

Germany Spring Seminar – Question & Answer
Sunday, May 17, 2015
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Good Morning everybody. This weekend we have been practicing the same old thing. It seems like every time I come here I teach you the same thing. Isn't that true, those of you who have been here for the past ten or twelve years? It sounds a little different each time, I talk about it a little differently, because times change and I change. But the fundamental principle is always, "How do we practice being present in the moment?" We like to say "present in the moment." As if there were a moment! Actually, there is just this stream of experience that we call "living." We can't find a spot where we can stop and examine it. And that's the difficult part, because we are constantly trying to examine, to look at and judge, what we ourselves are doing. And it's very frustrating, because actually we can't do that. When you are examining, you are examining something that happened already. So you are bringing yourself away from this stream, you are stepping out of the stream and looking away. Even if it was just a moment ago, a fraction of a second ago, it's still off time. You are still stopping your experience of this that Tohei Sensei called "Fudoshin" [immoveable mind]. So the practice is to experience this Fudoshin and stay in the stream and relax and enjoy all the time. This, Suzuki Sensei called "living life completely."

I realize that this is the most difficult thing anybody could ask of them selves. It would be much easier to climb the Matterhorn than it would be to do this. This is the most difficult thing a human being can attempt, because all of your experience in the past is against it. All the magazines, all the newspapers, all the movies, all the other people that you have ever known in your life, everything in life point directly away from this. Yes, people pay lip service to it, like "Oh, you want to be in the zone, when you are playing basketball or some sport." People talk about this, and they wonder how do these magic people get into the zone? No, no, no. And then they lead you somewhere else, directly away from it.

Tohei Sensei, somehow, in his practice with O'Sensei and his other teachers, Nakamura and others, came upon this realization that it's just living this life completely. He called it "Shugyo" practice, as opposed to "Keiko," Keiko being all different forms of self-improvement. Shugyo is not concerned with self-improvement. Shukyo is the practice of being in the stream.

So then Tohei Sensei developed all these different things for us, Sokushin no Gyo, and Kiatsu, Ki Breathing, Ki Meditation, Bokken training, Jo training, Junan Taiso, Aiki Taiso, Oneness Rhythm exercise, techniques. Everything he came up with was just another effort to help us come to having this experience that he was having, but couldn't really tell us. You can't tell someone the nature of this experience, because it is completely unknown to the conscious mind. It can't be known, intellectually. No matter how hard you try to figure it out or read about it or hear someone speak about it, you will never

know, ever, you won't even have a glimpse. It's so utterly different to experience everything as being your self, everything as being "the self." This is not the small, selfish, self-oriented self, but The Self. And that's home. You will feel like you finally came home. You cannot tell about this, actually. You have to experience it. And how do you experience it? You have to train. You have to practice. You have to sit every day. And of course, you have to continue to come to the dojo, and practicing all of Tohei Sensei's practices, and try not to leave any of them out even though you prefer some, everybody likes some more than others. You try to do them all if possible.

So, that's my introduction. Do you have questions that you have been saving up to ask me, or are you going to try to get away without asking any questions?

Student: Sensei, I have a question concerning meditation and breathing exercise, which I find really helpful in getting the feeling of being in the stream. And the thing that has bothered me is how you want to sit for a certain amount of time. Let's say you want to sit for 30 minutes, and in the beginning you just put a clock there and you end up looking every five minutes. So then we started to use meditation timers, so that we wouldn't worry about it any more. And this helped me, at least, a lot to not worry about when 30 minutes are over. So I am more in the stream. And then you said that you don't use a machine, that you have to know when 30 minutes are up. I am kind of losing track of time when I am in the stream, so I don't know when 30 minutes are over.

OK, who doesn't know? You see, you are mixing apples and oranges there. We could say, "The universe will tell you when 30 minutes is up." Do you use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning?

Student: I set it, but I mostly don't need it.

OK. But there is somebody that thinks he does need it, because you still set it. When I was in my three-year retreat, my teacher gave me a regimen to follow. I finished meditating sometime in the late evening, and he said, "You may go outdoors and walk for one hour from 11:00 to 12:00 every night. You are not allowed to go out during the day, but you can go walk the neighborhood at that time every night. No clocks." I wondered, "How am I supposed to know when 11:00 PM is?" He said, "What? You know perfectly well." So it's mixing apples and oranges. Yeah, Chris Curtis doesn't know, but I know what time it is, for God's sake. Yeah, it's like my Mother saw me cooking one time. She was a very good cook and she taught me to cook. And she was at my house and I was cooking for us, and I set the timer for whatever I was cooking in the oven for 30 minutes. And she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm setting the timer so I don't have to think about it. We can go have a cocktail, and then it will "bing" and I can come take it out. And she said, "You don't know when a half an hour is? No, no, no. Don't use a timer. Pay attention. A part of you must be paying attention!" That's what my Mom said. That was many years ago, even before I went to my retreat. But I still didn't understand, even when my teacher told me, "Come on, you know." Often my teacher during that period would say to me things like, "Why do you ask me? You know the answer already." Well, my conscious mind didn't know the answer, or didn't

think it did, anyway. I had no idea. That's why I was asking. But he would say, "No, you are asking the wrong person. You are asking your teacher outside of you. Ask your teacher inside of you." Do you understand that? This is very important. We say sometimes that you have to be your own Sensei, because I am not here all the time for you. You have to be your own Sensei. But it's more than that. Sensei is not just a person, you know. This is not about some special person. This person isn't particularly special. But it's an extremely special condition that is being represented to you, and you have to discover this condition within your own world of experience.

Of course, the day will come, if you do this practice, when you don't need your teacher any longer, and you might even go off and open your own school somewhere, as some of you have. But you continue to honor your teacher in the duel world until he or she dies and leaves. And even after, every year we celebrate Suzuki Sensei's birthday and we celebrate his memorial. We were having a meeting and one of my students said, "How long do we do this? Like, he's dead already. He's not here." "No," I told him, "we do it until I'm gone, and then you do it until you're gone." It's not about the man. It's not about Shinichi Suzuki, exactly. Though I do have gratitude to even Shinichi Suzuki, because he was willing to give up his life, so that I could wake up. But I do know now, and I didn't know this when I was younger, but I do know now that it's not about any man or woman.

When you step into the dojo, you practice leaving your self-oriented one, who we think of as our self, outside the dojo. And one of the ways we do that, is that we have this sangha, this group, and we practice together, as a group. And this group practice allows us to discover our interconnectedness and our interdependence with other people. No one is independent of anybody else. Everyone is completely interdependent throughout the world, but we don't know that, so we start experiencing it with the group. And then, if you are lucky, the teacher may ask you to practice otomo, like Carlos is doing now. I practiced otomo for 26 years with Suzuki Sensei. So if you are lucky the teacher will ask you. And then you get a sort of advanced course in this business of leaving your self outside. Carlos and I are gone for one month together. So for one month. And he has had a cold and been ill. You know what it is like when you are not feeling well. But you cannot pamper yourself. And in two or three days, he got well already, because he just doesn't do that...right? So this practice is golden, if you can get this opportunity.

In my dojo only three or four people get to do this, but in most dojo, it's lucky if there is one that can do this. And you have to have a teacher that knows what otomo is. If the teacher doesn't understand otomo, then it is a waste of time trying to be otomo for that teacher. So this is a tradition that is handed down. The teacher teaches the student how to be the teacher, how to accept otomo. You know Jeff Baldwin? He wrote me an email soon after I left on this trip and said, "Have a good journey, and please take very good care of Carlos." This was a joke, see, because, on the surface, Carlos is supposed to be taking care of me. But Jeff knows that the Sensei is the ultimate otomo. And if you don't see that, if you think "Oh, someone else is carrying his bag. He doesn't have to do anything." That's only seeing the relative condition. Something else very powerful is

happening, and you have to learn to experience that. And of course, if you have the insight to see, you can see it, but probably you have to experience it directly. That's why I say, "If you are lucky, you will have a teacher that is capable of this, and the number two, he will happen to ask you."

That was in answer to a question.

Student: OK, thank you.

Student: There is an important question arising through my years of practice. In this stage of my life, I have been training for 35 years, with intensity and with a lot of good will. I have a lot of things hidden in my mind, that come out spontaneously during my practice. There are things in my practice that seemed to be OK, but now I am not so sure.

Now I wrecked it for you?

Student: Yeah, and now I start questioning, or re-considering, questioning my practice every day. You are a person who has spent a lot of time on this. You are older. How do you deal with this kind of stage in our training?

Well, first of all, I am not much older, just a little bit. So let me understand the question. You asked, how to deal with this. How to deal with what exactly? That's the key to the question. How to deal with what?

Student: There are physical and mental changes that happen as I am practicing, and I do feel more limited in some of the things I can do.

Yeah, and as you get older, it will get worse. And some day, you'll die. And that's really disappointing, because then you can't do anything anymore. So welcome to life. Yeah, of course when we are young and enthusiastic and we can move like these young boys, then we really feel like we have the tiger by the tail, like we've got it, we're really in it. It's sort of like the first blush in a love affair. It's like you just can't stop doing it, you know. But if you stay with a partner for many years, as you know, the nature of love changes completely. It becomes much deeper, not so shallow, and not so self-serving.

We have to learn to just live in gratitude. You know, it's a funny thing. It's not about me. It's about everybody, the whole thing. And yet, no one can do it for me, a sort of paradox. You used the word "maturity" earlier. And the key to this is not, not getting older, but getting more mature. Like raising children. If it's a good experience for you, then you become more mature. I don't know how many children you have but, the first one you have is always your precious baby. "Don't let them eat that, don't let them do that!" But by the time you get to the third or fourth one, "Oh, he'll be all right." So this is maturity, and you do the same thing with your self in your practicing of Aikido. In the beginning it's, "Oh, I've got to be perfect." But after a while, it's just, "OK, OK."

So it's not about "me." It's about surrendering "me" to this much bigger, more

interdependent picture that you need to be grateful for. To be alive is something to be deeply grateful for. So two things are happening. One is, you are getting older, and some of the fun things you could do when you were younger don't work so well any more. And number two, you come to see me, and the things you thought you could do very well, don't seem to work so well any more. Right? Both of these. So, what to do? We have maturity. We call this "equanimity." We cannot control what happens. Good things happen, bad things happen, we have pleasure, we have pain. That's fine. Earth should be that way. You don't want earth to be all pleasure. It wouldn't be earth. It wouldn't work. But our practice is to learn not to react to the pleasure and pain, which is what we call suffering. When we suffer, it's because we didn't get what we wanted, or we lost something that we wanted, or we aren't as perfect as we wanted to be. By now, you figured you ought to be perfect! And it can be very disappointing to wake up one day and realize that's not what this is about at all.

I know that you understand this, but I am explaining this to everybody, about equanimity. It's like the farmer who said, "We'll see." Sometimes good things, sometimes bad things. We'll see. Everything has a bad side and a good side. Every thing.

OK?

Student: OK. Thank you.

Student: I have a quick question. Maybe it's just an intellectual misunderstanding that I am having. Here we are talking about polishing the mind. in Japan they say very often that when talking about misogi. But then when I listen to other spiritual teachers, they say "no mind, there is nothing to polish." So I am a bit confused. Maybe the words are not used in the same context, I guess something like that. Maybe you can comment on that a little bit?

Well, it's like saying...OK, so the nature of the universe is often referred to in Asia as "emptiness." The first Koan that you practice in a Zen Temple is "Mu." Of course that means "no thing." Mind doesn't exist "as such," as a "thing." What those teachers are trying to get us to see is that we are stuck in the dual world, where things have boundaries, and we can't see beyond that. So then it is very difficult to understand what somebody means by "polishing the mind." How do you do that?

As student comes to see a teacher and asks, "Sensei, could you please tell me, what is the nature of the universe." And the teacher says, "Yeah, it's emptiness." The student says, "Thank you. Got it," and gets up to go. And the teacher says, "Wait a minute. Let me ask you something. What is the nature of the universe?" And the student says, "Emptiness." The teacher then says, "No, wrong." The student says, "But you just told me it was emptiness." "Yeah, when I told you, it was true. When you told me it was not true," said the teacher. So that's a koan. If you can understand that, then that's the answer to your question. It's experiential. It's not conceptual. And when we mix experience with concept it doesn't work. Do you know Yogi Berra, the great baseball player and coach in the U.S. He said it best. "In theory, theory and practice are the

same. In practice, they are not.” Or, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”
Yeah, a very famous guy.

So? Yeah. Sit more.

Why don't you just ask about what you are feeling? You know, when we are in a group like this and you ask a question, you are asking it for everybody. Everybody has this question, or they are either not brave enough or not astute enough to ask it. Everybody has this question. When you ask a question, you are revealing something about yourself to the group. And isn't it amazing that, no matter how much I'm telling you this is a group experience, and yet we are still all in the group wanting to protect ourselves? And yet no matter how prevalent this is at your level, it gets much worse the more experienced you become, the more developed you are, the higher your rank. You notice the higher ranking people usually don't say anything, because they are still possessed by this, “I don't want people to know what a fool I am.” I know that I am a fool. The difference is, I don't care. It's OK. Do you see what I mean there? It's not a relative fool, it's an absolute fool. There is no way you can know anything about anything, ultimately, because it's all relative. I mean, forget that it's all self-interest, and you want to know something so that you can use it, make money with it, get love for it, or get respect for it. It's impossible to isolate something. Every single position that has ever been taken by a human being is defensible from some relative position, including your Fuhrer that was here before. He was a nasty man, yes. But every position is defensible from some relative position. I am not supporting him, but when we look with equanimity, we see that no matter how far right or left you are in the political scale, no matter how radical you are, it's the same. And coming to the middle doesn't change things. In our practice there is no scale. We are not talking about getting better and better. This never stops. There is no stopping. It's something else altogether. It's completely different than what we are used to. So then doing this (opening the heart) doesn't hurt any more, because you know there's nothing in there that is not in every single one of us. All the fears, all the anxieties, all the maturity and all the lack of maturity, it's all right here. Just sit more. Did I say that already?

Thank you very much.