

**THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF BUSHIDO**  
**AND ITS ADAPTATION FOR USE IN THE MODERN DOJO**

By Michael (Gennan) Alexanian, April 2002

**The Original Seven Principles & Their Modern Paraphrase**

<p>The Seven Principles of Bushido</p> <p>As codified by Yamagei Yoko (cir.1685)</p>	<p>Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo</p> <p>The Seven Principles of Bushido (paraphrased from Yamagei Yoko)</p>
<p>1. 義 GI (Justice, Right Decision): Making correct decisions from the heart rather than from the mind. To die when one must without thought or regret.</p>	<p>1. Right Decision: "I will always make correct decisions from the heart, rather than from the mind."</p>
<p>2. 勇 YUU (Bravery): Rushing onto the point of a sword without hesitation if it would accomplish the greatest good.</p>	<p>2. Bravery: I will never hesitate to put my needs last, especially if it is best for the group."</p>
<p>3. 仁 JIN (Compassion, Benevolence): Universal love toward mankind. The ability to exhibit compassion.</p>	<p>3. Compassion: "I will always show Universal Love to all mankind."</p>
<p>4. 礼 REI (Right Action): Etiquette and the preservation of courtesy. The Samurai believed that it was better to lose his life than to be impolite.</p>	<p>4. Right Action: "I will always be polite and courteous at all times."</p>
<p>5. 誠 MAKOTO (Truth, Sincerity): Truthfulness</p>	<p>5. Truth: "I will always be truthful and sincere in everything I do."</p>
<p>6. 名誉 MEIYO (Honor): Glory without ego.</p>	<p>6. Honor: "I will always be honorable in thought, word and deed."</p>
<p>7. 忠義 CHUUGI (Devotion): Loyalty to one's Lord</p>	<p>7. Devotion: "I will always be loyal to my superiors and the members of my group."</p>

## COMMENTARY

This paper is an expansion on a recent article that I submitted for publication in The Iaido Journal section of EJMAS (Electronic Journal of Martial Arts and Sciences).

As the topic for this year's Guelph School of Japanese Sword Arts Academic Session is "Ethics in the Martial Arts", it seems appropriate to address the issue of adopting "ethical standards" in the modern Dojo; not only as a means to achieve a certain sense of *WA*, or harmony, among the members of the Dojo itself, but also as a way to keep a higher level of integrity in the particular form of *Bujutsu / Budo* practiced by that Dojo. By using the Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo as an example, I hope to show that the *Seven Principles of Bushido* can, in fact, be utilized quite effectively as an ethical guideline, especially in the context of teaching and practicing a government-protected Cultural Art like Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu.

When I was formally commissioned by Tsumaki Seirin (Motonobu). Soke, the current and 14th Headmaster of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu, and his son Tsumaki Kazuo (Genwa). Sensei to introduce this Koryu Bujutsu to North America for the first time in its 405 year-old history, I was faced with numerous challenges. One of the most important

ones, not only to the Tsumaki family but to myself as well, was to create a set of conduct guidelines for the Dojo that would enable both Instructor and Deshi alike to represent the art of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu honorably both inside and outside of the Dojo.

As Miyamoto Musashi once said: "In all forms of strategy, it is necessary to maintain the combat (Dojo) stance in everyday life and to make your everyday stance your combat (Dojo) stance. You must research this well." (Victor Harris translation; 1974, The Overlook Press, p.54) If we take this to mean that the standard of conduct that one is required to uphold in the Dojo is also equally applicable in one's daily existence, so that the Ryu's reputation (or that of its Instructors and Leaders) is not jeopardized, then the need for a clear-cut set of ethical guidelines becomes very apparent. Further influencing the development of these guidelines was the unique fact that the government of Japan has designated Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu as *Mukei Bunkazai* (An Intangible Cultural Asset) and that the Emperor has named our Soke as *Ningen Kouhoku* (A Living National Treasure).

Looking back at the *Seven Principles of Bushido* (The Way of the Warrior) as codified by Yamagei Yoko in 1685, I saw there the basic framework for the ethical standard I was seeking to implement for our new organization. In order to bring the

*Seven Principles of Bushido* into a more understandable form for modern usage, I chose to paraphrase the original precepts of Yamagei Yoko into a form that could be easily memorized by our Deshi and recited together as a component of our *Hajimari Reishiki* (Opening Etiquette), thereby engendering a sense of camaraderie and harmony (*WA*) such as existed amongst the *Samurai* clans of old.

For example, the original principle of "Bravery" reads: "Rushing onto the point of a sword without hesitation if it would accomplish the greatest good". However, since we really don't want our modern-day Deshi to take this concept literally, I paraphrased the idea of 'self-sacrifice' as: "I will never hesitate to put my needs last, especially if it is best for the group" (Please see the Table at the beginning of this paper for the other six principles and their paraphrases).

What is important to keep in mind at this juncture is that I am, under no circumstances, claiming to be some kind of 'paragon of virtue' or 'moral icon' or trying to set myself upon an ethical 'pedestal' for all to worship...far from it. I am just as human as the next person, with as many flaws and faults and backslidings, to be sure. This makes it incumbent upon me, as a Branch Manager and Principal Instructor to try my utmost to set a good example for the Deshi by putting these principles to work in MY

OWN everyday life. The overriding issue, though, is that if my Deshi and I are to represent an Intangible Cultural Asset like Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu faithfully, respectfully and sincerely in all walks of life, there must be, perforce, a 'code', which governs the lives of Deshi and Instructor alike. Moreover, one that is simply and succinctly stated and easy to keep at the forefront of one's mind at all times.

Putting a set of ethical guidelines into effect, as we have done, ultimately begs the question: "What about those Deshi who 'break' their Bushido, or feel that they cannot live by these seven precepts." In the past six years that the Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo has been in operation, we have been most fortunate to admit Deshi who have tried his or her utmost to live by this Code, and we have not had to expel anyone for gross misconduct by violation of the *Seven Principles of Bushido*. The reason for this is quite simple, really. When a prospective student first comes to visit a class, with the intent of perhaps becoming a formal Deshi of the Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo, we discuss in detail with him / her what following such a code will require of them if they are accepted as a member of the Dojo. If the prospective student feels that the responsibility to Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu to live their life by this set of precepts is too overwhelming or difficult, then all they have to do is say so, and we will understand and

encourage them to look elsewhere. This process has the effect of eliminating potential ethical dilemmas at the very beginning, with less hardship and heartache later on.

There is also the question to be considered here: “How can a Dojo other than the one discussed in this paper add *The Seven Principles of Bushido* (or another ethical framework) to its existing membership regulations and adopt it into their regular Dojo practice?” First, it would seem that a Dojo practicing traditional Japanese martial arts, in order to maintain their ties to their individual ‘tradition’, could use *The Seven Principles of Bushido* as a means to that end, perhaps by posting a framed copy of it in a conspicuous place at the entrance to the facility where it could be readily seen by Instructor, student and visitor alike. This would also have the effect of being a constant reminder to those entering and exiting the Dojo of what their ethical responsibilities are whether they are in or out of the Dojo environment.

Second, as was noted above, the modern paraphrase could be used as a ‘recitation’ led by the Instructor after the regular Dojo Opening Ceremony. The advantage here would be that, given enough time and repetition, both Instructor and student would come to know these principles by heart and they would begin to internalize them, whether they realize it right away or not. Internalizing *The Seven*

*Principles of Bushido* can, over the course of time, have a conscious and subconscious effect on the individual, thereby creating a series of ethical “flags” which will begin to go up if the given individual goes against the principles. In other words, *The Seven*

*Principles of Bushido* can reinforce the individual’s conscience and how it reacts when faced with moral dilemmas. For instance, if a member of a given Dojo is approached by his/her friends (who may or may not be members of the same Dojo) to steal some item, or behave in a dishonorable way, the internalized principle of *Honor* (“I will always be honorable in thought, word and deed”) should give that Dojo member cause to ‘think twice’ before acting, potentially bringing dishonor to themselves and their Dojo if they ignore that principle and get caught. If caught, they may face several consequences if the Dojo Instructor consistently enforces *The Seven Principles of Bushido* as an ethical framework for the Dojo (verbal or written reprimand, extra exercises, or possible expulsion if the behavior continues). This is a key point. If a given Dojo adopts *The Seven Principles of Bushido* as a guideline for moral conduct, then the Instructor must try their utmost to lead by example and do his/her best to embody what they are teaching. Otherwise, the framework becomes nothing but a plaque on a wall to cover an old nail hole.

By providing this simple, seven principle conduct guide to the Deshi of the Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo, and by impressing upon them the great responsibility that comes with adhering to it, not only IN the Dojo, but in ALL aspects of their lives, it is our sincere hope that the Deshi of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu will use it to become solid and positive examples to others and, perhaps, make some small difference in a world where rational, solid and effective ethical guidelines are so frequently lacking.

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### ***One Paragraph Bio***

Michael (Gennan) Alexanian, Branch Manager and Principal Instructor of the United States Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo holds a BA from Hope College in Holland, Michigan; and an MA from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. He is also the Vice-President of Shakunage Consulting, Inc. whose mission is “to promote, nurture and develop awareness of the Japanese Culture and to enhance Japanese / American business and individual friendships through the mutual understanding of each other’s cultures.” He currently holds the rank of Rokudan (Sixth Degree) in Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu, Nidan (Second Degree) in Toyama Ryu Iaido and Shodan (First Degree) in Shorinji Ryu Ju-jutsu.

### ***Paper Summary***

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of ***The Seven Principles of Bushido*** as an ethical framework for Dojo conduct. Although the main focus is on using it in a Dojo which practices an art that the Japanese Government has designated as an Intangible Cultural Asset, thereby demanding a certain moral character to represent it properly, consideration is also given to how it could be used in other Dojo as well in order to supplement existing Dojo regulations.