

Letting Go Discussion Ch. 9

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This Chapter in our Letting Go discussion is called *Influence and Control*. As you know, the purpose of having these discussion groups, as I said way back in the beginning, is for all of us to become more familiar with the text and with the teaching itself. And I said, maybe trying to be a little humble, that this is true for me too. But what I didn't realize at the time was just how much this is the case.

I did write this book, so you would think that I would know it forward and backwards, and in a way I do. But when someone is teaching, it really isn't coming from just that one person, or from a personality as such. If it did, there would be something, not wrong, but very limited about the teaching. So when I listen to a podcast or read one of these transcripts, it's not like listening to my own self. It's news to me too, in a way. In other words, it's a teaching to me too. So re-reading the text, when I am preparing as you do for the discussion group each month, I really look into these chapters.

Now on this one, frankly, I would change the name of the chapter if I could. It should be called *The Paradox of Practice*, and in the next printing of this book, if there is one, it will be changed. There is nothing wrong with *Influence and Control* as a chapter title. But that's only the first part of the paradoxical equation. This grappling for influence and control is the impetus that drives us to try to create some new level of advantage in our lives, the need to become more liked, more effective, more respected...basically more powerful. And of course that's our downfall. I see that sort of tendency as a weakness in every area of life, but it is nowhere as profound a mistake, as profound a weakness as it is here in the dojo when we are practicing Aikido. And really that's the brunt of what we are addressing in this chapter. So *Influence and Control* is a good chapter title, but not the whole picture.

I'll read a little bit as I usually do and then we can proceed with some discussion.

“What do we mean when we say “Mind Body Unification”? In Japanese, we say “Shinshin Toitsu” which means “mind-body coordinated” or “mind-body unified”. But Tohei Sensei, for the last several years, likes to say “Shinshin Ichi Nyo”. This means the same thing, basically, but with some difference. I would like to explain why he says this, and what is this difference. In Japanese “toitsu” means “coordinated”, but it implies some making of coordination; a doing of something. “To become coordinated”. But “Ichi nyo” strictly refers to our innate state of being, or condition. You don't have to do anything – it's already this way. We were born with mind and body, so naturally it is already unified. This is a perfectly balanced condition. If you find yourself not unified, it is because you are doing something to alter that condition. You become out of balance. So to think that you

must train very hard for many years to become mind body unified is a mistaken notion. This is going backwards.

When we are young, before we learn of Aikido, we tend to see ourselves as ineffective, and not able to influence or control others. As we grow older we become even more painfully aware of our inability to influence and control others. But when we discover Aikido, then we study mind body unification. Our teacher helps us, we train and train, and we begin to become very strong and centered and technically adept so that we can move someone easily. In short, we begin to understand how to influence and control others through our own mind body unification. Is this Aikido? What do you say?

Student: Something must be wrong.

Yes, something is wrong. And yet this is the way we are, isn't it? Is someone here not like this? This is the way we are. This is not our innate condition, now, but it is our socialized condition, our socialized mind, or our every day personality following selfish needs. The need of this kind of mind is always to want to influence and control others. So when we get some power, naturally we want to use that power to do so. This is what we have been longing to do all this time. But this yearning for control is a big mistake. This is not Aikido. Aikido is an expression of a mind that has moved beyond the need to control. Mind body unification in the individual must not be guided by selfish thinking, but by Universal Mind, or our original, universal condition.

Training can be very frustrating if we imagine there is something for us to accomplish. There is actually nothing to be achieved. And while the training is necessary, all of it is to...what did T.S. Eliot say? "The end of all our exploration will be to find ourselves back where we began and know the place for the first time." After all of this Aikido practice, you find out that you are exactly as you were on the day you first stepped into the dojo, only you know that place for the first time, and can accept being there. It is not that the experience of training is not valuable, even essential. We must train in order to know this original and natural condition which we already possess.

Of course, we all have to practice to improve. For instance, if you don't sit, you will more than likely not ever wake up. But if you do wake up, it is not necessarily a direct extension of better sitting. So in the same way, if you don't practice cutting bokken all the time, you will never have this realization that I am talking about, but on the other hand if you do have this realization, it won't necessarily be on account of the daily practice, but maybe something else altogether. In other words it is not gathering, gathering, more and more. It is actually quite the opposite. It is suddenly dropping everything. Yes, you do gather, but then you give away this accumulated power. You drop it. Of course, if there is no practice, then there is no power, and then you have nothing to give away! You must have a vast history of cutting, and then cut as if you have no history.

This is the paradox of training. And if we don't keep this paradox constantly in our mind while we are training, then we will train in the wrong way. You might be doing the correct training in terms of the criteria...but the fundamental principle of the training is not correct, because you are attempting to achieve a goal, to obtain something we imagine we do not yet have.

In closing, Suzuki Sensei would like me to give you his best. He wishes he could be here you know. He is 88 years old and he can't travel any more. And even though he doesn't know all of you, through me he wants to know you. I lived with Suzuki Sensei for many years. I followed him everywhere, carried his bags, acted as his otomo. During those times he taught me the meaning of responsibility and of gratitude, and how those two are related. Realizing this and acting accordingly is being true to what you are given. Don't take it lightly, don't make assumptions, and don't resist because of fear or loneliness. Face everything with equanimity. This is the teaching. This is what Tohei Sensei was teaching and this is what Suzuki Sensei was always taught. I am happy to show you how to hold the bokken properly also. But that, as I am always pointing out, is not separate from what I have been expressing today. You cannot hold the bokken correctly and at the same time ignore these deeper considerations. As I have said many times, actual correct cutting of the bokken, is not in the same category as practicing to do it perfectly. You know you can get very good technically. But you will never experience true cutting unless you look very deeply. You have to do this kind of training. Otherwise your experience will always be a shallow one.

Technique is important, but you don't want a big shiny beautiful apple that tastes like sawdust. It may be beautiful, but it is no good to eat."

So you can see why I want to call this chapter *The Paradox of Practice*. And this is fundamental to all of our lives because in school, growing up, we've all learned from our parents, our community, our society, our government, laws, economics, we've learned from all of this the principle that the way to achieve success is to set a goal, work hard towards that goal, and achieve that goal. I think I said in the last discussion group that that's fine in that milieu, but in the dojo, and in this kind of training, it becomes our stumbling block. Because in the dojo, and in this kind of training, what we are learning to do is see who and what we already are, not become something different than we already are, not become something different than we already are. And the paradox is that what we already are, when we see it, will seem completely different than the way we now think we are.

So, how does that sit with you? Does that bring up any questions?

Student: When we train in weapons we are asked to just cut. And yet when we train in Ki we are asked to observe. So I am finding a difficulty in discerning when to do which, or in what situation to follow which method.

When you are training bokken, I ask you to just cut. And then you said, when we are training Ki Principles, I ask you to observe?

Student: Well, to observe our movement, to observe what comes up. So there is a paradox here. I mean how can one just cut and observe at the same time?

Right. So what's the real problem? You know you have to ask the right question to find the right answer. So what is the right question there? In other words, what's missing? When we see an apparent contradiction like that, and not a resolution, there must be something missing.

First of all, I don't think I've ever told you to "observe" yourself. I do tell you to be aware, but that's different than observing. And it points out what the question is. Who is doing the practice? If you are just cutting, then there is just cutting. There is nobody cutting. If you say, "I am cutting," then you are observing yourself cutting. But when I tell you to just cut, I don't mean that someone cuts. No. "Just cut" means cutting just happens. But in order to cut like this, I said in this chapter, you have to let go of all of your expertise, which is all gathered together with the idea of making you an effective cutter. It represents power and technique, a gathering. You let that go so that just cutting can happen.

Well, exactly the same thing happens when you are taking a Ki Test. If you are observing, you will react automatically, without being able to stop yourself from doing so. You will react by either resisting or collapsing against the pressure, the challenge that is coming to you. It is not always just a physical pressure. There is a much subtler pressure. If, when we are challenged in this way, we are observing our self as the object of its own subject, we will fail the Ki Test. It is that achieving mind that has a self that needs to see its own self as an object, and polish that object to make it better and better, more powerful and more effective. Two selves? This is a very confused state of affairs, and what I am referring to here is the ultimate mistake.

You have to be very careful when you say to yourself, "I need to observe myself." No, you need to be aware. There is just awareness. There is not even somebody being aware of something. That's why we say "Keep One Point first." One Point doesn't come out of, or as a result of a Ki Test, or any kind of training. We Keep One Point before we think, or act, or even think to act. In other words we go to that place of complete and selfless awareness, which is devoid of any subject or object, lacking in any self identification, without any needing to perfect any one, mind or body, because there isn't that present. There is just awareness. Of course it's difficult to just jump right into that. It takes many years of training before we can let go and fall into this condition, even though it is an inherent condition. Even though I tell you that you were born with it, it seems that you can't just do it. You can't just be here. And that is because the need to achieve something more is too deeply ingrained. We are too involved with a subject and an object, with a self and other.

In the beginning of the training, indeed, we teach people to develop that self. As you are doing the training, I teach you to cut better and better, until you get right up there, and you think you are pretty hot. But then I'll tell you to let go of all of that, if you want to perform true cutting. When Suzuki Sensei told me that, I said, "Everyone else says I'm really good at cutting now." And he said, "Well maybe so, but this that you are doing is not it at all, not even close." At this point I had been cutting for many years, every day. And yet he said that what I was doing was not it at all, not even close. Yes, of course as students come into the dojo they have to learn the techniques, learn the uke, and learn all the different aspects of the training with enthusiasm and with gratitude. And we learn those, we take the responsibility for those techniques and the different practices that we learn. And we practice them faithfully and with enthusiasm and diligence as I say. But never forget the paradox of practice, which I always try to show every student on the very first day. "Yes, do all of this stuff, but by the way there is this inherent contradiction."

So there is this kind of fundamental contradiction in your relationship with me as your teacher and with the training, and there will always be up until the time when you completely let go. And you do hesitate to let go of the problem because it feels like, if you do, you will be letting go to somebody. But it's not to somebody. We are all in the same boat. I have to do the same letting go every time I see you. See? Do you know that? Or do you think you are truly my otomo? Actually, I am your otomo. This is what I learned through Suzuki Sensei.

Student: You say that you will discover that you are exactly as you were the day you stepped into the dojo. But I feel very different now. When I first stepped into the dojo I felt very self-conscious. And then through the practice I have come to a place where I am at ease with myself. So I do feel very different. So how can you say that you wake up to see that you are just the same as when you began?

I mentioned that we come into the dojo being kind of oafish, with a lot of misunderstandings, our mind and body is not connected up very well and nothing is working at its best, and it takes years and years to work all of those difficulties out until we come to the place where we have a very substantial and profound sense of self, very at ease, very skilled. This appears as a kind of a luxury item that we never had before. We become so satisfied. But that is not it yet. When I say we "wake up" I mean we wake up to the one we were the day we walked into the dojo, but were unawares of at that time. Now, that is the one that engaged in all of that perfecting and feels very good about it, and then also the original one, both at the same time. Without the work, the seeing or recognition of this original one could not take place. This distinction is important lest we forget that no matter how expert we become, no matter how much we achieve, no matter how refined we become in our practice and our understanding of the art of living, that still doesn't mean we are awake.

Student: This chapter reminds me of Dogen's saying "the practice is realization."

Yeah. What do you others think of that?

Student: I was doing techniques the other night and I asked someone what it looked like I was doing and he said it looked like I was thinking. Is this trying to realize?

Hmm. The practice is realization. Let's try to make this clearer. Even Keeping One Point has a shoga and a taiga aspect to it. What we are talking about here is a shoga mind that tries to perfect itself, needs to perfect itself, and a taiga mind that always was beyond such ideas as perfection and non-perfection. There is a sense, as we train and train, that we let go more and more and are more comfortable and have a more fundamental experiential understanding of what Keep One Point is. So there is some relative progression that happens there in all aspects of our practice. We do learn to think less and to just let it be. But this thinking less and letting it be, or Keeping One Point also have a profoundly transformational promise in it, that no one can explain or express to you, except to say things like Dogen said. This is incomprehensible, unless you are doing it. In other words, unless you are experiencing this, you cannot know it. That's why every bit of this talking and writing is just pointing to something that pervades everything and is inexpressible. We say unbound, unborn, unknowable, inconceivable, and unimaginable. It's completely outside of our ken, or our sense of anything. Because the complete package that we have available to us to work with is all shoga. It's all our relative personality. In some people this is highly developed and effective, and in other people it's very klutzy. But the point of the chapter is that no matter how much you perfect yourself, (and yes please do that because it is of inestimable value in daily life), you are still not experiencing everything yet. Somebody expressed it as being just like a dog dropping the bone and instead chasing the shadow of the bone. In a way, isn't that missing the point entirely?

There was a famous teacher named Swami Vivekananda. He was the first to bring the teaching of Hinduism to the west. He was very well known in the U.K. and in the Eastern U.S. in the late nineteenth century. He was a great teacher and prolific writer and speaker, and he had an incredible ability to express this teaching. Just before he died, he was in his bedroom lying on his bed because he wasn't feeling well and he suddenly had a heart attack. From the moment of the heart attack to his death was about 30 minutes. And during this half hour period he wrote a very famous statement, and it says, "Everything I have ever said is a lie and a fabrication. Everything I every expressed is not it." He is saying this at this point because he is presumably just now experiencing life for himself in its completeness. So when he had this heart attack, somehow everything fell away for him. He was an acknowledged master during his life, but when confronted with the real, he was in a state of utter shock. This should be a lesson to those of us who might imagine we have any sort of profound wisdom.

Student: Equanimity. We like to think we are having equanimity. But then when it really hits the fan you may not be. And you can never know if you are ready for that until it happens.

Well, it's a state of being, isn't it? Equanimity is a verb, not a noun. It is a state of being that you are either in or not. There is no such thing as "I've got equanimity permanently now." It's like saying "I have love" up until someone gives me a little shit and then suddenly I don't have any love any more. Then you remember that you forgot your love state, and you come back to it. So that's practice, that's training. Keep coming back. Keep realizing. "Oh!" That little "oh", that's awareness already. This is what "practice is realization" means. OK? It's just practicing waking up. Practice is this realization process itself. It's just being in this realization, this awareness, and just resting in that awake-ness.

Student: I see now that it is only about experiencing itself, not about knowing something.

Yes, and it's good to be challenged all the time. Those who challenge you are your greatest friends. You know, we say, "God bless those god damned bastards!" Really. Because they are the ones that let you see what you actually are, not what you think you are. Your friends all let you believe what you want to believe, because they are doing that too. But your enemies call you out. So we have to be grateful to them and responsible to what we learn from them. That's what I meant about the connection between those two, gratitude and responsibility. True gratitude cannot exist without taking responsibility. And true responsibility is not taken without gratitude.

So I say, don't abandon your efforts in returning to equanimity. Even though you will see yourself betraying your own best efforts over and over, never give up. There was a very high level Tibetan monk who was asked how his practice was going. And he said, "Well, looking at the whole picture, not doing well at all. For the week, mostly not very well. For the day, still pretty bad. For this moment, I'm almost there." So don't feel bad if you notice yourself being a pea-brain. It's the nature of being human. The only difference between you and a master, like this Tibetan monk, is he knows it and admits it freely, and is therefore in realization.

We tend to think realization means you are some kind of saint, perfect in all ways, and you will never do anything stupid again. If that was true there would be an end to practice. But practice, as Dogen said, is realization. Realization of what? Of what is, not some imaginary golden lotus pond. Realization is realizing what is. And you are what is. That's all you can realize. You can't realize what I am or what he is. You can only realize what you are and accept that completely with equanimity.

Student: In this chapter you talk about as you train, stuff starts to dissolve, and disappear out of your life, things that you identified yourself with in the past, and about how fear comes up with that. Well, I have been trying to just step back and not play a role in the dramas that come up in my life. But then it seems like I have a

harder time connecting with people, because of letting that go. I mean, their lives seem to be based upon all of this drama.

Letting what go?

Student: Just the drama in my life and not playing a role in that any more.

Ah. And that makes you feel...

Student: Well just a little disconnected. Because everybody's into these dramatic stories in their lives and you know, I'm trying to remain aware and not partake in their stories so much.

Is this story you are telling me right now dramatic enough for you?

There's levels and levels and levels of drama. We can't live without it. We're addicted to it. It's our adrenalin rush. So we are constantly creating it, even in the midst of our training. In this way, we turn our training into that drama. Do you see? So we say, just Keep One Point. So what? Be natural. Do nothing. Don't worry, be happy. Yeah, that's Suzuki Sensei's solution to all of this. And this is really beautiful, if you think of it as applying to just this difficulty.

There is no one here that isn't plagued by the need for creating a drama out of their experience, a separate kind of self that is having this experience and having some difficulty with it or some success with it. It works both ways. You're screwed either way you go because it's false. You participate just because you want the rush that it gives you. So, can you let go of the rush? And what happens if you go without it for a while?

It's like food. Have you ever done a fast? When you fast, you go without food for a little while. In the beginning you get terrible hunger pains, because your stomach is used to being fed with this gross food. But then a kind of a change happens, and you feel a new kind of energy that you didn't ever feel before. You have a kind of sensitivity that you didn't have before. This may have to do, partially, with chemical reactions in the body, but your experience becomes quite different, and you are very happy to not have food. In fact you have to be careful and be sure that you eat on time again, because even that new feeling becomes a drama.

Yes, all of your friends are dramatic experts, but you are too. Isn't everybody's life their own drama. When you guys write to me and or ask me questions it's always about the drama of your life. And that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. I mean, I'm not saying it's bad. It's human nature. But see it. Listen to what you say. Read what you write. Look in the mirror. Sit. Take stock. Notice. And even when you are at the height of noticing, don't make that into something special. Like, "Oh man, I'm finally getting it!" That's the ultimate poison.

Student: If everybody was walking around enlightened, and everything was just brass tacks the way that it is, and there was no spicing it up with drama, what fun would that be? I mean, that's part of the quirks and personalities and, you know the highs and lows. I mean that's life, isn't it?

Yeah, well there will always be plenty of that. Don't worry about it. It's seeing it for what it is, that's all. It's not trying to change everyone else and keep them from being dramatic. That's why I said that it's not wrong, it's not bad. But see it. That's all. And in yourself, not so much in others. That's why I said to look in the mirror, notice, sit, take stock, see, listen to yourself speak, read your emails over before you send them. Not necessarily to change them but just to see. This is who I am. This is what I do. Sometimes when you are sitting you may find that you are much more than you have thought you were. And other times when you are sitting you will find that you are much less. Both of those are true at the same time. The problem is assumptions, beliefs, stories that we tell ourselves, instead of just seeing.

Without any drama means without any subject/object, without any person to be dramatic about. It doesn't mean there won't be huge fireworks of energy, very high levels of blissful experience, and deep levels of confusion and dismay. But who is it happening to? That's what we have to notice. Where is the one that thinks it is suffering? Show him to me. You can't show him to you, let alone to me. Notice who is the subject of all this drama? How can all of this drama exist if I can't even find the subject of it when I look? There must be something wrong with the view, the assumption.

It wouldn't be bad not to have war. All drama leads to war. War is just the extension of that so we can see that is where it leads. It wouldn't be bad to not have war. Do you think? Everybody would agree that it would not be bad to have no war. But we are not so sure about the little stuff that eventually leads to war. And we have to see that whole picture, and the connection, how this human seeking to become something more always puts someone else down, makes someone else less. And that's the source of all contention and hence war. So it's not a small matter. To actually cut, within yourself, your own dissentive seed. Not with the intension of making it go away, but just by being aware, accepting and admitting. Remain in awareness, noticing, practicing realization, all of this can be very disheartening. Sometime you may see that your every impulse leads to war. Every impulse that arises in you, if followed all the way out, leads to war. It's some aspect of either desire or fear, maybe strong, maybe weak, but it's all wanting to take for yourself that which is good, and get rid of that which you see as not good. This is the cause of war. And every impulse that arises in us is one of those two.

So how to be at peace in the midst of all of this chaos? That is the question. That's why Dogen said, this is the practice of realization. Practice is being in a state of awareness. It's simply too dangerous not to be.

