

Holland Fall Seminar Q & A
Oct. 2, 2011
C. Curtis

Good morning everyone.

Can somebody tell me again what is the theme of our seminar?

In some way, every time it is the same. I am always repeating the same thing over and over. But every time it is different too, because we change. How we view life is constantly in flux. You think that there is a person there that has always been present. Like, my body is big now, but I remember when I was five years old, riding a horse, and think that "Oh, yeah" it was me, but just with a smaller body. What is that "me?" What is that "me" that we think is constantly present? If you look for that "me" what do you find? Nothing. And yet we stake our very lives on this. When you are insulted by someone, who is insulted? Me. That one that you cannot find. This is insanity. And yet, it's the one common denominator amongst everyone.

So what's the theme of the seminar this weekend?

Student: I was thinking that the theme for me is "Keep One Point." But then look deeper into what that is. We found out that, especially yesterday with the testing....well...

And what did you find out?

Student: Well, I don't know. I was trying to find out what it is not and what it is, Keeping One Point. I have an image of what is Keeping One Point...

Ah, an image. Very dangerous.

Student: Yeah, I know. And each time it's not what I thought it was.

It can never be what you think it is.

Student: I know. Yeah, but that's the problem, I think. Each time there is a new image appearing, and I cling to that.

Give the recording device to our friend from Belgium.

Student: What is it that you want me to say?

I don't want you to go on and on. I want you to ask the question that is right there in the forefront of your mind. Do you see? When you look aside like that, you are trying to think, "what is the question?" The question is right there. It's actually true for every one of you. Where we live is this open place, which is a big question. When we try to think about it, when our eyes wonder off, then we close off to this. And then we don't ask a good question. Well, I

had better be careful or you won't ask me any questions.

Student: But I have no questions.

You do have a lot of questions during the class. OK, someone else.

Student: Sensei, how do you know when you cut the bokken right? Do you know? Do you ever know? Is there a way? If I am going to practice at home, how do I know if I am doing it correctly?

You don't. So...what is correct? Remember I said that in Japan you never tell the teacher, "That was a very good class." ? Because the assumption is how could you possibly know? He is the teacher and you are the student. So if you want to practice by yourself, quite often you are practicing bad habits, or you are practicing a confusion or a misunderstanding of what it is. It is almost guaranteed that it is going to be that way. But if you don't practice, then what? If you say, in despair, "Ah then, what's the point of practice?" Then of course, also you never make any progress. The key is having a good teacher that understands directly, in this way I have been teaching you, and you stay with him or her every moment you can be with him or her. Every moment that is possible. And then little by little all the piles of rubble in the road of your life get cleared away and you have then a straight, clear road. Of course, you don't need to know about how the road is straight and clear. You are just on it, and it is clear, and you go. It's not like some sort of thing you can even talk about. You know. When you cut correctly, you know. But then, even that is a lie. Because there is no such thing as correct. But I will say that you know. There is a direct, "Hai!"

You know, so many years I cut with Suzuki Sensei, every afternoon at the dojo, and he told me "No, no, no, not it, you are thinking, you are trying to cut correctly, stop, let go, let go." Over and over for many, many years. Finally one day I cut and he said "Ah, that's it. Do it again. No! that's not it." And so many more years of cutting. And finally he said, "OK, now you cut when you cut." But it took twenty years of this before he finally said, "OK, now you can teach. You are cutting." Of course this doesn't mean perfect. It just means you can cut, now.

Student: Yes, thank you Sensei.

Student: About questions. You have been writing that, if you have a question you need to boil it down to an essence. OK, so I am sitting on the balcony and I am boiling, boiling, and boiling and suddenly I find myself in the pot. You know, it's not that I forget the question I had at the beginning. It's just that while reflecting about things I get answers, but what do I do with those answers? You know I am just there and I am sitting. OK. I am getting somewhere, but at the end, I don't have an essence. I just have the same thing as before. So what do I do with this?

The questioning mind is very much like what happens in our training overall. You know, I have been saying for a couple of days, you have to do all this work, you have to set a goal and develop yourself towards this goal. But sooner or later, you will find that the goal is the problem, that

this goal-setting mind is the one that gets you there and the one that keeps you from continuing. You come to the door, and you are rapping on this door, kicking this door, trying to open it. This door is actually not there. The door is made of your goal, your idea of what is correct, or your self. We are like fish swimming in water, you know, looking for water. Where is water? Where is water? I need water. I am a fish.

You have to have the questioning mind. You must ask questions. You must come to terms, boil that question down to what it is essentially, and ask it. For one thing, this tends to open you in a way the most people are frightened to be opened. They don't want to ask, because they think every one will see that they are stupid. There's no such thing as stupid questions. Every question is valued.

Of course, ultimately, you can say that there are no answers, so therefore questions are useless. But how many of you are there? How many of you can sit there and tell me, "I am beyond questions and answers?" No. So if you hold back, this is some kind of misplaced pride or arrogance, thinking, "I don't need to do this." No, we have to be like children, in this way. Me too, you know. We have to be open. This is why I gave you this Whole Body Meditation this morning, so you could practice.

So I know I didn't answer your question, but yes I did.

Student: Curtis Sensei, let's say I am trying to practice meditation. And let's say after a certain period of time of sitting, I get some sort of sense that I am falling into a different level, but on the other hand I feel a sort of block in my head that is a kind of wall that I run into. It actually gives me a headache. Do we need to try to get through this wall, or try to let go and ignore it?

We run into this wall because we are working at it too hard. And it's frustrating and limiting in the same way as working at anything too hard on the physical level, and that is also not efficient, is. The headache becomes worse.

Student: Yeah, it also has the feeling that if you get through it, there will be some flooding or something like that. I don't know.

Like I said, the worse thing you can do when you are meditating is work at it. Meditation is not like that. We let go. We surrender. And if you say, you "fall into something...but," it's the but that is the problem. Fall into something, and just rest in it. And if something comes up, then just include that in your awareness. This meditation practice that I gave you of just breathing from your One Point, and including your heart center, including your throat, and including your head, this is what we do when we are sitting in meditation, just following the breath. Let's say, something comes up, some difficulty, we include it in the breath. We include that. Now the breath is breathing that too. Whatever comes we embrace it, we bring it in and let it be in the breath.

All these kind of ideas about that's over there, and it's coming from the outside in, or this is

foreign or this is difficult or this is a wall, this is all conceptual thinking. It doesn't actually have any effect, unless you let it. A famous Teravadan teacher, Ajan Cha, said, when a student asked him what to do in meditation, he said, "Take a chair, go into the middle of the room, sit, and wait. Whoever comes, don't entertain them and don't chase them away. That's meditation." This is a master saying this. And if you sit a lot, then you know that any move is dangerous.

Student: Distraction?

Any move, no matter how good, is not good.

Student: Thank you Sensei.

Student: I am translating this for my partner here. You said that we can give the body rest. We can give the body food, drink, or sleep. You said that the awareness only just goes half, half, half. So does awareness ever need rest? This is the question? I mean, in this case, if someone is learning and they become tired, and yet you say that the awareness never tires...maybe you don't know what I mean, I think?

What is awareness?

Student: Mind. When we practice bokken, you said...

I know what I said. I am asking you, what is awareness?

Student: Awareness is mind grasping at surroundings.

Grasping?

Student: Grasping, or understanding, seeing, feeling? I don't know what to say to this.

And yet you are asking me a question about this. So maybe that question should be, "What is awareness?" Because what you are asking me doesn't make any sense, if you don't know what awareness is. How can you ask me if awareness needs rest, if you don't know what it is? You say, "Oh, it's mind." OK, please show me mind.

Student: I cannot show you.

Cannot. That's why it doesn't need rest. Only that which you can show me can rest and be nourished. You don't need to nourish mind. That would be arrogant. Who would nourish mind? Remember, I repeat this all the time, this fish in water story. This is a good metaphor. Not quite good enough, but in the physical or relative world we can't get there.

Mind is everything; the good, the bad, and the ugly. It's everything and nothing at the same time.

Student: So if somebody has to learn for exams, and limits himself to a span of time, would you think this is wrong, a limiting of mind? This is her question not mine.

(to the other student) Are you practicing?

Student: He said he would translate for me.

Yes, but I think you should ask me the question.

Student: OK. You say perception doesn't need a break. And I am thinking that perception is the same as mind. I am learning a lot each time and everybody says to me, "Don't try to learn too much. You need a break. You always need a break. You can't learn and learn and learn."

OK. I think I understand. You are confusing mind with thinking.

Student: It's not the same?

Not the same.

Student: OK.

Of course, thinking mind becomes exhausted when you try to gather too much, like trying to work out too much. I used to train in Aikido too much and my body would get wrecked, some parts of it were permanently wrecked because I was so stubborn. And people would say, "You know you need to back off from the training a little bit." But I didn't respond well to that. You know, this is damaging in some ways, and you can wear yourself out in this way, trying to jamb conceptual knowledge in your head, so to speak.

This is not mind. Mind is everything and nothing. It's the substrata out of which everything arises in the moment. And everything that arises is either sights, sounds, feelings, smells, tastes, thoughts, or emotions. That's all that arises in every one of our worlds. There is nothing else that exists but those seven things. Unless you have something secret that I don't know about? That's it, for all of us. All of this arises in mind, and it is also mind. So Tohei Sensei says always, "taiga and *shoga*." *Shoga*, relative world, and taiga, absolute world, are completely different, and yet *shoga*, relative world, is part of taiga. And taiga has no limit. This is mind itself, or "ground of being" and this has no limit to what can arise within it. Of course, there are limits to the relative world, until we look closely at relative world. That's why Tohei Sensei made Ki Meditation, *kakudaiho* and *shuchuho*. In other words if you look closely at an atom, and then a sub-atomic particle, and smaller and smaller and so on, no matter how many times you cut that in half, it never becomes zero. It's infinitely small. And out there, it's also infinitely large. We cannot conceive of this. If you try to look at infinity, it boggles you. You can't do anything. Your mind stops.

So, if we look closely at the relative world we see, ah, it's actually limitless. It's actually absolute. But the way we use it is not. Everything appears to have limits, and we experience those limits mentally and physically.

Does that help?

Student: Um, after translating, I hope. I understand twenty percent.

Yes, please help her. Thank you.

Student: You asked us to meditate and I've noticed that at some point, maybe afterwards, I realized there was some gap, some emptiness in between. I think this is the thing, that when you really meditate there is nothing there. The question is, how can you deepen nothing? If there is nothing, how can there be more of nothing?

OK, so thank you. All right, I am going to go about this a little differently than maybe you might think. We differentiate between objects in our world by defining them. We put a line around them. Emptiness is simply removing that line. And then all hell breaks loose, because we maintain our sense of structural stability, our sense of self, through the efficacy of these lines, these definitions, these structures. We hold everything to be a certain thing, a certain way. And when we differentiate between all of these, we are considered to be intelligent.

Student: Everything becomes formless?

Everything is the way it is. You are the problem. You don't have to do anything with emptiness. You have to sit and sit until all the garbage that you have placed in your road is gone. Then you can fully experience what you are calling "emptiness" or "nothingness." I was going to say, "It's always here." Well yes, of course. It's actually this. It's not far away. It seems far away because we see that we have to go into a really deep state to experience it. But in the end, no. It seems that way because we are just so wrapped up in ourselves, so wrapped up in our structure, so dependent on this definition of who and what we are, this business of self-development, structural change, getting smarter, and all of this stuff.

All that is OK. There's nothing wrong with that. But in the end, the structure can get in the way. It doesn't have to, but it can. When I was in my three year retreat, before I began training Aikido, I asked my teacher, "Oh, please tell me what is enlightenment?" I said, "How will it be? Tell me." And he said, "Well, it will be just the way it is now, only your experience of it will be entirely different."

Think about that. Thank you very much.