

# SMAA JOURNAL



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2020 SMAA DUES

Membership fees are due on January 1, 2020. Please be sure to pay your SMAA dues on time. You can either send a check to our headquarters or pay online at <http://www.smaa-hq.com/payments.php>. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal. This is a quick and safe way to make your annual SMAA membership payment.

We appreciate our members paying dues promptly. It makes life easier for the SMAA staff of volunteers, and it is representative of the type of self-discipline we are cultivating through the study of traditional Japanese martial arts.

### DONATIONS & TAX DEDUCTIONS

The SMAA is a federally tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation. As such, your donations to our association are tax deductible. Send your donations, in the form of a check or money order (made out to SMAA), to our headquarters in Michigan. We'll send you a letter back acknowledging your contribution, which you can then use for tax purposes. We hope you'll support the SMAA in our goal to preserve and promote traditional budo and koryu bujutsu.

### E-MAIL

Please make sure we have your correct e-mail address. Without this address, we can't e-mail you the *SMAA Journal*.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE SMAA

1. To promote and aid in the growth of Japan's traditional arts and ways.
2. To assist the public in achieving spiritual growth and physical development through budo/bujutsu.
3. To further friendship and understanding between Asian and Western martial artists.
4. To establish goodwill and harmony among martial artists of various systems.
5. To offer Western martial artists access to legitimate budo/bujutsu organizations and teachers in Japan.
6. To give practitioners of authentic budo/bujutsu recognition for their years of devotion to these arts.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Karl Scott Sensei
- Nicklaus Suino Sensei
- H. E. Davey Sensei

**Editor:** H. E. Davey Sensei

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修道館武道会

Do you have a new e-mail address? Have you sent it to [hedavey@aol.com](mailto:hedavey@aol.com)? If not, we also won't be able to send you SMAA publications, so please be sure to let us know if your e-mail address changes.

## SMAA PATCHES

The SMAA HQ is selling official SMAA patches for your gi. They're great looking patches that embody the spirit and honor instilled in members of our group. They won't fade or bleed when you bleach them, and yet we've been able to keep the cost down. Each patch is basically a 3 ½ inch circle featuring our logo below:



Our patches were produced using state of the art digitizing and ultra-modern technology to create an accurate and attractive embroidered emblem. They feature tight stitches, sharp detail, clean lettering, and top quality craftsmanship. There's no jagged stitching, but we've still got plenty of stitches so that the background doesn't show through.

*The patch should be worn on the left side of your gi jacket near your heart. SMAA policy mandates only one patch per uniform to maintain the sense of dignity associated with traditional budo.*

These new patches are a great way to show your respect and enthusiasm for our group; we hope all of our members will order at least one. *And the best part is the patches are only \$5.00 (US) each!* (E-mail [shudokan@smaa-hq.com](mailto:shudokan@smaa-hq.com) about special shipping for international orders.)

To order, go to the "Payments" section of [www.smaa-hq.com](http://www.smaa-hq.com) or send a check or money order made out to "SMAA" to:

**SMAA HQ**  
**PO Box 6022**  
**Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022**  
**USA**

## FACEBOOK PAGE



Have you been to the SMAA Facebook page? If not, you're missing out on the latest SMAA news, features, videos, photos, and information. It's easy and safe to join Facebook, and all you need to do is click the "Like" button to become a follower of our Facebook page. This is the fastest way to get SMAA news and updates, and we hope you'll drop by <http://www.facebook.com/ShudokanMartialArtsAssociation> and check it out. Once you're on Facebook, we hope you'll share our page with your friends and help us promote the SMAA.

## SMAA ONLINE PAYMENTS

Did you know you can pay for your annual dues at our website using PayPal or a major credit card? You can, and you can also pay for gi patches and promotions in the same way. This is a much faster, and in some ways more secure, means of sending money to our headquarters. We hope more of our members will make use of this feature. Just drop by <http://smaa-hq.com/payments.php> for more information.

## SMAA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

修道館武道会

Shudokan Martial Arts Association

Want to see some great videos of SMAA teachers, officials, and members? Now you can by visiting our YouTube channel. We're Shudokan1994, because 1994 is the year the SMAA was founded.

To see video of SMAA teachers and members, go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5NIka6Ge0&list=PLS11\\_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSefGyNZ0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5NIka6Ge0&list=PLS11_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSefGyNZ0o)

To see video of the amazing experts that trained leading SMAA officials and teachers, go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11\\_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLE1NZ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLE1NZ)

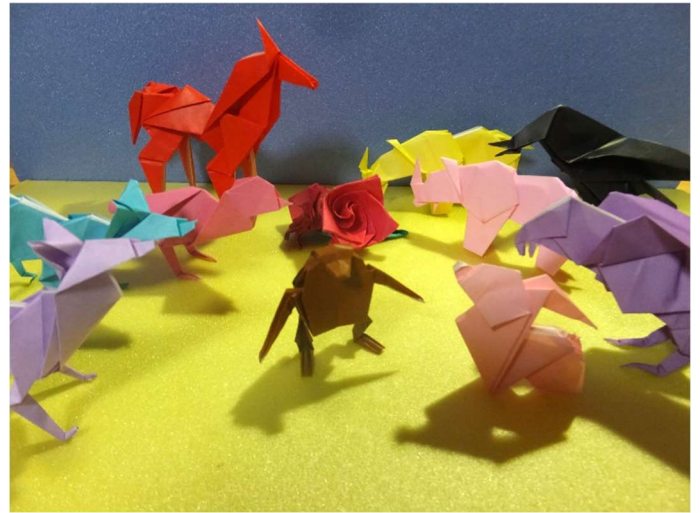
## OTSUKA SOKE NEWS

In November, Otsuka Yasuyuki Soke and some of his students gave a demonstration of Meifu Shinkage Ryu at Aikido Aoba Juku in Yokohama City. They showed how to use a fundo kusari, a weighted chain, and how to throw bo shuriken, which are metal spikes. Both weapons are of ancient Japanese origin. You can learn more at <https://meifushinkageryu.jp>.

Otsuka Soke also visited Calgary in Canada to teach a Meifu Shinkage Ryu seminar in November. Aside from teaching participants how to throw shuriken, he offered instruction in origami, another traditional Japanese art he is expert in.



*Otsuka Soke (center) and assistants at Aoba Aikido Juku*



*Otsuka Soke's origami art*

Otsuka Soke is the current Headmaster of Meifu Shinkage Ryu and one of the highest-ranking martial artists in Japan. He travels the world teaching this unique martial art. He is also a member of the elite SMAA Board of Advisors, an international group of top experts, who oversee the activities of our nonprofit organization, endorse SMAA ranks, and offer advice to the Directors of the SMAA.

## EVANS SENSEI NEWS

John Evans Sensei is a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors, the leader of the Fudokan Dojo in England, and a direct student of the founder of Nakamura Ryu swordsmanship, which he studied for many years in Japan. A seventh dan in Nakamura Ryu, Evans Sensei has also taught at several SMAA events. You can learn more about him and his dojo at <http://battodo-fudokan.co.uk>.

He was recently interviewed for the *Success ID* podcast. You can listen to this dialogue conducted by Glenn Wallis here:

<https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=469344>



*Evans Sensei demonstrating Nakamura Ryu*

## MARTIN SENSEI NEWS

In November, Paul Martin Sensei presented iaido in a shigin and swordsmanship performance collaboration. (Shigin is a combination of classical Japanese poetry and song.) This took place at the Ama Town Sango Bunka Matsuri on Okinoshima, Shimane prefecture. Ama town is home to the resting place of Emperor Gotoba, patron saint of Japanese sword making.

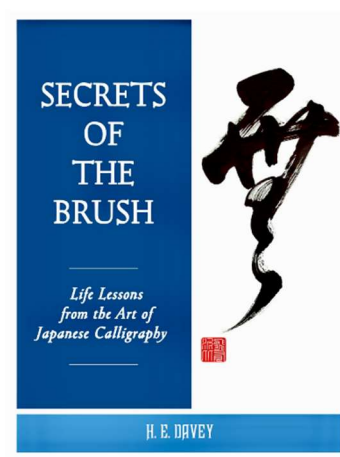


*SMAA Senior Advisor Paul Martin*

Shigin was performed by Ishibashi Naoko Sensei. Martin Sensei was also invited by Mayor Oe, of Ama town, to throw mochi from the balcony to the crowds below.

Martin Sensei is a Japanese sword specialist. A native of England, he's lived in Japan for many years, where he's studied kendo, iaido, and several forms of ancient swordsmanship, including Ono Ha Itto Ryu. But his main area of specialty is the study, history, and appraisal of the Japanese sword as an art object. He is one of the world's foremost scholars of the Japanese sword, and we're honored to have him as an SMAA Senior Advisor. Learn more about his activities at <http://www.thejapanesesword.com>.

## H. E. DAVEY NEWS



H. E. Davey, SMAA Jujutsu Division eighth dan, recently had a new book published called *Secrets of the Brush: Life Lessons from the Art of Japanese Calligraphy*. It should be of interest to SMAA members because many samurai, including Miyamoto Musashi, were avid and talented exponents of shodo, "the Way of Japanese calligraphic art," a discipline they felt was complimentary to the practice of martial arts. A number of the founders of modern budo were also dedicated shodo practitioners, including Kano Jigoro Sensei (Kodokan judo), Ueshiba Morihei Sensei (aikido), and Funakoshi Gichin Sensei (Shotokan karate-do).

H. E. Davey, aside from his decades of Japanese martial arts training, is an internationally acclaimed shodo calligrapher and ink painting expert, and his new work covers the 20 years he studied under Kobara Ranseki Sensei—a recipient of the Order of the Rising Sun and a Japanese shodo master. *Secrets of the Brush* imparts Zen-like life lessons for finding peace of mind and beauty in living. It explains shodo and meditation through an innovative format that blends biography, autobiography, and calligraphic art. The author details life-changing Eastern principles by combining old Asian texts, cult movies, punk rock, and more, with over 50 years of

experience in the Japanese arts. These concepts will increase your skill in Asian fine arts, martial arts, tea ceremony, and meditation. Even fans of Western art can use *Secrets of the Brush* to transform their craft, and the book can help you understand why at least some samurai devoted a great deal of time to practicing Japanese calligraphy.

The book is packed with new artwork by the author. Full-page illustrations and an extensive glossary complete this guide to life and an ancient Japanese art. Want to know more? Drop by [www.michipublishing.com](http://www.michipublishing.com).

## AN EXCERPT FROM SECRETS OF THE BRUSH: LIFE LESSONS FROM THE ART OF JAPANESE CALLIGRAPHY

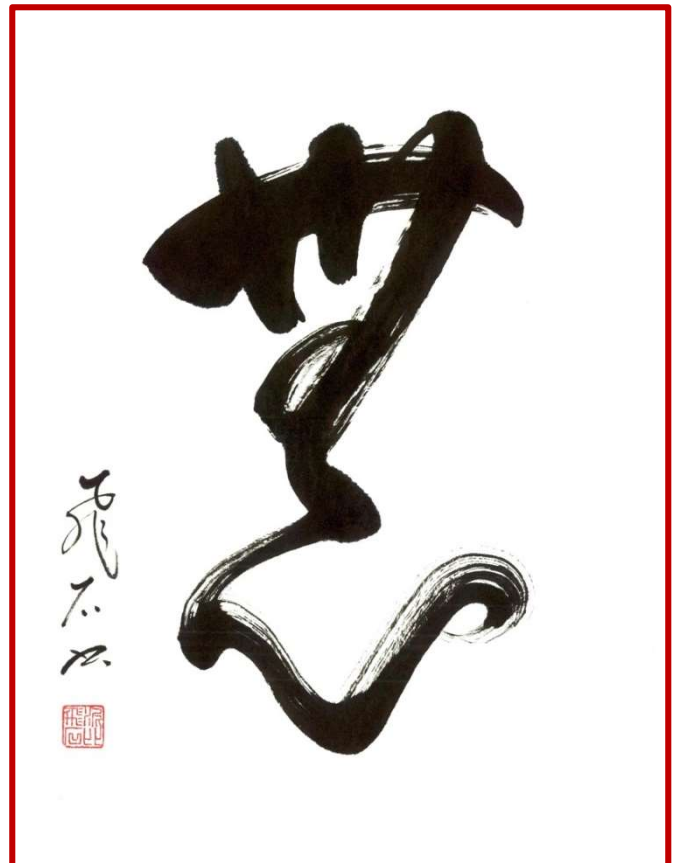
By H. E. Davey

### CHAPTER 3

#### MUSHIN: AN EMPTY MIND

The word *mushin* (無心) is widely known in classical Japanese art forms, where it's defined as “no mind” or “empty mind.” Both definitions are literal and correct, although they may suggest different things to the average person. Just as often, *mushin* is explained as a state that allows for greater effectiveness in the performance of an art, but rarely is it clarified as the “mind of mu,” which is of importance in understanding *mushin*. Understood in this admittedly more difficult way, *mu* isn't merely a prefix attached to “mind.” *Mu* has its own unique reality and meaning that's less commonly addressed. That's why in Chapter 2 I used quite a few words to get at *mu*—nothingness—from several different angles.

It is *mushin* that Kobara Ranseki Sensei almost always reverted to when describing what happened to him when he brushed one of his masterpieces. And it's *mushin* that he regularly painted on shikishi at his demonstrations. This chapter, more than any



*An empty mind*

other in *Secrets of the Brush*, is central to understanding the basis for Sensei's art.

### BREAKING DOWN THE ARTWORK

In the late 1990s Japanese newspapers in San Francisco featured *kakizome* (書き初め) in their January 1 issue. *Kakizome* describes the first calligraphy of the New Year, and it's common in Japan for calligraphers to devote part of their New Year celebrations to brush writing. The creation of beautiful calligraphy on this day is seen as auspicious. As California's preeminent shodo expert, Kobara Sensei's art was highlighted in one

or more of these dailies each January 1. Eventually, he suggested to the *Nichibei Times* that they feature my artwork on New Year's Day. They agreed, and I brushed *mushin*, albeit in advance of the big day itself.

This same *mushin* calligraphy eventually appeared in *Brush Meditation: A Japanese Way to Mind & Body Harmony* and *The Japanese Way of the Artist*. It's a fairly unusual rendering of the two kanji, with a challenging asymmetrical balance that's similar to the artwork Kobara Sensei is holding in the preceding image. So for this chapter, I created a simpler version of *mushin*, one that Kobara Sensei painted more frequently, and one that fans of my previous books can use as a guide for shodo practice. You'll find it easier to copy than what appeared in my earlier works, but like the previous *mushin*, it's written in *Ranseki*-style *sosho* script.

*Sosho* evolved in China during the Han dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) through the Jin dynasty (265 B.C. to 420 A.D.). An early method of cursive writing developed as a quick way to brush *reisho*, or "clerical script." Speedier *sosho* techniques to write Chinese characters developed through roughly four means. One involved excluding part of a character. Another blended strokes together, and a third replaced components of the kanji with condensed graphic elements. (An example is replacing several dots with a single brush stroke.) Last, refashioning brush stroke styles was also an aspect of *sosho*.

This progression in *sosho* evolution can be appreciated by viewing surviving bamboo slats from the period, on which early cursive and undeveloped *reisho* forms are combined. The initial form of *sosho* script, based on this clerical script, is now called *zhangcao* (章草) in China. It's also called ancient *sosho*, draft *sosho*, or clerical *sosho*, to separate it from contemporary cursive script. Modern-day *sosho* grew from this older cursive writing with influence from semi-cursive *gyosho* and standard *kaisho* calligraphy.



*In this image, Kobara Sensei just finished painting *mushin*, "empty mind," at a large shodo exhibition in San Francisco. The artwork is now framed and resides in the author's collection.*

Sosho script can be split into the unconnected form called *dokuso* (独草), where each character is separate, and the connected style termed *renmentai* (連綿体) in Japanese, where characters are linked in a flowing line. Kobara Sensei taught both forms of sosho, and the mushin that begins this chapter is an illustration of *rementai* cursive script, in that the two kanji are joined.

I painted the kanji in such a way as to encourage *kasure* (かすれ, 掠れ), an effect in which the white of the paper shows through. Many people admire this dry brush effect, but it's hard to produce reliably unless you know how. Calligraphers can rarely guarantee the production of *kasure*, because there are many variable factors: ink, paper, brush type, the speed of the brush, and so on. But there are ways to boost the production of *kasure*:

- Use less ink. A drier brush more easily produces this dry brush look.
- Use thicker ink. Grind the sumi longer or don't add water to liquid ink. If liquid ink still isn't thick enough, grind sumi into it with an ink stick. Letting the ink sit in the ink stone for a longer period before use, say 60 minutes, tends to thicken it as well.
- Use rougher paper. Some paper has a smoother surface, some a coarser one, and some paper is rough on one side and smooth on the other.
- Move the brush more quickly.
- Press down strongly with the brush, and then lift it to cause the hair to partially split, letting the paper show through the stroke. *Kasure* tends to happen in the transition from heavy brush pressure to lighter pressure.
- Place paper under the paper you're painting on (as opposed to merely having a felt mat

under the paper). Paper under paper sucks the ink downward, keeping the edges of the brush strokes sharp and crisp at a moderate speed, but more easily creating *kasure* when sped up. This is one of the secrets of the "clean" look of much of Kobara Sensei's calligraphy.

I like *kasure* and feature it more frequently than Kobara Sensei did. Some of this is intentional, but it also has to do with the feeling I have when I paint. How I feel, and who I am, changes the way my brush moves, and it changes the manner in which my body produces power.

That said, simply creating *kasure* doesn't equal good calligraphy. This is like thinking all red cars are excellent and fast. Some are, some aren't, but the color has little to do with build quality and performance. It's just a personal preference. So is *kasure*.

Some folks, especially in the West, are so in love with this effect that they automatically gravitate toward any artwork that displays it. That's a mistake, because with trial and error, and an aggressive movement, anyone can eventually produce ink lines that display this effect. Plus, too much *kasure* among the characters in a work creates imbalance, just like too much salt in a dish renders it inedible.

Strong *kasure* isn't a substitute for well-balanced kanji and well-formed brush strokes. It can't hide weakness of *ki* and lack of *mushin*.

But what, more explicitly, is *mushin*?

## DISCOVERING MUSHIN AND SUBCONSCIOUS REACTION

I'm an only child, and the neighborhood I grew up in had few children. I spent lots of time around adults, and my parents concluded I needed people my age to hang out with.

I'd started martial arts (jujutsu) with my Dad at the age of five, but that didn't result in kids to play with. So at age seven I was enrolled in a judo school, populated by mostly Japanese-American children. To be honest, I wasn't initially well received by every kid, the meeting being a little awkward on both sides at first. It was a time when different races were just starting to more freely socialize, and the judo dojo was a safe haven for Japanese kids, a place where they didn't need to fit in to a predominantly white town.

Regardless, I kept coming to judo several times per week. In short order, we were friends. Kids are like that. Given the chance to play together barriers disappear.

I spent hours each week with them and their families, at the dojo and in their homes. I grew up around chopsticks and *inari sushi*, Zatoichi movies and shodo on the walls. And mushin.

I'd heard the word in judo classes, but it wasn't exactly taught. Later, I read about it in martial arts books as a teenager, but it's not an easy concept to wrap your head around. But I knew even then it was important.

And one day something peculiar happened. I was a teen training for an important judo tournament: the AAU Junior Olympics. Back then in the U.S. the Amateur Athletic Union sponsored an Olympics for young people in multiple sports. Judo, being an Olympic sport, was one of them. Competition occurred at district and regional levels. I'd won a gold medal in the district competition, representing the judoists in my town, which qualified me to compete in the regional Junior Olympics encompassing a larger area.

It was long ago, so I don't recall every detail, but one stands out. It was my final match against a hard-hitting competitor. We'd been trading throws for a couple minutes, neither able to score, when suddenly my opponent was on his back with me over

him, poised to crash down and pin him to the ground.

I had no idea what happened, other than I could hear my kiai, a loud guttural shout used in judo, and the referee roaring "*Ippon!*" I'd won the match by a full point (ippon) and another gold medal.

Not a clue as to how I did it.

But with the match over, the details came to me. My *tokui waza*, my favorite technique I drilled hundreds of times daily, was *o soto gari*, "major outer reap." It involves using your leg to sweep an opponent's leg out from under him or her, resulting in the person being walloped onto their back. I saw an opening to use it, and my rival was down. But at the moment it felt like frames missing from a film. One second we were standing and the next he wasn't, with no conscious thought and nothing in-between.

How did *that* happen?! Then I remembered mushin.

Mushin describes a state of mind similar to my tournament experience, a condition in which action occurs naturally, instantaneously, and without conscious forethought. Back then I thought it was specifically a martial arts term. It's not.

If anything, it might have originated in Zen, shortened from *mushin no shin* (無心の心)—"a mind without mind, a mind of no mind"—an emblematic Zen conundrum. Despite what's commonly believed, although Zen had a big influence on some ancient martial arts schools, every samurai didn't feel its impact, many actually favored Mikkyo, esoteric Shingon Buddhism. Regardless, even if Zen didn't inspire all ancient martial arts, it did influence some, along with tea ceremony and other Japanese arts. Today mushin's referenced in manifold art forms in Japan, not just martial arts, and just as widely misunderstood. Let's get to the misconceptions while we continue looking at what mushin is.



## MU AND MIND

To do that we need to consider the mind. Is the mind our thoughts? Is it memory? Is there a difference between thought and memory?

Few of us consider these questions, which is strange. We all have a mind and mention it regularly. But not many have any idea what this thing we call “mind” is. My experience is that most folks are solely aware of their thoughts, just as most moviegoers only center on the impermanent images flitting across an empty screen. The screen is hardly considered nor is the existence of anything other than thought. And these thoughts are not ours in the same way that a bicycle belongs to us. They seem to appear of their own accord and dissolve when we try to hold onto them. They’re associated with us, but I’m not sure they are us nor can we fully control them, unlike a bike that does what we tell it to do.

In meditation we have a chance to watch the movement of thought. If we do it enough, we notice a gap between thoughts. In that space, that pause, do we still exist? Don’t guess at this; actually try observing what I described.

The question may seem silly, but we act as if we’re the thoughts that pass through the mind. If this is true, then what becomes of us between thoughts? Obviously we don’t cease to exist, and we don’t lose consciousness. Something is there—maybe just for a split second—but it’s not thought. Some would describe it as mu.

What about memory? It also comes and goes of its own accord, without being under our full control. We behave as if it’s real, but the event being recalled has no tangible current reality. Yet when recalling a scary incident respiration increases, heart rate goes up ... much as if the real thing was happening. But it’s not, except in our thoughts. It’s an illusion that we experience constantly without realizing it.

Thought and memory are mutually dependent. The thoughts we form are rooted in memories of past experiences that we believe might have some connection to the current moment. That’s why if several people see the same thing, they have different thoughts about it. For identical thoughts to happen simultaneously, we’d have to have a matching past and memories. That doesn’t happen.

And recollections are experienced as thoughts, even thoughts about the future, which is unknowable. Since we don’t know if we’ll even be here tomorrow, to think about it we guess using memories that we believe might happen again in a variant form. Plus, no two people remember an event in exactly the same way, indicating that like thought, memory isn’t as stable and under our control as we imagine.

For instance, if I write in a way that reminds you of something happy, memories of the past arise to form thoughts, which then alter your physiology in a way that creates certain emotions. Yet none of that might have happened if I didn’t compose a handful of sentences. So are the thoughts you’re experiencing solely yours or do they belong partly to me? Did I create them or did you?

Thought and memory cannot be fully separated, both are impermanent, both aren’t completely within our control, and while they’re associated with us, they are not us. Practice Muga Ichi-nen Ho meditation and find out if thoughts are consciousness or if they merely pass through consciousness. Are they you or just happening in association with you? And where are you when thought is not?

Mu.

## REFLECTIONS AND REACTIONS

Mushin is empty in the same way a mirror is empty. And the mirror is empty and full. It’s full in the sense that a mirror is always reflecting something. If you

think about it, you've never seen a mirror without a reflection in it, and you probably can't conceive of what its reflective surface would look like.

But it exists, and in this sense, the mirror must be empty. If it held onto one or more images, then anything new reflected in the mirror would have the old images superimposed upon it, which would make it hard to see an accurate reflection of the current image. People that cling to a past event do the same. They superimpose their feelings about that event onto present reality, mindlessly modifying what they think they're experiencing and not for the better. When the past is layered over the present, the present isn't seen for what it genuinely is.

So the mirror only works well when it lets go of past reflections. The mind works the same way, and when it does, mushin is present. In other words, mushin takes place when the mind is focused in the instant. It's the current moment that's not thought, not memory. It's actually the only time we experience reality.

This is why mushin is associated with clarity of mind and appropriateness of reaction. This is also why it's compared to a mirror-like state. The mirror only reflects when it's empty.

We're much the same, and we realize mushin by keeping the mind in the moment unless we deliberately choose to concentrate on the past or future. It's in the moment that coordination of mind and body happens, in that the body only exists in the present. With unification of mind and body, we can direct all of our power, as opposed to just the mind or just the body, into an activity. It helps us realize our full potential, and it's only when mind and body are coordinated that the body follows what the mind tells it to do. If you've tried shodo or even constructing a simple drawing, you know your hand doesn't always accurately reproduce the picture in your mind. Unity of mind and body is

needed; it occurs when the mind is in the present, and shodo and meditation encourage this.

This is a condition in which accurate perception is experienced without the immediate interference of thought. In short, when the mind is in the instant it's empty. This doesn't mean there are no reflections, meaning no perception of what our senses report. It means that the perception isn't modified by memory and thus by conscious thought. It's seen for what it is first.

You may be confused about thoughts versus perceptions. A perception is something you hear, smell, feel, and so on via the senses. Everyone with a functional nervous system has these perceptions, and it's unnatural—maybe even impossible—to block them out. That's true even during undertakings that require deep concentration like meditation or art.

Why? The more we resist noticing what our senses report, the more the mind focuses on these perceptions. So that doesn't work.

Perceiving reality isn't a problem. Creating an endless chain of often unwanted and meaningless chatter about these perceptions is the problem. That's thought, not simple perception. And that happens a lot.

It makes us unable to rest, constantly being blitzed by our thoughts about nothing of importance. (Kind of like *Seinfeld*, the "TV show about nothing," but not nearly as funny.)

Think of it like driving a manual transmission car. Sometimes you need to press down on the accelerator, increase the revs, and make the car move. But when you come to a stop light, continuing to press on the go pedal only stresses you out, uses up gas, irritates drivers near you, and wears out your engine. You need to put the car in neutral, take your foot off the accelerator, and let the engine

return to its natural idle. That's what it wants to do anyway.

The mind is the same, and lots of us have forgotten how to let it return to idling. Try the meditation described earlier to get a sense of this "idling mind." It's when the mind is resting in the present, which should be our default mode. But it's not, at least not for multitudes of folks, who are continuously doing, striving, thinking, and wearing out their engines.

### WHAT ACTS?

If the engine is merely idling, if the mind is empty—mushin, experiencing mu—then how was I able to throw my opponent as mentioned earlier? What acted? Seemingly not conscious thought, because I didn't initially know how I did it.

But something made my body move in the right way, at the right place, and at the right time ... pretty much a definition of effective action. But what acts?

Long ago in Japan people interested in meditation and art forms potentially related to meditation—like martial arts and shodo—came up with analogies, metaphors, and the like to explain what acts when the mind is empty. Some of it is useful, some only confusing, but rarely has it been updated for the 21st century. While I'm not suggesting that we necessarily abandon these timeworn accounts of mushin, I think it makes sense to use what we know of modern-day science and psychology to help us understand it. Unfortunately, the relationship between mushin and action isn't a hot topic of study in scientific circles these days.

That doesn't mean the average person has no tools to fathom this. We know we have conscious and subconscious parts of the mind. We're more aware of the conscious component, but we know the subconscious sways conscious action. You may have also heard of artists and musicians contriving unusual methods to get the conscious mind out of the way, so their art could stem from their

unconscious. And if you've read this far, you know repeated acts build up in the subconscious to become unconscious habits. We use these habits every day, just as I'm using my subconscious to type these words without staring at the keyboard.

What's more, you may have experienced trying to use a cultivated habit, only to be distracted by consciously thinking too much about what you're doing. This is the absence of mushin. Not what I did or experienced in my judo example.

When I threw the other person my mind must have been in the present to recognize the opportunity to use my favorite technique. And remember, I drilled this skill every day, creating a subconscious habit. So in a heightened state of perception, a state of not consciously thinking about the past or future, my subconscious noticed an opportunity to use a technique I'd practiced to the point of unconscious habit. Trained reflexes instantly took over. Some might label this "muscle memory," a popular term for what is really motor learning.

Muscle memory unfortunately implies that the body moves the mind, that the muscle has a brain. Probably not strictly accurate, and it negates understanding of the subconscious. And that's what really acts, but there's still evidence of motor learning, an activity that's been studied for a long time in science.

It's all about repetition, part of the reason I've spent decades repeating basic brush strokes in shodo. But there's more to it than that from a psychological and neurological perspective. The neuroanatomy of memory is unconscious and extensive throughout our brains. The conduits essential to motor memory are detached from the medial temporal lobe pathways connected with long-term memory, in this case conscious, deliberate recall of accurate information, past experiences, and ideas. Similarly, motor memory is hypothesized to have two stages: a short-term memory-encoding phase that's unstable and vulnerable to loss, and a long-term

memory consolidation phase that's more secure. Simply, habits become stronger with additional repetition over time.

The initial so-called memory-encoding phase is what some term motor learning. To make it happen we need an upsurge in brain activity in motor areas along with enhanced concentration. Brain areas operating throughout motor learning encompass the motor and somatosensory cortices. Nonetheless, these areas of operation decline once the motor skill is developed.

The prefrontal and frontal cortices are likewise operating throughout this phase owing to the need for augmented attentiveness tied to the undertaking being trained. But the central area related to motor learning is the cerebellum, a section of the brain involved in motor control. The basal ganglia, associated with thought, emotion, and voluntary motor movement, is also crucial to so-called muscle memory, in particular to stimulus-response associations and the development of habits. The basal ganglia-cerebellar networks are believed to intensify with time when absorbing a motor skill like shodo.

Over time there's a consolidation of muscle memory in the brain that forms habits. The how of this isn't agreed upon by scientists, but everyone acknowledges that it takes place. What is understood is that sleep, when the subconscious comes to the forefront, is critical for memory consolidation. It might have a connection to motor learning, too.

The takeaway from this is that when we do something difficult, we tend to focus strongly on it, and if we do this long enough and often enough, we create a subliminal pattern of action that's encoded in the brain-muscle network as a subconscious habit. I don't believe that the muscle literally remembers, but it's clear to me that the subconscious mind maintains records, as in the bike you never forgot how to ride.

Sadly, it's not that simple.

Our conscious mind, specifically our thoughts, often gets in the way of motor learning, muscle memory, mushin, or whatever you call appropriate and spontaneous action. If this were not the case, given enough time we'd be experts at anything we tried, and we'd never screw up. But we do, and mushin ties into the idea of getting the conscious at least momentarily out of the way so unconscious ingrained habits can work for us. How do we do that?

- First, drill whatever it is you want to acquire. And don't get complacent after a few years and slack off.
- Second, bring the mind into the present, especially during the moment of performance. This reduces pointless thoughts, which are frequently associated with the past or future.
- Third, relax but not in the sense of limpness of mind or body. Relaxing in a manner that's not tense/not limp is vital for getting the conscious mind out of the way so unconscious habits can manifest themselves. Don't think yourself out of succeeding. Mentally do nothing ... alertly and intensely ... just like in the meditation introduced in Chapter 1.

Do this and you can experience mushin.

### NO MIND OR EMPTY MIND?

You may have seen mushin defined as "no mind," while above I've mostly referenced "empty mind." Both translations are accurate, but I think the latter is a bit less prone to misinterpretation. No mind doesn't mean zombie-like action and images of lobotomies shouldn't pop into your head. But they do, which is why I often decipher mu in this context as empty.

No mind is really tied to mushin no shin, the “mind of no mind.” That’s Zen folks encouraging us to drop attachments to thought, since we typically feel that our thoughts are our minds. Let go of conscious thoughts—“the mind”—and allow subconscious habits to work efficiently. Plus, in art the unconscious is seen as a resource for deeper creativity.

So long ago some Asian people coined mushin no shin. It made sense in an era without a comprehension of the conscious and subconscious aspects of the mind, without research into motor learning. Today maybe we can shorten this to mushin. Actually, you can call it whatever you want, but first you have to experience it, something this book is designed to help you experiment with.

If you’re like a lot of my readers, you’ve read other accounts dealing with Japanese meditation and art forms. If you have, you’ve seen a plethora of terms connected to the psyche:

- Muga—“no self”
- Munen—“no thoughts”
- Mushin—“empty mind”
- Mushin no shin—“the mind of no mind”
- Fudoshin—“immovable mind”
- Munen Muso—“no thoughts, no mental images”
- Tenshin—“heavenly mind”
- Heijoshin—“peaceful, stable, everyday mind”
- And many more

Japan has a huge number of words and phrases dealing with the mental state in meditation, shodo, martial arts, and other classical disciplines. They’re

worth looking into, but I’m not convinced they are truly separate from each other. With some exceptions, I think we’re actually talking about different ways of describing varying aspects of the same thing.

My house has four doors that lead inside. You can choose any door to get in, but depending on which one you use, you’ll initially see a different view. To explain how to find the door, I’d use a different description for each one as well. Regardless, once you’re in my house, after you stroll around a bit, you’d see that all the doors go into the same home.

Which door you use isn’t important. What’s important is that you actually walk over and come inside my house. (Not literally. Seriously, don’t show up inside my home uninvited. I love the guys and gals that buy my books, but not that much.)

Once you’re in the house, words and descriptions cease to matter. They’re just symbols used in the place of bona fide experience. To understand meditation, shodo, or any traditional Japanese art, start practicing and wait at least a year before you evaluate what you’re learning.

That long? Yes, that long.

Anything with depth and value can’t be understood in 10 easy lessons. If it can, you’ll be bored quickly, and I doubt you’ll get much out of it. Kobara Sensei practiced shodo for over 70 years, only to comment toward the end of his life, “Did you notice I changed the way I paint that kanji? It’s different now because I’m starting to get better at it.”

### USING THOUGHT TO GO BEYOND THOUGHT

Kobara Sensei wasn’t the first individual to mention mushin. I’m far from the first person to write about it. And I hope I’m not one more author contributing to misconceptions relating to it, because misunderstandings are widespread. So are assumptions, one reason why I prefer to teach

students with no prior shodo experience and people who haven't read a ton of books like this one.

While I accept most individuals as students, providing they can work within the program of instruction, there are reasons for the preceding sentence. One is that I've met quite a few people interested in shodo, who've read about mushin and think shodo amounts to "just spontaneously moving the brush and expressing my feelings." It does, but not in the way they assume.

Many people have read shodo parallels Western abstract expressionism and may have influenced it. I even wrote as much in the past, and it's historically true. But don't assume shodo is equal to abstract art. It has its own inimitable place in the art world.

Correspondingly, don't assume abstract art is easy. Just splash paint on a canvas, right? Any six-year-old could do it, right? Except they don't and their "paintings" don't end up in high-end galleries.

A related assumption is that abstract artists can't execute realistic paintings and drawings. With a few allowances, most start by drawing conventional still life arrangements like other artists, and they have a grasp of the fundamentals of realistic art. They learned the basics with great rigor.

Based on the above assumptions, some folks are dismayed that classical shodo requires intense precision in the brush strokes. It's perfected by copying samples of calligraphy, without even slight deviation. Every nonconformity in balance and form is corrected with red ink by the sensei. No conscious expressing of creativity is allowed.

It's all about repetition, absorbing the essence of shodo as it's been passed down through the generations into the subconscious, absorbing something older and greater than our egos. Repetition equals motor learning. Not engaging the ego equals muga, a state beyond self-consciousness, beyond the conscious mind.

Cultivating habits equals freeing the unconscious mind. Requiring precision equals bringing the mind into the moment.

Mushin.

People assume that I've mastered shodo, so they're occasionally surprised that I spend anywhere from several hours to several days experimenting with how I want to paint something, trying different inks and varying brushes. When I've entered my shodo and/or sumi-e in international exhibitions, I've worked on one idea for an average of four months before sending the best example off. This is common among shodo artists, although probably not everyone.

Doesn't this involve consciously thinking? Yes.

Is this mushin? Yes and no.

Deciding what brush or ink stick to use requires thought. Noticing how dissimilar types of paper react to various inks requires thought. Figuring out which script to brush requires thought. Looking at the end result and evaluating it requires thought (and at times spur-of-the-moment, intuitive perception as well).

But using the brush is always in the moment, free from indecision and distracting thoughts. As the result, I practice repeatedly and deliberately to ingrain what I'm striving for into my subconscious, but when the time comes, I let all of that go. I focus the mind briefly and positively. Then I just relax and do it.

Mushin.

Is it creative? For sure, but not in the hyper-intellectual way Western art is sometimes presented.

Is it spontaneous? Definitely, that's where its clout comes from. It emerges from the infinite depths of my subconscious, from generations of artists in my

line, and ultimately from the universe that I'm part of.

What if it stinks? I learn from it. Nothing's wasted. Then I let go of the past, ball it up literally, and throw it in a big bag of crumpled art I keep near me.

And I move on to create something the same, yet fresh and different, quite possibly better. As long as life exists, there's another chance.

So shodo uses thought and a condition beyond thought ... at least transcending overtly conscious thinking. It's simultaneously deliberate and free, impersonal and personal, hard work and effortless.

Its beauty takes place suddenly and in the instant, but it's based on decades of disciplined practice. It's the hours of training, the years of constant self-reflection, and the depth of study that makes mushin in action possible.

**About the Author:** H. E. Davey is a founding member of the SMAA and an eighth dan in the SMAA Jujutsu Division, with over 50 years of training in traditional Japanese martial arts. He is also successor to the late shodo expert Kobara Ranseki Sensei, and he holds the highest rank in Kobara Sensei's internationally acclaimed system of Japanese calligraphic art. Learn more at [www.artofshodo.com](http://www.artofshodo.com).

## AN EXCERPT FROM BUDO MIND AND BODY: TRAINING SECRETS FROM THE JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS

By Nicklaus Suino

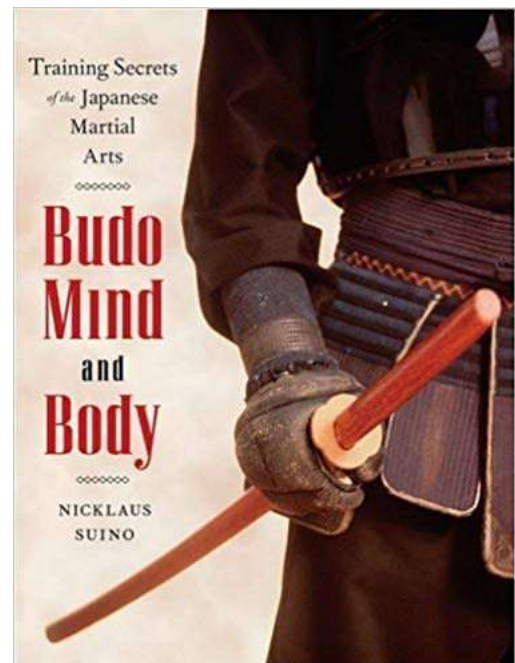
*The Way is in training.* -- Miyamoto Musashi

### PHYSICAL TRAINING

The foundation of martial arts, that which gives them their unique character, is that they are physical arts. In order to be martial artists, we must use our bodies in practice. This may make the arts seem primitive, in the same way we think of ancient dance rituals as primitive, but it also grounds them in the real world. There is no avoiding the toil and sweat required to learn martial arts skills, and you should be suspicious of anyone who promises results without long, hard work.

The work is, in fact, the very thing that make budo worthwhile, because almost everything good that comes from budo comes from the process of physically training the body over a long period of time. The health benefits, such as improved circulation, stamina, and strength, come from repetitive motions of the body itself, starting with lighter, less strenuous motions and building up to more taxing drills as we advance. Mental benefits

are the result of seeing hard work pay off in the form of improved skill. We learn that our efforts produce results and, if we have good teachers, we learn to generalize the concept of discipline and apply it to all sorts of activities, not just budo. The so called "spiritual" rewards of training, such as a sense of



well-being, of place in society, and of purpose in life, come in large part from the feeling of hard work well done that we get at the end of the training day.

Experience tells us that there are better and worse ways to work, however. One lifetime is barely enough to master a single martial art, much less the several arts that many practice these days, and there are always distractions from training. The road to mastery is so long that we must learn to be as efficient as possible as we travel it. Many great people have studied the learning process and have added refinements to the way we practice. Some have made mistakes that we can try to avoid. We can benefit from their experiences by understanding history and the principles of learning, greatly improving our chances of following a smooth path as we progress.

What follows is a discussion of five selected aspects of physical training that almost four decades of martial art study have led me to believe are particularly important.

### **PROGRESSIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Progressive skill development is a vital key to long-term progress in budo. The Japanese were the first to start granting belt ranks, reflecting the many advancements they made in systematizing the learning process, one of their most important contributions to the development of martial arts.

Instead of randomly presenting material and hoping that students would catch on, the Japanese formalized the process of introducing basic material to beginning students, and gradually increasing the complexity and difficulty of the material as students became more advanced. Principles that were learned at the beginning would become reflexive through long practice. Later, the instructor could concentrate on teaching more advanced concepts, knowing that students would already be able to hold a strong stance, for example, or be able to throw a punch without any glaring weaknesses.

Failure to take this incremental and progressive approach can limit one's potential for long-term growth. Many students who start training in competitive martial arts, or who learn in a casual environment (from a friend, for example), reach a certain level of competence and never progress beyond it. If they are naturally talented, or very dedicated and hardworking, they can become fairly skilled, usually reaching their peak in two to three years, but problems can occur that limit their growth after the initial training period.

One problem is that they have no tools for teaching themselves to get better. They learned by being exposed to a technique, practicing it a little, then trying it out in the ring. In this context, techniques are usually not clearly divided into groups of more and less advanced skills, so students learn to think of them in terms of those that work and those that do not. Powerfully effective techniques that may take hours to master are ignored, because they do not yield any benefits when first tried.

Progressive skill development, on the other hand, allows you to practice lesser, simpler skills first, gaining ability and confidence in those skills before going on to others that may be more difficult. The period in which you learn these skills also gives your teacher a chance to closely examine your basic skills, and to make sure that you have no serious weaknesses that might cause you trouble later. You can prosper in your martial arts training by adopting a progressive approach.

Always concentrate on the simpler things first. Everyone learns to crawl before learning to walk, and you cannot expect to perform an advanced karate kata unless you know how to stand in a strong, well-balanced front stance. In karate, iaido, and kyudo, spend time to ensure that your stances are good, because everything else depends on them. In judo, jujutsu, aikido, and kendo, be sure that you understand how to move in a balanced manner. If you do not develop an intuitive



understanding of balance, you will never be good at these arts.

The progression of kata taught in arts such as karate is also designed to teach skills in a progressive manner. You learn certain kata first because they are simpler, and because the connections between one move and the next involve less difficult transitions. Take the time to master the kata you are being taught now before growing impatient to learn a new one. Most of the students I have seen who are constantly requesting new material are not very good at the material they have already been taught. This shows clearly that they do not understand everything about the early forms. Any more kata piled on top of the first will simply reveal the same fundamental weaknesses.

### **BREAK IT DOWN**

When learning a new technique, try it first in its entirety. Chances are that you will have some difficulty performing it with confidence. Instead of repeating the whole technique over and over, determine the parts at which you are weakest, and practice them separately. If there are even smaller parts of those portions that still give you trouble, isolate those and practice them. This is what is meant by "break it down." Once you have achieved a reasonable degree of mastery over each part, you can then put them back together into one complete technique.

To take a very simple example, consider a two-handed aikido technique such as *tenchi-nage* ("heaven and earth throw"). This throw is a counter to an attack in which the opponent grabs both your wrists. In it, you step forward, passing the opponent on his right side while leading him down with your left hand (earth) and reaching over him in front with your right (heaven). If the opponent does not fall smoothly to the ground, there must be some weakness in your execution.

Break the movement down by practicing the heaven hand and earth hand separately. While doing so, look carefully at each part of the movement to see that it is doing what it should. If stepping and moving the earth hand at the same time does not give good results, practice the step and the hand movements separately. Keep breaking down and refining the parts of a technique until you can perform the whole strongly and in good balance.

### **DETERMINE THE PRINCIPLE**

Always look for the principle that makes a technique work. If you can determine what the principle is, then you will be able to learn the technique better and will also eventually discover other techniques that operate on the same principle. Subjecting each new technique to such intense mental scrutiny is more difficult than simply doing what you are told, but undertaking it is what separates the serious martial artist from the hobbyist.

There are no skills in the martial arts that exist without a foundation. Every technique is based on a larger or deeper principle that can be applied to other techniques. Punching relies on using the largest muscle groups in the upper body in a coordinated manner to achieve the strongest extension of the arm. Stances depend on correct bone alignment to direct power from the ground through to the body and the limbs. Many throws are based on the idea of using a figurative lever and fulcrum to upset an opponent's balance. If you understand the notion that putting your hips lower than your opponent's hips gives you an advantage in power when throwing, then you can strive to lower your hips in every forward throw, and thereby overcome one of the major obstacles to performing such techniques well.

As another example, consider the structure of the human hand. When that hand grabs your wrist, its weakest point is the space between the thumb and forefinger. When attempting to escape from that

grab, it makes the most sense to apply pressure to the area where there is space, not muscle and bone. In one common escape technique found in jujutsu, we pivot the forearm so that the leverage is applied against the thumb and fingers, and the attacker's hand naturally opens just enough to allow the forearm to slip out. Once you understand and apply this principle, locating the weakest point in the attack and concentrating your energy there, you will find that all your escape techniques work better.

## REPETITION

Many students come into the dojo thinking that there is some magic trick to learning the martial arts. They imagine that if the instructor would simply reveal the secret to them, all their difficulties would vanish. Common sense tells us that this is not so; if it were, there would be far more masters than students. The "magic" in martial arts is simply the teaching power of repetition. It is possible to walk into a dojo as a nervous, clumsy student and walk out as a confident, skilled instructor, but the transformation takes years, and only occurs if the student throws herself into the training body and soul.

Repetition is the magic that makes us both strong and physically capable of performing a technique. This is true in any physical endeavor, and especially true in the martial arts. Repetition is also the magic that gives us our understanding of the principles that underlie the techniques. Constant practice forces us to compare many different types of techniques, physically if not mentally, and to draw conclusions about how and when they work best. This action, done often enough and over a long enough period of time, leads students to the intuitive grasp of principles that is the foundation for real progress in budo. Repetition is the key to the peculiar mental state sought by Zen practitioners and martial artists called "no-mind," which we will discuss in greater detail in a later chapter. Almost nothing in the martial arts is possible without repetition.

## CONDITIONING THE BODY

I am always surprised when I meet someone who claims to be a martial artist or martial arts instructor, but who is obviously out of shape. An instructor who cannot train for an entire class alongside his students is unlikely to be much of an instructor at all. Only extreme old age or recent injury are acceptable excuses for standing on the sidelines barking orders. Nearly all of the master instructors I met in Japan were not only of higher rank than their students, but were clearly better at performing the techniques of their art. Those who could not perform as well were almost all over seventy years of age.

Martial arts are physical. I emphasize this again here because there are so many budoists out there who exercise the muscles of the jaw more regularly than any others. Sincere physical commitment is the key to healthy martial arts training over the long term, and almost no student has ever become really expert without an extended period of intense exercise that approached the limits of his or her physical endurance. Through hard training, physical skills become mental certainties, and mental certainties lead to a calm spirit. The more thoroughly the physical components are practiced and cultivated, the more clearly the other aspects will be revealed.

This physical training can take many forms. The most obvious are the different repetitive conditioning drills. In striking arts, punching hundreds or thousands of times with power is very beneficial. Striking a *makiwara* (a device used for conditioning the hands, arms, feet, and legs, usually a thick board wrapped in leather or rope) for long periods of time is a traditional means of training the body.

In judo, an exercise called *uchi-komi* is used. Two training partners grasp each other in the usual judo fashion, then one executes a throwing technique up

to the point just before the actual throw. He or she repeats the drill ten times or so, then the other partner performs an equal number of repetitions. The more sets, the better the results. As long as both partners have built up their bodies through training to be able to endure the high numbers, there is no reason not to do a few hundred of these *uchi-komi* in each training session.

While I was living in Japan, my training partner and I undertook to complete ten thousand *uchi-komi* of our favorite techniques. We only had time to train together on Saturdays, so it took a few months to reach our goal. During the training, we learned a great deal about these techniques, and though the number itself doesn't mean we reached perfection, I recall that the techniques worked very well in competition, and that we both felt very satisfied on the day we reached ten thousand. I recommend this approach to anybody serious about judo training.

In *iaido*, train by making many thousands of sword cuts. In *kyudo*, train by shooting arrows until you are exhausted. In *kendo*, strike the opponent until you cannot lift your *shinai* even one more time. In *aikido*, resolve to throw and be thrown until you cannot get up. Although not many students will have the heart to follow it to the end, this is the way to success.

## PURIFICATION

An important concept in *budo* is that of self-purification through training. *Budo* practice is thought by some to be a means of approaching the presence of the sacred. In some ways similar to the ritual of washing the hands and mouth before entering a temple, training is a way of cleansing the body, mind, and spirit in preparation for an encounter with a higher plane of existence.

The physical cleansing that takes place is fairly obvious. Sweat cleans out the pores, and the rush of blood through the veins and arteries is thought to help keep them clear. Comparing the physical

condition of a budoman at seventy years of age and that of someone the same age who has not trained will satisfy you that exercise is good for the body. If, in fact, "the body is a temple," then hard physical training is equivalent to sweeping the floors of the temple, painting the walls, and burning incense to welcome the gods.

Mental cleansing comes through concentration. The complex actions performed in *budo* require our strict attention, distracting us from petty concerns. Paradoxically, deep concentration on the details of technique frees us from the worry over daily issues, allowing us to concentrate on fundamental matters. Thus, we can look clearly at our circumstances and decide if they are what we think they ought to be. In a lesser sense, this can mean something like examining a technique and deciding the best way to perform it. In a larger sense, it can mean contemplating our whole relationship with the world and perhaps making behavioral changes that bring us more in line with our ideas of how we ought to live.

Through frequent practice, we learn to stay in this state of sharpened perception for longer periods of time. Repeated efforts of this kind eventually sharpen perception permanently. Like the results of regular meditation, daily exposure to a clearer way of viewing the world affects our thinking in fundamental ways. Learning to perceive truth is intrinsically rewarding, and we begin to seek it in experiences outside the *dojo*. Constant exposure to this kind of thinking can ultimately have a profound effect on our personalities.

"Spiritual" cleansing also comes from hard training. A tired body seems more inclined to operate in unity with the mind, leading to the kind of clarity that often follows intense meditation. At the extreme limit of fatigue, an exhausted body becomes unable to resist the dictates of the spirit. Thinking and then acting becomes, after many repetitions, unified thought and action. According to certain *budo*

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philosophers, there eventually arises a "perfect" relationship between mind and body, at which point the whole human being becomes a means of expressing divine intention, and thus is no longer constrained by ordinary physical and mental limitations. It is when students experience this oneness that they find their training most rewarding.

**About the Author:** Nicklaus Suino Sensei is one of the most active teachers in the SMAA. An author of several budo books, he is also the Director of the SMAA Judo Division and one of the Directors of the SMAA Iaido Division. He has trained extensively in budo, in both the USA and Japan, since childhood. Learn more at <https://japanesemartialartscenter.com>.

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