

Letting Go Discussion – Ch. 12

Happiness is Extending Ki

Friday, Feb. 26, 2010

Good Evening. Tonight is the twelfth chapter of our book *Letting Go*, and the name of this chapter is “Happiness is Extending Ki.” That title could be misleading. It might make you think, “Well, maybe I better learn to extend Ki so I can be happy.” This is because we look at happiness as something we want to achieve or attain sometime in the future. And each of you has your own strategy that you are currently working on, to increase your happiness. Each of us has varying degrees of self-perceived happiness. Some of us think we used to be happier than we are now, and are hoping we will get happier again later. Some of us used to be more unhappy and are happier now. But it is never enough, so we want to be even more happy. So, if happiness is extending Ki then, whoa, all I have to do is extend Ki, then I’ll be more happy. Right?

Of course, you are all extending Ki right now. That’s how you know what’s going on. You can see what’s going on, you can hear me, see others in the room, you are aware of your thoughts, you are aware of how you feel, how your body feels inside right now. You are aware of all of that. Extend Ki just means being in awareness, being in attention. It doesn’t mean we have to do something extra. It just means we have to wake up to what’s going on already, right now. And that waking up is just looking. It’s not something that you have to wait for years and years to achieve. Just notice what’s already happening, because this is it. Nothing changes. This is it.

Someone said to me, “You know, what you are doing up there in a question and answer session or a discussion group, is like balancing on a tight rope.” Very apt. So if that’s the case, what are you folks doing? Well, some of you are sitting back, watching me balancing here on this tight rope. I do not know what is going to come up next, and any attempt on my part to control what happens, and I fall off the tight rope. So staying on the tight rope means not allowing your self to attempt to alter anything in any way. Which means that we cannot have any preference. Any idea of that kind will knock us off the tight rope. So some of you are watching this from a distance.

Some of you are acting like you are also on the tight rope, and you are commenting about what that is really like. In other words, some people just make comments, or try to agree with and encourage me. But what you are really doing when you do that is you are grabbing the rope and shaking it a little bit, just to see if it will knock me off. And some of you even come over and try to push me off, sometimes.

But most of you don’t do any of that. Most of you just sit back and watch. So instead, I am asking you, tonight and always, to jump up here on the tight rope with me. Expose yourself. Put yourself in a place where there is no turning back. What’s the

worst that can happen? If you fall off, jump on again. But there is no easing on to it, you know? You've got to jump.

So, I say we are always extending Ki already, because that is our natural condition. But as Tohei Sensei said, there is calmness, and then there is calmness in action. True calmness is calmness in action. Calmness, when you are on the tight rope, is a heightened sense of being human. This is living your life truly, completely, without hesitation. No beliefs about extending or not extending Ki. Just get on the rope and see for yourself what this is like. Many people ask me questions, and it sounds like they are not sure. Get on the rope and you'll know immediately. So what if you fall off right away? Eh! Jump back on. Most people want to sit back and watch me up there, doing my dance. I mean, ask your self. Is that the kind of person you want to be? Is that the kind of life you want to have? The one who is always watching from a distance and commenting internally on it? No. I don't think any of you would say, "Yes" to that question.

All right. I am going to read something from the chapter, and it begins on page 142:

Happiness is Extending Ki

Just about everything that we do in Aikido was developed by Koichi Tohei Sensei to reveal something about ourselves. We cannot let go if we don't see what there is to let go of. If we don't see a limitation, we cannot move beyond that limitation. We can't dissolve a barrier that slows us down or impedes our progress, keeping us from being genuinely authentic, unless it is revealed to us. So when we practice, what is usually being revealed?

Most of us approach Aikido in exactly the way that we approach our daily life problems. We are products of self-imposed patterns, or unrevealed story lines that we tend to blindly follow without awareness. In everything you do, you are there. So if you can see some of your patterns of behavior in some aspect of your Aikido training, then that will not only spread throughout all of your practices in Aikido, but also into your daily life. A limitation revealed and resolved is a limitation that is resolved in all aspects of your life.

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We must not act unilaterally in this business. The Universe has a rhythm, or, if you like, you can say that it has a will. What we call the "Universe," you can, if you want, give it further personality and call it God. There can be any number of names for this. We just say "Universe," and that is fine. We don't have to endow this with our own concepts of self. Still, no matter what we call this, it is this very thing right here. It is this. And it has a rhythm. When we act in concert with that rhythm, then we seem to have a very powerful will, because we are not out of balance with what is. We are moving with what

we might call the “will of the Universe,” in exact harmony with what is happening. When we move from our own personal notions, following only our own will, then most often we are off-time or out of tune with this Universe. This Universe includes, and therefore cares for, everyone, not just us. We can be a champion, someone held in high esteem by others, while at the same time quite miserable to ourselves inside if we are not in harmony with the Universe. We say the ultimate goal of this training is to be one with the Universe. This means to move in harmony with this rhythm. This is being one with this Universe. Your will and the will of the Universe are not separate. When we find ourselves in this harmonious condition, it produces a feeling within us, which we call “happiness.”

Happiness is not an object, in itself. We are talking about a state of being. A “state of being” does not mean “something that I am in,” because in that phrase there is a subject, and that makes happiness an object. State of being simply means the condition of how things are. This is our natural condition, as long as we are not thinking that we know it is that, and reflecting on that. Because if we do that, then we are treating this state of being as an object, and we will try to cling to it!

I want you to be happy. How to be happy is not to try to change the circumstances inside or outside of your self. In other words, we don’t attempt to evade, cling to, or alter our experience. Of course, yes, we pursue our activities, like working, developing relationships, maybe voting to change the political structure — that’s a big one. It is not as if we don’t do anything. We have to drive to work. We are involved in the community. All of these things we do. It is simply that we don’t make the mistake of thinking that having these things one way or the other produces happiness. Otherwise, happiness is an object in itself that we long for and will never, ever have. We will always be discontent. It will never be enough. I am suggesting that happiness is our fundamental condition, which exists already, before we see something wrong with the world and attempt to correct it to make ourselves happy.

So that is why I wanted to start out by asking what you folks think is the source of true happiness. “Happiness is extending Ki” means true happiness is a state of mind that we call, or identify as, Ki extending. We have people very upset in this world who want to kill other people, blow up countries, fly planes into buildings and things, because their contention is that happiness comes from objects, and they don’t have them, and it’s pissing them off. Or, happiness comes from a certain set of religious practices, and if you don’t believe that, then I will kill you! This is a big mistake and a true human tragedy. And maybe the biggest mistake of all is that we either represent ourselves to others as happy as a result of our objects, or we offer to others that we can be happy by having fewer objects (implying that they should be happy with less). Two sides of the same unbalanced coin. If you misrepresent happiness in that way, you are causing someone else to be envious of you. Don’t be surprised if they are maybe a little angry at you as a result.

So I hope what I read about happiness there helps to explain what I was trying to get at in the beginning. I was talking about balancing on the tight rope. Of course there is no rope.

The balancing is between the past and the future. It is staying right in the present, which is a moving condition. One moment moves to the next to the next and so on. There is no standing still. And any effort to influence ourselves, anything that we are experiencing in any way, moves us away, what I called “falling off the rope,” which is falling into the future or into the past. So really this tight rope is balancing in a state of constant motion, as balance always is.

Of course there are a lot of pressures that arise in our lives, that tend to tempt us to move away from this moment to the future, or to the past. Like thinking happiness is something that you have to attain later, or remembering some happiness you had in the past. So it can be very distracting. And that’s what makes it difficult to balance here in the moment. So even though it is our natural condition, we don’t often stay in the awareness of that condition, because we’re tempted to stray. We’re taken away by our reaction to whatever it is that is going on. Our attempt to cling to and manipulate or resist and push away, takes us away from experiencing everything that is here, without preference.

OK. Now we can have some questions.

Student: All the feelings and emotions that you talk about, I have undoubtedly experienced. And I don’t think I have ever even talked to anybody about them, I just know that I have these feelings. I just wonder what it’s all about. I don’t even know what I am trying to ask. I mean, what’s it all about? Why do we fall off the rope, I guess is what I am wondering. Where does it come from?

That’s a good question. When you have a thought, where does it come from?

Student: I don’t know.

We don’t know. No one knows. And after it goes, where does it go?

Student: I don’t know.

We don’t know. No one knows. And when it takes place, where does it take place?

Student: Right here.

And that is...?

Student: I don’t know.

Don’t know. So what do we say about something that we don’t know where it came from, we don’t know where it is, and we don’t know where it goes?

Student: That it doesn’t exist?

Yes, that it doesn’t exist.

Student: So why do we want to know what it is?

Well, why do we follow that thought? Why are we such suckers for that thought, or that emotion, or that next thing that comes up, whatever it is? It's all the same. Every experience is just like a thought. That's just an example. Every feeling we have, every sensation we experience, every thought we have, is all the same. We don't know where it comes from, we don't know where the experience of it takes place, and we don't know where it goes when it's gone. And yet, it's tremendously compelling. And it's good that it's compelling. When something is compelling it raises our level of energy. And when we bring our sense of exploration and curiosity to that, that's like bringing a flint and a piece of steel together. That's what makes stuff happen. That's what makes living life really worthwhile, when we bring our curiosity, when we bring our awareness to this question. There may be no answer to that question that is satisfactory. We can offer answers and we always do. But any word or phrase or paragraph or book that is offering those answers is not the thing itself. It's just pointing to it. So no matter how clever, or how useful even, our answer is, it's not the experience itself. And like I said, being on the tight rope requires always inquiring into it. Always bringing your awareness into it – that's inquiry. It's not asking a question so much as just being in a state of inquiry. Bringing your awareness to this strange paradox; something that apparently doesn't even exist is tremendously compelling.

So that's our practice. You know, in Chapter 5 I gave you the four aspects of practice:

- 1) Show up.
- 2) Open to whatever is happening.
- 3) Follow along with it, no matter where it takes you.
- 4) Accept whatever the result is.

And all four of those are without preference as to outcome. Without attempting to make it any other way than it is. You don't come to the dojo with that in mind, you don't start a conversation with that in mind, and you don't meet anything that comes your way that way. Just follow those four principles and that will keep you always on the tight rope of the present. Completely awake, inquiring, full awareness, and no time to be running off anywhere. Because you are too busy paying attention.

So I know I don't answer your question, per se, but does that help?

Student: Yes.

OK. More practice is always a good idea. More practice.

Student: I'm wondering, when we are living in the moment, and something does come up that, let's say someone says something to you that you don't like, and you try not to react to that. I mean, I just have a hard time with that. Like someone says something to you that you don't like, and so you just don't engage them at all? Is that what you are saying when you are talking about not reacting?

When you have a reaction, once you notice it, it's already there, isn't it?

Student: Yes.

You don't get any warning. It's up and running before you know it. And then you notice it and you try to suppress it because you think you should. As if I am telling you that you should do something. But I'm not telling you that you should do something. Whatever comes up, that's you. And that's right now. So experience it completely.

I always say, "Don't express it, don't repress it, just address it." Address it mean to be in inquiry, to be in awareness, in the moment. Don't judge yourself either. Remember I said "without preference." That means that it's not wrong or right. Whatever happens is what happens. It's not a matter that it should be some other way, one way or another way. There is no such thing. Those are just ideas. That's pretty much why you had the reaction to begin with. Because somebody says something that you think they shouldn't say, and it upsets you, so something comes up in you. So experience that. Just be here with it.

Student: You don't express it?

Something may be said, something may not be said. It's OK either way. There's no rules. When I say "don't express it" I mean don't feel compelled to put your upset-ness out there on someone else, like it's their fault that you're upset. You're upset. So, just don't add insult to injury. We all know that phrase. It's a cliché. But how many follow it?

Practice more. Of course, it begins here in the dojo, with your relationships with your fellow students. They're tweaking you all the time, right?

Students: (laughter)

Yeah, lots of laughter. Well, of course, that's what the sangha, the group, is for. That's why every one of you is so important. That's why someone who really tweaks you is a really important part of your life. We need to cherish that person, be very grateful for that person.

There was a person in the dojo many years ago that I didn't like very much, because she got on my nerves. And I actually went to Suzuki Sensei and said, "You've got to get rid of this person. She's causing trouble in the dojo." And he said, "What? She's the most valuable student we have." I was of course thinking I was the most valuable student. That's how arrogant that position is. I was exposed right there. Willingly, ignorantly, I exposed my weakness. But then it was out, and then I could see. "Ah, now I have to deal with this."

Is that helpful?

Student: Yes, I understand.

Student: So Sensei, what if the present moment is not as much fun as some memory that you have and may want to dwell in for a few minutes because it brings you pleasure? I mean, we all have the capacity to remember the past, every one of us, so that's got to be something. I mean, why is it there if it's not something worthwhile?

Have you even heard the phrase "cheap thrills?"

Student: Hai Sensei.

As we practice, we develop a keener and keener, more refined sense of what you call "fun." Of course, in all of our pasts, we have been fairly crude, all of us, at one time or another, and thought it was great fun. When you are a fourteen-year-old boy, everything you do is disgusting to adults, but to you it's the most fun. You know, like mooning a passenger train. Like that's a fun thing to do? Well, fourteen-year-old boys think that is great fun. Any of you ever did that?

Students: (great laughter)

See, you don't want anyone to know, but you do see what I mean. Often, almost one hundred percent of the time, when we are looking back at something that was fun, that was an entirely different person.

Student: Well, what is that?

It's cheap thrills. It's avoidance of what is happening right now. Like, let's say you are sitting in meditation, and you are bored. Bored is an emotion, a very interesting one. Experience that boredom completely. Who is bored? Where did it come from, where does the experience take place, and when it's over where does it go? As soon as you turn the light of awareness on that, boredom ceases instantly. But instead, you take it for granted that you are right to be bored, and flee off to some place in the past to find some cheap thrills to entertain yourself until the clock says you can get up and do something else.

Student: Yeah, until the next good thing comes, and then I'm "present" again.

Or until you surprisingly become enlightened, which you vainly dream might happen by just hangin' out. No. Bringing your self back to the present, and being in this that I've been calling inquiry, or completely awareness, completely engaging whatever is here. Boredom? Fine, engage boredom. Whatever it is. This is the tight rope. And there are no vacations. There's no getting off, because it's always now.

Student: OK Sensei, yeah.

Student: It think this has been asked before, but if being present and being on the tight rope is our natural condition, why is it so hard? And why to we always have thoughts,

and why is it so interesting just to run off and think about things, the future and the past? For me it's really challenging just to be present. Why is it so hard?

Yes, that question gets asked at every single question and answer session, almost without fail. So why don't you tell me, because you are the one who is experiencing that. Why is it so attractive?

Student: For me, I think that my attention is very short, when I try to just be in the moment that I am in. And it's almost a reflex to just go off somewhere else.

You are sort of asking the same question that the last person asked. Again, cheap thrills. In other words, you are not respecting yourself. You exist here and now. You are not respecting this moment, this life that you are living. Because of course if you are off thinking about something else, you're not actually experiencing your life. That's not your life, this is your life. This is where it happens, right here and now. So if you are off in some imagined state, in some la-la land, in the past or dreaming about some future event, you are missing everything. You are missing your life completely. And for most people, that's most of their life. Unless they have some life-threatening experience, and then, when that happens, everyone that's ever had that experience reports, "I was really living in that moment." Because a life and death situation forces your attention to the present. You can't escape it, it's so compelling. And therefore people become addicted to that way of having this experience. And so they climb Mount Everest, or go rock climbing, risk their lives, drive fast race cars. You know? Everybody has their own way of thrill seeking. And that is a way, when you risk your life, you are forcing your attention to the present, and so you get to experience life much more fully than when you are daydreaming about something. Right?

So...you really have a choice here. Most of the choices we make are just conditioned reactions. To have a beer or have a soda is just some sort of program that you have. "I happen to like this or I happen to like that." Just selecting one thing over another, even when choosing a mate. That's all a conditioned response to however you have developed over the years. But you have one true choice that you can make in every single moment. And that is to be present or not, to be in awareness or not. And that choice, you have to make consciously to stay here. You can leave unconsciously, but the choice to Keep One Point, the choice to stay present and inquire into this life, to stay on this tight rope of a moment, this is that choice of a lifetime.

Then this is the choice that you practice over and over and get better and better at making. In this way you can see, when you are suddenly off somewhere else, "Oh, I'm meant to be here." And you're back. You don't say, "Well, OK I'll go back there in a minute. This is really interesting." No. You know it leads nowhere. It's a perfumed harlot that offers you nothing in return. Nothing. Raw sawdust. There's nothing there because it's all imagined. It's like masturbation. It's not the real thing. Therefore you don't choose the false. You choose the real. "Choose the real" means Keep One Point, come back to this moment. No matter what is in the moment, it's always the only place to be, because that's the only place your life has any true meaning.

Of course that's why we practice Ki Breathing and Ki Meditation, or practice any form of meditation. This is to build our capacity of attention, so that we can be here, so that we have the strength to make that decision to stay present, instead of going off somewhere.

OK?

Student: Sensei, as you were talking I had a recollection of something that could be seen as painful and uncomfortable and unhappy. I was hiking in the crater and I aggravated an old knee injury, so I was in a lot of pain. My friends took off, so I did the whole hike by myself, from Sliding Sands up out of the crater. But the pain sharpened my attention. I remember almost every step of the way. And so it's one of the most memorable hikes that I've had.

Congratulations.

Student: It was an extraordinary experience. A couple of very strange things happened. I was climbing up the switch-backs and I had a sensation of climbing a spire. I literally had to stop in the trail and orient myself. I had no choice but to hike, but I did have a choice. So what was occurring to me while you were talking was about choice. Is it a choice to be happy, or is it a choice to extend Ki? And you've already answered it. You have one choice, and it's to be present.

Right. Thank you for that summary.

Student: I was debating in my mind about Ki extending first and then comes happiness, or the other way.

You mean whether Ki extending cause happiness or happiness causes Ki extending?

Student: Yes.

Is that a cause and effect deal there?

Student: Well, my experience is that when I am happy, (and I'm not planning to), when I experience it, I also experience that my Ki is extended.

What do you mean by "Ki is extended?" Happiness is extending Ki. There aren't two things. Happiness and extending Ki are the same thing, in the sense that you are talking about now. So one couldn't cause the other. They are one thing.

I think it's maybe because I used the word "happiness," that it might tend to make you think of it that way, as if you could have extending Ki without happiness or you could have happiness without extending Ki. But in this way I'm using it, it is impossible. Maybe it might be better for us to say "joy" rather than happiness. Because often happiness is thought of as a kind of giddy thing. Happiness sometimes comes from cheap

thrills. But I am talking about true happiness. The deep sense of fulfillment we feel when we are in the present, the tremendous engagement, the life force that we experience, produces a sense of great joy, even though it might not be a giddy happiness at all.

So maybe I could have entitled the chapter “Extending Ki is Joy,” to help people see that there is not two there. It is just this state of being here, which we could call “joy” or we could call “Ki is extending” or we could call “One Point” or we could call “inquiring into the present moment.” That “inquiring” may sound a bit intellectual, but this is not something we do intellectually. You are inquiring from, looking from, the One Point, not from your thought structure.

And this is just a way of expressing what I think you are trying to say. When you find yourself in that condition, you notice you are also in the other condition. So this is just confirmation that happiness is extending Ki.

Student: Yeah.

Is that fair?

Student: Yeah.

Did you have a further question about this?

Student: Well, I will put it another way, which is if something makes me unhappy, if I have a sorrow or something I am not happy about, then I feel my Ki shrinks. And I feel that to, and I don't have control over that.

You don't have control over the thing that happens, and then you see that you react to that, which is called “suffering,” or feeling sad as you said, you see that come up and in a sense you don't have control over that either, it just happens. You just react. It's a pattern that's in you. But you can choose to wallow in that pain and suffering, or you can choose to try to push it away and repress it by intellectually telling yourself that it just doesn't matter, or as Sensei says, “I should do this or that.” I mean you can wail and pull your hair and tell everyone you know about his horrible problem, or keep it to yourself and let it build up until it's really causing you a lot of pain. Or you can just inquire into it. Or, in other words, you can Keep One Point. And once you Keep One Point and inquire into it and experience it for what it is, maybe you won't feel “happiness” but you will have a sense of fullness which even in the worst tragedy we can call “joy.” We can call this experience joy.

I heard a story from a friend of mine who was presiding over a funeral ceremony. A young man had died and they were interring him. This friend is quite adept, and he helped every one come to the present. And later on the boy's mother, the mother of the deceased came up to him at the food gathering afterwards and said to him, “You know the strangest thing happened to me as you were speaking at my son's funeral. I felt a deep sense of joy. And I almost criticized myself for that, because I love my son so

much, and I felt the society wants me to feel suffering. It's not that I felt happy that he was dead, but I felt so in the moment that I experienced this great sense of joy."

So even in a moment of great tragedy, if you are present with it, this can be very satisfactory, very fulfilling...

Student: And enriching.

Very enriching. Yes, thank you.

Student: All this talk has made me jump off the wire to an experience where you were talking about life and death situations. And when I was in the experience I can remember consciously choosing to die in this moment, but in my way. And it was a very calm feeling. I wouldn't call it joy, but it was extremely calm. Is that what you are talking about?

Can you help me understand what you are saying?

Student: My life was threatened, not only my life but also the people around me. And for some reason I just became extremely calm. I've always wondered about this. I was totally calm and I chose, "I will die here and now, but not in some cane field."

My heart is beating now because this is afterward. But during the time, I was never calmer in my whole life. I wouldn't call it joy, but I was aware, conscious, and calm. I don't think I was dead calm. Maybe. I don't know. They left, why I don't know. They squealed their tires and left us. But it was a conscious decision to die there on my terms. I hadn't understood it, for all these years, I hadn't understood that experience.

Until now, of course, right?

Student: Yep.

So I don't really need to say anything about that, do I?

Student: Well, is it just cheap thrills to go back and try to feel that calmness again?

You saw what was necessary to see. You knew what the choice was, and you made it.

Student: Yep.

And once we make that choice, we are in a state of deep calmness, a deep knowing. There is no disturbance. Things may be chaotic around us, but we are calm. That's why people in war often say, "I experienced this tremendous calmness and peace in the midst of battle." This happens. Often people report that.

And I was talking about driving race cars, or climbing a mountain, putting your life at risk. When something happens and you find yourself in this situation, and when you can cause it to happen again, like taking drugs or climbing a mountain or putting yourself in some sort of danger, then it becomes an addiction. But when you are not the cause of it, in other words, when something happens that you didn't see yourself bringing about, then you won't become addicted to it. But you will never forget it all your life, and you will always wonder "How was that able to happen in that moment?"

But now you know. And I know that at other times in your life you have experienced this. In other situations not actually similar to that from an external perspective, but if you looked at it internally, when there is some attempt to take you away, to cause you to disrespect yourself, and you make the choice, "No, I'll die on my own terms, thank you." Immediately you become deeply calm, and enter a deep state of knowing. That's it right there. That's practice. This is pristine awareness and we can all practice it everyday, all day long. That's what we are born for. This is the purpose of being a human being.

OK Thank you very much.