

## **Short Discussion #1 – What is a Student?**

C. Curtis

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*Tracy Reasoner: Hi Sensei. Thanks for taking some time here to discuss some things about training in Aikido here on Maui. I thought we would post this on the web site, so that we could have an interaction between us and various students, to allow other people to kind of gaze into your mind, basically, by talking about training and practice and how it has evolved.*

*One question I have about training: What do you consider training, and how do people progress in Ki-Aikido?*

Well, thank you Tracy. That's a really good question. And there isn't, of course, any easy answer to that because really every single student is so unique in that way. There are some generalizations that we can make, and principles that I try to follow with students, and that I followed with my teacher.

Of course I talked to Suzuki Sensei endlessly about this, because it was a major concern of his. Like any teacher, you want all of your students to be on the very highest level of commitment, with lots of enthusiasm, and taking responsibility for their practice, doing the side-discipline training, meditating and breathing every day, and taking full advantage of this, what I consider a very unique opportunity.

First of all, we have to remember, which is easy to forget while living in the world here in the west, how privileged we are. The majority of the people in the world don't have this opportunity. They don't have the access to this kind of practice, they don't have the money for it, they don't have the time for it. Most people are primarily engaged in trying to make a living and survive.

Here in Hawaii, certainly, and really throughout most of the western world, we all have good jobs, we have a nice home, we have a peaceful society that we live in, relatively speaking. And we have elected to come and practice because we want to, somehow, be freer from the worries, struggles, concerns, and heartaches that we have in our daily life, even though we're so privileged.

So, I take it for granted that if you are here in this dojo, that's what you are looking for. However, what that means to different people is many levels of different things. Most students are not what I would consider "students." They are happy to come to the dojo, I'm grateful to have them here, I love to train with them whenever they are here. But for most people it's a kind of a hobby. I know that they use what they have learned in the dojo in their daily life. They value it, I know, because they keep coming to the dojo and they tell me how big a difference it's made in their daily lives. And for many, in fact most people who practice Ki-Aikido, that's enough for them. There may be many different reasons why that's enough, but just generally speaking that seems to be enough for them.

However, there are others whom I consider to be serious students. And naturally those individuals get a lot more of my attention, and give me a lot more of their attention, because they are serious about a deeper level of release from, as I said, their daily struggles, heartache, disappointments, fears, anxieties, the kind of things that everyone carries around but many people don't want to deal with directly. Because it's so difficult to approach the cause of these difficulties directly, many students prefer to avoid it. So those that do attempt to deal with these things I consider courageous and sincere and I also consider that they deserve everything that I can do to help. I can't actually "do" anything for them. But I can be an example of how to move on the mat, how to conduct yourself with other people in the dojo, and the results of years and years of this kind of practice hopefully is apparent when people practice with me.

The big subject for the past while for me has been this idea of taking responsibility for your own training. I said, there is nothing that I can really do for you, except that I can be here and be a kind of sounding board for you. You can ask questions. Serious students constantly ask question, always looking for a deeper explanation, and a deeper experience of what it is that we are practicing.

You know, I say these things so many times. I realize that what I'm saying I've said over and over and over for as many years as I can remember in Aikido, and certainly as many years as I have been teaching. When I became Chief Instructor of Hawaii Ki Federation and Suzuki Sensei turned over the teacher here at Maui Ki-Aikido to me, I had the sort of vain idea that within a few short years, all the students would become sincere and take responsibility for their training. I imagined that I would have to repeat it a few times but pretty soon everybody would be on board and they'd be deeply into this. And when I offered something new like the book *Letting Go*, or when we started the discussion groups, everybody would be enthusiastically enjoying that and show up, be in it, and...yeah, yeah. This is not human nature and it was unreasonable for me to expect that. But it's taken a number of years for me to not just realize that it is unreasonable for me to expect that, but realize that it is OK just the way it is.

Really this is like the bigger subject of waking up. I mean, people imagine that enlightenment is some kind of realization of some ultimate truth, that it is waking up to some secret, unknown, previously un-experienced, special secret that you acquire and then you can take that and use it to be powerful and effective in everything that you do in your daily life. This is nonsense. It is a pipe-dream. It is very human, but actually waking up is, in way, the opposite of that. Waking up is realizing how things actually are. That it is a mystery. That we cannot know what's coming next or the source of what is here now, or where things go when they are done. We can't know any of this. We can't know even what's going to happen to us even in the next moment. And it's OK. That's the nature of this game, being human.

And so, if that's the case, then whatever any student presents me with is exactly all right. It's whatever they have. It's whatever they are doing. So when I am talking about what I expect of the student or what I'd like to see in a student, and the difference between different kinds of students, I'm not saying that if you are not one of those

specially motivated students, there is something wrong with you or that you are making a mistake in some way. I know that every single human being is doing everything they are capable of in every moment. So don't misunderstand me, and think that I am being judgmental or critical here. As I said in the beginning, I am grateful for every single student that is in the dojo, It is not a matter of trying to meet some expectation of mine. Taking responsibility for your training, which I do always ask each of you to do, means taking responsibility for whatever level of training you see yourself being engaged in. And it's equally a mistake for someone who is not able to engage on a very deep level, to act like they are, or try to do something that is over and above where they are. In other words don't over-reach, don't work yourself to death trying to be something that you are not.

The practice itself is just paying attention to what's happening in our life right now at this moment. That's actually all there is to the practice. There isn't anything more. Now, there is skill and capacity involved in that. You've got to know what you are doing. So you learn that by coming to the dojo. And by doing it again and again, continuing to return to attention in the moment, then you develop a stronger ability to be present and pay attention and so you are able to see more deeply into what's happening in every moment. So this, in a way, naturally allows you to develop, though am even hesitating here to use that word "develop." Because it's not like there is something you don't have that you need to develop. You already have everything you need. You just have to notice it. And the only way we can notice it is by paying attention, because it's always right here in the moment. Every moment is designed, sort of mysteriously, to reveal everything we need to know about ourselves. But we don't get to know it, we don't get to realize it, we don't get to experience it unless we are paying attention on a very deep level.

So that's our practice. And doing that is taking responsibility for our practice. And of course, the more you practice that practice, the deeper you will get into it. And if you have the courage and the commitment to stay with it, no matter how difficult it is, then you will see something that you never thought possible about your life. You will experience a way of living that is not necessarily better, but different than the way you've been before. And certainly you will be much, much freer from the anguish that everyone comes to the dojo with that I talked about in the beginning.

So I wish everyone the best. Please practice daily and the development will take care of itself. Thank you very much.

*Student: Thank you very much, Sensei.*