

## **Southern California Ki Society Seminar**

**November 22, 2009 – Question and Answer Session**

### **C. Curtis**

So, what was the theme of our seminar?

*Student: To be open to new experiences, open to the universe.*

We say “open to the universe”. By the way, what is the universe?

*Student: An infinite circle with an infinite radius?*

Well, that’s one of the principles of the universe. The three principles of the universe are: 1) the universe is an infinite circle with an infinite radius, 2) the universe is an infinite gathering of infinitely small particles, and 3) the universe is always changing. These are characteristics of the universe. But for you, personally, what is the universe?

*Student: Where I am.*

It’s where you are, and it’s everything that you experience. And it’s nothing else. It’s not something that you remember or look forward to, or something that you assume exists outside of your world of experience. I was in Japan recently, and I remember being there. I assume it’s still there. But I am not in Japan right now, so I am not experiencing that. That’s a memory. There’s nothing wrong with a memory, but a memory is not the universe that I am in at the moment. The universe is everything that, with our senses, our thoughts, and our emotions, we can experience right now. Now, if something happened in Japan that suddenly brought up something in me, then OK, that’s present. That’s now part of my universe. So everything may be potentially a part of it, but it is very important to be clear about what your universe actually is, that is, if you want to open to it.

Some people go around worrying about something that’s going to happen when they get somewhere where they are not. You may be thinking about something that you are going to have to handle when you get home from this seminar. But that’s not being present. That’s not being open to the universe here. That’s not the universe that you are in. It’s not in the present. In other words, you can only be open now, to what you are experiencing right in the present moment. If you have a concern or a need, that’s always outside of the moment, having to do with the past or the future, but never the present. As soon as you begin to reflect on something, a concern or a need, that’s past or future. If you are only in the present, you are not thinking about anything. You are not evaluating the moment. Thoughts may arise, but you don’t follow them somewhere else.

We cannot control any thoughts that arise. Can anyone here do that? If so, please teach me your technique! We cannot control what thoughts arise within us, we

cannot control what anyone else does, or anything that happens at any time. A thought may arise, as I say, but we don't go on a date with that thought, we don't take it out to dinner, we don't go off in story land, into all the stories that back up that feeling, idea, or thought that has arisen. And at the same time, we don't try to repress it, get rid of it, get it out of our life, because it won't go. It's only there to be recognized. A feeling just wants to be felt. A thought just wants to be seen. So just let it be there. That's the answer to the dilemma I brought up in the class today. When everything is going wrong, what do you do when you can't distract yourself from it, when you can't avoid it, can't escape it? You have to be in it. Just that. That's all that's necessary. And in order to be in it we have to open to it. And if we are completely in whatever is happening, then when a need for a response comes, we'll recognize it and we'll respond appropriately. It doesn't mean you don't do anything. There is no such thing as nothing happening. Life continues. Experiences continue to evolve and responses continue to be requested by the world around you, maybe it's an individual, maybe it's a bunch of people. And if we are open and present, we'll respond appropriately. This is the definition of compassion. Compassion is an ongoing response to the needs of the universe within and around you. This is not a reaction, which is quite different and is selfishly and emotionally based. "Response" comes when we are simply open to whatever arises. It is not that "I respond". If there is subject and object, I and other, then that's a reaction. Response and reaction are quite different.

So this is the theme of our seminar, what we have been exploring since Saturday morning. Don't you think so? Did anyone get anything different from this work? No.

So I know you have some questions. Please ask.

*Student: When you mentioned being defensive, that's like being manipulated by our own self. So how do we overcome being defensive? I mean it is human nature to be defensive, so how can we overcome that reaction?*

How can you overcome the automatic defensiveness that arises in you when someone challenges you?

*Student: Yes, Sensei.*

Why do you not want to be defensive? Why do you want to overcome that?

*Student: Because I want to be open.*

So be open. If you want to be open...

*Student: (laughing) That's a big thing you are saying there. I'm getting it, Sensei.*

OK then yes, no one can tell you. I mean, I have a lot of conversation in me and I can give you a long-winded explanation, as I have been doing for two days, right? But if you really want to understand, then you do understand. We can't wake someone up

that's pretending to be asleep. It's very important to recognize that we actually already know. There's no duplicity, there's no bad news, there's no "negative Ki", there's nothing wrong at all. Just be honest with yourself. And yes, notice what keeps coming up, experience that, and see how that makes you feel. And as long as you don't lie to yourself about the source of that feeling (like putting it on someone or something else) change will happen in just the way it needs to. All trouble begins, all war begins, when we put the source of our feelings somewhere outside of our self. That's the big mistake that all humans make. The only thing we can experience is our senses, our feelings, and our thoughts. Those are all ours. There isn't anything else. So where is the source of whatever you think or feel?

*Student: Right here.*

Yes, somewhere in there. And even this is not correct, because where is the boundary of you? Yes, we walk around in these bodies, so we think, "OK, so she is over there and I am over here." But that's only for convenience sake, and getting around in earth mode, in shoga world. Of course, this kind of view is useful and necessary. We use the word "I". I use the word "I". It's a convenient reference so that we can all be able to work and convey ourselves around, and do things.

I have this new iPhone. We got off the plane on Friday morning and the fog was so bad that we couldn't read the signs. So I thought, "Ah, the iPhone!" We plugged in where we wanted to go and followed it to the hotel. That was our map. This is exactly what I am talking about. This is the way we navigate in the world, using self and other, over here and over there.

But the point is always, what experience are you having at any single moment.

*Student: Well thank you for mentioning that, and I love your Q & A. So, when I use the word "I", I'm thinking that I am taking responsibility. I am the only one having this experience. I'm the victim...*

You're the victim?

*Student: Yeah. I identify myself as being a victim. Yes.*

Of who?

*Student: A victim of others. You know, there is tension there, when I see that this person or that person doesn't like me. So I'm thinking that I say "I" to take responsibility, and I reflect everything back to me, saying, "I am experiencing this." But I think that I could possibly see that I am also separating myself, when I use the word I....*

Wait. I know you could go on and on about this, but I think we have the idea here. So could you take a look for me right now at that "I"? Just sit here with me. It doesn't require anything physical. Just look and tell me what you see. Look right at that "I" and tell me what you find there.

*Student: Nothing.*

Nothing. There is nothing there to see. There is no “thing” there. And yet this experience continues. We don’t know where it comes from, where it takes place, and we don’t know where it goes. What do we say about something that we don’t know where it comes from, where it takes place, or where it goes? We say it doesn’t exist! But it makes us very uncomfortable that there is no actual entity that can be pointed to. Because, not just you, but all of us have been pointing to this all of our lives and assuming that there is some thing here. It makes us very uncomfortable to see what we are left with, after seeing that there is no thing there. And yet we still are experiencing this intensity and we don’t seem to be able to know where it takes place, where it came from, or where it goes. So what then? I don’t exist as such, and none of this exists as such either? It doesn’t feel like that. I think this is very real. It feels very real. But everybody can see that that is nonsense. And yet... So that right there is the paradox. You don’t want to get hung up on either side of this thing. But it is important to see it. Because if you don’t see it, then you are hung up on one side or the other. That’s why, no matter what happens, “So What?” That doesn’t mean that you are heartless or cynical or cold.

Yes?

*Student: Um, I have a lot of fighting mind, and it bothers me. I mean I aspire to have less fighting mind. But the more I aspire to have less, the more I notice it everywhere in myself. I don’t know what your take is on that. I mean I would like to have less fighting mind, but it seems that even though I want to have less fighting mind, that doesn’t change the amount of fighting mind I experience in myself.*

Yes, well isn’t this the same as the first question? First of all, I would guess that you don’t have more fighting mind now, and that it was always like that. You just notice it more now. And then, your question is how to not have any fighting mind?

Why don’t you want to have fighting mind?

*Student: That’s a good question. I guess that when I experience it, I don’t like it.*

What do you want?

*Student: I would like to be less reactive, I guess, to other things around me.*

So, why don’t you be less reactive?

*Student: That’s a good question.*

You said you wanted to.

*Student: I know, I know. Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don’t.*

So, take a notice, and be really clear about what you want. I said to the first questioner, we cannot wake up someone who is pretending to sleep. I don’t mean to

insult you by inferring that you are pretending to sleep, but the one you are looking at is pretending to be one thing, and is actually something else.

This is why we have to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. We must see exactly how we actually are, not how we would like to be. I mean, it's fine to like to be something, but if you really do want that, then you are that. If it's true that you want to be a certain way, then it's true that you are that. If not, not. Do you see?

*Student: Yes.*

Someone else?

*Student: Sometimes I feel that when I confront my self, or my own fighting mind, I'm afraid to lose something. I know that in the modern world we probably don't need this, but what about our primal selves that can jus rip somebody apart when it needs to?*

How old are you?

*Student: I'm fifteen.*

OK. And you feel you don't want to leave that behind because you might need it *sometime*.

*Student: My rational, logical self says that I will be a better person and a better Aikido practitioner if I am able to relinquish this aspect of myself, but then there is the other side that still wants to have this.*

Yes, I agree with you. But which you do I agree with? Who is fighting with who there?

*Student: I guess I am fighting with myself.*

What, now there are two of you? I mean, I said there wasn't even one of you a minute ago, and now you have two.

When we let something go, where does it go? Nowhere. There's nowhere for it to go. Anything you need at any moment in your life is available to you at any time. Believe me. If you need your primal, raw, brutal condition to arise so that you can use it, it's there. I have been doing Aikido and practicing non-dissension for over thirty-five years, and believe me, it's right here. OK?

So don't feel like you have to fight with it. That's making it something special, unnecessarily. Just do the practice. And the practice is, "So what?" When it comes along and says "You need me. I don't think you ought to let go of me." Just say, "OK, hang around then. Whatever you like. I am busy practicing. Don't bother me." There isn't anybody there anyway. You're just playing with yourself. Right?

You're a young man. You're strong, and you're bright, and you have your whole future in front of you. Be grateful; take responsibility. You'll be fine.

*Student: Sensei, could you elaborate a little more what you meant by "There's no negative Ki?" There are certain people who act certain ways or express themselves in certain ways that seems to indicate that there is something that could be called "negative Ki." For instance war. How do we feel about war?*

This is a big one. My first teacher told me that his first awakening came from seventy-two hours straight sitting at the kitchen table, staring at the wall, considering the difference between good and evil. It took him seventy-two hours before the light went on.

We have been talking about the scale all weekend; evil at one end, good at the other. There it is right there. No matter where you are on that scale, you have a problem. You are not seeing the whole picture. Somebody said to me last night that he felt he just needed to get further away from his problems. The cliché is that if we move far enough away in time as space, and see the whole movement of evolution then we can see why something or other has to happen. But sometimes that is not possible. Sometimes we simply cannot see.

Look, we honor the ancestors that developed Aikido for us. So don't misunderstand me. But each of us carry limitations, which are a product of our time and our culture. And our students tend to transcend those limitations. That's how evolution works. If your student isn't a better teacher than you are, then you are not a very good teacher. You blew it. Your students have to transcend the teacher. My teacher taught me this. So I am not disrespecting my teacher, or my teacher's teacher, or his teacher before him when I say this. But this conversation we are having right now could not possibly have taken place in and Aikido dojo twenty years ago, let alone fifty years ago. The kind of training that you have available to you is way beyond what was available then. That's not disrespecting anyone. One hundred years from now, fifty years from now, twenty years from now, it will be that much better than it is now. And you folks will be teaching it. You know? You. Stick with it, see. And remember I said this, fifty years from now. Don't forget.

That actually answers your question, but I know it doesn't seem like it does. Everything is in perfect balance and perfect harmony just the way it is right now. We don't see that because we have personal preference. We (we meaning our small self) we want to have things that make us comfortable and happy and support our sense of our self. As we develop this strong sense of self, we want to find things that support that. Nobody is not like this, and that's OK. And we want to avoid being shot, misused, beaten, or emotionally stressed out. We want to avoid stress and conflict of all kinds. Does anybody here not have this? This is the way we are. OK?

And when we feel good, we think it is because of that new BMW we have, or the wonderful woman that we are married to, or the great son we have. In other words we put the source or that outside of ourselves. We don't realize that joy doesn't come from someone else doing something. I am experiencing it here, within my universe. And when something bad happens, we don't want to take responsibility for that either, so we say, "That's your fault." And when we react to that, then he

reacts, and so on and pretty soon we have a war on our hands. Now that's a natural consequence of believing that things are out of whack. We believe that "I am important and you are not treating me with the respect you should." That's an error. Because if I look very closely, I see that there isn't any "guy." So if we keep making errors, then chaos happens. That's what it leads to feeling like. If we don't, then things feel better, clearer, calmer, and we begin to really see what is going on. So in a sense, even awakening is an evolutionary factor. Waking up to the fact that there isn't someone to defend and there is no one to blame...when you want to see that you will see it. If you don't want to see it, you won't see it. And you can't see it until you can see it. And seeing it isn't seeing it with your eyes, of course, or cognizing it only, but you have to experience it with your whole body. And that's why we need to be one hundred and ten percent at every moment.

*Student: I've come to understand how deeply lazy dimensions of my self are. It's like I can open to pure presence, but then shortly thereafter my mind has gone into a kind of dull, detached state. So when I am Ki Breathing, or training, or even just working and trying to stay open and connected, the inertia of the habitual mental slackness is kind of what I am seeing. Now, other than "Just Breathe More" (and if that is the instruction I am happy with that) is there anything you could comment on regarding that laziness?*

So, what's the problem?

*Student: How to not get stuck in this endlessly lazy state of mind.*

No, that's not what I mean. You're here, right now, because you are not satisfied with your experience, pure and simple. That's why every single one of you are here, because you are not satisfied with your experience. If you were, you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't need to be. You would just be being satisfied with your experience.

There's nowhere to go, there's nothing to get, there's no one to be. Everybody just wants to be satisfied with the experience they are having. There is nothing missing, nothing needed. There is no negativity, no need for negativity. So when I say "What's the problem?" I mean to say, "Why not just be satisfied with your experience?"

*Student: It should be different.*

In T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Four Seasons*, he defines waking up as finding yourself where you first started and knowing the place for the first time. All the way coming full circle, and going "Oh, this is all there is." It's not a matter of not enough, or plenty, full or empty. It's not on a scale. True life doesn't exist on a relative scale in a relative world. True life is present. It only occurs now in this moment. When you are reflecting on it, you've lost it already. That's why your experience is not satisfactory. Because you think it isn't. That's why I said, "Go back, sit down, do your breathing." I am not being cruel to you, dissing you, or dismissing you. You can go ahead and do whatever you want to do. But the problem is you are not satisfied.

You think there needs to be something more. Which means you are thinking. Just be here, no time, no space, no past, no future, nothing missing, nothing needed, nothing wrong. Whatever there is, that's what's here. You can't control what comes, you can't control what goes, you can't control any part of it. This is what a samurai had to know to stand in front of another person with a six foot razor blade.

So, yeah, it takes courage. But what choice do we have, see? We imagine we have choices, so we put it off.

Thank you very much.