

Home

Move like a beam of light:

Fly like lightning,

Strike like thunder,

Whirl in circles around

A stable center.

- Morihei Ueshiba

Breathe in and let yourself soar to the ends of the universe;

Breathe out and bring the cosmos back inside.

- Morihei Ueshiba

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Sandan

Home

Home is that sense of familiarity of place, that door—like a gateway into my own space: my cat, the black furry comfort, and its small living heart. I am drawn to the feeling of coming into the quiet, known comfort of home. At home I am able to attend to my deepest needs for safety, autonomy, connection. "Home" is much more than a geographical location, it is where my heart resides and restores. It is where the music of my life begins.

Listen to the word "home"; listen to the sound. For me, I hear "om." Contained in the word "home" is the sacred Sanskrit syllable "om" which is the primordial sound by which the earth was created. It symbolizes unfolding and expansion. "Kotodama", the "spirit of sound," is the energy from which creation emerges into the world and the "meaning of existence is grasped." In kotodama, the kanji for sound is read as "Om" which translates to the "establishing of the spirit" and refers to the "cycling of the electromagnetic field of life." (Gleason, 1995)

At times in my life I have been out-of-harmony with myself—I have been lost, homeless; my mind fragmented, my spirit broken. During these times I have not been at ease in my body or in my surroundings. I did not sense the ground, breathe, or stay present with what is going on in the mind or body. I have left my immediate experience and am going through the motions, but not fully trusting the flow of life.

For me, the study of Aikido is the study of concrete ways to be more fully present and at home within myself and with whatever is happening in the moment. Sometimes when distracted by fear and self-judgment I notice that I become constricted, tense, resisting life. I resist the ground as if there is no ground, as if there is no home, no place to root. Yet, the ground doesn't leave; I

leave the ground. The earth and its gravitational forces remain continuous and constant.

Through active breathing, I am learning how to contact the gravitational forces of the earth. "Breath power" in Aikido, *kokyū-rokyū*, the breath that unifies the mind, body, and spirit, creates a means to realign and harmonize with my own fear or resistance in a liberating way.

Control your breath and unite yourself with the natural rhythm of the universe. This is the way to keep centered within your *seika tanden*. Your own center must be linked to the center of the earth. Ki emanates from that sensation of stability and calm. (Ueshiba & Ueshiba, 2002)

Home is finding calmness and equanimity within the "busy-ness" of life. One of the dangers of getting caught up in the overwhelming speed and noise of daily life is that I lose connection with myself. The Chinese word for "busy" is composed of two characters: "heart" and "killing." Thomas Merton said that when we succumb to overwork, we are actually giving birth to a subtle form of violence:

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence...overwork. To allow oneself...to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism.... destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because... it kills the root of inner wisdom with makes work fruitful. (Merton, from Muller, 1992)

As we seek salvation through our frantic productivity and accomplishments, we squander the teachings that may be present in this very moment, in the richness of this particular breath. (Muller, 1992)

Aikido practice is the practice of finding stability and stillness within the unpredictable flux of life. O'Sensei described the state of stillness within

movement as “*sumikiri*” — a principle which lives at the heart of Aikido. In this state the mind and body become one entity, moving with clarity and balance. “...one of the goals of Aikido is to teach us how to maintain one’s equanimity regardless of the situation, no matter how harrowing or difficult.” (Ueshiba & Ueshiba, 2002)

One who truly understands Budo is...quite calm in appearance and gentle in demeanor...” Those who understand Budo manifest *shizen tai*, “a perfect natural and relaxed state of being...a matter-of-fact equanimity. (Ueshiba & Ueshiba, 2002)

For me, the principles of Aikido are principles of coming home and from there expanding out beyond the edges of the known. Home provides the security, the base from which to be free to enter into the unknown worlds of experience; home provides the ground for staying awake while moving from one known moment to the next unknown moment. Aikido is the dynamic blend between the known and the unknown, home and the wilderness, conscious and the unconscious.

The 6th Pillar of Aikido, Ushiro, involving development of the 6th Sense (Stevens, 1997), also connotes “coming home.” Ushiro is a perfect metaphor and concrete practice for “coming home,” establishing ground, vertical posture or *shisei*, extending breath power through the whole body, and finding equanimity within the unknowns of life.

Like the planets orbiting the sun, where uke orbits nage, ushiro is an apt metaphor for my life. Leaving home I take breath, pet my cat, and move out into the winds of a busy life. Moving quickly from safe harbor to the hectic apogee of the world, but anchored like the hand and hamni in ushiro. An hence it goes, expanding and contracting, fooled and amazed, knowing and unknowing (both good things I think), so much like the uke/nage dialectic—two forces really moving as one in that wholeness of this life I love.

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