

Letting Go Discussion – Summary
June 24, 2011
C. Curtis

(Begins with 15 minutes of Ki Breathing)

Good Evening. I really love Ki Breathing. It's just like being, I don't know, rocked by the Great Mother Universe. The breathing goes out, the breathing comes in. It's like sitting right at the edge of the ocean at the shoreline, you can just sit there in the sand and the waves come in and go out. It's just so calming. In some way it automatically brings us a very deep brain wave state, which is why we like it so much, why it feels so calming. It's such a luxury. It's such a treat to be able to just sit down and breathe. I am so grateful to Suzuki Sensei, because it was so important to him. Of course, I used to be a breathing Nazi until I learned to really appreciate and love it. And then I realized that was silly. So now I just love it.

Tonight is the last night of *Letting Go*. We've finished all 23 chapters. So tonight this discussion group is to give you an opportunity to ask any questions that you might have remaining, and then also to give me a chance, I suppose, to offer some sort of essential summary of the book. This is very difficult to do.

It's called "*Letting Go*" and wherever I go people always ask me, "What exactly do you mean? Letting go of what?" Because there appear to be so many things to let go of, like material things, material wealth maybe, habits that we have that some busy body might be telling us to change for some reason, or some social structure says we need to. Or then actually, in our training, maybe letting go of the need to try to figure it out, to get some sort of intellectual satisfaction. Like we think there must be some secret that will solve our burning desire to understand. We have to let that go. But I have to say that, for me, the real point is letting go of the illusion of control. This is the most challenging, and like everything that is challenging like that, it is also the most rewarding when transformed.

You know, we love these Marvel comics. Superman, Spiderman, Ironman, and uh... Green Lantern. We love these movies. And I think we love them in our culture because these are people that have control over nature and control over other people. And we long for this kind of control. Even in a fantasy, it's OK. And we in fact fantasize about that within ourselves. You know, the fantasy of having control over the external world. And of course, whenever we go to war as a country, or go to emotional war as an individual trying to change or control another person, whenever we do that, we are desperately seeking control, trying to right the wrong that we see. And this kind of attitude always leads to violence unless it checked. But even the checking of it becomes another form of control.

And so this leads us to our training, which in a sense, from the very beginning is a sense of checking ("checking" meaning "putting stop to" or "bringing to a cessation") our violent tendencies, our tendencies to shoot off our mouth in anger or righteousness

when we really might be better to not say anything. So from the beginning there is a sense of wanting to become a better person. Everybody has their own idea about that, but there are some general ideas about it here in Aikido. Wanting to become a better person, wanting to develop our selves into a kind of more saintly person, a more useful person, a less entrapped person, a less deluded person. We love this idea. We really long for this idea of becoming a better person, and so, as a result, we get engaged in this struggle.

And yet the very name “Aikido” suggests the end of struggle. And isn’t that ironic, that we spend so much of our Aikido life struggling within ourselves? Definitely, by practicing Aikido we do learn to achieve a better sense of harmony with other human beings, you on the outside and me on the inside kind of idea. But within ourselves we are very ruthless and struggle desperately to do the right thing, to be the right way, to be the right kind of person. And always there is one part of us struggling with another part of us. Sometimes one wins, sometimes the other wins, but we have so many of these parts. For every subject there are two parts, for and against. I always say that we are a village, but we are a nation, we are a world within each of us. We have so many thousands of different positions that we take. And when we are taking any position, that is a person. That’s who you are, right there, right then. If you go and look within yourself, as we have so often said, you can’t find a self. You can’t find an “I”. There is nothing there to be pointed to. You are whatever is in action at the moment. And when it is in action, it is already in action by the time you notice it, so it’s too late to control it, no matter what you do. If you do succeed somehow in suppressing it, you begin to build a ball of suppression inside of you, and that becomes in itself problematic, because you have to then struggle with the ball wanting to come out. It wants to explode in some way, and sooner or later it will. So this is a very dangerous way to deal with what arises.

Because of this tendency of wanting to control ourselves, we hear a phrase like “letting go” and we think, “Well, I will do that. I must do that. I must let go of all this stuff that’s holding me back. I must let go of all of these things Sensei talks about.” These are all the things I just mentioned, emotional things, intellectual things, spiritual ideas. “I must let go of all of that.” But that’s not how it works, folks. There is nothing really that you can do. It’s like when you fall in love. It just happens. You don’t have to practice that, do you? You know, the first time in your life, when you are young, and you fall for someone that you adore. It just suddenly comes into your life and it’s there. You don’t have to do anything.

That’s what letting go is really like. It’s like being in love. It’s like being in the love of Ki Breathing, for instance. That’s what we are experiencing when we are experiencing just sitting in this deep calm, radiant kind of pleasure, or satisfaction, even though it’s not satisfaction and pleasure exactly. It’s much deeper than that, isn’t it? It’s not like we can make that happen. Like, “If you do Ki Breathing you will have this experience.” Although I am sure I have said that many times. I know Suzuki Sensei maybe said this many times too, but it’s not quite like that. Of course, if you don’t do Ki Breathing you definitely will never have this experience. But just doing Ki Breathing as a way of

having that experience, see, that's not it. It's as if you said, "I'm going to just keep talking to this person until I fall in love with him or her. I'm just going to make myself fall in love." Well, you can't do that. It just doesn't happen that way. You can't just keep working at it. There is nothing to work at. That's the whole point. There is nothing to control, nothing to figure out. It's called "letting go" of that.

We say "falling in love." Well, when you are in something, deeply engaged in something you really enjoy, it's like you fell into that. There is a shift that happens in you, and you are just in it. And you are not exactly aware of being in it. If you are aware of it, in a kind of self-conscious way, then you are not in it. When you are aware of it in this way, you are out of it, looking at it. Do you see? So true awareness is not like a reflective awareness. It's much more of an experiential knowing. That's why we talk about it that way. It's not something to find out about. It's not something just to reflect on, necessarily, although we do reflect on it constantly. But that's not it. That's not what letting go allows us to fall into, which you could say is a kind of a reverie. It's deeply peaceful and yet extremely dynamic.

Of course, there are many techniques offered by many different disciplines that you can practice that will help you fall into this awakened state, or being present in awareness state. Not just Ki Breathing, not just Ki Meditation. That's what we practice here. But there are many other schools. For the *Sufi's*, they spin in a circle, continually, with their arms and their robes spread out about them. And this spinning they love so much that they fall into a state of delirious ecstasy, a deep sense of joy. And similarly, I once knew a Flamenco musician that this happened to him whenever he played. He would go into this state. The only problem is that when he was not playing, he had no access. He had to have his guitar and it had to be the right situation. It's like Michael Jordan maybe has to be on the court for that to happen. All the experts we know of, that have become expert in some field, maybe they fall into this reverie, this no thought direct experience, at some point, but it requires their skill, their craft, their art form in order for that to happen.

So the whole point of training Aikido is not to have it just happen when you are in the middle of *shomenuchi kokyunage*, which of course it does, or not just when you are in Ki Breathing or Ki Meditation. We learn to rest in this free state at any time. We learn to sort of shift into this state at any time during the day or night. Particularly in a difficult circumstance you might even consciously become aware of that a little bit and so allow that shift to take place. Maybe at other times, when you are enjoying yourself, it is just automatic. That's the way it is for me.

So, as I said, this is much more akin to falling in love than any kind of actual self-development program. I mean, all the self-development programs are fine and they will help you develop in a *keiko* way. You will develop to be able to do the techniques better and get in better physical shape, be able to move more easily, and happily, and live in a more healthy state maybe. And that's fine. That's all great. As Tohei Sensei said, "a bright, happy life." More power to you. Please have a bright, happy life. Don't have a dark miserable one. But this here that we are talking about is beyond that. This is

shugyo practice. This is falling completely into the moment without self-reflection and without any kind of self consciousness, self watching, or self controlling. It's just like being in love.

OK? I've been experiencing and teaching all these years, and so that is why I recorded all that and why I wrote the book, *Letting Go*, and got it published, and why the teaching has taken the course that it has taken over the years. That's just the way that I have come to understand what this experience is that is happening. So that, to me, is the essence of the book, *Letting Go*.

So there you go. Maybe you have some questions.

Student: Sensei, my question is: You wrote this book several years ago, and during the chapter discussions each month for the past couple of years, how has the book changed for you, and how has this experience helped your development?

OK, thank you. I just noticed that the actual copyright is 2007. But, as you know, much of this teaching came from years before, and was developed over a period of years, then it was recorded and transcribed, and then I rewrote it and sort of cleaned it up and moved things around so it was hopefully a little easier to follow. And during that whole process I had to look at it from maybe a listener's perspective, as you have to do when you are writing. You have to write for someone or to someone. You can't just write in a vacuum. So that whole process took place. And then, together with all of these discussion groups which have been going on for, I think, almost three years, I have been traveling and teaching all over the place, Europe, the Mainland, and throughout Hawaii, lots of seminars with other question and answer sessions with things happening over and over. And of course people are always asking me questions, requesting if I can clarify some aspect of this teaching which is offered pretty much already in the book.

And so two things have happened. First, all of these things are my practice, my sitting, breathing, this is not separate. It's all my practice. And during all of this time it has become much more clear to me what the essence of this is. For instance, maybe five years ago I couldn't have given that little talk I just gave. Or I might have given it. It's not like it wasn't being experienced then, but I would have had more difficulty delineating it, or expressing it then, maybe. And number two it has been simplified tremendously. Of course, you know me. I can still go on and on about it for just as long as you'd like to listen, because there is no end of ways to look at and point to this. But the actual experience itself has become crystallized, like a jewel. I mean it's compressed. Now it is just this. And so my experience of it is so much more profound and clearer for me, easier for me to be in this. Because before, I was constantly reflecting and thinking about what was happening. "Wow, that's interesting. What's that?" you know. And also there were elements within me that I was struggling with. I felt I should overcome this or overcome that. And letting that go...I started to take my own advice...and just let that go. As far as Chris Curtis is concerned, he is just who he is, I am who I am. He's not going to change. I think I won't be any different the day I

die. But my experience of Chris Curtis, or the experience of this life that I live, this world I live in, has completely changed and opened up, just by letting go of all of those efforts to be someone special.

So that's helped it all, just really simplified it tremendously. Does that answer your question?

Student: Yes, thank you.

Student: Sensei, I wonder what question you would ask of yourself, if you were sitting out here?

How deep can it go? That's what I would ask. This keeps getting deeper and deeper so I am assuming it is infinite.

Student: So the answer would be...?

Infinite. How deep can it go? Infinitely deep. Does that tell you something?

Student: It more confirms something.

Did you want to be mysterious, or did you want to share that with us?

Student: Well, it's more of an idea I had about what "it" may look like, this state, or what you are speaking of, an experience.

This is the experience of being a human being.

Student: Well, I mean the experience of deepening.

You know, we have to be careful with that. Of course you are conceptualizing here, that is always going to be dangerous. It's always going to take you away, rather than bring you closer. Maybe you can say there is some negative object lesson there, like "bad habit value," like it can take you away until it takes you so far away that you realize, "Oh, that's doesn't take me anywhere," so you then fall back in. Because it's just this. I mean we say "deeper," and I say this "deeper" too. The experience does become more inclusive, let's say. But there is nothing being added to it. It's all here already. We just don't notice because we won't let go.

And it's quite purposeful, this not letting go. We don't know it, but when you see it, then you see, "I've been doing this on purpose all of my life. I've been purposely clinging to this. I knew all along, and I purposely clung to this. I just wouldn't let go of this idea, or this approach." We feel that it has to be this way or that way. Surely everyone here knows this, right? Anybody who has ever peeked at this at all knows that this is our nature.

I just read a beautiful poem by *Rumi* this morning. I can't quote the whole poem for you, of course. I almost brought it with me, it was so beautiful. He is characterizing himself and the Divine within himself, and he's got this question and answer going with the Divine. First there is all of this positive stuff, and then he says to the Divine one, "But when you are strict with me, you are just harsh like everyone else." And the Divine says, "Don't insult me. I am much harsher. Only what I do, I do from love." Those are valuable poems, not because of the duality between the self and other or the self and the Divine, but if you just read them experientially, they are awakening. They are enlightening. This is *Rumi*, the *Sufi* poet from the twelfth century.

Student: Sensei, one of the things you say in the book is that whenever you are teaching Ki-Aikido you are demonstrating how it is an authentic path. What is your understanding of what makes something an authentic path?

Good question. I don't know if I can tell you, but I'll give it a shot.

I consider anything an authentic path that leads to presence, that leads to the all-inclusive experience of being completely present in the moment. If the path doesn't cause a shift that puts you in this condition, this godlike state, then I don't consider it to be authentic. Because that's the only practice, in my view, that has value, the purpose of being human. And the purpose of practice is to discover what the purpose of being human is. And that's, to me, all of it. I have no doubt that all practices are somehow related to this. But there are a lot of aspects of practice that can be misunderstood and you can spin your wheels chasing after some sort of intellectual satisfaction, or some sort of feeling of being something special, in spiritual practice just like any other practice. So then I would say that is not authentic. You have to let go more and actually practice shugyo.

So, to answer your question, when I am practicing techniques in front of the dojo in a seminar or class, or even just talking like this, this is like kiatsu. This is a transmission that is happening. And for me, it is just an experience of freedom and joyfulness and openness and release. The wonderful thing about Aikido is that the physical body is so involved also in this. I mean, even in speaking, the physical body is involved. You are really engaged all the way in it. And like that *Sufi* spinning, when you are in Aikido and moving, it's liberating. In itself, it's like Ki Breathing. The rhythm of it, the freedom, the relaxation, the calmness regenerates itself. It constantly brings you deeper and deeper. So this is an expression of authenticity, to me. If you watch and you understand what I'm saying about an authentic teaching, then you will know right away, "Oh, this is authentic."

Student: Is the concept of letting go a means to remember one's natural state? Do you believe that the attainment of letting go, or what that entails, is everybody's natural, forgotten state? Or is this something possibly we have to completely learn?

I understand your question, I think.

Student: Because it just seems as though it may be finding a means to attain a natural forgotten state. So what would have been factors in all of us forgetting, like self-created concepts? Do you know what I mean? I'm having a hard time even asking my question, because it's not even that clear to me. I guess it's like, what is the point of letting go? What are we doing? We are not in our natural state. We need to remember, or we need to learn that.

OK. So that's an idea, this concept of letting go. And the question is what are we letting go of, and what do we find when we let go?

You want to know ahead of time. You want me to tell you ahead of time, so that you can calculate, is it worth it, so that what I get is going to be really groovy? Am I right? Is that fair? Common, admit it.

Student: I don't know. I think maybe.

And there's nothing really wrong with that. We're all risk averse, investment oriented, risk/return kind of deal. Sure everybody wants to know. It's a lot of work to do Aikido. Well actually, letting go is no work at all.

Somebody once said that no matter what you do you can't cause your self to wake up. In this vernacular or vocabulary, you can't cause your self to let go of anything. But practicing any authentic practice makes you more likely, in the sense of being accident prone, makes you more likely to fall into your natural condition. And when you experience that, and I've already so many times attempted to describe that condition, it's like "Oh, this has always been here. I actually didn't have to let go of anything to experience this." But you did, because you forgot. There is nothing new in the universe. What is not here is not there. There is nothing to be gained. You have it all. You are the one. Just notice.

Student: Remember? Does "notice" mean remember?

You can say it however you want. But it's not something you forgot about, because in this lifetime you haven't known it. Maybe you can say you forgot from a past lifetime, but I don't have that experience, so I can't say that from my own experience. Some people say they can. I don't, not that I want to talk about anyway. OK?

Student: Thank you.

Student: Sensei, a moment ago you mentioned that you recognized that there were things that you were deliberately clinging to, or holding on to, for a reason. Would you care to elaborate on what one of those things was, maybe something that is common?

Yes, it is common. Common amongst most human beings do you mean?

Student: Well, a common example.

Well they would all be common examples. You know, it is primarily that control issue, hanging on to, wanting to make sure things are a certain way that I think they should be, and being unwilling to let go of that. This is something I have been doing most all of my life, but I would never had said before, or maybe you could say I would never have admitted, that it was on purpose. You know, I have often said that I am just conditioned that way. This is a much more fundamental character error, this thing of wanting to control other people, wanting them to be the way you think they should be. This is the source of all of our misery in life, and we know that, and still we do it. For instance, I don't think that Barrack Obama is a stupid man. I think he is a bright guy. I think he knows this. But he can't help himself. He feels compelled that he must do this thing.

So I propose letting go. And it's not over night. I mean, just ask Lynn. (She is looking at me very humorously) Yeah, I mean it's not like it goes away over night. And again, what you do is not so much what's important, but your experience of it, your recognition of it. Because it's all practicing. You are never going to be perfect. Just practice, but practice shugyo, not just keiko. This means actually do the practice. Actually notice. Because as soon as you notice, you're in it. Even if you are angry, when you notice, you are in it, and it's OK. Be in the anger, but be in it. OK?

Student: Thank you, Sensei.

Student: How far does the discussion go? You said something a few minutes ago about being careful about conceptualizing things. We're talking about things that don't really translate into words very well. I mean, where do you, or any of us, get to the point where we stop trying to describe things that don't really translate into words. Letting go is not really something that you can completely explain, at least in the way we understand language, and yet we keep asking questions on that sort of thing. It's like, can you put your finger on your One Point?

You are right. It's like trying to describe love. And yet do you know how many workshops there are on that subject? And the need for them is real. People are really having a tough time. You know, it's like I often say, all I need to do is teach this holding of two fingers together with strength, and trying to pull them apart, or then making a ring of Ki and trying to pull them apart. That's it right there. That's enough for a lifetime of practice. That's all you need, keiko-wise. I could just do that until the cows come home. Like, every time you come to the dojo, that's all I do. But would you be here, if I did that? Most people would not. Maybe you, but most people would not. So, Tohei Sensei developed all these different approaches. Those Four Basic Principles are four things that can be conceived of. There is a philosophy. We have to keep our minds busy in some way. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop."

You know, you could be engaged in many different ways at this moment. It's Friday night. You could be in a bar drinking. Or you could be at a baseball game, a football game, or you could be at a fighting game, the mixed martial arts game. You could be robbing a home or convenience store. There are lots of different things that you could be engaged in. This here, on the other hand, when we are engaged this way, and

constantly reaffirming verbally and physically in our practice, we are setting ourselves up to be “accident prone.” In other words, there is a chance, if we use our time this way, that we may fall in love, we may fall into this love that I am talking about. This letting go may take place.

Student: What do you think is more beneficial, verbal or physically practicing?

I think they are both necessary. Someone asked me this in Holland this year, and I said, “We don’t spend enough time with this part of the practice. This is the part we need more of.” We have so much physical, and then we have this one little forty-five minutes here, and at a seminar it is often only one half an hour. Of course, here on Maui people have encouraged it, so there is now one evening a month. But then there is all of that other practice in between. And this practice is important too, very important. It’s like when you read the Buddhist sutras. Every one of those sutra accounts is one of these. This is what we are doing. This is sutra. It’s question and answer, and we are really just affirming for each other. I am doing it for me and you are doing it for you. You are doing it for me and I am doing it for you. We’re polishing each other. We’re affirming each other. And we’re getting, all the while this happens, a deeper and deeper familiarity and comfort with a kind of a very challenging prospect, which is letting go. It’s very, very difficult. And it’s nice to have brothers and sisters who support us. And you can hear, when you hear the questions, that everyone is engaged in considering this, and at least working on it. And you get to hear other people’s struggles and you see that you are struggling in that same way, you have that same thing, you understand that. And this helps. This helps as you are going forward. And it might not happen here, but tomorrow morning you sit down and bing, “Oh, I’m in it. Wow.”

Student: It seems that the concept of trying to figure it out in your head may interfere with the concept of being empty so it can happen.

Yeah. Yeah. We are figuring out how to not figure it out. OK? It’s like the “slow but fast,” or the Zen phrase, “carefully un-careful.” Definitely we have to work very hard to not work hard. It takes a lot of effort to learn to not make any effort. And if you don’t put out all of that effort, you will never learn to operate without effort. So that’s what all of these efforts are all about, for all of us.

Thank you very much.