

Bayern Ki-Aikido - Fall Seminar 2012 – Q & A

Sunday, Sept. 23, 2012

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Our seminar this weekend has been built around the experience of, first, calmness, and then this calmness allowing us to open up to the connection that already exists between each of us. And when we really are calm, then that connection is very focused and powerful.

The unique thing about this kind of connection, is that it is completely natural and already exists, so that there is nothing you can do to increase the intimacy or profundity of this experience, except to get out of the way. The reason we normally don't experience this intense connection that exists between all human beings, is because we spend all of our lives keeping ourselves separate, listening to our senses and believing them, and concluding from that that not only is it the case, but it is wiser and safer to be separate from others. Our society basically teaches us how to survive while being separate from each other.

Of course we have marriages and we have friendships and we have families, and these things bring us together and ask that we develop and open ourselves to a more intimate connection. But because it's not our habit, then it becomes very difficult and challenging. So it is wonderful that we have this opportunity in the dojo to practice this, so that we can take this sense of openness and recognition of this connection and the kind of experience it brings us, into our families and into our personal relationships with members of the opposite sex and same sex, everybody together, into our daily life and experience this more and more.

So, maybe this teaching has brought out some questions in your mind, in your heart, and if so then please ask me, and maybe I can clarify this, or not. If you don't think you have a question, then I will remind you of what your question is.

Student: Sensei, I have basically two questions on different levels. First, maybe you can tell us from your experience, what keeping One Point means in, let's say, the case of personal tragedy. There are a lot of different tragedies, like people getting deathly diseases, or getting attacked from someone, or whatever. What does the One Point, in that context, mean? Can you tell us of your experience?

OK, let me just address this with you and then you can ask your second question.

It is important to remember that often, when someone is agitated, we say, "You should Keep One Point," as if One Point is a cure. And in some sense it is, but let me say this about it and maybe it will clarify something. We always think of One Point as the gateway between the relative world, where all such tragedies take place, all challenges, difficulties, illness, loss of loved ones, separation from friends, all of these are phenomenon of the relative condition, and the absolute. Keeping One Point will not make difficulties go away, but Keeping One Point is like constantly being in the two worlds at once. Of course, we remain in the relative perspective, so

that we feel the emotion of loss, or the elation of a new love. We feel this. It's not like you become a zombie, and don't have any more emotion. But at the same time, we experience this deep sense of peace, powerful peace, which basically, in my experience, translates to what I would call "faith." I mean here faith as opposed to belief in something, not faith in some "thing," but faith that no matter what happens, no matter how bad it gets, no matter how difficult it is for me, always I can accept, because I don't have any choice in the matter anyway. I cannot prevent such things from happening. So to spend any amount of time praying for, hoping for, or desiring change is basically superstitious nonsense. You cannot change these things. You don't become more wealthy by wishing for it. That book, *Secrets*, may be bullshit, but it is eaten up by humans. We love the idea that we maybe could become more beautiful, more wealthy, more successful in life by wishing or praying for it, calling on the gods. Things do change in all kinds of directions, and we never know and cannot control in any way what comes next.

I said before that you don't really make any decisions in your life, except one. Every change that happens within you, that you might call choice, choosing an apple instead of a peach for breakfast, choosing a beer instead of a glass of wine, choosing pork instead of a vegetarian meal, this is all conditioned response. This is something that has been conditioned into us. Our ego or sense of self claims this as choice, but actually the only choice we have is to Keep One Point, or to be in this state of being that whatever happens is OK. This comes about by learning to rest in this state that Tohei Sensei calls "Keeping Once Point," resting in this feeling in our lower abdomen that radiates not only throughout our body, but throughout the whole room around us. So no matter what happens then, we always are in One Point.

And again, this doesn't mean that we won't have pain or joy or anything in between. But in some way it means that we don't have to cause ourselves unnecessary suffering. Our reaction to a tragedy often causes us much more pain than necessary, because we tend to think about it and dwell on it, telling ourselves stories about it, and so intensify the agony and we suffer much more. But if we have this faith, if we are resting in the hugely powerful stream of joy in our lower belly, it's not like that at all. It still happens and it is still maybe disappointing, but it is not the same as suffering. And, as the Buddha said, the purpose of this study is to end suffering. That's all, just to end unnecessary suffering, and by suffering, he means all reaction to pain and desire.

So even the fact that we tend to believe in the relative world and be trapped by it, in this sense, is OK. We might find ourselves in some trivial situation. For instance, I forgot this recording device at the hotel this morning. Normally it's in this package here and no way it ever get's forgotten. But I had a chance to call my wife on Maui this morning, so I called and talked to her, hung up and of course my mind was still a bit with my wife on Maui, and I forgot to pick up the package and bring it to the dojo. Then, after an hour or so I realized what had happened. So that's what I mean by getting trapped by the relative condition. But even in the midst of all that, and even when I realized I had forgotten, it doesn't mean I have to lose One Point, it doesn't mean I have to be feeling guilty. I hope I didn't cause anyone any inconvenience, and actually in

my experience it didn't seem to. So does that answer your question?

Student: Yes.

So what is your second question?

Student: Maybe this gets more deeply into the relative, and maybe even more abstract. We have been talking about individuals, about ourselves. But are there also aspects for bigger human groups, like companies, or societies, Keeping Once Point. Can this also be influencing companies or societies as well? Like, if individuals lived in this state more and more, of course societies and companies can change, that's clear. But looking at the more abstract level of a company itself, could that be an idea for a company, Keeping One Point? In other words, could this also be an idea for higher levels of units, not individuals, but more abstract companies or society in general?

Of course, corporations or companies, communities, families, countries, these are all made of human beings. They have no identity of their own. All forms of identity are held in the minds of humans that are a part of them. We create them. A group often appears to have a life of its own. Sometimes we say a "good corporation" or a "bad corporation," but it's actually human beings that are a part of those groups and they are not necessarily evil or good.

So, as you say, of course, if the preponderance of the members or any family, community, or group, or even country are practicing and are aware, then that's going to change the nature of that company, the nature of that family. Last fall someone asked me about other people in the family that might be losing it, and what do we do about that? I responded with what Confucius said, that if you want to bring peace to the world, first you have to bring peace to your country, first to your community, first to your family, and first to yourself. It always comes back to the individual. There is nothing but the individual. In your case, and in my case, as individuals, the world we live in is just our personal world of experience. There isn't anything else.

So how I live in this world, and whether or not I cause suffering to myself and to others in this family, community, or company, depends entirely upon me.

It is true that there is such a thing as "group think," you know, or like mob action, when a whole bunch of people get together with a single kind of belief. This can be very effective or very dangerous, depending upon what that belief is. But this is another matter altogether.

This practice here is not belief, or even an attempt to more effective. It's a practice to end suffering, not only for myself, but if I can minimize suffering in my own world of experience, then everyone who is in that world of experience, will experience less harm. I will cause less suffering.

I think that addresses your question?

Student: Yes, thank you.

Student: Sensei, you brought up atemi quite a bit, and this has been bothering me for the last several years, coming from another Aikido school. O'Sensei said that 90% of Aikido is atemi. That's apparently a quote from him. And this weekend I think it got a little bit clearer to me that atemi can also be a way of connecting with someone, and not to put it into the other extreme, pushing them away from me to keep a distance. Can you elaborate a little bit on how that fits into the concept of accepting the other persons Ki and his attack, and that atemi can actually be a way of enhancing that connection, even though it may appear to be a kind of punch?

Well, OK. You can think of punching as pushing someone away, harming someone, or threatening them. Certainly it gets their attention. But like most things in Aikido, it's not the actual punch, or the lock, itself. In nikkyo, for instance, it is not the effectiveness of the final lock, which if nikkyo is applied correctly never happens. It's the threat of that, or it's the implication present. See, when we spark together like this, whether it's a nikkyo lock or a punch, we make contact. This is a huge shock to our system because we are taught in our society not to make contact. So in some sense, atemi is like saying, "Yeah, you better pay attention, and respect this connection, because if you don't, there will be this forced connection." Of course, if it is applied properly, that punch never ever happens, that nikkyo lock never ever occurs, because you have their attention, based on the degree of your ability to surrender to, or open to, this connection.

Both Suzuki Sensei and Tohei Sensei used to call this "osairu," which basically means controlling, in some sense. But it is essentially commanding the attention of the individual, or the group, through opening to this innate and natural connection. In the case of atemi, it is of course a kind of attention getter, a kind of a threat. If you don't recognize this connection voluntarily, then there will be some meeting of minds through our bodies, literally.

Student: So it is almost like a more intensified invitation for the uke to also connect.

Exactly. Exactly, an intensified invitation. Yeah, I love that. That's great. I said before that the job of the nage is to secure the agreement of the uke, not to threaten the uke. "Secure agreement" means you have to make it so...well, the uke is connected to the universe in the same way that you are. But when that uke is attacking you, it means they have forgotten their connection. You are going to remind them, in a very intense fashion, of that connection. And when they feel that, they cannot help but follow. And it is so effective that, when Tohei Sensei would do it to me, it was like I lost awareness, or lost consciousness, until I found myself on the mat. It didn't know what happened, because my little thinking mind was sort of put aside by the intensity of this universal connection. And so it was intensely pleasurable and terrifying, all at the same time, but never painful. I did Aikido with certain people when I was younger and doing uke all the time for people, where they would just smash me to the mat. There is a lot of that in Aikido. But you know Suzuki Sensei taught me that this is not Aikido. Just because you can knock somebody down, and even if you move with incredible grace and are very effective in your techniques, there is no meaning, unless it is Ai-Ki-Do, unless the connection happens. And when that happens, it's like magic. It's completely different. You enter a different realm than

the realm of relative contest between two people. OK?

Student: Thank you.

Student: Well, Sensei, I just open myself to coming questions. Like last time you were here, there was this big feeling that something is coming from far, far out there, and this formed the question. Now there is not really much coming. I just thought about, we all listen to you, we all learn from you, and we have kind of different understandings on a deeper level, depending upon how long we are practicing, and we always try to do what you teach us. How can we stop trying and start doing?

When we say “try” or “I’ll try that,” it means we have some doubt. Everything is relative in this keiko, this development process. Jeff Baldwin always tells students that, when you practice otomo, it is basically one failure after another. But you still do it. And you learn by that, that success and failure is a kind of illusion. You’ve heard before that you should turn a difficulty into a possibility, right? That’s a kind of philosophy. You have some problem and you turn it into an opportunity. Does everybody do that all the time?

My otomo here, has been practicing over the past few days, keeps saying, “I don’t think I get it yet.” In this sense there is nothing really to get. It’s just that you keep putting yourself in the place, and not being concerned with success or failure. That’s just doing it. When you say “try” you mean “well, I’ll try to succeed at this.” But really nobody succeeds, and really nobody fails. It’s all practice. That’s why we call it practice, not performance. Life is practice. Ask any teacher who is in his later years. He will tell you, “Life is practice.” That’s all it is. So you just do practice, as you understand it. And as your development changes and grows, your practice will become more and more refined and more and more effective, in the sense of ending suffering.

So we can really throw away the idea of trying to do something, because that has to do with success and failure. Put yourself in the place all of the time. Remember the four principles of practice. The first one is show up. You have to be at the dojo, or you have to be in the situation. You cannot avoid. You have to always be here. And then once you are here, you have to open yourself to what is happening. And then you have to go along with whatever is happening without trying to change or edit it in any way. This is so difficult. And then, whatever happens as a result of that, you have to accept the consequences, completely taking the responsibility for them, even though you cannot control anything, because it is your world of experience.

So if you look at it this way, and practice this way, then the concept of trying will fall away all by itself. And there really isn’t anything, exactly, to do, except to show up, and then to open, and then to follow along with what’s happening. Basically it’s all about surrendering to the life that is presented to you, making yourself available for this. You want to learn Aikido, then you make yourself available to the situation, you come to the seminars, you move to a place you can train, you open yourself to this teaching. And to be sincere about this is uncommon, even in Aikido practice. Most people who do Aikido don’t do it with any kind of sense of ending suffering for themselves or anyone else. There are all kinds of other motivations. And so they choose a

teacher based on those other motivations. So you are doing great. Keep showing up.

Student: Thanks.

Student: How can you encourage people to trust that this connection is something good and not threatening? Because you have all these feelings that it is thrilling, it is full of threat, it is full of love, and I think there is a piece of trust inside that it is good if you connect. You said that we are separated and I think that is because they are afraid to connect. So how can you encourage this connection?

I don't try to encourage it in someone else. That might not appear to be the case. But actually it is. It's common, excusable, or understandable to have a lot of ideas about connection, which do include your fears, your anxieties, your hopes, and your dreams. All of that has nothing to do with, and actually only gets in the way of experiencing your natural condition, your original, natural mind. Any kind of thinking about it, any kind of concern, is just avoiding it. Even a positive concern, a wishing for it or trying to do it, is avoiding it, because it is going to push it away from you. That is because it is already here. All we have to do is stop getting in the way with our thinking mind. All we have to do is stop being a "smarty pants." Do you have this word in Germany? Do you know, when a kid is going through the "terrible twos," when a kid is being precocious, full of himself, we call this being a "smarty pants," like he thinks he is smart. But that's us. We are all smarty pants. We all think we know stuff. And all that stuff we think we know, all that's doing is preventing us from connecting with this natural condition.

It's not connecting with another person, per se. That's why I said that I don't encourage it. The connection is already here. If I am connected intensely and you attack me, or you come into my sphere, even without an attack, you feel that, because you are also connected. So that connection in you is awakened by that connection in me. And if a whole bunch of people are alight with this, then the community connection can become incredibly powerful and create a very effective family, a community, or a country.

OK, did that address your concern? I guess I said, basically, just don't be concerned.

Student: But now I have a second question. I was talking about feelings like fear and love and threat, and you say "stop thinking." So is thinking and feeling the same?

Well, it's easy to say "stop thinking." We cannot stop thinking. So instead, "Keep One Point." In other words, what we have been practicing this weekend is, even though our mind is preoccupied with it's fear, it's desires, it's concerns, we rest in this One Point, this gateway between the relative and the absolute, in other words this access or opening to Original Mind, the original connected condition. So we have that connection, we are experiencing it, when we have that feeling, and that natural connection between all of us is Universal Mind. This is what Tohei Sensei means when he says you must recognize Oneness, not the differences. And that is this natural condition that is accessed by the One Point in the lower abdomen. This feeling is non-separate from that. So even though you feel those fireworks going off in your mind, and we

all do because everybody has stuff going on, the more you practice sitting and resting in this One Point, the more powerful, the more capable, the stronger is your ability to remain calm and put yourself in a vulnerable situation without freaking out and running the other way, which would be being driven by that fearful mind. So recognizing that we all have this fearful mind, and we all have been injured in the past by other people or ourselves being careless, then we all practice Keeping One Point. And then we can put ourselves in any situation, without concern to succeed or fail, but just to be responsible for our own self, here in this life, to stand up, to show up, to be present, and to open our hearts.

Student: When you look to the sun, or a very strong source of light, then for a while wherever you look, you don't see very well. So before we went to Taigi 29 today, I was in a pair with my partner. And in some moment I was partially blind when looking in his direction. I was not able to see him, except a part of his head and feet and the tip of his bokken was sticking out of this yellowish blur.

Was it because he is so bright like the sun?

Student: I don't know. But then it reminded me of looking at the sun. And I looked away and could see fine in another direction, and I looked back at him and it appeared again, but not right away but a few seconds later. So what was that?

I don't know.

I will say, that in my experience training in the dojo, I have had a lot of experiences like that where my vision was changed in some way, not always exactly like that, but similarly. What I think that is, is that it happens when we train very intensely. Like when I would train with Suzuki Sensei and would lose ten pounds in one night, there was so much intensity taking his uke and so forth. On these occasions, sometimes I would just begin to hallucinate. I mean that it would create visions, and light, and color and all this kind of stuff. I never understood what any of it was. And sometimes it was troubling because it got in the way and I couldn't do what I needed to do in the dojo. But it was always intense and exhausting and I think when you really get into this practice, particularly in the way we have been practicing yesterday and today, it's going to have an effect on the way you perceive the world through your senses, not just sight, but sometimes hearing. Certainly the kinesthetic feeling in the body changes as you get more intensely into the practice. You become more calm, and you start to experience this connection more and more, your body gets heated, not just sweaty from exercise, but your energy begins to radiate. I think this fools around with your senses in some way.

So that's all I know about that, and probably a neurophysiologist could give us a better explanation about why that happens. I don't really know, but congratulations.

OK, thank you very much. That's enough.