

# **Shokushu #1 – Our Motto**

## **Friday, Feb. 24, 2012**

### **C. Curtis**

Good evening.

Tonight is the first night of our next section of discussion groups. As you know, we try to do one of these on the last Friday of every month. Because of seminars, travel, etc. it usually works out to nine or ten times per year that we are able to do this.

This subject that we are working on now is Koichi Tohei Sensei's *Shokushu*, of which there are twenty-two, so it will be at least another two years to finish this.

The first on tonight is "Our Motto." Before I read this, let me say that we have about five main books written by Tohei Sensei over the years, and then there are another nine or ten small pamphlets, all of which has valuable instruction in them, and all of them in Japanese and English. And then we have all of his Ki Principles, originally written in Japanese and translated into English as some point. They are all in the Training Manual, Ki-Aikido on Maui, and I am sure you are familiar with them. And then there is the *Shokushu*. To Tohei Sensei, the *Shokushu* is the jewel, or the essence, of what he offered, what he taught.

There are a couple of challenges that we have, as related to all of these writings. Number one is that he was Japanese, and so everything is written in a foreign language, to us. So to begin with, that's a challenge, since most of us can't read it in it's original form. And number two, it was translated into English many, many years ago, at the very earliest stages of the teaching. Which should tell you that whoever translated it into English was one of his first, but quite inexperienced, students. This presents a number of difficulties. A good example is that at the end of each of the Five Ki Principles, and they are all the same this way, the fifth phrase is "and therefore you can perform to the best of your ability." Nowhere in the Japanese does it say anything like that. It says, "please don't add anything else here." This is according to Kashiwaya Sensei, who mentioned this to me once when we were training together.

Around 2005 to 2006 Tohei Sensei decided to re-write the *Shokushu*. But this is a difficult thing for him because we have had the *Shokushu* for so many years, and he didn't want to change it very much because we are all used to it. But there were some key phrases that he wanted to change. Then he asked David Shaner Sensei, and also me, if we would help with this re-write. Well, Shaner Sensei can read some Japanese and I don't read almost any, so basically what we did is take the existing English and fixed it so that it made a little more sense. And as we are going through these twenty-two chapters in our discussion groups here, one of the things we'll do is discuss some of those changes. Shaner Sensei assembled our final product and submitted it to Japan, but very little was used from our efforts. So if you compare the old *Shokushu* to the new *Shokushu*, there are some significant changes, but most of the changes that we made are not included. This is probably because Tohei Sensei felt we went too far in our changes, and he

wanted to adhere more to the original so as not to make it too difficult for the students. Which of course is fine.

So we have these challenges that we have to recognize when we read this. So what do I mean here? What is the problem with having an inexperienced person translate Tohei Sensei's teachings, if the translator understands both English and Japanese fluently?

*Student: It's an experiential teaching. And if he doesn't have that experience he can't articulate it from the place of that experience.*

Yes, exactly right. And furthermore, one of the primary conditions, as we are developing ourselves through the years in Aikido, that we all have to come to confront, is the relative value of that progress. In other words, Tohei Sensei talks about the shoga world, which he calls the relative world, and the taiga world, which is the absolute or universal realm. And as we're progressing through this *keiko* training, this self-development training, it's all *shoga*, it's all relative. Everything in the relative world is compared to something else. All of the values that we place on things have to have intrinsic value except relative to something else. Tall does not exist by itself. It only exists relative to short. Same thing with large and small, far and near. So in time and space, everything is relative and nothing can stand alone.

But that's not how we live and refer to and use this world, is it? We act as if it's absolute. So when we begin seriously training, at some point, hopefully sooner rather than later, we begin to realize that no matter how much we perfect ourselves in all the aspects of this training, what have we actually accomplished, if there is an infinite amount to accomplish? What are you comparing yourself to when you say, "OK, I'm coming along. I'm doing a pretty good job now."

Well, we give you these black belts, brown, purple, and blue belts. And then even after you get black belt we give you more ranks, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth? That's fine, but we become attached to these ranks and compare ourselves to each other. I am higher rank than you, so that makes me something special. But there is always someone higher rank, and there is always someone lower rank. So everybody is always in the same relative position, compared to other people. So we don't actually get anywhere when we compare ourselves to others. It's a false sense of accomplishment. And if we feel that we are failing in some way or other, if get down on ourselves, that's a false sense of negativity.

What I am trying to get at saying here is that Tohei Sensei's teaching for us is always mind teaching. He is always talking about the universal condition, or *taiga*. Of course, he and all of us use the relative condition, because if we didn't you wouldn't stay and train. We have to do something while we are here. So we practice developing all of these different skills. Of course that's fine. But as you know, I always emphasize from day one in the dojo, I want you to know that those skills are relative. There's always someone better and there's always someone worse. So don't get caught up in that. Just keep developing yourself. But while you are doing that, practice *taiga*, practice universal condition.

And sure enough, the first thing that Tohei Sensei says in Our Motto, is:

*Let us have a universal mind that loves and protects all creation and helps all things grow and develop. To unify our mind and body and become one with the universe is the ultimate purpose of our study.*

*The Four Major Principles to Unify Mind and Body:*

- 1) *Keep One Point.*
- 2) *Relax Completely.*
- 3) *Keep Weight Underside.*
- 4) *Extend Ki.*

What does he actually mean here? Does he mean that you cannot possibly become one with the universe except “ultimately?” This, to me, means “much later,” definitely no right now. That’s the feeling I get when I read this. OK? But he didn’t necessarily say that. This is a translation. This is what we have to deal with. Who ever sat down and translated this, and it is not his or her fault necessarily, we need to recognize that they were living in and conscious of a *shoga* or relative world. And that was it at that point. They hadn’t been training long enough to get to the point of recognizing that the whole point is to live in *shugyo*, or to live in universal mind, indicated by these Four Basic Principles, all the time from day one. Of course, that is very difficult to recognize and even more difficult to do. But it is possible, and it is accessible now. And if the teacher tells you that it can only be achieved many long years later, maybe ten lifetimes from now, then what is the purpose of the training. No, the purpose of your training is to wake up now, today, and to practice that shift into the awake state over and over and over.

This is the purpose, what Tohei Sensei means by, the purpose of our training to become one with the universe. Well, we are one with the universe already. Of course, you may think you aren’t, because it may feel so separate. It feels like you are over there and I am over here. That’s what our senses tell us. But that’s actually not the case. And you don’t have to wait until you are black belt to have the experience of that. You all know that, at least most of you.

This experience does indeed deepen with our capacity to be in this shift, this state of awareness. So we practice this through Ki Breathing, Ki Meditation, classes, etc. to strengthen that capacity. That is the only way this makes sense to me.

And just before I open it up to questions, I can’t of course let this opportunity to go by without saying something about the Four Basic Principles. Again, they were translated as actions, like commands: Keep One Point, Keep Weight Underside, Relax Completely, Extend Ki. Actually they are not verbs. They are nouns. They are descriptions of a state of being, which taken all together, we call “Mind/Body Unification.”

So I would much prefer to say “One Point, Completely Relaxed, Weight Underside, Ki Extends.” And in fact, that is basically what it already says in the Japanese. “*Ki o dasu*” means in English

“Ki Extends,” not “you extend Ki.” Tohei Sensei says “Ki o dasu,” meaning “wake up to the fact that Ki is extending,” no “please push out your Ki,” which is a popular notion.

So that is some of my take on Our Motto. Now I’d like to open it up to comments or questions from others.

*Student: Sensei could we hear Sayaka read it in Japanese?*

Sure.

(Sayaka reads Our Motto in Japanese.)

Do you notice that the Four Basic Principles in Japanese are long sentences?

*Student: Yes. That “chikara o kanzen ni nuku” means to throw away all of your power?*

Yes. That’s what was originally translated as “Relax Completely.” So it’s kind of enlightening to hear it in Japanese, yeah? Thank you, Sayaka.

*Student: Why, even after it was re-written, does it still say that the purpose of our study is to become something than we are now, as apposed to realizing that we are already one with the universe? I notice that wasn’t corrected. Is it because this is easier to understand?*

That’s a good question, and that same question is going to come up again and again as we go through all of these *Shokushu*. All of these can be taken in two ways, so to speak; the shoga way or maybe in a more absolute way. But the surface explanation that of what we read here seems very relative.

“Please be kind to other people.” Well, this is good advice for all of us that are living together on earth in this relative condition. Most every student that comes along is living exclusively in that condition, perhaps even many years after beginning to train. I’m sure Tohei Sensei wants to speak directly to that. What I’m saying here is that there is a much deeper, universal meaning underneath this teaching and the more time you spend with him, in fact even reading any of his writings, the more you begin to understand that that was for one level, but that there is a much deeper level that he was attempting to get across to us. This deeper level is very difficult to speak about directly, and still have students that see things only in terms of time and space, relative. It’s very difficult to speak to those trapped in the relative mind state from a position of the universal. I think Tohei Sensei was very keenly aware of that. Shaner Sensei and I took a lot of the relative talk out of the *Shokushu*, and I know Tohei Sensei didn’t agree, because he didn’t make those recommended changes.

Let’s face it, the Bible, even the Buddhist sutras are all that same way. There is a surface meaning that you can take that will encourage you and keep you training to greater self-improvement. But sooner or later, as my first teacher told me, if you study the Bible, you will find within it instructions to burn it. But it might take a number of years to see that, and during

those years you need it to guide you. During those years we need to have relative teaching in the dojo, relative teaching, how to move, how to breathe, how to sit, how to cut *bokken*.

This question came up when I was teaching in Russia last fall. Someone was asking about the *Shokushu* entitled "*Intoku*." They wanted to take its meaning as literal, "sew good and the harvest will be good, sew evil and reap evil." Somehow they thought that must mean that if you sew good you will get wealthy and live a long and healthy life, and if you are not nice to people then you will get smited, lose all your money and die soon. I was trying to help them understand that, yes, to some degree, it is certainly better to be nice than to be cruel. But that is not really the deepest meaning of this *Intoku*.

*Student: That idea of a punishing God is a really old and deep one.*

Yes, this comes from the ancient idea of a "smiting God" which continues to be a very heavy part of eastern and western religious philosophy to this day. We cannot have fundamentalist religious practices without this idea. And this is not really foreign to any of us. Just about everybody who comes through the door of the dojo carries this sort of myth of the smiting God with them, from their youth. It is for this reason that one of the things we do in Aikido is address that myth directly, experientially, so that we can see for ourselves that is not actually how it is. It may be a powerful idea useful for controlling others, but that's simply not what the actual experience is like, when we look very closely at it. If we do, then we start to see the world in a different way, relate in a different way. We tend to drop unreasonable expectations, so things that really upset us in the past, just don't upset us so much any more. We can still remember and understand. We can still see the judgment over there. We may still not like some of that, but that is all relative.

Living in universal awareness, equanimity, compassion is not some mysterious state. You have all experienced this and will continue to do so. You just don't notice because our habit is to be so self-involved. The process of practicing is for that shift to happen over and over again. So from day one, if we are practicing, this teaches us to be less self-involved and more and more universal in our view.

*Student: In your talk you alluded to the collapsing of the concepts of time and space. So where is Ki extending if there is no time or space. Because in the experience of One Point, I'm and over there and you over there, you don't have One Point and I don't have One Point. There is only One Point. So there is no special dimension.*

Where is that One Point?

*Student: Everywhere.*

So where do you see it going.

*Student: From nowhere to everywhere.*

You know, the wonderful scroll that Suzuki Sensei gave me many years ago that's in my meditation room, says "*Masa katsu a gatsu kachi haya bi.*" That translates as "true victory over self transcends time and space," or "is beyond time and space." "True victory over the self" meaning self as we were talking about it a moment ago, self-obsession. True victory over that self-obsession takes us beyond time and space. Because the whole experience of self, me over here as separate from you over there, depends upon time and space.

So these Four Basic Principles are basically designed as a transitional phase. I always like to call the One Point as the "gateway" between *shoga* and *taiga*.

*Student: So time and space is shoga.*

Yes. Time and space, the relative world, is referred to by Tohei Sensei as *shoga*. And *taiga* is the universal awareness that is beyond time and space, or transcends time and space.

*Student: OK, so that clarifies it for me.*

Of course, there are levels and levels, like in the ten ox herding pictures. In other words, in the beginning, we are locked into *shoga*, to a relative state of mind. And when we begin to experience these principles, One Point, Complete Relaxation throwing away all of our power, true Weight Underside and Ki Extending, when we begin to have that experience that the *shoga* world drops away, at least for a while. But we have to be able to find our way home at the end of the day without GPS. We need to know how to speak. That scientist that had a stroke was experiencing *taiga*. She describes it beautifully. She was fully in *taiga*, but she couldn't function. She couldn't remember a phone number, she couldn't even dial a phone. She couldn't do anything in the relative condition, in her body, though she could move just fine. So that has to come back.

In the traditional teaching it's called the dual world, which is the *shoga* or relative world, and the non-dual which is *taiga*, but exclusively *taiga*, and then the final stage in the ox herding pictures and in traditional teaching, is called dual/non-dual, both at the same time. And even Hameed Ali in the Diamond teaching speaks about this. You have to be careful that you don't leave something behind. Everything has to be subsumed. Everything has to be integrated. What Tohei Sensei calls "*iki teiru*," "living like completely." Is everything all at once. It is not living in cave, or in some exalted state where you can't walk, or eat, or talk, or laugh, or cry. So that is a really important part of our practice.

One of the reasons I love Aikido practice so much, and Tohei Sensei was so adamant about making sure we understood, is that it is all together. So there is no excuse to hang out in *shoga* any longer than you have.

*Student: Sensei, I see that value in that, of course, and it helps a lot. But I am still feeling like it hinders me to think of "Keeping" One Point. When I start thinking about that, how to do that, what it means, etc. it gets in the way. I'm always trying to fix things up. I don't really know how*

to explain this.

This is your practice. You are the center of the universe you experience.

*Student: That's it. Right there. Hai. OK, thank you.*

We want to remember that all of these writings, including the *Shokushu*, are basically in code. You have to break the code, and you can't do it intellectually, but only experientially. Of course more time with Tohei Sensei would help, but he is gone now. So you have to bring your own awareness to what you read and let that enliven it for you.

I hope that nothing I have said or would ever say would discourage anyone from using the *Shokushu*. I think it is extremely valuable. I really like that it is read prior to each class.

I should note that in the old days the person reading the *Shokushu* first bowed to the teacher, then came out and bowed to the *shomen*, then turned and bowed to the students, then read the *Shokushu* selection, bowed to the class, bowed to the *shomen*, and then bowed to the teacher. And then for a period of time the bowing to the *shomen* was dropped. And then this past summer when we were in Las Vegas with Shinichi Sensei, I noticed that he was having everyone once again including the *shomen* bow when reading the *Shokushu*. I was sitting next to him before class so I asked about this. He said that someone else had been responsible for removing the *shomen* bow from this procedure, but that both he and his father would prefer that we include the *shomen* bow, so now it is back in once again.

I bring this up not just to explain why we are doing it this way, but also because in a sense it feels that we are now honoring the *Shokushu* more. We are not just bowing to the Ki Symbol, we are bowing to Tohei Sensei and in so doing offering him our gratitude for his teaching, which is what we'd like to do. All of us can use all the help we can get in understanding Tohei Sensei's teachings.

Thank you very much.