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**Mushin – Peak Performance States in Aikido Philosophy**

**By Charlie Badenhop**

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In Aikido we learn how to enter into a peak performance state that in the Japanese arts is known as "mushin." In Seishindo work we often call "mushin" a state of "embodied presence." "Mushin" is similar to the term "flow state" as used by many people to describe the conditions for peak performance. For several years now I have been defining "embodied presence/mushin" in the following manner: "When the structure of your body is balanced, and your thinking mind is fully present but not engaged in any form of internal dialogue, you will tend to release any extraneous thoughts or actions and enter into the flow state of "mushin." Your thoughts, feelings, and actions occur simultaneously and spontaneously. Nothing comes between your thoughts and your actions, and nothing is left over. When we embody such a state we greatly improve our ability to learn with grace and ease."

At such times we have a pleasing sense of fullness and great potential. We do not attempt to eliminate or control our thoughts, feelings, or actions, but rather we move with our thoughts, and feel into our experience. Breath, movement, action, and rest. Breath, movement, action, and rest. So when I say above that I want to talk about peak performance states and how we can live our lives with a greater sense of ease, grace, and power, I am referring to how to enter into a special learning state where our thoughts, actions, and feelings occur simultaneously and spontaneously.

This state of "mushin" is one that we very much strive to experience in Aikido (and in other Japanese arts as well) knowing full well that it is not a state that we will maintain throughout the course of our everyday life. Indeed, what we do when we find we are NOT in a state of embodied presence and instead mired in a difficult situation, tells us much about our spirit and our deeply held beliefs. Mushin is an ephemeral state that is to be experienced and released. An experience that is meant to be lost and found a gain, many times over in the course of our life. Please be certain that I consider peak performance states to be an enjoyable quest and not just for some special few who are professional performers of one sort or another.

When we enter into mushin for even brief periods of time we find that we receive what I call "a residue experience." By this I mean that even when we enter back into our everyday mind, we find ourself living our life with a greater sense of vitality and well being. Our relationships with others tend to be

## Mushin – Peak Performance States in Aikido Philosophy

more heartfelt, compassionate, and aware. We find ourselves feeling more connected to our "self" and our everyday experience, while living our life with a greater sense of meaning.

If you are at all like most of the human beings I meet every day, and the one that I meet in the mirror every morning, during much of your life your thoughts, actions, and feelings occur somewhat independently of each other, and you lack a certain sense of spontaneity. To some extent this is part of the human condition, and yet we can definitely also achieve from time to time, a much fuller way of learning and living.

One of the unique aspects of embodied presence is that we do not have internal dialogue when we are fully present in the moment. By "fully present in the moment" I mean remaining relaxed while fully engaging in an activity, without internal dialogue taking up any of our attention or awareness.

Mushin = Embodied presence

Embodied presence = Fully present in the moment

Fully present in the moment = Michael Jordan during an NBA final; Tiger Woods at the Masters; My daughter watching her Saturday morning kids program.

I think that being able to be free from internal dialogue at times is quite an interesting phenomenon. One of the main questions I always ponder in this regard is "Who is talking to who?" during internal dialogue. Another thought that I often have is "Why in the world do I need to tell myself what I am feeling? Why not just feel?" And of course asking myself such questions is just another form of internal dialogue!

To me, the fact that we have internal dialogue in the first place leads me to understand that each person has at least two different selves that they experience life through. One self is a rational/cognitive self with its "headquarters" being just that, in the head. This is the self that generates our internal dialogue and likes to critique what we are doing. Our other self is an emotional/somatic self with its command center being in the body. This appears to be the self that the cognitive self is trying to inform via words. The problem is that the somatic self thinks in feelings and not in words, so really the only thing it understands from the verbal communication of the cognitive self is the tone of voice, volume, and phrasing. Seem hard to believe?

If you have a dog bring it to a foreign country some time and you will notice that it does quite well in understanding the basic conversation directed towards it by the local populace. In Japanese they would say "Kawaii! Kawaii!", and your dog would soon be wagging its tail. Either your dog is a heck of a lot better at learning foreign languages than you are (which is quite possible if you are like many of my fellow Americans), or, your dog is picking up the basic meaning of what is being said, via the tone of voice, volume, and phrasing. Your rational self thinks with the aid of verbal language. Your somatic self "thinks" like all other mammals, and such thinking involves making meaning out of what is sensed, rather than distilling meaning from the spoken word. When entering into a state of mushin we want the feeling, intuitive, mammalian mind to come to the forefront, while the rational mind is encouraged to take a bit of a holiday.

When things are going well for us our two selves seem to cooperate rather nicely and at such times it

is likely that we will not have internal dialogue. We easily reach this cooperative mushin state when walking in a beautiful mountain range area, playing with a young child, or perhaps when watching a compelling movie. In my way of thinking, the three examples offered here are everyday examples of a peak performance state. The whole self is actively aware of, in touch with, and absorbed by, what is transpiring. There is no need to comment on what is occurring, because every part of you already "knows" what is going on. Your thoughts, feelings, and actions occur simultaneously and spontaneously. If you take a moment to think about it, most any state that we find highly pleasurable could be defined as a peak performance state. Interesting to think about how peak performance relates to pleasure.

On the other hand, when we get worried, frightened, or angry, we usually find our two selves (rational and somatic) in conflict with each other. In fact what becomes most obvious during times of stress, is the very different methods that your rational and somatic selves have of processing and understanding what is occurring. When your rational self gets upset it uses words to express what it is feeling. "What's the matter stupid? I thought you knew better!" might be a common complaint uttered by your rational self. Your somatic self on the other hand communicates that it is upset by releasing various enzymes that lead to an upset stomach, or by tensing up the muscles of the body until you find yourself with a

headache. What is important to note here is that both selves can be quite adept at communicating that something is wrong, but often the cognitive self delivers this message in the form of self criticism rather than really helping you to note in a compassionate manner just what needs to be different. Your rational self is sort of like a scientist or news commentator. It comments on what is being felt, much more than actually feeling into the experience.

One of the main tasks of entering into and maintaining a mushin peak performance state is keeping your rational self and your somatic self cooperating with each other and supporting each other. In most instances what we invariably find, is that instructions delivered by the rational mind via internal dialogue, almost always get in the way.

What to do then?

The Seishindo Practice "Peak Performance Coach #1" can help you to begin to understand the early stages of peak performance states. Rather than "trying" to achieve a certain way of being, and wondering why it isn't quite happening yet, this exercise is designed to help you start from where you are, and begin the journey from there.

Charlie Badenhop is the originator of Seishindo, an Aikido instructor, NLP trainer, and Ericksonian Hypnotherapist. Benefit from his thought-provoking ideas and a new self-help Practice every two weeks, by subscribing to his complimentary newsletter "Pure Heart, Simple Mind" at <http://www.seishindo.org/anger/index.html> .

### **British Aikido Board Controversy**

**By Henry Ellis**

## **British Aikido Board Controversy by Henry Ellis**

British Aikido Board acronym BAB or

Bad at Budo, this is the governing body for Aikido in the UK, In the UK we have a governing body for each of the martial arts, the governing body should oversee its's particular art and protect it and it's members as well as the ancient traditions. There is a universal problem within the martial arts of "IwannaBeAmaster" brigade of so called teachers who either grade themselves numerous invalid grades and titles, gradmaster being one of the more popular ones along with professor and Shihan to name a few, then we have the ones that concern me the most at the moment is the people who when they think no one is looking, they then re–invent themselves in a vain attempt to gain credibility, I had an immediate beginner in my school "The Ellis Schools of Traditional Aikido" a man called Mr Jack Poole, who has re–inveted his background, and now claims to have started Aikido not in 1968 but in 1952, Aikido was first introduced to the UK by Kenshiro Abbe sensei in 1955, this would make him the first person in the UK to practice Aikido and would of course change the proud history of those that were involved in it's inception. there is a very controversial article on this issue on the "British Aikido" web site at [www.GeoCities.com/BritishAikido](http://www.GeoCities.com/BritishAikido)

The article:

"British Aikido Board Controversy"

This site is a fully documented and honest detailed account of the bizarre conduct and actions of the BAB who instead of protecting it's heritage actually supported this mans claims and refused all the evidence offered against Mr Poole. The BAB then awarded Mr Poole with a bronze samurai statue to ratify his claims and therefore change the history of British Aikido.

Henry Ellis

Author: "Positive Aikido".

Henry Ellis a direct student of the legendary Martial Artist Kenshiro Abbe sensei from 1956. Author of the book "Positive Aikido".



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