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ISSUE #75 - JUN - JUL 15



THE WORLD'S BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL KITE MAGAZINE
WWW.KITELWORLD.MAG.COM

CAPTION – Silent wave assassin.
Gabi channeling her uplifting
moments in shred at one of her
home breaks in Western Australia
PHOTO – Colin Leonhardt

Flow & Silence

If you're just starting out in kiteboarding, you will probably have a hard time imagining that kitesurfing can be a peaceful and almost meditative experience. Believe it or not, you'll soon gain control and learn to ride like a zen master. Gabi Steindl - once a world tour competitor, now a writer, traveller, physiotherapist, free thinker and frequent solo

missioner - reflects on the art of getting completely and wonderfully lost in kitesurfing and making friends with silence

Flow

You may have read more about flow in Dr. Jason Gallate's 'To Love, To Kite...' columns in previous issues of this magazine – he too was very keen on the art of flow. Mihaly created the 'Combination of Challenge and Skill Model' which explains that you will be in flow when your challenges are greater than average and, crucially, when your skills are higher than average.

I read one of his books about ten years ago while training in Brazil in preparation for the final world cup stop in Fortaleza. I found myself studying the book, rather than just casually reading it, and ended up writing out pages and pages of information by hand so that I could go back to my favourite parts at any time. Analysing and understanding flow was pretty ground-breaking, not only for my career as a pro kiter, but for my life in general.

Mihaly suggests that reaching 'flow state' is one of the secrets to happiness, and I certainly agree. Existence is temporarily suspended, you become fully immersed in a task and feel free from external worries or problems - everything seems to happen automatically and effortlessly, without thinking. It's almost as if you're on autopilot.

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Flow in life

Sport is just one area that people refer to flow, but regardless of titles, fame or fortune, spending your life doing the things you enjoy and simply getting good at them will also allow you to enter a 'flow state'. Life's meaning takes on a greater significance when you are constantly engaged in something that you are passionate about.

For me, wave-kiting is just that: it puts me right into that flow state. Just by being out there in 'the big blue' I feel a connection with the waves, the wind and the ocean in a way that goes beyond the physical. Writing can also give me that feeling of flow – admittedly not always, it has to be said - but when I'm in flow I have the opposite to writer's block. It's pretty great really.

I could not imagine a life devoid of these feelings and the moments that I experience them. Being completely involved in what I'm doing enables me to experience a perfect inner clarity and a deep sense of serenity. I simply begin to forget myself and feel as though maybe I'm part of something bigger.

If you've ever felt something similar then it's likely you've experienced flow in some way. Perhaps you're chasing it again even now. Perhaps you always will be.

Experiencing flow while engaging in an enjoyable past-time is great, but how good would it be if we could consciously create flow in all of our everyday tasks?

If you're lucky enough to have found a vocation that you enjoy, perhaps you're able to find flow at work, too? Lucky you.

Silence

"Silence is a true friend who never betrays." Confucius

One of the unique beauties of wave-kiting (and something that is very contrary to surfing) is the fact that you are

completely alone. Sitting in the line-up at a crowded break is the total opposite; there's always chatter and lots of interaction. (Maybe the occasional fracas too if you've unintentionally stirred up the locals.)

When you're immersed in waves with your kite there is no noise, other than the sound of nature. And possibly the sounds of your friends cheering you on (an unavoidable potential block to achieving a feeling of flow and inner serenity, but welcome all the same).

From the moment we wake up in our beds until the moment we crawl back into them, our lives are loud, busy and filled with external noise. We rarely experience actual silence and, if we're honest, many of us probably 'fear' it to some extent. We feel uneasy when life becomes too still and being comfortable with silence doesn't come naturally for us. Apart from all the external noise, there's all the noise from within; the constant internal mind chatter that many of us are accustomed to is quite often even harder to deal with than the noise from the outside. The sounds of our environment combine with the 'monkey mind' inside of us, leaving very little room to truly experience silence.

I personally love spending days when I don't speak to anybody and I feel fortunate that I'm able to do that. However, not everyone is in the position to do so. As a result, for most of us, the silence we can experience while kiting in the waves is absolute gold and a rare opportunity.

"Within you there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at anytime and be yourself." - Hermann Hesse

Experiencing and immersing yourself into silence is an incredible, and I would argue, worthwhile experience. Connecting with nature in the same instance can make that experience even more potent and I find the easiest time to fully go within myself is when I'm in flow out there in the ocean. Time can cease and thoughts may quieten. If you will let it, silence can be an anchor, healer and a guide.

Nature is perhaps the most readily accessible and effortless channel through which we can experience inner silence. For me and many others, kiting in the waves is a kind of active meditation.

When I face seemingly unsolvable problems I can usually

find the solution as soon as I can find flow in the ocean. In silence my head feels lighter and it seems that mental clarity is more readily attainable. As a result I make every effort to allow time for silence in my life.

"Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom." - Francis Bacon

If only we could apply what we can experience and feel in the water to our daily lives on the land and try to cultivate and adopt more flow and silence into our day to day existence; if we could try to become more mindful of the power these mental and physical states afford us in terms of how we feel after a sick session and the potential insights they can give us, then perhaps we could feel more relaxed, more focused, more satisfied, more peaceful and yet at the same time more powerful.

Let kiting, the waves and the ocean show you the way.

Find Gabi at: www.kitegabi.com ☺