

What is Ki ?

An interview with **K. Yoshigasaki Sensei** 7th Dan (1996)

The interview was made by Aragon from Iokai Shiatsu School in Den Bosch, Holland in '96

1. What is Ki?

Ki is a Japanese word which is written with a Chinese character so there is a Chinese meaning and a Japanese meaning of the word Ki which are very different which creates much confusion. Of course for the Chinese meaning -I suppose that the Chinese pronounce it as Qi or something like that-you better ask the Chinese people, but since I am Japanese I prefer to use the word Ki in the Japanese way. So in the Japanese meaning Ki is something which is unclear, something that cannot be defined. In daily life it means something like feeling , sentiment or emotions or ideas which are not yet clear but will become clear later. Or some motivation, etc, etc. That is why to understand Ki is very important in the sense that it is a process of understanding one's own life and understanding ourselves.

2. Sensei, do you have a certain goal by teaching the form of Ki-classes and also Ki-Aikido?

Teaching in the Ki-class is in a way the basic. But then the thing is that the practice of Ki is in daily life, that's the only way; but that is rather difficult. That is why i do this Ki-Aikido, meaning we use Ki-principles for the practice of physical martial art Aikido so that people have a good exercise and the practice of Aikido can be integrated in one's daily life and in this way it is easier for people to continue. Another reason is, that by practicing Aikido techniques certain Ki-things are much easier to explain and understand. So I really think that Ki- Aikido is a very good form to practice Ki.

3. When people are talking about Ki, there could be still a shadow of the martial arts like Aikido. Do you have any examples if(??) non martial development in people?

Ki practice is good for everybody, but the thing is that on a superficial level it is very easy for everybody. Whenever you want to go to a deeper level, you have to live with it. That is the difficulty. So normally people need some physical activity which could be something like Yoga or Taichi, or a therapy, it doesn't really matter what. But then it is clearly better if people can use Ki-principles in the physical activities. That is why Aikido is good, but if other people can use Ki-principles in their daily life that is also fine.

4. Sensei, you explained about the difference between Ki class and Ki-Aikido, but could you specify on your goal in a bigger meaning, like why are you teaching Ki anyway?

Why I am teaching Ki is because nobody else is teaching it; that is basically why. But actually, at home I sometimes ask myself the question why I am teaching. When I hear other teachers teaching quite nonsense or mistakes, or when I see meditation books; most books are quite nonsense. So my motivation is since there are so many wrong teachings in the world, somebody should teach the correct thing. That is the only motivation of my teaching.

5. Could you give me a definition of science, and also an indication of what science is doing to our society?

There is the original science from Greek time. I suppose that in the Greek period the science was research of nature and the universe and the human being etc, etc. So this continues until the fifteenth century, before industrial revolution, and the scientists are at the same time artists like Leonardo da Vinci, etc, but also philosophers, so these are all connected. But then after the industrial revolution in England, science became very material because they could use science for the purpose of the material progress of industrialization. So after that industrial revolution science became very material, which is not so good for life, since material science is based on the material principle. Now people are starting to use science for life, because clearly the last, let's say twenty or thirty years, we have seen that material progress is not enough. But then, especially university professors who try to understand human life with science called it human science, or something like that. Here arises a danger because it is fundamentally wrong to apply material principles on life. So these mistakes are doing harm to our life and will create more harm in our life.

That is why it is my purpose to propose something which can replace material science; meaning with something that has a structure as good as science.

6. Sensei, what means 'Shin Shin Toitsu', and 'unity of mind and body'. Is it the same as coordination of mind and body?. What is mind, and what is spirit?

Both unification of mind and body, or unity of mind and body, and coordination of mind and body are the translation of the Japanese or Chinese words, so it is the same thing. This unification of mind and body, I don't know who started this idea; maybe Zen people or maybe Chinese people, I don't know. But this unification of mind and body is only a small part of what i am teaching. It's a good concept, but not so important.

Mind is a concept: something which moves body. That is the normal concept of mind. Spirit is a religious word, so actually i never use the word spirit. For me, spirit is a word for religious people who believe in God.

7. In the light of what you just explained, could you give me a definition of the word meditation?

Meditation too is an English word, and actually I don't know who invented it. I can't find any Japanese word which corresponds with meditation, so it is something which I don't know quite well. Let us say it is a convenient word to describe certain activities with which we can try to understand our own life in relation to the world. So in a way I use the word meditation to imply the activities to unify ones life and the whole world

8. Sensei, Ki and breathing seem to go together. Why is this, and is there a reason why we in general are breathing so inadequate?

So Ki is something which is not clear, but which becomes clear later. For the most people breathing is also Ki, because most people are unconscious of their own breathing. Sometimes the breathing becomes evidently disturbed without people noticing it; so to practice Ki in the daily life is one way to understand one's own breathing. But then, to do this you must also understand the practice of breathing as a basic practice of the diaphragm, which must move well. That is the basic practice. And then after that we do the practice of no breathing, which means you must know

your own breathing.

9. As I can feel myself, better breathing has a lot of implications. Is there more to say about the physical consequences of good breathing? What about the relationship between breathing and emotions, and with awareness?

The influence of good breathing for health, well I suppose that good breathing helps to keep good health. I don't have the statistics, but I hope that it is so. For the emotional part too. Many people don't notice when they are breathing in a wrong way. Clearly, when you are breathing in a wrong way, your emotions are disturbed. Actually there is no problem with emotions; only disturbed emotions, which means that breathing is disturbed. So with practicing good breathing your emotions become clear and undisturbed. Then you'll find that to have emotions is good, and in a way all emotions are nice.

10. What is emotion?

Emotion is a movement in the body provoked by or related to the movement of the diaphragm.

11. Could you give me an idea of the functional meaning of emotions? why do we have emotions?

I don't know why, but mostly when we perceive something outside, we have a reaction. When this reaction is not harmonious then the part which is not harmonious must be expressed by the movement in the body. So in a way to have emotions is always very good. The only thing is that when you are breathing in a wrong way then your diaphragm is not moving correctly, so the inside movement is not harmonious, and not doing good for the body. And if emotions do good for the body that's fine, but the reality for most people is that emotion disturbs the body, that is the problem.

12. Could you give me some idea of awareness; what is awareness? did you see any improvement of awareness by Ki breathing or Ki practice?

This word awareness too is a word which i almost never use, because I don't really understand the meaning of it. So I cannot answer the question. But i can say why I don't use the word awareness. To be aware means you perceive something which you did not perceive before. So clearly it is impossible to practice awareness because you can never practice to be aware of something. That is why when your mind is free, then there is a possibility that you can be aware of new things. That is why I never use the word awareness when i teach people.

13. Excuse me, I missed your definition of awareness.

To be aware of something means to perceive something I didn't before. It is a discovery, that is why we cannot practice it, because we cannot practice discovering. We can discover only when the mind is free, so the practice is to keep our minds free.

14. Sensei, I often heard you explain that Ki class is for our own development, and that meditation is something else than therapy. But in what way could a Ki class be interesting to a therapist. Could a therapist become a teacher of Ki?. Is that the meaning of the word setsudo?

First of all, Ki practice is for one's own life. Whereas people who are interested in therapy are mainly interested to cure other people, so they are interested in other

people. But then, the technique to do something for other people, to deal with other people, and the technique to deal with oneself are different. That is why I always say that this mediation or Ki practice is not therapy. I found to explain this very important, because especially the psychology, people who practice psychotherapy use the theory of psychology, which is based on observation of other people. Whereas for meditation the theory is to observe oneself. I found it is especially important to see the difference between meditation and psychology. That is why I always make that clear so that people don't use meditation as a psychotherapy.

And then, this setsudo is a Japanese word of which I don't know who started to use it. It means to teach truth.

So as a teacher too, there are two types of teachers. Teacher who teaches techniques which is good for, in a way, everybody. Actually most teachers are like that, especially school teachers. But then this meditation teacher is different in the sense that meditation is what I see in my life. So I know my life, but I am never sure that what is good to my life is good to other people. The meditation teacher only knows something that is good to himself, and doesn't know if that is good to others. So I hope that what is good to me will also be good to others, but I am never sure. That is why in meditation we never force people to do it; we just suggest and if people like it, they do it. But people do in their own responsibility. But whereas for other types of teachers, they teach what is good for other people; they must have enough experience to know people and what is good for the people. That is the difference between the two types of teachers. But then it is that most teachers are of the second type, that means teachers who teach good things for others.

15. In the Ki sayings there is mention of unification of mind and body. What comes out of this is that everybody has a lot of power, which they has not always available. Could you explain a little bit about what you mean by power? Still, for many people this Ki class is related to healthy people and martial arts. Could you give me some examples maybe for just common people, old people who don't have special physical abilities?

It is quite simple actually. There is a problem with the translation. This power means the ability to create change in life. E.g. if you are sick and you cure yourself - a sick person becomes a healthy person, that is power. Or if you have a big problem and you solve this problem, that is power. If everybody is excited and you are calm and clear, that is also power. So whatever that makes a change in life is power. But then clearly, by understanding mind principles and understanding body principles you can create better change in life.

That means you have more power, that is the meaning of it. And then, you have to understand one principle, and one principle means unification of mind and body.

16. I also asked this question because in the book " Ki in daily life" by Koichi Tohei Sensei, what strikes people most is the picture of you: heels on a chair, head on another chair and three people sitting on your belly. This is very close to magic for most people. But of course it is also suggesting some physical power. Why are you using this kind of examples in a book?

Actually it is not me who is in it. It is Tohei Sensei. There are two things. Since he started with Aikido he had experience with people who did Aikido, that means people who were not so interested in intellectual exercises. So clearly with people like that it is easy to use physical examples. And also that it is the Japanese culture that people

don't like logic with words, but more action with the body. So if you want to reach the Japanese people it is better to express with a powerful body and not so much with a powerful mind or powerful word. So it is a cultural thing. I understand very well that that method is not so good for European people

17. Could you give a clear example of an image for teaching Ki to the European men and women?

It is also that the Japanese people have a very easy solution for the problem of thought. They just push away thoughts and do something physically. So in a way that is the Japanese tradition: that's why they propose physical methods. European people try to continue thinking and to solve with thinking; that is why I think it's better for European people to use words and to explain very well things. And the physical exercise should be used only to help understanding with word. So far I think that is good for European people, because they should have a solution with word. They don't like pushing thoughts away.

18. Of course you too, some time in the past started practicing Ki. Could you give me an idea of what this meant to your own daily life?

For my daily life nothing because I started this kind of things of, let's say curiosity, so it was more like a research. For me it is just like doing scientific research. I do research for life.

19. Do you like your job?

Yes, yes.

20. When teaching Ki Aikido you very often, I recall, use the concept of gravity to explain and guide movement. Could you give me some explanation of why gravity is so important for us?

No in the daily life, gravity normally is not important at all to us. It is only when you do Aikido techniques that it becomes more important. But then, even for people who don't practice Aikido it is important to understand gravity. Many people have a wrong concept of gravity, and with this wrong concept they create mistakes in the daily life. That is the only reason why I teach this 'keep weight underside' in the Ki class for people who don't practice Aikido. For Aikido technique, clearly it is very important.