

Relax Completely Discussion

Friday, Aug. 26, 2011

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Good evening.

Tonight is the second of the Four Basic Principles discussion group, Relax Completely. The Four Basic principles are Keep One Point, Relax Completely, Keep Weight Underside, and Extend Ki.

As I mentioned in the last Keep One Point session, these four principles are four different ways of looking at the same thing. We are just looking from four different views. And the actual experience that accompanies each of these is identical. We always say that if we lose one of these principles, we lose them all, because they are the same. On the other hand, if you gain one, you gain them all, because they are the same. So if you have a favorite way of looking, for instance if you really like Ki Extends, then you can always use that. By developing four of these, Tohei Sensei was trying to make it as easy as possible for everyone to practice. These four principles describe, or point to, the basic practice, which is to experience mind/body unification.

I think first I will read the five principles of relaxation:

Five Principles of Relaxing Completely

Each part of your body settles in its most natural position

You relax positively without collapsing or losing power

Your sense of presence makes you look bigger than you actually are

You are strong enough to be relaxed

Therefore you have an attitude of non-dissension

Non-dissension is a very important part of this relaxation. Of course, just like when we practice the different levels of Ki Test, when you take a *Shokyu* or *Chukyu* Ki Test, if you have a stable posture and your body is reasonably in attention, you can easily pass those two tests. But when you get to *Jokyu* and then *Shoden*, *Chuden*, *Joden*, *Okuden*, those tests require a deeper and deeper level of mental relaxation, or calmness. It is not enough just to have a stable physical posture. In this same way, you know that you can take a deep breath and relax, and when you are in the dojo and practicing surrounded by friends and supporters and everybody is sort of in the relaxation principle zone, it is one thing. But then, what about when your mother is criticizing you? What about when your boss is on your case, or your husband or wife, or your children, or co-workers? What about when you have some issue with somebody? Then the question is, what does it take to be relaxed? So when Tohei Sensei is talking about complete relaxation, he means relaxation in any circumstance. This is then a very different story.

I'll read the *Shokushu* now, number six, entitled "Relaxation."

We are accustomed to having trouble with unnecessary nervousness. Nervousness causes blood vessels to contract making it difficult for the impurities to leave the body, and thus makes one susceptible to many diseases.

Relaxation is truly an elixir of life. Let us spread the true method of relaxation, which enables us to meet each day with a spirit like that of a mild spring breeze. If we practice this, we need never get nervous and excited in our daily affairs.

And then I also want to read "The Principle of Non-dissension," because I think this is the key to complete relaxation and Tohei Sensei even mentions this in his principles of relaxation. This is *Shokushu* number ten:

There is no conflict in the absolute universe, but there is conflict in the relative world. If we unify our mind and body, become one with the universe and practice its principles, others will follow us gladly. Do not say that this is a world where we must struggle to live each day. The true way to success is exactly one and the same as the principle of non-dissension, and that is the way to peace.

So we are saying that the principle of non-dissension is truly complete relaxation. Why is that? What causes tension in our mind/body?

Student: Conflict?

Conflict. Tohei Sensei says the relative world has conflict. It's full of conflict. So, is it necessary to have tension, when there is conflict?

Student: Apparently not, but we do.

Yeah, we do tend to have tension and blame it on the conflict. It's actually because of the struggle that we are having with the conflict. And the struggle arises because we treat others as objects. And of course let's not forget that the Four Basic Principles are the ways to get to mind/body unification, non-separation, not two but one. Because ultimately, the purpose of our study is to be one, to recognize that we are one with the universe.

Just understanding that doesn't do us any good. We have to actually practice that. And there is no time to practice like the present. So we always practice it in the present. How do we practice non-dissension? If we don't want to struggle, then we better not see an object or an event or a person as separate from us, right? Because if we see them as separate from us, then we must struggle. And yet this is an experiential practice. It's not an intellectual thing. So it is not just intellectually seeing some magic in your relationships. "Oh yes, I suddenly see we are one." It sounds good, but it doesn't work like that.

Remember the Four Basic Principles are the same. Sometimes it's difficult to see one without

looking at another one. In my case, it's much easier for me to understand the true method of relaxation by going through the One Point in the lower abdomen. This relaxation is obviously not something that we can figure out, this non-separation, this not two, this not looking at someone else as an object, separate from us. It's a great philosophy. But doing can be very difficult. However, resting in One Point, which we all have been exploring for years, and last month it was our study, is very easy. Even in the worst conflict, we can rest in One Point. We know this experience. And when we are resting in One Point, we are completely relaxed. Our weight is underside. Our attention, our Ki, is out, is extended, not withdrawn within ourselves.

So, any comments or questions about complete relaxation?

Student: Sensei, if we are not separate from everything and everybody, if you see a person struggling, shall we join their struggle to see...? I mean do you just stay calm and let them struggle, or what? I don't know how to not be separate. I mean, you see him there, you see him struggling, so how to be one with that?

Well, it always helps to go back to the example of the dojo. That's why we do Aikido. We have this physical representation in the dojo. So let me ask you, when someone is struggling to hold onto your wrist, what is your best course of action, struggling with him?

Student: No, Sensei.

So what do you do instead?

Student: I relax and I lead.

Of course. OK. So, it's the nature of human beings that misery loves company. When your opponent, or your partner, however you want to say that, is struggling, they want you to struggle too. That's the whole point of their struggle. They are trying to pick a fight. Right? That's what's going on. So you cannot neutralize that negative energy by fighting with it. We all know how unsuccessful that is, even though we may make that mistake over and over again. So we learn in the dojo, loud and clear, that to struggle against struggle, or to compete against competition, or to aggress against aggression, to resist in any way, we just cause more suffering than was there already.

The key in Aikido is to remain calm enough that you can just be in the presence of that out-of-control mess, that struggling, that anger, that frustration that someone is feeling, and stay calm. There is nothing to do. I mean we do teach different ways to counteract different kinds of moves, but the key to all of those is not so much the move itself, but the staying calm, the Keeping One Point in the midst of that move. Right? In daily life, no one can tell you ahead of time, "When the guy does this, do that." No. "When he says this to you in anger, say this back. This is the clever technique that you use to counter this." No. In fact, quite often there is nothing to say. In fact, quite often it's better to say nothing. But you don't know and no one can say, ahead of time. You wait until the situation arises then in each moment, if we can stay

calm, then we have a better chance of being effective, compassionate, and supportive, by saying or doing the right thing. And this may be something, or it may be nothing. Just being present is the key.

Does that make sense?

Student: Yes, Sensei.

Student: Sensei, I kind of boil down our sense of becoming involved or not involved in an issue in the right or wrong way by determining if we like it or if we don't like it. How do we get past your likes and dislikes and how does that affect One Point? How does that affect being Relaxed Completely, being one with everything? Or does it?

Give me an example.

Student: Well, take a job. Let's say you've been given a job and you think it's unfair and you don't like the situation at all, but you have to do it.

Because it's your job.

Student: Yeah. You may not have to do it. You could rebel, and do all sorts of things. But there's a sense of personal unfairness in things. You don't like it and you think that you're right and somebody else is wrong.

You are talking about preference, which is really a much bigger question. Our preference reflects our idea of what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad.

Student: For us.

Yes, what's good and what's bad in our own world. We've developed that over a long period of time and we tend to resist what we think is not good, or bad or wrong, and are attracted to that which we think is good or right. How do we come upon these ideas? Where do these things come from?

Student: It's just the way you are.

Let me just say something else about that. There are two different categories here. Of course, we learn when we are quite young that when you stub your toe it hurts, when you make a mistake you get hurt, when you stick your finger in a fire it burns you. That's not the kind of thing we are talking about here. That's not good or bad, per se. That's just dangerous for your survival, so you avoid that.

But for most of us, we live in a world that is fairly free of physical danger to us. I mean we are not being attacked all the time. If you live a reasonably together life, you are not in constant physical danger. So most of our preferential reactions to circumstances, as good or bad, are usually blown out of proportion, and are blown out of proportion because there are layers and

layers of past experiences, or conditioning, that gives us a sort of syndrome, or process. When A happens, I react B. Now, the way you are interpreting A may not have anything to do with reality. But that's the way your conditioning is, so when you see it that way, that's what you see, and you react to that. So, if we want to get beyond that, it has to start at home. It has to start with seeing that we have, or are in the clutches of, a reactive process, and seeing how that colors the way we see things. And as a result, then we may be able to see what's actually going on, which may be nothing like what our conditioning tells us. In fact most often it's not what we first think it is. Most of us just ricochet from one reactive process to another all day long. Positive, negative, negative, negative, positive, positive, negative. That's pretty much what most people's lives are like. And whenever we are caught up in, or collapsed down on, a reactive process, then we are anticipating the future. We are trying to manipulate and control a situation to get out of what we don't like and get into what we do like. We usually want to make another person or some circumstance change to fit our conditioning. Now this is kind of crazy, but we all do this. This is what conditioning does to us.

You are not just going to turn a switch and get rid of the conditioning. It's very deep. It's karma. But we can just not make more. Like Tohei Sensei says, "Don't put more negative stuff in your subconscious mind." Every drop is something, and each moment is another drop in your evolution. And how you respond in each moment, creates the next moment, and the next moment and the next moment. So the minute you drop out of a reactive process and just Keep One Point, just listen, the chances are that next time that will be easier for you to do. And little by little you begin spending more and more moments resting in One Point.

Again, I think you asked me last time, it's not like therefore you don't do anything. It's only that therefore whatever is done is effective, because you see what's going on and you're not reacting emotionally because of a conditioned situation in your own emotional life. So now you are seeing what's actually going on and you can calmly, effectively, supportively, compassionately deal with whatever the situation is.

We are talking about absolutes here, in a way. It's very difficult. I mean, why am I the Chief Instructor? Well, I've been doing it longer than anybody else here, OK? So it's easier for me than everybody else. For instance I heard a teacher say recently, "Oh, I'm not perfect." We are not only not perfect, but far from it. This is a huge task at hand. And the belief in the dual, relative story is a very powerful thing. We don't want to underestimate that. It takes a lot of commitment, a lot of strength and courage and practice to even begin to move beyond being just a slave to my same old stuff. You know what Einstein's definition of insanity was? Doing the same thing over and over again and each time expecting a different result. If that's insanity, then we are all insane. And that's of course what he was implying. Because we keep going at solving the same problem that same way, without seeing that maybe it's our seeing that is the problem. Maybe I'm the problem. And for every one of us, this is the case. We are the problem.

So hopefully that motivates us to sit more, breathe more, come to class more, look more

humbly at the situations that we find ourselves in. You know there is an advantage to have practiced a lot. But there is the attendant growth in pride that we have to look out for, which is a problem with all the teachers. It's there. That's a sort of self-reflective, self-assessment conclusion, which, as utterly erroneous as that may be, is always there as a temptation.

And this doesn't only apply to teachers, of course. We are all on this hierarchical scale, we are all on different levels. For instance, when you are Godan, then you feel that you better be treated like a Godan, whether you deserve it or not. In some sense you do deserve it, otherwise you wouldn't be that. But that's why, when I talk about these different levels, the emphasis is always for each person to practice on this level. Don't just demand that others treat you on this level. I have to practice on Hachidan level. So it's, yeah, very challenging.

Student: Sensei, I have difficulty understanding. Speaking of making habitual mistakes and expecting different results, on a practical level we tend not to do that. You may experiment with something and it fails, so you change it immediately. But when it comes to emotional things, you keep doing the same mistake. Why is that? Why are we so stupid in this way? We have that opportunity every day on a practical level, and we experience that. So why can't we adopt those same principles that we experience every day, on a practical level? We don't burn our food every time we cook it. We learn. Why can't we adapt this learning to our emotional level and even our intellectual lives?

When you are talking about a practical, problem solving, carpentry issue, let's say, that's a skill set that you have some control over. Because it is intellectual you can control it to some degree. You can plot it out ahead of time, think it through, and go through step A, B, C, and D. OK? When you hit your thumb with a hammer at step B, then what happens?

Student: You freak out.

You freak out and once again, even knowing that it's not the hammer's fault, you might throw the hammer as far as you can throw it. Or not. You might have a different approach.

So here's the deal. In our emotional life, it's up and running before we notice it. You cannot plan your emotional life. Well, actually you can't plan even your intellectual life. You know, the military says, "The best battle plan lasts until first contact with the enemy." We really don't have control over anything. But we have the illusion of control often in our work, our external activity of some kind. But life is completely unpredictable, and we will hit our thumb with our hammer, we will cut the board too short, the board will split when we nail it. Of course with experience you have less of these accidents. But still life is constantly surprising us. Even when you are a very good defensive driver, there are people that do weird stuff out there. Or maybe your car breaks down. Life is made of that.

We have the idea of our life, and that idea is very well organized with most people that are successful. This idea, or philosophy, is well organized and we try to follow that at all times, and we are as successful as we are depending on how well we are able to follow that. But life itself,

that actual experience of living, which is our thoughts, our emotions, and our senses, which are always happening in the moment, is full of surprises. It's constantly different than we thought it was going to be.

If we can stay calm and relaxed completely, then when those surprising things happen, which is constantly, we can respond appropriately. When we have tension, which is when we are trying to control the way our plan is supposed to work out, and it's not working out that way, then we get further tension, we have an emotional reaction, and we cause harm to ourselves, to the board, the hammer, the saw, the job, our client, everything.

And you know all of this already is true. The question isn't quite that. You asked, "Why can't we be as logical in our emotional life as we are in our intellectual life?"

Student: Yes.

Because that's not how life works. That's not how life, which is living in the moment, works. No matter how well you plot things out logistically, it's going to change and be different than you think. So how you respond to those changes is how you succeed. In other words, what is your level of calmness? That's the value of training. The value then in this practice is to practice sitting, breathing, patience, gratitude, calm, resting on One Point, no matter what comes up. It's a very simple practice.

Does anybody have trouble with thoughts interrupting them during meditation?

[everybody laughs]

Yeah, that's the rule. It's going to happen. It happens to the Dalai Lama. The question isn't whether somebody crosses you or not. The question isn't whether somebody does something to disappoint you or not. The question isn't whether a thought is going to arise or not. The question is how you respond to that. This has to do with your peace, your joy of life your love.

Student: Well this is kind of my point, in some way. Using the hammer and the thumb analogy, if I was to do that to myself, and I have, I can't blame the hammer, and I won't throw the hammer because it might do more injury. It's just pain. You deal with the pain and then it's over. It's somehow easier to accept that.

Physical pain can be much easier than emotional pain.

Student: Or some issue with a colleague or a client even. It's just for that day. And if you rest on it, then the next day is different. At least that's the way I see it. But when it comes to emotional matters, it doesn't seem that easy to abandon it and move on.

And you would like it to be?

Student: Well, I would like to have the ability to let it pass.

That's why we are practicing. That's why you are here, right?

Student: Oh, yes.

And you have some degree of experiential understanding about that already, because you have just expressed it. You deal with the pain until it's gone. Something happens, you let it go until tomorrow and it will be better. That's an intellectual way of expressing it. You have some understanding there. So how deep does that go? We all practice, because no matter how deep it goes, there is always something deeper that will come up to challenge us. Just when we think, "OK, I've finally got this about where I think I can deal with things," then the minute you think that something heavier comes out of left field and you think, "What is this?!" Ahh, more practice.

Student: Thank you, Sensei.

Student: I just heard something. It's not new, but I just heard something differently. We are always taught to "Keep One Point first." But I now relate that to Keeping One Point or Relaxing completely in this way. If you Keep One Point or Relax Completely, then when an issue comes upon you, you will see it differently. You were talking about seeing something differently and then responding differently than your normal pattern. Tell me if I understand this. If I am just waiting and Keeping One Point, so that I respond differently, I'm missing the beginning of this whole interaction. I need to be seeing this differently, through One Point.

So what is your question exactly? Do you have a question?

Student: What's the division? What's the separation between seeing something differently, and responding, seeing something through One Point, and responding through One Point? What happens if we are waiting to respond in One Point, and we are not seeing in One Point.

I am not sure about your distinction there. I mean that's an idea or a concept, it seems to me. You know, resting in One Point is like listening. When you are in One Point you are completely aware of everything that's happening. You aren't collapsed down on some thought. When somebody is talking to you and you are thinking about what to say next, or thinking about how you feel about what they are saying, you are not hearing what they are saying at all. You are not seeing what's going on. Right? In fact, sometimes you have to say, "Excuse me, say that again," because you were busy thinking, thinking, thinking.

Keeping One Point means paying attention. Here's an example. Tohei Sensei used to teach us that, as an examiner, of course you have to have a clear intention to support the student. Without seeing clearly you cannot support the student, because you are just on the same level as the student is. You would just be in reactivity. So he said that an examiner has to develop to the point that before he gives the Ki Test, he must be able to see their state of mind. He already must know, pass or not pass. Then the touching and the pressure is to help the student see their state of mind.

And as we are learning this, we go all the way from being so self-involved that we are really just treating the other person like an object, just pushing on them. Then gradually we learn to use our hand more gently, to change the way we are thinking and see that we are helping, not challenging, not testing. So little by little you see the moment you touch them you can see if they are stable or not. And then gradually, with more meditation and more Ki Breathing, then when you see someone you can see already, "Oh, this is stable," or "Oh, this is a little something off."

So that's all just Keeping One Point. So being in One Point means that your maximum attentiveness is on the experience of the moment. It's meeting whatever arises with clarity and calmness, presence and preparedness. You are ready to go. You have living Ki. You are Relaxed Completely, so when something comes up, you move, you speak, or you don't. But you are here for it.

That's why I said that I think that's a false distinction there, which you would know by practicing it. But if you are only thinking about it, you might come up with some kind of a concept like that. Actually, experiencing One Point is not like that at all. OK?

Student: Thank you.

Student: Sometimes you can fall into dead relaxation, avoiding the conflict. How do I steer away from that? You know, you are afraid that you will react a certain way, so then you just avoid it altogether.

Well, there are times when, knowing your own state of mind, you might be better to go in the other room. If you see that you are going to say something or do something that might cause harm, then you leave. If someone is so out of control that he might harm you, then you might just get out of there. Other than that, practice.

You know, we are not magic workers here. People come home from the war with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the tremendous trauma that they have been through. Well, you can't tell someone like that to just Keep One Point or to just sit with it. It's too hot to handle. It's too big. Or also, when you really have an issue with someone, someone you really are not comfortable with, someone who has done something to you that is hard to handle, you don't try to go into all that at once. You take a little tiny bit of it, one thousandth of it, today, right now. Tomorrow you take a little bit more. You can kind of sneak into it that way.

I know that you are not suffering from PTSD personally, but even with you, you want to be sure that you have someone that you can go to that's outside of that difficulty to talk to. Because you can also do yourself a lot of damage by re-upping this all the time, and going through it again and again you may be just digging a big hole for yourself.

All of this is to say that Complete Relaxation is the elixir of our life.

Thank you very much.