

Ki Lecture: Non- Dissension

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Good evening everyone. I recently was on jury duty here on Maui for just a couple of days. It was a pretty simple case. But what I noticed, and I had never done that before and maybe everyone already knows this, but the instruction to the jury is that every single one on the jury has to agree on the verdict. There can be no dissent, not even one. That is called a “hung jury.” It is not a “majority rules” kind of thing. I was the jury foreman, so I was responsible. We already had about 80 or 90 percent but there were a couple of hold-outs, dissenters, so we had to find a way to help them.

If you look up “dissent” in the dictionary, it says something like in the Supreme Court, there is something called a “dissenting opinion.” Maybe some of them agree and some don’t, so in that case it is a majority rules kind of thing. You don’t have to have 100 percent. And then the dissenters always write a dissenting opinion. Or you can have political dissenters that have a dissension with whatever happens to be the current despot in charge.

So Tohei Sensei is teaching us “the spirit of non-dissension.” And it really made me think about it a lot when I was on this jury, because my responsibility was to help these two people get on board with what we all knew was the case. But they each had emotional reasons why they were not going to let this guy get away with it. It was a domestic abuse case. This guy was an abuser. He had a long history of it, which normally you don’t get to find out about in a court case, but because of some mistake that was made, we got to hear about it. We all knew he was guilty. We all knew that the woman was recanting her testimony when she got up and said, “Oh, he didn’t hit me.” We knew it. He was guilty. However, the prosecuting attorney has to prove it beyond a reasonable doubt, and he did not do that. He left an opportunity open that it could have happened another way, the way she was saying it.

After the trial was over, the judge came into the jury room and said, “Let me congratulate you, because I know you all wanted the defendant to go to jail.” And I said, “Yes, we all did.” And he said, “But you didn’t convict him, and that is the way the judicial system works. They have to prove it beyond a reasonable doubt.”

So I had to convince these two jurists to let this guy go free, to agree that he was not guilty, when I didn’t feel that way. That wasn’t my opinion. That wasn’t where I was resting, nor was anybody else, on the relative scale of guilt and innocence. And those are not absolute things, because he will do it again and then he will get put in jail sooner or later, and hopefully someone doesn’t get hurt too badly.

It was a very difficult thing to do, and I realized that this is what we are doing in Aikido. We all had a dissenting opinion on that jury. We all didn’t believe that he was not-guilty. But we knew that we had to give him a not guilty judgment because the prosecuting attorney didn’t do his job. It turned out to be the second time the prosecuting attorney had ever been in court. He came up to me afterward and said, “What did I do wrong?” I said, “Well, you didn’t do your job. You left this opening.” It’s too much to explain

right now, but he left an opening. He said this was only the second time he'd ever done this, he was a really young person, and I said that we all felt really bad for him, but the judge did not give us any choice. And I told him that the judge had told us we did the right thing. "So take that into account when you are thinking about how to present a case in the future."

Tohei Sensei says, "the way to success is none other than the spirit of non-dissension." And when he says "success" there, as he explains in the Shokushu, he is talking about a life without struggle. That's what he says, being free of struggle. We all had dissent, but only two of us were struggling with that. And my job, as jury foreman, was to help them stop struggling. It was a double edged sword, and was very difficult to do. And, like I said, I thought that this is exactly what we are doing in Aikido when you want to move someone somewhere. They want to do one thing, which is grabbing you or hitting you or attacking you in some way, moving, or not moving, and you don't want them to do that or you want to do something else. In the relative world it is all conflict, because whatever position you take, someone else will take another position. So here we are with these two positions. Are we going to struggle or not, is the question. We have conditioned minds. We are going to have opinions. We are going to have positions. We can't help it. You like something better than you like something else. Some people are more "left wing" and others are more "right wing," or whatever. Everything is like this. Everything has these relative positions.

The question is not whether you are going to find yourself with an opinion, or find yourself with some kind of point of view. The question is are you going to struggle as if your point of view is the only point of view that has merit. So when Tohei Sensei talks about the spirit of non-dissension, he is talking about us learning not to struggle. He doesn't say that there is not going to be conflict. The relative world is made of conflict. And you and I are going to be involved in that, because we have conditioned minds and we have positions. We have points of view. We have preferences. We have opinions. The problem begins when we think, "OK, well I reasoned my way to that opinion, it's not an emotional opinion, I reasoned my way to this opinion." But that reasoning is based upon conditioning. So the result of that reasoning is suspect. There is no way we can say, no matter what opinion we have, that our position is the only right position. It's relatively right, it's relatively wrong. It's somewhere on this scale. There are always people that are more conservative than you are and there are always people who are more liberal, that will look at what you are doing and say that you are being too conservative or too liberal. Always that's the case, because it goes infinitely in both directions, right? And there is no center. It goes forever. So there is no position that we can rest in and say, "This is worth dying for," or "this is worth hurting someone for," or "this is worth defending and struggling for."

OK? This is a very unpopular notion. There is almost no one out there in the world who will agree with me. Eh? No. I mean, there are some, but very few. Because that's not the way that we are conditioned. That's not the way we have been taught. I mentioned before, you know, someone comes over to your house, and meets with you, and some subject comes up. If you look in the letters to the newspaper, there's always the "cane burning letters" the "GMO letters" the "telescope letters." There is a long list of subjects

and the opinions are all over the universe, not just both sides but every little subtle aspect of both sides that people are writing about. So someone comes and meets you and they want to know, “Oh, have you heard about this controversy that’s happening?” one of the many things that we have seen in the news that we distract ourselves with here on Maui. “And what is your opinion?” they ask you. “What is your position?”

Have you ever had this happen? Don’t all of your friends want to know that? Has anybody not had this happen, like, almost daily? This happens to me all the time. People want to know where do I stand on this or that. Where do I stand? Where am I ready to die? Where am I ready to set up my castle and struggle to defend it? And if it is not his castle or her castle, then it’s going to be a problem. Thank God they found someone who doesn’t agree with them, so they can struggle!

So this is really hard to practice. Tohei Sensei just told us that this is the essence of our practice, the essence of Aikido practice, this spirit of non-dissension. Suzuki Sensei taught us for 25 to 35 years, “This is the spirit of non-dissension, fellas. This is the essence of your practice.” And it completely goes against everything in our nature. We want to join with a group that feels like we do so we feel like we belong and have some power, and then we want to struggle against the other side to get them to change and be like we are. Right? And they want to do the same thing. It’s comical. It’s insane actually. But that’s what’s happening all day long right here in our community, and not to mention the effects of this you can see in the world outside. Of course, if it goes on long enough people start to kill each other, build bombs and have wars.

I know that all of you, as Aikido students, are, let’s say, dealing with this every day, in one way or another. You are finding your selves taking positions on things, and either putting something on Facebook or emailing someone or talking to someone, and starting a struggle. “Let’s get a struggle going here. I’m going to tell these other people how it ought to be.” We find ourselves doing that, don’t we? Does anybody here not do that at all? Is anybody here free of that? No. It’s a daily occurrence that you notice you have these positions.

So I thought I would give that kind of introduction about it, and then ask you to tell me how you are doing with this on a daily basis. Are you struggling with it? Of course that would mean that you have an Aikido position that is struggling against the popular position, and that’s not what I am talking about.

Student: Back to the beginning, when these two dissenters were on the jury and didn’t agree with the rest of the group. Is it possible that they were trying to get you to be dissenting with them?

Absolutely. Of course. They were struggling to convince the rest of us that we were wrong. And they could see that we actually agreed with them. So it made it very frustrating for them, because we said, “We agree. He’s guilty. But we can’t condemn him, because the law says that the prosecuting attorney has to prove it beyond a reasonable doubt, and he did not do that.”

Student: So they thought that there wasn’t reasonable doubt.

Yes, but it wasn't a reasoning thing. It was an emotional thing. The two of them, one was a man and one was a woman, wanted to crucify this guy. They were just mad. Once I agreed with them and did Aikido with them, you know, and got on board with the way they were seeing it, that calmed them down. And then they realized, "Oh yeah, well this is terrible. We have to make him innocent." I said, "Yeah, we do."

Student: So it wasn't just the two agreeing with the majority, then. It was much more than that. I mean there are a lot of people that others don't agree with that are perfectly normal and right. I mean, look at Galileo. No one believed him. Are we supposed to agree with the masses?

Don't misunderstand. I am not saying that you shouldn't have dissent in your heart, or that you shouldn't have an opinion or a view or disagree because of that opinion or view. But the question is, do you struggle as a result of that? And if you do, then you are not practicing the spirit of non-dissension.

The distinction I am trying to make here is that Tohei Sensei is not telling us that you have to be free of any conditioning. He is not saying that you have to be free of any opinion, free of any preference, free of any point of view at all. He is not saying that. He is saying, on a scale that goes infinitely in every direction, every position is possible. Don't be so arrogant to think that your particular position is the only right position. It's not right, it's not wrong. It's just a position. It's not noble, it's not ignoble. It's just a position. There are positions that are more noble and there are those that are less noble. It's a position. Don't struggle to make everyone else agree with your position.

And it goes for both sides. I mean the people that were criticizing Galileo, if you will, or even Luther Burbank. Luther Burbank was the original GMO guy, right? He gave us "Burbank potatoes"...do you folks know about Luther Burbank? He was a plant pathologist who crossed species. He took plums and peaches and crossed them, and now we have...a nectarine! One of the best fruits around. And you know he developed the potato so that now we have a nice baking potato. It's called now a "russet potato" or a "Burbank potato." Before he came along, we didn't have any potatoes like that, big baking potatoes. They were just little. Anyway, the religious people in San Francisco found out he was doing this and got really upset, because they said the Bible said you can't do that. And they had him arrested and put in jail and he was forced to prove that this was a benefit to society. But society was convinced, absolutely convinced that it was not a benefit, and that it was in fact, against the Bible.

So, it happens that Luther Burbank was a sometime disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda. It was a kind of side deal for him. He trained like you guys do, on the side. So he didn't struggle. He didn't fight with them. You can actually read the transcripts of the trial and it's very fascinating. He did a great job, and they all went "Oh, well OK then we like what you are doing." And so then he got to keep doing nice things for us. And as a result, when you go to the super market, most everything you see in the fruits and vegetable section we have Luther Burbank to thank for, directly or indirectly.

That's a little sidelight there, but you can see that he could very easily have gotten angry, if he hadn't trained, and struggled against those people, because surely they were wrong

from his perspective, and ended up spending the rest of his life in jail, or at least had to give up all of his work.

So struggle is the key, not that you are not supposed to have a point of view, but that you must not think that it is the only valid point of view. And we can't begin to do Aikido, until we have gotten to that point. As long as we secretly harbor some sort of special feeling of righteousness or nobility, you are not going to be able to do Aikido, because you are going to be too insulted by the person that is either yelling at you or wants to actually smack you because of this.

I am always saying, if you are practicing Aikido, no one would ever think to attack you to begin with. You are never going to need to use physical Aikido out on the street, unless you are not practicing Aikido. In which case, if you have to use it, it's not going to work anyway. Do you see what I mean? If you are offering a struggle, you will have one. And if you want a struggle, then you have already left Aikido behind, and it's too late. And we all know, from taking Ki Tests how fragile we are, how delicate this is, how easy it is to take a position, to try to pass that Ki Test. That's just the same thing as trying to take a position to make yourself more worthy or more noble or more righteous, or whatever it is that turns you on or makes you feel good about yourself.

In our case, it's mostly like more peaceful kinds of things. But there are people out there that, in order to feel righteous they have to shoot somebody. There are all different types of what people consider to be the "noble way." Stoning women, because they committed adultery, that's the noble way in Afghanistan. That's the right thing to do in their society.

Student: That's a really good example. That's what I was going to ask you about. So, if you are talking about a society where stoning women who have been raped is the normal way, how can someone who is in a more powerless position stand up and advocate for a better world while maintaining non-dissension? I mean, can you clarify the difference between non-dissension and just rolling over and accepting brutality at the hands of somebody like that?

Right, yeah, thank you. That's a really good question, and I'm sure that's what everybody is thinking, "Well, am I supposed to just do whatever they say? Let them stone me to death?" Of course, we don't live in a society where it's overt like that, but the same thing occurs to us here, even though you don't die for it. Though, if you are a young black man in Chicago, maybe you do die for it.

So your question is, clarify the difference between just rolling over and practicing non-dissension. Can I give you an example? Mahatma Gandhi, who always throughout his life advocated non-struggle. Do not struggle. The result of struggle, or the extension of struggle is violence, so if you are non-violent, you ought to be non-struggle. If you are not non-struggle, you are not actually non-violent, so you can't say that you are. And that was a big deal for him, and he was always having to explain this to people, the difference here. People would say to him, "We need to fight for what is right. We need to struggle here." And he knew that if they struggled, if they went out and presented that face, they would get bludgeoned. And in fact they did that on occasion, and they did get bludgeoned. It's like Martin Luther King. He was constantly advocating the same thing,

saying “No, no, there is a difference between just rolling over and practicing non-violence or non-struggle or non-dissension.” It doesn’t mean that you just let them walk all over you. You still march to Selma. It’s not a very popular view that you would just stand there and let someone smack you. Jesus said, “When your enemy hits you on your right cheek, turn the other cheek and let them hit the other cheek.” What on earth was he talking about? He was talking about non-dissension.

This is not very easy to adopt. It’s not our human nature to allow that. It takes tremendous strength and courage to do that, like only people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. I mean these are rare individuals who have that degree of strength of purpose and character and clarity of understanding of this principle of non-dissension.

And so we are practicing this all the time. And what I have asked you is, in your daily life, I know you have to deal with this every day. So what are you coming up against? What is this like for you? How are you doing with it?

Did I answer your question?

Student: Yes, Sensei.

Student: Sensei, most of your examples have been two opposing views. But you have also alluded to views that are in common being at least equally as dangerous. Someone once said that if you find yourself in a room full of people that agree with you, it’s time to find new friends.

Sensei, it seems to me that it’s easier to get sucked into a group of people that are constantly agreeing with you, and then you end up stoning people, or coming up with weird things.

Well, yeah, I mentioned that a little earlier. I mean, misery loves to have company. If you are struggling with something, and always when you are angry and frustrated and struggling, it’s because you feel someone has too much power over you. That’s why we get angry. Anger is you feeling like someone has power over you. So, if you band together with a bunch of other people, you can feel like you can have more power. But the problem is if you can’t control your own urge to struggle with whatever the conflict is, and you are with like-minded people who also cannot control themselves, also can’t control their urge to struggle, yeah. By “control” here, I mean they don’t know how to Keep One Point. They don’t have a practice. If that is the case, then yeah, you have mob rule.

It matters not at all what the subject is, or what you think you are defending. And isn’t that strange? Haven’t you ever had an argument with somebody, maybe even someone you love, like your partner, and you were really mad, and two weeks later you can’t remember what the subject was that you were mad about? It’s not about the subject. It’s about the struggle. And in some sense, it feels good. And again, I gave you the example of the little boys with sticks, little kids with sticks fighting with each other. We used to throw stones at each other. And for kids, that’s great fun. That is an exciting adventure and fun to do. OK? But it’s not fun for adults. It really shouldn’t be fun for adults. In other words, that’s not what an adult is. So when you get people that are trying to hurt

each other, whether it's emotionally or verbally, the written word, or actually physically trying to hurt each other, then we are just acting like children hitting each other with sticks.

Student: Sensei, I know we are not religious here, or anything, but in Buddhism, isn't one of the main things that there is struggle in this world, and he also says that there is an end to struggle? I mean it was so important that we see that there is struggle constantly going on, and that that leads to unhappiness, but that there is light at the end of the tunnel. But I don't know if he is talking about that in this lifetime or some other lifetime. Does that pertain at all to this?

Yeah. He's teaching non-dissension. The Buddha you are talking about, yes?

Student: Yeah, didn't he say something about that?

Yes. What he learned under the pipal tree was that the nature of people's life is suffering, suffering meaning struggle. It's the same thing. OK? Everybody has pain, everybody has pleasure. That's the way it is. When we struggle against that, when we suffer because of pain and pleasure, then we are not practicing non-dissension. And he is teaching non-dissension. It's not a matter of, will I be free of it in this lifetime or some other lifetime. Practice. The practice alone is the freedom. So just practicing this is freedom. This is what I wanted one of you to tell me. It's not a matter of...I mean Tohei Sensei says "success," but what does success mean? Surely it doesn't mean there is no more pain in your life, and nothing bad ever happens to you any more. I don't ever get sick again, nobody ever speaks crossly to me, nobody ever misunderstands me, everybody loves and supports me all the time, and I have all the money that I need and I am going to live forever. Well, of course this isn't true of anybody, ever.

Student: Sensei, doesn't that also deal with a persons change of identity? I mean most of this struggle comes with demonstrating who you are. I mean, "This is my position. This is who I am." It's sort of like you might not even know who you are, but you are exercising these things so that you find out who you are. But, we're not really taught that who we are is as transitory as the rest of the world, who we are is changing, continually. Like you say, we don't even remember two weeks ago what we got angry about. I mean that's a big change. And if that subject came up again, you might not even enter into it in that way. So it seems like we are so involved in becoming this person, and forget that who we were yesterday is going to be different today. So I would think that would sort of help, like in Buddhism, that train of thought teaches you a different way of looking at it.

Of course. And even though Aikido is not religious, it is largely based on Buddhist teaching, the teaching of the East. And the philosophy of the East is so heavily influenced by the Buddhist teaching that it does permeate our practice. I mean, we are practicing the spirit of non-dissension, or the state of mind called non-dissension or non-fighting or non-violent, non-harming. If you have a position to protect or defend or even promote or proselytize about ...

Student: Well you will always have a position if you are identifying yourself as this person who is defined by a position.

Or a person who is made up of positions. Yeah, it's all conditioned mind. So if that's who you think you are and no one else, then you are stuck. You are going to be struggling and fighting and suffering all the time. That's why the Buddha said that the problem is the self, the identity as a self. If that's who you think you are, it's just made up of a bunch of conditioned positions and you have to fight to preserve all those conditions and all those positions, and you will die doing that. So there will be no happiness. There will be no peace, no true peace.

So we practice every day, practicing what Tohei Sensei calls the spirit of non-dissension, and we do it by Keeping One Point and experiencing our self as a universal self or a feeling of identity that includes everything and everyone in our world of experience. And that's the experiential position we have to have before we can even touch our partner in Aikido. We have to begin by being in this state of mind, and then we can perform Aikido. So it's the precursor, the requirement for any kind of Aikido expression or Aikido exercise.

Yeah, and to go back to the beginning, because we are at the end here, when I first encountered these two people that were against the group and wanted to have their way, I saw that I reacted to them with, "Are you going to keep us here all night?" And then the whole room went, "Ahhh no..." And then that made the two people madder, because they were righteous now. Now they had a righteous cause. I gave it to them on a platter. So then I said to myself, "Wait, wait Curtis, what are you doing? You just stepped right in it!" So then I just changed the whole way I related to them and it worked out great.

So there are no answers here, like when you are being stoned for the wrong reason, well I guess it's always the wrong reason if you are being stoned, and by then it's a little late. I guess if you find yourself in that situation, and then like Malala Yusef, you just have to continue to make your voice heard, and speak as clearly as you can, and not struggle. Like Gandhi, you may die doing that, and even she may die doing that, or you could leave the country. Some people have that choice. Malala does, though they all don't. You can leave that situation and go to another situation, but generally you are taking that situation with you, though, because it's never "them," it's always "us." It's always something in our world of experience that is causing this to happen, and that's what he/she has to discover, that's what we have to discover. When everybody is lined up to throw rocks at us, "Hmmm, why?" I don't mean the obvious reason, but there is something deeper, see. There is something else going on there. "Oh, what a minute. Maybe being a human is not the story about being a human."

Student: Would there be any possible way of seeing that compassionately for a ten year old rape victim who's being stoned to death?

Well Jesus did it for Mary Magdellan.

Student: But she was a prostitute.

She was getting stoned. So therefore it was OK to stone her because she was a prostitute? What are you saying?

Student: Well no, but you know...

But He was compassionate with her. “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”

Student: Maybe you can clarify the difference between what you just said, that if you find yourself with everybody lining up to try to kill you, to look inside yourself and think what did I do wrong...?

No, I didn't say to look inside yourself.

Student: There is a famous poem by Thich Nhat Hanh, “Only By My True Name” where he actually speaks to a 10 year old being raped by a sea captain. It's a hard thing to see, but to see that each of us contains all of those possibilities within us...we are the rapists ourselves.

Yes, I have read that. Thank you very much for that. If I had thought of it I would have used it as a perfect example. It's not easy to see. And it's not so simplistic as in, “Oh just look inside.” I mean, that's not very compassionate. It's not “look inside,” it's look at, as I just said, being human. Which is much more inclusive. No one is in a position where they can say, “I am innocent.” And no one is in a position where they can say, “Only he or she is guilty.” We do this all the time. But that is what I meant about people seeing it as the story of being human, but not the actual experience of being human.

We all would like, or think we would like, a world that was peaceful and free of violence. I, for one, would like a world that is free of violence. And in my weaker moments, I would even like a world that was free of conflict. That means, I would even like a world that didn't have any pain or pleasure. Well, what am I talking about? That's not earth. That's heaven. That's what we call “heaven.” That's the name we give to that place where there is no conflict. But unfortunately the world of conflict that we are born into, this relative world, is our ticket to the absolute. It is the friction between the pain and the pleasure. It's the friction that is caused by conflict that heats us up enough to experience non-dual or non-relative consciousness or awareness. Tohei Sensei calls this Taiga, the absolute universe.

People think that Keep One Point is like pretty mild. And it can be at times, but it is generally incredibly intense, and very hot and very powerful, and not at all what people would call “peaceful.” Except, that it is completely devoid of struggle and suffering, and very effective, and very compassionate. That's why, when we are teaching about this, we are always saying that you can't understand this from a relative or logical or story-book point of view. You can't understand the world that way, that way it's told in books and newspapers and magazines and on television and in other places. “Position papers.” That's the world of story-book. That's not how it is. We all believe it too. We notice that we are conditioned to believe this.

Basically what I am saying is, in order to practice, we have to find our way to a deeper understanding of the spirit of non-dissension and practice it regularly.

Thank you.