

Yamamoto on Bushido

Selected and edited by M. Divjak

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Constant Preparation for Death

The Way of the Samurai is death. In a fifty-fifty life or death crisis, simply settle it by choosing immediate death ... To make the correct choice in a fifty-fifty situation is nearly impossible. We would all prefer to live. And so it is quite natural in such a situation that one should find some excuse for living on.

In order to be a perfect samurai, it is necessary to prepare oneself for death morning and evening day and day out. When a samurai is constantly prepared for death, he has mastered the Way of the Samurai.

If day and day out a samurai rehearses death in his mind, when the time comes, he will be able to die calmly. Since disasters are never so formidable as in anticipation, it is utter foolishness to spend time worrying about them in advance.

A samurai who is not prepared to die at any moment will inevitably die an unbecoming death. But a samurai who lives his life in constant preparation for death - how can he conduct

himself in despicable manner?

A calculating man is a coward ... To die is a loss, to live is a gain, and so one decides not to die. Therefore, one is a coward. Similarly, a man of education camouflages with his intellect and eloquence the cowardice or greed that is his true nature. Many people do not realize this.

Absolute loyalty to death must be worked at every day. One begins each day in quiet meditation, imagining one's final hour and various ways of dying - by bow and arrow, gun, spear, cut down by the sword, swallowed up by the sea, jumping into a fire, being struck by lightning, crushed in an earthquake, falling off a cliff, death from illness, sudden death - and begins the day by dying.

Planning and Preparing Ahead

Truly important problems are few; they occur probably no more than twice or thrice in a lifespan ... Therefore, it is necessary to plan ahead what to do in case of a crisis, and then when the time comes, to remember the plan and dispose of the problem accordingly.

A truly enlightened samurai investigates beforehand all possible situations and solutions so that he will be able to perform brilliantly when the time comes.

It is advisable always to make plans the evening before and make a note of the schedule. This is one way of staying a step ahead of other people.

Resolution of the Moment

In the last analysis, the only thing that matters is the resolution of the moment. A samurai makes one resolution after another, until they add up to his whole life. Once he realizes this, he need never feel impatient, he need seek nothing beyond the moment. He merely lives his life concentrating on his resolution.

Now is the time, and the time is now. We tend to think of everyday existence as different from the hour of crisis, and so when the time comes to act we are not ready ... This goes to show that in our minds we separate "the time" and "now".

Never-ending Training

At the lowest level of training, even though you practice, you do not seem to improve, you know you are unskillful, and you believe the same of others ... At the middle level you are aware of your deficiencies, and you begin to recognize the shortcomings of others. When a samurai attains the highest level, he is able to dispose of any situation on the basis of his own wisdom so that he no longer need follow the teaching of others; he gains confidence in his abilities, rejoices in being praised, and laments the failings of others ...

One who penetrates deep into the Way realizes that there is no end to his training, and that the time will never come when he may be satisfied with his labors. Therefore, a samurai must know his shortcomings well and spend his life in training without ever feeling he has done enough. Of course he must never be overconfident but neither should he feel inferior to others.

Saying to himself, "Today I am better than I was yesterday, tomorrow I will be still better," a true samurai lives out his days in constant effort to improve. That is what training is, a process without end.

A samurai must pile diligence upon diligence, attaining first total mastery over the basic principles and skills, then continuing his training so that basic skills will reach fruition. A samurai must never relax but pursue his training throughout his life.

When one learns to recognize the strong points of others, anyone may become one's model, anyone may be one's teacher.

What one has not experienced firsthand one cannot know.

One Occupation Only

It is wrong to set one's mind on two things at once. One must devote all one's energy to the Way of the Samurai; one must seek for nothing more.

Anyone who is especially skilled in a particular art is a technician, not a samurai. If a certain person wants to be

considered a samurai, he must realize that any artistic accomplishment is detriment to his samurai stature. Only when he realizes that this is so will all sorts of accomplishments in fact become useful to him.

A man who earns a reputation for being skilled at a technical art is idiotic. Because of his foolishness in concentrating his energies on one thing, he has become good at it by refusing to think of anything else.

Great Self-confidence

Skill and training are of no use unless one has great confidence in oneself.

The Golden Mean is greatly valued, but when it comes to the martial arts, even in daily practice a samurai must constantly feel that his skill surpasses that of everyone else.

I am just as much a man as the master, why should I be inferior to him?

Constant On-guard

The Way of the Samurai requires that he realize that something may occur at any moment to test the depth of his resolution, and day and night he must sort out his thoughts and prepare a line of action. Depending on the circumstances, he may win or lose.

A samurai must never relax his guard when drinking, so that if ever something unexpected should occur he would be able to deal with it appropriately.

Quick Decisions

Make up your mind within the space of seven breaths.

I know of no trick to ensure victory. The only wisdom I have is that one must jump at every chance, never letting an opportunity slip by.

No Retreat

Stumble and fall seven times, bounce back eight times ... A samurai must conceive of himself as a self-righting doll that bounces back no matter how many times you knock it down.

If the first time things do not proceed as he wish, he must try again. For this he needs no special wisdom or skill. The stubborn samurai thinks not of victory or defeat but merely fights insanely to the death.

No Haste

No matter how clever the samurai may be by birth, his abilities are not fully developed when he is young and he will not be sufficiently accepted by others. When he has reached the age of fifty, he must gradually finish his preparation. Behaving in such a way that people believe his entering into public life is if anything slower than it should be, is actually the true way to commit himself to service.

Everyone occasionally fails at something important because he has been impatient. If one thinks there is still plenty of time, one's wishes are apt to be fulfilled more quickly. Let us simply say one's time will come.

When one rises quickly in the world, many people become enemies, and one's early success becomes meaningless in the long run. When, on the other hand, one is slow in making a name for oneself, many people are on one's side and one may count on still more fortune for the future. In the last analysis, it matters little whether success comes early or late.

No Sign of Weakness

A samurai must proceed unflagging, never tiring or becoming despirited, until the task is completed.

A true samurai must never seem to flag or loose heart.

Sometimes a samurai does not watch his tongue and inadvetently makes a remark such as, "I am a coward", or "Ouch." Such words must never pass one's lips, not in jest, nor in fun, nor asleep, nor by accident, not in any context whatsoever. A perceptive person hearing such a remark will discern one's true

nature. One must always be on one's guard.

Even in casual conversation, a samurai must never complain. He must constantly be on guard lest he should let slip a word of weakness. From a slight remark uttered inadvertently, one's true nature may be guessed.

When the water rises, so does the boat. In other words, faced with hardship, human abilities increase.

It is not enough simply to avoid feeling discouraged in the face of hardship. When disaster befalls a samurai, he must rejoice and leap at the chance to proceed with energy and courage.

When undertaking a great feat, do not worry about minor failures.

No Unnecessary Words

The first thing a samurai says on any occasion is extremely important. He displays with this one remark all the valor of the samurai. In times of peace it is language that manifests valor.

It is wrong to speak ill of others. It is equally unbecoming to give them praise. A samurai should know his own stature, pursue his discipline with diligence, and say as little as possible.

The best conduct with regard to speaking is to remain silent. At least if you think you can manage without speaking, do not speak. What must be said should be said as succinctly, logically, and clearly as possible.

Bear and Forebear

There is something called the "rainstorm attitude" ... If from the outset one is mentally prepared to get wet, one is not in the least discomfited when it actually happens. Such an attitude is beneficial in all situations.

Anyone who has never known suffering has not fully established his character. It is better to know hardship when young.

How can they object to being called loose and slovenly if they

cannot control their appetites?

Fighting Strategy

To win from the beginning is to be a constant victor.

The true way to take revenge is to march right into the enemy camp and fight until you are cut down.

Personal Grooming

One may be run through at any moment in vigorous battle; to die having neglected one's personal grooming is to reveal a general sloppiness of habit.

Public Behavior

One may be getting along badly with a friend, but showing displeasure when one happens to meet him, or making twisted, sarcastic remarks, arises from the foolishness of a narrow mind.

In this fleeting, unpredictable world, one may well end up being disliked. That is unavoidable. One must not behave in a shallow way calculated to win favor.

The way to handle a person's misfortune is to act as though nothing has happened, to try to take his mind off their troubles, remarking that things have in fact turned out for the better in some respects. The person concerned will eventually come to understand. In this uncertain world, there is no need to take each sorrow deeply to heart.

It is lesser men who have no peacefulness in their character, who compete for fame and go around knocking each other down.

If a samurai's sword is always drawn and he is constantly brandishing the naked blade, people will find him unapproachable, and he will have no friends. If, on the other hand, the sword is never drawn, it will rust, the blade will become dull, and people will make light of him.

One should listen with gratitude and reverence to the words of a man of many years of experience, even if he is saying

something one already knows. It sometimes happens that after hearing the same thing ten or twenty times, one suddenly feels a deep, intuitive understanding.

It is because one sometimes overlooks details and does not lend an ear to minor complaints that these in one's service are able to live in peace.

A man who seeks criticism from others is already superior to most.

In making the opponents understand your arguments, you will do them a service by teaching them various things, and your victory will be even more splendid. This is the reasonable method of arguing.

Life Pleasures

The best method of preventing illness consists of controlling one's appetite for food, drink, and sex.

The samurai must do his utmost to discipline himself so that his daily thoughts, words, and deeds are all clean and pure.

Since one's stipend belongs not to oneself but to one's lord, there is no reason to value it highly or part with it reluctantly.

Human life lasts but an instant. One should spend it doing what one pleases. In this world fleeting as a dream, to live in misery doing what one dislikes is foolishness. Since this may prove harmful if misinterpreted, it is a trade secret I have decided not to pass on to young people.