

Thirteen Rules for Disciplinants: #4

Friday, February 24, 2017

C. Curtis

Good evening everyone. Tonight is our 4th of the Thirteen Rules for Instructors by Koichi Tohei Sensei. I think I will read, first of all, the original version that was translated from Japanese back in the 50's and 60's and sent out to everyone.

The first sentence is, "Do not criticize any of the other martial arts." So that's the subject.

"Do not criticize any of the other martial arts. The mountain does not laugh at the river because it is lowly, nor does the river speak ill of the mountain because it cannot move about. Everyone has his own characteristics and gains his own position in life. Speak ill of others and it will surely come back to you."

Sayaka, would you read it in Japanese, please? [She reads] Thank you very much.

OK, so this is what Sayaka translated and she and I worked on. Some of it is the same, some is quite different.

"You should not speak badly about other martial arts. The mountain does not laugh at the river being low, and the river doesn't speak badly about the mountain for being immobile. Each has its own characteristics, which work or fit the best for them. Someone who speaks poorly of others, pointlessly, should know that it will come back to them inevitably."

It's one of those subjects that we all are very familiar with. It's like one of those moral lessons from church that everyone in church thinks they are following, but nobody in church really does. Right? How are you doing at following this? It's very difficult, because we are judging creatures. We judge ourselves to be right or wrong, successful or unsuccessful, moral or immoral, mature or immature, lovable or not lovable, respectable or not respectable. We are watching ourselves constantly, as our parents has taught us to do, and the society constantly demands of us. And maybe, here in Aikido, you may even think that I am asking that of you, although actually I am not. You take that on yourself.

And so, since we are so used to doing this to ourselves, then we also do it with everybody else that we are close to and those that we are not close to. It's much easier to do with someone that you don't have proximity to. It's much easier to judge the Europeans and those from the Middle East than it is to judge the Americans, as we have seen recently. It's very easy to judge someone who is foreign, like an immigrant. So the best way to get over judging others is to get to know them better.

Bishop Desmond Tutu, said, "If you want peace, don't talk to your friends, talk to your enemies." And I would say, if you want peace, make friends of your enemies. Don't just talk to them, but make friends with them. Somebody you feel compassion for, or even just feel empathy with, is a friend. You are much less likely to be judgmental with

someone who you consider a friend, and someone you have allowed yourself to become vulnerable to. So this is something I would like to bring up.

In the dojo, which affects all of us here, when you are a mid-level student, you may find yourself being judgmental about your teachers, the various people that are higher up. "He's not doing this and she's not doing that. They should be doing this and they should be doing that." And then as an instructor, of course you have a responsibility to serve your students without judgement. Now that may seem strange, because you know that as an instructor, one of your responsibilities is to support your students and help them find the way, to help them get those things that are hindering them, out of the way. The question is how you do that. For instance, when we were in Japan in the early days, there was an instructor named Otsuka Sensei. Most people know Otsuka. Long ago he was infamous in his cruelty and just downright outrageous judgments of the students. And he no doubt justified it by thinking, "That's my job." And we watched him through the years, until finally, about 10 or 15 years ago, he became really quiet, and I noticed that he didn't chew people out any more. He had nothing like that to say to students any longer. He changed. He matured. He finally woke up. What did he wake up to?

We were talking about this before. When we have empathy for someone, we recognize some similarity, as in, "That could be me. That immigrant could be me." That's empathizing, right? And there can even be a little pity in that. Because you don't think you are actually them. You just could be them. Compassion, on the other hand, true compassion, is not like that at all. You experience compassion when you see in the other person, that there is no "other person." You see the mirror universe. You see that that is actually you. This probably sounds outrageous. If you really think about this, how could that possibly be true, when it is quite obvious that they are over there and I am over here. Right? We are clearly two separate creatures.

And I have no explanation for you, other than, it's an experience. In Sokushin no Gyo, we say "*to ho ka mi e mi ta me*," "with the sharp sword of my will I penetrate the mirror universe, and polish my character like a beautiful crystal ball." This is an ancient, ancient saying, and of course hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people have chanted that throughout the years. How many of them were experiencing the mirror universe, or even had an inkling of what that is when they were chanting? It's very unusual to come upon this. But in our training in Aikido, I like to bring it up because I always say, it's not enough to see your similarity with your partner. "Becoming one with" does not mean "being a lot like" someone. It means actually seeing, experiencing, that there is no separation. And obviously it is not in a physical sense, it's in a much more subtle sense that takes a deep penetration into the subject at hand, not the idea, but the actual experience, at hand, in order to experience this.

How we can experience this, or how we can come closer and closer to that kind of freedom, is of course sitting, sitting, sitting. And I see it happening all around me, through the years with people that I know are sitting, and I see that they are starting to become more vulnerable. But it is not a guarantee, because I also see people who sit a lot who it does not happen to. They do not become more vulnerable. They become very set, and actually harsh, in their ways. So it's not that meditation is a guarantee. Someone once said, "It's not that you are guaranteed to have the accident happen, but

it makes you more accident prone.” It’s more likely that you will go, “Oh, wait a minute. It’s not like I thought at all.” And why? Because when you are meditating you are resting in your One Point, you are not judging, you are just looking. Life is a query. It’s a living question. You are just in a state of questioning, and there are no answers, you know there are no answers, and it doesn’t matter that there are no answers.

So when you have that kind of experience, and you are practiced at that, then when you meet another person that is different than you, the chances of you getting to get right in there are much greater.

One other thing about this narrative where Tohei Sensei says that the mountain doesn’t criticize the river because it’s lowly and the river doesn’t criticize the mountain because it can’t move about, is that we...well, for instance, we just had a seminar and we all worked very hard at this seminar. But every one of us did a different kind of task. One of us couldn’t do all of it, because we all have different talents. So we are all given different things to do. There are people that are more flexible and can do more different kinds of things, and there are people that are less flexible and need to be assigned exactly the right thing for them. But I think it is important to recognize that it is all “chop wood, carry water.” Even when I am having a half hour meeting with the student in there, and there is nothing other than talk in terms of movement happening, for me it’s “chop wood, carry water.” For me, that is service, just the same as if I were sweeping the floor. It’s the same kind. And I can sweep the floor, but I am better at that than I am at sweeping the floor, maybe.

Do you see what I mean? It’s the same with all of us. It says something like that here. “Each has his own characteristics, which work or fit the best for each of them.” Isn’t that interesting. We are recognizing these differences, and that helps us not to judge them. And yet, I am telling you that ultimately you have to see that they are the same as you, to not judge them.

OK, I think I have talked enough about that. Do you have any questions, comments, concerns, complaints, judgments you would like to share?

Student: I just had the experience this week of being judgmental about one of my staff members. I learned something very essential about her upbringing, what happened to her as a child, and this allowed me to be quite a bit more empathetic and understanding, and the judgement stopped. But what happens if you don’t get that information about somebody, because it really made a difference?

I think the real question you are asking there is “Do you need that kind of information to be empathetic?” Empathy often masquerades as compassion. Often people who feels strong empathy for others are just feeling sorry for them. They say, “Oh yeah, they had it really rough, so I won’t be so hard on them. Oh yeah, come on, let’s not judge them, let’s not be so hard on them. All these things happened to them that were negative that didn’t happen to me, so I should be more supportive.” And that’s all good. That’s fine to be more supportive. That’s great. But don’t for a minute think that’s compassion. Again, compassion is the end of judgement. You say, “It made me stop judging.” I would suggest that it didn’t. It made you change your judgment of her. Compassion is

no judgment at all, good, bad, or indifferent. No judgment. I have told you, I asked my first teacher about compassion, and he said, "When you first experience compassion you are going to accuse yourself of being cold hearted." This is because we think it's feeling nice and warm and fuzzy about somebody. There is nothing wrong with feeling warm and fuzzy about somebody, but don't think for a minute that that is compassion. You have just changed the nature of your judgement from bad to good. You are still judging them. You are just not judging them to be bad, and so you feel more kindly towards them. And that's a good start. That's why Bishop Tutu says, "Don't talk to your friends, talk to your enemies." Because maybe you will get to know them and that's a good start. You begin to feel, "Oh, wait, this is not a bad guy. He is a human like me. Ohhh." You know?

Imagine a scientist who wants to be free to create GMO with every product that is possible because he sees value there. And then imagine the other person who says there should not ever be any GMO anywhere, anytime. Neither of them are ever going to get what they want, because the opposite view exists. So there is only one thing for them to do and that is to become friends. It's not just to put up with each other. It's not just to compromise. It's to become friends. And then they can begin to build that third thing. They will discover something that neither of them ever even knew existed. This third thing, this is what we teach in Aikido. When true connection happens, then we realize that it's not about whether there is GMO or not, it's about being connected with each other. That's what humanity is for, this connection, not to dictate to each other how we ought to think.

Ideas are useful only as a vehicle to bring us together. Much more important is always love. And how many times have you been involved in something where you put love second?

Again, this is profound. This simple little rule has far reaching implications.

Student: Can you extend what you are talking about to compassion for yourself?

Sure. The characteristic of compassion is that it is non-judgmental, one what or the other. Meaning you are not proud of yourself for being so swell, or you are not disgusted with yourself for being such a dweeb. And all points in between. Compassion is the opposite of the way we are with ourselves. We have this superego that is constantly on watch, ready to leap and attack. So, since we are doing that with ourselves, then we are doing that with other people. "If you cross me you won't hear the end of it!" We are ready to jump on somebody when they make a mistake. Or, we are full of praise for someone when they are doing well.

If was up to me I would say that praise is better than criticism, generally speaking, because it keeps things a little warmer and a little more empathetic. But when we say "Plus Life" we are not talking about being nice to ourselves, or self supportive, or taking a stand, or having dignity. All of that stuff is B.S. When you really notice yourself, it's empty. It's not good and it's not bad. There is nothing to judge. And you are no one to judge. "You" meaning you in general. I am the worst judge of Chris Curtis. The very worst possible judge of yourself there could be would be yourself.

It's like, there is that bumper sticker that says, "Don't believe most of what you think." Baloney, you should not believe anything you think, because when you are thinking about things, you are judging, qualifying. "What will this food taste like, good or bad? Is this guy right or wrong?" You can't help it. It's going to happen. Notice it. Certainly, when you are sitting in meditation and you are practicing resting in your One Point, which feels empty or full, either one, there are no characteristics to it. It's just total. And as you practice sitting in totality, you are practicing compassion for yourself. This is what I would say.

Does that make sense?

Student: Yes, thank you.

Student: Sensei, sometimes criticism is necessary, or it's expected, in a way. It can be healthy. Not necessarily in a judgmental way, but we need to be able to discern certain things, like danger and safety, those sorts of things. And there are people that are in those positions that are expected to give healthy feedback. Like I expect one has to practice a certain amount of humility in order to dispense healthy feedback. So judging isn't all bad.

Judging isn't bad?

Student: That's not a judgment!

OK, I am one of those people whose job it is, you might say, at times to be critical. I am correcting students all the time. But I don't use that word, "criticize," and I don't think ever of myself as being critical. I am not perfect, and so it may happen, but I don't think of it that way. I think of it as supporting. You know, I have to go back to my job as an instructor, and your job as an instructor. The instructor's job, first of all, is to show the way, to show that it can be done. So that means that you have to be an example of non-judgment. It's possible to actually have compassion. So you have to be an example of that compassion. That's number 1. Number 2, your second job, is to help them get whatever is stopping them from being free and experiencing this non-judgmental state of mind, out of their way, to help them see through the murkiness, the darkness of that, the obscurity. Right? And then also, to show them the way, show them how to do that. The student's job is just to listen and follow, as much as possible. It's very difficult, but that's our job as a student.

Often, for instance in a question and answer period, people are really asking to be corrected, in some sense. And so sometimes silence is the answer. I use silence a lot, sometimes just a long pause, because all I am really asking of the other person is what I am asking of myself. Let's pay attention to this for a minute. You see? That's what I am really asking. I will put my attention on this. Do this with me. I will put my attention on this for a moment, and let's just notice what's actually going on here. And really that's all that's happening, even in the class. It's all just that kind of thing. I am bringing something to the party that will help you, if you can receive it, to pay attention on a deeper level.

Yeah, any kind of idea that our job is to straighten out someone that has been out of line, that is anathema to a teacher. It had better be anathema. I am sure that Otsuka Sensei thought he was teaching in those early days, but he did wake up at some point, and he does not do that any more.

So it's really important to recognize that any kind of criticism is not what this is about. It's not what our responsibility is. I admit, I used to think that it was. I did not know any better. And it was at a point where Suzuki Sensei was not saying anything much to me any more. Maybe for the last 10 years of his life, I was on my own. He would not correct me. So I had to learn to notice on my own. Don't you remember? I used to be a real Nazi about stuff. So don't be like that. Don't do that to your students. And I can't even say that, because you are going to do whatever you are going to do. Everybody is different. But try to see that that is not the most constructive way to support a student who is really screwing up. What it's going to do is cause them to resist you, because they are already beating themselves up, so they don't need you to beat them up too, thank you very much. I mean, you don't hear me do that, right?

Students: No.

So this is what I am saying. Please be like this now. Don't wait until you are 73 years old.

Student: I had a really good example of that this week in my interchange with you, Sensei. I will share that. I came home from the seminar just full of ideas for how we could do everything better for my department, which was hospitality, hotel, and bus transportation. And so I wrote a report which I sent to Jeff and Sensei. Sensei very kindly pointed out to me that he could see that I was venting.

I never used the word, venting.

Student: No you didn't, but I see that now. And I am really thinking about that during this conversation tonight, and what you wrote to me was very good. It was just like what you are saying tonight, to help me see that maybe I was a bit self-righteous. I did feel like I was right and those other people were not right, and I wanted to tell them. So I do understand that now, and I see myself now in a different light.

Mele, that's music to my ears. So there we go. If you weren't training, which opens you, you would not have had that moment of "Aha, I see what he means there."

And so that's why we are all here. I said something six months ago, after I got over my illness last year, and came back to the dojo, the first thing I taught was that Aikido is about how to be a good friend. And really, your teacher is just your best friend. If the teacher is truly a teacher, they are just a good friend. And every one of you, even though you may not be an eighth degree black belt, every one of you is a teacher. At some point, you are with other students. And you can be sure that when a student who is a blue belt sees someone who wears a brown belt, they are thinking to watch and see what that is like. So what do you want them to see? What kind of person do you want to be? You want to be your highest self, whatever that is. You want to be your clearest, calmest, deepest, the most useful human being you can be. And a useful human being

is someone who serves others continually. You know it makes you feel good when you are taking care of other people, when you are feeding other people, arranging a bus ride for one hundred people, cleaning the floors for one hundred people. That is a wonderful experience. That is a great opportunity to have. And I was just so proud of everyone this weekend, because more than ever before, everyone was working hard to make this thing happen from every different direction. Wherever I was, it was just happening like clockwork all around me. It's an uplifting thing. And don't think that Shinichi Tohei Sensei doesn't notice that, and also appreciate it. He told me again and again, "Wow, your students are amazing, the way they do this. How did they learn this?" Well, after twenty of these seminars, some of us have had a lot of experience doing this. But it is because, even those who haven't done a lot of it, put themselves completely into it, and gave of themselves, allowed themselves to be vulnerable and worked hard. Even though there were times when it seemed frustrating and it seemed there was nothing left to give, you do it, and you find, "Oh, wait a minute. That's not where it comes from. It comes from somewhere else!" Because suddenly you are filled again with the power that you need to continue.

Thank you very much for that.

Student: I noticed that the rule starts off talking about other martial arts, and clearly that is not what it is about. It very quickly snowballs into including everything, starting with yourself. Are we carrying that out to a further degree, or are we finding that this lesson does apply to everything and everyone?

Sure. This is a martial art that we are doing, and people in martial arts tend to think their own martial art is the best one, and put other martial arts down. We all have done that, in the past, and so that's a way good way to show the principle. It's a principle we are talking about. It's not that it is only true of martial arts. Churches do it, politicians do it, everything is a martial art in that sense. Everything is something that you can glom onto and say, "This is the best. What I am doing is best, and everybody else is wrong."

We have to recognize that those guys in ISIS, the only thing they want is for you to think like they do. All of that violence is secondary. Their objective is to convince everybody to be like them, to think the way they think. And if you think about it, whenever you are trying to do something politically or otherwise, that's all you are doing. You are not better than ISIS. The thing you are supporting might be nicer, it might be a little more inclusive, of course, of course. But don't forget. It's like the difference between empathy and compassion. It's not the real deal yet. Don't tell yourself that it is the real deal until it actually is. And when it is, there is no more judgement left. There is no more comparing my ideas to your ideas. There is no more this is better than that. It's all the same, and you see that it's all the same. So you just sit in the chaos, and it's fine. And you don't have to do anything about. It's all being taken care of perfectly, as we speak.

Thank you very much.