

## Thirteen Rules for Instructors: #11

Friday, July 27, 2018 C. Curtis

Good evening everyone. This tonight is the 11<sup>th</sup> of Tohei Sensei's 13 Rules for Instructors, (which means thirteen rules for all of us), and this one is about arrogance. Or, a better way to put this, is that this one is about student/teacher relationships.

I will start off by reading the original translation:

*"Do not be a haughty instructor. The students grow in knowledge as they obey their teacher. It is the special characteristic of training in Ki that the teacher also advances by teaching his students. Training requires an atmosphere of mutual respect between teacher and students. If you see a haughty man, you see a shallow thinker."*

Sayaka, would you be kind enough to read it in Japanese please? (she reads) OK, thank you very much.

And now I will read our new English version:

*"Do not be an arrogant teacher. It is a characteristic of Ki Training that a student progresses by following a teacher, and a teacher progresses by leading the students. Please train together with mutual respect and caring. Arrogant people must know that they have a shallow mind."*

So, we have basically simplified it, and made it a little more to the point, and just a little better English. Well, tell me, doesn't that make more sense?

*Student: Could you read that again?*

Yes. (he reads again)

*Student: But they don't know.*

Yeah. So, those among us who are arrogant certainly don't know that we are arrogant. Is this what you are saying? I think that is a good place to start, because, as a teacher (and most of you are teachers, or potential teachers) you have to be careful that you don't make assumptions about a student's inability to respond appropriately, or what you think is appropriate to you, as a teacher,

and put that down to arrogance or stubbornness. Generally, to characterize it in any way whatsoever is going to be an issue for you, as a teacher. You are going to have a much more difficult time supporting that other person. And for a student, it's very easy to misread a teacher, and it is common. Most students misread the teacher, in one direction or another. This is not black and white, of course, but you know, you might be going through a difficult period where the teacher is finding it necessary to demand, or hold the line, with something in your training, something that has to happen in order for you to move forward, and so he keeps representing this to you, keeps bringing this up to you, keeps throwing this at you. You might find yourself quite resistant, and that will produce in you a feeling that the teacher is just a stubborn, arrogant, jerk. That happens.

And then, on the other hand, things might be going very well for a long period of time, and you hear all sorts of other people saying what a wonderful teacher you have, and you might just be in ya-ya land, thinking how wonderful your teacher is. And yet, he or she might be a bit of a jerk in some ways that you don't even notice.

I do know teachers that are a bit arrogant, and yet not always characterized like that by their students, and visa versa. I know teachers in whom I particularly notice a lack of arrogance, and yet I have heard people characterize them as being haughty or arrogant in their relationship with their students.

I think maybe it's important, even though you have probably heard me say this a number of times, to define what it is that teacher is supposed to do, and what it is that a student is supposed to do, in this relationship, this student/teacher relationship. The teacher's job is to demonstrate what is training, what is the way. And "training" in this sense is a noun and a verb both. Our training is the effort we make to be present, and it is at the same time the state of mind that is present. Maybe you can see that both of those are the same, that the effort to be present doesn't produce presence, but is in fact already presence. In other words, when you have the awareness to practice, you are already practicing. That is practice. The awareness to practice, is practice. Like Dogen said, "Life is practice." There isn't anything after practice. You don't practice to get enlightened. You don't practice to become a different person. There may be side effects to practice, but that is not why you practice. If that's why you practice, then you are going to limit yourself to that particular side effect that you desire. And it might not ever come, but you will always be hung up on that particular goal.

So it is very important that the teacher, as I hope I am doing right now, properly characterize what this training means. And then, the teacher has to be able to show you how to do it. And then thirdly, as soon as you begin learning to do it, you will notice lots of things getting in the way of you doing it. So also, the teachers job is to help you remove those obstacles from your path.

Of course, the way I lay it out here is kind of linear, and it's not like that at all. It is all happening at the same time. All of these things are one thing, actually. This is just a way of defining or characterizing it that might make it more easy to understand. And every time I talk about it, of course it is different. So that it is good for me to express this again and again to all of you, because it is so different every time we talk about it.

And then, on the other side, we always say that the students responsibility to just to do what the teacher says without editing, which of course is impossible. So, it might be a fairer characterization of the students' responsibility to say that the student needs to follow the teacher. The teacher is demonstrating practice. He or she is demonstrating training. What is training? What is practice? Most of what I learned from Suzuki Sensei, (and those of you that trained with Suzuki Sensei will probably recognize this because it's probably true for you too), most of what you learn from your teacher you learn by watching her or him. And not just when they are teaching on the mat, but in their daily life. You watch them. I was always clandestinely watching Suzuki Sensei just to see. And, he took me into all kinds of difficult situations, where he was actually being insulted, but with subtlety. I knew him, and the situation, well enough to know that what the other person might be saying was not appropriate. And then, watching him, how he responded to them, when he got angry, when he didn't get angry, why he got angry, was it really anger, or just what I called anger? All of these things...a young student is going through all of these unknowns. There are not a lot of "knowns" at that point. You are not moving from one known to another known. You are in a mess of a whole bunch of unknowns, and you are just trying to keep your head above water and keep training, keep practicing. And gradually things sort themselves out in spite of us, not because of us. Although, certainly, if we didn't hang around with the teacher, they would never get sorted out. So you do have the credit of showing up, if you want to call it that.

This relationship is so fraught with challenge. I heard the other day on NPR that 23,000 people a year kill themselves by shooting themselves with a gun. That is just a fraction of the suicides that occur, because these are just gun deaths, but

self-inflicted. We don't have that many Aikidoists in the world. 23,000? There are not that many members of Ki Society in the whole world. So what does that tell you about the state of the world we live in? Well, one thing it doesn't tell me is that I need to reach out and change that, because that's a fool's journey. But it does make me sit up and take notice. And it does make me deeply grateful that I had a teacher, or teachers, who shared the practice with me, showed me how to practice, and helped me to get all the crap out of the way that was keeping me from being able to practice, and to stay and keep practicing even when it seemed like not the thing I wanted to do. There were moments. I know that there have been these moments with everybody, so don't think that you are unique. It happens to everybody.

That is sort of my take on this. I don't really feel that I have adequately introduced, or covered, the subject of arrogance. And frankly, it's because right now it seems arrogant to do so. I don't think there is anyone in the room that doesn't have a touch of arrogance in them, every now and then. It might not be your modus operandi, but it is there, every now and then. So, to be able to practice with a clear conscience and a strong heart is a wonderful blessing that not only provides freedom, but is freedom already. When I am going around the world teaching all the folks, it is exactly like it is here. They are just friends of mine, that I have known for a long time, and that I am just wanting to support in this practice.

I want to acknowledge that we are all frail. The mind is such a tricky thing. We all have frailty and we are all constantly losing sight of our practice. And so, we all need support. We all need somebody who encourages us, supports us, and says, "Yes, you can do this!" It's worth just shutting up and sitting down and listening to the universe as it has its way with us, good, bad, and indifferent.

OK, so that's my take on this Rule #11. If you have any comments or questions, please.

*Student: It was mentioned earlier that arrogant people don't see it in themselves, just like, I suppose, narcissistic people don't see it within themselves. And if that is the presumption, then is it not maybe the best path to just assume that we all have a degree of arrogance already and just agree to work on it?*

Well, yes, I think I mentioned that we all have it. It is not just imagining. If we just notice, it pops up every now and then. It's a kind of thinking you know better

about something, whatever it is. It might be about how to cook a steak, or it might be something very deep and philosophical, but it is still arrogance. We all have it, and it behooves us to notice it. I think that is what you are getting at. We say, we need to “work with it.” What we mean by that is just to notice it. You can’t change it. You can’t not have arrogance. You can’t make it go away. It’s what it is. It is part of the human condition, part of the rainbow that makes us who we are. But noticing it, and noticing how it is triggered, changes everything. And then it stands a much smaller chance of doing any harm to others. This is my opinion, my view.

*Student: Sensei, the original version said “haughty,” and you changed it to “arrogant,” but both denote pride, and the opposite of pride is humility. When I came back from my retreat you asked me, “How was it?” I said “It was very humbling.” And you said, “Well, if it wasn’t, you weren’t paying attention.” I am looking at that there. But then, the other thought that was coming was to be one with the universe. If the teacher is not modeling that, but instead being arrogant, then he is not practicing. So then, he can’t model that to the student.*

Yeah, he is not having the experience of unification. So what has he got to share? He is going to end up sharing knowledge of past experiences, which is not fresh, not present, not new, and not alive, to me. And that too, as a teacher, you have to learn to notice when you are teaching out of your history, and when you are fresh and alive.

Of course, it doesn’t go anywhere. All of your experience is going to be utilized in your teaching. If you are going to say anything, or even move in any way, then this is all something that has been conditioned into you. So you do have that. It’s just that you are not teaching that. You are only supporting the practice, and this is the vehicle that you use.

I heard an interview with a famous Aikido teacher the other day, Christian Tessier Sensei from France. I have seen him move, and it is quite beautiful, in the Aikikai style. But it is not something I would do. I don’t move that way. I never learned to move that way, and I have always sort of thought, “Ah, well, that is Aikikai style. That’s not what I am doing.” But, you know, I saw this interview with him and I realized “Oh, he is just like me. He is just a teacher that is doing everything he can to support others in the practice.” It doesn’t matter what kind of Aikido he does. It doesn’t matter what vehicle the teacher is using. It happens to be Ki Society with us. That’s great. We love it. We love Tohei Sensei, we love Suzuki

Sensei, we love Shinichi Tohei Sensei. We love this form. But don't get lost in it. Don't get hung up on it being better than anybody else, or even "special." It's just a vehicle. What's "special," is practice, and everybody does that, no matter what school they are in, no matter what religion they belong to, no matter what thing they practice, everybody practices. And so, as a teacher, you want to be sure that you are sharing with your students that very thing. Not that you should ignore the vehicle. You need a vehicle to use. You know, in my case, even this discussion group is a vehicle. And that's not common in Ki Society, or probably any Aikido. But in my case, it is, because I find it very useful as an adjunct to help clarify that this is all about practice, not about performance.

*Student: Regarding what Prakash mentioned about his retreat being a humbling experience, I remember that recently I did two weeks of Zen sitting, Sesshin, and at the end of the second week I was feeling a bit of discord. It was just some niggling thing. And when I looked, I realized that there was an arrogance that had crept in, that "I had done this great thing of sitting for two weeks."*

And it was killing your practice.

*Student: Yeah, I thought about it that night, and then the next morning I woke up and it was cleared away.*

Yeah, you just noticed it, and that's it.

*Student: Yes, whether it's arrogance, or whatever, the noticing is so important because arrogance can creep into any part of our practice, and that is just not what we are here for.*

Yeah, this is very common in Aikido, of course, and particularly in the early days of training. Tracy just sent me a connection, a link, so that I could read this guy's blog about all the old timers in Hawaii. This person has done a lot of research about the early days of Aikido here in Hawaii. And, as he was describing these guys, I realized, "My god, they are all arrogant. This is all an arrogant thing." But at the same time, they were good people. But it was a big deal if you could last for 8 hours with this guy. Then you were "tough." It's like, excuse me? This has nothing to do with true practice. And yet, in the early days, and not in Aikido only, but the early days of the 40's, 50's, 60's it was like that. And it was radically changed in the late 60's and into the 70's. Before then, you were not something unless you could do something longer, harder, better, unless you could suffer more than someone else, you were not something special.

I have read so much about the early days with Tohei Sensei and O-Sensei. And what was described as to why they were such great teachers, was that they could suffer more than anybody else. They could do things more times, more tough, longer, etc. than anybody. It's like a Marine Corp thing. It's really a fundamentally wrong idea. It's a bad mistake.

Ahh. On the other hand, if you are a lazy, good for nothing, selfish, son of a gun, you are also not going to get anywhere. You know I have to have this metal knee, because I so horribly misused my body when I was younger, in Aikido and some other pursuits, and I carry this big hunk of titanium in me, because of my arrogance, because of my insistent competitive spirit that wanted to push everybody else out of the way. I wanted to be the one in Suzuki Sensei's life, and when I was with Tohei Sensei, in Tohei Sensei's life, thank you very much. Whoever the teacher was, I was going to be the guy. And I was surrounded by 8 or 10 or 20 or 30 other guys who also had that same idea. It was pervasive. And we would read about O'Sensei and Tohei Sensei and Yamaoka Tesshu, and it would say "this is how many times he went to this thing," "this is how many times he did this," "this is what time he gets up in the morning," "this is how much he takes uke," etc. So I was like, "Oooh, I must do this!" It is an arrogance, as you described it, and it is delusional.

"Wrong" is not really the right word to use. It's just that it is very limited.

*Student: It just interferes with your practice.*

It really gets in the way of the practice. So that, if that is a strong part of your practice, or that becomes your practice, then you are going to have to come back a whole lot more times.

*Student: Sensei I want to ask a question about the last sentence. "Arrogant people must know that they have a shallow mind." I am wondering if you could talk about the depth of their mind that is beyond the shallow part. It looks like a statement of who they are, but I think it is a statement of how they are practicing.*

I didn't want to use the word "should," which the original one does. "You should realize, or you should know, you should recognize that." Uh, I used the word "must" because it feels to me like you cannot miss it. If you are training you cannot help but notice it. If you are practicing. And if I am right about what I said about all of us having this arrogance, then you already know about it, and you are already noticing it, and you already know that noticing it is all it takes. It pops up

for me all the time. Maybe not “all the time” but when it does, I notice it, and fortunately the noticing is usually prior to it doing harm, but sometimes not. Sometimes something pops out of my mouth before I notice.

I think “must” is not an injunction, but it is something that has to happen. It must be. It must be that you will notice your arrogance, if you are. It must be that you will notice it, if you are practicing. If you are not practicing, chances are you might not know, unless you are lucky enough to have a spouse that brings it up and says, “Hey, you know what?” You know how much we like to hear that from our spouses? And not just your spouse, but maybe your friends, and certainly your teacher. Are you the kind of person that can be told that, that can have that pointed out to you? Or are you somebody that nobody ever points it out to you, because you are too scary, you will freak out too much.

So that is another way that arrogance makes itself known. You find yourself on guard. You notice that you are guarding against someone saying to you, “Hey, what’s that?” It’s like you have a pimple on your face, you know?

Is that sufficient? I know you wanted me to go into the deep mind, not the shallow mind. I am not quite sure what that means.

*Student: Thank you. It was a good explanation of the characteristics.*

*Student: I supervised teachers in training, and I was doing a session with one of my supervisees, and I was saying to her that I felt she was too far forward, that she wasn’t back enough in her seat, where she could be out of the way. And she said “But I was present!” And I said, “Yes, but you are not really listening to what I am saying. You were there. You were being the teacher. And that’s not...who is the teacher?” And then she dropped her arrogance and was able to see what I was saying to her.*

Well, I guess you are reminding us that it comes in all shapes and sizes. And sometimes it can masquerade very well as humility, or modesty, let’s say. We are very capable of being arrogantly modest. Proud of ourselves for being so modest, and not like those other boisterous, arrogant, people.

I think it is very much what you are saying there, in “are you forgetting who the teacher is?” Don’t forget who the teacher is. It’s not that there is “someone else” that is the teacher. It’s just that that is not how it works. I find it most useful to characterize it as “that’s just not how it works.” You don’t want to be thinking

that there is some “one” that you can ask, or pray to, to make you a good teacher, or to teach through you,( although sometimes we do say things like that), because ultimately that’s you doing that, and if it works, you are going to be proud of that! And if it doesn’t work, you are going to say, “Well, screw that. I didn’t get any response.” And you will be upset. And all of that is arrogance. All of that is pride of agency.

*Student: Appropriation.*

Yes, appropriation, taking credit for something that you have no business taking credit for. But, on the other hand, I never, or rarely, (at least I think I don’t) characterize it for what it is. I don’t like to put a name on it, and say, “This is who is doing that teaching, and you have to turn it over to him, or her, or it.” Look out for that. I don’t want to go there, because that is just as big a mistake as saying, “I am doing it.” or “Chris Curtis is doing it.” Because what does that make Chris Curtis, if he has got a line on that? Oh boy, there is a source of pride that will never stop producing for you. (laughs) So it is fraught with difficulty, this situation that we have got ourselves in here.

And as Tohei Sensei is saying here, as a teacher, you learn by leading the students. And, if you are a teacher, then you know that you learn a lot more by teaching than you do my attending a class, in many circumstances. My view is that, the reason I learn more by teaching, is that I am exposed constantly for what I am, so I can’t not notice it. Whereas, if you are in class as a student, it’s often easy to hide. I do try to call you out and not let you hide, but it is still easy to hide. If you are a teacher expressing the practice through your vehicle, that “calling out” has to be happening. Otherwise it is deader than a doornail.

Thank you very much.