

The Samurai Had No Choice

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THE SAMURAI HAD NO CHOICE

The Samurai were warriors. They've been around since the 9th century. Some say longer. The Samurai were trustworthy and honest. Their loyalty to Japan, the emperor and their overlord was unquestioned. The Samurai lived frugal lives with little interest in wealth or material things. What was important to the Samurai were honor, pride, obedience, and a commitment to self sacrifice.

The Samurai were trained to be civil, cultured, literate and how to fight to the death. Those who were reluctant to give their life and embrace death were not Samurai warriors.

The Samurai were skilled horseman, masters of the martial arts, expert archers and swordsman. The Samurai did not fear death. They would go into battle no matter the odds. In a life or death battle the Samurai choose death. They looked forward to a glorious death and believed that to die in battle would bring honor to the warrior and to his family's name.

If a Samurai failed in his mission he could only regain his honor by taking his own life. Suicide. One who chose to go on living after failure was despised, called a coward and brought dishonor to his family. Suicide, therefore, was a solution. The Samurai Warrior Had No Choice!

In 2006 33,300 people in the United States committed suicide. That's 91 deaths per day or 1 suicide every 16 minutes. 30,000 were white and 26,000 were white men. 5,200 were 65 or older and 4,200 were between 15 and 24 years of age. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States - homicide is 15th.

The Samurai lived by a Code of Honor which is known as

The Bushido – "The Way of the Warrior"

The Bushido teaches that the warrior should behave according to a strict moral standard. What is right is right. And what is wrong is wrong. A warrior did not argue about what was wrong and what was right. The Samurai were taught the difference. The Samurai knew the difference.

The Bushido articulated the principles which the Samurai were required to observe. These principles were embedded in the mind of the Samurai child from birth.

Justice - is the strongest virtue of the Bushido

Courage - is doing what is right.

Benevolence - A man with the power to command and the power to kill is expected to demonstrate the powers of benevolence and mercy. Benevolence is the highest requirement of a Samurai.

Politeness - is the expression of regard for the feelings of others, but it is not a virtue motivated by a fear.

Honesty and Sincerity - The Samurai disdained money believing that money and riches hindered wisdom. Luxury was believed to be a menace to manhood. Simplicity was required of the warrior class.

Honor - The Samurai were characterized by commitment, personal dignity, self worth and fear of disgrace.

Loyalty - The Samurai are forever loyal to those they served and to those to whom they were indebted. Loyalty to their leader, their family and their culture was required. The moral standard demanded by the Bushido shall not be violated.

In 1274 the Chinese sent 40,000 men and 900 war ships to invade Japan. 10,000 Samurai met the invading army and killed almost half of them. Major thunderstorms during the invasion helped the Samurai and the Mongols were forced to retreat.

The Mongol army returned in 1281 with 140,000 men and 5,000 war ships determined to finish what they started. 40,000 Samurai defended Japan. The Mongol army encountered a typhoon. The damage caused by the storms and the casualties inflicted by the Samurai warriors again caused the Mongol army to flee. They did not come back.

The Samurai were vastly outnumbered in both invasions but were able to repel the Chinese invaders with a lot of help from the storms. These storms became known as the "Kami-no-kaze" the "divine winds."

The Kamikaze -" The Divine Wind"

From October 1944 to August 1945 there were 2,940 Kamikaze raids on US and British naval targets.

Kamikaze - systematic suicide - was a phenomenon that was unprecedented in modern warfare.

The Japanese military were taught that death was their destiny. Most Japanese soldiers believed they had a sacred mission. The mission was to die for the Emperor as all war - in his name - was holy war. For this sacrifice they had the ultimate reward of "death in battle..." as the Samurai believed.

"Please congratulate me. I have been given a splendid opportunity to die. Thank you, my parents for the 23 years during which you have cared for me and inspired me. Think well of me and know that I will die today for you and our country. There is nothing else that I desire."

It is said that it was not necessary to order a Japanese soldier to fight to the death... not to turn his back to the enemy or flee - because doing so would bring dishonor to him, his family and the Emperor. Do not fear death in the cause of justice. Today's suicide bomber gets the same indoctrination.

Japan was losing the war. The Kamikaze was motivated by nationalistic ideals. They wanted to save Japan from a humiliating defeat and to keep Japan free from the influence of foreigners; a perspective that motivates today's suicide bomber.

On August 15, 1945 Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender. For weeks after Japan's surrender, Japanese citizens, in large numbers, committed suicide as an apology to Emperor Hirohito for losing the war and allowing Japan to be "shamed."

The code of the Samurai – The Bushido – not only influenced the actions of the Japanese soldier but also ordinary citizens, many of whom volunteered, late in the war, for certain death in the defense of Japan.

There's a lot to talk about when it comes to the subject of suicide in America - but we don't talk. It's a subject that's discussed primarily in whispers.

Today, when a person commits suicide, the event has a violent effect on a lot of other people. In most cases no fewer than six. It's hard for family and friends to understand when it (suicide) kills the young or the old; it is incomprehensible to a spouse or child when it takes Joe the plumber, the physically healthy, the talented or the successful. We are inclined to rationalize the loss of the very sick or the frail. When suicide finds its way into our lives we don't know what to say or what to think or what to do. There are no easy answers.

We do know the underlying conditions that predispose a person to kill himself; heredity, severe mental illness, an impulsive or violent temperament, a job/career setback, romantic failures, great personal shame and so on...

We know the who, the how, the where and the when of suicide. The big question is the Why of suicide! Of those who take their own life, only 1 in 5 tells us why or say good bye.

The Modern Suicide Bomber

In October 1983 a truck load of explosives was driven into a Marine barracks in Beirut. This was the beginning of the modern use of suicide bombing since World War II. In the explosion 237 Marines died and another 80 were wounded. The truck driver died.

The bombing was the first time since 1945 that the United States had experienced multiple casualties caused by a suicide bomber. Similar suicide bombings were experienced by the French and the Israelis.

The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence - perpetrated against noncombatant targets by groups who wish to cause fear while promoting their ideology.

Modern terrorist groups don't wear uniforms. They use suicide bombing when other tactics have failed. The use of suicide bombing spreads in countries when the broader population is (sometimes passively) receptive to terrorists who target civilians. We must also keep in mind that there is no shortage of inventory, that is - bombers and targets - and the cost of entry is low!

The leaders of organizations that recruit people to blow themselves up in crowds of civilians have persuaded these mostly young people that they will be remembered forever, get their heavenly reward and enter paradise. We've seen this movie before.

Terrorism targets civilians. Terrorism, for the most part, is promoted by non-state organizations that engage in violence in order to affect a political goal. In most cases the groups want to get rid of foreigners and/or foreign influence in their region. Where have we heard that before?

A suicide attack does not aim to physically destroy a specific target. Rather, its primary use is as weapons of psychological warfare intended to influence and intimidate a larger audience. In short the target is not those who are killed by the bomber.

The bomber's personal goal may be martyrdom or material incentives such as a cash bonus or the guarantee of a place with God for their family. The certain death of the bomber is a leading indicator of the bomber's complete dedication to the group and their cause.

Our various talking heads have attempted to explain away the suicide bomber as brainwashed, poor, or emotionally dysfunctional. Others suggest that suicide bombings are acts of religious extremism. Well maybe; who really knows?

What we do know is that the vast majority of suicide bombers are young and increasingly women - The Kamikaze were young. There are a lot of young people in the third world and most have little to do.

Speaking of the young, 4,500 people between the age of 15 and 24 kill themselves annually. Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in this age group and the 2nd leading cause of death of college age students.

The group with the fewest number of suicides and attempted suicides are African American women.

The Department of Defense

Senator Patty Murray, a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, asked the Department of Defense for a report on number of veterans that have committed suicide. The DOD did not respond.

CBS submitted a freedom of information request to the DOD asking for the same information for 1995 to 2007. Four months later the Department reported that there were 2,200 suicides during the period. The report included only active duty soldiers.

CBS then requested suicide data from the states and found that there were 6,250 veterans who committed suicide in 2005 - 120 suicides per week.

Meanwhile the Department of Defense was reporting, until just recently, that there is no suicide epidemic in the armed forces.

The rate of suicide among veterans is twice the rate for non-veterans. 21 per 100,000 versus 9 per 100,000. Veterans aged 20 to 24 have the highest rate of suicide among all groups at 32 per 100,000. The majority of these soldiers served more than one tour in the Middle East or was forced to extend service past their commitment - unit continuity.

This summer The National Institute of Health announced that it will manage the largest study of mental health and suicide among military personnel ever undertaken with \$50 million of funding from the Army - YOU.

Better late than never - as they say. Perhaps their findings will help the rest of us better understand suicide in the civilian population.

It's Four O'clock - Do you know where your Money Is?

Suicide does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

47 year old Kirk Stephenson was co-founder and chief operating officer of Olivant Ltd. Olivant had a billion dollar position in UBS shares. Stephenson put the shares in an account at Lehman Brothers. The account had a rehypothecation rider which allowed Lehman to use the shares as collateral to borrow money. Goes to show how important it is to know your counter-party Lehman filed for bankruptcy in September 2008. Olivant can't find the assets.

Mr. Stephenson stepped in front of an express train in October 2008.

In November, 2007, 51year old Alex Widmer was appointed CEO of Julius Bear, the \$294 billion asset Swiss private bank. The banks off shore banking practices were (are) being investigated. Something about customers not paying their taxes or some such... In December 2008 Widmer committed suicide.

Multibillionaire Adolf Merckle put too much leverage on the family business and made some big stock market bets in 2007. The bets went south in 2008. He killed himself in January 2009 at age of 74. Forbes magazine estimated his wealth at \$9.2 billion.

And, French financier, Magon de La Villehuchet, died in his Manhattan office just before Christmas last year. He took some pills and cut his wrists. La Villehuchet invested \$1.5 billion of his customer's money with Bernie Madoff.

Did these men have a choice? Did our soldiers have a choice? I think not.

Families and friends need to pay attention to loved ones and colleagues when they notice a (major) change in behavior or temperament. Teens and young adults often give us a signal. Most times they give us more than one. But are we paying attention?

The armed services must get off their denial of the growing epidemic of suicide in the military. Non commissioned officers have to set-aside their macho mantra of "on your feet "or "suck it up soldier," although I must admit that I was guilty of this attitude when I was in the Army.

We must all do a better job of paying attention to the people around us while avoiding being judgmental. There's a chance we may be able to save a life.

Given their culture and training - The Samurai had no choice. The Kamikaze and the modern day suicide bomber may have had a choice but were persuaded otherwise. My hunch is that the people that kill themselves - Like the Samurai - had no choice - at least not a choice they saw at the time.

Like Justice Brown said last month - sometimes you have to play the hand you're dealt.

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