

HKF Omiki Seminar – Q & A

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By this time it must be very obvious what the theme of this seminar has been. Can anyone tell me?

Student: Filling up the space?

OK. Anyone else?

Student: Reiseishin?

So those are both correct, in a sense. We started out with the theme yesterday, and I repeated again twice today in two different classes. Today we used two different metaphors, one in Sokushin no Gyo and one in bokken training. Yesterday it was the teacher/student relationship.

I'm running out of clues for you here...

Student: Being in the present?

That's good too. OK. You know we talked about the fact that it is very important to develop our relative skills, our relative self-image. We do need to develop and improve our sense of a self, as it were. And in so doing, we gain power. Power in our work place, power in our relationships, power over technology, that's all power. By developing your self you gain power. The problem is that we want to hang on to that power because it has now become our self-image. So then we feel, "I am powerful, and I don't want to let go of that." But we are not free as long as we are clinging to that power, so we have to let go of that power.

Now, the more power you have developed, the more transformational is the experience of letting go. Just like the very wealthy man who suddenly decides to give away his billions and billions of dollars to the people who don't have enough to eat. That's a very intense experience for him. Well, another man who has only two or three dollars in his pocket might also decide "I'm going to give all of my money away to the needy." That's a wonderful thing and for him to do and that is an important gesture for him. But the level of experience these two individuals have is not comparable.

In other words, we develop a very powerful sense of self, and then we give that up. When we throw that away, when we agree to be in the present moment without the backup or dependence upon our money, our connections, our intelligence, our morals, something profound changes. Of course, this kind of giving up is not

something to worry about. When I say “give up” I mean you let go of all of this in this moment. But it’s not like it goes anywhere. Where would it go?

We’re not talking about just giving up material things here. That might be included, as a gesture of some kind and that’s fine. But you can’t actually give up your intelligence, for instance. It’s there. You can give up your dependence upon it, your need to be seen as intelligent. Don’t you notice that people that don’t have a very good sense of humor about them selves are always the ones who want to appear intelligent, or all of those other things I mentioned? They want to appear successful in all of those ways. That’s clinging to a self-image.

When I was in high school I very much envied a group of guys that seemed to me to have it more together than I did. I hung out with them anyway, I mean they did let me hang out with them, so they didn’t have that image of me at all. But I had that self-image that I was less than them. And this wasn’t materially so much as it was energetically. So I envied them. And they could feel that and they would tease me, and I would get really mad when they teased me. Finally one of them who was a little closer than the rest of them to me, took be aside and said, “Do you know why they tease you like that?” And I said, “No, why do they?” And he said, “Because it bothers you. If you didn’t care, they wouldn’t bother to tease you.” And I thought, “Oh, really?” OH! That was an “aha” moment there, when I was very young. And it helped. I didn’t wake up to this over night, it took some time, but this helped.

Student: That’s letting go.

That’s letting go. Exactly right. So always in the process of this letting go there is some kind of noticing that has to happen, some kind of “Oh, I didn’t see that before.” You know when we are doing an exercise together, I show you how to do it and when you are able to do it I always am saying “How easy was that?” You do it and it’s so easy, and you wonder “Why was it so difficult before?” So you have to see it, sometimes with the help of someone else, a teacher. When the teacher says, “no, no not that” he is pointing to the thing that is holding you back. And we often don’t realize that the way we are trying to do something is the very reason we cannot do it. What we are depending upon for success is what is holding us back. The image I had of those guys in high school is what caused the problem in the first place. I thought that I was seeing the problem when in fact I was causing it! There is no difference between me and them, and yet all I was seeing was difference.

It’s always our own “fault”, or responsibility. We don’t like to say “fault” because it’s not a blame thing, there is no one to blame. But when we have a problem, it’s always our own miss seeing. When we feel a problem, it means miss seeing. Those two are not separate. It’s not like one thing leads to another. If we feel a contraction, a tension, a worry or an anger, that is the experience of miss seeing itself, of not seeing clearly what is. It is not one thing causing another. You see? So you know when you have that feeling of something not being right, you know that your problem is you are not seeing clearly. But how many of us know that in the moment we are upset about something? We think the opposite of that.

So that's what I mean when I say we've got to let our practice, our training, inform our lives. We're all in the same boat. I mean we all have this self and other structure we've built. It's not easier for some people than it is for others. Everybody has this structure. But seeing that structure for what it is, and owning it, helps us let go.

Student: Is letting go the same as non-attachment?

Well, that's a popular way of saying it. And I think it's more than just attachment. What we are letting go of is more than attachment, because attachment is still subject/object. What we are letting go of is bigger than that. What we are letting go of is the whole subject/object premise. That whole paradigm is being let go of and a new paradigm is being allowed to operate in the system. If you were just giving up attachment, that is still you seeing yourself giving up attachment, and then that's you without the attachment. No, this is not what we are talking about at all. It's a completely different operating system.

If we use a computer metaphor, the magic of this is like a computer that can still operate without an operating system. See, computers weren't born with this inherent knowing, like humans are. We have a similar kind of operating system as a computer. But if you take that operating system out of the computer, there's nothing left. If you take it out of us, finally it's real! Now, that operating system is not going anywhere, so in that sense it is a case of simple non-attachment. It's never like you are throwing away the operating system because you will be needing it tomorrow morning to get to work, and to feed your family, and so forth. So it's not going anywhere. And yet we can't depend upon it because when we do we are stuck in this subject/object relationship, which automatically creates a kind of tension. A tension is created here because living in a subject/object relationship is living in the past and in the future, and we are never there but always here. Tension is never created in the present but only when we reflect on the present, which is either past or future. You can't be in the present and be a self observing an object. That's the past or the future. In the present there isn't a separation in time or space. There's no more space, there's no more time, and there's no more self consciousness. That's why in Zen your first koan is "What is Mu?" because that's where we start. First we have to experience emptiness. Emptiness just means no operating system. Of course, then much more work follows that. But this basic or fundamental transformation is what we are practicing today. This comes out of the theme of the seminar.

Student: I don't know how to write down a condensed version of the theme. It seems to require a lot of explanation.

Well, everyone had something to say about that, but they were all talking about the qualities of this experience, or some aspect of this experience, but maybe not the experience itself. You know, the theme of the seminar really was this: in order for us to succeed in our lives we tend to find the most effective place to reside on a scale between looseness and tightness, or hardness and softness, or fun and work. We are always working on not too much control, but then not too much letting go.

Everything in the relative world is measurable on a scale from low to high, from dark to light, and we are always trying to find the correct or best position for ourselves to be on that scale. "What is the right way for me to be?" And sometimes we get carried away and we get way out on the right or way out on the left and we get really radicalized and start saying or doing foolish things and then usually we end up dead or in jail or in an insane asylum when we get too wacked out. We may get radicalized about our religion or even our diet, politics, or something else. So to prevent that in our society we tell everyone that they have to be balanced, to get right there in that nice central position on the scale. And that has value. But the theme of the seminar is you have to let go of the entire scale view in order to experience this freedom or true openness. So maybe that's it in one sentence. We have to let go of the entire relative scale in order to experience freedom or openness.

Student: Couldn't you just say "dual/non-dual"?

I could have. Would that have done it for everyone? Maybe not. It depends upon your word association, doesn't it? I mean these words are like short hand. We have all of these words or phrases that effectively are short hand for a long explanation. But maybe you have one association with this phrase or that phrase and that does it for you. For you it's both dual and non-dual at the same time. In other words the operating system can be there and be effective, but there is no dependence on it. Perhaps you are free, and yet you can operate in the everyday world. That sounds great. Ask any master or teacher and they will tell you that's it. But does everybody associate it that way? I don't know.

Student: So as a teacher, when you say "letting go" there is a sense of openness, but I think that is sometimes scary for some people. And so what do you say to them?

I think what he is expressing is, as a teacher, what a challenge it is when there is nothing to say, when a student is asking questions. On the other hand you always have to be there to answer the questions. This right here is a question and answer session. You have to make a special time when everyone can ask, if they have a question. Even though there is no answer as such, still you have to answer. So the answer is always to help the student explore and get closer to experiencing this new paradigm, this change in the way of seeing. As long as you are seeing self and other you are just a dramatist. You are making your life into a drama with you at the center of it. Don't you notice when people are talking about their previous lifetimes they were always a prince or princess or a great teacher, but never a cabbie or a laborer in a rice field?

Student: In the bokken class today you asked us to put our best self-image forward, to embody that, then after that to let that go and just to be present. That's the first time I ever had it taught to me like that. Is this new, or...? I mean maybe the feeling is not new, but the method of discovering that seems like it's new.

Yeah, I think I didn't ever do exactly that kind of exercise before, and don't think anybody ever showed it exactly like that. But remember both Tohei Sensei and Shinichi Sensei like to have us do the wrong way and then the right way, both. Yes? So in a sense, while even though showing your best self image is not exactly wrong, this is very similar. Similarly I often do an option A and then an option B or C because I think that helps us develop the ability to notice the difference between what's real and what's not real. So in that sense we have already been doing this kind of thing. But I never did show it in that particular way.

I remember one time Tohei Sensei had us sitting facing each other and one was the observer and the other one was supposed to think "I love you" or think "I hate you". And the observer is supposed to be able to tell the difference. Was anyone there when we did that?

Student: I was there.

How did you do with this?

Student: I was able to guess correctly more often than not, but not every time.

Yes, it's very difficult. And part of the difficulty is that the person who is supposed to be doing the thinking of "I love you" or "I hate you" is having to be very clear about that. It takes tremendous mental discipline to just think "I hate you." Can you have just pure malevolence without any guilt or self judgment? Any of that self judgment disbursts the energy. You have to be able to do pure hatred, without any self-consciousness about that. The same with pure love.

Some people tend to be cut off from their bodies and only think thoughts in their head as it were. But they don't realize that thinking thoughts is actually done with the whole mind and body. So there's no difference between thinking and feeling actually. But for many people there is a difference. But for Tohei Sensei there isn't a difference. So when he is saying we must love them or hate them, it better be big time. It has to be thought and felt with everything. So I think the reason why this exercise is difficult is because you have to find a partner who can really do that, without hesitation.

Student: I have a question. We have our experience of looking at the world from our self, subject/object. And then our battle now, or our goal, is to try to have a new experience, a new paradigm where that is out the window, so that we can fully operate in taiga.

Whose goal is this?

Student: That's this person over here, or any of us.

Who is that? In your life, whose goal is that?

Student: It would be mine.

Who is that?

Student: My consciousness, my awareness, my experience of myself.

Where does that take place? Show. Show me that person. Show me that. Or better yet, look directly at that self, right now, and tell me what you see there. Why are you looking around the room? Look directly at it and tell me what you see.

Student: Look at what?

Your self. The one that's going to get improved. Look directly at it and tell me what you see. This is a very straightforward request.

Student: I see someone whose...

No, those are ideas. Look directly at it and tell me what you see.

Student: I don't understand the question. I mean I do understand the question but...that's not my question. We should just pull out of that for now....

We're doing fine. We are right on your question, believe it or not. Look directly at that self and tell me what you see. We can't move forward until have done this.

Student: Well, the text-book answer would be that there is no self. But that's just what I've been taught.

What do you see when you look?

Student: I don't see anything.

Ah! Don't see anything. Maybe that's because there's nothing to see. Everyone here in the room, everyone here on earth, if asked to look at themselves and report what they see would all report "I don't see anything" because there is no "thing" to see. It doesn't mean that we are not having a vibrant experience here, but there is no one there aside from it to see it.

So the answer to your question is very importantly based upon this realization. If there is someone who thinks they are going to get to move on to a new paradigm, they are sadly mistaken. They are the problem. They are the old paradigm. That notion that there is a self and therefore an other, a subject and therefore an object, is the paradigm that will go away. So there is no way that you can look forward and speculate what it might be like without the self, because it's the self that's looking. It's the self-conscious notion of identity that's looking into the future and wondering "what is that going to be like?"

That's the "aha" moment right there. When you see that, when you see that you don't get to go along for the ride, that's a moment of seeing. And yet, this incredible experience continues. It doesn't rely upon or need some one to be experiencing it. It just continues. It doesn't need an observer in order to be. This, the perennial observer finds completely unfathomable.

So that is the answer to your question and that's why I wouldn't let you leave it alone. Is that deeply satisfying for you?

Student: That was an aha moment.

OK. That's good enough. I'll take that. Thank you very much.