

Letting Go Discussion Ch. 10

Acting

Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

This is the 10th chapter of our book *Letting Go* that we are going to address tonight. And the title of this chapter is "Acting." Whether we realize it or not, this acting figures very strongly into each of our lives. We are always concerned with acting in such a way, presenting ourselves in such a way, that our spouses, our friends, our employees, our employer, our colleagues accept us in the way that we would like our projection of ourselves to be accepted. We are very much engaged in this all of the time, both unconsciously and even consciously. Of course, how much we are aware of depends upon how aware we are of what we are doing, on all levels. And then we are also engaged in trying to manipulate and control others, in the outside world, to have them fit our image of what we think they should be.

This is the acting profession that we are all engaged in. So that is the subject of our chapter tonight, and I'll just read a little bit here first, to get the ball rolling.

To Act

Now: We say the word "act." What does that mean, "to act"?

When I was young, I was a professional actor. That was my job. I learned, when I was going through my years of training in school, something that I didn't know when I began. In the beginning, I thought that acting was different from real life. I thought acting was a false representation, and that daily life was real, because I wasn't clear about what the word "act" meant. This is important because, when you do Aikido, you are acting. Now, there is such a thing as bad acting and good acting. What do you suppose the difference is? I am saying that acting, on stage, or acting when you are performing a Taigi Competition, or even acting when you are eating dinner or driving to work is all the same. It is all acting. It is all just doing something. But there is doing something without mind and body unified, which is false, and there is acting in a true way. We call this "true action." It means no tension, no dead relaxation, no false leading, no false following. It means not making the Universe into your own image or trying to fit yourself to someone else's image of the Universe. Can you see how that allows for true action?

This is very tempting, in the world in which we live in right now. We are all a combination of these two things: trying to create a world that fits our image, and then trying to create an image that fits the world that we see. So for mind-and-body-unified Aikido, the epitome of this kind of temptation is demonstrated in the Taigi Competition.

This practice is very strict. You must move exactly according to the criteria. You must bow together, begin on the left foot together, walk naturally, perform certain techniques exactly according to the criteria of the judges, and while you are trying to meet all those criteria, the temptation to try to either do something to manipulate the world outside (meaning the judges' minds) or try to do something to make your self perfect in their eyes (which is simply two sides of the same coin) is very strong.

Because of our habit of being untrue, we think that being true is something that we need to manufacture or represent. We cannot represent that which is true. It is not in our capability, our lexicon, our quiver. In fact, that which is true is the very opposite of any kind of representation. It is not something that we can manufacture at all. It is only what is here when all of the effort to create it drops away. We must let go of all of our compulsion — I am talking here about letting go of the attachment to the conditioned personality itself. This is the attachment that has to go before the true can be present. The true is your Original Condition. It is the way you already are, without anything added on. Doesn't that just sound great?! So why do we feel compelled to add something on?

Student: We don't know. Because we are normally acting out of habit. Our compulsion is habitual.

So you are saying that we are forced to add on something, because this is habitual. It kind of sounds like saying "We do it because we do it." Isn't that circular thinking?

A big hint is that the answer to the question resides in the correct understanding of identity. We have to be careful that we don't think about life from a distance, as if it is a story. This is looking from conditioned memory, not seeing what is immediately in front of us.

The reason we tend to think in circles when asked a question like this is that our consideration is secondary to the cause. There is a primary cause. What is that? There is an original error that all human beings have made through all of time and that will continue as such. What is that error? What is the mistake that compels us to choose minus, to add on top of what is, to fake it?

We find ourselves in an identity crisis. And you don't have to do something about that. Just recognize it. Seeing it is everything. You don't have to chase the negative away. You don't have to beat Satan. If you go into a dark room, what do you do with the dark? You turn on the light! It is just darkness. It actually doesn't exist as such, but only as an

absence of light. It is not a substance. But we tend to come into the room and feel frightened and then try to do something with the bad darkness. The solution is just seeing, just recognizing the condition that we are in. That is what turns on the light. It may not do so instantly, like a light in a dark room, but it begins the process of change. And then at some point all the darkness indeed is gone, in one moment of blinding light. From then on everything is different for you. It still looks the same to everybody else. And you still have to go through everything. It is not the end to your troubles, exactly. It is simply that the awakening event is actually the beginning of true practice for you. You still have to earn a living, raise a family, drive yourself to work, etc. It doesn't mean there are no more things to work out. It is just that you see life utterly differently. You can now practice being free of the attachment to the result of it all. Do you see that this is possible for you?

This is why we want you to engage with each other, why we ask you to discuss a subject after class. We want everyone to get jump-started into this process, because we only have old-fashioned circular thinking otherwise. This process of being in Aikido is the process of seeing so that you can let go of the darkness.

Does that sound familiar? While I am reading, of course, I can't always see all of you, but I do see people nodding while I am reading, as if to say, "Oh yeah." So everybody is engaged in this and everybody knows it? Does it sound like I am talking about you, or do you think maybe I am talking about some other people, not you, but someone else?

There is a story about a Zen monk that is cooking in the kitchen and the master comes in and says to him, "Go to my room and look just above my desk, in the tokonoma." The student has just recently cleaned the master's room, and thinks he must have left something amiss. So he runs to the room and searches the whole room very carefully, to see what is wrong. But he can't find any dust or even a drop of water left over from the cleaning. So he runs back to the teacher and says, "Roshi. What did I do wrong? It seems perfectly fine to me. I've checked it out very carefully. Your room is clean." And the master says, "No, you fool. I picked a flower this morning and put it in the tokonoma. I wanted to you to see the flower. It's so beautiful. Did you notice the flower?" And the student says, "No, I didn't see any flower. I was looking for what was wrong."

We are so busy, looking for and then correcting, what isn't even wrong, that it is very difficult for us to see what is right in front of us. We often see something wrong and think, "I'm seeing what is." But is this seeing what is?

If I asked you, who is your teacher, who would you say?

Student: I'd say you, Sensei.

OK. So whose teaching do you follow?

Student: I'd say what's being taught.

You don't have to say it's my teaching, if you don't want to. You can say it's Tohei Sensei's. Or you can say that it even came from ancient ones. There's a succession of this teaching. We can't really point to where it began. But you are following the teacher's teaching, whoever you might want to say the teacher may be.

When you make a decision to come to class or not, or in the morning to get up and breathe or not, whose teaching are you following?

Student: I guess your own.

Oh? So, if you are teaching yourself, how is that going to go for you?

Student: It doesn't go too well sometimes, Sensei.

Well, it hasn't gone so well so far, or you wouldn't be here. Right?

Student: Right.

Right. None of us would be here if that approach worked. And yet, and this is what the chapter is saying, we continue to persist, selfishly, ignorantly, and stubbornly to follow our own "teaching." We call it "making our own decisions," as if we were capable of such a thing. If following your own inclinations led to a satisfaction in you, then you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't be practicing.

Is that fair to say?

Student: Well, sometimes our decisions lead to a satisfaction and sometimes they don't. I mean, it's a matter of degrees, right?

So some percent of the time they do, and some percent of the time they don't. Is that right?

Student: Yeah, and we're working on that percentage of the time when they don't.

OK. So you are trying to figure out how to make the right decisions all of the time so they will always work out well for you?

Student: Well, at least to increase the percentage of satisfaction.

I see. Well, what I'm saying here is that that, in itself, is the mistake. Trying to increase our chances of success is the very mistake itself. If that worked, you wouldn't be here. The only reason you are here is because you are not satisfied with your experience. You are happy with some of it, you say, but you are not fully satisfied with all of it. And if you could just see it for what it is, I suggest that you wouldn't be satisfied with any of it. Or, you would be satisfied with all of it. Only when we are in ignorance are we satisfied with some of it some of the time. Do you see? You either see it for what it is, which means you are satisfied completely, or you're completely not accepting it, which are two sides of the same coin. It is seeing the same thing.

Student: Can you talk a little more about the difference between good acting and bad acting?

I started out by saying that before I began training in the acting world, my understanding was that acting was a false representation, and that the only real acting was in the world, not on stage. And then gradually I learned that there is just acting. Acting is simply doing something. So whatever we are doing, we are acting. It doesn't refer to some sort of false representation. We are always acting all of the time.

Good acting is being in a state of mind/body unification, in other words being true, not being false. Bad acting is attempting to fit yourself into a socialized mold that you have figured out over a period of time. As the other student was talking about, we see that some things seem to work some of the time, so we are trying to figure out how to act so that everything works all of the time. And that effort is what I am calling false representation. We are trying to create our own nirvana.

This kind of thing is an utterly fruitless endeavor, and yet, tragically, most people, even you folks, are to some degree engaged in that process. The revolting development is to see how stupid we are and then to realize that we are still stupid.

First, we have to see how foolish we are. I mean by "foolish" or "stupid" that we promote bad acting in our own character, a false representation of what is, in hopes that that will give us some success. We hope to fool some of the people some of the time, but we can never fool all the people all the time. When we see our falseness is not working, then we think, "I had better polish my acting skills. My falseness better get more convincing so I can fool all of the people all of the time."

If you are lucky, one day you get to meet someone who says, "That will never work, because that's false." It may hurt when you hear that said, and you may fight against it, you may resist it. You may not like that idea. "How dare you say I am false! How dare you say I'm a fake!" And yet, that is bad acting, the way most people are engaged most of the time.

Student: That makes it more clear for me. But good acting is not necessarily speaking your mind, saying whatever is going on, is it? I mean, just to clarify, it would be very rude at times wouldn't it? So being truthful and genuine is not putting everything out

here that is inside of you, right? I mean we still represent ourselves in as positive a way as possible. For instance, if my boss is upsetting me, I don't automatically just display that disturbance on the outside, right?

Do you mean, that would be, being genuine in your falseness?

Student: No. I am talking about expressing exactly how I feel.

Yes, but that is a state of false acting to begin with. You are not in a state of mind/body unification when you are angry at your boss. You are in a reactive state, a false state. That anger comes about because you are trying to create a certain image and he has contradicted that image. He is not respecting that image that you are holding up there. So the whole issue is one of bad acting.

In good acting there is often nothing to say. Good acting is just responding to the need of the moment. Just like in good Aikido, there are no moves to be made unless there is finally a physical attack of some kind, and then the response is true, compassionate, efficient, to the point, and satisfactory. We're OK, as long as there is no bad acting involved. So the question is, can we be free of bad acting. And our practice is that very thing, to be true.

Student: Is bad acting just reacting?

Yeah. From my view, there is a difference between reacting and responding: reacting is the self protecting itself, or attempting to preserve or increase itself in some way. That's always bad acting. But a response is true. In other words, often people think, "Well, if I don't engage in reacting them I am just going to sit here like a lump and do nothing." But stuff still happens, you know? If somebody falls down they need to be picked up. OK? So that would be a true response to the need being called for, which is picking up an old lady that falls down in front of you. OK?

Student: Sensei, sometimes I am a good actor, and sometimes I am a bad actor. What should I do?

What's the problem?

Student: I mean, of course, that I would like to be a good actor all of the time.

You would?

Student: Isn't that the proper way to look at it?

I don't know. You are saying you would like to be a good actor all of the time.

Student: Yeah, I'd like to act according to my true self. I know what that's like. And I also know what it's like to not do that.

So that's what you want?

Student: Yes.

Then why don't you do it? You just told me you want that and you know what that is. If you want that and you know how to do it, then why don't you just do that?

Student: There's probably things in the way. So how do I get rid of those?

Do what you want, and see what the results are, and see what that leads you to. That's what led you here to this dojo, so be true to that.

We can't wake someone up that is pretending to be asleep.

Student: OK.

Student: Sensei, I notice that the only time I am truly mind/body unified is probably in a test or Taigi Competition. And I am always doing a lot more breathing than normal leading up to those big events. So what prevents us from keeping it up, when it is over? I mean, I try to do the breathing every day, but it's never as much as I'd like.

Not as much as you'd like? Well, if you would like to breathe more, why don't you do it?

Student: Well, I can't find out why. Maybe I stay out too late the night before, and I just can't get up early enough to do it.

Well, wait a minute. Let's be honest with ourselves here, folks. The reason you are not doing what you say you want to do, is because you don't really want to do it. You want me to support you, as a student who is sincere and wants to train. That's what you present to me. That's what this chapter is about, that representation. But that is not entirely true, is it.

Student: Apparently not.

Apparently not. And this is why all of us are here, because we are wrestling with that. To be honest with our self takes a lot of courage. And it takes a great deal of attentive capacity to be able to stay in that and look at it. If your mind is flitting around, giving yourself various excuses, and saying "I'm not so bad," you're not going to come to any kind of great reckoning. By the way, that's the worst phrase that a student can utter, "I'm not so bad."

We are a village. There is not just the one who wants to breathe and the one who doesn't want to breathe. In every aspect of relative thinking, there is a pro and a con. And we chase back and forth on this relative scale that you are talking about, like mad rats, always trying to figure out how to be on the successful end of things. And it never ever happens. Just talk to someone who has billions of dollars. It doesn't do it. No matter what your aspiration is. It might not be to be a wealthy man. It might be to be a great teacher, or it might be to be a great writer, or a great artist, or a great lover. But it all turns to dust because it's just an image, something we are trying to create. It's those two things, it's representing something that everyone will think is cool, which is meeting society's expectation, or trying to adjust everyone else to fit your idea. When you are angry at your boss, you are

attempting to re-adjust him to recognize how good you are, how you should be respected. And he is not following along with your program.

Student: You always say just to do it, right? But Suzuki Sensei said "Do nothing." I'm kind of confused about what the difference is between "do nothing" and "just do."

No difference.

Student: I don't really get it.

When Suzuki Sensei says "do nothing," he means don't organize and control and run your own program. Instead, follow life. Whatever comes up, respond truly to that. That's why we practice otomo, for instance, so we can have an opportunity to do that with someone who, presumably, we respect; our teacher. And then once we sort of get the hang of that, we have that experience, and we see what it's like, then we might be able to transfer that way of responding to everyone in our life, and every thing in our life, so that at every moment we are just being an open conduit for the wisdom that's in every one of us. Every one of us knows. It's just that, like I said, you can't wake yourself up when you are pretending to be asleep. We have to admit that we are not asleep. Which means that we have to admit that we know, and take responsibility for that knowing. That takes a lot of courage. We've been pretending all of our life to be asleep.

So do nothing, means don't organize your own program, just be true and present. And that means what ever comes up, just do it. So respond is a good word there. Does that help?

Student: Hai.

Student: I keep thinking back on a conversation some time ago when you talked about story telling. We tell ourselves stories and we get in to these elaborate mind states trying to figure out what 's going to happen next or what happened in the past. Is bad acting a manifestation of these stories? Are the stories not the cause of the bad acting, in some cases? For instance, I tell myself that if I dress better, then this girl will notice me more, and we'll go off into the sunset together.

I said in this chapter, please don't stand back and look at your life as if it were a story. Don't separate yourself from your life. When you are planning ahead to go out with that girl, and trying to look good and so on so that you will succeed, let's say she rejects you. And then you have a whole story about that, which is a reaction to that presentation that you were making being rejected. That false representation that you offered, was rejected. And then you have a further reaction to that, because you were rejected, so now you are angry, and you have a whole story about that, and then you want to tell her that story about just how bad she was to you....haven't you ever done that? "Oh, no. Don't say anything. Let me tell you." What you mean is, "Let me relate my story to you, because my story is the real story." And the other person always has their own story. It's all bad acting. It's all this circular thinking that I was talking about. And one thing leads to another and another and another.

And by the way, a lot of that in there can be pleasurable. It's not that all of that is painful. A lot of times she doesn't reject you. She loves you. And now you're in worse trouble than the other way around. The worst thing that can happen to a teacher is the student comes and says, "Sensei, I've fallen in love." You know you've lost them for at least six months, maybe a year, before they wake up again. They're completely subsumed by the story, and they're gone.

Student: Aren't they happy then?

They are miserable, actually.

Student: But isn't that what we are doing here? Love?

Oh yes, love. That has nothing to do with love.

Student: So when a student comes to the teacher and says, "Sensei, I'm in love...?"

What he or she is actually saying is, "I've just fallen off a cliff and I can't come back. When I realize what true love is, once again, I'll be back. Because I'll realize that I didn't have it then, and I didn't get it that way either."

Student: Oh, I see.

We have unending faith that we are going to get true love through another person. You're not even going to get it through me. You have to take a piss by yourself. I can't do that for you.

Student: So then, when I pee for myself, aren't I teaching myself?

No. You're following instructions carefully. See, they're not really my instructions in the first place. It's just the truth, and you are following that carefully when you pee for yourself.

If you were to try to get someone else to help you do that, that would not be following instructions. The package didn't come with those instructions. That's enough of that metaphor.

OK?

Student: Uh, I still have a question. I mean I certainly understand how we delude ourselves. But aren't we responsible for our own learning?

Maybe. It depends on who my mean by "we."

OK, to be more straightforward with you. You bring yourself here. You are responsible to be here or not be here. You are responsible to get up in the morning and breathe or not. You are the one responsible to follow the teaching or not.

I often say that we think we make decisions all day long. But those are pretty much one hundred percent conditioned responses. But there is one decision that all of us

can make in every single moment, and that is to Keep One Point, or not. To be true, or not. To be true to what? I said earlier, people see something they don't like, and they say, "I'm seeing what is." Well who is that seeing what? See? So you have to be very careful when we use words. That's why I said, "Maybe." "Maybe we are responsible. Of course we are responsible. But who?"

Student: There is no who.

So what do you mean by saying you are responsible? That's just like him saying "I want to get up and breathe in the morning but I don't always do it. What should I do?" And I said, "If you wanted to, you would do it." True is true. It's not for no reason it's called "delusion." We delude ourselves. We are not honest with ourselves about what is actually going on in our lives.

"I'm not so bad." Or, "My life is not so bad." Those are the worst things we can say to ourselves. You can see it as a total disaster, or you can see it as absolutely perfect. Anything else is a lie. Anything else is illusion. The unfortunate thing about seeing that we are stupid, is realizing that we are still stupid.

Student: How long does the stupid last?

Forever. Stupid is stupid. But you don't have to follow stupid. You can just let her lie there. But she's really beautiful. She has fine clothing and beautiful eyes. She is very seductive, and she promises great happiness. So it's very difficult, because we desperately want satisfaction. And when someone comes along and offers it, we'll take it any way we can get it.

It takes a certain amount of unfortunate circumstances, a little bit of experience, before we see that that road doesn't lead where it promises to lead. But when we really see how foolish, how weak, how moveable we are, that's when we listen to a teacher and a teaching.

Student: Sensei, why not just say "human." "Ignorant, stupid, limited." Why not just say "human?"

Humans aren't limited to that. The Buddha is human. It's a limitation of being human. Being stupid is not the same as being human, but a limitation of being human. It's not like we are going to go off into some heaven. You know, if you follow that thought out that you are offering there, then we have to get rid of being human in order to be true. And that's not the case. We just have to stop lying to ourselves about the state we are actually in. That's bad acting. But a human can be a good actor, can be true.

Maybe. You have to discover for yourself, if what I am saying is so or not.

Student: But that's not teaching yourself?

No. While you are looking, you can't be talking to yourself. There is no self teaching going on. Just look. Just open to whatever is. Just like when the uke steps out to

attack you. Just open, with full awareness, to everything that's going on. You don't have to think, "What to do, what to do? What is the right way to be now?" No. Any of that kind of thinking is trouble, right? So when you are doing Aikido techniques, you are just open. That's called "osairu." And if you can really open, then they can't even attack at all. This was the secret of the samurai.

Student: I have a family. And I want to go to class all the time, every class. But the other people in my family often want me to stay home. So is it bad acting to say, "I'm going no matter what?" Or should I try to help them out by staying home? In other words, am I trying to satisfy myself, or am I trying to satisfy them? That's the real question.

You are always satisfying yourself, or attempting to. You are rarely actually satisfying yourself, but you are always attempting to satisfy something within yourself. This has nothing to do with anyone else.

I am not saying not to care about them, or not to take their feelings into consideration, so don't mistake what I am saying. But what you do at every moment is attempt to satisfy yourself in the best way that you can. So, more breathing.

You know, when we are breathing we are just open to breathing. We are just listening, sitting there, open to everything. So when we learn to be in that state of openness for some period of time by practicing breathing, then we can transfer that into our daily life. So when we are in situations with people that we care about, we can just listen, and nine times out of ten, that listening alone takes care of it. Because when we are really listening, then the appropriate response is there.

There are no rules. No one can say that you should do this or that in any situation. And anyway it is not my business to say do this or that. Even when I tell you to breathe in the morning, because that's part of the training, that's to help you build this openness, so that you can benefit in your daily life. If you choose not to do it, I can't do anything about that. I mean, I can't force you to do anything. But the people that breathe, I see how they respond, change, and grow. And the people that don't, I see are stuck in a rut and can't get out and wonder why. And it's not ever going to change. That's the way it is.

Thank you very much.