

HKF Taigi Seminar – Q & A

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I heard someone recently call this a question and comment session. I like that, because there are no answers. Another way to look at that is, before you ask the question, you already know the answer. So my comments on your questions are just that.

Traditionally there are several ways for a teacher to respond to a question. One of them is to say nothing at all. Another is to answer the logical aspect of the question, rather directly, if it is a beginning kind of student. Another one is to ask a question in return, that points to the incompleteness of the question that is being asked. And the last is to make a comment that hopefully reveals something that is missing in the persons perception of their own still small voice, which is the voice of wisdom that provides direct knowing to us, that allows us to live our life.

I used to say that people just don't hear that voice. But that's not so. Everyone hears that voice all the time. They just don't know they are hearing that, because they think the "still small voice" has to be something else, something different, something obscure, and something that has to be attained at a higher stage. But actually, you couldn't even get from moment to moment without that voice, because it's not just a voice. It's everything that is. It's who you are. It's what you are. You couldn't live, you couldn't breath, your heart couldn't beat, without this.

I had a dream last night that I was some sort of agent. I worked for HMS, Her Majesty's Service, you know, British. I don't think I was a spy. I'm not sure what, but I was just providing some sort of service. And whatever written material I had with me, papers and so forth, and whatever thing I spoke, immediately it all disintegrated. As soon as I said it, it was gone. As soon as I saw it, it disintegrated. And then I was alone and then there was nothing. There was no trace left behind. What do you think about this?

We like there to be a trace left behind. When we go boldly forward on a path of exploration that has meaning to us, when we want to accomplish something, whether it's physical, ideological, or spiritual, it doesn't matter, we want there to be a record of that. We want that to be known. We tell everyone about it. And hopefully there will even be a newspaper article about it, so people will really know of us and our efforts to help mankind. And when asked about this, we say, "I'm not being arrogant about this. It's just that it has great meaning and I want people to share in that meaning." Actually, there is no trace. When you see traces, those

are manufactured by other people, by us.

So this is what this means that I wrote on the board here: “form is emptiness, emptiness is form, form is not other than emptiness, and emptiness is not other than form.” And that is not esoteric at all. There are no secrets there. When you experience being in your body and experience that what you are experiencing fills the world of your perception, which is as far as you can perceive, are you experiencing form or not form? You are experiencing this body, maybe like you’ve never experienced it before. That’s form. This is a room. There are four walls. That’s form. There is air in it. There’s space in it. That’s form. Space in this sense is form, relative form. And yet if you think about experiencing the form, you put boundaries around it, limiting it. Emptiness just means all of this without any lines drawn around the objects, without any boundaries. There is no separation, and hence to trace. It’s not that we are stupid and don’t see that there is a wall there or a person there. We see that. But the experience of it is without boundary, without limitation, without judgment, without trace. And this is the state of being that we have to be in when someone stands before us with a *bokken*, or when someone comes to attack us, or when someone gives us a Ki Test. Or in other words, whenever there is a challenge in our life, whether it’s perceived as coming from inside or outside, it doesn’t matter. If there is disturbance, there is disturbance. This creates a trace. So in this sense, stability is just being in the experience completely without collapsing down on any particular aspect of the experience.

So that’s the theme of the seminar. I’m sure you must have some penetrating questions about that.

Student: Sensei, throughout the seminar we’ve been told to experience our body from tip of the toes to the top of the head. And often times I question where the boundary between that experience and self-consciousness is. For instance being self conscious about where the weight of the body is falling, whether on the inside of this foot or the outside of the other foot, does the right side feel like the left side, and how to make the whole thing balance. I guess what my question is, what is the difference between this experience that you are teaching us this weekend and self-consciousness, like where you start thinking too much about the rights and the lefts and the ups and the downs?

Thank you. Good question. Remember in the beginning when I said that when you ask a question you already know the answer? You actually just revealed the difference between these two in your question, just now.

Student: You mean when you recognize that you are doing it?

Well yes and no. When you collapse down on some aspect of your experience, that’s self-consciousness. So if you are concerned about some part of your body, or whether the left foot

or right foot is supposed to be forward, if you are caught up in what we are calling self-consciousness, that is a collapsing of our attention down to some aspect of our body action or mental action or emotional action. Or sometimes we are meditating in this dojo and across the street in the gym there is a rock band playing, and we collapse on that sound. So any aspect of experience becomes self-conscious when it dominates and controls our attention.

What I'm wanting to share with you this weekend came about because I asked myself about the teaching. You know, I am an Aikido teacher, so I am always checking to see how it's going for the students. Are they getting this or not, you know? So I thought maybe it would be good to be more direct in the way that I share with you. Like what am I actually doing? I hadn't thought of it exactly that way before, maybe because I was a little locked into the tradition of how to teach. So now this is what I experience. As soon as I wake up in the morning, because I've practiced so many years doing this, immediately I become completely aware of my body, and the room, my wife, the bed. I just relax into that. And then I go shave and do the bathroom things and then sit down and if there has been any disturbance in all of that activity I just check again in the body. And that's all I'm going to do. I am going to sit for an hour and I am going to just rest in this experience of being where and when I am.

The way I expressed this to you was to start very practically to become aware of the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. And this is traditional. I didn't invent that. I'm sure some of you have heard of this before. It's a way to be aware of your whole body. The teacher Gurdjieff used to teach this all the time, how to experience the entire body all at once. But usually for most people that is only an idea. You have to practice experiencing that, like right now while you are listening to my voice. Certainly while I am speaking I am practicing this, and you too, right? So here we are, and that's enough.

Of course things are constantly coming up to challenge this condition, to distract us from this condition. So that's our practice, to be confronted by how we or someone else is sitting, what gestures they are making, what our judgment is of other people's facial expressions or how you see yourself or other people being distracted. What does that do? Do you collapse when you are in this condition? Maybe, probably, but then the more you practice returning to this condition of awareness, the more you build capacity to be in it. So it is self-supporting.

Through the years, you practice and practice in this simple way. I have been doing this for many many years. So you do it through the years too. And you find that, no matter how difficult the situation, you are able to stay in it. And then of course sometimes you are not able. Sometimes something happens to your computer and you just can't handle it. This happens to me when something happens to my computer. My wife says there is something wrong with my "energy" and these kinds of machines. I always seem to break them, or they always seem to break when I am around them. So I have a little electronics issue here, though I don't know

what it is.

Student: There are people like that.

There are people like that? Well maybe I'm one of them. So in any case there is plenty of work available for each of us. I have four children, elderly parents, I'm married, and I have twenty-eight employees. I mean there is plenty of opportunity to practice, even if you don't go outside your own small realm. Yeah? And you don't have to. I mean if you find yourself out there being concerned with something that is happening on the other side of town, let alone on the other side of the world, you are out to lunch in your own life, here and now.

Somebody asked Confucius, "How to we bring peace to the world?" And Confucius said, "We cannot bring peace to the world without bringing peace to our own country. And we cannot bring peace to our own country without bringing peace to our own community. And we cannot bring peace to our own community without bringing peace to our own family. And we cannot bring peace to our own family without bringing peace to our self." It starts and ends here. You don't get to a certain point where you are enlightened, and then you can go out and mess with the world. There is no such thing.

You know in Zen the Bodhisattva vow is, "I vow to save all sentient beings." Do you know this? The question is, "How can I vow to save all sentient beings?" And do you know what the answer is? The answer is, "There are no sentient beings." There is no other possible answer. But that is a mind-bender and counter intuitive at best, an illogical thing to say if you are not in that/this state of mind which is all-inclusive. See, let's extend this. Whatever you are in the presence of is not separate from you. There is no separation, therefore there are no sentient beings. You are always in the presence of you. There is never a moment in your life when you are not. And there is never a moment in your life when you are in the presence of something that you are not in the presence of. So what are you thinking when you see others that need your help? That's just a nice idea that keeps you going and allows you to feel good about yourself until you start practicing.

That was kind of a long answer to your question. But it was a really good question. So did that answer your question?

Student: Yes.

Yes. No collapsing. Of course you will collapse. And when you collapse, just come back, reset. Reset in the sense of, "Ah, this." OK?

Student: I don't know if this is a question. I have been assigned to practice otomo this weekend, and I really noticed that I was completely caught up in my test and whatever I was doing. I

caught myself later on in the night, and noticed that my own little story was going on the whole day instead of doing what I was supposed to be doing.

So you were assigned as an *otomo* {the teacher's attendant} but were instead completely thinking about your own trip.

Student: Yeah, exactly. So I don't know where that awareness thing goes. Because I noticed that the energy in the room was way more yesterday. Does that mean that my awareness was more out, or because I was caught up self-consciously in everything more? I do realize though that I think of myself a whole lot more than I thought I did before yesterday. Even when I am trying to do it right, I am too full of busy-ness and end up stepping on my own foot.

Well, don't be too hard on yourself there. I mean we are all like that. That is the whole point of this practice. For instance even having something called a Taigi Competition, where the temptation is to compete with others, and to compare your self with others, is the same kind of opportunity. If you win and you feel proud of that or if you lose and you feel bummed out about that, then you see, "Oh, this is how I am." And you might not have realized that before. You might have thought, "Oh no, I take Aikido. I'm not like that. I'm not competitive." So we have a competition and we say, "Let's see how you do."

We all have it in us. It doesn't go anywhere. And then it gets called up in us and we see, "Oh, that's me."

The same is true for you with *otomo*. You get to see immediately that you are completely self-obsessed. This is not a criticism. You told me this is what you discovered. And this is why *otomo* is such valuable training, because if you don't realize you are like that, then how can anything change in you? You know, what you don't see will kill you. That's the one that is going to get you, what you don't see about yourself.

You don't ever want to think that you have accomplished something like that, put an end to that kind of reaction, thinking you are not like that any more. There is a story about an Indian master named Sri Ramakrishna who lived with his wife Sarada Devi, who was known to be a very beautiful woman. They were both chaste. They never had any sexual or intimate physical relations in their life. And that was part of their vows. He was a monk and she was a nun. But they still slept in the same bed. And one day he was lecturing to his students and a student asked him, "Is it possible to completely get beyond sexual desire?" And Sri Ramakrishna said, "Of course. I've done it." And that night he went crazy. So he came back the next day and said to the students, "I am so sorry. I spoke incorrectly yesterday." Nothing ever goes away. As soon as you think you've mastered something, then you've made two again. "I've mastered it." You've made it separate. As long as you own it, it's not separate from you. But when you say you've conquered it, you make it separate, and it will get you. You've created an enemy. There

is no enemy, but you've created one.

Student: That reminds me, there is a point I've been thinking about. Aikido never explicitly brings any teaching around sex. And yet it is a very difficult energy to come to terms with in your self. Is there a reason for that?

Well, I can think of a lot of things that Aikido doesn't address directly, like food addictions or food issues, and etc. You know, one time I was driving along with Suzuki Sensei, and as usual he was teaching me how to teach. And he said, "Don't ever tell your students that they should do this or do that in their private lives. It's none of your business. Show them the way to be, how to Extend Ki, how to Keep One Point." So then the student takes that understanding, that experience, into their own private and intimate lives with their own personal relationships with food, drink, sex, parents, children, etc. and then they will see what it's like to experience all of these things in awareness.

Sometimes in private meetings someone will ask a kind of personal question, something about their own lives. I always answer in a general way. What I mean is, when someone is asking about a specific issue, they are collapsing down on that issue. That's why it's a problem. When you have a problem, it means your mind is stuck on that. So then I always try to help them let their experience be more open. Because everything and anything can become an issue, even if it is not an issue, if you start dealing with it, you may make it one. The point is, no matter where you are or what you are doing, to be in awareness, to be completely in your body, in the room, and in this moment, not some other place, not some other time, and not collapsed down on any idea about that or judgment of that or even really cool philosophy about that. Just do it. Just experience it. OK?

Student: OK. Thank you.

Student: Sensei, you were talking about a change a little bit there. When you start to pay attention to yourself and you see that you are totally self-absorbed. Maybe I have a misconception, that when you begin to recognize yourself as being self-absorbed like that, that change happens from that. And yet I don't experience that in my life. So maybe I just have a misconception that the recognizing of my self-absorption should automatically lead to some change.

Oh yes. If I notice that I'm an idiot, how come I'm still an idiot?

Student: Yeah, thank you. Why the repetition once the awareness has been presented to me?

Well, it's seeing all of it. If you have some kind of a habitual way of seeing, if you are a racist, seeing people of color a certain way, or a misogynist, seeing people of the opposite gender a

certain way, some pattern of reactivity that you have grown up with, noticing it may not be enough. You might notice it and like it. Or you might notice it and think, "Well, there is nothing I can do about that. It's just too ingrained." We really have to see why it is that we are doing that.

There is no general thing such as "being an idiot." There are specific moments of idiocy, if you want to put it that way. I know about them. You know, I'm sixty six years old, sixty six years of having to notice more and more, deeper and deeper, forms of (since we are using that word) idiocy, in other words doing something that is really not in anybody's best interest.

We want to not just notice the effect. "I see this thing is taking effect in me in this moment. I am engaged in this craziness." But what is the genesis of that? See? Why am I doing that? And we aren't looking for some intellectual answer, but actually what is the genesis of that. What causes me, or what is the origin of me thinking people of different races are inferior to me, or superior to me (there's that too). Or that women are somehow less than, or even different than...We have all of these social categories, like "men are from Mars and women are from Venus." It's all bullshit.

And again, you know the answer to that already, before you ask me. And I don't want to discourage people from asking questions by my saying this, but because of the nature of Alex's practice I am pointing it out. And I don't want to discourage you, Alex, from asking questions either. But notice, what is the genesis, the origin, of that question? What does it originally come out of?

Don't answer me. It's just something to consider. And when you see something that is a little jarring in your personality or in your actions, your words, ask "What is the genesis, the origin of this? What is this coming from?" Don't try to change it. Don't say "That's bad and I don't want to do that any more." Find out what's going on first. Because we are not very perceptive, us human beings, and have to be careful about our judgment. We judge ourselves and others, at least half of the time, incorrectly. We have no idea. That's why when you see a teacher, for instance, and you think that she or he ought to act a certain way, you may not actually be properly prepared to make that judgment. For instance, some time a teacher might just whack someone in the face, with compassion. You hear about this kind of thing all the time. I haven't done it yet. But you do hear about this, particularly in Buddhism. Or maybe you hear of some other weird thing that is going on. But you don't know. Forget the teacher. You don't even know about your friends. We only have our own self to deal with, and we don't do a very good job with that. All of this judgment about other people and their actions and their beliefs and their ethos, forget it. We don't know. We have no idea.

Out of that kind of judgment come all wars. That's why Confucius says it starts with you and

ends with you.

Student: Sensei we talked a lot this weekend about this thing of competition and how we get attached to competing in a competition, which is sort of a contradiction of terms in a way. We are coming to compete in how well we don't compete. We talk about this all the time, I know, but I think it is still a sort of block in our lives and it displays this tendency we have to be afraid of this encounter called "Taigi Competition," this winning or losing, doing well or not doing well. It's all set up with judges and awards that all prompt this reaction in us. You have spent a lot of time addressing that for us. But, I guess if you don't show up then you don't really understand the challenge that is here to compete without competing.

Exactly. If you don't sign up for otomo, you are never going to know how obsessed you are. If you don't win and lose in this Taigi situation, you'll never know that to react to that is your very nature.

Student: It seems like "showing up" is much more important than winning or even doing well. Because at least it allows you to learn that the real purpose isn't winning. The real purpose is to show you what you are up against, within yourself, in this arena. And that arena doesn't get presented every day as intensely as it does in the Taigi Competition. So I guess it's more of an observation, but how does an instructor take that back to their students and show them the greater purpose of showing up.

Oh, good question. And of course if you are an instructor and you didn't show up this weekend, then you won't be able to share that with your students. Everybody knows already that "showing up" starts with being present in the room. That's the beginning of the practice that we have been going through. I've just been showing you all morning how to actually show up. So that's how to show others. You take the student and you help her or him initiate that practice of showing up, of how to be present. And then let them begin toying with that, practicing with that, fooling with it, trying it out in different kinds of circumstances. Of course in the dojo you can constantly remind them to be attentively present. But then when they are on their own, they are doing their own practice. You can choose to continue practicing in your daily life, or not.

So. Please make use of this practice. To my way of seeing, it is the essential practice of life. There is nothing else to do but show up, nothing else to do but be present. And then as this present unfolds, we discover what further might be required, and not before. And if we don't have a personal agenda about all of that, then we can always be a response to the difficulties that others are having, instead of dealing with our own issues all the time.

Thank you very much.

