

Letting Go Discussion – Ch. 16

Freedom

July 30, 2010

Good evening. Tonight we are discussing chapter 16 of our book, *Letting Go*, which is entitled “Freedom.”

The cover of the book, *Letting Go*, shows some falling leaves, or a leaf shown in a series of stages of falling. This was designed, as you know, by our good friend and student Joelle Perz. And when we were trying to design what would an appropriate cover for a book called *Letting Go*, I said something to her that letting go, as it is expressed in this book, is best represented by a leaf naturally falling from a tree at the right time.

In our culture, in our society, last time we were talking about competition, and being the best one, being in the best dojo, having the best school, etc. All of that comes out of a feeling of inferiority, and wanting to somehow grasp some sense of superiority. Of course, as long as we are going for superiority that means we have inferiority complex. One can't exist without the other. Just like there is no such thing as small unless you compare it with something bigger, and there is no such thing as big unless you compare it with something smaller. Such a thing as big doesn't exist by itself. Such a thing as superior or inferior just doesn't make any sense by itself. It only exists in relation to something, its opposite.

This is the relative condition that we perceive and speak about in our world. So when we say the word “freedom,” we are usually meaning as opposed to no freedom, or bondage, lack of civil rights, etc. We have different kinds of lack of freedom, some of them very minor, like when you are in a formal setting and you have to go to the bathroom, but you don't have the freedom to do that until the class is over. This is a fairly minor difficulty and usually can be handled. And then we have major restrictions of freedom that you might have in a dictatorship or some sort of undemocratic, some militarism imposed on us.

Naturally, we don't like to not have relative freedom. And I don't have anything to say about that kind of freedom. Of course, I am just like everyone else. I like to have relative freedom. So if I am given a choice, I suppose I would like to have more freedom rather than less freedom. But that is not what this chapter is about.

This chapter is about true freedom. The difference between true freedom and relative freedom is kind of like the difference between *taiga* and *shoga*, or the difference between *shugyo* training and *keiko* training. The difficult thing to understand about this *taiga* world, or what Tohei Sensei referred to as the absolute universe, as opposed to *shoga*, which he referred to as the relative universe, or relative world, or relative

existence, is that when we hear it that way, because we are used to thinking in these relative terms, we think there is *shoga*, the relative world, and the somewhere offset against that is *taiga*, this absolute world. So it's difficult sometimes for us to grasp that that's not how it is. The *shoga* or relative world does not exist on its own, outside of this absolute. As Tohei Sensei talks about *taiga*, he means everything that is, nothing left out. And he means everything that isn't, nothing included. So the *taiga* encloses and includes the *shoga* world. It's kind of a paradox, because it's everything there is and it's nothing, both at the same time.

So true freedom is like this. That's why I referred to *shugyo* training. *Keiko* training is everything we do to make ourselves a better human being. All of our efforts, whether in the dojo or out in the world, everything we do to improve our lot and give ourselves, well perhaps more relative freedom, is *keiko*. *Shugyo* only happens in the moment, at the right time, all by itself. True freedom only exists as its own thing. It isn't something that we can acquire. There is not even some thing to realize there, in the sense of an investment. There is no return. There is nothing to do. Any effort that we make is *keiko*. Any effort that we make is to improve our lot, which means that no matter how free you get, it's still not true freedom. It's just a much higher state of relative freedom.

So this is similar to the examples you have heard me give so many times when you are practicing in the dojo and you get better and better at something, but no matter how good you get at cutting *bokken*, or no matter how excellent you are at doing *kokyū dosa*, it's not the thing itself. It's not true freedom. It's not *shugyo* until it is. The teacher might recognize it in you and say something or he might not. My stories always include the teacher recognizing that and saying it, that's nice. Shinichi Sensei told the story about doing *kokyū dosa* with his father and he was very good at it and became better and better at it and finally his father just said, "Listen, you don't understand at all." In other words, it's not about some relative condition. It's altogether different than that, although, just like *taiga* and *shoga*, it includes everything in that relative condition of excellence. If you don't do that training to become excellent, you'll never understand anyway. It's not like, "Oh, well it just happens naturally, like a leaf falling from the tree, so I can just sit on the couch and have a beer and at some time I'll just wake up, I'll just get it." But as we all know, that doesn't work either. So, in a sense, we're kind of damned if you do and damned if you don't here. Because no matter what effort you make, it's not leading toward that thing directly, it's just leading toward a more and more refined effort that never leads to any culmination. No matter how much money you get, it's not enough. No matter how much freedom you have, you always want more. In fact, the more freedom you get, the more you require. So this is a sort of bottomless pit, and this is the way everything is in our life. This is why we are never satisfied, and why we feel something missing. And no matter how well respected we are, no matter how wealthy we are, no matter how intelligent we are, no matter how much we study, we never find any satisfaction. Oh, we find some temporary satisfaction, but that is like temporary freedom. It always goes away. There is always someone more intelligent, there's somebody more wealthy, there's somebody more highly respected, so you are just not respected enough yet.

So freedom is really the highest form of letting go, because it doesn't involve doing anything. There is no way to obtain it. In other words, it's not something to do, or something to gain, or something to work out. It's a state of being that already exists.

OK, so I'll read something:

Freedom

We have the idea that in order to evolve or develop we have to get rid of bad habits. This is a very common and popular idea, but can be a big mistake. Why? Because this is looking only from a relative perspective. Our culturally conditioned idea is that freedom is an activity thing. For instance, freedom to many of us means to choose this activity over that activity. We feel we need to be free to think the way we want to think, say what we want to say; have freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to carry arms, etc. — all these freedoms. In the West, and increasingly in the world today, the idea of freedom often has to do only with activity choices. This is a kind of freedom. It is a relative freedom. But it is not Absolute freedom. Actually that kind of relative freedom is still bondage, because it is based on thinking mind. Real freedom is being free from thinking mind. Freedom is being free from a mind full of, and tied to, thoughts, opinions, issues, ideas, philosophies, commitments, promises, ideals. But this is a very difficult thing, this kind of freedom.

In the beginning, we have etiquette in the dojo. You do it because you are supposed to, or because the teacher tells you to. And you do it, without saying anything. But do you do it with no thinking; no opinion about it? How many of you is that easy for? You feel funny when you are compelled to do something by someone or something seen as outside of you. You also feel funny when you are required to do something other than what you are already doing.

True etiquette is based upon the practice of being present, and operating only in this moment and only according to what is brought to us. If we can do that, then we don't have to be told how to make a decision as to this or that. We always know. If you are here in the present, you always know. It is the same for everyone, in all times and all places. Once you understand, and you are doing the practice, then automatically you always have good etiquette. Even if you don't know what the etiquette should be, and you are not even thinking about such a thing, still you will naturally have good etiquette. And naturally you will preserve and cherish and maintain the traditions of this training. Because the traditions of this training all arise out of the Way, arise out of the practice. If the practice is true, the important traditions are always honored.

That is exactly how this dojo has evolved, within and without. That's what my story about teaching is saying. Automatically things die and new things are born. It is important to notice that the way a dojo develops is the same as the way you develop as an individual. And the one that tries to get rid of delusion is the deluded one. That is the delusion itself: that you can get rid of delusion. Who do you think you are? Only notice, "Oh, this is delusion." Then never mind. Things are evolving as they are. That is this process we live in called life. It is only that our small-minded efforts block and misdirect the natural energy that flows into this process. You actually don't have to do anything, but everything has to be done. If you see things out of balance, just be in balance. The work has to be done. But it is done by simply being present,. This is right living.

Now obviously this is a very long chapter, and I didn't read all of it. It don't have time here to read all of every chapter. So I tried to pick aspects of this chapter, as I usually do, that point to the most important aspects of the subject, in this case freedom.

You've all heard me so many times. You've heard me talk like this, you've heard me pointing to this thing that can't be talked about. I notice that I am of course repeating it over and over and I wonder, so how's it going?

I think I'll just ask you if you have any questions now.

Student: I was recently on a retreat, and the first few days I was feeling very expansive and free and light, and then something happened where I had to confront someone and then someone else confronted me, and criticized me, and I just completely lost that lightness and freedom and expansiveness. You know, it brought up this energy in me that's trying to do it right. I feel free if I'm in harmony and balance. But as soon as someone reflects to me that I may not be, then I get on my own case. And for two days I struggled with this, and I couldn't free myself from it. So I talked to the teacher about it and it dispelled the image I was holding in my mind. So then I became light again. But I am dependent on the outside in this way, for his reflection that what I was imagining wasn't the case. So I think before in these discussions I brought up the subject of the superego, as the part of us that really keeps us from this rhythm. I do feel very free from it, mostly, but in that instance, that's what grabbed me, and suddenly I wasn't so light and expansive. It showed me that it gets more and more subtle as we progress.

Maybe you want to say exactly what you mean by the superego.

Student: The superego is that inner critic, or the part that is evaluating me according to some standard that it is holding. It's saying that this is the ideal that I should be aspiring to and working toward. I didn't feel it as much as a voice, but I definitely felt it as a contraction that robbed me of the freedom I was feeling.

So you said that you were dependent upon the outside.

Student: I was doing fine until someone from the outside criticized me. Then I lost my freedom. And then someone on the outside gave it back to me.

Somebody on the outside had to fix you because somebody on the outside caused that state.

Student: Well yes, it's a whole situation.

I want to clarify this for everyone, since everyone doesn't use the same language. Somebody comes along and criticizes you, and as I understand what you are saying, it activates what you call the superego, or the part of you that....

Student: That says I did it wrong again. I didn't follow the proper etiquette or the protocol.

And they are pointing this out to you. And so you had to go to the teacher and say, "Help, I'm attacking myself here. What should I do?" And he told you to let it go.

Student: Well, he said that it would have been better had I come to him to begin with. But it did work out fine.

OK. So, next time this happens, which of course it will, he's not likely to be around. So what's the solution?

Student: Well in that situation I felt that I was doing what was appropriate, and somebody else said it was not.

What I mean is, always this is going to happen to us. We think we're doing all right, and we either are or not, (we are not often a good judge of that), but somebody doesn't think so. And if we let that criticism affect us, if we take that personally, then it activates that part of our self that is self-critical. So, what is the solution when we don't have someone near to help and remind us to let go of that sort of silliness? Because, actually let's face it, everybody has this problem. Everybody is nodding his or her head here, right? I mean we all have this same situation occurring again and again. And I have just finished saying that there is really nothing that you can do to get this kind of freedom, except to be like the falling leaf, or like the tree it comes from, or then like the whole process. Let go, means let go of trying to do anything. Which includes fixing yourself up, because you don't see that you are acting appropriately.

We talk a lot about "what" and "how." We have just been referring to this recently at the seminar in Honolulu because Shinichi Tohei Sensei brought it up in Boulder, Colorado, "What is the difference between the what and the how?" The what is the state of freedom. The how is, what do you do to get there? So what is that how, in this case?

Student: I feel the how for me is my commitment to my practice. And that's what has provided more space for me where I am not grabbed or I am not as cruel to myself as I

have been in the past. Because I am understanding that more.

Somehow it has come about for all of us here, that we are not as hard on ourselves as we used to be. Is that fair to say? Anybody here is still hammering their self just as much as they were when they first started training?

Student: Maybe David.

Maybe David? No, I don't think so. Not as much as you used to, yes?

Student: No, not as much.

So what has happened? Prakash says that it is his commitment to his training. Of course that's a way of saying it. But what is that really saying?

Student: Show up.

Yeah, that's number one. Number two?

Student: Open.

Number three, serve whatever is happening, without editing of any kind, and number four, accept the results.

Student: I thought it was an "f." The acronym was "s.o.f.a." that you wrote on the board.

Oh yes, following. Show up, open, follow or serve the present, and accept. So you remembered it by sofa. That's a good one, easy to remember. So it's either sofa or sosa. Sofa may be easier.

So in other words, yeah, this is the how. The intensity of that, or the capacity of each of us to engage in this practice, which is just those four elements of living, those are the four aspects of this practice, the degree of intensity that we engage in and the capacity that we have to engage depends upon how deep our experience of this freedom, or lightness of being that you are talking about, is. You mentioned commitment. We have willingness, know-how, and capacity. We have to be willing to practice, and almost everybody here is. You have to have some semblance of know-how, and those four aspects of our training are the know-how, and then of course the more you do the practice the more you develop capacity or strength. It's like lifting weights. You become more capable, stonger. And so your experience becomes deeper and deeper throughout your life.

I said in the chapter that when you see there is deluded thinking, and there will be, you don't have to get rid of the delusion. It's delusional to think you can get rid of delusion. Any effort in that direction is going rapidly in the wrong direction. Just notice, "Ah." In

other words, we don't have to be perfect to be light and free. So when someone points out an error to us, we can just agree, "Yeah, I accept that. That's right." It doesn't change our birthright, which is our original condition. Just because we are accused of something, that doesn't actually change anything. There is no such thing as perfection. I mean what is that? That is versus non-perfection. That's just a relative condition. And this state of freedom is not controlled by or influenced by or manipulated by the relative world. It doesn't come from, and can not be taken away by, the relative world, meaning other people or life conditions. Whether it's illness or some other fate that might befall us, it doesn't matter. If it contradicts this in us, then the state we are experiencing is not true freedom.

Student: I'll always remember Suzuki Sensei saying "Easy come, easy go." That is what I was feeling. I thought it was wonderful to feel that free. But in an instant it was gone and I was really in hell.

Yeah, that's why they call it "slavery." OK, thank you.

Student: This is a question, but it is also an experience. A couple of weeks ago I told you that I was struggling with my training, that I had kind of hit a wall. And you told me to just keep sitting. So, I was sitting more, and then I noticed, maybe I was always struggling like this, and only now I am noticing it. And bang, all of a sudden the struggling wasn't so much struggling, and my training got freer, and my sitting too. I didn't try to do it so perfectly all that time. I just started slow with my breathing, like ten seconds in and out for a while, and then it would gradually go to twelve and then fifteen to twenty. And when I noticed a little struggling, then I would take a break and then breathe again and gradually build up again. And then I saw that it wasn't so bad, and I wasn't so captive to that struggle.

Yeah, that's very close to exactly what I am talking about. I don't think you really have a question there. I'm so glad that you told me that. It just comes about all by itself, through noticing, as you said. It suddenly occurred to you that it was probably always going on, and you just didn't notice.

It's like when the student in Honolulu had that break through when we did a group sitting. He suddenly opened his eyes and the whole experience of his physical universe, his senses, his feelings, his thoughts, everything had completely changed and he was wondering, "Was it always this beautiful and I just didn't notice? Or does this way I am feeling right now make it like that?" Maybe you remember, I asked that question of the group, and finally we realized that it is sort of a moot point. The point is that when we become freer and lighter in our being, we experience the world in a completely different way. And as I'll say again, to the degree that we are able to practice, to the depth of our capacity, to that degree we are able to experience what's actually happening, or what's actually here. And there is no one that can say, "I get it." No one can say, "I see how it really is." Because there is always more to peel away.

It sounds so much like a relative condition, that's getting better and better, but the

paradox is that if you approach it as a relative condition it doesn't go anywhere. It's fruitless. So this paradox is what this whole book is about. It's what the practice is all about. And I really only wrote the book because I noticed that so many of us forget that is what the practice is about and are fully engaged in relatively improving ourselves and don't get that it is letting go of that that allows it. While still practicing ten thousand times, we let go of the result of that. This allows us to experience this lightness of being, (such a wonderfully descriptive phrase), and freedom, that Prakash was sharing with us.

Thank you .

Student: I'm confused, Sensei. I am just a bit bewildered about exactly what is the nature of this struggle. I am a bit perplexed about freedom. I guess I want to sort things out in my life but I find I am just going in circles. I can see that there is nothing to fix, really. I mean I can see it as it is and accept it. But I keep coming back to needing to fix this, do better at that. Why do I see my life as needing to be fixed? It always comes up. Something is wrong. I need to do something better, or I could have done this, I should be doing that. And I read this and I listen to you and I understand that, yeah, it's really a trap. I do believe that there is nothing to fix, and yet my mind still finds problems.

Thich Nhat Hanh said, "Everyone wants peace, but nobody is ready to settle for it." You can substitute the word "freedom" for the word "peace" there. For most of us, it's just far too boring. I mean, when I give you the four aspects of practice, the solution to your problem, my friend, is practice. The practice is those four aspects, showing up, opening, serving the moment, and accepting the result without comment or reflection. That's practice. So the solution to your problem is, "Please just practice." When you actually engage in that, willingly, with your whole heart, whole mind, and whole body, the part of you that Prakash calls the superego that is always trying to fix things, that part of you doesn't have a voice. Because that self-critical voice doesn't exist within our practice. There is no place for it. It's not that it's wrong. It just doesn't exist in actual practice. It only arises when we fall off of the tightrope, or fall off of the horse, when we are not practicing. OK?

So what I am saying is that when and if you engage in this practice, as I am recommending that you do, as much as possible from moment to moment, then you are very soon going to notice all the parts of you that don't actually want to practice. And at the same time you are going to notice why they don't want to practice. And that's the practice, right there. There isn't anything more. You don't have to do anything about any of that. There is nothing to do. The trap is, the lie is, that you have to not just find out what's wrong with you but do something about it.

Student: Exactly. There is always something I am doing, or something that I am not doing, that is screwing it all up.

And the advice others give you is always that. Not only that there is something wrong with you, but that you need to fix it, and sooner rather than later. That's that way people who are not practicing talk. And this is us. When we are not practicing, that's how we talk and that's how we think. That's what we do to ourselves when we are not practicing and that's what we do to others, even people we love, when we are not practicing. And it's very simple, but it is very difficult. And becoming discouraged by that difficulty is just more of that superego in action. It's just more of that part of us that can't stand to be peaceful.

Student: Yeah, there is something about it that we all get some sort of satisfaction out of be-rating ourselves, finding something to fix, the familiarity of that critic. Something is there that we want to serve. But I see that is not part of the practice.

Well, it doesn't need to be fought against, because it doesn't exist as long as you are practicing. And if you are engaged in it, in any way, you are not practicing. If it can get your attention, in any way, love it or hate it, it's got your goose. You've had it. You are not practicing. So just practice. That is very simple and straightforward and you can follow that. Right? This is not confusing at all.

Student: So this is just the way I am, always have been, always will be. I need to just keep showing up. Is that valid?

Yeah. It's kind of like having a bad leg, but you've got to get from here to there. Now you can just walk from here to there as best you can. Of course the bad leg is going to make itself known. You'll notice that. But if you say, "Oh no, it's too painful. I can't do this," then you are stuck in the mud. But if you just walk, the more you walk, the more healthy your leg gets, until one day you don't notice your bad knee any more. It's just not around. Now, if you put some attention back on it, you can experience the pain again. But there is no room in the practice for this.

I'm using this as a metaphor, so don't get into thinking that you don't have to have a broken arm set because you can just practice through it. No, please have it set and then continue to practice. OK?

Student: Thank you.

Student: I think it was Trumpa Rimpoche that said "Practice is just one insult after another." The only thing I can seem to find, there is just nothing but reactivity. Reactivity, reactivity, reactivity. Is there anything I am missing, because that is all I can seem to find in my practice? One reaction after another....

What's your question?

Student: Is there anything else? Practice is just that?

Each of us is many different views, let's say. And each of those views is a structure, a

way of seeing the world, requiring that the world be. These are belief structures. And included in these is a reaction to the world, when the world doesn't fulfill its requirements from our point of view. And we have who knows how many of these, and some of them even directly contradict each other. One time it has to be this way, and another time it has to be just the opposite. All of these are selves, or belief structures. All of these things we think we are, and I am not just talking only about teacher, student, father, brother, son, husband, wife, sister, etc. I am not talking about just those, thought those are real ones. But there are other much more subtle ones, like requiring that things be a certain way in order for us to feel right, or free and open. So, in other words, we may be experiencing true freedom, but we are still troubled by a belief about it, so it requires a certain condition in the external world to prevail for us. That's why we have seminars or retreats. Because we can all agree to create and maintain this free condition, and we can all experience it. But when somebody steps right up in the middle of that and goes, "I don't like what you are doing here," then it blows the whole thing and we have to find a way to return to our peaceful condition, our light and airy freedom.

These personalities, or these selves, are myriad, and always acting, constantly. That's what *samsara* means, as you know. *Samsara* just means a constant moving from one thing to another. That's what the word is describing, the life of suffering in the relative condition. All we are doing is cycling through these various personalities which have all of these various requirements in order to exist for us. Some of them we are really familiar with and we cycle through the same things every day, over waking up, over breathing, over brushing our teeth, over first sighting your partner, over breakfast, driving, starting work, the whole thing. There is a personality for each of those and there are requirements that go with that. So if things are going well, you may be feeling good, but that's still reactive. If things are not going well, you may be feeling shitty, and it's just a reaction. You are just identifying with this temporary personality. That's why, when we practice the four aspects, show up, open, serve, accept, there is no room for a single personality to dominate and control our life. In other words, it's a practice of freedom, so there is no slavery to one of these personalities that dominate and control our lives. Many of these we don't even recognize that we are a slave to. We don't necessarily see that they are actually causing us to be reactive. Whenever we point to someone else and say, "You're making me feel this way," or "This is your fault," that's when we have dodged something in our self that we don't want to look at or notice. This is an unseen personality that we are enslaved by. We call those reactive patterns, and they cause us to react in both directions, plus and minus. Which is why the practice is so important, because as I am sure you are noticing, without it, there is only insanity.

Student: So it kind of goes back to what Dave was saying about when he was struggling with his breathing. You just don't try to control it so much.

Exactly.

So this was very good session. Once again, we came to the point of seeing how simple it is, and how all of us are very complex, multi-selved beings with all of this reactivity,

and the only recourse is just to practice. And those four aspects of practice are a certain way, known to mankind for ages, a very effective way, to practice, and this happens to fit exactly right into Shinshin Toitsu Aikido.

Thank you very much.