

## **Thirteen Rules for Instructors: #6 - Conceit**

**Friday, July 28, 2017 C. Curtis**

Good evening everyone. Tonight, our discussion is for the 6<sup>th</sup> of the 13 Rules for Instructors, written by Tohei Sensei and translated and communicated to us here in the West, back in 1956 or 1957. These rules came about largely because of difficulties between instructors, jealousy and envy and other difficulties, primarily in Hawaii. Originally, you know Tohei Sensei first came to Hawaii in 1953 and returned more often to Hawaii than to other places. So, a lot of what he wrote and a lot of what he taught came out of his experimenting with Westerners, and that was primarily in Hawaii.

This one speaks volumes. I will read you the original translation that came to us back in the beginning.

*“Be warned against conceit. Conceit not only halts your progress, it causes you to regress. Nature is boundless. It’s principles are profound. What brings conceit? It is brought on by shallow thinking and a cheaply bought compromise with your ideals.”*

And then, Sayaka, would you read it in Japanese, please? (She reads)

Thank you very much. The work that Sayaka and I did on this doesn’t change it much, but it is interesting. You know, what we are doing here is always trying to get closer to the original expression of what Tohei Sensei was experiencing and trying to communicate to us. It’s not just a more literal translation, but we are trying to stay truer to his original intent, if that is possible. And often, as you know from these studies that we do, we find that whoever translated these originally added an awful lot of their own ideas into it. This one seems to be pretty close to the original.

We translated this as:

*“You should avoid conceit. Conceit not only stops your progress, but also causes regress. The universe is infinite, and it’s principles are deep. Why does conceit manifest in you? You should know that conceit is a cheap compromise with your self, because of your shallow mind.”*

So, having spent a month contemplating and meditating on conceit, which is more time than I have ever spend looking that closely at conceit, and tryiing to understand... well...I should first say that, in the beginning, in the Old English language, the word conceit developed in the 16 and 17 centuries, and referred to an excessively flowery romantic expression by a poet. That was a conceit. And it was not necessarily derogatory. In fact, it was so popular that poets competed with each other to see who could be the most filled with this conceit. But not the way we think of conceit. Not the most conceited, but the best as producing conceit.

And then that fell out of favor, and eventually the common use of the word conceit came to be more like what we think of it as today. These days I am imagining that everybody thinks of conceit as a considering that the talents that you have, or the

understanding you have, or the status you have, or whatever skills you might have, are a bit more than they actually are. I think this is a pretty common understanding of it. We don't use the word conceit as much as we use the word conceited, in derogatorily putting someone down. We think they are "conceited." They think too highly of themselves.

But it seems to me that it is more than that, or at least more serious than that. Somebody can just be shallow and misguided, and that is true that that is what it means. But for instance, a good example is that sometimes you see in Facebook, or elsewhere, that people claim to be an "empath." That means you are empathic, right? So this is a conceit, a really good example of conceitedness, because this body here is a living, breathing, feeling, organ. It is nothing other than empathetic. That's exactly what this body/mind is. So to say you are an empath is like taking credit for something that you did not create, and making yourself special. And this is key to understanding the whole meaning of conceit. It is a conceit, to believe that, because of a condition of your birth, you are special in some way. This is an extremely common conceit in the world today.

Of course, claiming to be an "empath" is not the only example. We have lots of them these days, particularly surrounding spiritual kind of people and spiritual teaching.

*Student: Wouldn't you say, Sensei, that different people have different capacities of empathy?*

Of course. Of course, we do. We all have different capacities.

*Student: Yeah. So I experience myself as an empath, and I don't feel it's something special. I feel it's something that I have had to cope with in my life, because often I will be in a situation with a person and I am feeling what they are feeling when they are not. And...*

Yeah, well all you are saying is that some people are more in touch with their natural condition than others. Some people are born more in that direction, maybe because of past life works or something, and other people, as they practice through their lives, become more sensitive and aware and open. And as a result, they may begin to have this perception you describe.

But I think that you just want to be careful about using that word, because it sounds like a narcissistic claim. And God forbid that we should say that about you.

*Student: No, no. I mean for me, I have felt it as a burden many times.*

I can see how it could be difficult.

*Student: And also a gift, because I can help that person come into it.*

I think maybe earlier in your life it was more of a burden, but lately, here in your life, as you learn the function of empathy, it is more of a blessing.

*Student: Yes.*

Yes, and along that line, for instance, we here are either teachers, or at least dealing with teachers often, because of our practice. Teachers often are seen as the conceited ones, and they are certainly living in a world that is a big invitation to conceit. You know, people are always blowing smoke at the teacher, always telling the teacher how wonderful she or he is, and how they have changed their life forever, and how they are so pure and spiritual and wonderful. People say things like that because of their own projections and needs, and if, as the teacher, you believe your press, you are probably not very balanced. It's not that empathy is not happening, or that the teaching isn't happening and that these wonderful things do not occur for people. But, as a human being, you have to know that you are a conduit. A human being is an organ of sense that is a conduit. In Aikido we say "the Ki of the Universe." But you can use other words for that. This phenomenon occurs where ever people go deeply into the nature of their being. They tend to recognize, or discover, that they are not the source of their own skills, or their own capacities. This is very important to recognize, as an individual. Even if you say, "I worked very hard to develop those capacities." By whose virtue and power did you work so hard? What drove you? If you keep asking the questions, penetrating further and further, eventually you will find no one there.

*Student: Is that where it relates to the shallow mind? Because the ego appropriates the capacity and says, "I did this." Whereas, you know when you asked us to look at the antonyms, the antonym I see as "humility," which is a virtue that arises from being connected to ones' nature, rather than the conceit of the ego saying "I am the one who..."*

Right. That is the one, if you look it up in the internet, all the sites that you may look into for an antonym, they all say humility. Humility is the most common one. And of course, it's dead on. What you are saying is exactly right. But the reason I wrote that to all of you, and asked you to bring an antonym...well some of you emailed them ahead and I have them here. "Altruism" (that's an interesting one), "sincerity," "humility," "gratitude," and "mushin" (empty mind). These five came from five different people.

*Student: Modesty?*

Yeah, that's the opposite of arrogance, but arrogance is not quite the same as conceit. Anyway, the reason I said this was...and I will let you say more in just a moment...because what word you pick as an antonym to another word is very revealing of your particular understanding of this. It is not just a shallow or deep understanding. We all have conceit in us. Conceit, like all darkness, best dissolves in light. When we see the conceit that we cling to (whatever it might be about ourselves – and it's not always positive) is just as much a conceit when it is low self-esteem as high self-esteem. It's just as erroneous. So the regular definition of conceit does not always fit. Like, "he thinks he is hot stuff," or "he is stuck up." But maybe he is stuck down.

So that is why I asked for these words. Not so much just so I could hear them, but so that you could.

Did you have a question?

*Student: Well, I was just listening to you. Every judgement we make is conceit, really. You were talking about the bigger issues, but it is so prevalent in everything we do, if we pay attention. Judgement is when we feel we are separate or better or something.*

Or maybe worse.

*Student: Right, or something. We are separate, at any rate.*

In some way, we are separating ourselves from another person. And that's always a conceit. That's what you are saying. OK, what's your word for the opposite, the antonym?

*Student: In general, I say "unpretentious." Having no pretence.*

Unpretentious. Yeah, I like that. That's good. For each person, whatever the word chosen, it will reveal a little something different in the flavor of their character.

*Student: Mine was "plus life." To me, conceit is almost like minus life, faking, con artist, or whatever you want to call it. That's what I thought the definition was.*

I think it's really important, as it says, that conceit not only stops your progress, but it causes regress. There is no such thing as standing still, and not going anywhere. There is always motion. The third principle of the universe is, "Everything is always in motion, and changing." So there is no just sitting in a static condition. If you have conceit, you are regressing, at least in that area, you are doing yourself active damage at all times in that state. So it really behooves us to discover where we have conceit.

*Student: And I think I can fall in the definition of conceit as "minus life" so that's why I said "plus life."*

Sure. Self criticism. Thinking you should be better than you are.

*Student: Hai, absolutely. I know that one well.*

OK. And you were "altruism?"

*Student: Sincerity.*

Did you want to say something about that?

*Student: No.*

*Student: Well, my word, like other people's, was "humility." And another one that came to mind was "vulnerability." I think being conceited can be walling yourself off, in a way.*

Oh, yeah. That's great. Yes, definitely. How about you?

*Student. It's been really interesting listening to everyone. It gives me a little advantage. Particularly moving to me was your sense of negative conceit. In other words, it could go either way and both are not good for your balance. And so, the word that comes to my mind is "ordinary." Ordinary in the sense that we are surrounded by nature, which is ordinary, but when you look at it, it's amazing. Looking at the leaves and blossoms behind you there, they are ordinary for their species, but when you look at them, they are truly amazing.*

Yeah. I am struck by what she said, that whenever you judge someone it comes out of a conceit. You know, just after we are born, and just before we die, there is nothing happening. It's just our natural condition. And all the rest in between is what you do with that, what you add on to that, or take away from that. So judging is sometimes self-judgment. Last time we were talking about blame, blaming others for your condition, or blaming yourself for your condition. And I think what you are working towards there, is that our natural condition is exactly what it is, and the things that alter that are conditioned responses to the conditions that we run into that have altered us, and it causes us to have things like conceit and judgment. This is one of the things we do from maybe one day old, and maybe a moment before you die, you finally give it up. You just don't have anything else to say. OK?

*Student: What might be another way of putting it is, as you say, conditioned response. We were taught in some way how to see ourselves, and that is, in some way, a conceit.*

Yes, some people are put down when they are young, by their parents, and taught that they are never good enough. That is pretty common. And then sometimes people are taught that they are really special, because they are "blue blood," or because they are a part of some tribe, or because they have some name, or some ethnicity. And often it is an ethnicity that is put down by some other ethnicities, so your reaction is to make yourself really special. All of that is conditioned response, and nobody is really to blame. It's just a condition that must be recognized, if you are going to progress instead of regress. Moving forward.

*Student: In reading the decription that Tohei Sensei adds to the paragraph, "a shallow way of dealing with things," to me this suggests what we do in life with our ego is that we layer it to protect and to disguise the depth of what we are feeling about ourselves. So to me, conceit is a result of something deep within us, that we are not looking at.*

It 's a result of something that we are not looking at?

*Student: Yes, and that, I think, might be what Tohei Sensei means when he says it is a "shallow" excuse. So, with this layering, we just have more layers to peel away.*

Yeah, isn't it interesting that a conceit is adding on something that is not there. Clearly you feel something is missing if you have to do that. Whereas if you just paid attention, things are very deep, and that means that you are very deep, we are very deep, not shallow. So there is no need to add something to make ourselves more special. How could you be more special than this?

*Student: So, in looking at it, I feel that, as do a lot of things in our ego, this is used as a defence. And in many times, I believe it's a defence because of fear, fear of what we judge ourselves to be. Below all of this, we see something in ourselves that we are protecting.*

Because we are afraid of it? Is that what you are saying?

*Student: Yeah. So, in my mind, the opposite of conceit, which I believe is fear, in some part, would be love. So that's my offering.*

Great. OK. Thank you.

*Student: The word that came to my mind was "beginners mind." For me this word is the opposite of conceit.*

Tohei Sensei always said that a beginner's mind is an open mind, a mind without judgment. That would definitely be the opposite of conceit. Often, when people come into the dojo, speaking from experience here, when we come into the dojo, we often are very protective of what we think we know, because we fear that being taken away, and then there being nothing. So, in some sense, we are experts, when we come into the dojo, and it takes years and years to let go of all that. So you might not have a beginner's mind until maybe 20, 30, 40 years of training, to get us down deep enough that we can experience that kind of not-knowing, and it being OK. That's always important.

Thank you

*Student: So, my mother was often talking to me about conceit, and making sure that I wasn't being conceited. And what I thought was an antonym to conceit was "self-conscious." Really that sums it up. If I am being self-conscious, I am not being conceited.*

Do you mean "self-conscious" like watching yourself to be sure you are not conceited?

*Student: Being self-conscious of worrying about if I am doing things properly or just being aware of what I am doing.*

Oh yeah. There is a little fear in there, right? Fear of being caught out.

*Student: I am not sure.*

Being caught out being the way you are not supposed to be.

*Student: Well, sure.*

Did you ever experience being conceited and think “I don’t want to be like that?”

*Student: Uh, yes, I do go through those things.*

I don’t think there is anybody here that hasn’t experienced that. Because we are taught, and not just by our mothers but our whole culture, which says, “Don’t be conceited.” And then we turn around and worship everybody who is conceited. We even elect them as President. We don’t have to mention any names here. OK.

*Student: So, reflecting on Tracy’s email, and what Sayaka just said, and what you said, Fincher, about the fear, it’s like we are really afraid that we are nobody, and we are always trying to be somebody. But when we come to the true realization that there is nobody, then we can really be in that place of beginner’s mind. But, for a long time, when I would try to find who I was, and there was nobody there, it felt as though something was wrong, that there should be somebody.*

Do you mean somebody missing?

*Student: Yeah, someone missing. Yeah? And that really scared me. But then, when I kind of relaxed and said that was really the truth, well, there is nothing there and that’s OK.*

And that’s OK. Yes, it’s the same thing as realizing that you can’t know anything. My daughter came to me the other day and said, “I’ve just begun to realize that nobody knows anything!” And then she said, “The problem is part of me doesn’t think that’s OK. So I have to deal with this.”

*Student: Growing up, if you don’t know, you are often shamed for that.*

Yes, absolutely. Our school system is designed to shame you if you don’t know. So you pretend to know, even when you don’t know.

I think it’s important to say that it’s not that nothing can be known. There is an infinite amount of knowing, of knowledge, about any particular thing. Even this towel here, there are an infinite number of things to know about it. So you might be a manufacturer of these kind of towels, or you might be an historian and know all the ins and outs of how these particular Japanese towels came about, how we use them, (this is a little Japanese bath towel that I use when I am training) but since there is an infinite amount possible to know, then as I am always saying, no matter how much you know about something, it is an infinitely small amount. Relative to infinity, it’s practically nothing. So matter how much we know, we can’t really know anything.

But, these conceits that we carry around with us, have to do with our knowledge about things. “Yes, I am a known person. I know about these things, these certain things.” And, boy, if you want to know about Aikido, it’s not going to happen. Because the more you learn, the more you realize there is no way to know. It’s

completely unknown. And was so to Tohei Sensei. It's not like he got it, but nobody else can. "Getting it," is realizing that there is no way to know it, no way to pin it down. And that it is OK that it is that way.

*Student: OK, well my first reaction was "humility." And then everybody was showing up with really profound words, and I just started thinking of it as compassion for yourself and for others.*

Compassion.

*Student: Conceit just seems very self-full.*

Yeah, self-restricting. Self-centered. So you can't be open to others. Thank you.

*Student: When you sent that email out to everybody, I looked at the list of examples of words and their antonyms that you started off with, and eventually you got to conceit. And what I saw in all of those examples is that there was a common theme between all of those. In every one of those words, you were pointing to something missing. I had a discussion with someone the other day, and we were talking about humility. Of course, that is the obvious antonym to conceit, and it is accurate. But to me, when I looked at all of those, the thing that was missing was connection, which you have been teaching us for decades. So I looked at every one of those words, every one of them was missing connection. So, just on a very base level, with conceit, the opposite would be connection.*

Yeah, connection. So maybe now, after listening to everyone's profound words of wisdom, we notice that it has been interesting, and has made this discussion a little different than usual. I don't think anyone asked me any questions today, but instead you took the opportunity to say what you felt about this subject. Which is good, great, we can do that every time.

To me, this whole discussion has showed me more about where my conceits are. Nobody is getting off the hook here. I often wonder, when we have these groups, I always look at who doesn't show up. I always think that there is some reason for that, beyond the fact that they have something they had to do. We always have a choice when we come to the dojo. It is simply a priority thing. I am not saying that you shouldn't stay home and take care of your family if necessary, or your work, or if you are ill, or whatever. Of course there are genuine reasons to stay away. But I always think..., I got this, of course, from Suzuki Sensei. He would always say that at any given class, the students you want to share the subject with never show up that night. He said that they "have radar." They somehow know that, when the subject is going to be penetrating for them, they are mysteriously not there. He felt very strongly that there is a kind of unconscious knowing on the part of the students, and they know when to stay away.

OK, any comments about this?

*Student: What's the difference between conceit and pride? Or is it the same thing?*



Well it's two different words, so there is some different meaning. I think, if you have conceit, you have pride. You are prideful. But it doesn't mean it's the same thing. Like I said, conceit can be negative also. It's a false, protective, exaggeration of what is actually happening. And we cling to it, because it gives us a sense of identity, and protects us from being too vulnerable and so our fears are exposed. And pride is more like that one thing that facilitates all of that kind of self-serving mistaken notions. Does that make sense? Not enough? More?

*Student: Pride is...?*

The facilitator that makes being conceited possible. Like we were talking about...when you are in a certain tribe, and this is not just Hawaiian, or Latino, or African American, but also something like Maui Ki-Aikido, which in this sense is a tribe. So you may be in a certain group, and how you treat this group and your relationship to the group, when you talk to other people outside the group is very revealing. And if you have a conceit, it's driven by pride. You are very proud. And in fact, in our culture, that is not a negative word. In fact, often people think pride is a good thing. Pride for your country, pride for your community, pride for your beliefs, your "core values," pride for you children, etc. This is all a conceit driven by this idea of pride.

*Student: In the Christian ethos, Lucifer was God's most beloved angel, and he was asked to bow to man, and he refused, and for that he was cast into Hell. And so they look at the Seven Deadly Sins, and they see Pride as being at the very top – because you lack humility.*

Yeah.

*Student: Can I just add that, as a word, I believe conceit still carries some of the connotation of that older meaning that you alluded to. It still does have the connotation of artifice, affectation, falseness, that goes beyond pride as an internal emotion.*

That's right. You know, when you see (again no names) certain people in politics or celebrity, the way they groom themselves and the way they dress and the way they are speaking, I see this. We were just introduced to a new pal of our President's, maybe you know who he is, and I thought right away, "Wow, there's conceit manifest." Yeah, and I think it's foppery, well it used to be called "foppery." You know, a "fop" is a "Malvolio." In "She Stoops To Conquer" that 17<sup>th</sup> century English play, they are all fops. And that 17<sup>th</sup> century was exactly when all of this use of conceit in poetry and language came about. Also known as a "dandy."

*Student: Sometimes though, there is also that this pride can have a loving quality to it. For instance when you see us performing Suburi on Sunday morning, you say things that seem like you are proud of us...*

Oh I have pride. I don't say I don't have pride.

*Student: But I mean it is loving and not hurtful in any way. Sometimes, if it is not taken in the wrong way. If it is not driven by conceit, maybe!*

*Student: That's kind of an interesting distinction, because you can feel pride for someone else, but can you have conceit for something else. Conceit someone described as "self-centered" or "self-serving."*

*Student: In Buddhism they have this term "varjra pride." Which means pride in the truth.*

You know, I don't know if, the thing you are talking about, I am not sure if I am experiencing it as pride. It just makes me really happy inside, to see everybody performing on this kind of a level in Suburi. And at such moments, I just wish that everybody in the world could see you guys going it.

*Student: So that's a loving pride.*

Yeah, I guess it means I am proud of you.

OK? Anything else?

*Student: I guess, one way to think about that would be, what would your feelings be if your students messed up. I think that pride in your work is very valuable, because it brings you up to a higher standard, or a standard of some kind. But at the same time, if your work fails, do you feel shame, or are you going to learn from your mistake?*

Yeah, the opposite of pride, in that sense, would be shame. But the reason I said that I am not sure I am feeling pride in that example is because pride means you are taking credit for it yourself. And if you screw up, then you are ashamed, which is also taking credit for it yourself. But if you don't take credit, the you just love them, whether they are screwing up or not. No matter what, you have a sense of Aloha for them, from your heart.

OK, that's enough. Thank you very much.