

## **Letting Go Discussion Ch. 8:**

### ***Readiness, Awareness, and Easiness***

**Friday, Sept. 11, 2009**

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Good Evening. Tonight we are discussing Chapter 8 in our book, *Letting Go*, which is entitled "*Readiness, Awareness, and Easiness.*" I think everyone knows what those three words mean. But if you look at a word like "readiness" for instance, it can be a big subject. Ready for what? What is "being ready" mean? It has some physical meaning. You learn to stand in Aikido with the four principles of posture, indicating a posture of physical readiness, ready for action. Whatever the world might bring to you, you're ready. So in sense this is all it means, just to be ready for whatever comes along. You never know what's going to happen. We learn that in practicing the techniques with each other. Every uke is a little bit different. And even though we may know what to expect from the technique, we may have trouble with some uke and not so much trouble with other ones.

Everything changes. You may come to class, and you are all ready and everything is great, and then some classes you come to and you just can't get with the program. You go to a party and have a wonderful time, and then you go to another similar party and you just can't get with it. Something's wrong. Somehow you are not ready. So understanding how to be ready is really important. And if you are preparing for something in particular, some object to this readiness, then you are going to limit yourself, because you never know what may come. Like is a mystery. It's unpredictable.

And really the subject of this whole chapter is that we don't know, can't know what is going on here. And yet, as we discussed last week, we spend most of our time trying to figure out what's going on, nail it down, and know it, so we can be the one who knows. Why do we feel this desperate need to know what's going on? Does anyone here not feel this need? You go to school because you want to know what's going on. Of course knowledge has value. You can make money with it. You can impress others with it. You can be more facile and get along better with things, if you know how to use your tools properly. That's knowledge. But the problem with always trying to know what's going on and operate from knowledge is that we tend to miss what's right in front of us. Because when we operate out of knowledge that's operating out of our history, what we've gathered from the past. And so we have this phrase, "thinking outside the box." This is seeing things in a way that you haven't seen them before. That's readiness. Being present and ready for whatever happens with an open and ready mind, a beginner's mind, a mind that is ready for anything, a mind that doesn't think it knows, that doesn't need to know, that is satisfied with being who we are, where we are, when we are.

Awareness speaks for itself. Of course we have to be ready, present, and aware also. That's an integral part of it. If you are ready and you have awareness, then life is a breeze. Life is easy and just smoothly moves along, and you are smoothly moving along with it. Like when you are flowing down the river in a kayak, you don't hit the rocks, you don't tip the kayak over. Everything is smooth and you are keeping one point and you are easily riding down the river of life. So you are ready, you are aware, all that knowledge that you have is working for you but you are not thinking of it, you are just enjoying life completely. This is the key to Aikido, and really what it has to give us for daily life living. And so when we cling to things from the past, or cling to how we think things should be in the present or the future, then we tremendously limit our life. We kill it, in a way. We shut it down. We limit the possibilities. That's why the name of the book is "Letting Go."

So I'll read something from this chapter. It's a long chapter and covers a lot of aspects of what I have been talking about tonight. So I am going to read just a little bit of it:

*"There is a nice quote I would like to begin with, from the Trickster, Wei Wu Wei. Maybe you have heard it already.*

*"Why are you unhappy?  
Because 99.9 percent of what you think  
And what you do,  
Is for yourself,  
And there isn't one."*

*I trained with Suzuki Sensei for years and years  
as his student and otomo, always working on maintain-  
ing an open mind, a ready mind, and non-expert mind.  
And believe me, it was not always so easy. Sometimes I  
didn't agree with him. Sometimes I thought I knew bet-  
ter. But I had to wait, and listen, and keep my mind open,  
and always, sooner or later, I got to see. And then one day  
I discovered that it was not about Suzuki Sensei at all, but  
about me! That is why I am sitting here doing this with you  
today. Not because I am an expert. Not because I have a  
lot of baggage, like Santa Claus, and my sleigh is full. No.  
The teacher must be the most empty one. The teacher is the  
biggest "idiot" of the group, folks. I am serious. I am not  
being modest. The teacher doesn't know what is coming  
next. And he knows that he doesn't know that, and it is  
OK! Most of you also don't know what is coming next, but  
the difference is that you think you do. If I were to tell you  
personally that you don't know what is going on, you might  
think that there was something wrong with you, because  
society tells you that you must know what is going on. But  
you cannot know. That is why we always dwell in the past*

*and future, mentally. Because we are always desperately trying to figure out what's going on.*

*Student: Well this is just like the discussion we had last night, when I told you that I was feeling lost.*

*Yes. What's the question?*

*Student: Last night you were like, "What? You're feeling lost? Well, that's not good."*

*Yes. It hurt me to hear you say that. Because I care about you, and I don't want to you feel lost.*

*Student: But it is because I don't know what is going on.*

*Oh, that's OK. Not knowing what is going on is OK. But you feel bad about not knowing what's going on, and that is what you call "lost." You only feel bad because society says that you should feel bad about that. "The rest of these smart guys, they all know what is going on. What is wrong with me that I don't?" Just accept this condition. You should be very grateful that you see this "not knowing" condition. Most people are not even aware of this condition. They hide it from themselves since it is not acceptable to be "not knowing".*

*There is a great "dark night of the soul." Don't think you get to get born without dying first. You don't go from birth to birth; from life to life. You have to die to be reborn.*

*When you see what you have really been doing, it is not going to make you too happy. You are going to start to get really depressed. But that is why you train, so that you have the courage, insight, and inner strength to make it through that valley of dark times with the attitude of Plus Mind. That is why this aspect of Tohei Sensei's teaching is so important, at all times. Because you are not always having a great awakening, or seeing clearly the waves of growth pattern that life is taking you through. Sometimes you find yourself at an apparent loss. At the same time, you recognize that you don't actually know what the heck is going on in this world. And it seems like other people do. Do you want to know? Of course you do, but there is knowing and then there is understanding. You can know this: that it doesn't matter that you don't understand what*

*comes next. Therefore, you are completely free to be as you truly are."*

When we had our last discussion group a few students found themselves to be quite frustrated by the idea of not depending on knowledge, because it seems such an important part of our daily lives. But life is a mystery. And that's the beauty of it. If you knew what was going on all the time, you'd be bored stiff. Awe is a wonderful thing. When you look at a waterfall you don't try to figure out what's going on there. Go to any place in nature. Just go down to the beach and watch the waves coming in. It's awesome. And every single wave is unique. Of course in a sense you can and do know something there. All right, yes, I know the names: It's ocean. I know that it's water and I know those are waves and those are related to the pull of the moon, and you can get into a lot of explanation about this and really get into your knowledge. But you know what? While you are doing that you are not experiencing the beauty of those waves. And if you are riding on one of those waves and you begin to think about the mechanics of it, you will fall off that surfboard. Everything that counts in life you have to do with an empty mind, with a free mind, *Mushin*. The Japanese call this empty mind, or *Mu shin*. That is the value of our training. That's what this book is about. That's what we are here to discuss, to discover together.

So, I'm sure you have some questions.

*Student: In this chapter you refer to "Plus Ki."*

Plus Mind.

*Student: Yes, Plus Mind. Is that making a distinction between plus and minus? The metaphor that I can come up with that helps me with this, is that if you are in a car and you are braking, it doesn't mean that you are not going forward, you are just slowing down. That would be the minus. You are not fully expressing what your capability is or what's open to you. From a plus perspective, there is always room to speed up. My question is, is Plus Mind a feeling?*

Do you mean like a feeling of optimistic hope?

*Student: Yes.*

Then no, it's not at all. There are levels of everything. You can look at plus mind as opposed to negative mind. A mind that is full of possibility is a plus mind, and open mind, a ready mind. And so in some sense I'm using it that way. But also, Plus Mind is bigger than that. When your mind is free, there isn't an opposite to that. Because if you say there is an opposite, you are making something that is not there. The problem with having a negative mind is not that it is wrong, morally. It's that what you are reacting to doesn't exist as such. It's a projection that you make in your own mind. You have some sort of fear of loss, some kind of demand you are making on life. Your mind is not open and ready and present. You are demanding that a person act

a certain way, when you have negative mind. When we have negative mind we are judgmental, we are attempting to manipulate and control life to make it a certain way. This is very unrealistic, very limiting. So this is very unreal. Plus Mind is just being present, open, and ready. I think that's enough.

*Student: I really like the beginning quote from Wei Wu Wei, that there is no "you" to be concerned about. In the previous chapter you asked us to look at who we are, and then ask who is looking at who we are, and so on. I really have a hard time wrapping my head around the concept of no self, when everything I experience tells me that there is a me. This is me, that is you, we are separate from each other and everyone else here. Is there an easy way to understand this, or is there an easy way to come to realize that there is no self and that everything that I experience as my self is false?*

Who is asking me that?

*Student: Exactly. That's what I can't get.*

Yeah. So who is that that can't get it?

*Student: I would say it's me.*

OK. Would you please show that one to me, the one that's asking?

*Student: Well, it's this (points to his body)*

You mean your body is asking?

*Student: My body, my mind.*

You say, "My body. My mind." Who's the "my"? That's what I want to know. Obviously this isn't the mind or the body asking because you just said that you possess the mind, you possess the body. Who possesses the mind and body? Show me that one. Can you?

*Student: No I can't.*

If you look there, what do you see?

*Student: Nothing.*

That's what we mean when we say there is no self. If you look, there is nothing there. It doesn't mean that you are not. Of course you are. You are aware. There is awareness. Something is definitely happening, and it's really intense, right? We call it life, or experience. We even say, in Aikido, you are the center of the universe, because the universe is infinite and wherever anybody happens to be must be the center of it. But where is that center? Can you point to it? No, you cannot. You cannot point to the

center of it any more than you can point to an end of it out there, because it's infinite in both directions.

The way we experience the world is through our senses, and again this is very very limiting. As every physicist will tell you, this is not what it appears to be, when judged by the senses. This towel, this chair, and this body are not what they seem to be. At a certain point we lose this distinction where we can say this is matter. Depending on how close we look at it, it can be seen as very intense energy. Right? When we get down small enough, to subatomic particles, we can no longer differentiate between it being matter or energy, particle or wave. But we experience everything with our senses as if it were what we call matter, objects, or things. So we think of our self as a thing. But that is just an appearance. It's an assumption. And what you ask is a good question because that is the fundamental reason why we don't know what is going on. We live in a world of assumptions. And it is a conspiracy. Because everybody agrees with our assumptions. This makes it very difficult to see beyond those assumptions.

You know the story about the little boy and the emperor? The emperor is nude and going through in a parade in front of the townspeople, but no one sees that he is nude and remarks on it. No one has ever said a thing about it. That's always the way they have seen him. And it would be breaking tradition and embarrassing the king to say anything. And then this little boy says, "Mommy, the emperor has no clothes on. Why does the emperor have no clothes on?"

So when someone like the Buddha or Jesus comes along, they are like that little boy. They just see what is. The Buddha basically says that the emperor has no clothes. If you look closely there is no one there, there's no one home, he says. That's our problem. That's why we have suffering. That's what the Buddha said. Most people don't react well to that. One of those guys who said that got nailed up and killed for saying this.

You say, "I'm struggling with the concept of no self." Well, the reason you are struggling is because this is not a concept. It's not an idea. It is something to be experienced. Self, on the other hand, is a concept. What is it like before a concept arises in mind? It's just this. It's not knowing. And that is why I said to the student "Don't feel lost just because you don't know." Direct knowing, or wisdom, is what is there before knowing or knowledge becomes important. So we have to learn to live directly, without needing to figure anything out. And it turns out that's OK. That's in fact the joy of living right here. We kill ourselves, we kill our life, by trying to pin it down and know it. Does that make sense?

*Student: It does. But I still don't understand.*

You are still trying to figure it out. So I am saying, never mind, Keep One Point. Tohei Sensei didn't talk about this in the same way that I do. He just said, "Keep One Point." Well the first thing we have to do is sit down and shut up, if we want to learn to Keep One Point. But then, with practice, we can become skillful, and do everything while keeping One Point, being responsive to everything that comes up by keeping One Point.

All problems begin when we start to try to figure it out. That's when we worry about how things are, how they will be. "Is this going to be all right? What's going to happen here? What is really going on here? I better think about it." This is an escape from reality, and the source of all of our struggle, this avoidance. If we just accept whatever it is that is happening, no matter how bad or how good it is, then everything is OK. Then we can just enjoy being here now.

*Student: Where does that urge, or that want, come from, wanting to know? You can go up to the top of Haleakala and watch the sunset and that feeling or experience is something that feels so natural and right, because you are not doing anything. You are just sitting and watching the sunset. And then, you know, you get up in the morning and you go to work and you start your routine and you are doing everything that you need to live your life. So why do you need to know? Where does that come from?*

You tell me.

*Student: I have no idea. I just always want to know.*

Well, you don't want to know when you are watching the sunset, as you just expressed. When you are enjoying something you are not worried about wanting to know more. So when do you want to know something? Give me an example.

*Student: Well it always seems like it's when I am thinking about something that I want to know the answer.*

When you are trying to figure something out? How do you do with trying to figure things out?

*Student: I'm not very good at it. I think I am, but I'm actually not.*

We're all very bad at it. That is the point. I always use Albert Einstein as an example because he's someone that we all consider to be quite intelligent. This was a bright guy. When I grew up he was the image of brilliance. And he came right out and said that you'll never figure it out. It's a mystery. But of course, if you don't pay attention, if you're not ready, in other words, if you are not in the condition of presence, you won't ever wake up to what it is that you are wondering about. It's not that curiosity is bad in itself, it's just that we go about the search in a very ineffective way. It's not that there isn't a knowing, but there are two kinds of knowing. There is direct knowing, experiencing knowing, wisdom, which maybe can't be put into words, and there is conditioned knowledge or regular knowing. What we are going after when we try to figure something out, what we are chasing after, is something way over there, something ahead of us. We are trying to find the answer. We are trying to find the kind of knowledge that we can capture, pin down, gather in, and add to our retinue. But true or direct knowledge is not anywhere else. It's already here. Like Socrates said, we already know everything we will ever know, we just don't know we know it. The way Socrates would ask questions would bring up things that you suddenly realized you already knew.

So the listener would have an “aha” experience, what the Japanese call *ki ga tsuku*. This is like, “Ah, I knew that already.”

It's like when you have a *kensho*, or sudden awakening experience, when you suddenly see what's really going on, that's like a big “Oh!” You often laugh, but sometimes you cry. Because how could you not have seen it? It's like a fish swimming in the ocean looking for water. What a stupid thing! That's what we're doing when we try to figure out what's going on. You're going on! This is what's going on! You don't have to think about it. Just experience it. Be it. That's why when we practice *Ki Breathing*, I am encouraging you all the time to just experience. Be the breathing. Don't let there be a gap between you and your breath, you and your body, breathing. Just be that experience of *Ki no Kokyuhō*. And if you can be that, that's what we call *Musoku*, or no one breathing, no one home, empty breathing.

*Student: After the last discussion class I had an odd experience. I like to listen to music to relax, so I went home and put on some nice music. And there is a certain song that I listen to that always makes me very emotional. But as I was sitting and listening to the song, something happened where I noticed me switching between emotions, between sad and happy, mixing them, blissful, neutral, and it was weird. I know from my work that everyone is not like that. I see people who are stuck in deep-seated emotional states, awful stuff.*

*But what I was experiencing was lots of different emotions, but “I” wasn't feeling emotional. Do you know what happened?*

David, what's your impression of what Mark is talking about?

*David: Well something releases somewhere that comes out from something. We cannot explain it. And then you see what you truly were doing before. But then you see again that maybe there's a light somewhere.*

Maybe you know, Mark is a psychologist by profession, so that's what he means when he says he sees people who are really stuck in their emotions, stuck in the past, stuck in some traumatic experience. And for us to get seriously discomforted enough to go to a psychologist, we're probably stuck on something very painful. But all of us, everyone, tends to be stuck in the past in ways that we don't even know, we're not even aware of. When we become aware of that, of how we have been, this is what I am referring to here as the “dark night of the soul.” And I said you can get very depressed so you must maintain a *Plus Mind*. You have to train so that you have the strength and the insight and the calmness to maintain a *Plus* state of mind even though you see how utterly conditioned you are, emotionally. How you've been such a slave to unhappiness and happiness and every other color of the emotional rainbow.

OK? Keep sitting.

*Student: In this chapter, Sensei, you talk about sudden awakening, and how this is not*

*something that sticks necessarily. In the previous chapter you talked about accidental awakenings. And it seems that you are saying that sudden awakening does not have as much merit.*

Some schools of Zen training use koan. A koan is a question to which there is no logical or rational answer to be found. And by addressing the koan, sometimes for years, one can be brought to the point where this desperately seeking mind suddenly gives up. And right in that instant we get to see what's actually going on. The mind that is seeking to try to understand is exactly what keeps us from seeing what really is going on. So koan is one way of bringing oneself to that point. But it doesn't cause it. That's why, in Zen, they always say that it's as if you were having an accident. But by addressing the koan, you are making yourself more accident prone, more likely to wake up, more likely to have this experience.

In Zen they call this sudden awakening experience kensho. I did this kind of training before and had this kind of experience. It can be a powerful experience and each event can be quite varied. There can't be any accurate prediction about it for anybody. Therefore there is no real point in me telling you anything about it, except that in a couple of days, it's gone. And you are the same old jerk that you were before you saw the light. But of course you are not, because someone saw something. There was a seeing. But with all awakening, the experience of a changed mind state gradually wears away and you return to a kind of every day living.

But what my teacher used to tell me is what we are working towards is abiding meditation, a state of abiding awakening. So that is also in the chapter, where I talk about gradual awakening. After many of these sudden awakening experiences, then you begin to see how you habitually keep yourself from being in this state, and hence you begin to practice more skillfully. So more and more you are in this state of awakesness. And the more you are the more that is what is known as abiding meditation or abiding awakening.

The first time I had kensho, my teacher was far away, and I wrote him a letter and said, "Yay, this thing happened and wow, boy, I've got it now!" And he wrote right back and said "Shut up and get back to sitting. That's nothing. You haven't even started yet." It was very disturbing to me because I thought I was enlightened already. I was around twenty six years old, so that was a long time ago, and between then and now has been a lot of unenlightened activity. So, yeah, life goes on, and you keep training and you become more and more skillful. That's why you don't want to ever listen to anybody who says "I'm enlightened." The person who says that is not enlightened. You simply can't say that, because there is no one to be enlightened. It is the opposite of that.

Basically "I" stands in the way of awakening. Just like I can't see myself, I can't see my eyes with my eyes. I have to look in a mirror to see my eyes, because the eyes are that which is looking. So this self is the same. It's that which is aware, that which is looking. How can it see itself? That's why when you look there is nothing there. It can't see itself. And this awakening experience I am talking about is fundamentally a seeing that everything is the mirror. That's what we mean by the "mirror universe." Everything,

inside and outside, whatever is seen, whatever is heard, whatever is felt, whatever is experienced in any way, is you. It's all you. It is a reflection that shows you who you are. So the very worst thing we can do is say, "You're over there and I'm over here, and there is a gap between us, and we are different." No, no. You are a reflection of the one that can't see itself. This is very important.

So can you see when you are practicing Aikido with your partner and you are learning to be calm, stable, and clear when you are moving with that person, why we're practicing this way? We're practicing how to deal with the mirror universe, a world of experience that is simply a reflection who we truly are. And it starts off by learning how to move correctly, but soon it becomes how to see the other person correctly. Because then you see, "Oh, I have to see myself correctly. Uh oh, there is nothing here." And that's why part of your training has to be sitting alone at home. You have to be breathing, you have to be meditating, you have to be sitting, so that you bring that to this mysterious experience of having someone try to grab you and seeing what's happening with you, where you go, in the midst of all of that. This is a wonder and this is how we come closer and closer to seeing what is actually going on in this experience we are all having.

*Student: Sensei, you know we have our lives, we have our daily affairs and we conduct them the best way we can with this concept we have of our self. When you come to the realization that there is no one there, who continues to conduct your life after that?*

Who comes to that realization?

*Student: When a person comes to that realization that there is no self.*

Oh, then I guess the person continues.

*Student: But there is no person.*

So then who continues?

*Student: That's what I'm asking. If there is not person...*

Hey! You just said it. You're standing up here saying it.

*Student: So no one continues?*

I believe everyone continues until they die. Look at the question. The answer is in the question. You see no one there, right now, but you are having an experience. There is an experience going on. What does that tell you? It is the answer to your question. Don't dally with yourself or with me. You know already, because you are standing here, we're both standing here.

This seems unfair, I'm sure. Sometimes it's the right question that you ask and sometimes it's not. It depends on the person and where they are when they ask that

question. And you were right here when you asked, but you weren't looking in the right place. You were looking away to me to answer that question, even though you were experiencing the answer to it while you were asking it. That's why I responded the way I did.

Now you're trying to figure it out and there is no where to go that way. We're pretty mean spirited with ourselves. We're pretty pinchy. We squeeze ourselves horribly, when we could just enjoy this experience which is ever changing, ever new, ever expanding. Life is wonderful. We don't need to figure it out. The experience itself is all we actually have. It's like I said in this chapter, there's knowing and then there is knowing. Not that there is no knowing, but we bother ourselves with wrong-headed knowing, unnecessary knowing, missing the point knowing. It's like you are nervous about standing next to some girl, you want to give her a hug and you don't know how to do it, so you talk about something else. You point over there, "Oh look at that beautiful sunset." When all you really want to do is just take her in your arms and tell her you love her. That's what we do. We are always escaping from ourselves, running away. "Look over there. Look over there." Learning to sit is learning to be here, no matter what.

You know there is enquiry. It's not that nothing is to be asked. But true enquiry is a state of mind that is opening to what is happening. Not worrying your way through something. Open to it. Let it teach you. The one who knows is within you. Let it teach you.

Thank you very much