

## **Letting Go Discussion Ch. 6**

**Friday, July 31, 2009**

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Good evening. Tonight is our sixth discussion group, and our sixth chapter is entitled "Meditation Without Thinking."

Most of the time, when we use the word "meditation," we are not referring to meditation itself, which is a state of being, or a state of mind. We are instead referring to an action as in, "Did you do your meditation this morning?" or "How many hours do you sit in meditation each morning?" When we use the word in this way, we are really referring to an activity, not a condition of being.

When we say "meditation without thinking," that is redundant, actually. There is no meditation with thinking, so therefore we don't have to say meditation without thinking. That is an impossibility. True meditation is a state where we are not spinning tales in our head. Something else is happening. It is a different kind of experience. It doesn't mean that when we are meditating no thoughts arise in our world of awareness. It means we are not following those thoughts, not thinking. In other words, when we are thinking, we are engaging in, and following, thoughts that arise. When we are thinking, there is a subject (I am) and an object (thinking). And that means that we have created a gap, and separated ourselves from our own experience. That's what thinking is. Thinking is not awareness. It's the opposite of awareness. Thinking is following a story line that takes us away from the present moment, and there is always a sense of someone doing the thinking.

When we have anger, we support, strengthen, and enhance that anger by spinning a story around it. And the more complex and justifiable we can create that story to be, the more good we feel about our anger. When we say "we have our facts straight", we mean we imagine that we are taking our story directly from what happened in our world of experience. But don't you know that if you ask every person here in the room about something that I just said, you'd have at least fifteen different versions. Isn't this common knowledge? In this sense, there is no such thing as "objective fact." Everything is relative to the perception of the perceiver.

When we're upset, we always blame someone else for our condition. "If you hadn't done that, I wouldn't feel this way." And yet, isn't our very practice learning to know that we are always responsible for our own emotional condition. There is no such thing as "someone else being at fault," in this sense. I'm not saying that everyone out there is a perfect angel, that's not the point at all. It's just that it's not about them. When you feel something, that's you.

Now I'll read something from the chapter:

*We can see that our previous experiences give rise to assumptions, which become our memory, which we then use to construct thoughts. So thought is often about past history, and sometimes about anticipating future events, based upon the past. We cannot think in the present. It is impossible. Once we have a thought about something, it is a reflection on that something. It is immediately the past, even if it was just a split second ago. If we are thinking, it is always about a moment, a movement, or an action that has already occurred, or may yet occur: past or future, never present.*

*We cannot stop thinking by trying to not think. That sort of circular effort is endless, and never leads to any realization. Instead, we must simply be aware. When we look at something like a Maui rainbow, is it possible to just look at it, without immediately placing ourselves into time, the past and the future, by commenting "Oh, how beautiful"? Because when we do comment we are inserting a space, a separation, between ourselves and what we are observing. We are separating ourselves from our own experience.*

*While you are listening to me talk like this, can you just listen, without agreeing or disagreeing, but just listen as if you are one big ear? Can you simply be, without bringing any history, without anticipating, without adding anything extra to it? When you are practicing the various exercises in Aikido, are you just doing that, or are you watching, observing yourself doing it?*

*As long as we are alive and aware, we must continue to be open and learn in every moment. Only when we are able to lead a life of this kind of thought-less, open inquiry, having available to us and using, but not depending on, past knowledge, only then can we come into contact with that which cannot be accumulated or measured. It cannot be measured because there is no "amount" to it. It doesn't gather, but continues to unfold, infinitely.*

*It is this moment, ever-new and constantly opening right before our very senses. When we are in this very practical and real, yet indescribable, state of present-moment awareness, this is what we can truly call "meditation without thinking."*

We've been exploring this phenomenon of comparing one thing to another lately. Thinking is judging. How we arrive at all of our judgments about each event, emotion, thought, or action that we perceive is by comparing it to something else. If there is no comparison to anything else, then it has no relative value to us, one way or the other. You cannot say something is big or small except compared to something else. You can't say it's right or wrong except compared to something else. You can't say something is the truth or not the truth unless you compare it to something else. There is nothing that we can conceive of that has any intrinsic value without looking at it in relationship to something else. That is the nature of thought. That's what we are doing when we think.

If you were to say, "I don't judge" that would be like saying "I don't think." Because it is impossible to think without judgment. That's what thinking is.

Somebody mentioned that this chapter has only three or four pages. So does that mean that there will be less questions? Let's see.

*Student: Can you think in the present, or does thinking separate you from the present?*

I just read, "We cannot think in the present. It is impossible. Once we have a thought about something, it is a reflection on that something."

So then, what is your question exactly?

*Student: In order to not separate your self from the experience, you must be aware, without spinning tales and thinking. If we spin tales and think, then we are no longer present but separated from the present. I get that.*

*But if a person is doing a math problem, for instance, and is thinking about it, is he present or not?*

Who says he is thinking? If he is thinking then that thinking must be getting in the way of his openness to the answer, and he cannot be doing a very good job with his math problem.

*Student: Would we then make a difference, a separation between thinking and thought, thinking being the action of reflection on the past or the future? Like if someone was doing a math problem, and they were one hundred percent involved in the process of finding the answer to the problem can they be in the present but still use their thought, or have thought, without being in the past or in the future?*

It seems like we have a difficult time defining thought here. You defined thinking for me, as the action of thought dwelling upon the past or the future. And your question was, "Isn't there thought present when you are doing math?" So please define thought for me in that context.

*Student: That's what I was hoping you could do, Sensei.*

Do you do math?

*Student: Yes.*

What form?

*Student: Addition, subtraction etc. I mean I've done algebra and other forms.*

Give me an example. Give me a math problem.

*Student:  $3X + 9 = 18$ . What is  $X$ ?*

Well, let's make it even simpler. Let's make it a little story. Like, Jane had four apples. She ate one and gave one to Billy. How many apples does Jane have now?

*Student: Jane has two apples.*

Did that take thought?

*Student: No.*

It's just like telling a joke. When I am telling you a joke, if you think about it, you won't get it. You have to just be open to it, and you will fall to it naturally. See, it's not that I am saying you have to be stupid.

Thinking is a misuse of mind. Doing math problems is not a misuse of mind. Getting a joke is not a misuse of mind, any more than waking up to what's happening here at this moment is a misuse of mind. It involves tremendous perceptive and intelligent and sensitive capability, but it doesn't need any thinking. Thinking about it separates us from the experience of it, closes our openness to it, and keeps us away from it. Mathematicians, just like meditators, are very susceptible to trying to figure things out. Even Einstein used to talk about, when he was pursuing one of his enigmas that he was faced with, falling into thinking about it, trying to figure it out. He said he would gnaw away at it and wouldn't get anywhere. And then at 2:00 am in the morning he would suddenly wake from a deep sleep and go, "Oh, I've got it!" And he would often say, "Where does that come from?" Thinking gets in the way. We refer to Einstein as a great "thinker" sometimes, because we are not very clear about how we use that word.

Is that easy to see?

*Student: Sensei, he wouldn't have woken up with that revelation if there hadn't been all that thinking before hand, would he?*

What makes you think so?

*Student: Well, he was trying to figure it out through thinking, couldn't find the answer, and then the answer sort of popped up in his mind in the*

*middle of the night.*

I think I know what you mean, but are you sure the thinking about and the discovery of the answer are related in a functional way?

We're talking about waking up to something. If you notice, to begin with, that something is not quite the way you assumed it was, and that intrigues you, then you will begin to look at that. As you look at this question, you may simply open to all possibilities surrounding this, or you may fall to trying to figure it out. These are opposites. The more you try to figure some problem out, the more you will keep yourself from getting the answer. So as you become more and more expert, or skillful at your meditation or at your math problem solving, you learn from past experience that if you try to figure something out, that will keep you from getting it. So you sit with it and stay open to it. That's all. Then much sooner, you will be able to say, "Ah, I see."

Don't you know, when you can't remember a name, or you can't remember the word you wanted to use, and as you sit there trying to remember, you are actually blocking yourself from it. Then you let it go, and in a couple of minutes it pops into your head. This is our unskillful habit. We use thinking, and really you could call it efforting with the thought process, to block ourselves, when in fact we believe, because we are very unskillful, that it's going to help us.

*Student: I've heard you say before that thinking has its place, but don't be a slave to it. Make it your servant. That resonates with me. I mean there is a time when we need to figure out our day, and think about it, so thinking does have it's place. Isn't that correct? Are we not defining thinking the same way?*

I don't want you to misunderstand. You are referring to planning. Planning is necessary, but we all know that the best made plans fall apart on first contact with the moment that they are intended for. Always, everything changes the minute you arrive. We need a plan to proceed with a project, but we must not be attached to our plan. We must be flexible.

*Student: Well, I planned to come to class and I came to class.*

You didn't have to do much planning. You just had to show up. I'm the one that planned this lesson, and believe me, it's nothing like I planned. But I still do plan, in a way.

*Student: Does it ever work out how you planned?*

No. No, of course not. Every military man in the field knows that you have to plan. You have to get the troops there, the weapons, the food, and so forth. It is a tremendous planning exercise, and you are guessing that a, b, c and d are going to happen and you plan for that. Well, you get there and often x, y, z or something else happens. You can't possibly know for sure what will happen in the future.

I am the cook in my house, and my family does come to dinner, and they do want to have something to eat. So I plan for the dinner, buy the right amount of food, am in the middle of finishing sautéing the fish, and my son calls and says, "By the way I won't be there for dinner tonight." Stuff happens. Or you plan to make something and you get to the market and they don't have that thing, so you have to rearrange the entire dinner.

But this is not thinking in the way that I am using the word here. Planning is like opening to something. For instance, ask me what I am going to cook for dinner tomorrow night.

*Student: What are you going to cook?*

Ah. Pizza. OK? I just opened to food, and pizza popped into my mind. It didn't require any thinking at all. Now as I look again, I see that I just changed my mind. I will have barbequed steak. That looks better. And then I might get to the market tomorrow and see some monchong fish, and then decide to serve that. But none of it requires thinking of any kind.

You see what I am expressing? In other words, yes, all of the history that I have in my experience is present. I do know what monchong, pizza, and steak are, I know how to prepare them, and what they taste like. It doesn't take any thinking about that to know it. I know it

already. It's a known factor. So I just open to the interior menu experience. Now, if someone is not familiar with cooking, and they need to plan a dinner, they might open a cookbook, and go through and look at the pictures and when they come upon one that looks good they do that. But I just do this same thing in my mind. And it doesn't require any thinking about the action itself.

On the other hand, it can be that there is thinking aroused by this process. Like you might see that delicious looking New York steak sizzling in the picture there in the cookbook, and it so happens that you have been trying not to eat meat, and so you begin to think about the pros and cons of eating the steak for dinner. Then, instantly, you are in ya-ya land. You are now into the world of indecision, how to balance calories, moral judgments, etc. Thinking is about judgment. If there is no judgment, there is no thinking. Thinking erupts when we can't just be with whatever comes up for us.

*Student: So just now when you were talking about food, it sounded really good. But if, while you are talking, I was to start planning when I would get to eat next, or wish that I had eaten before I came here, and so forth, that would be thinking.*

Yes, and now here we are together with this discussion group, we are doing the same thing with ideas as I just did with the food, which made you hungry and could have made you start thinking about dinner and stop listening. Right?

In the chapter here it says, "Can you just listen as if you were one big ear, without any judgment?" What happens when you take a break to think about something? What is happening there?

*Student: You stop listening.*

You stop listening. Exactly. Don't you know, it happens to all of us? In fact it may be happening to one of you right now as I am speaking. Don't you notice that you start thinking about something while someone is talking to you and then you have to go, "Wait, what did he just say? I completely missed what he just said." Don't we do that in conversation all the time, not just in this kind of situation?

But in this process the more you come to these kind of sessions, and the more you sit, the more you learn to open to whatever it is that's happening, the more capacity you will build and the easier it will be for you to be in conversation with someone, just listening, really listening, with no judgment. This means you are not thinking about what you are going to say next, not thinking about the problem the person is presenting you with, just listening.

*Student: Sensei, I found this passage interesting. "Our Aikido practice is designed to reveal to each of us, among other things, just how much we are adding unnecessary movement to our lives, pushing and pulling ourselves off time." Can you elaborate on that? I'm not sure what you mean by "off time" there.*

Oh. I meant by that, "away from the moment." Possibly a poor choice of words, since in the moment there is no time. But I was thinking of the phrase, "being on time," meaning "you're in the moment." But actually the way I used time there was a little confusing. What I meant, and possibly should have said was, "pushing and pulling ourselves away from the present moment."

It's important to remember that in the present moment, it's not just that there is no sense of time or place, but there also isn't any sense of self and other, as in "I am doing something." That happens when you are reflecting on the moment, reflecting on your own action. That's why we add extra things in our Aikido movement, because we are watching ourselves and attempting to achieve something. If we are just in the flow, there is no sense of time, or place, or separation from the action. When we are in it, there is nothing to be separated from it. There is no sense of "I am doing something." It is just being done. It is just happening. And that's that phenomenon that we experience when we move with rhythm in the dojo.

Granted, it takes some practice to get the physical body, which really means the mind, relaxed and trusting and open and free enough to allow one self to experience life that way. And it's so nice that we have Aikido because we can discover it here and practice it. And then we have a richness in our experience that we never could have ever discovered

any other way. Well, possibly. I am not saying that this is the only way. There are other avenues of practice. But this is a good one. And it is particularly effective, I think, because it involves physical movement and confrontation that has to resolve itself into relationship before it is effective.

*Student: Is awareness part of mind? I just wonder when I read this, where awareness arises from. It seems to me, when I examine my process, that there is an awareness of a thinking element, and I have a very intimate relationship with this. I am involved intimately with the thinking process, but there seems to be an awareness that seems like a third part of this. It's like I am my manifest physical self, my thoughts are present in a constant stream, and then there is an awareness of both of those.*

*And usually, when I am really involved in thinking, then it is like the awareness devolves into just thinking and there is no more awareness. This thinking is like a monster. Are you saying that if we stay in awareness we can just let the thinking go by without getting involved? It's not like I want to struggle, but how do I not get involved in thinking like that?*

*I do see that Aikido is good for this, as you say, but I still can't do it. So how can I get to this? Breathe more, practice more? I think that's what you are going to say.*

Of course that's what I am going to say. Because you are trying to figure it out right now. You are trying to think about it and figure out what is going on here, when it's already going on. What's to figure out?

*Student: How to stop it.*

Yeah. You said you wanted to find out how to do it. What you are really trying to figure out is how to stop it. But it says right here, "You can't stop thinking by trying not to think." It's like trying not to feel, or trying not to hear. It's impossible, even in a sense deprivation tank. Have you ever been in one? There is still kinesthetic feeling inside your body, of course.

This is very similar to the question you asked me last time. Last time

you mentioned “The little old man in the light house is watching.” Do you remember saying that? You called it “the witness.” There is a seeing. There is an awareness. But are you sure that there is someone who is aware of something, someone seeing something? I grant you, this is the way we talk about it. This is the way we express it. But if you don’t think about it, and just experience it, I suggest you might discover that there is just awareness. Whatever you experience, whether it’s a thought, or a sound, or an emotion, just include it in the awareness. Don’t separate yourself from it by making it an object of a subject. In other words, don’t judge it. In other words, don’t think about it.

Without judgment, you don’t think. You just use your intention and open to whatever interests you. You include it in your field of awareness. That’s all that’s going on. In fact, that’s all this book is about. What we are doing here is experiencing. That’s what real life is. Not sitting back and thinking about experiencing, but just experiencing. And it doesn’t exclude anything. It doesn’t exclude math, physics, science, or art. It is the beauty of all of that. That’s why I say it’s all the same. You discover the same fundamental skill is required to open to anything, from a game of golf, to eating French fries, to reading Baudelaire, to working on a math problem, to doing Aikido, to listening to great music.

Does that make sense? Is it perfectly clear? At least maybe we can all see how it is that we use judgment/thinking to impede ourselves when in fact we are trying help ourselves. So it’s entirely excusable. Nobody is blaming you. We all do it. We are doing the best we possibly can at any moment. If you practice more, in the right way, you will build your skill level, which includes trust, openness, strength, and acceptance. Then you will be able to be in a really dangerous area, where you have no idea what is coming next, like this here right now, and be perfectly comfortable.

*Student: You have talked about where thought arises from. Where does wisdom arise from?*

The word for wisdom in Sanskrit is *prajna*. It translates to mean “before knowledge” or “pre-knowledge.” Wisdom is what arises directly, before you begin to reflect on something. There is a direct

getting it. That's wisdom. And then we try to take credit for getting it, figure it out and see how we can place it in our philosophy to make it very useful for later on when we want to be brilliant. So we have to think about that, and thinking takes us away from the experience itself.

You know I started out this evening talking a little bit about anger and blame. When we get angry and blame others, this is because we don't want to face our own responsibility. We want to make the responsibility someone else's, so we can avoid taking responsibility by saying, "It's your fault this happened." And then we build a story about that, in order to back up our position. And that's how thinking works for that. But even just thinking about something, trying to figure it out, is avoiding the responsibility of it. So someone who is skillful at meditation, skillful at this non-judgmental practice, has wisdom. That's what we mean when we say, "That person is wise." So wisdom arises when we are directly experiencing the knowing. It doesn't come as a result of thinking about something.

I used to say that we could intellectually think about something and come to some limited kind of understanding, but that kind of understanding is not as useful or as potent as direct knowing. But now, my experience is that there is just direct knowing. That you never really arrive at anything at all, when you are thinking. All you do is take yourself away from the opportunity to experience life directly, knowing directly, wisdom.

So meditation without thinking is very wise, and it's the only way it can be. There can't be any other way. I mean, there is no such thing as meditation with thinking.

I hope I didn't leave you with more questions than what you started with. I see that I did suggest some things that got your attention, and maybe you will look at those further, and open to them.

OK. Thank you very much.