

**Seminar in Bubenreuth, Germany – Question & Answer  
With Christopher Curtis Sensei  
Sunday, May 15, 2016**

Good morning everyone. This weekend I have been working with you on, of course, valuing every moment of your life, and, of course, the practice. Not just that, but a discussion, a pointing out, that the nature of the practice itself is to practice valuing life. That's what Aikido practice is. Suzuki Sensei called it "living life completely." "The practice of living life completely." And it's not easy, because our whole habit is to live life very partially, from point to point, and pretty much dead, or empty, in between the moments we feel are important. We look forward to the next point, we go to it, and then we look back on the last point. And then we go again, and it's like leapfrogging through life. And so most of the experience of life is left out.

Of course, this means in every moment that practice is to be present and aware. Tohei Sensei said that true calmness is not the calmness of inaction, but calmness in action. You must be in action for true calmness to exist in you. You must be active. This doesn't mean running around, of course. "Active" means your mind is awake and present and alert. We call it "paying attention." But that really under-sells it, because it takes a tremendous amount of attention, without collapsing down on some "thing." In other words, Extending Ki and Keeping One Point, Kakudaiho and Shuchuho, these are the same. They are not different. So, if you are paying attention, you are paying attention to everything that is, as much as possible. In other words, whatever you are capable of.

I can hear and see fine, but I probably had better eyesight and better hearing when I was younger. I am in my 70's now, so probably these are not as good as they were, but that's not the point. In other words, it's not how well you hear. When I am listening, I am listening with my full capacity. Your capacity might be better than mine to hear, but are you listening fully? See? And so it's not so much about the quality of the senses, or improving those, but opening yourself to everything that is experience, and of course experience comes to you through senses, and feelings, and thoughts. That is all there is. Smelling, tasting, touching, hearing, seeing. And then your feeling in your body, your emotions, and your thoughts. Is there anything else? That's it. And from that information, we concoct, miraculously, this. Look around. That's what you are doing with that input. And then you add all of this stuff that you are bringing from the past, because you have been doing this since you were born. And you have been making conclusions about how to do something, how to get something done. So when you meet me, and I tell you "Don't do that." It's like someone told me

today, "But this is so strange. That's not how I do it!" Who was that? Oh, I think it was you. I think you said, "Are you sure? Really?" Because we are used to doing things for twenty or thirty or forty years, and in some cases longer, in a certain way. And then you meet someone like me who is encouraging you to change your mind and use it completely differently. Not attempting to achieve something, because the goal or the requirement or whatever you might call it, the desire, is already implied in your life. You don't need to add yourself seeing the goal. The thing is set, you know it, you realize, "Oh, I need to go to that college and get a doctorate degree. Oh!" So then you watch how the universe does that, how it unfolds, how it lives your life. But that is not how you learned. You learned, "By God, I will do that. I will do that, no matter what. No one will get in my way." Well, what are you building there? You are building a huge delusion. And let's face it folks, we've all been doing this all of our lives. So I am not leaving myself out of this. This is what I discovered, by looking at myself. There is no escape. That is the way we were all raised. That's how the earth raises you.

You know, you come here as a baby and you are like a clean slate. You are open. If you have children, then you know that when they are born they are just amazing in this way. But on the other hand, they are little animals. They are not "enlightened." They eat and they sleep and they crap. That's it, you know, for a while. But they are so cute, so we keep them. I just can't get over my grandchildren. I am always amazed at how cute they are. And then I remember, "Oh, if they weren't cute, it might be much more difficult." So, you come in innocent, and then you begin building this structure named whatever your name is, and then at some point you notice (Chapter 5 in Letting Go book), "Oh, this doesn't work like I thought it would." And that's when you go see somebody like me. You come to Aikido, and meet someone who has been practicing and can show you another way to be that's natural and freeing instead of unnatural and limiting.

A big part of this, as I started with here, is appreciating being grateful for this opportunity that you have by finding yourself here and alive and free to live a life that can include a practice like this. This is very rare in our world today, and always has been, and always will be. There is nothing wrong with that. The earth is perfect. The job it does, it does very well.

We come here to learn this value, to learn to value and to learn to appreciate. To learn to be grateful. And in every case there is something to find to be grateful for, but in our case we are flooded with this.

OK, so if you have questions, please ask me.

*Student: Actually I have a question from Sofia, but her English is not so good, so I will ask for her. Imagine if we train in the dojo and we are training with a more experienced partner than we are, and I think I find that he is not doing the same as Sensei was explaining before. So we have sometimes a bad feeling what to do. We cannot say, "Oh, no, no, no. You are wrong." That is not appropriate. Maybe it's better to prevent having seen it, or speaking instead with the person after the training, or ....what to do? Do you know what I mean?*

Exactly. OK, Olaf Schubert is your teacher. Olaf, please answer her.

*Olaf: OK. So I would say to her, and I already have, I guess, on a polite level you are not supposed to correct your training partner anyway. So you are to train and be there and fulfill your part as uke, to be coordinated in mind and body and connected with him or her. So it shouldn't be about judging your partner anyway. But then, you find something that he is clearly doing different than what Sensei was showing. Maybe sometimes they even do a different technique almost, because they want to try something. I think she is referring to that. People are trying stuff out and not training what Sensei was showing. So then, maybe you can first ask permission. Ask your partner if you may say something. I know it's a hard thing to do but this is also part of our training.*

Just shut up and practice. You said it all. It was great. No "maybe's." You know, the teacher is supposed to be attentive to what is happening in the class. You may not realize this, but the teacher knows what's going on with every student, even when there are 30 or 40 of them in the dojo. He knows what's going on with the students. And if he chooses not to correct your partner, there is a reason why he chooses not to. Yeah, you said it politely, so I will say it a little less politely. The question should be, "Sensei, I am struggling with arrogance. What should I do?" Please translate this for me.

I don't know if she understood everything I said. I see a kind of blank look on her face, so please tell her what I said, word for word. That's your job.

(he translates)

It's like, I had a student come to see me and ask, "I would like to train with you." I asked where he was training before, and he said that he was training with so-and-so, but he found that he wasn't what he thought he was. And I said, "Well then, I would rather you didn't train with me." That person is not ready to be a student.

The whole point is....I mean, I even meet people who say, "I haven't met the right teacher yet." "Oh really?" I say, "How would you know?" Because I know from

being a student that you may be very devoted and really give yourself to it, but you don't see, you don't see. The mind hasn't changed yet. Everything you are trying to do as a student, and everything you judge to be correct or incorrect, is from a relative perspective, and it is completely dominated and controlled by your particular conditioning that you have in your mind and body from 20, 30, 40 years of building. And believe me, the practice is going to shatter that, if it's a good practice. It is going to contradict that, to stand in the way of that. It's going to break that down. It's going to challenge that. And it is no good to come to the teacher in tears and say I am an arrogant son of a bitch and I don't know what to do about it. Shut up and practice.

Suzuki Sensei would say, "Train for ten years and then come back and tell me that." That's what he would say, because he didn't want to bother with somebody like that. And yet, he loved the students and had great compassion. It's like, Suzuki Sensei was very, very strict, you know, in the way that he trained me. He was incredibly demanding and strict. But he would always say, "Let's move the students along. We are taking too long to test them. Test them, test them, test them." So he had all kyu tests six months apart, boom, boom, boom. From 1st Kyu to Shodan, one year. From Shodan to Nidan, two years. From Nidan to Sandan, three years. That's it. In his view, if you wait any longer you have a problem. "Move these students along, what's the matter?" And I said, "But Sensei, maybe they are not ready." And he would say, "That's your fault if they are not ready! Don't tell me they are not ready. It's your fault. You are teaching them. What's the matter with you?" So do you see?

You know the kind of teacher that says, "I make you wait for ten years until you take the test, and then it better be exactly right." And they make a big deal about a whole ceremony around the test, and putting a lot of stress and pressure on you to see what kind of character you have. So guess what all of those students are going to value in Aikido? Passing the tests! Getting rank. And that is the least important part of it. What kind of a teacher is that? Don't do that, teachers. Don't do that.

Put the value where the true value is. What is our true practice about? When I came to Europe in 2004, I was gone for three or four weeks. Suzuki Sensei was not really teaching so much, but he was still coming to the dojo all the time. So when I left I said, "Please keep an eye on things for me, Sensei. I'll see you when I get back." And by the way, whenever I left to go somewhere, the last thing I would do is go to his house on the way to the airport and say goodbye. And when I returned from teaching somewhere, I would go from the airport to his house and say, "I'm back," and give him my report. Then I go home and see my wife and family, not the other way around. Do you understand? No?

*Student: No, I mean why is it so important to see the teacher first?*

I am traveling at his behest. He is my teacher. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be going anywhere to teach. I am only doing it, because he taught me. And then they ask me to come teach because his teaching was good. So it is my responsibility to honor him in this way.

*Student: I see.*

OK. And so I came back from my traveling and I said, "How's it going at the dojo?" And he said, "Hmmm, OK." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You'll see." So I went home and saw my family, and then came next time to the dojo, walked in, looked around, and thought "Oh, oh." When I see him doing something like this, I know there is a lesson coming, even though I don't know where it's coming from. So I went to see him and said, "Sensei, the dojo is like, dead. What's going on? I mean, you were here, right?" And he looked at me and said, "Well, where were you?" I said, "I was in Europe teaching." "Oh, I guess you don't understand the teaching," he said. "Huh. So you think that if you are over there in Europe, then you cannot take care of the kiai in this dojo? Is that right? You have to be physically here? Is that what you are telling me?" And I suspected he sucked the kiai out of the dojo, or something, just so he could say this to me. (laughter). "Oh, Sensei. Thank you."

So this is very important. Again, we are talking about something not so mysterious or magical. We are talking about a very, very deep level of respect, gratitude, and appreciation, for this opportunity. We have to see that every single moment is an opportunity. Don't waste this opportunity. It is precious. It's golden. So how we practice is very important. I talk to you about keiko and shugyo. Keiko practice is very important. It's self-improvement practice. You have to learn to memorize all the stuff. But on the other hand, that is not the be-all and end-all of Aikido. Those are just tools that we use. To learn to play golf, you have to buy nice golf clubs. It doesn't make you a good golfer to have nice golf clubs, so you have to learn to hit the ball. But even hitting the ball perfectly doesn't make you a good golfer. I don't know if you ever watch golf, but you see a tournament and you see the best golfers in the world. You know they can hit the ball better than anybody and they all seem to be playing really well, but they don't all win. I saw Tiger Woods interviewed once after a game, and he said, "Well I was in the zone for only a portion of the time. But it was enough to win." So he is expressing this same thing I am trying to express. He calls it "in the zone," because he can only conceive of it like Michael Jordan. It happens only when you are doing your sport. But in Aikido, you can't afford to have it happen only when you are on the mat. It has to happen all the time. Shugyo. You have

to be in this condition all the time.

I'll tell you, when I was a young student, probably 32 or 33 years old, I was at a party in Honolulu with Koichi Tohei Sensei. He was there. I was with Suzuki Sensei and was just a beginner, but somehow I ended up sitting on the floor leaning against the wall next to Tohei Sensei. And he was sitting there and seemed a nice guy, so I said, "Sensei can I ask you something?" And he said, "Sure, sure." I said, "Tell me, what is the meaning of Aikido?" Only a rank beginner would ask that question, which is what I was. So he said there is a true story. In the old days in Japan a young man was at work and his grandmother was at home. She was in her 90's, and the house started burning down. He heard about this and came running from work, and when he got home the house had burned to the ground, and his grandma was out in the front yard with the katana tansu (sword box) filled with swords, weighs about 400 lbs. and the swords represent the spirit of the family. And he said, "Grandma, did you bring this out?" And she said, "Yes, the house was burning. I needed to save these. I brought it out." And there is no way she could lift this box. Sometimes you hear a story about a woman who lifts a car to save her baby.

Tohei Sensei said to me, "What this grandma was experiencing, when she moved the katana tansu out, this you have to have 24-7. This is the meaning of Aikido." And then he said, "And by the way, the future of Aikido is in the west, not the east." This he said to me around 1975 or 76, a long time ago.

Any other questions?

*Student: Sensei, you know I am teaching a lot of children and they often start at 5, 6, 7, or 8 years old. And then some of them stop training around 10, 11, 13, 14. And during this time I usually build a connection with them. And then when they stop, I always feel so hurt. I have this connection and I spent so much time with them and now they just stop training. What should I do about that?*

Shut up and keep training. You know, this is a natural thing to feel attached to people, maybe particularly children, but even other students, you know? I am not saying it is wrong to grieve in any way, or to feel sad that a student leaves. Of course, when kids hit puberty and get into boys and girls and all that stuff, generally very few of them can stay and keep training under those circumstances. So it is understandable. But yeah, that's the way it is, and you can't do anything about it, and so if you feel sad, you feel sad. Equanimity means you are there for them no matter what, not you are only there for them when they are there for you. And you want to be sure that when you are feeling sad you are still there for them, even if they are not in your physical presence any

longer. That is what they have asked of you, and you have that responsibility to them. OK?

We are out of time. Thank you very much.