

Shugyo Tassei Kigan Shiki Seminar

Question and Answer

C. Curtis - Jan. 25, 2009

While we are training on the mat during class, questions come up in our mind that we would like to ask the teacher. But it is not always appropriate to stop what's happening in the class to answer such a question. Sometimes it's all right and I usually let you know when it's time for that, but there's not always a place for questions in the regular classes. Therefore we have this period of so-called "question and answer", so that all of those questions that you had during the training you can ask. And by the way, please don't be shy about asking something that pertains to your personal training. We are all in this together. I mean, surely you can see that I am not shy. Right? I don't hide from you, so don't hide from me or from others.

Student: Sensei, what is your personal experience of moving from One Point? The reason I ask this is that I noticed for the first time, when we were doing Kokyu Dosa in class, that I had the sense that when the One Point moved, everything moved. So I saw that this is not really just a "one point". I am just wondering is that an experience you have had in your training and exactly what is happening here?

Perspective is everything. How we see this moment is what this moment is. It doesn't matter if we are miss-seeing the moment, for us it's real. Up until 200 years ago people were certain, they knew, that the earth was flat. It wasn't a matter of belief. They knew. So that's how they experienced it. The option of roundness just never occurred to them. You know when I was talking about seeing the sun and the moon on my early morning walk - didn't they ever see that? I often think, "How could they see it that way?" You know? Perspective is everything.

As your our awareness begins to take in more and more at the same time, and isn't so narrowly focused at a task at hand, more and more we begin to include more in our experience. Our perspective expands. Everything moves together. What you experienced was simply more inclusive.

Student: I am trying to understand this Universal Mind. When your mind and body are unified in taiga, is there thought, or does thought exist in that state? Because obviously we have to interact with people as we speak, and a job may require that we come up with an idea or a plan.

Taiga is not a vacant state. Thoughts arise out of Original Mind, and thoughts disappear. They come up and if we leave them alone they just go away again. A feeling comes up, some recognition, then we let it go again. Someone comes up to you and asks you to do something, you just do it. Begin to observe how you get wrapped up in those things that arise and use them in a sort of "self and other" or

“me and them” sense. You know, either you are doing something for me or I’m doing something for you.

The practice is to relax and be natural and just reside in this space in which everything arises. If a glass is full, you can’t put any more water in there. But this life space is miraculously infinitely available. No matter what arises, it is still completely open. A thought comes and goes like a bird flies across the sky or you pull your finger across the surface of the water. There’s no trace. Where do thoughts come from? We don’t have any idea. We don’t know what we are going to think next. There is no control over that at all. They just come. And then where do they go? They just go away.

So the question is not, “Can I have thoughts in taiga,” but what is a thought, and what is it that is aware of those thoughts? And not just thoughts coming and going, but what is aware of sounds? What sees this color? What feels pain or pleasure?

Taiga is a useful condition, a true condition. The time when makes a difference is when there’s an explosion and that wall over there blows out into the room. Do you freak out? Or do you roll up your sleeves and say, “Who’s hurt and what’s got to be done here?” That’s when the real condition shows. Not when it’s easy. This isn’t some airy-fairy thing where you sit around in your hotel room or your meditation chamber. Yes, please sit. But you are preparing. This body/mind is the vessel, and it must be prepared. Which means coming back, coming back and residing in attention. It’s a simple exercise that nobody does, so everybody lives in pain and suffering.

There’s no easy solution for you. You have to ask yourself “What is going on here? What is this?” And, “Who is it that sees this?” If I ask you to show me, you cannot show me. If you look there you don’t see anything, except a bunch of ideas, right? How well do those ideas serve you in an emergency ?

Student: Right.

It’s so funny, what we do. Instead of cleaning the mirror, we try to scrub the images in the mirror. But they are images in a mirror. You’ve got to clean the mirror. Then you can see the images clearly. Sitting is cleaning the mirror. Just resting, no scrubbing involved. Just resting. OK?

Student: You were talking about freedom, and how freedom is about being free of external circumstances, and how to not be affected by that.

We can’t help but be affected, but we are not controlled by that.

Student: Yes. This week I was noticing the effect of the change in the administration, and how that really brought home an optimism in me. I didn’t really see until then just how much I had been impacted by the general atmosphere of the world before. So that brought up a question. How to stabilize so that I am not affected by whoever is in the government?

Maintaining stability is maintaining balance. Balance is not a rigid, immobile thing. In all aspects of our life, whether it's politics or food, we tend to be radically in one direction or the other, or certainly leaning towards one direction or the other. Which means, even though there is no such thing as absolute center, the further you move away from another perspective, the less chance you have of seeing that other perspective. And when you get way out there and it starts to get radicalized, then you have no understanding, let alone compassion, for the person over there, who is the one that, guess what, is the one who needs all of your compassion and understanding! So we want to be as inclusive as possible, not reacting blindly to what effects one side of the other.

Just read the newspaper. The Super ferry battles, the development battles, the economy. I mean the myopic views are all there for us to see each and every day.

Student: It's a good example of how for someone that's in resistance to a certain aspect, in this case evil, they will become most like that which is being resisted.

Yes, I mentioned that it's a wonderful realization when we see that we never have to fight evil. Because of course fighting evil is that very evil itself. That's exactly what your enemy is doing! How ridiculous is a "war on drugs" a "war on terror", you know? A war on anything is evil against evil. And hasn't the last several years been a perfect example of that? However, I think to some extent this is not commonly understood in the world even yet, the fact that it's a mistake to fight evil. People have seen that to some degree, maybe, and that's why we have this new administration. But when it comes right down to it, do we really understand this, or will we take exception when it's our own hide at risk?

Student: I would also add that don't we all have a little bit of that inside of us? Whatever we criticize in others, we have in our own selves?

Oh yes. If you recognize it, you've got it, brother. If we can see it, it's us. That's what I am trying to point to all the time when I say, "all you have is your own experience."

Many years ago when I was a professional actor, at one point I had to play the character of Iago in the Shakespeare play, Othello. Do you know this character? Iago is about the nastiest man that ever lived. Why they picked me to play him, I don't know! But I had to get behind it, because you can't just fake it, you have to actually think those thoughts to get those emotions to come. You have to actually do it. It has to be real, otherwise you can tell that it's fake when you watch it. I didn't know what to do with that character because I thought I wasn't like that. So guess what I had to discover? That given those circumstances that Iago went through I would react in just that same way. I had to create a back story, of course, because it's not all provided for you in the play. Basically his story is that he was passed up in a military promotion. So the key was I had to connect with that in myself. I saw that I had my own ambition, plenty of it, and so finding that became relatively easy. And then the story is that his best friend who was someone that he had been promoting all of this time got chosen over him in advancement, and suddenly he was

enraged. And this became very easy then to discover in myself, and suddenly I thought, "Oh, my God. I am that."

Of course, this happened then many other times, because I played many roles, and I began to see how everything I can conceive of, I can conceive of because it is me. Now I didn't yet see that "all is experience" but that allowed me later to be able to see that more easily.

So when we see we have this all within us, then it is easier to realize that you really need to be able to see how much Mr. Bush needs your compassion. He cries out for it. If you can't hear that, then you're not listening very carefully. You're not really looking. It's something important. You can deal with it or not, it's your own training.

Student: There is a certain type of meditation that I've heard about. You breathe in the suffering of others and you breathe out compassion.

Tonglen. It's not breathing in suffering and breathing out compassion, exactly. In tonglen practice, you breathe in all the pain and suffering of others and you give back all of your well being, your intelligence, your wealth, your health. You give it all away. That's tonglen.

Student: Is that then my goal when I think of someone I'm judging? Like Bush for instance.

Your goal? Your practice is to notice what's going on in your world of experience. When you feel judgment, that almost invariably leads to an emotion of some sort. In severe cases, hatred, minor cases, discomfort. On the other side of judgment, in severe cases adulation, and in minor cases warmth and attraction. That all comes from judgment. Judging someone to be good, judging someone to be bad. There is no room for compassion in that world. Compassion is being present with the other person in their suffering. Even if you are seeing them on TV, they are part of your world of experience. You don't have to go over to Texas to see Mr. Bush, in fact I wouldn't recommend it, as he might not understand. Watch him on TV or look at a picture. It's your training. You are not actually doing anything for him. Do you see what I mean?

Student: Right. So my practice would be to do that tonglen, and not have to even interact with the person.

Yes. English for this Tonglen is Taking and Sending. Taking in the suffering of the world and sending away everything you cherish. This is good practice. You breathe in the black smoke of the suffering of the world through your nostrils. Take it all. It won't make you sick. No one's ever died from it. And then send out your wealth in the form of clear moonlight, send the wealth that you possess to everyone who is suffering, out through your nostrils.

Student: Well, since we are using Bush...I recognize in him, say, competition/aggression. Then I take a look and I recognize that in myself. And then next time I see Bush and recognize that again, does that mean it's still in me? Doesn't it go away?

Well, of course the possibility is always in you. Where else could it be? So if you are seeing that, you are seeing yourself. It's not like, when you look at Bush and you see his competitiveness that's his competitiveness and you see that you have that too. That is the shoga way of looking at it. But the truth is, what you are seeing is actually a projection of yourself.

There is no other but you. Even if you find that you had a severe case of competition, as most young males do, what are you going to do about it?

Student: Recognize it?

Yeah, that's right. You can't fight it off. You can't get rid of it. You notice it, you turn the light of awareness on it and you see the results of this kind of thing, how it can hurt you and others. And then it loses its luster for you. You see through it, and so it falls away and isn't used through you. It doesn't mean it's gone. It's just that you can no longer be bothered with that way of thinking and being. That's maturity.

So awareness is the key. That's what we have been practicing this weekend. That's how we train. We turn the light of awareness, or attention to whatever is happening. Don't try to do anything with it, gettin more of the good or getting rid of the bad. We just pay attention. And try not to make too much separation between yourself and what you experience.

Student: We have a lot of beginners here now. Could you maybe give them some advice? Because you talked last night about how the Ki-Aikido world has changed and developed through the years. Maybe you could cover that a bit more?

I think what you are trying to get at here is that Aikido is alive and changing all the time, and has been since it's inception in 1953 here in Hawaii, and in Japan back before the war, with Morihei Ueshiba. I mentioned recently, if you want to see how Aikido used to be, in the 1950's, go watch a 1950's movie. You'll find it full of sexism, racism, homophobia, non-recognition of competitive ambition, and so on. Well, that's what Aikido was like back then. Oh, it may have been a cut above that, because it was Aikido, but it was primarily a reflection of the culture of the times.

You know this is not aimed at Tohei Sensei or at O'Sensei, because as individuals, they were far beyond the culture they lived in. But O'Sensei for instance, didn't know how to communicate the experience he was having. He could do it and everyone would say, "Wow, how does he do that?!" but he couldn't tell other how to do it. He would say, "Well, it's the gods. The gods give me the power and I can do it." That's the way he saw it. It was belief based thinking. Then Tohei Sensei came along, and he spent his life developing ways to teach. That's why we have all of these principles, phrases, and different exercises that they don't have in Aikikai

Aikido, which was the original school of O'Sensei's. Tohei Sensei left and began teaching on his own because Kisshomaru Ueshiba, O'Sensei's son, wouldn't let Tohei Sensei develop a method of teaching. There was, prior to this, no real method of teaching it. So when O'Sensei died, and his son was left in charge, he kept saying "My father never taught that. You can't teach that," every time Tohei Sensei would develop a new way to communicate this. So that school of Aikikai was abandoned to itself and its own devices, and basically hasn't changed a lot since.

That was very unfortunate for those who were left behind. My son had a professor at Waseda University in Tokyo, who was a yondan in Aikikai. Of course my son wanted me to meet this teacher, so when I was in Tokyo I went to meet her. She was very charming and really bright, a wonderful lady. She was about 46 years old and I was about 56 years old. I said to her, "What do you like about Aikido?" And she said, "I just like to get out there and mix it up, you know, with the guys. I love to kick ass." "Oh," I said, "how long is that going to last for you?" She looked at me and she said, "It's already starting to go." "What are you going to do, when it's gone," I said. And she said, "I'm going to quit." And this was very sad to me. "It has so much more to offer each of us," I told her. "I know," she said, "but it's not taught in my school and I am not going to change at this point. I'm too old." This was, as I said, a very intelligent woman, who in this area of her life was completely blinded. So I have to say, somebody, some high-ranking teacher that she loved and trained with, should have given her a clue. But no one ever did.

I told you once that Tohei Sensei's view has always been that everyone can have this experience. When I was with Noburo Tamura Sensei [an Aikikai teacher] in France last year, he said, "Most people cannot understand, so I don't explain." He means most people can't have this experience, only some special people. He wouldn't say it that way, but that's what he is saying. Only the one's the gods favor can have this experience.

But Tohei Sensei's view, and Suzuki Sensei's view, and certainly my view is that every single person can have this experience. So this is one strong cause of the way Aikido has developed over the years. Another way is that the students themselves have changed. For instance, if you went into a bookstore on Maui in 1953, if there even was one, what you would have found on the shelves was maybe a Christian Bible and some Buddhist sutras. If you went to the "martial arts" section, there wouldn't be any books. If you went to the "self help" section, there wouldn't be any. Go down and look in Border's now. Half of the store is full of this stuff. There are literally millions of books written on spiritual training. Now that doesn't mean you should go read them all. I am just saying take a look. What you see there is the consciousness of the world now. When the Dalai Lama came to Hawaii 20 years ago, 300 people showed up. When he came here two years ago, 5,000 people showed up. That's the difference in the world we live in. Obama couldn't have gotten elected in the 50's. So the world changes because the people change.

You young people are growing up in a world that is completely different than the world that I grew up in. And I grew up in a different world than the world Suzuki

Sensei grew up in, and so on. It's not like someone is coming along and changing Aikido. Evolution happens, change continues. What Charles and Tracy and Jeff, those middle aged teachers, teach when they are my age, won't be just like this. It will be better. It will be clearer, it will be more concise, it will be more penetrating, and by the time you guys are teaching, it will be even better yet. For those of you who have been here training for 20 or 30 years already, just think how Aikido has evolved. It's only been 10 years since we started Hawaii Ki Federation. Think about this, and then think back on 1953. It's always radically changing. Evolution is exponential.

It's not so much about cause and effect, or even specific people involved. It's that our whole existence is evolving. Some people like to say the world is a terrible place these days. But look around! Are your teeth rotting in your head? Because 100 years ago they would have been.

Student: We wouldn't even have still been here in those days.

You and I would not even still be here. Are you alive!? Many of us are still alive because of the times we live in. So let's be grateful and embrace our lives.