

Stories exemplifying the virtues of Bushido

A Samurai must show a sense of justice and honesty.

In a large city in a distant part of the country a daimyo of great wealth and power ruled over the people, and was both envied, hated, loved and respected for his actions and his decrees. Some considered him a fair and loving lord, while others thought of him as a power-hungry daimyo with the only interest being the throne of the shogun. As he was fairly new to this part of the country, however, most people shrugged it off with the explanation, that the daimyo was still merely ignorant and unversed in the ways of the local traditions.

The time of the year came, when the annual spring festival was to take place, and the daimyo was going to open it with a speech at the city square. He spoke at great length about the beauty of the land and the greatness of its people, and praised the spring festival. He then proceeded to announce a new decree, that stated that any criminal or violent act done during the spring festival, how justified it might be, would be punishable by death. This was greeted with a great applause and loud cheers among the people, as it was a peaceloving kind.

Suddenly three Samurai stepped forth from the crowd. All the people, including the daimyo went silent as they approached the podium, where the daimyo was standing.

"How dare y..." Seeing the faces of the Samurai, the daimyo abruptly went quiet and his face grew pale. As the Samurai stepped up on the large podium, they drew their swords and, surrounding the daimyo, pointed them at his chest and back. He fell to his knees, crying "Please don't kill me! Don't kill me!". The Samurai looked straight at him with seemingly uninterested looks, and the daimyo started sobbing.

"Who are you and why are you carrying your blades like you do?" An elder man stepped forth from the crowd, who now began to show signs of nervousness. The oldest Samurai said, "Forgive us our insolence, at the time we didn't see any other alternative. We are called Kinbei, Riemon and Kazuko, former Samurai of the Shimatsu clan in the Satsuma province."

"Former Samurai?" the Elder man asked.

"Yes, a few years ago our lord was killed in battle for the shogun, thus rendering us without master; Ronin with no further quests but that for justice."

"What justice is that, and what does that have to do with our lord?"

"Three years ago the shogun was attacked at his palace by a small, but skilled group of unknown Samurai, whose intention was to assassinate him in order to make way for their daimyo to reach the throne of the shogun. At the time our lord was at the palace and with his few Samurai he managed to defend the shogun from the attackers, but at a very high cost."

"What cost?"

"As we were poorly outnumbered, it was a difficult task fending off all the attackers, several of us got very serious wounds, some lethal. Our lord himself showed such contempt for death, that he refused to leave the midst of the battle, and was so seriously wounded, that a few hours after the last attacker was chased off, he died in front of the throne. Since then, we have been searching for the one responsible for the attack on the shogun and the death of our lord."

"Surely you don't mean..." the Elder man began.

The younger Ronin spoke, "He is found at the tip of our blades, but shall soon find himself closer

to the hilt. However, as the only proof you have heard so far is our voices and our claims, allow us to present you this." He sheathed his sword and reached into his clothes, taking out a paper. "This is signed by the shogun himself, and contains a thorough description of the one responsible for the treacherous deed." He walked over to the Elder man and handed the paper to him. The Elder man looked closely at the paper for a long time, as if reading the letters several times. He then said, "It certainly looks like you are telling the truth..." He turned to the daimyo. "What have you got to say?"

The daimyo looked up with fear in his eyes, as if he already had been found guilty and sentenced to death. "It wasn't my fault! I didn't mean to... I was drunk! I don't remember what orders I gave to whom! Don't kill me!" He began thrashing wildly, without realizing that the two razor sharp blades were still pointing at his chest and back. Suddenly the daimyo went silent and still, and looked down at his chest, where the tip of the Ronin's blade now protruded. His mouth was quickly filling with blood and, choking heavily, he fell over, dead before his face hit the podium floor.

The three Ronin turned towards the Elder man. "This is not how we intended it to be."

"I realize that, but should no longer be of your concern. None here doubt your claims anymore, I would think, and if anyone here doubts the justification of your act, they are free to take it up with me. I serve the shogun with my heart myself, and I do not take any pity on his dead body."

The youngest Ronin stepped forward, with blood still dripping from her sword. "There is one other thing, Elder one. You have not forgotten your former lord's last decree already, have you?"

"I assure you, we won't hold that against you!"

"Nevertheless, it was declared a law, and Samurai are not above that. For Ronin, the local laws are the only laws, and thus it's more important than ever not to break it."

"Surely you don't mean..." The Elder man's voice trailed off.

"Our quest is done, and you will have no more to deal with us." The three Ronin bowed to the Elder man and, lifting their swords high, simultaneously performed the ritual of seppuku in complete silence.

A Samurai must show courage and contempt for death.

The Samurai was on his way to the capital city of his Daimyo's neighbouring country, carrying an invitation to the wedding of his master's daughter. He had been walking on foot for quite a few days now, and was beginning to feel a bit weary after all this travelling. However, he felt that his journey was soon coming to an end, and felt light at heart and hurried his steps.

He trudged across a grass covered plain, when he suddenly spotted a large cloud of black smoke rising from what looked like a small cottage. He hurried onward, and soon realized that the cottage was completely on fire, and he saw a small group of people standing outside. As he came closer, he noticed a young woman, who seemed to be struggling for her life in the hands of a couple of men. He promptly ran over to the group and demanded to know what was going on, and why they were holding the woman.

"Her daughter's still trapped inside the house, and she wants to go get her. It's suicide we tell'er, but she won't listen."

"Is anyone in there getting her daughter back?" asked the Samurai, looking at the men.

"Well, no. Just look at the house! It's too late, we tell'er! Her daughter is probly dead by now, anyway."

The Samurai looked at the woman, who was screaming and thrashing, desperately trying to break free from the men holding her. He turned his look at the men in the group and he saw fear in their eyes. He mumbled some well-chosen words about the men, took off his backpack and his swords, and ran in through the open door into the blazing fire. Had had taken a deep breath before he entered the door, but the smoke still entered his lungs, making him cough and breath in even more of the smoke. While cursing himself for not having asked the men for the name of the girl, he kept shouting "Hello!" in case the girl was still conscious and alive and could hear him. A bursting flame suddenly set his shirt on fire, but he didn't notice it in his desperate attempt to find the girl. He stumbled into the smoke filled kitchen, which seemed to be the room, which was least ravaged by the fire, and looked under the kitchen table. There he saw the small girl, a girl that couldn't have been more than a couple of years old, lying on the floor. The Samurai noticed that she was still breathing, but heavily and coughing wildly. When he stretched out his arms she opened her eyes and cried out, pointing at his shoulder. Only then did he notice the burning shirt, which he quickly pulled off, but it still managed to burn his hair a great deal. Suddenly being aware of his fire damaged back and shoulder, he felt the pain from the heavily burnt flesh and skin. Nevertheless he scooped up the little girl in his arms and started off toward the exit, but he didn't get far until parts of the ceiling in the outer room suddenly collapsed, turning it into an inferno of burning timber and furniture.

The Samurai looked around for a window in the kitchen, but none was to be found. He cursed himself again, this time for not bringing his swords, for he realized he would not be able to break through any of the still solid walls. Only one other option remained, and that was through the way he entered. He looked up at the ceiling, and the remaining beams seemed to be able to collapse any second. Still, without any other alternatives, he clutched the girl tightly to his chest, took a run and jumped over the burning wood covering the kitchen door.

The heat was unbearable, and hit him with full force as he landed heavily on the floor in the outer room. For a moment he feared that the floor would give, but luckily it only creaked loudly, but he realized that time was not on his side this time, and if he did not leave the house quickly, they would not stand a chance of surviving. He climbed over burning furniture and collapsed beams, desperately trying to ignore the hellish flames licking his feet and legs. He looked up, and

saw that the outer door was only a few more feet in front of him. His heart raced, but by this time he had inhaled so much of the treacherous smoke, that his vision was getting blurred and his chest was becoming more painful than he could stand. Suddenly he heard a loud crash somewhere above him. He made a move towards the door, but a sharp pain in the neck stopped him, as a collapsing beam hit him straight in the back of his head. He toppled over, still clutching the girl in his arms, heavily to the floor, and he felt a large nail being driven into his back. The Samurai lost consciousness for a moment, and he had trouble re-orientating himself, but the flames all around him quickly reminded him where he was, and he moved his head with great difficulty to check on the girl. She seemed to have survived unscathed, and small eyes filled with fear met his. He tried to stand up, but the large wooden beam was still on top of him, and an intense pain in his back told him the large nail was still imbedded in him. Large flames were closing in around them, and the Samurai realized he wouldn't be able to move without ripping open his back. He looked out through the door and saw the group of men looking at the burning house from a safe distance. He thought about his alternatives and quickly came to a decision. With the force of desperation, he strained his legs and arms, and managed to lift the beam a few inches. With his left hand he grabbed hold of the little girl and heaved her forward through the open door, where she landed a few feet into the open air. One of the men in the group saw the girl and ran forward, snatching her up and running off again to her awaiting mother. Then the Samurai could no longer hold himself up, and fell forward once again, driving the nail deeper into his back. He looked up through the smoke, seeing the mother clutching her daughter, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

A Samurai must show sympathy towards all people.

Once the Samurai came across a small village, where a tailor had his little shop. As he quenched his thirst at a local tavern, he couldn't but overhear how unpopular the tailor seemed. He apparently did his best to become rich at the poor villagers' expense. Since he was the only tailor in the area, he was able to have much higher prices than he actually needed for making ends meet.

Suddenly a man ran into the tavern, screaming "Help! My house is on fire! Help me put it out!" A silence spread across the room. Some of the men looked into the cups, others ignored him completely. A few of the men in the tavern mumbled something to each other, and the Samurai realized that it was the tailor, whose house was on fire.

The Samurai looked out through the door at the tailor's house, and saw that little could be done to save it. The house was engulfed in flames, and anything inside was certain to be burnt beyond recognition.

"My house and furniture! All my textile! And all my money!" cried the tailor. One of the men in the tavern stood up and shouted "That's what you get for your greed! Don't come looking here for sympathy, when you charged us with prices much higher than we could afford. I for certain won't help you put out the fire. Maybe your lust for fortune and wealth will diminish now!" and agreeing murmurs were heard from many others in the room.

The tailor fell to his knees and sobbed, while slurring undistinguishable words. The Samurai looked at him and then said, "Don't hurt your knees on the floor and your eyes with the tears, because they are not spent on things gone forever. If you truly love your profession, you will find it a lot easier than you probably imagine to start all over again. If you don't, then I pity you for spending so many years on something, that wouldn't have meant anything even if the house hadn't burned down. Here, take this money that I have. To me it doesn't do much apart from giving me a couple of cups of sake at whatever local tavern I happen to stop by. Spend it on whatever you happen to love, as long as you don't wipe your tears with it." The Samurai left the tavern and the village.