

**St. Petersburg, Russia**  
**Question and Answer Session**  
**Sunday, Sept. 19, 2010**  
**C. Curtis**

Good afternoon.

This is the last of four seminars in a row that I have been teaching, and this is the biggest, with four days and more than sixty people attending. And it is certainly the furthest away from my home in Hawaii (fourteen hours difference). So this is really wonderful for me as a big culmination of a lot of teaching and traveling. As I said last night, it is very rewarding for me to see how open and hungry and sincere you all are, and this affects the nature of my teaching. Believe me, I teach a lot of seminars every year everywhere around, and so I am very sensitive to the kind of mind the students have in different places and different times. And even though your teacher, Igor Ostroumov Sensei, as been telling me what super people you are, and what a great job he has done teaching you, of course I didn't know until I came. So I have to say that, even though he and I have been friends for years, I now have a new level of respect for him because by watching you I can see the kind of teacher he is.

It's not so important whether one teacher says the hand should be this way and another teacher says the hand should be that way. Any way is OK as long as you Keep One Point. So the kind of teacher that is teaching you the fundamental principle of the practice is the kind of teacher you want to stay with. And I can see that this is what he has been doing, under the guidance of his teacher, David Shaner Sensei, because I can see the kind of character that you all have. And there is no way this can be possible any other way.

I think you will agree that, when you come into this group, you let something go. And in return you get some feeling of unity or togetherness. Yeah? And this is precious, and it's just a little tiny taste of Unification. In the beginning this kind of experience depends very much upon your relationship with other people. I guess I mean that we learn through others, even though ultimately we are each born alone and we each die alone. And all the time in between we are each essentially alone. But that's not bad news. It's just the way it is. All these other people are still here. Don't you see? So Unification doesn't mean just somehow being physically or emotionally close with every other person that you meet. This is not Unification, even though it's a wonderful experience, and very important for your personal development, the development of the dojo, and of the Ki Federation. The purpose of my teaching over the last four days has been to help you to understand, I hope, that ultimately there is just the experience of being present in the moment. And the more calm you are and the more aware you are the more you get to participate in this life, which is always happening only in this moment.

So I think that doesn't leave anybody out, including each of you. I said earlier that everybody has asked me all the good questions already during the seminar, so I hope you have some good ones left.

OK, so please, take it easy on me. Yes?

*Sensei: Would you explain the meaning of Norito?*

The word *Norito* means “word celebration.” This *Norito* is ancient Japanese. Most modern Japanese people cannot understand “*takama no harani ka mura masuka...*” They don’t know what that says. But if you really want to know every word, you can look it up on the internet and it will tell you. I explained this morning what the *Sokushin no Gyo* phrase, “*to ho ka mi e mi ta me*” meant. “With the sharp sword of my will, I penetrate the mirror universe, and polish my character like a beautiful crystal ball.” Maybe you noticed that these words are repeated here and there throughout the *Norito*. So basically the whole of *Norito* says the same thing, with some elaboration.

The purpose of *Norito* is that, when you do *Sokushin no Gyo*, you bring up some very powerful emotions. So *Norito* is a very important part of this, in my opinion and my teacher’s opinion. When I say, “*Harai tamaye, Kiyomi tamaye,*” this means “wash away, clear away.” So the *Norito* is a big wave of energy that passes through you. You don’t have to understand the words. You just sit and allow this wave to wash through you and all of this stuff that’s come up during this intense experience is washed away.

As an example: One morning, many years ago, my wife and I woke up Sunday morning early and had some disagreement about something. This was when Suzuki Sensei was leading *Sokushin no Gyo*. We were very stubborn about our argument that morning, and she wouldn’t back down and I wouldn’t back down. It was very difficult. We don’t drive in the same car to the dojo because I leave much earlier, so I was alone driving to the dojo. You know the bad feeling in the stomach when you became angry at someone and you didn’t forgive them before you left them? Big mistake. But the story was still affecting me. “Why did she say that? How could she say that to me?” At any rate, we got to the dojo and first thing, of course, is *Shokushin no Gyo*. And then, at the end, Suzuki Sensei read *Norito*, and we looked at each other, my wife and I, and we thought, “How amazing!” Because our anger was completely gone, every shred of it.

This taught me a lot more than the value of *Norito*, though that was important. I learned that day that there is not substance to that kind of anger and disagreement. It’s like a cloud. There’s nothing there. It’s a complete waste of energy. So I was really ecstatic when I learned this that morning many years ago.

So that is the meaning and purpose of *Norito*.

*Student: I wanted to ask, what is the position of a person who attained such a level of enlightenment as you? How do you relate to such a thing as world conflict and everyday conflict around you? How do you behave, how do you act, in the face of that situation?*

I don’t know.

*Student: Well, how did you act, in some instance the past?*

In what instance? Give me a specific circumstance. See, you cannot say, because you don't know my life. So you are only saying "as if" you know. You are asking me for some kind of intellectual idea about how to be in relation to certain circumstances.

But that's not it. I don't know how to be, ahead of time. I'm doing my best to be free of how to be. I spent my life being "how to be." And obviously I didn't like it very well. It made me suffer. I'm not saying it's the society's fault so much. I mean I accepted my parent's instructions about how to be a good boy and do the right thing at the right time and in the right way, you know? So I was responsible for you conditioning.

Maybe someone could close these drapes. This is hard with the sun shining in your eyes. (A student starts to close the drapes but the clouds cover the sun before the drapes are closed.) Ah, it's god's curtain.

So, I appreciate what you are asking, and I know that everyone has these kinds of questions. First of all, I'm just like you, though perhaps I have been more radically affected by this practice. And perhaps most of you have not yet been radically changed. But, in the past, I have been just as selfish, foolish, and deluded as everyone else. I just consider myself to be a practitioner, a practitioner of Aikido. When someone asks, I just say that I practice Aikido. So this kind of thing that I am sharing with you during the seminar is that you can't stand outside of it and look at it accurately. If you try to decide how to be, this will never happen. The future doesn't ever happen. It's always now. And how many times (you already know this) when you try to figure out what's the right way to be in response to something and you arrive there and it's not like that anyway? Something else happens, some different emotion, or the other person says something different than you planned on, some different circumstance. I just told you to close the drapes and then the clouds cover the sun. Things are constantly changing.

So I am sorry if I can't help you in the direct way that you are wanting, but I hope that indirectly you can understand the kind of importance I am placing on actual experiential practice.

*Student: May I just clarify? What's the difference between accepting, and indifference?*

Right. As an example, if you think you are too fat, and you just resign yourself to "Oh shit, I'm too fat and there's nothing I can do about it. I accept it." This is not acceptance.

It's obvious, the difference, isn't it? We all know already that this is not acceptance. Sometimes it's something you can do about changing, if you really don't like however you are. If your hair is too curly you can get it straightened. If your hair is too straight you can get it curled. But true acceptance is the fourth part of the four aspects of practice. So...show up, open, follow the way, and accept the results. So accept in this

case means, not just without attempting to alter the results in any way, but to accept them without any emotional reservation. Accept, means to accept completely. This is the way I'm going to look, I'm afraid. It's not going to be any different. You look in the mirror and think, "I wish...I wish." But once you can accept, then you forget. Anything that is not truly accepted is still hanging around in you, causing some difficulty of some kind. Once you truly accept what is, then it's gone. Then you don't carry all of this baggage, more and more, as you go through your life. You know, like, "Well, that's OK, but I would have liked it better if this happened."

*Student: How do you accept all the suffering that happens in the world? It's quite painful.*

Did anybody say it shouldn't be painful? "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden" is I think the name of the play.

How to accept the suffering in the world? This is a good question. If you want to be happy, you cannot. Someone asked me in the beginning of the seminar, what was it?

*Student: One of my students asked me to ask you whether you are happy or not.*

Right. And what did I tell you?

*Student: You said that if I want to be happy I will be destined to suffer. You said you have to be one hundred percent here and now.*

OK. Thank you. If we have the habit of seeking happiness and running from or avoiding pain, then we suffer. And if we suffer, we suffer because we don't think life should be like that. We don't want it like that. We think it's life's fault that makes us suffer. Like life is someone that's doing something to us. So that, when we look out there in the world, we think, "Oh the suffering, the suffering."

You know, it's your world. This is kind of radical, but I am going to tell you that it's your world of experience and if there is suffering in it that you are not able to accept or are having a difficult time with, that's your problem. I don't mean to be cold. I mean, literally that's your issue.

I don't mean that seeing others suffer doesn't cause me pain. I mean, I'm human also. I have children, people I care about in my life. And when I see one of them hurt, emotionally or physically, it does something to me, like an arrow to the heart. Awakening doesn't mean that you go to a funeral dry eyed, or that you never get another joke, or don't know how to enjoy yourself in a light and pleasant way, or that you don't know how to grieve for those that suffer. But there is a difference between grieving, and feeding that kind of thing within your self. So I think maybe the thing to say here is that accepting doesn't mean that you don't have any feelings. It means that you see that this is what it means to be human. This is compassion. It's definitely not having all of the answers. In fact it's very close to not having any answers at all.

Probably most of you have more answers than I do, because the process of this that I have been teaching you is to let go of assumptions, which is what people call answers, knowledge. We let go of all assumptions about how things are, and ultimately see that we have no control and no way to see what is next. So you just throw yourself into this one hundred percent, with an open heart, and when it's moving you cry and when it's moving the other way you laugh, you make love with the ones you love and not with the ones you don't.

I mean, folks, it's nothing different in this way.

I know this probably doesn't satisfy you. You don't look like you are satisfied.

*Student: I would like to hear more about your philosophical views. I mean, which role does your mind play in your practice?*

Well, let me say this. When I start thinking about how I ought to do something, what might be the right way to go about something, I get sick to my stomach now. Can't you see why, from this seminar we just went through?

*Student: You told a lot about keiko and shugyo. You said that in shugyo we don't have control over things and we just swim with the flow. On the other hand, in keiko, we're all making decisions and the result depends upon our choices.*

Is that a question?

*Student: Moreover, we are taking responsibility for decisions for ourselves and others. It seems that this is a contradiction.*

I missed the contradiction. Please help me.

*Student: If I can just follow the flow, I don't need to be a better person then.*

Ah, OK, I get it. So why don't I just sit on the couch, open a beer, and watch TV, and some day I will just wake up? But of course this is not it either. So do nothing, but we must at the same time do something.

*Student: I have to be the best in my family, here in the dojo, and in my work.*

Hmm. How's that working for you? Are you the very best at everything you do?

You know, some people seem to win often, and others feel always they are losing. Both of them are always trying to win, which is always I will win, I will accomplish this or that. This is sort of like an obsessive work ethic. And of course those that lose, or feel that they are not up to snuff or up to par, suffer because they feel that they are not cutting it, not good enough. And those that win, become the champions, the wealthy people, etc., those who enter into the god realm, the celebrity realm, they may be very pleased with

themselves for a while, but ultimately they see that you can never ever be the only one. You get older, you can't run as fast, you get older, you don't look as good, you get older, your organs break down. So sooner or later, even if you are a winner, you see that you are losing.

So, I'm not suggesting that you not do your best in your work, and in your relationships and in the dojo. Of course, train at the highest *keiko* level you can train. But don't forget that there is no satisfaction there, ultimately. If you come to the end of your lifetime, which by the way might happen any day now, and all you have accomplished is perfection in *keiko*, you're going to be miserable to yourself, and cry out, "Why, why, why didn't I get to know what was really going on. Why did I spend all this time with this fruitless effort?"

So yes, practice, practice, practice on the *keiko* level, but don't forget that that's not where your satisfaction comes from. It comes from a much deeper level which is full and complete in you right now and has been since the day you were born, in fact since long before you were born, and is completely available if you just *let go*.

I know it must sound like a question comes up and I just bat it down, and I'm sorry. Many students have said that's the way it sometimes feels. But here's the thing. Every question comes out of, "Do I really have to give up *keiko*? Now wait a minute. What about this and this and this? These things are important to me." Do you see? So naturally, and as gently as possible, I remind you that these things don't lead to happiness, don't lead to a deep level of satisfaction. So, I'm just always the person that needs to say that. And that's OK.

*Student: I would like you to express in your own words the part of the legacy of O'Sensei that was left behind by Tohei Sensei when he left Aikikai. What was left behind that Tohei Sensei felt was not necessary.*

Oh, yeah, most of it.

You've probably heard this story before. Tohei Sensei basically had three teachers; Ogura Sensei from *Ichikukai*, Nakamura Sensei from his yoga group the *Tempukai*, and then O'Sensei from Aikido. And Tohei Sensei told us that he learned relaxation and calmness from O'Sensei, and he learned mind/body unification from Tempu Nakamura Sensei, and he learned the value of calmness in action, which is the intensity of your training, from *Ichikukai*.

Of course, he borrowed all of the techniques from O'Sensei, or most of them. But after O'Sensei died in 1969, Tohei Sensei did not formally leave *Aikikai* until 1973, four more years. And during that four-year period, many of the exercises like *Hitori Waza*, some of the *Junan Taiso* that we do, were developed by Tohei Sensei to help in teaching Aikido. And it wasn't only during those last four years with Aikikai. When he began traveling to the west in 1953 in Hawaii, he saw that O'Sensei's method of just going boom, boom, boom "OK do that" was not an effective way of teaching. No one

understood what the heck was going on with O'Sensei and how he did what he did. So Tohei Sensei began developing all of these methods of teaching, which were not previously practiced by Aikikai. Of course during all of these years Tohei Sensei was the Chief Instructor of Aikikai Hombu. O'Sensei spent most of his time on his farm in Owama, not in Tokyo, and Kishimaru, his son, worked in a bank. He wasn't even coming around until the old man started aging. He came back because in Japan this legacy you are talking about is a family thing. It's not a teacher/student thing. The dojo or school is worth a lot of money and a lot of prestige to the Japanese. And O'Sensei wanted to make sure that stayed in his family. So, even though Tohei Sensei was Chief Instructor, he asked his son to please get going with the practice. And then, on his death bed, O'Sensei made Tohei Sensei promise that, even though he is the most experienced and powerful teacher, please to make sure that Kishimaru is respected as the head and he receives all the prestige and the money.

So basically Tohei Sensei took everything with him that was not strictly taught by O'Sensei. Soon after Tohei Sensei acknowledged Kishimaru as the head and said, "Your father asked me to be true to his wish and I am doing so," then Kishimaru said, "OK, well I don't like what you are teaching. The only thing you are allowed to teach here is what my father already taught. No Ki Principles, etc." So, according to Tohei Sensei, the only things he took from O'Sensei's school were the techniques themselves and this sense of relaxation that he learned from watching O'Sensei.

*Student: The question was not what he added, but what he left behind. So maybe there were ideas, approaches, philosophy or whatever that he threw away. Maybe he felt some things were not necessary.*

Yes, well he certainly left behind the entire religious aspect. *Omoto-kyo* and that entire way of seeing the world that O'Sensei based his teaching and life on. He completely left that behind.

*Student: As we know, in Aikikai it is also not practiced now.*

I started Aikido in early 1974, so I was one of the first Ki-Aikido students. In those early days, there was no difference between the way the Aikikai trained and the way Ki-Aikido trained, in terms of techniques, because it had been one group for so long. It just happened to be artificially split down the center because of the politics in Japan.

At this point, now, for Ki-Aikido, there is a tremendous amount that has been left behind that was originally carried over from Aikikai. In other words, it didn't get left behind the day Tohei Sensei resigned and moved to his own group. He just kept teaching what he had already been teaching. Realize that all the teachers that teach in the world today, or at least their teachers, were once all Tohei Sensei's students. Noro and Tamura, Saotome and Yamada, these shihan were all Tohei Sensei's devoted students at one time. They began training at Headquarters with him.

*Student: So Tohei Sensei threw away Omoto-kyo, and then only added. All the rest is*

*the same as in O'Sensei's time?*

Well, as I say, it was the same at the time, but not now. Go to any Aikikai dojo and you will see that we have gone in separate directions, in many aspects of the practice.

*Student: Sensei, where is the line between doing nothing and passivity in our life?*

Are you asking me what is the difference between those two?

*Student: No, I am trying to see where I move from do nothing to when I am just passive in my life.*

Are you trying to figure out what to do?

*Student: Yes, because I want to have the satisfaction of being a completed person, like a man.*

Well, there is not doing and then there is not doing. Listen, we have this idea that doing nothing means that nothing happens. We mean by "do nothing," don't try to manipulate and control the circumstances of your life. It doesn't work. You have to show up, open your heart, follow what's happening without editing, and accept the results. I'm not giving you a formula that will make you wealthy and famous. This is the practice. How to be free from our own devices that cause us to suffer. You can't take this teaching, although many people try to do it, and say use this teaching to get rich and famous in business. This is nonsense.

*Student: I have another question. All people must have a mission in life. Do you have one?*

You haven't noticed?

*Student: I want to hear from you how you would choose to explain your mission. Maybe you would say that you don't have a mission, but that you just life moment to moment.*

I think I understand what you mean by mission. There are several ways to look at that. I feel that, if there is a mission that I am engaged in, it's one that I have discovered, or it's what's left after everything gets taken away. It's definitely not something that I manufactured or dreamed up or created. This idea that you can grow up to be president and so forth, these are Nazi ideas. These are things to destroy your life. This is that whole superman idea. I mean we are not that.

Certainly we are here to discover the purpose of living. And I am spending more and more of my time trying to help other people discover that for themselves.

*Student: I think children are very important. So how deep is Aikido in the lives of your*



*children?*

Not very.

*Student: What place in your life is reserved for self-realization?*

I am not quite sure how to answer that. Is the question, do I have certain times of the day set aside where I am serious and the rest of the time I just don't care? This is my life. I am like this all the time, for better or worse.

You were talking about this mission idea, and it's not like that at all. You guys want to look at life from the outside in, as if it's a kind of experiment and you are god. But you're not. You don't have any control over what you think you have control over. All this nonsense is dreams of men. It's just not like that in this moment. If you would just join me here, in this moment, you could see that there is no room for thinking about it or objectively looking at it. You are in it whether you like it or not. So why don't you participate? Why stand back and try to be smart about it, or clever? All that is just going to cause you to suffer. I understand that's what we do, but it will just make you suffer.

So please keep practicing Aikido with Igor Ostroumov Sensei, and I hope I see you again someday very soon and we can train together some more. Thank you very much.