

## **Ki Lecture: Accessing Infinity**

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Good evening everybody. I wrote an email to you that said the title of tonight's talk was "Accessing Infinity." Right? Which is, for lack of a better title, but it is kind of like that.

Tohei Sensei gave us the three principles of the universe. The first one is, "the universe is an infinite sphere with an infinite radius." The second one is, "the universe is an infinite gathering of infinitely small particles." And the third one is, "it's always in motion, always changing, always dynamic." In other words, it is not fixed in any way. He said that this is the nature of the universe. So when he is talking about the universe to us, that's what he means, that which that is the nature of. That's very important, that you understand, because that tells us, "Oh, this is what Tohei Sensei means by 'universe'."

A lot of people think of the "universe" as a collection of things, planets and space and such. If you approach your practice thinking that is what Tohei Sensei is referring to, then it's going to be difficult. You are going to miss my a mile, because the key to understanding and practicing is an experience of infinity. "The universe is an infinite sphere with an infinite radius. The universe is an infinite gathering of infinitely small particles."

When we breathe out, we breathe into this infinite universe, and when we breathe in we take in these infinitely small particles. When we do Ki Meditation, kakudaiho, we experience the infinite sphere of the infinite universe with no limit, and when we do shuchuho, we experience the entire universe collapsing into our center. So it's sort of like, this is the way the universe breathes. And like Tohei Sensei says, when you are doing Ki Breathing, if the breathing out and the breathing in seems different, and you prefer one over the other, then you don't understand Ki Breathing. And when you are doing Ki Meditation, if kakudaiho seems different than shuchuho, then you are using your imagination instead of actually experiencing it, and it means you don't understand Ki Meditation.

So by introducing us to these practices, Tohei Sensei is sort of saying, "Here are my friends. Rub shoulders with them, hang out with my friends, Ki Meditation, Ki Breathing." Because the more you hang out with them, the more you are going to get this feeling of universal breathing, of this infinite expansion, infinite gathering. The feeling of infinity, no beginning and no end. And this is important to us, because when we start a practice like Aikido, we think, "If I train hard I will improve and eventually I will get enlightened." Right? Isn't that why we practice? We think, "If I do the practice correctly, I will wake up to what's actually going on here." Right? And right in the middle of that is a motive, there's a motive there and that's our motive. And whenever there's a motive, the other side of that same coin is a goal. In fact your motive and your goal are the same thing. Your motive is your goal. Your goal is your motive. What if you don't have a motive? You might tell me, "Well, my motive wasn't to get enlightened. My motive was to get a much lower level than that. I just wanted to get black belt. Or I just wanted some new friends, and didn't have any." I'm sure every one of you might

express this differently, but fundamentally we feel like we are motivated to do this practice because we posit some kind of goal, some kind of end. But of course, that means there is a beginning, and that's the motivation, and there's an end, and that's the goal. So we can't help but think of some sort of perfected state. You might not call it "enlightenment," you might not call it "awakening." You might call it "universal mind." Or you might be more vague about that, which is reasonable, and think that you just want to understand this teaching that Tohei Sensei offers. "I don't really know how to put a word on that, but I just want to understand it." But that is putting an end to it. That's saying, "When I understand it, then I will understand it. Then that's it."

We are all like this in the way we think, and again, it's reasonable to think like that, because that's the way it works in the world, doesn't it? Apparently anyway, because that's what everybody tells you. That's the way it works in the world. You work hard, you become successful. You study hard, you become smart. You fix yourself up really nice you get married, or something. You grow your hair long you get sexier. Somewhere in there is that sneaking motivation.

So, this is our small mind, of course. And this is the part of us that will prevent us from ever awakening to, or experiencing this infinity, because we are making a start to our practice and we are making an end to our practice. But the nature of practice is that it continues infinitely.

And also, because we have a motive, we are making a purpose to our practice. What is the purpose of your practice?

*Student: To be one with the universe.*

To be one with the universe. Tohei Sensei even supplied that purpose for us. He said, "The purpose of our practice is to be one with the universe." So, one with infinity. One with that infinite sphere with the infinite radius. One with that infinite gathering of infinitely small particles. One with always changing and never standing still. One with infinity. And here we are, and the very nature of this universe here, living itself, we call "me" or "I" or "life" or "my life," is infinity. It's always changing, we can't see when it began, and we don't know how or if it will even end, because we haven't died yet, so we don't know.

The nature of our life is infinite, and yet the very practice that we do is to limit. We say the purpose of our practice is to be one with the universe, but it might be more reasonable for us to admit that we practice because we want to achieve something. Doesn't that seem reasonable? Does anybody here have no desire to achieve any kind of awakening? Well, if you do have no desire for any kind of awakening, may I please shake your hand. Because that means that you have started to practice.

The curious thing about this that I wanted to bring up tonight and try to put out here for you, and it's very difficult to do so please listen carefully and help me... Well, OK, so last night I had a dream. And I dreamt that I was the continent of Europe. Not just the land-mass, but all the cities and all the people and all the cultures and all the pain and all the happiness. In the dream, I was the continent of Europe, I mean I was the whole of

Europe, and I was surrounded by people wanting to come into my self and invade me, well to immigrate. And they are all suffering. And some of them had weapons and a gleam in their eye, and they wanted to hurt me. All of them were suffering, but some meant harm, and there was no way to know how many. And I realized that as a citizen, it was reasonable for me to have an opinion, either for or against bringing them in, letting them come into me. But as the continent of Europe I had no such choice. I didn't have that kind of freedom. It was too big. It wasn't so simple. I wasn't allowed to have an opinion one way or the other, because neither of those opinions solved the problem, which is not just their problem but my problem. What to do with all of this. How to change. How to be willing to change.

And then when I woke up this morning and sat, I thought, "How strange." I never dreamt I was a continent before. But then I realized that it is this, this that I have been working on lately.

I'm bringing this up, as it's what happens in our practice. We think that we are the causative agents in our lives, so when we are good boys and girls, because we have this motive and goal set up, we feel proud of ourselves, healthy and good and strong, OK. And when we are bad boys and girls and we don't practice, don't sit in the morning, don't come to the dojo, or don't practice in some way, then we are very filled with self-judgment. And of course, when we look at other people then we pass that same judgment onto them. This is because we feel that we are the causative agents in our lives.

And again, that is a very reasonable thing to assume, because we notice in life that if we make certain kinds of decisions, we have a better kind of life, and if we make other kinds of decisions, we don't have so good a life. So we see that there is something going on like that. But it's not quite like that in our practice. I think if you were able to look very closely at those things I just mentioned, making good choices makes you a better person, and making bad choices makes you a worse person, that that's not quite what happens. It's like, these days neurologists will tell you that when you decide something, "Oh, I think I'll do that," or "Yes, that's a good idea, I am going to pursue that," you think that you just made a decision, that you decided to do that. But actually, it was decided already. You just noticed that it was decided, and verbalized it, because you think you are the causative agent. And you can't think any other way, because it's always been reasonable to assume that.

We have three stages of breathing. They're called "Whole Body Breathing," "Universal Breathing," and "Musoku" or "no breathing." In Whole Body Breathing you are basically dealing with bringing the breath throughout your body, from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, and when you breathe out you empty your body from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. That's Whole Body Breathing, obvious why it's called that. When you begin to lose the sense of a membrane that holds your body together, or holds "you" or "I" or who you are together, that encompasses you or is your boundary. If you do a lot of Whole Body Breathing you begin to lose that sense of boundary, and when you do, then you will automatically begin, (not because you decide to but because that's what's happening), then Universal Breathing will start occurring. Universal Breathing is that when you breathe out you do so to the ends of the universe,

and as you breathe in, the whole universe comes in to you. It's just like kakudaiho and shuchuhu but in Ki Breathing instead of Ki Meditation.

Obviously when you are doing Whole Body Breathing you are very involved with yourself, improving your health, improving your calmness, freeing yourself from suffering and pain, and it does a good job of that. The breathing is fantastic, and if you do it every day for a long period of time, you really will improve. If you do correct breathing you will really feel a sense of improvement. And then when Universal Breathing happens, then you are really excited because, "Wow, this is amazing. I am not really this body. I have heard this. I've read this in the spiritual books or I've heard my teacher say that I'm really not just in this body, but I'm everywhere. Oh, I'm one with the universe!" Please notice that the word "I" plays a big part in that. "I" am one with the universe. So even when you are doing Universal Breathing, it's still very much "I." There is still very much your own identity still hanging around, thinking it is the causative agent that brought you to this point and maintains you at this point, and will save your ass in the future as time goes on. The proof of it is, "Look at what I am now able to do. I am now doing Universal Breathing. I am now one with the universe. I have practiced so hard and I have let go so much, now I have surrendered to such a degree that now I am the fucking universe. That is exiting!" And of course that's all about me. It's all about "I."

It's not about the universe. Well, it kind of is, but the main point is that "I" am doing this, right? So then Tohei Sensei says there is this thing called "Musoku." "Mu" in Japanese means "no," or "nothing," or "empty." "Soku," of course means "breath." So "no breath" or "nothing breath" or "empty breath." But if you don't breathe you die, so breathing keeps going. So it doesn't mean there is no breathing. What it means is that there is no "one" breathing. It means you forgot about yourself. Not only you forgot about yourself, but you forgot about time and space, where you are and what time it is, how much time is left, because only the self is aware of that. Only the small self is aware of time and space. They are intricately tied together; time, space, self – same. And so there is this incredible experience. I say that is impossible to talk about. Whatever I say is wrong, because every time I have this experience, I am not there! The self thinks that it is the one that is going to get to be one with the universe. The self thinks that it is the one that is going to get awakened. The self thinks it's the one that's going to get enlightened. The truth is, the self is the part that isn't, that gets left behind. When you say "let go of what?" we mean let go of the self being the causative agent. Of course this doesn't at all mean that you are not. It just means that you are not in the way that you think you are.

I can tell you this, but you have to experience this. This is not an intellectual thing, not something that you can imagine, because the self can't imagine it. It can't imagine life without it's self, because it thinks that it is the one that does everything.

So Tohei Sensei offered us these three practices so that we could rub up against infinity, and hang out with infinity, and Mu would raise its head in our life, infinity which is empty of opinion, time, space, position, qualities, never started, never ends, in hopes that we would be able to recognize this quality of life, and like I say "rub shoulders" with it or identify with it, or adopt the principles of that somehow.

I have to say that lately, some time this year, this thing turned completely around on me. It's not like the self goes anywhere. It just can't believe that it is not the source. The self doesn't become one with the universe. The universe is right here. That's what this is. Whatever we put a dimension around, a boundary around, like a dojo or a bokken or a mat or even the air, which has dimension to it (if you don't think so then study aerodynamics – it's like water). Every word we can say, every concept, every idea that can happen in our heads is dimensional. It has shape. It is a thing. And as such it has meaning to us. And so we live our life in a kind of menagerie of all this meaning, always attempting to refine the meaning. Here we are all in a dojo and not in a bar. We have refined our meaning now. Right? We're really high level now, because we are in a dojo, not in a bar. Or we're not in another bad place, think of one yourself.

*Student: A brothel.*

There you go. Yeah, so we are very high level here. But essentially it's the same thing, because we are using the practice, or we think we are using the practice, to gain an end. That might be awakening or enlightenment for you or it might not be, or you might say something lower down like obtaining a black belt, but whatever it is you choose, you have chosen something, that's why you are here. You are motivated to be here because there is something you want to gain of higher quality in meaning, by being here. So that very wanting to gain it, is going to keep it away from you. You will become black belt, but when you do, you will realize, "Wow, this is nothing. I haven't changed at all! Why did I want to be black belt. It has no meaning at all!" And even the vanity of it...like you might say that it has some meaning because now people respect you more on the mat and so forth. But even that gets really old really quickly, right? Really hollow.

Just imagine that you are in my position. If I think that I am doing this teaching I am going to be miserable. I am going to be quaking in fear. What a responsibility for one person to have! And when you tell me I doing a good job, then I am going to believe it, because I need to. And I am going to set everything up so that it will be confirmed that I am doing a good job, and that what I believe is actually so.

So the higher the level you get in this practice, the more dangerous the delusion of "self being the causative agent" is. Autonomous, you know? Like, you do this all by yourself. No, not only do I not do this all by myself, I don't know where it comes from. Well, I could say that it comes from infinity. But that sounds preposterous, or inflated in some way. Grandiose. "Ah, my teaching comes from infinity." It does, actually. Now Tracy is thinking, "Wait a minute. They are not going to like hearing you say that, Curtis!" It's true. Probably everyone who is listening to this is thinking, "Oh, he shouldn't have said that!" But it's very important that you understand. It's not just this teaching. Everything you do comes from that. That's why there is no such thing as "You're a bad boy and you are a good boy." That's why self-judgment is a huge error. You judge yourself to be good and bad, right and wrong, high and low, pure and impure, because you think you are the one, that you are the causative agent, that you are autonomous.

What you are experiencing is the universe living itself, awakening on its own through you. That's what you are experiencing. So nothing I am saying is pure and ultimately true. What you are hearing me do, what you are hearing happen here, is the universe

awakening to its self. That's why every week, every month, every year, it changes and sounds different and develops. And the same thing, of course, is true of Tohei Sensei and Suzuki Sensei and Shinichi Sensei, and Tracy, and Joni, and every single one of you.

Of course, the more we let go of being the one, the causative agent, the more we can experience that. But look out, because that's getting right in there where you are making yourself the causative agent again, like if you don't let go then you are a bad boy, a bad student, or you are not getting what you want. Everything we say, the way we look at it is this cause and effect. Everything. So you have to really notice how your mind works. By hearing what you say, outwardly and to yourself, how you justify what happens, what choices you make. What are you really going for there? What do you really want?

So this universe is, of course, living itself here. I call it "my life," but it's just the universe living and awakening more and more, but awakening to its self. And just for the joy of it. There is no purpose whatsoever, other than the awakening, which is purposeless.

OK, comments? Questions?

*Student: Sensei, what would you say the difference between desire and aspiration is?*

Well, traditionally we say that desire is your "lower self yearning" and aspiration is your "higher self yearning." But, you know then of course we have to be careful, because when we say, "I am desiring," then I'm a bad boy because I am not my higher self. Only when I am aspiring to purity am I a good boy. See? We're right back in the trap again. We're always looking for the right kind of causative agent to be, for ourselves. What if there is no difference whatsoever between desire and aspiration, except what we do with it in our self-centeredness? That's what I am discovering. And again, we are very hard on ourselves, but we are also hard on other people. When we start to think that way...you know...there is nothing worse than someone who is going off to be a priest shouting down everybody else because they are still going to bars.

*Student: So in contemplating this question, and I've been thinking about it for a couple of weeks, and I've been seeing that the view of the personality is on a horizontal dimension of past, present, and future, and when we step into infinity or out of time, it's that vertical dimension which comes from being fully present in the moment. And being fully awake, suddenly there is a kind of dimensional shift.*

OK.

*Student: And, you know, in the language of Aikido, taiga and shoga.*

So you are saying that the dual world is more like a lateral or horizontal plane and the non-dual world is more vertical?

*Student: And the crossing point is that portal.*

Yeah, the One Point. Well, it's a picture, an image.

*Student: It was a helpful image for me...*

OK.

*Student: Sensei, I wonder...I wanted to ask you about emotions, and if, when you are mentioning about taking ownership of our actions and being the "doer," do you feel that emotions might be something distinctly different than this causative sense that we have that we are operating in the universe. Are the emotions coming from a different place, or are they indicating something else? Is there a distinction?*

Yeah, that's an interesting question. Because when we are...well I don't know about you...oh, well I guess I do know about you...when we are going through our life, as we move from babies to high school to young people to getting older and older, throughout our life we have this sort of low-grade fever, emotional fever, that explodes every once in a while. Sometimes it's for excitement and joy and sometimes it's for pain and misery, or all different levels of that, of course. Sometimes it's quite severe and sometimes it's modest. We call those "emotions." This volcano erupts, this tension that is there all the time. The tension is caused, I have to say...you wanted me to differentiate it, but it's not quite like that. This imagining that we are the causative agents drives us crazy, emotionally. It is tremendously disruptive. That's why, when we learn in Aikido how to Keep One Point we suddenly feel that go away, that tension. It's like we have this huge expansion in our lower belly and we feel completely stable and present and OK. It's OK to be right here right now. This is what our belly does for us, because the belly is where all of this arises-out-of. So, the more you practice Ki Breathing and Ki Meditation, which is really just noticing infinity, experiencing yourself as infinity, just experiencing infinity as infinity, basically we are learning to understand, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically, what One Point really means. It is the source, it is the portal of the source, in our being. When we learn to allow that to be present, in spite of our ideas about it, then when the disruption begins to arise, you feel it, you sense it immediately. And you can practice with it so that you can allow it to come up, and...it goes right back down.

That sounds like you are being a causative agent there, but that is not the practice. For instance, I've been doing this practice for a number of years called "Taking and Sending." It's a Tibetan Buddhist thing. You take all the pain and suffering from the world into your One Point, and then you give all of your peace and calmness and love to everybody. Now, of course, you are not really getting everybody's pain, because they have still got it out there, and they are not really getting all of your love, because nobody has noticed yet. It's not for them that you do this. And you have to really be careful doing this exercise, because on the one hand it's designed to contradict your egoic needs. My self-centeredness says, "Please give me all the peace and love and harmony, and let me give any kind of bad feelings away. Let me get rid of that." We want to get as far away from pain as we can, and suffering, and be happy. That's our self-centeredness that wants that. So this is designed to contradict that, in some way. And, yeah, up to a certain level, yes. But at some point you have to realize that "I am taking all the suffering of the world into me" and "I am giving all the peace and love and joy to the world." There's that "I" again. All it's really doing is that you are experiencing infinity. It's just like Ki Meditation. If you take yourself too seriously, then you have to look out.

Similarly, we have to be careful when we think about, or look at, or question or inquire about emotion. It's very personal, and very heavy duty. If we were able to release all that tension, like permanently, then of course there would be no self-centeredness, no selfishness, in that sense. But we couldn't do that. And nobody wants us to do that. You don't want to jump from the first stage of practice (chapter 5 in my book, *Letting Go*) to the fourth stage of practice. You'd go crazy. And anyway, it doesn't make any sense from this stage. You have to go through it orderly for the next area to open up and take....well, it does it by itself. When it says, "OK," then it moves forward. It's not up to us.

So the idea to enhance emotion or get rid of emotion or understand emotion...no. The problem is, we think we are the one. As Tohei Sensei would say, "Oh, just Keep One Point, then, if you really want to know. Just Keep One Point." OK?

*Student: Thank you Sensei.*

*Student: The sense of infinity, that is even when you experiencing that as metaphorical, isn't it?*

Oh boy. Is that the question?

*Student: No, let me narrow it down. Could it not be just the experience of the dramatic change in you, that seems like infinity, from where you came...from what you were experiencing prior to this?*

What are you actually asking me?

*Student: Can you really state anything definitively, even the infinite?*

Well, first of all, let me say that anything I say to you, I don't want you to believe it. I want you to practice and discover for yourself. But by saying it to you, it ticks off stuff in you, whether you ask me a question about it or not, it brings stuff up, like...that. Yeah, it could be just that. Why don't you try it and find out? But by saying, "Couldn't it be just that," are you sure you are not minimizing it for yourself in some way?

Look, what's happening in every moment is this that I am calling infinity or the universe, is awakening in you. And the self-conscious mind is doing everything it can to prevent this. To the extent that ever time something happens it goes, "Yeah, I did that." It coops everything. It takes it for itself, on every level in every moment. Its primary function is to not allow the universe to awaken itself within you.

And we are all in the same boat, so I am just saying that it is something to be aware of. That dynamic is going on all of the time. When the Bible talks about it, it says "You must have no other god before Me." What it means is, that. So, we're all heathens, from that perspective. The Bible is full of great advice, and great wisdom. It's just what people do with it that's not so good.

Does that help?

*Student: Yes, thank you.*

*Student: Sensei, the question I have is, could we replace the word “infinity” with “emptiness” in everything you have just said.*

Yes. Yes, but let me add this caveat. Finding that word is very difficult. Other teachers use the word “being” or “reality.” Of course, every one of those words, every one of you have all of these ideas about those words. Like the word “reality.” “Reality realizing itself.” That’s what’s happening. “Being awakening itself.” Just then I called it the universe awakening itself within us. The phenomenon of it, or as Fincher was pointing out, the sort of experience of it, in my case it helps to think of it as infinity, or to see it that way, because it comes from nowhere and goes to nowhere. It comes from infinity and goes to infinity. It has no boundaries. You could call it “shuyata.” “Shunyata-shunya.” It could be empty. It could be full. It’s the same. It’s very difficult to find a word that doesn’t, for one thing, sound grandiose, or for another, bring up all kind of notions in peoples heads, because that’s what words do.

So tonight I used the word infinity. And Tohei Sensei used it a lot. And I think that’s because the nature of the experience we have here, when we are doing this kind of practice, it is a very apt word. You know, in Zen, I think they might say more like “shunyata.” But you know the word “mu” means “emptiness,” but to me it means “infinity.” I mean, when I think of mu, I always think, “Ah, the infiniteness.” Which means there is no thing. Oh that’s emptiness. Yeah, so of course you could substitute the word emptiness for every time I used the word infinity in here. So when I do the transcript, I’ll just put a little parenthesis after it: “emptiness.”

*Student: I just wanted to clarify...*

Yeah, no it’s a good point.

Is that it? Thank you very much.