

**Seminar in Helmond, Holland – Question & Answer  
With Christopher Curtis Sensei  
Sunday, May 22, 2016**

Good afternoon everybody. When we have these seminars, of course there are so many different things to practice, Sokushin no Gyo, Bokken and Jo, Meditation and Breathing, Techniques, Exercises, and all of this stuff. I have tried to remind us all that every one of these is the same. These are all an expression of a state of mind, which we call “mind/body unified.” This is open and free. By “open” my mean open to all possibilities, and ready for all possibilities. No matter what comes we meet it with equanimity. We don’t meet it with excitement. We don’t meet it with aggression. We don’t meet it with fear. We meet it with equanimity.

Of course this is important in the physical world, because if you don’t do that then the world is like it is today. So in your world, don’t let it be like that. You cannot change others, but you can change your world. So that’s why we get together and we practice like this. We have attacks, kicking, punching, and grabbing, but also there are personalities in the dojo. We think, “I want to train with this one, but I really don’t want to train with that one.” Do you ever have feelings like that? Like you would rather train with certain people because they are a little more kind to you, or more gentle, or they are not always trying to teach you something.

But actually, these are opportunities to earn your fortune in self-realization, when you are confronted in this way. So we don’t run away from this. We face this with an even mind. This is what we are practicing in the dojo, and this is what we are carrying, in the way of practice, into our daily life. It doesn’t happen over night. But no one else can do this for you. Only you can do it. No one can make you magically changed in some way. You have to do the work yourself. And as I say, it doesn’t happen over night. It takes time. Because it took you this long to become the way you are, so it’s going to take some time to change that. Tohei Sensei always mentioned the cup of tea into which you put one drop of fresh water each day - some day it will be clear, but not for a while. If you are training 1 or 2 hours a day, there are still 22 or 23 hours left in the day. So during those times, what are you doing? That’s the question. Remember, you are always practicing something, in every moment. Whatever you are doing, you are going to become better at than you were yesterday. Tomorrow you will do more of that same thing. You will get better at that. Oh, that should be terrifying to you, if you really notice what you do with your time.

This is not a moral thing about “you shouldn’t do this or that.” Do whatever you like. It doesn’t matter. It’s all fine. Every single thing you can think of is fine.

Just do it with mind/body unification. And some of those things you think of, you might not do, if you are experiencing mind/body unification. But you don't start with morality. You don't start with "No, you better not." You start with One Point and then see, because what's good for you, might not be good for me. Our customs are different. In my country it's totally different than here. When I go to Germany, Holland, Russia, Spain, it's four completely different cultures. But the common denominator is that we all operate from One Point. In other words, we operate from a mind state of equanimity, and then discover our way, the way for each of us. And every one is different. So no one can tell you, "Oh, you should do this," even though Facebook is filled with it. Just don't watch, and don't add to it.

So this is always what I want to emphasize, in terms of our practice, when we get together, because this is what my teachers, Suzuki Sensei and Tohei Sensei, taught me, and this is what changed my life so that I can have this experience now. Of course, this is what I want to share with you. This is all I know, so this is all I can share with you.

OK? If you have a question, please ask me now.

*Student: When we were in Japan, Shinichi Tohei Sensei told us to do Ki Breathing. He taught us to start with Shuchuho on the exhale, and Kakudaiho on the inhale. And we are a little bit confused about that, because we are used to do it the other way around. Can you please tell something about that?*

Are you trying to get me arrested by the Ki police? Yeah, well OK. Yes, I know this. Kashiwaya Sensei just had the Midland Ki Federation camp over there at Japan HQ. One of the students that attended happens to be a student that I work with a lot, and he immediately called me and said, "Hey, Shinichi Sensei taught breathing backwards, you know." So, don't worry, be happy. It's fine. Yes, of course, the way I learned from Tohei Sensei and Suzuki Sensei and the way I have taught you is "breathe out to then ends of the universe." That's what the Shokushu says, yeah? That's kakudaiho. "Breathe infinitely into the One Point, and continue there." This is shuchuho. So, in is shuchuho and out is kakudaiho. That's why I taught you this way. But you know, the student told me something interesting. He said, "I've always had trouble with breathing in. When I heard it that way, I was able to look at it differently, and it was really easy to do." So I said, "Then don't change. Whatever works for you is great." I haven't talked with Shinichi Sensei about it. It's not really my job to talk to him about that. It's fine. It's OK. You can do whatever you want. You are going to do whatever you want anyway.

On that note, are there any other questions?

*Student: Sensei, what's the difference between right and wrong? I don't mean the right or left, but doing something right or doing something wrong.*

Boy, that's a loaded question. Thank you for that question. So everything in the relative world has a scale. There's life and death, there's healthy and ill, there's up and down, there's over there and over here, there's hot and cold, windy not windy, rainy sunny, right and wrong. Just one more scale.

First of all, what's acceptable, or let's say preferable, in one culture, is not necessarily preferable in another culture. In some countries you eat with your hands and belch loudly after dinner, and if you don't, it's very rude. Don't do that in my house, because my wife will think that is very rude. Right and wrong. It's relative.

That is kind of a radical example, but I think it is important to remember that what we are practicing cannot be discovered on a scale. If you are trying to learn to cut bokken the right way, and not the wrong way, and here is strong and here is control and you try to find the middle...it doesn't exist. No matter how close you get, half, half, half, it never becomes zero. There is no center to any scale. You cannot find it. So, then cutting correctly and cutting incorrectly depends upon whatever school you are in. But actual cutting, as Tohei Sensei would teach, is not to be achieved on a scale of right and wrong. "Right cutting," "True cutting," is completely free of intension to do it perfectly.

I'll make it really short, but you know that I did this cutting every day with Suzuki Sensei for 15 years and for 15 years he told me "No, no." And as we were getting closer, I was cutting more and more, and of course everybody was telling me, "Oh man, you can really cut now," But Suzuki Sensei would say to me, "Not only are you not cutting correctly, you don't understand at all." All this time I was thinking, "Could you please just tell me I am getting better at this, because everybody tells me I am?" But no, he didn't do that. So it was very frustrating, and I became very angry. One morning I woke up and was so pissed off I didn't want to go to the dojo. But of course I had to go because he was my teacher, and so I went. And on the way to the dojo this thing happened where, instead of being angry, I sort of gave up. I can't say it in words, but the closest I can get is that I lost my need to do it perfectly, because I saw no light at the end of that tunnel. The tunnel is relative. Light is relative. I saw no success. Success is relative.

Don't settle for success, because right along the tail of it is failure. Forget that shit. I just dropped it all. I came to the dojo, put on my gi, went to the mirror with

Suzuki Sensei, I cut once, and he said, "Oh, that's it. Do it again." And I thought immediately, "I've got it now," and cut again. "No, no, no, that's not it," he said. Then many years later he said, "OK, now you can teach this."

So this is the best explanation I have for this conundrum of right and wrong. First of all rightness and wrongness is a very relative thing, as I say, and anyway it is beside the point. We don't start with a moral injunction. We tend to start with a tradition, because we are brought up and taught how to do certain things, what is appropriate and what isn't appropriate. But as we become a mature human being, then we realize it is inside-out. It's the other way around. We are practicing shugyo, not keiko, not everyday self-improvement practice. We are completely open and experiencing everything for the first time. There is no room for right and wrong there. There just isn't.

Maybe this is a really dangerous thing to say, because people think, "Oh, so I can do whatever I want, then."

*Student: The reason you are here and why you return to us every year, is to teach us. But then we practice and we do it wrong, not the way you told us. So we practice and practice and we do it perfectly wrong ten thousand times. And then you come again and you say, "Well, this is not OK and that is not OK. You should do it this way." But does this prevent us from having the right experience by practicing perfectly wrong?*

There is no such thing as right and wrong practice. You know, I have to remind you what I told you about Tohei Sensei. One year he would show me one way to do something, and I would come back the next year and do it, and he would say, "Who taught you that?" You cannot say, "You taught me." You have to say, "I made it up, Sensei." "Who taught you that? This is how I show!" he would say. He would change, and he would do it on purpose, because I was constantly thinking I had gotten the right way, that I had finally understood, and then he would say, "Who taught you that? That doesn't work at all." And show me something new. He wasn't just hap-hazardly screwing with my mind. He had a purpose. He did this again and again, because he could see that I wanted to have the right way. He just kept contradicting it.

Of course he and Suzuki Sensei were in a conspiracy. Suzuki Sensei was doing this to me constantly, just like with the bokken. And neither of them would ever accept for me to be satisfied with something. We have to give up our whole dependency on that kind of thing. And as Ad Voogles Sensei will remind you, because he understands this and this is why he is asking this question, it's the state of mind.

You know, if you are having trouble with something, it's probably not because you are doing some form incorrectly. It's probably because your state of mind is one of intension to do something. As soon as the intension to perform comes up in you, you are no longer doing Aikido. That's harsh! It's almost impossible...but not impossible. Yeah. So, from that perspective I am very, very strict. There's no escape. This is the big time. This is not play land. Much Aikido is play land. This is life and death, *shinken shobu*. And yet I think I am flexible, and happy, and love to train together with you. And you know that I am not a Nazi about making you do things. But on the other hand, I am not going to accept...well except with Toby. Toby thinks I may be a Nazi. I am just encouraging you, and maybe Olaf and Carlos.

Carlos, don't you ever have a question? You come here and sit here every time. You might want to ask a question.

*Carlos: I've asked questions before.*

OK, anybody else? We have a little time left.

*Student: Sensei, do you think teaching Aikido is making oneself tired? When you teach, does it make you tired? Do you get exhausted?*

Yeah, good question. Yes, it can. It depends so much on the people in the seminar. Of course, teaching, as you know, is uplifting. It inspired you. But it also takes a lot of extra understanding and compassion. You cannot afford not to give 100% to every single person. You cannot short someone, cheat them. I don't mean because they won't get their money's worth. I mean that's your job, as an instructor. And sometimes, there are students that are really dragging their feet, just inexperienced, don't understand, have issues, and helping them can be exhausting. It can be. Actually today, when I was just finishing up over here, I thought, "Wow, I am usually wiped out by this time." And today I feel really good. So thank you, all of you, because, yeah.

I don't think that there is a rule that says you do or don't get tired. You know I saw the Dalai Lama who was giving a talk on Maui. And my guess is he is a pretty awake human being. And after the talk he came outside after talking for maybe two hours. That was it. He was standing with some of his students, I looked at him, and he was exhausted. He was just wiped out. When he was speaking, he was dynamic and passionate and really moving, enlightening and inspiring. After he was done and no one was watching him, he was like...ahhhh. I don't know, maybe he had a bad flight, or he was sick, but he looked pretty wiped out.

We are all human beings. It is not like you are suddenly magic when you wake up, and never get sick and you are never going to die. You are going to die. I thought my golden voice would last forever [Curtis Sensei has laryngitis today]. My wife said, "Oh, I guess you won't be able to talk so much, huh?"

*Student: In the dojo, when you train, and you have to seem not to fight and to be in connection with each other, to be in relationship. We have to keep the connection in the dojo and in the world outside the dojo. I have a conflict in myself to get the connection in the outer world. I have a feeling that in the outer world I have to fight sometimes. How can I practice in the outer world?*

When we did *Sokushin no Gyo* this morning, we said "*to ho kami e me tame.*" This means, "with the sharp sword of my will, may I penetrate the mirror universe, and polish my character like a beautiful crystal ball." So... sword, mirror, crystal ball. These images are very important in Japan. The mirror universe refers to everything that you experience, whether with your senses, your thoughts, concepts, or your feelings, emotions. This is all we have. When we see a person speaking to us, maybe rather roughly, or not giving us what we feel we need, that is a construct that we have built out of our senses and our thoughts, our history, our feelings. And any physicist will tell you that those items are not reliable. The senses do not tell us the truth, do they? And yet we rely upon them and believe them. What we are really doing is believing our own construct of what is happening right now. When you look at it, I would guess you see it quite differently than when he looks at it, or I look at it. It's like "through a glass darkly." We look through a screen of our own history, so that we think that we are seeing something other than us. But in fact, it is a mirror universe. Everything you see that sparks something in you, if it sparks something in you, that means you have it. It's you.

We like pleasure and we don't like pain. So we try to cling to our pleasure and push away pain. So when you say "fighting," it's generally to cling to some form of money, love, food, car, boyfriend, (and by "boyfriend" I mean boyfriend the way you want him to be, not the way he actually is) or you are trying to push away the enemy that you perceive wants to do harm, or just doesn't agree with you. So this is the game of fighting, and this is why we practice to see everything with equanimity, a mind that is free of judgment, free of belief, one way or another. Belief is all about right and wrong. That's very relative. It doesn't get you any where close to the skills that you need to operate in the world outside without fighting. It's a poor excuse for the real. In English we say, "It's a peevish substitute." "Peevish" mean small or petty. This "belief" would be a petty excuse for the real. The real is what is actually happening, that is for most people entirely unknown, because everybody is seeing through their screen. Which is

why all teachers will always tell you that you have to meditate, you have to sit more, because when you are sitting you at least have a better chance to notice what you are doing to yourself in this way. It can be quite painful. But it is worth it!

Don't express it, don't suppress it, just address it. Cute, heh? I made that up so that you could remember.

Does that help? It's no answer.

*Student: I will look for it. I will practice.*

Yes, everything is ten thousand times. You know you just have to do it again and again and again, find your own way, what works for you, and be grateful that at least you have a life where you can ask a question like that. This is not available to most people on earth. So we are really fortunate to have each other.

*Student: I have one more question about micro-teaching. As soon as you have begun training Aikido and then a newer student comes in, then of course you are more experienced and you start teaching immediately.*

"What you learn today you can teach another the next day."

*Student: Yeah, and you do it over and over again, ten thousand times, and you become an expert at this micro-teaching. But this is not the way it should be, I guess. What is the right way? How can you escape from doing that?*

It's not that you should or shouldn't. Everything has a time and place. And Tohei Sensei did say, "What you learn today, you can teach another the next day." He didn't say "Practice micro-teaching." So this question is a little like the question Voogels Sensei asked me about right and wrong. It isn't one thing or the other. It is never one thing or the other, you should this or should not this. This is why I often answer "Yes" to the question, "Which should I do?" We like to try to figure out ahead of time, what is the right way to be in certain circumstances, because we have had experiences where it didn't feel good, either from our own mistake or someone else torturing us on the mat. But we can't do that. Every moment is different. We can't make rules. As soon as you make a rule, it gets broken. It's going to be different every time.

People ask me questions. Sometimes I respond in different ways. Even a couple of times someone asked me a question and I didn't say anything. That's just because I know, in that moment, that that is the appropriate response. Sometimes I try to help them have an experience of what they are actually looking for there, and sometimes I just answer simply. But always we want to

remember, and always I want to remind you, that it is not about one way or another way. It's not about a wrong way or a right way. Frankly, I don't care how you do the techniques, as long as you have mind/body unification when you do them, and you know what that is and aren't substituting something else for that, that you think is saleable in the dojo.

If you take care of all that, then you don't have to worry about micro-teaching. And that's the instructor's job, to help everyone remember that In the dojo. Just remind them over and over again. See, look around. That's what they are doing. Tohei Sensei would teach and then go away for two years, and the Tabata and Suzuki and Nonaka and the others would all argue about what he had taught. And he would come back and teach them something entirely different!

OK? Thank you very much.