

Ki Lecture: Objectless Awareness
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Good evening. This evening is entitled “Ki Lecture.” That is a very wide range of subject. When I have the Shokushu, one by one, and when I have the chapters from my book, one by one, then I have a structure that I can tie everything to, and that small portion of the subject I can talk about and we can discuss then. So somehow I have to bring this down to something that works for you. And somebody suggested the other night, would I please talk about Ki in Daily Life, as if that might reduce the subject some. Well, he is not here tonight anyway, so...No matter what I talk about or we discuss, it’s always the same subject, isn’t it?

Everyone has a relative degree of success or failure in their own mind. It’s usually a combination of those two. Some things they feel are not the best thing they could have done, and other things they feel very good about. If you look very closely, those things are all determined by other peoples opinion. We are defined, we define ourselves, right down to how we experience life itself, by this. Because it’s experienced through this definition, and the conditions of this definition, dictate the experience. “This definition”, meaning my mind dictates the condition or quality of the experience itself. And if I allow my mind state to be defined by “other,” no matter what that is, then that’s a tremendous limitation.

The subject of the Shugyo Tassei Kigan Shiki Seminar this spring was “objectless awareness,” which is a kind of fancy sounding term. Like...what does that mean? Well, when we allow someone to define us, we are focusing on them as an object. In fact, we are focusing on our self as an object, an object of their opinion. But what’s the thing that doesn’t change? What is it about us that doesn’t change, no matter what anybody else’s view of it is? You know, like I may, at some time in my life, be a great success with a lot of power and prestige, I get to travel all over the world, I have lots of students and they all treat me like I am someone special. But what if all that goes away. What if someone starts some sort of rumor about me and destroys my reputation, and I lose all my students and I get fired out from the Ki Society, and I lose my family and everything as a result of this. Does something change? Am I still the same, or am I different?

Well, if when I am very successful and highly respected, if I take that in as true and valid because everybody else thinks so, then when it’s not there, I will be devastated, because everybody else thinks so. That’s letting myself be defined by others. Think of some great men, like Gandhi, for instance, I mean here people that I recognize as being representations of what I am talking about, objectless awareness. You know, Gandhi and what he did to help people rise above the caste system in India, Martin Luther King Jr. and what he did to lead the people who were being discriminated against because of race, poverty, Caesar Chaves, in the Salinas Valley? I don’t know if everyone knows who that is, but he was a man that represented the migrant field workers that were not being treated well, and helped them get together and have a better life. But the thing about those three men, for instance, and I’m sorry I just picked men, that’s all I could think of

right now, but there are women of the same ilk, for sure. What makes them the leader there? How come they are not one of the followers? What's the difference? If they are a true leader, the difference is that they are no longer defined by their enemy. They are not defined any longer by anyone else. They are not victims. Do you see? At some point they stopped hoping for victory, and began to accept who they are.

Do you know, we here like to say that every moment in life is a Ki Test. But moments are (snaps fingers) like that. When we give a Ki Test in the dojo, it takes a certain amount of time, but it's made up of tiny little moments. And when you pass a Ki Test, you pass every one of those tiny little moments. You don't pass the big Ki Test. Or if you do, it's because you passed every one of those little moments, or most of them. And likewise, when someone breaks free of being defined by other people, that's done in tiny little increments, because the person who is practicing Shugyo, moment by moment, it's not because of some big choice. It's not because of some big event. It's not because that person is different than anyone else, except that that person practiced what he or she preached in all the little tiny things, the little moment to moment to moment.

It looks like life is made up of big moments, big events, with beginning, middle and end. And after the fact, you can look back and you can find sections of life like that. But as we are living it, it is not like that at all. It is never like that. It's just these tiny little moments...well there are not even any tiny moments...it's just this stream that goes on and on. So when I say "objectless awareness" I mean not stopping that stream by freezing something and putting a boundary around it and making it different than you in time and place.

This is how we pass a Ki Test. This is Ki in daily life. We say "living in the moment." Yeah, well what does that mean? There is no moment. There is no now. As soon as you say it, it's gone. It disappears. It's constantly moving and you can't get ahold of it. You can't pin it down. You can't say what it is. It's living constantly, rolling along like this. So our practice is to be open and experience this as much as possible. And any time we pick something that we want to focus on, we limit our ability to experience. You could easily say, instead of objectless awareness, you could say object-full awareness. It's the same thing. You take all the boundaries away, that's objectless awareness. You include everything there is, that object-full awareness. It's the same thing. Kakudaiho, shuchuhō. It's not different. The experience is the same.

So again, I can't emphasize enough, and I know I say this all the time, how important just being present is, just practicing in the moment, just paying attention to what's happening here, is our practice and it's all that we can do. That's it. Because there isn't anything else. There are no moments. There are no decisions. Einstein said, and this may be apocryphal, but it's a good quote, "When I got married I decided I would make all the big decisions and my wife could go ahead and make all the small decisions. Only I finally realized there were no big decisions." And that's what he is trying to point to there, if he even said that. But we consider him a genius, so it's good to attribute to someone who is really smart.

I have to drive around a lot during the day for my job. I go from important meeting to important meeting. I mean they are important to me and my business, maybe not so much “important” but significant, something I need to be paying attention for. So I used to drive really fast, so that I could get to as many of these big events as I could and make sure they were handled properly. But then I realize that when you are going between point A and point B, everything that happens between point A and point B determines what happens at point B. How you drive from one job to another job, how you walk from the bedroom to the kitchen, how you walk from your office to go out and get into your car. We think of those as transitions, that the important part is getting to the car and driving, or getting to the kitchen and cooking your breakfast, or getting out there and feeding the cats. No, that’s not more important. There is no moment that is more important than any other moment. There is no action that is more important. That’s practicing. Practicing is being in everything as it is unfolding, completely.

And when we divide our life up into objects, define them and put boundaries around them, and define their importance to us, we miss everything else, and in fact we even miss that. So that’s what I mean when I say objectless awareness. Living a life that can’t be defined by yourself or anyone else, can’t be limited by your own mind, your own attachments, or anybody else’s. It’s not choosing what you do. It doesn’t matter what you do. People get so obsessed with aspects of their life that they want to change, that are either not good or not good enough, and then the things that are really good, trying to freeze them and cling to them. Everything is change. It’s not going to be the same tomorrow. Maybe you’re going to die. We don’t know when we are going to die. We might die in this next moment. You just never know. You are not in charge of that.

So it doesn’t do any good to try to control things. That’s making your life into a series of objects and events defined by and governed by someone else in your life. And I am not talking about someone who says, “I don’t let anyone define me. I define myself.” This is arrogance. I am not talking about that. You have no definition. If you think there is something to define, you’re missing what I am saying. There is nothing to define. Go look closely inside yourself. There is nothing there. There is no thing. And yet, we just read in the Shokushu about the unseen power, like the hidden bottom of an iceberg, that we don’t know about and that we don’t have contact with. How do we make contact, and where does that come from? It’s not some special ritual we do. It’s not even thinking differently. It’s just opening our heart to being present completely, and not letting our brain define who we are, based upon other peoples view of what that should be.

Sometimes when I am teaching a Ki Class, I am trying to help other people get the idea of how to pass a Ki Test. This is something that I have been doing for many years, and it comes up at every seminar and practically every class. So somebody wants to know, “How do you do that?” It’s too late, if you are asking how to do that. You have to start doing it before you got up this morning. It’s the practice itself. Yes, after years and years of flowing in an open state from moment to moment, then this iceberg becomes apparent to you. You experience all of it, or a lot of it. Maybe you can never experience all of it, but you experience more and more of it all the time. So when I say, “Just be here,” that’s how you pass a Ki Test. Just be here completely. When I say that, I am

trying to express an experience that I am having. And no matter what your level of development, and your experience of that may be more than mine or less than mine, that doesn't matter. You can only be what you are in this moment right now. You can't change that. You can't be more than you are.

So whatever is there, open to this, and be here now completely. And if you move, it's because you move, not because someone moved you. Don't ever say, "He moved me," in a Ki Test. He didn't move you. She didn't move you. You moved. That's very different. You might even move because you choose to, like if the person doesn't give the right kind of Ki Test, you might perform Aikido on them. There is nothing wrong with moving. Moving or not moving is not the be all and end all of the Ki Test. Only you are experiencing stability or you are not. Let's say it that way. And experiencing stability is this completely being here. Not as something definable, limitable, something you can define or say what it is. You can't. If you say something you are wrong. It is an experience that is profound and powerful. And it evolves by being open as the moments tick away.

This is the practice. This is Shugyo. Of course, you still do Keiko practice, all of the self-development stuff. That's great. You get better and better at that. But the thing that makes this experience of life true and full and powerful is this Shugyo practice, being in this all the time. And it's not serious business. You can still have a sense of humor. You can still enjoy yourself. And no one else should be able to notice. If anyone can notice that you are practicing, then you are not practicing. No one should be able to see, particularly. If they are practicing on the same level you are practicing on, they might feel something, but that's very rare, and I even hesitate to say that, because we fool ourselves. We think we can feel other people. But that's usually more projection and self-limitation, so I don't want you to think about that. But the reason I am saying that no one is going to be able to tell, is so that you don't think you have to project something, or that people need to be able to see that you are practicing. That's phony. That's an act. That's once again putting a boundary or limit around yourself, because you care what they think of you. You do it or you don't do it. That's all. Being present.

And you might have the talent, from whatever aspect of your life, the way you are built or how old you are to be a fancy Aikido practitioner, in terms of techniques. You might have the talent to be really good at Kiatsu, you might have the talent to be good at this or that, maybe surfing or climbing mountains. Different people have different talents, different skills. And you can develop those and perfect them. Some of us are born with more and some with less. But that has nothing to do with what I am talking about. You might practice and be like this, and never teach Aikido. I am only in the position I am in, in terms of being Chief Instructor, because I happened to meet Suzuki Sensei when I did and he needed someone to pass it all on to, so I was lucky he chose me. So it ended up this way. But it has nothing to do with this thing I am talking about. This thing is for everybody. Not for Tohei Sensei, and Suzuki Sensei, and me, or certain people. This is for everybody. This is our practice. Everybody can do this. You don't have to have any special skills or talents. And you don't have to be praised up for this or not. Who the

hell cares? Believe me, as you get older, you realize it's all going to go away anyway. So that doesn't matter. It matters less and less – put it that way.

So that was a long talk. Do you have any comments or questions?

Student: I have been pondering this question, and it might relate a little bit to this. I hear you talk a lot about you, or I, or we. But is that sort of an illusion? Where does who you are come into this? It seems like something that is relatively hard to define. When we say, "I like" something, who is the "I" that is saying that? It seems like a worthy subject to contemplate, but it also seems like one of those things that you can't label.

That you can't find an answer to... Yeah, if you look inside, could you show me that "I?"

Student: No, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Did I say it doesn't exist? I said, if you look inside, can you find it?

Student: No.

And yet, it's got to be the most profound experiential thing there is. We use words like "you" and "I" for conventional purposes. But if you want to contemplate, to seriously look at what this "I" is and you say any word to define it, you are going to be limiting it. So that's clearly not it. We say, "I have a body, I have an idea, I feel a certain way, I like a certain thing." So clearly the "I" is not that....those are all subject/object sentences. "I" is the subject of everything. That's why Tohei Sensei says, "You are the center of the universe." "I" is subject, the center of all experience. And it cannot be defined. That's why I am saying, don't allow someone else to define you. If you think you are a victim of some person or circumstance, you are allowing those persons and those circumstances to define who you are. That's not who you are. It may be the case, and it may need fixing, but it's not who you are. And that's a big difference. That's that difference between all of those followers and Caesar Chavez, all those followers and Gandhi, all those followers and Martin Luther King. I am suggesting that. I didn't know those three men.

Student: I wonder what life would be like if we lived in a vacuum, or only me, and there was nobody else to define me. Would that be easier to...ah...

Well, excuse me but you are the one that is using other people to define you. I am not saying that they are even part of the equation. It's projection. Actually, all you know is that you have this experience of other people. You don't really know any more than that. You see colors, you hear sounds, you have sensations. We already know from physics that all those colors don't exist as such. It's just a play of light. That when you touch something, the evidence that your kinesthetic senses give you is not so. This is not solid. We already know that all the information that we get is actually not correct. It's not actually the way it is. So I wouldn't worry about doing anything about that. That is how

your senses work. So you are going to continue to live in a world where apparently there are a bunch of other people. Whether there are or not, or if you are all by yourself in a vacuum, I don't know think that is probably worth thinking about.

I will tell you an experience I had once. Just at the end of my three-year retreat, I went out with a friend to dinner at a small restaurant in town. And I had been sitting for days and days, and I wasn't used to being out with people. And I sat down in this restaurant, and the hair on my neck stood up and I thought, "what is that?" As I looked around the restaurant, I realized that everyone there was putting on a show, waiting only for me to wake up. That's the experience I had, that they only existed for me. And now I see what that means, in terms of what I have been discussing with you tonight. It's like I require all those other people in order to be who I am. So I am saying don't let other people define you. Don't require all those other people to be a certain way in order for you to be a certain way, not their opinion about things, not the fact that they even exist. It's not the point.

And here's an interesting thing that I have also noticed. When I am in this less defined state of mind, I am much more conscious of other peoples needs, than when I am not. Because when I am not, guess who's needs I am thinking about? My own! So I am not suggesting, and none of this suggests in any way, that you ignore any one or any thing. This is inclusive. This is including. Only you have to be in a certain state of mind to include everyone. This is Reiseishin. "Man is blessed with a mind that is one with the mind of the universe." That means one with everything. So that means we have to include everything as our experience of this indefinable that we can't put a word to. OK?

Student: You said not letting other people define you, but it's also how you define yourself, other than saying something huge. I mean anything I say, if I say I'm a good person, you know, it always comes down to what is good. I mean it's a relative term.

Any time we are trying to define ourselves, whether we think we are letting others do it or are doing it ourselves, it's all the same thing. We are just limiting. We use definition for convention and for story, and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with it as long as you are practicing. As long as you don't forget. That's what the practice is. Then you are experiencing it all. We do live in a story.

Student: It seems like, um, when you are in it that you notice it, but when you are not in it you don't notice it at all. From my experience and when I am looking back on it, then I kind of know. Well, say like now, when we are talking here. You can feel it. But then when you are not in it, you don't really notice it all. Like when you are working you are paying attention to your work, but it's not the same as being in it. It that a fair question?

Was there a question there?

Student: Well, I mean, yeah. If you are just working and concentrating on your work, is that it?

So there is an infinite amount of possibility for every moment. There are an infinite amount of activities, and infinite amount of things to think about, contemplate, and in each of our lives we have a lot of different change from morning till the next morning again, all the way through the night. Shugyo practice is all the time, as much as possible. The activity has nothing to do with it. You can be robbing a bank and practicing Shugyo. There's no morality to this. There is no "should be doing this or that." Whatever you are doing, you are doing it. So do it one hundred percent. If you don't want to do it, don't do it. But if you are doing it, do it one hundred percent. Be in it one hundred percent.

Student: I understand that, but I just think there is a different feeling that you have when you are in it.

There are a lot of different causations, a lot of different reasons why we might be more attentive at a certain time than at another time. Let's face it. We come to the dojo because it's a place where attentiveness is celebrated. So it's much easier to be in this experience here, to practice Shugyo here in the dojo. So we come to the dojo as much as possible. And when we can't, we are out there. And we do notice, as you are describing, even sometimes in the dojo but more often outside, maybe forgetting your practice. It's very easy to do. And that's fine. You can only be what you are. But the practice is to constantly return to it, when you become aware of it. You can't do anything about it when you are not aware of it. When you become aware, "Oh, I meant to be practicing here. I want to practice." So then you practice until you forget again. And the more you do that, the more you'll remember what this is like.

I know you have routines. I know what it's like to get up and brush my teeth in the morning. So there is no way I'm going to brush my teeth and not be practicing, you see, because it's part of the routine. So routine makes it more easy. And then I am going to go sit, and then come out, walk up and get the paper, and I'm practicing. I couldn't not be practicing, because I do that every morning and then I would know if I wasn't practicing. Do you see what I mean? And maybe I'm with Lynn, and we're having our coffee and we're practicing. Yeah. But then maybe something happens, some shock. Somebody comes in and wants to see me and I don't feel it's time yet. So maybe I forget for a moment. Maybe not, but maybe I do. And then, "Oh." So routine is very important if you are using it in the right way. If it's just a habit, that's different. But if you are using a routine to help you practice, that's what routine is for. That's why we have ritual in religion. That's why we have tradition. We have these routines we practice. You come in the dojo and you forget to bow? You were somewhere else! So you come in and you bow, you bow as a practice, one hundred percent you are present. It's not how you bow, but how you feel as you bow.

Shinichi Sensei's latest web log is all about having the feeling when you are sitting, and then having it while you are doing Hitori waza, and carrying that feeling on throughout your practice, can checking to make sure you still have the "feeling of mind/body unification" even when you are practicing with another person, and it doesn't go away. I just finished that one and it is coming out soon.

Student: Right now, in my life, I am very involved with my grandchildren. And it's interesting for me to be practicing and try to stay in a place of acceptance. But with the grandchildren there's trying to teach them something in their life about safety, but then later on, I reflect on my day on how I have affected them in some ways, how they will be defined. That's a quandary for me. How to help them learn about society and so forth and so they can define themselves? Because children just are. They get defined by their environment. And so I'm just trying to figure out what my practice is, and how to be with them, and help them to be who they are and not get so defined by others.

Well, it sounds like you care a lot about them. Right?

Student: Yes.

That's all that matters. They are going to be so inundated, already are and have been, by so many other forces. The amount of influence you will have is so tiny. The thing they will remember about you is how you felt about them. What you were like when you were with them. And when we are loving someone, that's practicing, as long as you are actually loving them and not trying to figure out what to do. If you care about them, whatever you do is fine. It's not about whether you spank them or don't spank them or whether you tell them this or that kind of thing. Just love them. It's like teaching kids Aikido. You have to love the adults too, but with the kids, that's the main event there. Well, I guess it is with adults too. We're all kids. Really that's all we have to do, just practice when we are together and practice when we are alone. And then we are loving all the time. Is that OK?

OK, we have to stop. Thank you very much.