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Something in the Samurai

Mōri Motonari (1497~1571) was a powerful lord in medieval Japan, who lived during the period of nearly constant military conflict and political intrigue that characterized 16th century Japan. A story tells of how he convinced his three sons to work together for the survival of the Mōri clan. He gave each of them an arrow, asking them to snap it in two, which they easily did. He then asked them to snap three arrows held together, which they were unable to do.

The *Story of the Three Arrows* has gained legendary status as a metaphor for strength in unity. Even though it is easier to align three arrows than to align three people, it was the leadership and example of the father which inspired the sons, and the power of a metaphor which still speaks to us today.

When two people work on a project, one of two things can happen. They get along well, but share the same blind spots, and may make the same mistakes. Or they work at odds with each other, resisting or even resenting the other's lack of understanding or cooperation. In either case, they are missing the magic of the third arrow.

To be truly aligned, the arrows should also be pointing in the same direction. It is not enough just to assign three people to a task. They must share the same sense of mission. In Japanese the character which best expresses this is 志 (*kokorozashi*), meaning intention or purpose. It is written with the characters for 士 (*samurai*) and 心 (*mind*).

What is the *samurai* mind, and how does it apply to us today?

The Book of Five Rings, written around 1645 by Miyamoto Musashi, is not only a classic masterpiece on the *samurai* mind, but was a *New York Times* bestseller when it was first released in English in 1974. It is doubtful that the average reader can grasp what Musashi was really talking about in revealing the secrets of the sword, but like the story of the three arrows, this book contains many metaphors that make sense to us today.

Bushido: the Soul of Japan was written and published in the year 1900 by Nitobe Inazo, and while it is more a code of moral principles, it had an influence on two U.S. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, as well as the founder of the Boy Scout movement Robert Baden-Powell.

It is interesting to compare the Bushido Code described by Nitobe Inazo with the Boy Scout Law created as a guide to good character by Robert Baden-Powell, who read *Bushido*.

Bushido Code: *Justice, Courage, Benevolence, Politeness, Truthfulness, Loyalty, Education, Self-Control.*

Scout Law: *Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, Reverent.*

While one stems from a heritage of Confucianism and the other from Chivalry, they are very similar in some respects, as they both point in the direction of service to a cause higher than self.

While the *samurai* mind means many things to many people, at least one interpretation is being applied by the U.S. Military. It is being applied on a large scale through a form of meditation called *Warrior Mind Training*, developed by Sarah Ernst and now being taught as meditation for marines. Time Magazine did an article on this called, *Samurai Mind Training for Modern American Warriors*, which you can read online at: <http://budurl.com/ts9t>

Film has brought images of *samurai* culture to the world, and its stories speak to people of all cultures. Samurai Cinema is a genre with more than a cult following, *Zatoichi*, *Seven Samurai*, *The Last Samurai* are household words.

It is quite remarkable that the *samurai*, the warrior class of Japan which changed dramatically across Japanese history, which bred both rogues and heroes, and which has attained legendary global status, continues to cast its long shadow over Hollywood, business, sports, and the military.

The mind-body connection makes sense, and *samurai* culture cultivated it to a fine art. Whatever challenge you are facing, there is likely to be something in the spirit of the *samurai* that will help you face it.

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