

Shodan Paper - Christopher Whaley - Aikido of Monterey

Voice and Breath

What had started several years ago only as a way to bolster a personal sense that I wasn't physically and mentally strong enough, for erasing doubts, fears and anxieties that crop up daily has become a learning to accept those same emotions and a focused path for eliminating unnecessary steps. On a personal level I recognize in every way that none of this can happen without the continued support, the daily showing up of those who have come before me, those who ride along with me and those who start their personal journey after me. We are all complicit in each other's journeys.

The few years training at AoM have helped bring about calmness and economy of movement that I've read about and searched for since a teenager, a community to share it with, a locus to develop as a human.

There can be no discussion of personal development or advancement without the tandem commitment to fostering the same development in all of my brothers and sisters, known and unknown who walk through the front door. Some may practice for a short while others stay longer. My own practice is augmented, enriched when I can be of service to others' training. Aikido is the clay I choose to mold myself and help others discover something of themselves. This aspect of my training I call "voice"

Since becoming an ikkyu and most especially since becoming shodan-ho I've been grateful for the opportunity to intensify my training, grateful for the senseis' focusing a class or classes on areas of study that I would need to better myself, grateful for the extra classes offered, impressed at how the senseis keep showing up despite having injuries or being sick, grateful for the continued patience with me when it looks like I understand a technique and continue to get it wrong. The mirroring of these qualities I also call "voice"

Other ways that my voice expresses itself.

A set of actions; showing up for class, sozi, patience with myself and others.

A set of practices; aligning myself with the dojo's rhythms, researching the deeper meanings to O'sensei's writings and penned thoughts, being present for my uke, giving 100% to nage. Enjoying the movement.

A set of principles; technique and ukemi are inseparable, spirals govern our actions, development of Ki, settling of mind, developing heart/mind.

I've especially enjoyed being asked to lead class in warm-ups or be available to help other aikidoka prepare for their kyu tests or occasionally help senseis as uke outside of the regular class times. The helping out others comes back to us much like the symbol for infinity always perpetuates, tirelessly continuing. As an ikkyu, the Tuesday and Thursday beginner's evening classes have continued to inform my practice as much as advanced classes did. Staying focused on the basics, exploring all the mechanical permutations leading to variations and different applications of energy has been refreshing to see through the eyes of the beginners on those nights. My voice can be both as an anchor to beginners and fellow explorer along the way.

Breath and breathing support my voice.

This is done by carrying forward our voice through breath by the continued building up on, re-examining of movement, the strength built in the continual showing up to class, the betterment of technique, being courageous to show our nature each hour of class. The fuller our expression of breath, the stronger our movement - our voice. By breath I mean the going up and down of our chest and the paying attention to the air that circulates through our lungs, the regulation of breath throughout all of our movements, and most insistently a way to connect with uke. Our sensei's example nourishes and sustains the strengthening of breath. O'sensei comes from another almost incomprehensible period of time and culture relative to ours. The mental and physical basics that he embodied though are universal through time like many other's teachings. These aikido basics allow us to become human no matter what epoch we live in. Breath as used and paid attention to in aikido helps us realize this. Breath can be considered the "zanshin" to our voice.

These are two aspects of my training that have become stronger as an ikkyu.