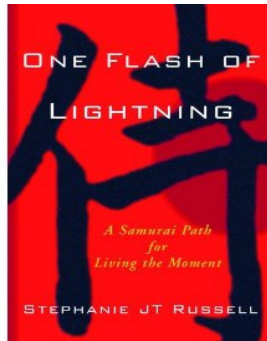


# One Flash of Lightning

A Samurai Path For Living The Moment



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## ■ The Big Idea

Freedom, for the true Samurai, is the presence of one's own truth. It is the discipline to end all disciplines, the love to begin all loves.

One Flash of Lightning is a unique and timely interpretation of Bushido, the Samurai Code of Conduct. Stephanie JT Russell explores Bushido's enduring relevance to the human condition, linking the ancient warrior's way to the modern psyche in a universal message of kindness and ethical integrity.

Interweaving eastern and western sensibilities, Russell poses compelling questions of intent, awareness, and honor, framed for men and women facing the complexities of today's world. One Flash of Lightning celebrates Bushido's innate beauty and its passionate appeal to the transformative power of living each moment with an ardent, tranquil joy.

## **Why You Need This Book**

This book is a stirring call for a new Western warrior code, drawing strength from the Samurai tradition – a work that attempts to give birth to what the author posits as a common language of compassion, decency, and abiding moral strength in the face of a culture gyrating away from civility and humanity.

## **BEGINNING HERE**

Simple consciousness in the moment opens our senses to the epic nature of life, and our own part in it. That sounds big, and it is. But the immensity of this journey is quite modestly expressed in elusive details that compose the distracting sweep of daily activity. Those details of life, chiseled into sharp relief by simple awareness, teach the imminent truth of the moment. And deepening awareness rouses the mind to lucid veracity, stronger presence, and lessening fear.

Integrity, candor, and depth are human signatures that bridge the Samurai Way across centuries to a timeless truth of self-excitation and spiritual awakening. May the visceral poetry of the Samurai Code ignite in you an appetite for the heat of inner change. May one flash of lightning fix your gaze on the hard won prize of a heaven unchained.

## TODAY I DIE, LIKE EVERYDAY BEFORE

In a classic Japanese paradox, Bushido's complex admixture belies the simplicity of the essential code, which is distilled into eight fundamental principles:

*Jin. To cultivate a sympathetic understanding of people*

*Gi. To embody and preserve meticulous ethics*

*Chu. To evince loyalty to one's master*

*Ko. To esteem and look after one's parents*

*Rei. To show respect for others*

*Chi. To enhance wisdom by broadening one's knowledge*

*Shin. To be truthful at all times*

*Tei: To care for the aged and those of humble station*

In our twenty-first century, the delicate balance of our world has become even more precarious. The exacting velocity of daily existence leaves many people feeling exhausted, angry, and powerless. And many feel it's not enough to seek guidance from political, religious, or other public leadership alone.

Our answers and questions must come from within – and through candid, meaningful discourse with peers and personal mentors. Perhaps we have entered a modern age of the ronin – the solitary Samurai, unbound from the restraints and comforts of a master, a government, or a retinue, unconditionally reliant upon his wits, his heart, and the internal mission to endless self-transformation.

## **THE WORD OF A SAMURAI**

In the Samurai Way, all self-cultivation is geared to build a fearless, alert, self-aware personality, to meet life and death wholeheartedly, to be attentive to the truth that emerges in each moment, to recognize that change is the primal force beneath every event. And to stand alone with confidence in that solitude, while feeling connected to everything.

Perhaps something like Bushido could have been created without words, like a silently transmitted body of pure military physics. But like all radical ideas, Bushido is anchored to words – language that shaped and animated the destiny of a subculture that is arguably accessible even today, wherever martial art is practiced.

Its intrinsic value cannot, however, be limited to martial capacity. The utterances of Bushido resonate with the immediacy of any moment in time, under any conditions that test one's moral strength and purity of intent.

Self-knowledge, which the Western mind often deciphers in psychoanalytic terms, is for Bushido a morally driven process of introspection. With it arrives a challenge that is difficult to ignore and perhaps impossible to flee. The code is oddly compatible with today's contradictory Western mind. Perhaps Bushido's modern function is to engender a new Samurai mind that transcends cultural differences and rises to the universal vanishing point where all imagination is freed.

## THE SAMURAI CODE

*I have no parents; I make the Heavens and the Earth my Parents.*

No matter how attached she remains to the bonds of her worldly clan, the Samurai soul truly belongs to the force of nature that creates all life. Solitary and exposed, the Samurai is rooted to the earth beneath her feet... and her vision is drawn from the wild expanse of heaven.

*I have no home; I make the Tan T'ien my Home.*

The Tan T'ien is the center of breath and balance in the body. In Western parlance, we might call it "getting centered." For the Samurai, it is the only reliable place of refuge and stability. When familiar power structures fail, or when ordinary help is unavailable, the Tan T'ien offers the core inner security that is "home."

Getting centered is not an easy task. There is so much noise in the world. Nearly all earthly desires distract from reaching a quiet internal focus. It takes will and, for those who choose it, some kind of trained discipline to generate the process. But even without training, without formal discipline, it is natural to seek and excavate the interior of one's real self.

*I have no divine power; I make Honesty my divine power.*

Truth is the bedrock of the Samurai's spiritual power. Knowing he has nothing to lose and everything to gain, he makes fearless honesty the medium of his fate. The world may disagree or even despise his candor – but he stands securely in the comfort of his firm integrity.

The Samurai's Honesty marks his place in the world. His Divine Power touches events with the rare grace of unembroidered sincerity. He is grounded in his truth.

*I have no eyes; I make the Flash of Lightning my Eyes.*

The Samurai's magnetic presence cannot be ignored. She is pure contained ferocity, the force of nature incarnate. The necessity of the moment is all she sees. And, through the evidence of her actions, others perceive the intensity and integrity of her inmost vision.

The Samurai view of the world is as raw as lightning, touched with inherent qualities of illumination and the passionate heat of action.

*I have no ears; I make Sensibility my Ears.*

How does the Samurai listen? From the heart, to feel what is being felt. From the bones, to move in the rhythm of what's happening in each moment. From the very bloodstream, to let right action flow from what's truly needed now.

*I have no means; I make Docility my means.*

Samurai composure is expressed in civility, kindness, and genuine concern for others, particularly those who are vulnerable or oppressed. At its core, Docility is the means to a greater awareness of what action is needed at the moment – or whether action is appropriate at all. Appropriate decisions cannot be made by a mind that is fraught with the heat of excess passion.

*I have no magic power, I make Personality my Magic Power.*

The Samurai is acutely conscious of human dynamics. She knows that events turn on the personalities of those involved in any situation – and that each personality brings new chemistry to the mix.

*I have no body; I make Stoicism my Body.*

Maintaining a firm, stoic mentality frees the Samurai from attachment to physical luxury. He can enjoy a lavish feast in an opulent palace while caring nothing for its allure. Self-possessed, indifferent to worldly entrapments, the Samurai owes nothing to anyone but for allegiance to his code. Living in wealth or comfort is not the problem. The problem lies in having a personal identification with wealth, or with the power to gain and hold it, or with temporal power itself.

*I have no designs; I make seizing opportunity by the forelock my Design.*

To remain wakeful and spontaneous, the Samurai keeps her mind empty of schemes. Her ready, instinctive response to the moment takes precedence over preconceived strategies and designs. She does not plot, plan or jockey for position or favors. And this is her formula for success.

*I have no miracles; I make Righteous Laws my Miracle.*

The Samurai is wired for action. He neither claims to manifest miracles nor looks to heaven to provide them. He is a realist. It is against his character to expect miracles from something he cannot see, feel or sense in the world around him. He wisely leaves celestial miracles to priests, saints, and magicians.

*I have no principles; I make Adaptability to all Circumstance my Principle.*

Adaptability is the fountain of youth and the tutor of wisdom. It exposes the Samurai's own resistance to change, and calls her to end old patterns that don't serve the moment. The freer she becomes, the more attuned she is to the world with all its fleeting sparks of vitality. She uncoils, loosens, pours her being into the hidden nuances of life – and proceeds unhindered into fair, truthful and relevant action.

*I have no tactics; I make Emptiness and Fullness my Tactics.*

The Samurai's overflow of human experience precludes any need for the tactics of scheming self-interest. His reward is the empty fullness that carries no burden of future gain. His fountain empties and fills at once, replenished in ecstatic surrender to the moment.

*I have no talent; I make Ready Wit my Talent.*

Ready Wit is the Samurai's genius for replacing tension with evanescent goodwill. The practice of Ready Wit must embody precisely what it states – a gift for quick, incisive speech that is immediately available to the astute Bushi. His humor is finely tuned to human interplay and the flow of emotions within a group.

*I have no friends; I make my Mind my Friend.*

Loneliness is a prevailing condition of people everywhere. For the Samurai, loneliness is the key to grasping the fragility of his own existence, bound up with the temporal nature of all life.

*I have no enemy; I make Incautiousness my Enemy.*

Bushido trains the soldier's mind in the artistry of caution. Life and death, failure and triumph, honor and shame are all hinged upon the Samurai's aptitude for vigilance. In view of such distressing stakes, it is no wonder that Incautiousness is the Samurai's sole enemy.



*I have no armor; I make Benevolence my Armor.*

The Samurai feels no need for protection. His surrender to the certainty of death renders fear of potential danger a questionable concern at best. *I have no armor.* He tells us in an offhand, unembellished way that he is, to all practical purposes, defenseless. Then, *I make benevolence my Armor.* Benevolence is the ultimate outcome of total awareness.

*I have no castle; I make Immovable Mind my Castle.*

Immovable Mind is the Samurai's towering strength. A humble strength, steadily built of mud and toil, of surrender to life and its panoply of circumstance.

*I have no sword; I make No Mind my sword.*

With empty hands, the Samurai steps into his final sanctuary. All he hears is the sound of everything, in one seamless chorus. It whistles like a teakettle, like wind, like a very old forest at night. He can hear himself somewhere in there, too, like a familiar creak in a porch swing rocket. It makes him smile a little.

No mind lifts him out of the world and roots him precisely within it. There is nothing to fight, defend, or change. If he had to, or wanted to, he could.

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