

Letting Go Discussion – Ch. 11

Not What You Do But Who Does It

Friday, Jan. 22, 2010

This is the eleventh chapter from our book *Letting Go* that we are going to address tonight. The name of the chapter is “Not What You Do But Who Does It.”

Some people worship science, some people worship money, some people worship culture, some people worship an unseen God, some worship food, some books, etc. Of course I could go on and on because every word that I can say represents something that someone somewhere is obsessed with. And we all worship many of these items I just mentioned, not just one or two. To worship something means that it is an object of belief. We believe that it is going to give us something that we feel we need and think we don't already have. Therefore we pay homage to it, we do its bidding in our lives, we believe in it. If you add all of these beliefs up together, relating to family, work, Aikido, and all those other aspects that make up our lives, that is the structure that we are. That belief structure is what we call the personality. And when we are operating out of a belief structure, we are basically being run by that belief. It's running us. We aren't living life, but that aspect of our structure is running our life.

This isn't to say that any kind of action or any kind of engagement is right or wrong. It's not about that. It's about recognizing what part of you is engaged. Therefore the title of the chapter, Not What We Do But Who Does It.

I'll read a little from the book.

The One Point is the gateway between shoga and taiga, between the relative and the Absolute states of mind. If you were to cut your stomach open and look for the One Point, you would not find it. This One Point is only a convenient reference point. But reference to what? As long as we are speaking about a universe with time-and-space, we have to have a center of that, and here we have a center that both is the center of the time-and-space universe and at the same time transcends that universe. So if we are to see the whole picture or know who we are, we must clearly establish our point of connection. That will do it. So we say, “Keep One Point”. Know your relative condition well, and then transcend that time and space being. Get beyond your relative mind. Then when you touch your hands to the piano keys, or you cut the vegetable, or you even turn on the car engine, the whole quality of life is transcended. Life moves then from just the thing itself, to something luminously glowing with the source. This changes the quality of everything. You know that when someone is really tired, depressed, and negative, it is difficult to see their beauty in any way. But then you see the same person at another time when they are happy and fresh. Wow! What a huge difference it makes.

This is what we mean by being full of Ki! It is a very natural condition, and everyone already has experienced it.

Yesterday when I was being interviewed, the interviewer asked me what was the most important thing Suzuki Sensei taught me. I told him that the most important thing he taught me was how to handle a difficult situation with equanimity. In other words, when everything is falling apart around you, when the most cherished thing is being taken from you right before your eyes, do you fall apart and add to the problem? This only adds insult to injury, as we say. You lose everything if you do that. It is never a question of what you deserve or don't deserve. That is taking it personally. You have to forget all of that. The selfish mind sees things that way, but that is not the truth. To be living in the truth is to not have preference in exactly this way. This is what we call equanimity. The condition that we find, is the condition that is. It is happening, and we cannot change it or avoid it. Handling a situation with equanimity means you don't care to gain or lose. You just stay right in it because that is what's happening to you. "Keep One Point" means to look at everything from the center of the Universe; to dwell in the center of the universe. Look from a position of equanimity and you will always have equanimity. If you look from a position of relative concern — call it shame or fear or guilt, or even relief....all that stuff is relative garbage that the society around us sells. You don't have to follow that. Your commitment to the center of the Universe, which I say is your commitment to the truth, tells what kind of human being you actually are. And we don't know until times get tough what kind of human being we are. Do you fold up, or do you stay with it? You might as well stay with it, because there is really nothing else to do. Oh, it seems like there are some alternatives, but those are imaginary options. Always it is what is right in front of you. And if you do succeed in avoiding it, then it will just return later, but be much more difficult to deal with.

Let's remember that the reason we are here is not to make money, babies, or mischief. We do that while we are here, it's true, but that is not necessarily why we are here. We are here to wake up. We are here to see and know the nature of this human situation. That is the purpose of being human. As long as we remember that, we will always have equanimity, because we will see everything that comes along is just helping us to do that very thing, to wake up to our purpose. That is the reason for every single thing that we come upon. It is not as obvious, sometimes, as me sitting here telling you this, but it is so. It is just easy to forget.

In the past several sessions we have had similar questions, or similar concerns, come up over and over again, so I know there is a view, a perspective, that can be problematic. If who does something is what counts in life, not necessarily what is done, then obviously it is important who acts. And many people have decided from that statement, "Well, it must be then that I need to be the taiga person, not the shoga person." Taiga and shoga is

sort of like emptiness and form, or mind and body. Emptiness and form, mind and body, same thing. Mind is the space here. Body is the thoughts, sensations, and emotions. In other words, experience is body. That is the dual perspective. However, when we say “body” we are not talking about you people or this building. This is not what is meant by form in this context. That’s why it is difficult to understand, when we hear “form is emptiness and emptiness is form, form is not other than emptiness and emptiness is not other than form.” I mentioned before, there is no separation between awareness and experience. There is no separation between the space in which experience takes place and the experience itself. There is no difference between mind and body. Because we see these as different, we have a sense of separation. So then when we hear something like the phrase, “it’s not important what you do, but who does it,” we think, “OK then, I have to be the taiga guy, the emptiness guy.” But actually taiga is all of it. Mind is all of it.

We don't look up in the sky, see the clouds floating by, and say, “There is the sky, except for the clouds.” It’s all the sky. There’s clouds floating by, there’s birds flying around, there’s airplanes up there, and balloons flying in it. But the sky doesn’t have a care what’s in it. There is no separation. It makes no distinction like that. This is completely open and accepting. This is open mind. Mind like the sky. This is all of this that we experience in every moment of our life.

On the other hand, if we are acting out of a belief structure that has been conditioned into us by our parents, society, or by some teacher or a friend, then we are being led and run by that conditioned belief. We are just reacting according to how that is. If someone agrees with our beliefs, we like them, and they are perforce our friend, even though they might not have our best interest in mind. If someone does not agree with our beliefs, they are not our friend and we don't trust them, even though they might have our best interest in mind. We are terrible judges this way, because we don't have any idea what is going on within and around us when we are caught up in these structures. We call this being run by a pattern.

That’s why I say that what you do is not so important. What’s important is who you are. And I don’t mean by that, that you should be something.

So that’s the theme of this chapter. Well, it’s the theme of the whole book, isn’t it, but it’s this chapter’s take on that theme.

Student: When you were talking about the sky, it reminded me of when I was trekking in the Himalayas, and we were on a very treacherous pathway, and I was really looking at the ground so that I wouldn't fall over the cliff. And my friend said, “You're missing the whole experience of the sky.” But it was quite a stretch to open up, look at the sky, the mountains, and trust that my feet would not go off a cliff. So because of that small contracted view, I was missing the whole point of being there.

Exactly. And what you are saying is that is how we often are in everyday life. So that's why we have meditation. Meditation is when you stop moving, without risking your life, lift your eyes from the path, and enjoy the sky. And when you maybe get a bit more experienced, then you can actually walk on the path and enjoy the sky. But it is not easy to do right off. We practice meditation so that we see that there is this wonderful openness to experience and enjoy, and then gradually it becomes more and more a part of our everyday life. Good point. Thank you.

Student: One other thing. When you were talking about worship earlier, you seemed to be relating it to some kind of obsession, or attachment to the object.

I related it to belief. We worship something because we believe that it has something to offer us that we don't already have.

Student: In the spiritual community that I lived in, the work that we did was called "worship." So no matter what you did, it was bringing a posture of awake-ness to that, whether you were taking the garbage out or doing the bookkeeping.

Right. Well, I hope you understand from what I said, that it's not the thing that you're doing, but who does it. For instance, some of us, in fact I'm sure all of us, to some degree or other, (and maybe in the local Japanese community even more), were taught a sense of responsibility. So when the parents are older the children feel a tremendous sense of responsibility or duty to take care of them. If they don't do that, they feel guilty. If they do that, they feel rewarded. They feel they have succeeded in fulfilling their duty. They feel good about themselves. But those are two sides of the same coin in that, in both cases, they are being run by a pattern or a belief.

I'm not saying not to take care of your parents. But do it without escaping from the guilt or chasing after the reward.

Let's face it, any kind of action that we do we think we are going to get something out of it. That's why we do it. So your teacher basically was asking you to recognize that every single thing you are doing is that. And so don't do it to get a reward, and don't do it to run away from the punishment or guilt or judgment of others that might come from not doing it, from shirking it.

This is what I was calling equanimity. It's just being here and responding with fullness and alertness and a presence to whatever it is that is needed, without preference.

Student: Of course the whole book is the same subject, isn't it? I try to grasp it every day. But the other day in Ki class we were having two people try to lift us, and no matter

what I tried, everything, including my body, came up. I guess I was going for a goal, but I don't want to say I'm doing that.

So where does frustration come from? When you feel frustrated, what just happened?

Student: I guess it's an experience of failing.

Yes. You didn't get what you wanted. You didn't succeed at whatever you were trying to do. That's what frustration is. "I don't seem to be able to accomplish this thing." Implied in that is the desire for success. And the teaching in Ki class in terms of Ki tests is, if you desire to succeed, that alone is the other side of the fear of failing coin, and that is failing the Ki test. The Ki test is that itself. It's not about physically being lifted or not. That's just an indication to us of the state of our mind. What happens with the body tells us what state our mind is truly in. We can't fool ourselves. That's why we like Ki tests, because they reveal what's really going on with us.

Student: I know what you are saying, but it's so hard to do. You think you are there, but you really ain't, you know?

That's the wonderful thing about Ki tests is you get to see exactly where you are.

Student: So I guess it comes with more sitting?

"Letting Go" is the name of the book. What are we letting go of? We're letting go of that need to succeed, that fear to fail. That's equanimity. That's why I said that is the most important thing that Suzuki Sensei taught me. Of course he gave me many teachings, but the core that he was always repeating to me, and always demonstrating to me, was this. Although he never used the word "equanimity." That's a word I came upon much later and realized, "Oh, that's this. No preference to win or lose." This is true confidence. This is not confidence to win, which is different. That's why I was covering this in the Ki class, because I didn't want people to identify confidence with succeeding. Because the whole problem is centered on success and failure, the drive to succeed and the fear to fail.

Passing Ki test is beyond success or failure. It's completely beside the point. So that's why we say, what matters is not what you do. "Who does it" does not mean there is someone there. We can go into that later.

Do have more questions? We still have twenty minutes.

I was in a private meeting today, and the student said, “This is sort of like going jogging. I resist it before I do it, and at the beginning it’s hard to get going, but then when I finally get going I love it, and think why don’t I do this everyday?” Kind of like asking a question in these sessions.

I don’t want you to feel that the subject is so esoteric or so challenging that whatever you would ask is not going to be important or is somehow a stupid question or something.

Student: Sensei, I sometimes have resistance to asking questions because it seems like there is always the same answer. So I kind of feel that I’ve heard the answer, so I had just better figure it out on my own.

Oh, then maybe I need to be more clever about wording the answer in a more entertaining way?

Student: No, no. When I first started training, I had of course a lot of ideas about what I knew of the world. And every time that I would ask you a question, I felt as though my foot was immediately placed in my mouth. And so for a few years then, I stopped asking questions. Because I thought it was part of the training that I just come and experience the training and do, to find the real answers to the questions that I had.

And now that you are free to ask questions?

Student: And now that I am free-er to ask questions, I really try to put a lot more thought into them before I verbalize them because I feel that I am learning that my training is about finding the experience that you are teaching. I can verbalize it an infinite amount of ways, but the verbalization feels like a trap sometimes.

Hmm. What’s the value of the practice for you?

Student: The value of the practice is not being disturbed by things, and not disturbing others.

And are you having that experience?

Student: Well, I have had that experience. It’s not a consistent experience for me. But I certainly recognize how my training has helped me see more easily when I stray into that disturbance.

OK.

Student: Sensei, I deal with a lot of people whose concern is “How am I doing?”

You mean in your psychology work?

Student: Right. In my work as a psychologist, every client always asks “How am I doing?” And I know from my own practice in the dojo, that if I am sitting on Friday night and looking at how I am doing, it doesn’t work so well for me.

I believe that as soon as we get identified with that lag mechanism that we are dragging around, which is “How am I doing?”, as soon as you ask that question you are already referencing something that is no longer existing, not happening. But the other people around us can have a much more direct experience of us that we do in that state. Unless, of course, if we let go of that mechanism and join with this, then we are doing it together. So is the answer to the question implied by the name of this chapter is “we are doing it”?

Who’s we?

You can’t know. In the same way that you can’t find anything when you go looking for “I” within yourself, you can presume that others also cannot. And if you ask any of them, they will respond affirmatively. But you can’t know that about them. Each of us can only know that about our self. I’m not suggesting that when we say that what’s important is who does it, that “I” or “we” do it. I’m not suggesting that any one do it.

As long as there is that separation, what you called that “lag mechanism,” as long as there is that separation between our self and our experience, we are placed a little bit away from our current experience. While everyone else may be able to experience us now, we tend to lag behind. We are sort of self-referencing. We are sort of considering, looking at, observing, watching. That’s always off time. What if you don’t do that at all, and you’re just on time? Something happens, and the response is just there. Someone attacks, boom boom, and it’s over. This is Aikido. No ideas about it.

And to be in this condition, here right now, we have to let go of any sense of a self doing something. As long as we have that sense of “I am doing something” there is a feeling of a separation between the I and the something.

Student: That separation has to mean something. I think about our vision. Each one of us is looking at you seeing one thing. But each of us is processing two images simultaneously, one from each eye, but our brain makes us believe that we are seeing one thing. There actually is a separation there, in both our seeing and our hearing.

I think we look for meaning in the separation and the gap gets smaller and smaller, but we never get there.

Yes, it never becomes zero.

It just means that we are not present. We are not living life. We are living our idea of life. That's what all of those belief structures do to us. Because everything that happens has to be compared against a belief structure to see if it's safe, it's good, if it's the right thing to do, to say, to think, to feel. That's what keeps us separate.

Student: Don't we have to think like that to keep from being eaten?

We don't have to think about anything to keep from getting eaten. You hear a lion, you get your ass out of there. That's a response, a healthy response.

We live in a world in which story rules. That's what we were talking about in the last session. The story is that reflection on the moment that everybody is engaged in and it is a very safe place to be, right? Because you are not out there on the growing tip of your life, you're not in the moment. You are back in the knowing body, the belief body. So you have a whole story about what happened to you, and then you go to someone and you share the story. Our whole culture, magazines and movies, radio and social interaction is all built on that self-referencing, which builds all of the stories.

So those people who come to you and say "How am I doing, Doc?", tell them "Next time you come, please come in, sit down, and say, "Who am I?" And then at least it gives you something to work with.

Student: I have a business to run, Sensei. If I told them that, I would drive the people right out the door.

Oh, you want to keep them. I'm sorry. I suppose I can chase people away, but you can't afford to.

Student: That's the problem, or the difference between psychiatry and spiritual work. They come to him with a problem and they want him to fix it.

I think maybe this is what you are saying, but fundamentally the difference between psychotherapy and spiritual work is that psychotherapy is dealing with minimizing suffering. Spiritual work is dealing only with ending suffering. So anything that you might do, in spiritual work, to make yourself feel better about yourself, would be considered, in fact, the problem.

Correct me if I'm wrong here, since I'm talking about this in front of you, a psychotherapist. I do know a few psychotherapists and this is generally what they are engaged in. They are trying to help their patients feel better about themselves and have a more healthy outlook on life. All of which is good and fine. It's just that it is a little different approach than we do here. If you were actually doing what I am doing, you would chase your clients away. Because most people don't want that. In fact, most students don't want that. Most students come to Aikido to get better. They expect a return on this investment. And when I tell them they are not going to get anything, in fact you have too much now already and you have to let go of it, that's not always satisfying in the way they wished for. Of course, it is supremely satisfying, but maybe not always in a way that is recognized.

But you students, you are all still here, so you clearly see through this.

Students: (laughter)

Or else you have rationalized it for some other reason.

Student: Well, Sensei, is there an answer to the chapter title "who does it?" It is a question. Is there an answer?

You can know this. I can know this. It can be known. It is known. If you identify it in some way, you won't be right.

Student: You mean it's wrong to say "I?"

Well, I would understand. But whatever word we use is misleading. For instance, if I say "Taiga does it" or "The Unborn One does it" or "the Universal Self does it." These are all things that might naturally occur to us when we think about who might be the one who should be doing something. The answer to that question are things like these words, and we could say this is accurate. But is it accurate to everyone in the room, or everyone who hears this or reads this account? Is it accurate, or do people perhaps think, as I was saying before, that this Universal Self, or Taiga, is separate from the relative agents that run their life? In other words, again, do they think that mind is separate from body, or emptiness is separate from form. If they do, that's not it.

Student: Could you not say that is the condition of sleep, to believe in that separateness? So the one who is awake, is the one who should be acting.

Yes, well there is another word, the Awake One. That's the Universal Self. That's the Unborn One. Yeah? The Original Mind, our True nature, is the Awake One, the Buddha. And it's not exclusive of anything in the universe. That's why the Christians have so much trouble. They see God there but then they wonder what they are supposed to do with Satan, as if he is against God. No, if God is God, then God is everything. So it includes everything. There is nothing left out. Universal Self means Universal. So every experience, every thought, every sensation, and every emotion is part of the Universal Self, part of the Awake Being. It's not that we wake up and then don't have any more thoughts, no more emotions, and can't see, feel, hear, touch, or smell. No, on the contrary. In fact, all those senses are heightened. The clarity of thought, the profoundness of emotion (which suddenly can become a deep sense of compassion and joy, instead of anguish and anxiety), and a heightened sense of awareness in terms of your sense organs. So everything becomes intensified. Not only is nothing excluded, left behind, killed, denied, or put away in some way, but everything is enhanced. We get to see everything for what it is, and experience it in its fullness. That means, as Suzuki Sensei would say, we get to "live life completely", instead of partially, or not at all. An argument can be made that those who are sleeping while living are really not experiencing their life at all.

Student: Sensei, does it come in levels, or all at once your are just there?

Did you mean "here?" See, we always think it's somewhere else over there. It's just this. You ask that kind of question when you pull yourself away from this right here. When you make a separation, then you have the curiosity, "Let's see, how does this happen exactly?" Who are you talking to? And who's asking that question? You are here now. You are having this experience. This is living. It's not something "other." So when you find yourself running away, off into "la-la land," be here now.

Student: I've been getting into writing a lot over the past year. And I've noticed I've been putting more and more of myself into my stories. And I've noticed that each character I create is one of the people that makes me. And after creating a chapter, sometimes just a paragraph, or maybe even a sentence, I've noticed that I have been able to open up more to what's going on around me and what's going on right here and now. So I was just wondering if this is considered a form of letting go?

I think that those are two different issues. Of course, whatever character you write about is you. How could you otherwise know? Right? No matter how outlandish the creation, it comes from you. So that's one thing.

Do you like writing?

Student: Yes.

Yeah. When we are engaged in something that we really like, it involves much more of our attention and awareness and therefore we experience it much more deeply than something that we take for granted, or something we don't particularly enjoy. Even something like cooking that involves a lot of repetitive work, it's the same experience if you love it. When I cook I often lose track of time, and even myself. So then the question is, when you are through writing, then what happens? Maybe after you are through writing you don't have that same experience? This is something to pay attention to. In the mean-time, just keep writing, keep enjoying it, do it more and more.

Thank you very much.