

Samurai One Who Serves

By Chris Graf (Copyright © 2015 Carus Publishing Company)

For more than 1,000 years, samurai warriors of Japan lived and died, fighting in small battles and great wars. They lived by a code of conduct that required loyalty, honesty, and courage, and they tried to die with honor.

My name is Yoshinaka. I am 12 years old, and I am training to be a samurai. The word *samurai* means “one who serves.” We samurai loyally serve our **daimyo**, who are rich and powerful landowners. We are courageous warriors, and we protect the property of the daimyo.

I have known I would be a samurai since I was a tiny boy. You see, my father is a samurai. Japanese boys born or adopted into samurai families must become samurai. Girls can become samurai, but not many do. Instead, they are trained to defend their homes from invaders.

When I was 7, I started training at a samurai school. By the time I was 10, I spent 12 hours a day in school. There is an ancient Japanese saying, *bun bu ryo do* (“the pen and the sword in accord”), which means we must live our lives in balance. So we spend time learning to read and write as well as learning to fight. We learn to shoot arrows from horseback, wrestle, sword fight, and defend ourselves from attack. We must never appear weak or afraid.

We also study art and history, learn to play a bamboo flute, write poetry, and learn calligraphy (the art of beautiful handwriting). We are taught respect, manners, and self-discipline.

By the time I am 15, my schooling will end and I will become an adult. In a special ceremony, I will receive a new name, a sword, and a suit of battle armor. I will shave part of my head and pull the rest of my hair back into a ponytail called a topknot. I will wear a simple silk kimono—a samurai must not draw attention to himself with fancy clothes. I will tuck my swords into my obi, the belt on my kimono.

Once I am an adult, I will begin to serve my daimyo. I will obey him and put his needs above those of even my own family. I will go into battle for him and die for him if I must. I will never surrender or let myself be taken prisoner. If somehow I dishonor my daimyo, or I am about to be captured, I will perform *seppuku*: I will take my own life with my *nihonto*, my sword.

I believe what I was taught: A man born a samurai should live and die with a sword in his hand. This may be hard for you to understand, but I have spent my whole life preparing for this. I am proud to be a samurai.

Definitions:

The Japanese word **daimyo** means “great name.”

Bushido, or the “way of the warrior,” was an unwritten code of conduct for samurai to live by.

All samurai should show:

Gensei: rectitude, or using good judgment

Yuuki: courage

Jingi: benevolence, or kindness

Sonkei: respect

Seijitsu: honesty

Meiyo: honor

Chuugi: loyalty

Answer the following questions with **evidence** from the text:

1. What were some examples of the code of conduct of the samurai?
2. Were girls allowed to become samurai?
3. How do samurai live their lives in balance?
4. What do samurai wear or look like?
5. What would a samurai do if they are captured in battle?