone can run into the thick of battle and be slain, this was termed a 'dog's death'. A prince of Mito is quoted as saying "It is true courage to live when it is right to live, and die only when it is right to die." The third aspect of Bushido is benevolence. Samurai were taught to have *Bushi no Nasaki*. 'Bushi' meaning 'warrior', 'no' meaning 'with', and 'Nasaki' meaning 'tenderness'

or 'the tenderness of a warrior'. Though mercy was thought of as a feminine characteristic, samurai still embraced it. A prince of Shirakawa described benevolence best when he said "Though they may wound your feelings, these three you have only to forgive, the breeze that scatters your flowers, the cloud that hides your moon, and the man who tries to pick a quarrel with you." The next aspect of Bushido is politeness. Anyone can pretend to be sincere and patronize someone else but this is not politeness at all. The Japanese are nice for only one reason. That is the feelings of others. Politeness is a poor trait if actuated only in the fear of offending good taste. The next trait of a Bushi was veracity. Lying, to the Samurai, was considered to be dishonorable and cowardly. The word of a samurai was often enough of a pact that no treaties or contracts were ever needed. Those who practice Bushido today strive to be honest. Those who practice Shuri-Ryu should be familiar with the Dojo Kun. One of the Dojo Kun says "I shall be honest and exercise integrity with the purpose of developing cooperation and trust..." The Samurai were horrified when trade came to Japan, only to find that veracity meant little in the world of commerce. The next aspect of Bushido is honor. "Dishonor is like a scar on a tree, which time, instead of effacing, only helps to enlarge." This was an ancient Samurai proverb. Honor is defined as a vivid consciousness of personal dignity and worth. Honor goes almost hand in hand with suicide. Samurai placed such a high estimated on honor, that it was often an ample excuse to take one's own life. Samurai practiced Seppuku and hara-kiri. Seppuku means 'self murder'. Hara-kiri is actually two words. 'Hara' meaning 'midriff' and 'kiri' meaning 'murder'. The soul was said to reside in the hara. Thus, the horrific practice of self-immolation by disembowelment was instituted. The next precept is of loyalty. As Confucius outlines, loyalty was important. Children were taught to sacrifice everything for the emperor. However, loyalty is almost forgotten as feudal ties have died out. Yet, loyalty to the emperor has somewhat transformed into patriotism for the country and has inspired feelings of nationalism. The last precept is self-control. The samurai did not show any expression of emotion, as to not invoke feelings of others. The samurai were taught from early age to have utmost self-control.

Is Bushido still practiced today...of course. If we look at our own style and the things we say, we can understand better our roots and how they relate to Bushido.

The Dojo Kun

I shall conduct myself in a manner, which will reflect credit upon myself and society.

I shall be loyal to my school and the art it teaches.

I shall be honest and exercise integrity with the purpose of developing cooperation and trust with my fellow karate-ka and my teachers.

I shall exercise restraint in the use of my karate knowledge employing it only in fair competition or in defense of my life, my family, or my country.

The above is our Dojo Kun. When analyzed one can see all the aspects of Bushido. So then Bushido is practiced today. Yet, I see so many people in life who do not practice Bushido. Karate-Ka should not be the only ones practicing Bushido. However, because we are karate-ka and furthermore because we are Shuri-Ryu Karate-Ka, there are high expectations of us to act appropriately in the ways of Bushido. In this way we can become better people and better Bushi.

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Mr. James Mula
www.suncoastkarate.com
dojo@suncoastkarate.com