



The Warrior in Me. A Voice from the Past

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It was the beginning of a new year and we were wholeheartedly engaged in our usual family planning. That year was going to be somewhat different, as I was at the point of turning fifty years old... In a brief period of time, I was to become a half-century old woman and I had already decided I was going to make it a celebration. Reaching the age of half a century should be a time of joy and recognition in a woman's life, savouring moments of self-appreciation, a time to treasure fond memories, cherish family, value hard-worked accomplishments, reflect on the past and the present, plan a purposeful future— rather than getting tormented by the anguish of the widely-discussed 'aging and ageism' in the modern world.

I shared my thoughts with my husband and he tuned in. "Where do you want to go?" he asked, anticipating that world travel would be my choice. I let my mind browse through our family's favorite destinations travel list, but nothing caught my interest at the moment. All of a sudden, I remembered the picture book I had recently brought from Barnes & Noble, a wondrous visual guide of the world's most extraordinary places, and I quickly picked it from the shelf. "I'll let my inspiration decide," I answered him, with a smile. With no delay, I started to flip the pages, slowly, letting my mind rest in contemplation. "I'll turn every page and look at every picture in this book..." I whispered... "When something sparks my attention, raises my spirit—that will be my place to go..." He watched me with curiosity as I patiently advanced through

over a hundred awe-inspiring images from spectacular vistas of the natural world, stunning physical formations, to remarkable human endeavours. It took a split second of suspension, like frozen in time, to know that I found the site and it was calling me. A feeling of otherworldly intuition, my chest elevating in awe, my breath stopping... It was an exquisite feat of architecture that caught my eye and I knew I had to go visit that place. The image looked familiar and, at first sight, I thought it was a temple or a magnificent shrine— given my usual travel preferences and my natural inclination towards spirituality. Much to my surprise, the book description of the place didn't reveal a temple, but a Samurai fortress! Himeji Castle, also known as the White Heron Castle for its shape and color, was the place that 'chose itself' for my special exploration experience on my 50th Birthday vacation... My moment of awe, surprisingly, was brought by the sight of a warriors' castle.

Nevertheless, once the moment of surprise settled in, the family trip planning followed smoothly and excitingly. We had independently visited Japan before, in our youth, and we were eager to travel there again, together. Moreover, our son had vividly expressed his keen interest in visiting Japan himself and therefore our enthusiastic plan for the summer was firmly made and clear.

The heat waves during the summer of 2025 made traveling somewhat more difficult. For all that, our trip to Japan went on dutifully and the day we visited the castle found us gazing at the spectacular structure— breathtaking in its beauty, crowned with multiple curved, pagoda-style roofs, its architecture surely resembling a white heron taking its flight. Himeji Castle is Japan's biggest surviving historic castle, heavily fortified, built on the foundation of a former Samurai's fortress and training site at the beginning of 17th century. The sight of the fortress made my breath stop, once more, and the feeling of overwhelming memories from a far, hidden, unexpectedly familiar past started to emerge. We zealously advanced through the mysterious training rooms, featuring eerie corridors and hidden chambers, secret compartments used as warriors' hiding places, false retractable floors, numerous walls entirely covered by large wooden weapons racks, ingenious defense features and fighting traps— surveilled from multi-level strategic observation points.

In Japan's feudal system, Samurai warriors were part of the noble class, belonging to various clans, directly subordinated to the feudal lord— the leader of each clan. Their training was long and arduous, of great physical and mental exertion, and their dedication to protecting their clan and the lord was a lifetime commitment. Traditionally, Samurai fought for defending honor and the survival of their clan, this sometimes involving territorial disputes over control and resources. Interestingly, there were many female Samurai among them, who fought in battles, especially when defending castles. Unexplainably, visiting the castle brought me a feeling of respect and admiration over the strategy, self-discipline, intelligence and wisdom that governed that place for centuries, in the past. My intuition told me that, somehow, I had been part of it, and the training discipline was, indeed, a trait of character that surely resonated with me. I could see why the image of that castle in the book had so subtly, yet powerfully, attracted my attention— in that state of quiet observation and inspired contemplation... We discovered, during our visit

further, valuable insights from the life and the training of some of the greatest Samurai of the past. We learned their view that success in combat depended mostly on the mindset, that it was crucial to perceive things which were invisible to the naked eye, and to develop intuitive judgement ability. Samurai's training in Martial Arts, in that regard, strongly referred to building a warrior's mindset through a long process, described as the attainment of the '5 Minds of Martial Arts'— starting from the 'beginner's mind', growing through the stages of 'lingering mind' (mastering alertness, awareness, mindfulness), 'no mind' (the skill of just being, doing, and reacting in real time), 'immovable mind' (reaching stability, fearlessness, control, and bearing under extreme pressure), and finally attaining the 'enlightened mind' (which aimed to transcend the previous four stages, once they have been fully achieved). Every piece of knowledge we acquired felt mesmerizing to me, while still feeling so familiar, and I cherished every moment of the visit.

We gathered more historical insights at the Samurai Museum in Kyoto City, the former historical capital of Japan till 1868, a place that highlighted not only the Samurai traditions, but also Kyoto's unique Samurai heritage. My favorite display at the museum was the exhibit outlining Bushido, the Samurai's code, also known as 'The Way of the Samurai'— comprising the attitudes of 'Respect, Honour, Honesty, Justice, Loyalty, Courage, Compassion'. It became clear how strong their belief was that one should never leave 'the way', and never stop training for 'the way'— as it required uninterrupted practice and awareness. From the principles of Miyamoto Musashi, known as 'The Greatest Swordsman', who was nonetheless a fierce warrior, exceptionally skilled in combat, I found most impactful his profound teachings that, if you were fully self-aware, you would be honest, and that maintaining humility and perspective was always a must— to not be consumed by your ego, but focus on understanding the world around you; he pointed out, moreover, that life itself was a constant form of combat, in which a strong mindset would always make a difference. Another spotlight, at the museum, was put on the coexistence of Buddhism and Shintoism as belief systems during that time, so that almost all Japanese were Buddhist and Shintoist at the same time. As presented, the Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, different from the monotheistic religions as neither of them followed one 'God', were treated mostly as philosophies rather than religions. It is worth noting that in Buddhism (which had arrived to Japan from China during the 530s CE) the law of karma was of important value, as Buddhists strongly believed in reincarnation; attaining and maintaining harmony and balance in the universe were central aspects of personal development and one's place in the world, while striving for mental strength was certainly of utmost importance. In Shintoism (Japan's own religious system from the 600s BCE), worshiping nature and showing reverence and respect to the ancestors were keystones; furthermore, it brought out the concept of Ki, the power and spiritual energy, in Shinto beliefs. It became immediately obvious how values and attitudes from both philosophy systems influenced and contributed to the path of the Samurai and their lifetime Martial Arts training— and that completed our cultural understanding of Japan's feudal Samurai's world of wisdom.

For the rest of our vacation throughout Asia, I reflected on some long-forgotten memories from my early youth, when I had the first glimpses of my unexplainable connection with the world of Asian warriors and martial artists of the past. While in silent contemplation, I often found myself navigating sudden memories of battles, training and combat— flashes of instant knowledge that felt so real and lively connected to my own perceived past experiences that they became very difficult to overlook. However, it was the memory of war that haunted me, in my waking dreams and reflection, the most vivid impression that stayed with me and followed me ever after. No matter how glorious, it was the war that caused so much death and destruction.

I thought of the time when, during my first studies of Asian spirituality, I had learnt the intricate ideas about Karma and the concept of reincarnation. The cycle of soul's existence, the unceasing survival, transition, and transformation of the soul from one incarnation to another, through the perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, is regarded — in many Asian philosophies — as the basis of our soul's evolution and ascendance through the myriads of experiences and groundwork life lessons we learn in every existence. Rebirth, a fundamental concept in Asian philosophies, is the belief that an individual's consciousness (the essential form of consciousness, the essence of the self) survives death and is reborn into a new life and a new form of existence. This endless and repetitive cycle would eventually end when one attains enlightenment and liberation, ceasing the need for further rebirth for the purpose of learning— when the soul breaks free and ultimately transcends birth and death. Karma is, in this context, a kind of natural law that manifests the causes and effects of what we think, say, or do in every life we experience, influencing future rebirths and determining the premises for one's progression from one existence to the next, with many intricate connections between the innumerable lives we live, and the resulting evolution of our soul. Another interesting concept from the classical Hindu philosophy is Akasha ('aether') — the eternal substance, field, or ethereal fluid, imagined as pervading the cosmos, essential to the structure of the universe, permeating the material world while being interwoven with the fabric of reality. Transcending mere visibility, Akasha — in a theosophical interpretation — is thought to contain records of everything that has ever happened in the past, happens in the present, and will ever happen in the future. This all-pervading 'etheric time-space' holds the promise and the potential to reveal direct knowledge from the all-encompassing history of the universe. When relating such concept to the philosophy of Karma and our soul's cycle of existence, we can intuitively think of the glimpses of knowledge and critical insights one might acquire if, when merging our consciousness with Akasha — in a deep, fully-engaged meditation or inspired contemplation — one is able to subtly access the etheric infinite space, the overarching 'collection' of Akashic records.

During that stage of my studies, in my early 20s, I grew to learn a new mysterious way of exploring my own karma. For a long time, I experimented with hours of standing meditation in front of a tall mirror, in perfect silence and solitude — and that became part of my daily training for some years. In those long hours of contemplation, like dissolving into the glaring surface of the mirror, I started to visibly perceive various shade-like figures emerging in the depth of the mirror, like surfacing from the depth of time and the abyss of space. Although being aware the

perceptions were projections from my own consciousness connecting with a deeper reality, the impression of the shades arising from the mirror was surreal, unearthly, fascinating. While gazing steadily, with an intent look, at what was revealing, some of the human-shaped images gradually unravelled and defined themselves with unexpected clarity— within my transcendent field of vision. I remember how one of the figures that repeatedly ‘presented itself’, as reflected back to me in the mirror, had the evident appearance of a warrior that I could, eventually, identify as a Samurai. I remember the face features clearly taking shape and — as I gazed in the mirror — gazing back at me, like a perfect reflection of myself. I remember the sense of perfect identification I experienced during those moments, and how natural it felt to observe the face and figure of the warrior becoming visible, always the same, unchanged, immovable— every time it appeared, looking back at me as my own reflection. Interestingly, although now being aware that many Samurai women were part of the warrior clans, participating both in training and combat, at that time, the image that always appeared to me in the mirror resembled, actually, the one of a male Samurai — displaying strong, masculine, sharp facial features. Nevertheless, I didn’t give too much importance to that particular mirror reflection in those days, simply because a series of other occurring figures were significantly consistent and became distinctly defined during my years of deep reflection on my own Karma— and some of them caught more of my interest at that very young age.

Noteworthy, however, another meaningful memory from my early youth took me back to the time when I started to have an intriguing spontaneous urge to perform physical movements that very much resembled the Martial Arts. While being immersed in my usual time of meditation, or absorbed in a quiet observation of life and existence itself, I would simply feel the sudden impulse to rise from a chair and start moving forward, my body advancing in coordinated steps and executing perfectly balanced stances— with a dream-like awareness that still maintained the quality of clear lucidity. It wasn’t at all a thrill of fighting that inspired me, although the ‘muscle memory’ often engaged my body in sharp, forceful, unexpected striking movements that clearly expressed the fierceness of a combat. For all that, what mostly inspired me in that unusual experience was the coherent graceful flow of moving meditation, the balance and harmony the execution brought to my wellbeing. While not yet being formally trained in the skills of the arts, what I experienced was the awakening of a spontaneous awareness of Tai Chi-like movements and, sometimes, of entire sequences of flowing steps and poses that raised from the depth of my being and revealed themselves, to the amazement of my own self-perception. Reflecting on our eternal existence had stirred my inspiration and triggered memories from the immutable past. In time, following the drive that had unexplainably prompted me to engage in those complex exercise routines, I developed an interest towards studying the philosophy and practice of the ‘soft’ forms of Martial Arts that were widely offered in training schools in the contemporary world.

I soon became an ardent practitioner of Tai Chi and Qigong— centuries-old practices of the body and mind originated as ancient Martial Arts, in China. I explored a large variety of styles and forms, remarkable mind-body integration practices that always required mental focus

and inner strength. While generally involving sequences of slow gentle movements, coordinated walking patterns, meditation in motion, and standing postures, I also found an array of more vigorous routines, such as dynamic revitalizing Qigong exercises and Tai Chi forms of self-defence— which challenged flexibility, balance, and muscle strength.

It didn't take long till my passion for practice grew into a calling for teaching the arts and sharing their beauty and benefits with the others. Teaching Tai Chi and Qigong required inspiring both physical discipline and mind discipline to the students, as well as maintaining focus for establishing a long term grounded personal practice. Ultimately, that challenge led me to becoming a dedicated traveling teacher. I discovered a teaching vocation for the Soft Martial Arts and, that way, I chose the ancient practices of health and wellbeing, and a spiritual pursuit, over the fighting arts. I chose healing over fighting, softness over hardness, and — as I continued to delve deeper into the secrets of the arts — I chose to ponder over the choices I made on the ways I would benefit from the mysteries of that invaluable discipline.



I gave serious consideration to the ‘martial morality’, finding that the Shaolin monks' orders and other traditional schools historically approached the study of Martial Arts as a system of ethics, founded on a series of virtues of the deed and of the mind, not only as means of combat, self-defense or mental training. When ‘martial morality’ was respected, it comprehended the morality of deed (concerning social relations) and the morality of mind (the cultivation of inner harmony between the emotional and the wisdom mind), with the ultimate goal to bring wisdom and emotions in harmony with each other.

When somebody tells you that you're an ‘old soul’, it usually relates to their perception of you displaying unusual wisdom and maturity, beyond your actual age, depth and authenticity, an empathetic and philosophical nature, and showing perspective in life that is far from the generational interests and superficial trends. ‘Old souls’ tend to be highly introverted, enjoy introspection beyond their years, and find comfort in solitude and reclusion from the usual trap of gossip and social inclusion. It was my mature outlook on life that drove me towards acquiring a deep understanding of human nature, always drawn to deep thinking and meaningful conversations rather than popularity in busy social settings and the thrill of loud modern environments. Above all, I found a strong drive to guide my life by my own ethical values and stay connected to the moral compass of my own self.

It wasn't that easy in the beginning, nevertheless. At that moment in my reflection, it felt imperative to look back even further, in time. The recollection of the earlier days when it all started, during my first years in high-school, was still vivid in my mind as it echoed for decades in my life. I was fifteen and eager to learn. A top high-school student with a sharp mind who easily over-performed in academic work, I accumulated sound school achievements and I

peer-tutored many of my colleagues, while simultaneously experiencing a rather difficult and unfulfilling social life. A loving heart, an 'old soul', not only wise for my age and dependable, but also prone to psychic visions and uncommon esoteric episodes. In that context, a strong urge for meditation awakened in me and I found myself looking for solitude most of the time— to allow my inquisitive mind to explore deeper into the mysteries of life and the universe.

The most peculiar circumstance that occurred in my life, during that time, most often while allowing myself to immerse in a contemplative state that sometimes resembled daydreaming, was that the surrounding reality of the present was subtly and gradually infiltrated with strong glimpses of appearances emerging from a different time and space. Suddenly, I could perceive myself and my surroundings in a different historic context, clearly unveiling and unfolding within my present field of perception, and I somehow became aware of my own existence as an 'old self'. The strangest thing, however, was that I could continue to perceive my own 'present self', and maintained the recognition of who I was in the current existence, the visual space of the manifestations from the past simply blending in within my modern ambience. It was like my present and past existences were merged within my field of vision and, while being aware of my current life and my 'present self', I was concurrently perceiving some old times' environment and my 'old self' in it. While engulfed in such an eerie, unearthly atmosphere of sights and sounds, the experience was always overwhelming. When it occurred, it was awfully difficult to fit the incident within my normal school hours, making it impossible to continue to participate in ordinary school activities or social events which I was expected to attend and enjoy. I started to look for solitude more and more, until being on my own became my natural way of being. Temporary, I developed a sort of unusual shyness and a feeling of insecurity that — although not uncommon during a girl's teenage years — wasn't at all characteristic to my typical strength, resilience, and tenacity, growing up.

The day in high-school when I chose to skip a class and remain alone in the empty school yard, for an entire class period, was one of those episodes when my daydream encounter of past memories fusing with the present announced itself as impending happening. It felt imminent that I had to seek silence and solitude. I was undoubtedly lucky that the yard was left empty when most of the students returned to class, while a few just left the school for the day. It wasn't often that I could have the entire school yard for myself! I was relieved. Finding a sanctuary spot out of sight, I sat with my back resting on the school wall, relaxed, I allowed myself to fully unwind and I entered my familiar state of meditation. I slowly let my anxiety guard down and I peacefully 'watched' what was unfolding... It was the memory of the warrior that came to me again, that day, as it had come before in the previous months, as trying to remind me about my old times of fierceness, heroism, courage, strength— my life as a male Samurai fighter...

All of a sudden, my immersive field of perception signalled an unexpected intrusion within my vision span. Out of the blue, a group of people had entered the school yard... It was a group of teenage boys whom I easily recognised, students from a few other high-schools in the city who often visited our high-school to meet their close friends. Somehow, I knew they were well-intended, so their presence didn't generally scare me. I personally knew some of the boys

from my early childhood, from our primary school grounds or even growing up on the same street. I was aware they genuinely liked me and they have long tried to connect; the boys had sometimes attempted to communicate with me, and socially include me in their circle, and I had no reason to be concerned about their attitudes or friendliness. It was only my awkward shyness in that strange time of my life — to much extent caused by the overwhelming incidents when I could hardly understand and take in everything that was happening to me — that made me unwilling or unable to respond to their repeated open invitation to social interaction. In essence, it was the challenge to cope with changes in my world perception, mixed with a girl's typical teenage transformations, that made me withdraw from normal social engagement and, for quite a while, become reluctant to communicate with peers.

As they spotted me, the boys realised I was alone in the school yard and there was no one else around. Curious about my presence there, in complete solitude, they walked towards me and tried to reach out. One of them, an acquaintance from my home neighbourhood and the son of some of my parents' old friends and colleagues, gave a salutation to me. He was a boy I had liked for some time, but never really communicated with. That day, my introversion was at its peak. On the spur of the moment, taken by surprise, a wave of salutation was all I could do to respond. I was quite aware I looked like I was lost in space and, as a matter of fact, as one might say, it was actually true. I was lost in the intertwining of different spaces and different times, at the edge between different realities— trying to tell them apart in my fused, overlapping, field of perception. I was frantically trying to get myself together and figure out how to act as my 'current self'— to be the high-school girl I was supposed to be in the moment.

One of the visitors asked me what I was doing there, or maybe just how I was, how things were going... I couldn't tell exactly. A simple question could easily get lost and twisted when one is trapped between worlds and tries to live them both at once. But I attempted to answer... and that was the moment when my whole life changed! For good. Without warning, I could hear my own voice sounding powerfully in the air... like it wasn't mine. I couldn't recognise my own voice, and nobody could. Stunningly deep, masculine, imperative, fierce— the voice of a mighty warrior reverberating in the school yard, the voice of the male Samurai fighter that had haunted my memories for the past few months. I knew it was still 'me', but not that 'me' I expected to bring to the surface to respond— not the shy, fragile high-school girl in the school yard that everybody expected to hear. It was that 'me' from the depth of my memories, reaching out, surfacing at the wrong moment, making his mighty voice heard... I was shocked, motionless, incapable to move. Startled, all the visitors turned and stared at me, at once. For a few seconds, I watched the boys— their faces perplexed with surprise, like trying to comprehend the incomprehensible, their minds struggling to make sense of the facts. "Who was that?!!!" I heard a voice exclaiming, "Who just spoke?" Utterly confused, in a split of a second, a few of them rushed to walk around, looking inquisitively in all directions, attempting to reach to the other side of my hideout— like aiming to discover who else was there that they couldn't notice... But nobody else was there. I was all alone, facing the empty school yard, my back leaning on the

school wall... stuck in my perpetual daydream of past memories and making strenuous efforts to come back to the present.

Keeping complete silence, I just stood there for a while, frozen still, and the world was over. The perception of my past existence was temporarily gone and I was finally rebounded to the present, on the verge of emotional burnout and feeling unable to loosen up. No more fierceness, courage, braveness... no more glory and mighty strength... just the little girl, scared and gasping for air. At that point, it felt like my entire life collapsed. I was doomed to live the rest of my high-school days in solitude, outcasted for my incapacity to fit in my own body, to live the normal life of a teen in an ordinary routine of her current existence. Of course, the world had come to an end. At least for me. The visitors were still staring, with a look of bewilderment on their faces, and the boy I liked probably thought I was a complete oddity. Then, a few moments later, like transported, I did the only thing a shy teenage girl in that situation could ever imagine doing: I found my way to the high-school entrance and I disappeared behind the door, melting into the corridor and aiming to vanish from existence.

That day I went home early. I was too scared to communicate, too frightened to even try to talk to anybody. I locked within and didn't say a word for the rest of the day, aware of a new discovery: the possibility that, out of the depth of time, a memory could find its way to the surface and a voice from the past, an 'old me', could utter my words in a tone that would surprise or startle people. That probability seemed unbeatable and, for a while, I feared every word I said and every sound I made. I simply dreaded the thought that, in a moment of contemplation, it might become impossible to control a voice reaching out from the depth of my memories.

Before the end of high-school, however, I was able to regain my natural inner strength and general confidence, which somewhat appeared to be lost for a short timeframe. For all that, I remember how, for a long time, I was still reluctant to speak. Several years passed and, even without an imminent reason, I found myself in that unbroken silence even when surrounded by close friends—that subconscious feeling becoming the substrate of a new way of living.

It wasn't until my first studies of Karma and the cycle of existence that I gained insights into the meaning of past lives and deeply rooted memories of old incarnations, the philosophy of it all and the profound implications of those puzzling episodes often occurring in my daily life. It wasn't till I had the chance to run across the concept of Akashic records, the presumed 'compendium' of unbounded universal knowledge, that I started to grasp the meaning of what had happened to me along the years, the shocking realization of a different time and space blending into my present reality— of stupefying events and sudden insights that were nonetheless utterly captivating. Years later, as I reflect on my becoming, the amusing side of those experiences reaches me joyously with a kind, warm sense of humor, and it makes me smile. Rising from the shy teenager who thought of herself of being lost in space, in time, and in the whole realm of existence, the time when I thought the world was over was the time that mysteriously put me on the track of discovery and exploration and made me who I have become, in this life: a wise woman on the path of a seeker that pushed me ahead, further and further,

challenging the very essence of my being, making me stretch myself in every way, and steadily uplifted me into the purposeful, inquisitive, and erudite person that I am.

It should always be a subject of inner curiosity, introspection and reflection to look into the memories we gather, more or less straightforward to explain and comprehend, and the imprints they leave in our conscious or subconscious minds, on our personality and ever evolving character. Out of the many memories I have uncovered, reaching out from the depth of my soul's past and the myriad of lives I might have experienced, the memory of the warrior was one of the most bewildering and considerably challenging to decipher, placing a powerful mark on me. While the contribution to my personal development was undoubtedly significant, to only mention wisdom, self-discipline, resilience, a strong mindset and perspective, there was always the memory of war and destruction that, nevertheless, left a shadow of pain and enduring remorse lingering in my field of awareness— very difficult to accept as the spiritually-inclined person that I currently am. Ultimately, for the glory in the battles I might have won, I feel the pride and fulfilment of a skilled, honored Samurai; for the death that I might have possibly caused, however — in justified or unjustified competitive combats or war, in the service of protecting the people of the clan or maintaining its territorial control — I can only experience sorrow and an inner honest drive to offer my sincere apologies and regrets to the souls I hurt and to the all-encompassing humanity. May the choices I make, as my present-self, guide my life and my soul on a path that my future-self will appreciate and honor.

