

# What is a Samurai

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In the film Ame Agaru the lifestyle as well as, at the very least our perception, of the samurai mindset is shown. “It doesn’t matter what you do but why you do it,” this quote made by Ihei’s wife, Toyo, in his defense demonstrates a significant piece of samurai values, not so much in that what she say aligns with what we would call “samurai code” but in the conflict the surrounds it.

In comparison to American, Japanese culture, especially at the time and especially inside the social hierarchal structure that was omnipresent at all times. For the average bushi warrior there was a heavy emphasis on following the rules. So Ihei breaking these rules by fighting for money, goes totally against what is expected of an honorable samurai. Although, the movie ends on a positive note as far as the opinion of Ihei and the honor of his actions, as in the lord sending his men to fetch Ihei before he left, overlooking his actions with Toyo’s words in mind, the initial conflict itself perfectly demonstrates the emphasis on adherence and also its connection to honor.

However on the other end it could be argued that this line is thinking perhaps isn’t as distant from how a samurai is thinking as one would think and could very much so be connected to the samurai way of life. For a samurai warrior living a life of killing and surrounded by death, the concept of one perhaps thinking during times of doubt that it wasn’t so much their actions that mattered but their reasoning isn’t such an unthinkable thought. To have this school of thought would bring more purpose and assurance to the warrior in question.

“Yet can it be the true Way if it has been made into a saleable item?”(Miyamoto, pg.91) Musashi brings in the morality of using the martial arts as a product to be sold, and discusses how the concept conflicts with his bushi warrior values. This can also be connected to the

previous subject of the conflict present in Ame Agarū surrounding the protagonist fighting for money in order to help the poor tenants in the inn.

In the end the largest part of what separated and made a samurai a samurai was their martial art, “by engaging in battle, you distinguish the principles of life and death.” (Miyamoto, pg. 61) While balanced with many other teachings and pursuits that became commonly expected for a samurai to study or pursue, a samurai warrior is firstly a warrior therefore cannot be separated from their craft, fighting. Samurai trained their whole lives and dedicated themselves for their masters, it is even in their name, “to serve”. For this reason the teachings in Miyamoto’s book serve to represent the importance of honing one’s craft in the instructions that he bestows in how to best accomplish the highest level of connection to the art swordsmanship. “Surpass today what you were yesterday, go beyond those of poor skill tomorrow and exceed those who are skillful later.”(Miyamoto, pg. 56) Here Miyamoto is demonstrating his value for honing the martial arts as well as commitment to do it.

History shows that the samurai used a plethora of weaponry in battle and that for the majority of time the biggest honor was actually the skill with the bow and arrow. however due to his focus on swordsmanship, Miyamoto’s novel and others like it are a small part of what help spur the concept of this primary importance of the sword to the samurai warrior, or the common idea of the sword being the soul of the samurai “It is by virtue of the sword that both society and oneself are put in order.”(Miyamoto, pg. 18). Musashi even goes on to explain swordsmanship as “*the* martial art on its own.”(Miyamoto, pg. 18) The importance of the sword to a samurai is undeniable, but if going by modern media one would think it was the one and only for a samurai warrior.

Samurai are also known to have the value of benevolence, politeness and sincerity. All of these are exhibited in Ame Agaru through Ihei and his relationship with the inn tenants and in particular the female outcast in the housing. Ihei displays his samurai benevolent values during the scene where he feeds the entire inn and when the woman returns, although he could've let her be left out he invited her to join, extending his kindness to all he sees that need it. Although they held the brutal position of warriors, the importance in which the society places on politeness and in particular the class where samurai belonged, in combination with the importance on the value of benevolence, as a class they were more than barbarians. The samurai had their intense sense of honor and duty and were meant to be better than the average citizen, and these scenes of Ihei's kindness demonstrate this view of samurai better than anything.

In the novel *The Book of Five Rings*, Miyamoto Musashi also very loosely lays out the social class system that was present in Japan, or what he calls "the four ways," as the "warrior, farmer, artisan, and merchant." (Miyamoto, pg. 9) Amongst everything else samurai is also a social class and by Musashi listing out the different castes and using them to help describe his martial arts it is also demonstrating this fact about what a samurai is. While he doesn't discuss specifically the social hierarchy or legislation involved in them he does go on to discuss his views on these four ways of life in this period of Japan and this is an example of some of the samurai values and their place in society. The integral role that samurai played as a class in Japanese society is what solidified themselves in history. Due to the role they played they are still remembered and widely known today and have succeeded in becoming a huge historical and cultural icon.

In a thorough investigation of the samurai spirit and the book of five rings and the film *Ame Agaru* I can conclude that the samurai were well regarded as warriors, an important piece in

the Japanese social structure in the past and today they still hold their significance as a Japanese cultural icon. Their stories surrounding their values of integrity, honor and benevolence retain their timeless qualities and attract an audience from all walks of life around the world even to this day.