

HKF Shugyo Tassei Kigan Shiki Seminar – Q & A
Hilo, Hawaii
Sunday, February, 20, 2011

So, hello. I would like to start by filling out something a little more fully, something that I said in the introduction yesterday.

We say in Aikido that our lives and our bodies are born of the Ki of the Universe. That is so. However, what is that “Ki of the Universe?” We give the name “Ki.” We provide the name “Ki.” But, as I was mentioning yesterday, this source of life, and life itself, is completely unknowable. It is infinite and that’s what makes it unknowable. So when we try to put a name on it, or identify it, or corral it and in that way decide on what it is, then we limit it. And then it’s not “it” any more, but something much less. So you cannot give it a name, and even “it” is not correct. It’s completely unknowable, completely beyond our comprehension. It’s not just that we don’t know what’s happening next, we don’t know where this came from and we don’t know where this is going. No, no, it’s not just that. We can’t possibly understand all in this moment at once. It is beyond any one of us.

So that’s what I meant when I said that waking up isn’t knowing it or somehow corralling that into some kind of useful knowledge or some truth that you could teach other people or make some money or get famous with. No. It’s unknowable. So once you see that, truly experience that unknowingness, and you see that it is OK, then this is waking up. It’s OK. The fact that it can’t be known is accepted and fine. In a sense, you might think that’s giving up on it. But since it’s endless, infinite, it’s everything that is, including you and every impulse you have. So to say it’s anything, like that it’s giving up, is missing it completely. That’s giving yourself some kind of power that you don’t have.

For all of us in the midst of our practice, our lives, it’s best just to be grateful, be patient and open our hearts, as much as possible, at every moment.

We’re going to have preferences. We are going to judge those that we love. We’re going to do it. You cannot say to yourself, “OK, I won’t do that any more.” Then when you do, you’ll be down on yourself. You’ll feel sad. You’ll feel upset, self-critical. “Uh, must stop doing that!” No. Be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself. Just pay attention and be present. The reason we don’t notice what is actually going on is because we are always busy thinking about it, trying to figure it out, to put a label on it, judging it.

Shugyo practice is just practicing being present without preference, as much as possible. This is our shugyo seminar, right? *Shugyo Tassei Kigan Shiki*. This is our celebration of *shugyo* practice, true practice. So I wanted to just reiterate what I said yesterday what that means to me and maybe help you clarify that a little bit.

So if you now have any questions, please go ahead and ask.

Student: How does kihon practice relate to shugyo training?

Kihon means basics, right? So how does *kihon* relate to *shugyo* practice? Good question.

Well, it's sort of a metaphor here, because there is only *shugyo* practice, nothing relates directly to it. But it's a good question because there is some relationship, in this way. Yesterday I was saying that there are better and better forms of *keiko* practice. When you are anxious and you're in a hurry and you just want to perform and earn your belt or have someone give you approbation, you're just trying to get through it. That's not the best form of *keiko* practice. As Carlos said a few moments ago, when you go slowly, you notice what is going wrong. So you like to go fast so you don't notice what's going wrong. That would be the opposite of *kihon*. *Kihon* is training in the simple, *kaisho*, basics, the simplest form, so that you notice what you can do and what you cannot do and you are not fooling yourself about it. You built up that bank account of basics and then you can respond appropriately any time on the mat throughout your life. So basics is the most important thing.

In this way it is similar to *shugyo*. Because once you understand that it's a fruitless effort to try to make your awakening happen, to try to make your self-development happen, once you can remember to be grateful and listen carefully with an open heart, see, this is the basics of living, isn't it? This is the *kihon* of life. So, in this way, it is very similar to *shugyo*.

Student: Thank you.

One thing more I would like to say here. Pain and pleasure never ever go away. Everybody is developing in their *keiko* principles to have more pleasure and less pain, right? But pain and pleasure are completely outside of our control. It's just happening. Can you control when you get sick? Well, you can live a more healthy life and maybe it happens less. But it still happens to you. Even the most advanced people get sick. And everybody dies, folks. You cannot keep yourself from dying. It's going to happen sooner or later, one way or another.

So there is going to be pain and there is going to be pleasure. Nobody here says "Make more pain." Some religions say, "Make more pain." – self-flagellation. "Avoid pleasure. Deny pleasure." No. I don't say to make more pain or to deny pleasure. It's there. Enjoy and accept. When we don't accept and try to run from it, or we try to embrace this pain out of guilt, we suffer. When we are having pleasure we want to hang on to it so it won't go away, and so we suffer. Suffering is the problem, but it is not what happens to us. Suffering is what we do with what happens to us. Is that really clear?

You can see this. There are painful things that happen to everybody and there are pleasant things that happen to everybody, and there's a scale of this. I guess hell is at one end of the scale, and out here is some kind of bliss consciousness. Many religious people want bliss consciousness. That's all they think the goal is, to be super happy. No, no. Because it's going to go away. One of my students had one whole week of bliss consciousness. And he came to me completely depressed. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "My bliss went away. I had it for a whole week. I thought it was mine for my lifetime and it went away." This is crazy.

So when we react to this pain and pleasure, this whole spectrum, and don't accept it and want it to be different and try to pick and choose from that tree of life, then that's called suffering. So the only real choice we have in this life, that isn't conditioned into or out of us, is to Keep One Point or not, to be present and awake in the moment. And to do that we have to accept what's happening in the moment, to be able to be with it. It doesn't mean you have to like it or not like it. Accept it. And don't misunderstand. If someone is trying to push you off a cliff, do Aikido. Get out of the way. It's OK. I'm not saying to accept in some sort of dull state. You are the active agent in your life, of course. Be active, but be present.

OK, so, question?

Student: So will the narrator in my brain every shut up?

Yeah, of course. Some teacher called this "chitch." *Chogyam Trumpa Rimpoche* called it, I think, subconscious gossip. It's just a gossipy thing. Is it a self-critical thing, criticizing you? Like, "This is going pretty well, you've got it now, let's keep going here, yeah that's just about right, no, no, no, don't do that...and so on"?

Student: Yeah, it's pretty Portuguese.

Pretty Portuguese?

Student: Yeah, it's always commenting on what's going on. Except, which is why the question comes up now, when I am in that shugyo state of mind driving along or doing something and I am in that moment and I am aware that everything around me is gorgeous and beautiful, and I am in this perfect moment, and then my little narrator goes...well...

"You're going good now, girl!"

Student: Exactly.

"You are in it now!" And then you are not in it. So, of course, you just answered your own question.

Student: But it still hasn't shut up a whole lot.

Well, there are practices you can do, if you are interested. In our school it's called "Ki Breathing," you know?

Student: Yeah.

In some schools they use mantra as an activity. Like "*aum mani padme hum, aum mani padme hum, aum mani padme hum*" for ever and ever. Then that becomes that voice. It replaces that gossiping voice. That's not my ideal of how to work with this.

You know this already, but I will just remind you. When you are sitting, like right here right now. I don't mean when you are sitting in meditation, but when you are just with a group of people waiting on the side for something, waiting at the bank, in your daily life, and you are engaged and present and here, there is no need for any inner comment. There is no need for any chitch, any subconscious gossip going on, because that comes out of preference. That voice is the voice of preference that is constantly judging you and everyone else around you, right? And it's not any more Portuguese than it is anything else. Everyone has got it.

But when we are here, and we're engaged, then it doesn't happen. So, if you are having trouble with it, then stop, do some Ki Breathing, follow the breath to the ends of the universe, continue, continue, continue, just following the breath. And the voice will fade away. Yes, maybe it will come back, but keep practicing. Some day you won't hear it any more.

Student: I am having a little trouble with Ki Meditation. Like in Ki Breathing I can hang in there a little bit, following the breath. But at soon as I try "half, half, half" and then I become distracted and then wake up and come back to "half, half, half" again...when I am practicing at the dojo, the bell helps a lot. But at home, on my own, when I lose it, then do I just do "half, half, half" again? I mean is that what Ki Meditation is?

Is it that you have trouble remembering to be present? Is that what you are telling me? Does anybody else have this problem? Every student asks this sooner or later. Every one of us, including Tohei Sensei, has trouble being present. That's why we practice! Is that really what you are asking me? Or are you asking for a magic pill?

Student: Well, I don't know. When I am trying to do Ki Meditation, I begin "half, half, half" feeling pretty much there, and then of course I lose it. So then do I think of "half, half, half" again?

Could you just put the mike down a moment and sit up straight? Now do half, half, half for me right now.

(he does it for a moment and then stops and looks up.)

Well, there's your problem. Half, half, half is infinite. (Sensei demonstrates and continues) See, you have to ask me to stop the half, half, half. I am not doing anything. I am not saying "half, half, half." Remember the instruction, when you hear "*shuchuho*" it's shaaa....immediately deeply into it. Instantly, right away, you are at infinity. It's continuing to go, so you don't have to do anything. Just rest in that. And, yes, you will forget and start thinking about something, and then just come back and rest in infinity again.

You know, I wouldn't get too involved in giving yourself instructions. Knowing you, I think that's maybe what's going on. You said, "Do I start instructing myself in half, half, half again?" It's not an instruction. It's actually a form of experience. So, should I continue to experience half, half, half? Yes. Should I instruct myself to? No.

Does that help?

Student: Thank you, Sensei. It helps.

You're always working at it. Just be patient.

Student: Hai.

Student: Sensei, I have a question about being present. What should the focus of my attention be on? I was just considering, like day to day, any time...

Let's take this moment right now.

Student: Yes. I even notice that I am wondering off now. Part of my mind is on that big banyan tree out there, and then "Oh, yeah, I am talking to Sensei." So there is a tendency, a very powerful one, to drift away. And it just occurred to me, how do I reign it in? What is the focus of the attention? The breath? Watch the mind? Be aware of the emotions? Engage with other's eyes? It seems like it is always shifting. Does it eventually come to there being one laser beam like quality, or something arises that one develops that is like, OK, presence.

It's maybe a little different than that. You know, because of our habit of shifting our attention from one thing to another to another, we're not used to being aware of a number of things at once. Whereas true awareness, or what they call "pristine awareness," is being aware of your entire sense field, seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, all thoughts that arise, and everything that's happening emotionally in the body, all at once.

That is what describes the moment. Because the "moment" is just the whole experience you are having. That is what we call the "moment." There isn't anything

else. It's your whole experience, right? So being aware in the moment means being aware of the entirety of your experience. Now that doesn't mean trying to listen to those ladies over there, and trying to include the sound of the cars, and then trying to bring in the lights in the room....no, no. It's the opposite. You just open.

I heard one teacher describe it as being similar to when you see someone that you care a lot about, your heart just opens to them. You feel this love, right? So, do you have to know something to have that happen? No, it just happens. So, if you love this here, right now, then it just happens. It just opens to everything. You don't need to know something. You don't need to do something. You don't have to work at it.

Student: Of course. Thank you Sensei.

Student: Sensei, on Friday you talked about forgiving yourself and allowing. You know, it is what it is. Could you talk about that, as it relates to devotion to practice? In other words, I really want to do this, and yet I am trying to figure out how to be gentle with myself and devoted at the same time. In other words, I see that this will take me where I want to go, but I don't go twenty seconds without criticizing how I am going about it.

Where do you want to go?

Student: I see something in this practice, a way of living, and I experience it when I am on the mat, that I want to have it more of my life. I want to live there more.

What is that? What are you experiencing on the mat?

Student: Moments of presence. Moments of "all is well."

The answer is right here in front of you.

You know, on the mat, people are actually attacking you. Right? Do you remember that part?

Student: Yes (laughing)

And sometimes they are challenging you and giving you Ki Tests that are very difficult, asking you to do things that are quite unreasonable, relative to things that are going on within you. An yet, it's OK. It's not only OK, you like it! So what's the problem again?

Student: I guess I don't have a problem.

You do not have a problem. Don't make some problem where there is none.

Student: Yes, Sensei

It's difficult enough as it is.

Student: Sensei, we have different levels of Ki Test, and basically that kind of corresponds to the levels of being present you talk about. Like in the beginning, with the Shokyu Ki Test, people pass it by mind moving to where ever they are being tested. And then as you progress you have to sort of let that shifting go and be more and more inclusively open. Could you comment more on that, as it relates to the more advanced Ki Tests?

Could I comment more on that?

Student: Yeah, because we have some advanced Ki Tests today, don't we?

Today, yes, this afternoon. He is taking *Chuden*, and you two are taking *Shoden*.

Well, OK, thank you for the question...or the demand, the challenge. Do you know I always say that the examiner, in a Ki Test, as the test becomes higher level, the examiner becomes calmer and calmer. What that really means is that he or she is just opening to this presence in a more conclusive way, a deeper way, surrendering to it more deeply, let's say. That's what the experience of calmness is, surrendering to this present moment much more deeply. So if you want to pass the test (I think this is what you are asking me), as you are taking a higher and higher level test, basically I think you want to know how do you pass the test? How do you match this level? And the answer is in the question. You have to do what the examiner is doing. You have to be where the examiner is, in terms of the level of your experiencing of the moment that is present. If you narrow your attention down to your chest, or even some thought, if you begin to think about something, or if you narrow it down to an emotion, like "Oh shit, am I going to be able to do this?" That means your mind stops. We say in Aikido, "Mind stops." It means you have narrowed, or collapsed your field of awareness. So instead of being pristine awareness or complete awareness, you have a very limited awareness. There is still some awareness, but the narrowing becomes a hot button in you. And then I push on that button and you go over.

So if you can allow your awareness to be more open, more fully accepting of everything that is happening, then, since your One Point is the center of the universe, and the universe is everywhere, all-inclusive, and whoever is coming to test you is clearly a part of this universe, a part of this picture, a part of the story, a part of the action, then that is completely acceptable and embraceable, enjoyable. And you are then very calm and very, very powerful.

True power is not power over someone else, or some other thing. True power is the capacity to stay present. That's power. The more capacity you have to be in the present moment, the more powerful you are. The less capacity you have, for instance if you are defending yourself, or sticking up for yourself...imagine sticking up for yourself in a Ki Test! Of course you will fail. Anything that you do that involves your self is

always limiting. You know, there is nothing there, but we have this concept of self. It's a concept, and it's debilitating, and limiting, and sick making. It's makes illness and weakness. So we just let go!

Ah, that's the name of the book. That's why I called it "Letting Go" because that's what we do. We are faced with a habit, in terms of how we react to being tested, being challenged, and the higher the level of the test, the more you have to let go.

Does that answer your question?

Student: Yeah, thank you.

OK. And so, we're out of time for today. Thank you very much.