

**HKF Omiki Seminar – Question & Answer
With Christopher Curtis Sensei
Sunday, October 25, 2015**

Good morning everybody. Yesterday morning I started by saying, “When the teacher is explaining, speaking about something or showing a form, how to move, how to hit the bell, how to yell, how to count, how to cut the bokken, poke the jo, or any technique or art, or any point of clarification, the purpose of the words and the forms are for your entertainment. They are to attract your attention and keep your attention, so that you will hang out and get the real benefit, which is unseen, unspeakable, unable to identify as some thing. We have names we put on it, but they are all inaccurate, because any word is a relative thing, and can only hope to point to that which cannot be seen.

I have a little story. This young student went to a seminar with a very famous Lama. This young student was very excited to meet this famous Lama. He had a number of questions he wished to ask him. However, when he got to the seminar, he found that the rule was that you may not speak to the Lama unless he speaks to you first. And of course the Lama never said a word to anyone, in the way of asking them to say something. So the seminar went on and became very concerned that he was not going to get to ask the Lama his very important questions. It got to be the last night, and he knew the Lama was leaving early the next morning, and so he finally wrote a note to the Lama asking permission to address his questions to him. Then it got to be 11:00 at night of this last night, and still no word from the Lama. Finally, much later, there is a knock on his door and the person says to him, “The Lama will see you now.” So he rushes, very excited, to the Lama’s room, and the Lama is busy doing some paperwork and he indicates that the student should sit. So he sits and waits, and waits, and waits, and finally the Lama looks up and indicates that he may leave. The is very upset, because he never got a chance to ask the Lama his questions, and he returned to his room. And then when he got up to sit in the morning, all of his confusion and doubt was gone.

So, the questions is, how did that happen? Let me say it this way, the student was sure that this famous Lama had somehow transformed his life. And indeed he did, but not in the way the student thought. Can you see? The student did that all by himself. He could have had that experience any time. He just needed the right kind of silence, for the right amount of time, at the right moment, and he saw and transformed his life. I offer this story as an example of what I have been talking about, for your consideration.

Any questions? Now’s your chance.

Student: What's the most wonderful thing that you practice in Aikido, for you? Yeah, is there any interpretation? What's makes you feel the gratefulness in practicing Aikido?

Oh, yeah. Well, that would be a very difficult question, because everything, from that perspective, is that same. There are things on a relative scale, that I like to do better than other things. Like, I love Sokushin no Gyo, I just love to do it. But the experience I have when I am doing it is the same experience I have when I am doing Ki Breathing or Ki Meditation or when I am doing a technique, turning and throwing. The feeling in my body, the experience itself, is identical. But I just happen to really love Sokushin no Gyo. I like to yell, I like to hit the bell, and I love to do it with other people. Like, we all have preferences. You might like one kind of food more than another kind of food, but that is your preference. And that is fine and you can choose in this world. But if you don't have a choice, you will still get nourished, yeah? The result will be the same. You will be healthy. If you eat fish instead of chicken or chicken instead of fish, protein. It's kind of like that. And if you ask other people in Aikido, they will give you different preferences probably, about parts of Aikido they like better. But I hope that for everybody the answer would also be the same, that the experience is the same, no matter what. And if that is not the case, then that bears looking at. Like, Tohei Sensei always would say, "Kakudaiho and Shuchuho in Ki Meditation are the same. If your experience is different, then something is not right." You are thinking about it, or you are imagining it instead of actually experiencing it. Good question.

Student: OK, so I guess for me, I spend all this time learning to let go, letting things happen and being in the present, but when I go to work, my job is to combat all that, you know, fight things that happen. I do research in diseases, and my entire scope is preventing things from occurring naturally. You know, diseases happen, and I try every day to stop that from occurring. So for me it's hard to rationalize things I practice here and translate it to what I do at work.

Oh well that's very interesting. I think I have the same job as you, here in the dojo. Diseases are naturally and constantly occurring and I have to stop them before they infect everybody and kill the dojo. Yeah, I have exactly the same job as you. The question is, how do you do that job? You know, it's not your fault that you have a disease. It's not the disease's fault, it's not the virus' fault. It's not a moral wrong for the virus to exist. And it's nobody's fault that catches the virus. They are also not wrong, right? So you don't have to put anybody down or even make any virus feel bad. You just have to work it out so that it doesn't infect everybody and kill them. That's a very productive and positive and uplifting sort of thing to do. And if you get too satisfied by your success, what will

happen? Yes, you get complacent. So, in some sense, constantly on the edge, questioning, looking, doubting, checking and checking has to continue for your whole life. Me too. So actually, how lucky are you? How lucky am I? We've got the same job. Can you see that?

Actually, everybody has that job.

Student: Sensei, when I first started participating in Aikido, one of the first things that was taught to me was the One Point, Keep the One Point. And it was very familiar. I remember the first time when you came to Kauai and you gave that talk and I thought, this is all familiar, because in my past experience, the One Point in the Hawaiian culture is the na'au. From the Chinese it was the dantian. The chi, the mana, and the ki, I felt were all the same thing, the same process. We are all connected to the universe from the One Point, which is no different from, like I say, when the Hawaiians say the na'au or the Chinese say the dantian.

But yesterday, you said that it is not any of those, oh, this morning. So there is a little conflict there in my understanding of what you said. My question is, is there no relation to what you say, as far as is the Ki of the Universe not mana? Is it not chi?

How important is it to you that they be the same?

Student: Well, because of familiarity, because of my conditioning.

How important is it, on a scale of one to ten? How important is it that chi and prana and mana and ki be the same? What the hell difference does it make?

Student: Not that important, I guess. I was just caught off guard when you made that statement.

No, I got you, I know. When Tohei Sensei first told me this, I thought I had it all figured out already. It's all the same. And then that sort of supported the idea, my intellectual philosophy about everyone being the same, and even if they are built differently, different faces, etc. but still the same thing is going on. We're all humans. I was in a point in my life where I was struggling to make sure, to find a way to figure that out and justify it intellectually. We're not the same. We are very different! We are the same in the unseen world. But in the seen way, we are quite different. We do different sorts of things, and we have different ways of explaining things.

Actually, there is only one. And we don't need to make us all the same to make us like each other. How boring would that be? And I will say, just for the sake of discussion, I would bet you, if I got to sit down with a Hawaiian Kahuna, a healer,

or spiritual person, and and Chinese Daoist, and an Indian Mahat, and we discussed this, we could all agree that it is the same. Because the less you are talking about descriptions and the more you are talking about experience, the more it gets toward the unseen. And I'm always just talking about experience.

Tohei Sensei said many times, "When I talk to you about body, I mean mind." In other words, I am really always only talking about the source, not the result. I am talking of the result, but you have to understand the source of what that is pointing to. This is the same thing I am saying right now.

And this is really critical, because when we have a difficulty, (and the spirit of non-dissension is what we began with here), it's because we are stuck on a relative scale, somewhere on something. We have got some thorn in our side that we can't let go of. Everybody is going to have an opinion. If you were brought up with this kind of people, and your friends are this kind of friends, then all you are going to hear is "GMO is bad." But if you get brought up with this other group of people, more science oriented, then you are going to think, "there is nothing wrong with GMO. Why don't those guys like GMO?" And these other guys are thinking, "Why can't they see how bad this GMO stuff is!?" And right here in our own community, in Hawaii, (most of the other parts of the world have this pretty well worked out) but here we are like green. We're new. And so we've got this big issue going on, where people feel that they have to speak up and say, "This is actually how it is!" Can you really say that, one way or the other, about anything? No, you can't. But we are willing to. We are all willing to live and die for these things. And that's why makes the world go round. That's why we have wars, why we will always have wars, and that's why it's OK that we have wars, because we are the way we are. Not because they are that way over in Afghanistan or Syria. Not because they are that way, no. There are wars because I am the way I am. That's why Confucius said, "If you want to change your country, change your community. If you want to change your community, change your family. If you want to change your family, change your self." Anything you try to do, outside of that, you are missing the point. This is all you have to work with. If you think you are in such a state that you can instruct the world about one side or the other of a relative argument, of course then that is missing the point.

That's why we do this training. That's why Shinichi Sensei and Tohei Sensei and Suzuki Sensei said that this [the spirit of non-dissension] is the essence of your practice. If you can get beyond choosing and fighting for a side of some issue, if you can go beyond that, rise about that...Suzuki Sensei used to always say, "You have to rise above it, fellas. Don't be on the same level. Rise above. See the whole picture, so you can see all of what is happening." That's equanimity,

and equanimity is the result of a deep experience of non-dissension.

Student: Sensei, when we train on the mat with a partner together, we are practicing it on both sides. But when we are out in the world, normally people aren't doing that. They are holding you without Ki, and with force, and you know, not only physically, but other wise. So, we take what we learn here and we apply it in a different perspective, let's say, because they are not holding with Ki. What is it that changes a person...I'll put it physically...if a person is holding you because they want to control you and you move them with Ki, what is it that changes in the uke that makes him willing to move?

Ah, yeah that's a really good question. Of course, I have addressed this a number of times, right? What do I usually say?

Student: I've forgotten.

You've forgotten. O'Sensei, being the first one to introduce Aikido to the world, always said, "You have to secure the agreement of your partner," right? That's what he said. There is no way that you can force somebody to do something. I mean, even if you put a gun to their head and you succeed, they don't do it well, and it won't come out well, and one of you is going to get hurt, if not both of you. The only way is to make friends with the person. Someone who sees you as an enemy is seeing you as different, or opposite, or other than them. That's why they are holding you and trying to control you. If you fight back, struggle to get control of them, of course, then you have ultimately got a war. You are just enhancing the conflict, right? So instead, you have to see it from their point of view. That's what we do in Aikido. You have to respect their point of view, as if it has as much value as your own. This is the spirit of non-dissension. Respect the person who has the opposite view, as if it has the same value and rational sense and emotional punch as your belief. If you can do that, they will feel that. In other words, Iwao Tamura Sensei used to say, "Universal mind recognizes itself, and then two move together." That was his explanation. So a loving, open, caring mind that is truly sharing, truly experiencing what the other person is experiencing, then you have no reason to resist. Then you want to go wherever this person is going. And then you are friends and you move together, and then it's not an issue any more. You don't have to move anybody.

People think that martial art is winning over another person, controlling another person. No, it's controlling your self. Winning over your own resistance.

Does that make sense to you?

Student: It does make sense.

It's not easy to do, but it makes sense.

Student: Yes. However, the opponent, the other person may not recognize that consciously. But they do, subconsciously?

Yeah, well I mean it's your job to help them recognize that. If they are not recognizing that maybe you are not sincere enough. Maybe you have to dig deeper.

Student: Maybe they don't want to recognize it.

Well, no, they never want to in the beginning. But they are going to want to, when they see who you really are. You agree with them completely! They thought you didn't agree with them, because you were out there with a sign screaming in their face, "You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong!" How do you like someone who does that to you. Do you think they will agree with you? Do you think you are doing Aikido? No! You are starting a war. That's what that is.

So it's really hard. I mean, how are we supposed to live in this world? We can't just let bad things happen, can you? OK, there was a really good movie called "Bridge of Spies" with Tom Hanks. The thing that makes the movie so good, Hanks is great, but the thing that makes the movie so good is this Russian spy, who is his enemy, his opponent. And the guy who plays the Russian spy is very good. Three times in the movie, Hanks, who turns out to be his lawyer, defending him, and they are talking and Hanks says, "You don't seem to be very concerned. Do you realize that they may electrocute you, and you don't seem worried at all about it?" And the Russian spy says, "Would it help?" And then two more times the same thing comes up. I can't tell you or it will wreck the movie, but two more times he says, "Would it help?" And it is so out of context in the world where everybody else is freaking out. The communists are freaking out and the Americans. The movie is about the Cold War in 1957 and he is a spy that has been captured by the Americans. And he knows that he is doing the right thing for his own country, and so end of story. "If you want to kill me you are going to kill me. If you don't, you don't. And it wouldn't help me to worry about it."

Student: You ask us, what are we up against, when we see all of this conflict, practicing the spirit of non-dissension. Not so much to get people to come over to my side. It's kind of like the opposite for me, when I look at myself. It's that I agree so much. Like in a work situation. I feel sometimes when I agree, I mean, am I making a contribution to a bad cycle of behavior? Because, over the years, I don't see this person or that person or a group of people changing their behavior.

Is it your job to get people to change their behavior?

Student: No, but they might be even doing something harmful to others.

You might be doing something harmful to others.

Student: So by agreeing with them, I am making a contribution to that.

OK, do you remember the story you told me about when you were on the flight and a nasty customer was there and you got mad at him and then your supervisor, and I don't remember the whole story, but there was another of you work mates who got mad at him too, and finally the supervisor had to say to you two, "The customer is always right." And she went and talking with the guy and won him over and he was OK, as OK as a guy like that can be.

Student: What I mean is, while practicing this idea, I find myself kind of losing myself, my own principles. I am not sitting quite right with it sometimes, you know, because, is it a small self that I am trying to avoid conflict? I am making a better little world right here, so that we don't argue, because I've seen so much argument amongst people. Just a little world where, "Oh, this is good. I'm not having any conflicts with you." But in the big picture, making contribution to this...

What do you mean that you are an enabler? You feel guilty because you are enabling that other person to be nasty and get away with it?

Student: So, I don't know whether it is a struggle or not a struggle. I don't know how to find a balance sometimes. When do I stand up? Am I agreeing too much with people, to say "Yes, yes, yes, you are right, you're right. I'll do it this way." Then the world is so peaceful. But it doesn't always work that way, that I agree with the person, and then the person will come my way gladly. It doesn't happen. So...

Uh, yeah, I agree that it is very difficult to do what I am talking about. The way I explained it for Fincher, that is the way to be with other people, to faultlessly be with other people. You don't cause any suffering. You are basically falling in love with another person. You are being in love with another person. It's all about a true relationship. If you have any reservations, that's you. That's not them. That's your own small mind reservations, holding yourself back, because it feel very vulnerable to do this. You are basically opening yourself up.

No one's perfect. None of us is perfect. You know, Naluai Sensei has told me maybe three or four stories about when this worked for him in his life. They are great stories, we can't go through them all now, but maybe ask him some time.

But does that mean that every time, with every single challenge he has had in his life, it worked like that? No. I have some good stories too. You have good stories. Of course, the more you practice it, the better you get at it and more useful, as a human being, you can be. But if you think your usefulness, or the answer to a relationship, or how to be with other people is according to some kind of code or moral position, or what did you call it, some inner integrity or something? That's all small mind stuff. That's all culturally conditioned mind. All that stuff will do is either allow you to falsely approach another person, and they'll be suspect of you if you do it that way, or it will hold you back from doing it. The key is opening up your heart to another person. And people are scared, and people are angry, and people are hurt, and they might just punch you in the heart, figuratively. They might just step right on that heart, without even meaning to or even knowing they are doing that, because they have been conditioned. So, you know what Jesus said about that? Let them do it again. Yeah. That's the spirit of non-dissension, and that's why it's so important to us in our relationships with other people. Yes, it's very difficult, and we have lots and lots of ideas about it and we're always trying to figure it out. But you can't do that. It's not about ideas and it's not about philosophy, it's not about a story that somebody tells you, because that story will never happen again. It will never be that way. Every time it comes up it's raw, it's new, it's unique, and all you do is open yourself to it and do the best you can. And if you get pissed off and screw up, well, start over again. It's all you can do. And you are going to. You are going to get mad and you are going to make a mistake and say the wrong thing. Well, you're not perfect. Tomorrow open up some more.

So that's our process. We are all in the process. It's not about performance. We don't have to worry, "Will I do a good job?" No. We are all practicing, together. And some times we do it well and some times we don't. But it's all about keeping going, this practicing. Right Francis? Stay in the river, be the river. You just think Abu Adu Tai, from Lawrence of Arabia. "I am a river to my people." Yeah, that's what that means. Everything. Give everything. OK?

Thank you.