

**HKF Shugyo Tassei Kigan Shiki Seminar – Question & Answer
With Christopher Curtis Sensei
Sunday, March 6, 2016**

Good morning everybody. I know it seems like I just keep asking you for more and more and more. And I do. But this should not be exhausting to you. There should be no threat of running out of stuff, because what I am really asking you to do is just let go. What I said the other day, if you are so full of yourself and your own ideas, your own preferences, your own fears, desires, requirements, then there's no room for anyone else. There's no room for the universe to provide you with something new and remarkable. So when I say "let go" I mean let go of those things that I am afraid are most dear to you. You know, Tohei Sensei said, "*Senshin no, chikara o kanzen ni nuku.*" It means that everything you are, you have to let go of, you have to give up, you have to put away.

Now, you've heard me say this, I'm sure, a hundred times, Where would it go?! It's not going anywhere. You are not really giving anything up that has value. You might cease to be plagued by some kind of doubt or fear, or cease to be obsessed about some future hope or dream. But anything useful in terms of your experience, your practice, your talent, your intelligence is not going to go anywhere. Where would it go? As long as you are alive it's there.

Of course, this is asking the impossible, well, asking that which is very difficult. There is nothing more difficult to do than to give up that which is most precious to you. It's much easier, I always say, to go climb a mountain or do some daring-do, whatever that might be. You know? There are a lot of extreme sports now, which are pretty cool, I'll say. I wouldn't mind flying in one of those suits down the side of a mountain. That looks pretty cool to me. But you know, I hear people talk about these kinds of things and hear people say "Wow, they have this courage to do this!" Well, I mean they are crazy, you know. If you want to call it "courage" OK, but it's not the same as what I am talking about. It takes real courage to let go of that which we are clinging to. And yet, if you try to force it to go away, it does the opposite, doesn't it? You can't make it go. It's always popping up. You cannot keep it down.

So it's an art form, this thing we are practicing. It's not a mechanical thing. It's not a craft. It's an art, this letting go. We have to be very sensitive and listen very carefully. You can say "watch very carefully" or "listen very carefully," whatever sense you want to use. Or you can say "intuit very carefully" if you want to say it that way. It's just that you have to be very aware, in a very subtle way, and you will be guided so that you can see how letting go works. It will take care of itself. As long as you don't try to force it, and at the same time, as long as you don't

ignore it and think “Oh that’s just too heavy duty. I’m not going to do that.” No, you are not going to do it. But it will be done, one way or another. Just don’t make it wait until you die. That’s a horrible way to have to let go. Let go now, before you die. Then you die a good death. I like that. I like that a lot.

OK, so I was going to talk about something else, but because of something Tracy said just before we did this...it got me thinking about how this business of letting go is so demanding in so many ways. We’ve had a lot of conversation lately, last night and at other times during this weekend, about non-dissension, which is of course a form of letting go, or then it is letting go. Never mind, I’m going to let that go. (laughter)

Ask me a question.

Student: Would you talk more about living a life without regret? Would you say like that's the ultimate form of letting go, in a sense?

Did everybody get that? Living a life without regret. Well, people sure want you to have regret, don’t they? “Don’t you feel terrible about what you did to me?” Your mother, your father, your children, or your husband, wife, or somebody is going to say that to you, your lover even. They say it all the time. It’s required of you to regret your dastardly deeds. But that regretting goes hand in hand with being afraid to make an ass out of yourself. We were talking about this today. If you want to lead a dynamic and open and thunderously meaningful life, you cannot be hesitating. You cannot be afraid to make a fool of yourself. In fact, to you, there can be no such thing as “making a fool of yourself.” I don’t even know what that means. So, as you can see, this is the same thing.

Nobody lives a life where they never cause themselves or anyone else any harm. Nobody. It goes with the territory of living. Let’s say, to be generous, if you have a habit of speaking a certain way or carrying a certain attitude towards women, for instance, or towards another race, if you have racism, if you have a habit of that, you had better become aware of it and notice it. And once you notice it, then it’s brought out into the light, and then it can go away all by itself. You don’t have to feel bad. Even that. You don’t have to feel bad. There is no requirement to feel bad. You shouldn’t feel good about it either. If you feel bad about something that you don’t do correctly, then you are going to feel good about yourself when you do something correctly. And those are equally erroneous, equally delusional.

Let’s face it, since we are talking about racism, for instance, or sexism, homophobia, we have these things because they are conditioned into us. Maybe in your life they were not conditioned in. But maybe in your life they were. I am

not saying they were or weren't. But wherever you are from or the kind of parents you had, or whatever input you had, this doesn't make you a good person or a bad person. It's just your conditioning. So get over it. Pay attention. Wake up. If you think you are good, you are wrong. If you think you are bad you are wrong. Pay attention instead. The whole business of living a life of regret or regretting things that happened is a social phenomenon. It's something that the society requires of you. The society is made up of your children, your parents, your husband, your wife, your friends, your teacher, your students, etc. That's the society. There is nothing other than that in the society. They are those people that you are close to, and look around because they are right here.

If I am feeling regret, it's that I am giving you the power to make me feel regret. It's not like it's your fault. It's not like it's societies fault. No. It's your fault for putting up with it. And I am not saying that you should be fighting against it, because that's the same or worse than not fighting against it. Because that creates more misogyny, more racism, more hatred, more violence. You know that's not what you want. That's not your impulse. But you are out of control. You don't know, you've never looked, you've never noticed. "Oh, that's me they are talking about!" See? It's me. Not her or him or them. So you might as well go in the bathroom, shut the door and lock it, and look in the mirror and have a talk with yourself, because you are the problem, not somebody else. You don't like what's going on? Why not? Have you ever noticed what you do when you speak to people? Am I driving you crazy?

Yeah, so that was a really good question. You know, you could go on and on about the inappropriate ways that we attempt to handle injustice. The fundamental thing there is to cast shame on others. To blame the other person. To say, "You should feel regret for how dastardly you have been acting." This is missing the point completely, of living life completely on earth. It's childish. Grow up.

But look what's happening in our political world. Well, forget our political world, look all over the world. It's just a mess, right, because we are all children, evidently. If that blaming is childish, then we live in a world filled with children. There are a few adults, but there are not a lot. And you folks want to be the adults, so you have to sit down and notice. "Oh, wait a minute. Do I really want to do that?" Wait. What is driving this. See?

And if you find shame and/or blame in there, somewhere in yourself, whether it's towards yourself or towards someone else, then you know that you had better shut up and sit down and consider it a little bit more deeply. OK?

Student: Sensei, I'm realizing very slowly, that the one that wants to fix things, wants to do what you are asking, is never going to be able to do it. You are correcting me, and the one who wants to do it right, is never the one that is going to be able to do it right. So I feel like being in that kind of situation, it's kind of a "catch 22." I don't know where to go from that place. That may be a good thing, maybe not. I don't know. But I feel like just letting go or doing something completely, living in Shugyo, however we want to put it, will happen when it happens. Do you see what I am saying? I can try, but then I can realize, "Oh, the trying is not going to help me."

And if you don't try?

Student: Then you are screwed.

But if you don't try, it will never happen. So you are basically damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Student: Yes. You said this on Friday.

Yeah, yeah, I have said it many times. And it is really important to see that paradox. You call it a "catch 22," but well, you know you can't stop yourself from living. I suppose you could, but even that is an action. We just practice, with whatever degree of awareness is available to us. That's all we've got. We don't have any more than we've got. We can't borrow any, we can't beg any, we can't buy any. But you can earn more. Practicing and paying attention helps attention grow. You build a capacity for greater attention or greater awareness. So we practice noticing what's going on without judgment. See, the deal is that when you are judging somebody else to be wrong, you are not noticing what is going on with you. That's why you are doing it. That's why we go over there and say, "You are wrong. I don't like you," because we are afraid to look here. If you look here, that never happens. You never go over there and say, "You're wrong." You look here.

And yet, if you become too self-obsessed with that idea, as an idea, that's also not going to work. I have a student that is quite obsessed with this idea I have passed on to him. Well, not only me, but somehow he has gotten this idea, and now it's a thing in itself. You can't make it a thing in itself. Just shut up and sit down. You know. That's what I always say. Just sit in the middle of it.

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And that's what you are really seeing, that you really can't do anything about this. And yet, if you don't pay attention, nothing will ever happen. So I think the

important point here is seeing the difference between trying to do something to change things, and paying attention. By noticing, and I like that word noticing, it's just awareness, but by really noticing, change takes care of itself in the place where it needs to happen, not where you think it should happen, which is always over there. Or even sometimes it's here, but it's misplaced. You try to do something. No. Don't try to change yourselves, don't try to change anybody else, because if you do succeed, god help you, because that means that you have submerged something that needed expressing, that needed to have the fresh air of the day. You've hidden it away, and boop, it's going to pop up somewhere else in some other kind of problem that you've got. Maybe it will come out as hatred, or "Sensei made me do that," so you've got some subtle thing going on that's going to be a problem for you later on. I mean, not "sensei" necessarily, but maybe your wife or your husband or your kid or your boss or employees. It's always operating. Always. That's why it's not just the cut and then wait, and make the cut and then wait. No. Don't just cut the bokken. No. The bokken is alive the whole time it's in your hand.

And once that living dynamic is operating, it means that you are completely subsumed by awareness. So then, live this way. Not just when you have the bokken in your hand, but when you are shopping in the grocery store, when you are at work, when you are with your family. Notice. Just notice.

Student: Thank you, Sensei.

Student: So, I am now in grad school, and one of my newest responsibilities is being a teacher to others. I have a class that I teach, and where I work, be a mentor to others. But recently it's been that I am finding a lack of confidence in myself, sometimes. So how do I make that connection with people that I have to teach and feel confidence in them, when sometimes I am not confident myself? Like I know everything that I need to teach, at least I hope so, but it's like know how to cut the bokken, but I just can't do it sometimes. Like it doesn't happen. I feel sometimes this happens when I am teaching. I know what I need to say, but it just doesn't come across.

That's a good question. Do you know, you can't be any better prepared than you are. That's really the answer to your question. Go look in the mirror. This is as good as it gets, right now. Tomorrow will be different. But right now, or when your students are around you and you are there and you are teaching them, that's as good as it gets. You can't do anything to make it better. But you can do something to make it worse. And that is doubt, to feel that something is missing. There is a lot of shit missing. There is no such thing as a perfect human being. There are things we don't know. For all of us, there are things we are not

prepared for. In other words, as you train and study and teach and work and move your way through life, you'll gather wisdom. You'll become deeper and deeper as a human being and have more and more to offer. But any point along that line, that's it. You can't move. You can't be somebody that you are not. And if you find yourself having a moment of doubt, share it with your students, because I promise you, they are having lots of moments of doubt. And the thing that you can do best for those students, is to be real with them, so they see that you are a real human being. And that, in its self, is very courageous. And after all, the first of Suzuki Sensei's principles is "So what?" Share something like that with them. When you are feeling something is inadequate, change the subject. Say, "I know this teacher that told me these four principles. I think that are really great." I mean, you don't have to do exactly that, but whatever. Pick up guitar and sing them a song. Get wild. Get raw. Don't do it according to any formula. The formulas that we make up, particularly in education, but also in work places, are really terrible. I mean, whoever invented this, there's some deficiency there. Yes, this person over here works for the government so notice he is laughing right now. It's just crazy. There is just no room for creativity and aliveness and humanity and this connection that you like so much and are always talking about. So, you are not missing anything that you ought to have. You are who you are, and that's all you've got, so enjoy. OK? Does that help a little bit?

Student: Yeah, it helps a little.

Student: First of all Sensei, thank you. I'll lead up to the question. I am part of the veteran's group in Kapulei and we are learning the principles of Ki Aikido, and it's been going on for three years now. However, I just want to bring up an issue or concern that one of the veterans brought up that we were not able to answer properly. First let me share with you the situation that he was involved with. He was at a family party gathering with friends and a few strangers. All of a sudden this individual looked at him, and said, "What? I owe you money?" The person's question, and this is my question to you, Sensei, is "How am I supposed to feel?"

Feel? Well, I don't know about "supposed to." You are going to feel bad when someone says that to you.

Student: Well, it's just like what you said earlier, Sensei, about letting go. I think about those words "Letting Go" but how am I supposed to feel to let go?

OK. That's a really good question and that kind of thing can happen to anybody anytime basically. So how to deal with that, you know? I told you a little earlier today, if you are actually practicing Shugyo, no one will ever attack you. They

certainly will never say that to you. He made himself a victim there, somehow, somehow, I don't know how. But we do, you know. He felt something about that guy, and the guy picked up on it and said "What? You got a problem?" And then, oh shit, it's kind of like, "What am I going to do now?" It's too late to practice Shugyo, at that point, because you weren't doing it. You were letting your emotions float around in this room full of family and strangers, and probably there was something he didn't like about the guy. I mean, it's happened to everybody, right? Everybody here has had this experience in one way or another. And so, I mean it's a little late to try to address that. That's what I am saying.

Practice. Learn to practice. Learn to be in the company of other people without judging them. And if you don't judge them, they will not judge you. And that's what it comes down to. When somebody is giving you some trouble about something, they are judging you to be a danger to them. If you get angry it means....anger always comes out because you think somebody has more power than you, has power over you. That's why you get angry, do you realize that? So next time you get angry, remind yourself. Do you really want to give them that? And you end up trying to diminish the other person, when that is not really what you want to do? Look at what that guy Trump does. He is a master at diminishing others and building up himself. Which means that he is terrified that others have power over him, and he can't live with that. That's what a bully is like.

So...the other day I was in front of Starbucks on Maui and I opened my door, and it was a windy day and my doors on my car are really heavy, and when I opened the door it hit the car next to me. And the guy was in the car. And he came out of that car like "Hey goddam it, what are you doing?!" And it was my own carelessness that caused it to happen. And it's a shock. You feel it in your car and you are like, "Hey! What's going on?" This guy came out of his car like a hornet. So I said, "Oh it was me." And he looked at me and said, "Well, I know it was you." And I said, "The wind, I am so sorry, it was very careless of me. Please forgive me." He didn't know what to say. Everybody is afraid to be an asshole. Nobody wants to see them selves that way.

You can diffuse any situation with kindness, support, and compassion and love for yourself, which is who's right there in front of you. I mean, I've done that. I've gotten pissed off plenty of times. And unfortunately it was not always with someone who was compassionate enough to apologize to me and so there was some problem there...when I was young, you know, college days.

Student: Sensei, I'll go back to what you just said. At that point, how should you feel?

When he said that to me? Well, of course you feel...well we are speculating here and I think different people would feel differently, but generally speaking, he said that to you because he wants you to feel bad, guilty, shameful. He wants you to feel regret. So feel regret! "Did I look at you funny? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to." You know? "You are a fascinating looking person. I'm just surprised, is all." OK, so everybody doesn't have the ability to think on their feet like that, but it's good if you engage and get something happening. And then he can see that you are just a person. Because he is afraid. That's why he says that to begin with. He is thinking, "Oh shit, I am going to nip this in the bud, I am going to cut this guy off at the pass before he starts giving me trouble. I'll scare him, and then he will leave me alone." Of course that's a bullying thing to do, but bullies are scared.

Yeah, the real answer to your question, as I said, is practice. And in the mean time, apologize. Or it's not just to apologize, but at least to be gracious. Be gracious. Don't be afraid to show your heart to someone, even a big huge moke. You know? Show them your heart.

OK. Thank you very much.