

Holland Spring Seminar 2012 – Q & A

Sunday, May 13, 2012

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Good morning everyone.

I have to tell you what a pleasure it is for me to be able to come here and do this. I've said this before, but I never meant it like today. You know, it's just so wonderful to be able to run around the mat like a kid, without any pain. There was this cloud around me for so long, that has lifted. Somehow my experience of this, let's put it that way, is even more profound. I think it also has something to do with what happened in the hospital that I was telling you about. It's such a wonderful thing that they can replace a whole knee and get rid of all that and now I'm like a new man. So that's really fun.

And then this was also a really fun seminar for me because there are so many of you here, some of you that came from a long way away, not as far as I came, but a long way. I am so happy to see that all the folks from the Bayern Dojo came up. Of course, you came because she is taking her *Shodan* test. So next time, come anyway, even if you don't have someone testing.

You know, you may not think of this, or maybe you might feel that this is not a humble way to think, but every single one of you changes this experience for everyone else. If one of you decides not to come, it changes the whole thing. You have to believe me. I mean that's not just something that people say. If you are in my position, you really experience that. You might see that I work with some people more than I work with other people. There are reasons for that, some of them because they can take my *uke*, others because they are teachers, and they need the attention. But it doesn't mean that I don't see you, or that you are not getting teaching.

Suzuki Sensei use to tell me that from the time you get on the airplane to go to teach a seminar, all night every night, all day every day, until you get off the airplane back on Maui, you have to cover and hold the whole group. You have to hold the whole group in your heart. He said if you don't do that, (and he told me this hundreds of times), then that's not teaching. Teaching is not showing people how to hold their hand. Of course we do that, it's part of what we do, because we have to have some vehicles. And anyway it's a lot of fun, isn't it, to learn how to do this thing.

But there's a much bigger thing happening here, while we are all together. And sometimes during the seminar, like during the meditation session, maybe we approach this very directly and are very open and directly pointing to it. And other times it's very indirect, and covert. But believe me, it's always happening. And you practice becoming a teaching by being a student with an open heart. You practice opening like this, because to hold everyone, you have to be open to everyone. You can't be open to some and not be open to others. You can't be partially open. You have to be completely open, as much as possible of course. So you practice this while we are in seminar. While you are practicing as a student, that's the primary thing you are

practicing: how to be open to everything that comes up, everything that arises. Not just every person but everything that arises within you or around you, every emotion, every thought, every sense, everything. And then everything is beautiful. Even the most painful thing can be transformed. Maybe it's hard to understand, but there is a joy in being able to be present with something that you have feared all of your life. Just to be able to accept it and be with it, is a kind of victory. The sign in my meditation room says, "*masa katsu a gatsu kachi haya bi.*" This is a very famous Japanese phrase, and O'Sensei did the calligraphy for Suzuki Sensei and he gave it to me. It means "true victory over self transcends time and space," "transcends or goes beyond time and space." There is no victory over the small, selfish, sly self in time and space. True victory is beyond that. This is what I am trying to express today, is *masa katsu a gatsu kachi haya bi*. Yes, there is one thing going on, this *keiko* practice that we do, which is very important and I love to do it with you. But there is always a much deeper thing happening that you must be open to more and more so you can experience with me, at the same time. And then later, when someone is with you, they cannot help but experience it too, because of the degree of your openness to this.

So, any questions?

Student: You said that a former teacher of yours used gods in Aikido. Would you tell a little bit more about that?

Oh, I was talking about O'Sensei. He is the original teacher of Aikido. He basically invented Aikido, and Tohei Sensei was his main student. His name was Morihei Uyeshiba, and we called him "O'Sensei." O'Sensei means O, O'Sensei, big shot, big deal. He is supposed to be the only one who wears a white *hakama*. He was very holy. He was a very religious man. He belonged to a certain kind of religion, *Omotokyo*, I think it's called, a Shinto oriented religion. They believe in the origin of the universe, just like if you were a Christian fundamentalist and you believe everything you read in the Bible, including that the world is only like 7,000 years old, or something like that. It is a literal translation, or a literal belief, based on the myths that are in the religious texts. Now the myths in the religious texts are all very true and important, but they are because they are pointing to something. Your job is to figure out what they are pointing to, not to adopt them as a set of beliefs. But obviously very few people in this world agree with that statement, because we have people running around blowing people up because of this same problem, right? The common name is fundamentalist religious people.

But O'Sensei was a very peaceful man. He wasn't blowing anybody up. He was our great leader. He really brought all this out, it all came through him. He did have genuine experience, but the way he identified it was always with a set of moral codes handed down from the gods on high. For instance, on one occasion Suzuki Sensei told me a story. O'Sensei and Tohei Sensei came to Maui together in 1961, and O'Sensei blessed our dojo. This was a big deal, because he didn't travel in the world at all. This is when Tamura Sensei was the otomo. So Tohei Sensei was asked to do a demonstration. The next morning there was to be this big demonstration, and Tohei Sensei was going to perform "unraisable body." Tohei Sensei always picked the most giant

Hawaiian in the crowd, and said "Lift me up." And the first time Tohei Sensei would just fly into the air, because he was so small, just under five feet tall. And then the next time the guy tried to lift him he would end up on his back, because Tohei Sensei wouldn't budge. Tohei Sensei was famous for this. So the night before the demonstration, O'Sensei told Suzuki and Tohei, "Now boys, don't you go out drinking, (that's not all he said, but I'll leave it at that) because the gods will punish you and you won't be able to do unraisable body tomorrow. So Suzuki said, "What should be do?" And Tohei Sensei said, "We're going out. That's bullshit. You don't have to worry about that. That's not the source of my unraisable body." So they go out, do whatever they do, come back late at night, and the demonstration happens the next morning. And O'Sensei is pacing back and forth in back of the stage because he is so scared that Tohei Sensei is going to embarrass him, because he knew that they didn't get home until 4:00 in the morning. But of course it was great, it was fine, and Tohei Sensei had no problem being unliftable.

So that is a belief system, all right? But that doesn't mean that O'Sensei was not also having a genuine experience. I didn't ever meet the man. I didn't start training until 1974, and he died in 1969, so I never met him. But I have seen lots and lots of films of him, and of course I have heard stories from Tohei Sensei and Suzuki Sensei, and O'Sensei was the genuine article. It was just sort of considered a curiosity that he believed in this stuff. It was like his hobby on the side, this religion. It was a big deal for him, but most people that did Aikido with him weren't so interested in that.

If there is some practice that you have trouble with...like reading *Norito*, for instance. You might think, "Well, what are you doing there? Isn't that religious?" Well, no it's not, actually. O'Sensei did it, and Tohei Sensei did it, and Suzuki Sensei showed me how to do it, and so I do it because of the value of it for each of us in our practice. Not because I believe something about it, or want you to believe something about it. Understanding the difference between those two things, as a human being this is very important for you. Because they are not just the fundamentalist crazy guys out there, also on the other side, believe me, there is the balance of that. There are the crazy guys on the other side that think anything at all that has to do with awakening is some sort of weird belief system, and consider themselves intellectually superior to that. So this is snooty shit, and is just as crazy as the other side. So you don't want to be catching yourself in any of these positions. You want to have an open mind to everything.

You know, one time I was sitting with Suzuki Sensei in the office, and he said, "Did I ever tell you about the hole in the top of the earth?" I had been having a particularly difficult time with this. You know that snooty intellectual? That was me. OK? So I had probably said something about that to him. But anyway, I said, "Hole in the top of the earth? What?" And he says, "Yeah. There's a big hole up there, and down inside it's like paradise. There are people living in there, and they are all handsome, intelligent people, there's mangoes and bananas and it's really a paradise." And I said, "Sensei, where did you hear that?" And he goes, "I know. Don't worry, I know." I said, "Oh" thinking he was crazy, and I said, "You know, that doesn't exist." And he said, "Really? How do you know? Have you been there?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, when you have gone up there and looked at the top of the earth and looked down in and you don't

see that, then come back and tell me. Until then, you cannot say you know it's not there." Then there was a long silence. He was watching me, and he finally said, "Do you understand what I am teaching you?" So I said, "OK, I'll work on this some more."

Suzuki Sensei was the kind of guy that would do something like that. He was a practical joker, you know, but he was very serious. My affliction was very serious and it needed something to fit it. He did have a wonderful sense of humor in the particular ways he would torture me on occasion.

So does that answer your question? That was a long answer. Someone else have another question?

Student: After I am doing Ki Breathing for about 30 minutes or so, I notice that I didn't breathe for some time, and I wondered if this is what you referred to as "No Breathing" or "Musoku," or is this just being spaced out or something?

Interesting question. We were talking about this this morning, because Carlos is having this experience a lot also. The same thing will happen when you are doing Whole Body Meditation, when you are just doing normal breathing and suddenly you breathe out and you just don't need to have another breath. So that just means that you are in a very deep state of calmness and acceptance. It's not Musoku. Musoku means no one is breathing. So when you have this experience, well you are telling me about it, so are you there?

Student: Well, afterwards it is just sort of like I just didn't need to breathe.

Well, it's not like I can jump inside of your experience and tell you exactly what is happening, but I know the phenomenon you are talking about, in terms of breathing, and I know that is not *Musoku*. But it could happens in concert with *Musoku*, and you may be having the *Musoku* experience all the time. I don't know. Have other people had this experience here, as you become more and more calm, it's just like you lose interest in breathing? Like, "well, I don't really need to breathe any more." But that's not dangerous, because the body will always take over and save you, "the body" meaning that part of mind, the part of mind that does the breathing. That part will always prevail, unless you do something harsh. OK?

Student: OK, thank you.

Student: In the lesson on Thursday, you taught something about a Sanskrit word that starts with "k."

Kaivalya.

Student: Yes. Can you say more about it?

Yeah, it's not really Aikido but... You remember that we were doing Whole Body Meditation and afterwards I asked a few people in the class what was their experience like. And Toby said he

found himself being very alone in the midst of this great emptiness, and I said that was wonderful and fantastic. However, he said it was really hard and really scary. So then I told about this Sanskrit word from old India, called Kaivalya. Kaivalya means “the great aloneness.” My first teacher taught me about Kaivalya. I was having a hard time, living in hermitage for three years alone. I wasn’t alone in a monastery setting with a bunch of other monks. I lived in hermitage alone. There was an 85 year old British lady that lived in another part of the house that I had occasional contact with, but there was no one to talk to, and certainly no one to compare notes with. So I complained about it a little bit. And then I was beginning to have meditations where there was this indication to me that I was all alone in the universe, that the universe was me and I was the universe, and there was nothing else. This is illogical and terrifying to the neophyte. So I complained. That was my way. You don’t like what’s happening? Complain to the teacher. “What’s happening!?” And he said, “Oh, this is Kaivalya. You have to go through this successfully, otherwise you will never be able to move on.” St. John of the Cross called this the “Dark night of the soul.” You have to go through a period where you are willing to be, and you actually experience that you are, completely alone. You have to be willing to be alone. Because otherwise you are addicted to people and they will steal your wa, every day.

Student: What is that?

You will give a way your power. OK? Does that answer your question?

Student: Yes.

Good.

Student: Yes, I just want to make a remark. You shared with us your views on what teaching is about. For me, this practice is about at the same time rigor and freedom and flexibility. So it’s about experiencing things that apparently are non-coherent, or cannot come together. But this rigor is bringing some level of understanding of what freedom can be. And I find it interesting but maybe belying that kind of life we are used to living.

Yes, that’s beautiful. The way we talk about this is shugyo and keiko practice. In other words the keiko practice must be relatively rigid and precise...

Student: No, I meant rigorous, not rigid.

OK. Alright, rigorous. So it has to be very precise, and so forth. And I guess what you are saying is that there is this one thing that is happening, but there is an underlayment, and undercurrent, that is much more important and happening at the same time. So it’s not like we are working towards freedom. If you can experience both of these levels at the same time, you experience the precision of the keiko practice and the freedom of the shugyo at the same time.

Student: And somehow, it may be a bit of a black and white description, but it is a gateway, this rigor. I think there is more than this, but part of the practice has to do with rigor, somehow

humility, and this is somehow a gateway to the world of freedom, or something that becomes very big and offers this fluidity thing.

Well that's great. I hope you keep coming back the rest of your life so we can practice together.

Student: When I sit and meditate and get calm, I often get irritated by the sounds that are coming in, because it feels like a disturbance to me, and I can't get rid of that feeling, somehow.

Were you here yesterday when we did the meditation class?

Student: Yes.

So you heard what I said about that.

Student: I don't know...

Maybe not. OK, so when I was talking you through the meditation, I said that in the beginning you are going to be distracted by a sound, and when you are, then just come back to the breath. You are in the breath, and then this blue-jay starts squawking outside, just come back to the breath. Don't follow the sound, or start thinking about how it pisses you off, but just return to the breath. And once you can do that with some sense of ease, then you want to start including the sound in your meditation, or in your breathing practice, which is a meditation practice. And not just sounds, but all of the sense, a smell, a taste, a feeling in your body, or an emotion that is arising. It might be a sense of aloneness, which you don't want to ignore. Maybe you want to embrace that, and let it be. And maybe there is a thought, and this is a good exercise because you need to do a lot of practice to where there is a thought and it doesn't become a story for you. In other words, you are not following the thought. You will notice, if you pay attention, the thought is serving what is happening in the moment. But you have to see what it is pointing to. It might be an image of a beautiful woman, for instance. Well, it depends upon how you respond to that, whether she is serving your practice, or she is taking you down the street for a role in the hay. Which is OK, maybe, but then you are not sitting any more.

So you want to include and embrace everything as you go along. And you might try that when you are doing your breathing. You have plenty of time to practice, since you are young. So you can decide that today you will just return to the breath, but then another day you might say "now I am going to include everything." And then imagine, you are living your life and nothing distracts you. This doesn't mean you are closed off to everything. You're open to everything. You embrace everything. Everything is OK. It's your life. It's your world of experience. So that means that everything that you perceive is you. So if there is something that you are perceiving as other than you, then you are excluding that from your life. It's like cutting off parts of yourself. So if there is something that you don't like, and you push it away, it might be unpleasant up front, but maybe you can't live without it, and you are pushing it over there. Do you see?

Student: Yes, that is very helpful.

Student: I have a small question. Yesterday we did a lot with leading and following, we had standing Kokyu Dosa, and I experienced that being one is not so easy. In our dojo we sometimes discuss to support the uke's a little bit more in how to follow. And it's not really a big subject but we want to raise it because the better the uke is the better the being together is, yes? So you have any words for this? We are practicing as ukes of course, but they are not often the subject here. You do a lot with the nage, but not so much with the uke. So how to improve the following, how to approve the attack, and how to be precise in what you do to the nage, because always improving the nage doesn't always improve the being together. And it's not so easy to teach this.

OK, I think I understand what you are asking. You know, in a seminar, occasionally I do some uke advice or practice. I think I even said today, about following. O'Sensei said you have to learn to follow, to be an uke, first, because that's actually what the nage is doing. Actually there is no difference between what's happening...ultimately. And there are many different levels of uke, just like nage. At our dojo in Maui we have a very rigorous ukemi practice that I never do in a seminar, because it takes too much time.

Student: Oh, shucks.

Well, come to Maui, for goodness sakes. We have lots and lots of uke and special kinds of stretching. I haven't even done much Aiki Taiso here, so maybe I can do more of that for you in the future. I mean that we have all these things we do in the dojo to help bring people up to the level, but that is dojo training. In the seminar, generally I am wanting to up the ante a little bit and help people in their nage. One of the reasons is that generally at a seminar, not everybody of course, but there are a lot of teachers, people that teach other people. And often teachers teach mistakes to their students. Tohei Sensei always said that you must take the responsibility and make sure you understand clearly and precisely what he is teaching. Because if you don't understand, OK that's just you. But if you are a teacher and you are teaching maybe 30, 40, 50, 150 people and you have that mistaken notion in your head, every one of them will. And then they will grow up like rabbits and start going out and then they are going to have all of their own students, and in a short period of time, one generation, the teaching is completely lost.

So we need a time where this is the focus, and when we are having a seminar here, that's what I am focusing on. But to answer your question, in the dojo, in our daily practice, we very much focus on ukemi practice. And we can talk about that, if you want some exercises or something. I think your teacher probably knows most of them, and if you folks are working on this already, then what's the problem.

Student: Well, we are still discussing so...I have the wish that we do a little bit more for the ukes. I started work with more falling, because I am afraid to fall, and then it's hard.

Yes, well that's fine. Do plenty. Wear yourselves out. Rigorous, rigorous, rigorous. OK?

Thank you all very much. I appreciate it.